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“Demons of Wickedness”:

Deconstructed Childhood Innocence in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*

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Foreword

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Cedric Van Dijck for his quick replies, useful advice, and interesting reading suggestions. I am grateful for his enthusiasm which encouraged me throughout the whole thinking and writing process of this paper. I would also like to thank my close relatives for their support in times of stress.

Virginia Woolf's life and works have intrigued me from quite a young age. Conducting this research has been a challenging but interesting journey.

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I Introduction

"A child is the very devil", asserts Virginia Woolf in one of her letters, "calling out […] all the worst and least explicable passions of the parents" (qtd. in Dusinberre 193). Woolf's antagonistic attitude towards children in this quote clashes with divine and pure representations of the child's mind that were popular during her time. These ideal representations of childhood were meant to offer comfort and help adults escape an increasingly complex world. Modernists, however, such as Woolf herself, did not approve of these ideal images, claiming that they underrate the value of mature life. Instead, modernists consciously chose adulthood over idealised childhood and paid less to no attention to childhood consciousness in their works. With this in mind, one might expect a rather absent or at least sceptical view towards children in Woolf's works. Nevertheless, in *To the Lighthouse,* Woolf's novel that recounts the story of a family holiday at the coast, there are multiple instances where the child's mind is highly idealised. So the question is: How to deal with this unexpected idealisation?

In this paper, I argue that childhood consciousness does play a significant role in *To the Lighthouse* through a double dynamic. On the one hand, the novel constructs an idealised childhood mind, foregrounding notions of honesty, divinity but also passivity. On the other hand, there are passages where these qualities are deconstructed through the child's secrecy, ordinariness, and overt agency. In this way, I claim that Woolf constructs an idealised image of the child's mind in order to deconstruct it and bring the reader closer to the living child. Considering that historical context is crucial to my argument, I will now turn to an overview of childhood and modernism. This will allow me to fully contextualise my research and therefore better explain what I aim to argue in this paper.

II Overview: Childhood and Modernism

For as long as humankind has existed, the interior world of children has been a conundrum for adults. Unfortunately, there is no potential solution to this problem for children will always lack the ability to articulately express their minds, and adults will never be able to accurately bring back their own consciousness as a child (Sklenicka 155-56). This unknowability makes it challenging to represent the child's mind in literary works, being "too ephemeral a subject for realistic fiction" (Sklenicka 156). Throughout history, however, writers often attempted to bridge this limitation by appropriating the child's mind "through literary art" (Gavin 2). This meant that authors invented coherent interpretations of childhood and imposed them on child characters in their writings. Depending on the historical era, these interpretations were based on certain beliefs of what a child should be like, reflecting "a particular theology, philosophy, or psychology" (Sklenicka 155). Depictions of the child's mind therefore came to serve specific functions that did not necessarily have anything to do with the living child. Often, the child's mind was sacralised in order to create a safe refuge for adults that felt lost in an increasingly complex society (Sklenicka 158).

Nonetheless, modernists purposely pushed back on this ideal construction as they deemed it poisonous to the value of adult life. This break put an end to a long history of abstractly representing the child's mind. In the next part, I will provide a concise overview tracing back the history of childhood representations in literature. This historical overview will help to understand why exactly modernists decided to break with ideal constructions of childhood and childhood in general.

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, often hailed as the father of Romanticism, who introduced the idea of childhood "as a specific mode of experience rather than as proto-adult" (Faulkner 132). In other words, Romantic writers did not focus on depicting children in their own right but rather as "a particular form of adult experience" (Faulkner 132). Childhood

became a symbol of pure joy and innocence in Romantic poetry and, most importantly, a state desirable for adults who mourned their own loss of purity during mature life and searched for a way to gain this back in literature (Gavin 8).

During the Victorian period, the child was often portrayed as "an angelic emblem both of uncorrupted nature and of spiritual truth beyond the material" (Wood 116). This transcendental nature of the child allowed adults to flee the reality of industrialised society that "despoiled nature and the simple" (Wood 117). Some Victorian writers even went so far as to represent the child as a Christ figure (Wood 119), often sacralising their death as it brought the child nearer to God (Gavin 9). Examples of dying child heroes are myriad in Victorian literature with figures such as Helen Burns in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Nell Trent in Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840). Briefly, the child's early death in Victorian literature immortalised their innocence and simultaneously allowed adults to approach this heavenly state of purity themselves (Wood 116-17).

In Edwardian writings, childhood was idealised to the extent that it became defined as a separate universe of joy and innocence to which access was prohibited for adults, yet highly desired (Gavin 12). According to Gavin, it was a universe "marked by timelessness and 'unadulterated' by civilization, adults, and adulthood itself" (12). During this period, there was a growing interest in the social and cultural aspects of childhood, considering it a state inherently different from adulthood. Progressively, it was acknowledged that children "have different needs, sensibilities, and habits of thinking", which meant that they could no longer receive the same treatment as adults (qtd. in Gavin 165). As a consequence, laws were voted that granted children their own legal rights (Gavin 165). The creation of a separate idealised world in literature, epitomised by Never Land in *Peter Pan*, echoes this reformist spirit that aimed to create a more adapted and safe environment for children (Gavin 169).

This brief overview shows how the child became gradually emancipated over the years, yet in general, abstract and fixed ideas continued to govern concepts of childhood. Constructed by adults, these fixed visions of childhood mainly functioned as a way to escape the difficulties of mature life. Modernists, however, often shied away from this nostalgic construction, claiming that it undermined both the merit of adulthood and the diversity of childhood identities (Phillips 15). This harmful influence on grown-ups, desperate to find solace in nostalgic childhood, is also stressed by Woolf herself in her essay on Lewis Carroll. In this essay, she warns that the writer of *Alice in Wonderland* was so obsessed with memories of his own childhood that "as he grew older this impediment in the centre of his being, this hard block of pure childhood, starved the mature man of nourishment" ("Lewis Carroll" 81-82).

What is remarkable, nevertheless, is that this critical view towards nostalgia in modernist literature starkly contrasted with views on childhood in modernist society more generally. In fact, the 20th century is often defined as the "century of the child" during which unprecedented importance was accorded to childhood and nostalgia (Cunningham 171). In the wake of the Edwardian period, modern society's interest in childhood continued to grow in multiple fields, leading to an actual "cult of childhood" (Gavin 11). As already mentioned, children were no longer "simply regarded as adults in the making" or as incomplete beings that constantly have to enhance themselves in order to reach adulthood (qtd. in Dusinberre 5). Instead, they were considered "specimens of a race apart" with their own strengths and weaknesses, requiring careful protection from adult society (qtd. in Dusinberre 5). This led to the creation of a separate childhood universe where children could be kept safe, which became an important topos in literature at the time. Not surprisingly, the turn of the 20th century was also known as the "golden age of children's literature" (Phillips 2). This imaginary space allowed reformers and scientists to construct a new social territory termed

'childhood' (Cunningham 172) with the intent to better understand and enhance the lives of children (Phillips 1). Simultaneously, this increased obsession to protect childhood reintroduced romantic views, depicting the child as essentially pure and innocent (Phillips 16). Yet this time, the idealised child came to be progressively interiorised by adults who believed that childhood provided the essential core of their being (Phillips 16). Put differently, adults considered this interiorised child as their deeper and truer nature that directed them towards a purer life, symbolising "the key to individual authenticity" (Phillips 8). This interiorised child posed yet another example of how adults tried to claim an ideal state of childhood purity themselves to "escape, in imagination, from adult socio-political life" in a rapidly changing modern world (Faulkner 132). Returning to Woolf's quote on Lewis Carroll, it becomes clear that she mainly aims to criticise this modern internalised child that completely dominated and devalued adult life, asserting that it "starved the mature man of nourishment" ("Lewis Carroll" 81-82). Woolf thus chose the value of maturity over the idealised child (Phillips 30). This is a tendency that can be extended to modernism more generally since child figures hardly occurred or at least faded into the background as a counter reaction to the internalised child (Hodgkins 357). Due to a considerable lack of research on the depiction of childhood in modernist writings, it is hard to challenge this view (Phillips 4).

However, children were not completely excluded from modernism. As a matter of fact, childhood played a crucial role in the development of modernism as a movement. That is, modernists used "[r]epresentations of the child, childhood, and the childlike" to convey "their goal of literary renovation" (March-Russell 197). More precisely, the uninhibited condition of childhood offered a productive source of inspiration for the experimental and subversive aesthetics of modernism (Reynolds 91). As Woolf herself argued, this source of inspiration was crucial for modernists, who were at that time nameless, to set themselves free from earlier generations (March-Russell 209). Children's art, for instance, was highly

regarded by modernist artists and often directly influenced their works (Druker & Kümmerling-Meibauer 9). In 1917, Roger Fry, a close friend of Woolf, even arranged an exhibition that only included child drawings and received considerable attention (Reynolds 93). Thus, as aptly summarised by Hodgkins, modernist art "raids but does not reinvest in childhood" (365). Whereas childhood was depicted as an ideal source of salvation for adults in Romantic writings, modernists never returned to childhood for spiritual strength. Rather, they robbed childhood of its spontaneity and rebelliousness and used these qualities as a symbol of modernist spirit that aimed to subvert older norms. In this way, the figure of the child had a mere artistic utility.

Whereas generally modernist works kept silent when it came to childhood, there were, nevertheless, two modernist tendencies that are worth mentioning as they offered the tools to foreground child figures without overtly idealising them. In Britain, Sigmund Freud's analysis of the unconscious proved a useful source to "[demonstrate] the complexity of children's experiences and feelings" (Sklenicka 159). His psychoanalytic approach undermined ideas of simplicity and purity regarding childhood and drew attention to the actual child in its own right. Hence, Sklenicka argues that Freud's psychoanalysis proposed "a territory that modern novelists found approachable and fascinating" for the representation of childhood (159). Especially interesting in this regard is the fact that the Hogarth Press, the publishing house founded by Woolf and her husband, published Freud's works, which suggests that Woolf was familiar with his work and potentially used it as theoretical inspiration for her own writings. However, this seems less likely considering that Woolf states in one of her reviews that psychoanalysis "simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches" (qtd. in March-Russell 204). To rephrase, Woolf deemed Freud's psychoanalysis too limited, arguing that "the moulding of identity is a more arbitrary process: less determined than the generic Freudian model" (March-Russell 204).

In American modernism, on the other hand, several writers integrated unconventional views regarding the child in their writings to reject the essentialist view of childhood as innocent and pure (Phillips 3). These unusual representations mainly sought to broaden the reader's understanding of what childhood encompasses (Phillips 4). For instance, in *What Maisie Knew* (1897), a novel written by Henry James, Maisie, a young girl caught in the middle of her parents' divorce, is depicted as an "opposing, ironic figure" since "[h]er interiority thrives by not conforming to what her parents believe the child mind is or ought to be" (Phillips 42-43). In this way, Phillips claims, James was "among the first to assert the social construction of childhood" and "to show concern for the damage that ideals of childhood could do to children as well as adults" (7).

Even though unconventional representations of childhood pertained majorly to American modernism at the time, Woolf's novel interestingly incorporated this disenchanting vision of childhood innocence in her novel *To the Lighthouse* as well. In some passages, this novel constructs the child's mind as highly honest, divine, and passive, echoing the nostalgic spirit that was scorned by Woolf herself. Other passages, however, deconstruct this idealisation by offering the complete opposite of these qualities, that is secrecy, ordinariness, and overt agency. Woolf thus constructs this idealised childhood for the sole purpose of deconstructing it to confront the reader with its artificiality. This suggests that Woolf's novel joins American modernism as another enlightening example of how unconventional childhood depictions strive for a better understanding of the living child. As a result, my analysis will contribute to research on modernism and childhood as it offers a rare example of how the child's mind was not just ignored, as most modernists did, but instead productively staged as a way to challenge earlier and poisonous ideas on childhood.

In what follows, I will analyse this double dynamic more closely. I have divided the construction of childhood innocence into three main themes, namely the child's candour and

divinity (1), passivity (2), and impressionability (3). After each individual theme, I will immediately introduce its deconstruction, that is the child's secrecy and impurity (1), agency (2), and the recognition of the child's mind in its own right (3). This latter point will receive some additional attention considering that Woolf's novel not only recognises the child's mind as an independent system but also recreates a fictional representation of the child's mind that aims to immerse the reader in their consciousness. In this respect, I will briefly elaborate on Merleau-Ponty's approach to child psychology which proves useful to demonstrate how Woolf's novel also tries to depict the workings of the child's mind as accurately as possible. Finally, I will look closer into a discourse that more directly attacks adult nostalgia, which will help to clarify why Woolf aimed to set up this indirect attack of deconstructed childhood innocence in her novel.

III Childhood Candour and Divinity

IIII. 1 Construction

In her seminal essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Woolf casts doubt on the objectivity of reality: "But, I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality?" (325). According to Woolf, perception of reality is distorted since it mirrors our own consciousness that "rake[s] up in their progress a whole series of thoughts, sensations, ideas, memories which were apparently sleeping on the walls of the mind" ("Phases of Fiction" 276). Put differently, "it is the emotional experience of the object, rather than the object itself, which is known" considering that perception is "altered or colored by the character's mind and emotions" (Richter 67). Hence, analysing our perception of reality might reveal aspects of our own consciousness.

Likewise, in *To the Lighthouse,* several instances of adult perception are emotionally biased. In those cases, adult figures perceive the appearance of the child as a direct reflection

of their ideal nature. To be precise, the subject, or the observing adult in this case, praises the object, or the child, with ideal qualities that cannot be detected in the described appearance of the child. This tendency reveals how adult perception is strongly influenced by an underlying urge to glorify the child. At the same time, it also shows how innocence is not inherent to children but part of a discourse imposed on their mind by adults. More specifically, adults seek narrative control over the child's mind (Richter 68) aiming to install and preserve the child's innocence according to their own nostalgic fantasies. This means that the construction of childhood innocence in Woolf's novel already reveals its own artificial nature. For instance, at the very beginning of *To the Lighthouse*, the narrator describes James' "high forehead" and "fierce blue eyes" as "impeccably candid and pure, frowning slightly at the sight of human frailty" (*To the Lighthouse* 3). Based on the observation of his eyes and forehead, the narrator endows James' interior with a strong sense of spirituality and openness. We can even say that the young boy is depicted as a godlike figure or a judge of humankind, watching down on "human frailty" (3). Yet, this description of the child as a prophetic figure is rather farfetched considering that it is merely deduced from the observation of his facial features. Besides, this prophetic ability is far out of reach for any mortal being, let alone a six-year-old. Briefly, this suggests that the narrator's descriptions of James' appearance are imposed by adults and reflect their nostalgic ideals as to what childhood should represent.

Relevant to this passage is one of Woolf's diary entries in which she discusses the appearance of the Romantic poet Coleridge. Woolf asserts that "there was something invincibly young in the look of his face" (*A Writer's Diary* 36) and starts comparing Coleridge's facial features to those of a child. In this way, Woolf sketches her vision of the archetypical romantic child "who passed his life apart from the rest of the world, with a book and his flowers" (36). Remarkably, she refers to the same facial features as the narrator in *To the Lighthouse*, that is the forehead and the eyes. She also suggests that these features reflect

Coleridge's prophetic nature, claiming that "his fine eyes, in which all the activity of his mind seemed to concentrate, moved under it with a sprightly ease, as if it was a pastime to them to carry all that thought" (36). Similar to James, this idealised description represents Coleridge as an almost almighty figure that knows more than is normally expected from a mortal being. The significant links between the description of Coleridge as a romantic child and James confirm that the narrator in *To the Lighthouse* purposely constructs an idealised picture of James' mind according to romantic ideals.

Apart from descriptions of James' appearance, there are instances in Woolf's novel where the child's mind is more directly idealised as candour and divine. At some points, these qualities are explicitly mentioned when, for example, the narrator describes children as "divinely innocent" (*To the Lighthouse* 32) and associates a "childlike" attitude with "something trustful" and "reverential" (6).

IIII. 2 Deconstruction

III. 2. 1 Secrecy

Purity and candour loom large in the novel's descriptions of the child's mind. Nevertheless, certain passages subtly contradict this romantic ideal by depicting the child as impure and secret. For instance, when Mr. Ramsay experiences a "child-like resentment of interruption", the narrator rephrases this indulgence as "this delicious emotion, this *impure* rhapsody of which he was ashamed, but in which he revelled" (24) (emphasis added). In this passage, Mr. Ramsay seemingly feels embarrassed after showing a "child-like resentment" but also "revelled" (24) in this experience. This shame represents childhood as an enticing, yet undesirable and impure condition for adults. This goes against the romantic belief that the internalised child was beneficial to adults, symbolising their most authentic and pure self.

Moreover, James' "impeccably candid and pure" nature is juxtaposed with a more secret and inaccessible inner life two lines earlier, describing it as "his private code, his secret

language" (3). The boy's hidden language challenges the romantic ideal of children as "simple and confiding" (Phillips 60). Again, honesty is at stake when Mrs. Ramsay contemplates her children "sitting there, in a row […] almost silent" (102). Not being able to fathom what "they were hoarding up" (103), their silence worries her, and in vain she starts wondering what occupies their minds. The children's secrecy is underscored when the narrator further describes them as having "set, still, mask-like faces" (103), which is again in conflict with their "impeccably candid and pure" (3) features earlier described. Hence, the narrator no longer imposes an ideal state of honesty on the child's mind but rather acknowledges their facial features as remarkably closed and impenetrable. This contrast suggests that the child's interior is more complex than might be expected from superficial romantic idealisations. The children's secrecy thus hinders adults to exert control over the depiction of their mind in order to construct its innocence. In fact, the roles of subject and object are completely reversed in this excerpt as the children are the ones observing now, foregrounded as "watchers" and "surveyors" (103). This shift in role relationships gives children power and narrative control over their caretakers, being portrayed as "a little raised or set apart from the grown-up people" (103). As a consequence, children are set free from constructed and restrictive ideas imposed by adults. On a metafictional level, the narrator also participates in this silent disruption considering that no access is provided to the child's mind through focalisation in this particular passage. In other words, the narrator only reports the children's silence without disclosing anything about their thoughts. Hence, the deconstruction of childhood honesty is not restricted to child characters but also concerns the form of the novel itself which "resists overflowing revelation" and therefore "frustrates for precisely the same reasons and in precisely the same ways" (Phillips 60-61).

The child's secretive attitude does not only function as a way to deny ideal depictions of honesty attached to childhood, but it also more generally creates "[a] spirit of satire,

risibility and irreverence" when it comes to Victorian society (Dusinberre xv). In *To the Lighthouse*, the children's silence takes place during a family dinner with some guests, which is a sacred symbol of Victorian domesticity. During these occasions, children were expected to be submissive and play their roles within the family. According to Dusinberre, the children's closed attitude in Woolf's novel rebels against the expected behaviour of the child and therefore mocks Victorian values regarding childhood (xv). This pursuit to break down Victorian domesticity can be linked to Woolf's own childhood. Woolf was one of those figures that was born in Victorian society to then move away from its suffocating influence and adopt a more modern spirit as an adult. Throughout her life, she continued to advocate the spirit of modernists over those of Victorians and Victorianism (Homans 411).

III. 2. 2 Intrusion of Ordinary Objects

Furthermore, the child's constructed divinity is often undermined by intrusions of the ordinary in *To the Lighthouse.* As I already brought up in my overview of childhood and modernism, Victorian writers often portrayed the child as transcending material reality since it allowed adults to flee industrialism. In Woolf's novel, however, the presence of ordinary objects surrounding children challenge this notion of the child as a divine and transcendental being. More precisely, the child becomes part of everyday reality because these objects "[place them] in ordinary domestic circumstances and [involve them] fully in novelistic relations" (Sklenicka 161). Turning back to the passage in *To the Lighthouse* where James' nature is described as "impeccably candid and pure", it is remarkable how this idealised judgment is deduced from Mrs. Ramsay just "watching him guide his scissors neatly round the refrigerator" (3). The fact that James is imbued with divine qualities based on the performance of a rather trivial activity deconstructs and almost ridicules the adult's idealisations. In this way, thanks to the scissors, James becomes a living child or "a self-contained being" (Sklenicka 164). A similar example occurs when Mrs. Ramsay tries to

predict James' future, thinking "what a delight it would be to her should he turn out a great artist; and why should he not?" (29). Again, she assigns idealised qualities to her son, such as artistic creativity, but does this "as she watched him chalk yellow the white dress shirt of a gentleman in the Army and Navy Stores catalogue" (29). As a result, this praising of her son as a potential artist based on the insignificant activity of colouring again mocks her romantic fantasy. Yet, modernist art and its innovations can interestingly shed new light on this excerpt. As already mentioned in the introductory overview, modernist artists, looking for refreshing and rebellious impetus, often showed considerable interest in children's art. In this way, James' assigned statute as an artist, derived from his childlike drawings, echoes the innovative spirit of modernism that highly valued children's creativity.

The presence of the boar's skull in Woolf's novel offers a last but striking example of how ordinary objects interfere with childhood divinity. In the next excerpt, Mrs. Ramsay tries to calm down James and Cam, two of her youngest children, who are scared of a boar's skull that was hung up in their room for no apparent reason:

> She had been so foolish as to let them nail it up there. It was nailed fast, Mildred said, **and Cam couldn't go to sleep with it in the room, and James screamed if she touched it**. Then Cam must go to sleep (**it had great horns said Cam-**) must go to sleep and dream of lovely palaces, said Mrs Ramsay, sitting down on the bed by her side. **She could see the horns, Cam said, all over the room**. It was true. Wherever they put the light (and James could not sleep without a light) there was always a shadow somewhere. 'But think, Cam, it's only an old pig,' said Mrs Ramsay, 'a nice black pig like the pigs at the farm.' **But Cam thought it was a horrid thing, branching at her all over the room**. (108) (emphasis added)

In my overview of childhood and modernism, I already touched upon the fact that Victorian writers often "celebrated" death with regard to childhood "as it preserved the child's innocence and inspired adults with thoughts of heaven and afterlife where that innocence could be preserved" (Wood 116-17). In this passage, however, the "horrid" (108) boar's skull, and thus death, seeks direct confrontation with the child's mind as "it was nailed fast" (108). In this case, death does not deify the immortal child but rather puts it back on earth as a mortal being. Furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay does acknowledge the skull and her children's fear in this excerpt, but she repeatedly tries to reimpose this imaginative, dreamlike world on their mind, saying, for example, "Cam […] must go to sleep and dream of lovely palaces" (108). This shows that she tries to avoid the intrusion of the skull, and thus death, on the child's mind by imposing her own voice. Nonetheless, the adult voice is constantly contrasted with the children's outcries expressing their fear for the carcass, which undermines the adult's control. This dynamic creates a clashing conflict running throughout the whole excerpt. More precisely, the adult's attempt to ignore the skull (underlined) systematically alternates with the children's intuitive reactions, again confronting the reader with its bleak reality (indicated in **bold**). In this way, Mrs. Ramsay actively denies the intrusion of the boar's skull and thus the deconstruction of the child's idealised mind, whereas the child constantly refuses this purification and thus strengthens the deconstruction.

Apart from this striking conflict, other strategies are used by the adult figure in this excerpt to exert control over the intrusion of the skull. First, during the same scene, Mrs. Ramsay seeks dominance over the depiction of the skull by describing how "it was like a bird's nest" and "like a beautiful mountain such as she had seen abroad, with valleys and flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and little goats and antelopes" (108). Related to the divide between subject and object earlier described, the mother thus "bring[s] the objective world", which is here the boar's skull, "into subjective consciousness", which is

here this dreamlike world, “in order to dominate it” (Richter 68). This dominance allows the adult figure to impose a more innocent depiction of the skull and therefore protect the child’s idealised mind. In addition, the repetition of “must go to sleep” (108) emphasises the authority of the adult’s voice, especially since Mrs. Ramsay boldly interrupts Cam to restore her own romantic discourse. Again, this shows the adult’s urge to maximize narrative control over the situation in order to preserve the child’s divinity. The fact that the adult desperately tries to establish authority here already hints at the artificiality and weakness of this constructed discourse.

However, in the same excerpt, the intrusion of the skull eventually prevails as the adult voice seems to give up at some points and validates the child’s fear, saying “[i]t was true. Wherever they put the light (and James could not sleep without a light) there was always a shadow somewhere” (108). As a result, the narrator undermines the adult’s control over the boar’s skull and thus the attempt to protect the child’s ideal image. On top of that, the fact that the concluding sentence of this paragraph is dedicated to the child’s perspective again stresses the loss of adult control and thus the end of this idealised construction. Mrs. Ramsay’s romantic discourse is further dismantled a few lines later when the narrator describes how she imposes this dreamlike world on her children’s minds. More precisely, the narrator uses adverbs that accent the artificiality of her tone such as “monotonously”, “rhythmically”, “nonsensically”, and “mechanically” (108). This sense of brainwashing is concretised when the narrator asserts that Mrs. Ramsay “could see the words echoing as she spoke them rhythmically in Cam’s mind” (108), which portrays Cam’s interior as an empty cave where incoming sounds are automatically reproduced without thinking. This artificial tone underlines the fact that children are not inherently innocent but rather the victims of imposed romantic ideals. Hence, Mrs. Ramsay’s tone damages and deconstructs the credibility of her own romantic discourse.

Interestingly, in *Jacob's Room*, a novel written by Woolf in 1922, several excerpts show striking similarities with this particular scene in *To the Lighthouse. Jacob's Room* recounts the life of Jacob Flanders from childhood to death. During his childhood, Jacob's mother takes up the same role as Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse,* namely as the protector of the child's unsullied mind. Similar to the frightening boar's skull, Jacob's brother, Archer, cannot sleep because of scary sounds in his room. Again, these sounds are particularly intrusive and risk damaging the child's innocence. For instance, Archer hears "[a] single leaf [that] tapped hurriedly, persistently, upon the glass" (*Jacob's Room* 10), which creates the sense of an evil power that is personified and purposely directs itself towards the child. Besides, Archer feels also threatened by the sound of trickling water that is represented as "gurgling", "rushing", bubbling", and "squeaking" (11). This way, Woolf portrays the stream as violently making its way down into the child's mind, comparable to poison that is on the verge of entering veins. Archer's mother tries to soothe him by imposing innocent and dreamy images, adopting a discourse that is identical to Mrs. Ramsay's romantic language: "'Think of the fairies,' said Betty Flanders. 'Think of the lovely, lovely birds settling down on their nests. Now shut your eyes and see the old mother bird with a worm in her beak. Now turn and shut your eyes,' she murmured, 'and shut your eyes.'" (10-11). A few lines later, she repeats "[s]hut your eyes, and think of the fairies, fast asleep, under the flowers" (11). The fact that she ardently keeps on commanding Archer to shut his eyes suggests that his mother, similar to Mrs. Ramsay, tries to protect his idealised mind by imposing her own voice and narrative.

Even more striking is the reoccurrence of the skull in *Jacob's Room.* Symbolising death, this carcass again desacralises the child by denying ideas of childhood immortality and divinity. Once more, the skull is described as a "horrid" (8) thing and seeks direct confrontation with little Jacob. Yet, whereas the Ramsay children are merely confronted with the presence of the skull, Jacob is almost drawn to it. This becomes already apparent during

the very first moment when James discovers the skull on the beach. The narrator demonstrates how Jacob was at first afraid of the skull as he was "[s]obbing" and "ran farther and farther away" (7). However, all of a sudden, "he held the skull in his arms" (7). This almost supernatural relocation of the skull suggests that it was rather the skull that approached Jacob than Jacob who voluntarily picked up the skull. From then on, Jacob is determined to carry the skull with him despite his mother's objection. For instance, when his mother cries "Put it down, Jacob! Drop it this moment!", he ignores her and decides to "[duck] down and [pick] up the sheep's jaw, which was loose" (8). Again, a few instances later, his mother asks him to throw it away, yet Jacob "squirmed away from her" (8). This dynamic displays a conflict similar to Mrs. Ramsay and her children considering that Jacob's mother also tries to protect the child's mind from the intrusive skull, whereas Jacob repeatedly rejects this purification. Jacob even goes a step further by keeping the skull in his bed at night (13). This peculiar interest in the skull, which differs from the Ramsay children who seek distance from it, can be a foreboding of Jacob's eventual death as a soldier during World War I later in the story. This implies that the metaphorical seeds of real death are planted in childhood in this novel, which ultimately deconstructs the child's divinity and innocence.

IV Childhood Passivity

IV. 1 Construction

As mentioned before, innocence discourses in *To the Lighthouse* are imposed on the child's mind through establishing narrative control. An important side effect of this adult control is that it inevitably condemns the child to a position of powerlessness and even passivity (McGillis 108). In short, the adult figure oppresses the child's mind in order to freely install and preserve the child's innocence, according to their own nostalgic fantasies. In this regard, we can analyse the scene where Mrs. Ramsay and James read a story together.

Although the two of them are performing a rather ordinary activity, bystanders compare them with Mary and the infant Jesus. As already mentioned in my overview, this imagery is characteristic of the Victorian age as Victorians often depicted children as figures very close to Christ. Evidently, this creates a particularly idealised image of James and Mrs. Ramsay. However, this idealisation entails a sense of passivity considering that the narrator describes the pair as "objects of universal veneration" (*To the Lighthouse* 50). This dynamic revokes the relationship between object and subject earlier discussed. As the proverb says, "meaning is in the eye of the beholder", which implies a certain control over the object that stems from the interpretative regard of the subject. Even though the object is performing an insignificant activity, namely reading a book, the subject interprets this scene as a highly venerable one. In this way, the subject imposes its own interpretation which puts the object, in this case Mrs. Ramsay and her son, on an unsolicited pedestal, being objectified and powerless as mere symbols of innocence. This fetishized vulnerability reoccurs during a scene where Mr. Ramsay is contemplating his wife and son:

> Here, stopping for one moment by the stone urn which held the geraniums, he saw, but now far away, like children picking up shells, *divinely innocent* and occupied with little trifles at their feet and somehow *entirely defenceless* against a doom which he perceived, his wife and son, together, in the window. (32) (emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Mr. Ramsay compares the image of his wife and son sitting together with imaginary children which he describes as both "divinely innocent" and "entirely defenceless" (32). The association between "innocent" and "defenceless" again confirms the idea that innocence discourses are inextricably tied to notions of passivity and vulnerability.

On top of that, this vulnerability even implies a sense of ignorance and general lack of experience attributed to the child, implicitly brought up by Mr. Ramsay when stating that

children were “entirely defenceless against a doom *which he perceived*” (32) (emphasis added). Put differently, adults assume that children are fundamentally not aware of potential dangers and therefore need their protection to remain safe. As soon as adulthood is reached, more knowledge about the bad in life is acquired, which makes adults less vulnerable, yet inevitably less innocent considering that “experience is cunning and cunning is both sinister and necessary” (McGillis 108). As a result, this helplessness absolves the child from any kind of liability and grants adults even more freedom to endow the child’s mind with idealised notions of innocence.

IV. 2 Deconstruction

IV. 2. 1 Agency

In the previous part, I described how innocence discourses in *To the Lighthouse* imply adult control and therefore often relegate children to a passive and even ignorant position. Nevertheless, Woolf oftentimes refutes this paralysing discourse by foregrounding a strong sense of agency and awareness attributed to child characters. When Mrs. Ramsay, for instance, commands James to “stand still” in order to measure him, she finds her young boy “[fidgeting] purposely” since he was “not liking to serve as measuring-block for the Lighthouse keeper’s little boy” (25). This subtle move manifests James’ own will and his capacity to act which evidently contrasts with the child’s passive innocence earlier discussed. Mrs. Ramsay’s extreme reaction, asking herself “what demon possessed him, her youngest, her cherished?” (25), shows that James’ sudden enterprising attitude strongly deviates from adult expectations, preferring a docile child. The “demon” (25) Mrs. Ramsay claims to recognise in James after his fidgeting confirms the idea that the child’s passivity is associated with innocence while agency rather implies corruption. This can be explained by the fact that passivity allowed adults to freely interpret the child’s mind, whereas the children’s capacity to act accords them the freedom to determine their own reputation.

The child's agency is taken to the extreme when children are represented as potential murderers in Woolf's novel. As earlier described, the presence of the boar's skull, symbolising death, already denies the child's constructed divinity. Nonetheless, the ability to cause death themselves completely destroys the child's innocence for good. Repeatedly, the narrator in Woolf's novel voices how James, agitated by his father's postponement of their trip to the lighthouse, considers killing his him: "Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it" (4). The significant aggressivity and brutality of his thoughts are stressed by the fact that he would kill him with "any weapon" as long as it killed him "there and then" (4). This aggressivity starkly contrasts with the child's constructed helplessness earlier discussed and foregrounds a child that is well aware of violence and how it can be used. Another excerpt features the same murderous desire, this time concerning Jasper, who shoots birds for his entertainment. Jasper's apathy towards the birds, claiming that "they did not feel" (77), again underlines the cruelty of the child and thus the distance from constructed innocence. Noteworthy are the names of the two birds he wants to kill, namely Mary and Joseph (77). The subtle integration of this highly symbolic pair here produces an effect of irony since the child is no longer the one who is passively venerated as a Christ figure but rather the one who actively tries to destruct this divine pair as if it were a game. It is evident that this agency causes the ultimate rejection of the child's passive innocence, considering that Jasper menaced one of the highest forms of divinity possible.

As an additional comment, it is interesting to refer to a remark made by Lily Briscoe on the exaltation of Mrs. Ramsay and her son as "objects of universal veneration" (50). When discussing her painting, which features the venerated pair, the narrator mentions that "[s]he [Lily Briscoe] did not intend to disparage a subject which, they agreed, Raphael had treated divinely. She was not cynical" (170). In this comment, we can spot a touch of scepticism with

regard to the child's divinity since Lily subtly questions its validity. That is to say, she underscores the responsibility of the Italian Renaissance painter Raphael as the one who started treating mother and child as divine beings, suggesting that she just copied his example by force of tradition. Consequently, she reminds us of a certain artificiality underlying this divine depiction and consciously seems to distance herself from it.

V Childhood Impressionability

V. 1 Construction

As previously discussed, constructions of childhood passivity and ignorance in Woolf's novel facilitate imposing innocence discourses on the child's mind. This constructed ignorance even leads to depictions of the child's mind as empty, which allows adults to control it all the more for "[i]t is theirs to fill" (Phillips 43). For instance, when Mrs. Ramsay experiences some tensions with her husband, the narrator indicates how "she transferred to him [her son James] what she felt for her husband" and a few instances later, she felt relieved as "domesticity triumphed" again (29). This way, the child's mind is depicted as an empty well at the service of adults as it allows them to expunge their worries. At the same time, this emptiness grants adults considerable power to design the child's mind as they wish. This impressionability is stressed when Mrs. Ramsay claims that "it was so important what one said, and what one did, and it was a relief when they [her children] went to bed" (58). Here, she considers adult input as a highly determinant and defining influence on the child and downplays the child's mind in its own right.

V. 2 Deconstruction

V. 2. 1 Recognition of the Child's Mind in its Own Right

Nevertheless, the belief that this emptiness essentially defines the child's mind is again rejected in some excerpts of Woolf's novel. That is to say, the child's mind is no longer

represented as a well at the service of adults and their idealised depictions but acknowledged as an independent system with its own workings. In the following passage, for example, the narrator voices Lily Briscoe's anxiety to continue her painting because of self-doubt and compares her situation with that of a child:

> It was in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself – struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: "But this is what I see; this is what I see", and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. (18)

Lily admits that she struggles to follow her own artistic gut, feeling confined by norms of what successful art should be. The narrator describes this anxiety "as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child" (18), which allows us to draw parallels between Lily and the child as figures that are both suffering from constraining external forces. According to the narrator, both of them are "struggling against terrific odds to maintain […] courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see'" (18). In the child's case, it is possible that these "terrific odds" (18) allude to adult nostalgia that constantly imposes abstract ideas on the child's mind, which strips them of their own identity. Hence, this passage brings up the damaging effect of adult nostalgia but, most importantly, acknowledges the fact that the child has its own thoughts and desires, independent from adult control. This recognition of the child's mind as an independent mechanism reoccurs in the next passage where Mrs. Ramsay asks Cam to pass on a message to the cook:

> The words seemed to be dropped into a well, where, if the waters were clear, they were also so extraordinarily distorting that, even as they descended, one saw them

> twisting about to make Heaven knows what pattern on the floor of the child's mind. (52)

Even though the narrator suggests at the beginning of this excerpt that the child's mind is impressionable and thus controllable, compared to "a well" where "the waters were clear", one admits that these waters "were also so extraordinarily distorting", and as a result, the words of Mrs. Ramsay "make Heaven knows what pattern on the floor of the child's mind" (52). Consequently, the narrator recognises the child's mind as an unanalysable system that is out of reach for adult control. This recognition emancipates the child from abstract ideas since Mrs. Ramsay no longer imposes romantic ideals on Cam's mind to satisfy her own nostalgic fantasies.

V. 2. 2 Creation of a Fictional Childhood Consciousness

Apart from the recognition of the child's mind as an independent system, Woolf's novel even goes a step further by using its own literary devices to set up a fictional childhood consciousness. This consciousness imitates the workings of the child's mind and therefore allows the reader to temporarily view the world through the eyes of the child (Salmose 332). More so, the use of literary language to convey this fictional consciousness completely immerses the reader in the child's mind, almost making "the act of reading approximately the experience itself" (Richter x). This immersion helps adults to step away from ingrained and romantic childhood ideals and to expand their "imagination of what it may be like to be a child" (Sklenicka 159). The reader is, for instance, confronted with the highly sensory nature of the child's mind, entering "a world of wonder and a world where sensations come before intellect" (Salmose 339). This fictional consciousness thus shows the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the child's mind, represented as "the unanalysable, indefinable reality of individuality" (qtd. in Sklenicka 151). In other words, it is an attempt to bring the reader

closer to the mind of the living child with its own logic that does not stem from presupposed nostalgic ideals.

In the next part, I will proceed to the analysis of multiple excerpts to show how literary devices are used to establish this fictional childhood consciousness. First, it should be noted that these passages are all primarily focalised through the child's perspective, which is as close as one can get to the child's interior and thus desirable for a fictional recreation. Fascinated by "the 'appearance' of things" (Richter 79), the child can be defined as an attentive observer that attaches a strong emotional value to its observations (Salmose 342). When describing Mr. Carmichael in *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, the narrator incorporates the children's opinion on his appearance: "for he had slipped into his glass at lunch a few drops of something, which accounted, the children thought, for the vivid streak of canary-yellow in moustache and beard that were otherwise milk-white" (9-10). This excerpt underscores the children's visually oriented mind since they draw upon very specific images, that is a canary and milk, in order to specify the colour of Mr. Carmichael's facial hair. Considering that the choice of these two objects seems rather arbitrary, this scene shows how the child's perception is determined by a 'perceptual catalogue'. This catalogue consists of images that the child has already come across before and have made a lasting impression on their mind. In turn, these known images are then used as a point of reference to better understand new observations. Briefly, these familiar images "[help] the child adapt or accommodate to reality by expressing the unknown in terms of the known" (Richter 196).

Sentiments attached to perception not only help the child to grasp new images in *To the Lighthouse*, it also blows up their observations and tricks them into seeing things that are not necessarily there. We can see this at work in the excerpt earlier discussed where Cam expresses her agitation caused by the skull hung up in the nursery. Focalised through Cam's perspective, the narrator voices how "[s]he could see the horns, Cam said, all over the room

[…] branching at her all over the room" (108). Apparently, Cam's fear makes her see the skull "all over the room" (108), taking up her entire perception to the extent that she cannot seem to notice anything else. The repetition of this phrase conveys a sense of enchantment and emphasises the fact that her visual senses are conditioned by her loathing of the boar's head. On top of that, Cam's fear seems to manipulate her perception to such a degree that she starts imagining the skull as an active threat that is reaching out to her, "branching at her" (108). In short, this shows how emotions strongly determine children's observations, causing them to be completely immersed in the moment of perception and temporarily treating the observed object as detached from other objects that fade into the background (Richter 79).

Moreover, the child, who has a strong visual inclination, uses synesthesia to translate nonvisual sensations. This means that children often translate abstract sensations "in terms of color and shape" (195) as to "arrange and simplify the world around them" (Richter 197). Little James, for example, experiences a strong hate for his father, which is not expressed in terms of abstract feelings but in terms of "embodied and sensory experience" (Salmose 335): "but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother" (35). Despite the fact that the language displayed in this excerpt exceeds the linguistic capacities of a six-year-old, this narration still gives us a clear sense of James' embodied emotions. More precisely, his father's attitude, which instigates James' repulsion, receives a concrete sound, associated with "twang and twitter", and a spatial dimension, envisioned as something "vibrating round them" (35). Synesthesia also occurs at the very beginning of Woolf's novel in the following excerpt, strictly focalised through James' mind:

> The wheelbarrow, the lawn-mower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling-all these were so *coloured* and

> distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language. (3) (emphasis added)

The fact that all these images are "coloured" in his mind again reveals a certain concretization aiming to simplify and categorise this accumulation of sensations, being now "distinguished in his mind" (3). Apart from synesthesia, we can identify other literary devices in this excerpt that aim to recreate a fictional childhood consciousness. On the one hand, this passage more generally foregrounds the child's sensory mind, chiefly evoking visual and auditory sensations. As a result, and partly thanks to Woolf's rhythmic style, the reader enters "right into the wonder of sensations of childhood" (Salmose 334). Additionally, the use of the present progressive here ("leaves whitening", "rooks cawing", "brooms knocking", "dresses rustling") creates a world where time is undefined, imitating the child's mind which lacks a sense of time. This timeless tense conveys "a dreamlike quality" (Salmose 347) as one is immersed "in the flux of the moment" (qtd. in Salmose 347). On the other hand, the focalisation in this excerpt, strictly limited to the child's perspective, also confronts us with the child's perceptual and cognitive limitations (Salmose 349). In the first place, there is no logic in the accumulation of images at the start of this excerpt, which hints at the chaotic nature of the real child's mind (Salmose 339). Especially striking is the sudden jump from impressions such as "the wheelbarrow" and "the lawn-mower", which pertain to James' direct environment as he is browsing through the Army and Navy Stores catalogue at that point in the novel, to more vague impressions such as "rooks cawing" and "brooms knocking" (3). Besides, the short and fragmented sentences in this passage add to the sense of disconnection and spontaneity of the child's mind (Salmose 342).

In "Sketch of the Past", an autobiographical essay written by Woolf, she elaborates on her own experiences as a child. Doing so, she does not draw upon romantic and coherent

ideals but rather represents her own childhood consciousness as a chaotic and sensory system, similar to the fictional childhood consciousness discussed above:

> Many bright colours; many distinct sounds; some human beings, caricatures; comic; several violent moments of being, always including a circle of the scene which they cut out: and all surrounded by a vast space – that is a rough visual description of childhood. This is how I shape it; and how I see myself as a child, roaming about, in that space of time which lasted from 1882 to 1895. (91)

Reminiscent of the last excerpt of *To the Lighthouse* I discussed, Woolf accumulates images to describe the entirety of childhood without implementing any kind of logic. These images again focus on the importance of the child's sensory nature, staging visual and auditory perceptions. Also, Woolf uses synesthesia to imitate the child's urge to concretize more abstract sensations to make them more graspable. She asserts, for example, after accumulating these childhood images, that these images were "surrounded by a vast space" (91). This defines childhood as an expansive, yet delimited and concrete space of experience. Likewise, Woolf represents her own childhood as "roaming about, in that space of time" (91), which again shapes the entirety of childhood into a concrete spatial environment.

V. 2. 3 An Exploration: Merleau-Ponty's Child Psychology

Despite the fact that this fictional childhood consciousness mimics the workings of the child's mind in a rather convincing way, it will always remain a far cry from a realistic depiction. However subtle, writers are inevitably determined by nostalgic fantasies that cause them to represent childhood in a very personal, if not idealised, way (Salmose 335). The dominance of nostalgia over childhood representations is also foregrounded by Woolf herself in her essay "The Captain's Death Bed", saying that "no living writer, try though he may, can bring the past back again" because "[h]e sees it through a glass, sentimentally, romantically; it

is either too pretty or too brutal; it lacks ordinariness" (176). In short, this fictional childhood consciousness will always be "a past that has never been present" (qtd. in Salmose 335).

Evidently, this inability to accurately represent the child's mind is also due to the fact that adults cannot possibly know the child's interior world. Whereas adults do have sufficient knowledge about their own mind to accurately represent it in literature, there is no way they can decipher the child's mind nor is it possible for children to spell it out. In addition, the question remains whether writers necessarily aim to depict childhood as realistically as possible in their works. During the interwar period, nevertheless, literature's interest in child psychology increased significantly due to several historical events, including the traumatic effects of war on youth and the widespread of Freud's psychoanalysis (Gavin 12). Amongst others, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty laid the groundwork for child psychology through a phenomenological framework. More precisely, Merleau-Ponty tried to figure out the real structures of the child's mind in order to show how it functions as an independent mechanism and to debunk the belief that the child is a mere "derivation or deviation of adulthood" (Bahler 217). This theory has the potential to ultimately free children from abstract and confining interpretations imposed by adults since it finally allows the latter to know and represent the child's mind as accurately as possible, aside from nostalgic depictions. Remarkably, multiple scholars have argued that Merleau-Ponty's framework has proved useful to uncover the practice of Woolf's fiction (Westling 856). Thus, in what follows, I will allow myself to briefly dwell upon some aspects of Merleau-Ponty's theory to show how Woolf incorporates a more accurate depiction of the child's mind in *To the Lighthouse.* The following excerpt is focalised through James who expresses the ardent resentment he feels towards his father:

> But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and

> sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him); but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother. By looking fixedly at the page, he hoped to make him move on; by pointing his finger at a word, he hoped to recall his mother's attention, which, he knew angrily, wavered instantly his father stopped. But no. Nothing would make Mr Ramsay move on. There he stood, demanding sympathy. (*To the Lighthouse* 34-35)

When discussing the child's relations with others, Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of actions as a means of knowing other people. To be precise, children do not define other people by recognising them as beings with a consciousness but rather as beings with the ability to act. Similarly, they do not define themselves in terms of their interior world but in terms of their own presence as an acting person in a given situation (Sardello 419). Briefly put, the child *is* his body (Bahler 211). In this excerpt, James seems to explain the hate for his father as a consequence merely of the man's bodily movements. The narrator stresses how James hates his father's gestures and the way he comes up to him and his mother, stops and looks down on them, interrupts them and even just stands there. Even his father's emotions are transformed into an acting substance, described as "twang and twitter" that was "vibrating round them" (35). Next, James answers his father by using his own movements as a communicative medium to make other bodies react and move. In other words, to make his father go away, he looks fixedly at the page so that his father would move on and he points his finger at a word to recall his mother's attention. Hence, children do not seek interaction with minds but rather with acting bodies that are positioned within the same space. This insight demonstrates how *To the Lighthouse* subtly integrates Merleau-Ponty's theory which suggests that Woolf sought to represent the child's mind in a psychologically accurate way,

breaking with older and abstract interpretations imposed by adults. Yet, it is evident that this analysis is limited due to a lack of space so further research is required to gain a richer sense of Merleau-Ponty's influence on *To the Lighthouse*.

VI Anti-Nostalgic Stance

In this paper, I argued that deconstructed childhood innocence in *To the Lighthouse* confronts us with a different and lesser-known side of childhood, aiming to enhance our understanding of the living child, apart from stifling romantic ideals. Indirectly, Woolf's deconstruction thus criticises adult nostalgia as deceiving because it neglects the diversity of the child's mind and only foregrounds a biased depiction.

In this final part, I will argue that Woolf's novel also more directly thematises nostalgia as a source of deception rather than salvation. In the third chapter of Woolf's novel, grown-up James still feels the same hatred for his father and struggles to compose himself. In an effort to calm down, he returns to childhood imagery "to cool and detach and round off his feeling in a concrete shape" (178), which implies that James believes childhood to be a source for healing. The narrator describes this recalled childhood as a paradisiac garden: "For one had settings for these scenes; trees that grew there; flowers; a certain light; a few figures" and "there was none of this gloom and none of this throwing of hands about" (178). On a sidenote, it is not surprising that nature comes to embody James' childhood considering that idyllic landscapes are often associated with childhood innocence and purity (Salmose 334). In this passage, the sentence "one had settings for these scenes" (178) directly alludes to nostalgia since it suggests that the depiction of this garden is based on fixed ideas. More so, it is nostalgic in the sense that these fixed ideas are idealised according to romantic ideals of what a garden should look like, with flowers and "a certain light" where "there was none of this gloom and none of this throwing of hands about" (178).

However, the narrator asserts that even this nostalgic world is not immune from harmful influences since "[i]t was in *this* world that the wheel went over the person's foot" and "something arid and sharp descended *even there,* like a blade, a scimitar, smiting through the leaves and flowers *even of that happy world*" (178) (emphasis added). Hence, James' attempt to find solace in nostalgic childhood ends in disappointment. This collapse explicitly brings to light the misleading character of nostalgia as a source of trauma and deception rather than happiness. Nostalgia is represented as cunning since it makes adults hold on to unrealistic expectations and leads to inevitable disillusionment. According to Faulkner, "it is a fetish" since it "forgets the socially diverse and difficult aspects" of real childhood (129). Turning back to Woolf's quote on Lewis Carroll one last time, it becomes apparent that this deceptive fetish is exactly what she aims to criticise, comparing it to an "impediment in the centre of his being" or a "hard block of pure childhood" ("Lewis Carroll" 81-82). It follows that deconstruction in *To the Lighthouse* is used as a strategy to show how childhood is by no means perfect and thus to convince adults to moderate nostalgic sentiments as they wrongfully devalue mature life. Thanks to this more direct attack on nostalgia, Woolf offers an explicit answer as to why she decided to deconstruct childhood innocence in her novel.

VII Conclusion

In conclusion, I argued that *To the Lighthouse* offers a critique on romantic depictions of childhood through a double dynamic. That is to say, the novel sets up ideal images of the child, imitating romantic discourses, to then contrast these images with its deconstruction. This double dynamic is a very effective method since it creates striking conflicts throughout the whole novel. It represents children as inherently ambiguous beings, both innocent and evil, or, as Woolf writes, both "angels of delight" and "demons of wickedness" (*To the Lighthouse* 55). This ambiguous depiction has two goals.

On the one hand, unusual representations of childhood in *To the Lighthouse* offer alternative roles to children and allow them to break free from restrictive definitions imposed on them by adults. Throughout my analysis, I paid considerable attention to the underlying structures of innocence discourses. Considering that children are not intrinsically innocent and divine, adults need to take control over the depiction of their mind to impose ideal images. This implies that innocence discourses often expose their own artificial nature. In *To the Lighthouse,* innocence discourses construct the child as distinctly candour and divine. Besides, these discourses also try to protect children from outside influences that might sully their carefully constructed innocence. In this regard, I analysed the intrusion of ordinary objects and how the adult constantly seeks control over these objects to preserve the child's divinity. An important part of this innocence discourse, is the construction of the child's mind as passive, ignorant and even empty. This subordinate position grants adults the ultimate freedom to control the depiction of the child's mind and to impose its innocence. Nevertheless, Woolf's deconstruction allows children to escape this subordinate position. That is to say, the child's secrecy, indulgence in the ordinary and agency boldly undermine the adult's attempt to control the depiction of their mind. Instead, these qualities allow children to rule their own narrative. At some points, this novel goes a step further by recognising the child's mind in its own right, independent from adult control. The novel even goes beyond recognition and represents the real workings of the child's mind, which is done in two different ways. More precisely, Woolf sets up a fictional childhood consciousness to immerse the reader in the sensory world of the child's mind. Apart from this fictional consciousness, she also incorporates a psychological view of the child's mind, which I have briefly explored using Merleau-Ponty's framework.

On the other hand, Woolf's unconventional depictions of childhood show that nostalgic fantasies are no reflection of the living child. Contrary to romantic ideals, the child's

mind is represented as secretive, mortal, enterprising and even violent. On top of that, their mind proves to be incoherent and arbitrary, governed by spontaneity and sensory details. Hence, Woolf portrays adult nostalgia as misleading since it foregrounds only one, idealised, side of childhood. She more directly criticises nostalgia in a striking excerpt at the end of her novel where she depicts it as an inevitable source of disappointment, making adults hold on to unreachable expectations. Briefly, this novel encourages adults to choose adulthood over nostalgic childhood to prevent the latter from unfairly "[starving] the mature man of nourishment" ("Lewis Carroll" 81-82).

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