

***ARTFUL ARTLESSNESS: AUTHORSHIP, APPROPRIATION,  
AND THE CREATIVE CHILD, 1858-1920***

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## ABSTRACT

*KATHERINE L. CARLSON: Artful Artlessness: Authorship, Appropriation,  
and The Creative Child, 1858-1920*

(Under the direction of Dr. Laurie Langbauer)

This project reassesses both extant definitions of authorship and Victorian reconstructions of the Romantic child by analyzing the tradition of published British children in the period 1858-1920. It suggests that current criticism largely overlooks the phenomenon that made juvenile writers like Marjory Fleming and Daisy Ashford household names because that phenomenon unsettles cherished twenty-first century definitions of intellectual property. Attempting to extend the rights of authorship to the misspelled and unrevised work of minor dependents forces the recognition that childhood and authorship embody an uneasy relationship between autonomy and socialization. Victorians, however, embraced child-authorship *because* it foregrounded this paradox, which allowed them at once to celebrate childhood creativity and to appropriate it for their own artistic ends.

Additionally, this project builds on Catherine Robson's claim that Victorian photography extended the bounds of adult-child collaboration already being explored in writing. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's images of children reveal complex attempts to afford sitters creative agency. In contrast, Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs

repeatedly efface the agency of child-sitters, despite the fact that they have not inspired the accusations of exploitation that are legion in Dodgson scholarship.

Rudyard Kipling and Frances Hodgson Burnett reflect similar questions of childhood agency when they acknowledge that they “plagiarize” the identities of their biological offspring by inserting them in fiction. Complicating the traditional book-as-baby trope as well as the evolutionary theory of recapitulation, Kipling in particular cast children as both outcomes of genetic reproduction and active creative originators, a paradox reflecting the same mixed complicity and resistance to adult forms that characterizes Daisy Ashford, Marjory Fleming and juvenile photographers Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright.

Griffiths and Wright – the infamous Cottingley Fairy photographers – created illusions of empirical evidence to prove the existence of fairies to adults. Their widely successful hoax challenged the infallibility of adult constructions of objectivity and earned them subjectivities outside of totalized notions of childhood artlessness and fancy. While it too was ultimately appropriated by adults, Griffiths and Wright’s work joined that of Ashford and Fleming in subverting definitions of childhood which simultaneously objectify children, harvest their creativity, and marginalize them from grown-up modes of expression.

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Elizabeth Carlson is a better writer than I am, and provides shining proof that there are in fact some interesting career options for English majors outside of academia.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Upon this planet there dwell two strange races of people. The first is a tribe small of stature and delicate of limb, the members of which make their way into civilized society one by one, arriving among us entirely unable to look after themselves and quite ignorant of our language. Were it not that we take pity on their helplessness, they would perish miserably – thousands, indeed, do so every year—but the majority are welcomed to our houses, fed and clothed by us, and after a little while, they learn our speech and something of our habits. Yet for the brief space of their existence—a matter of about a dozen years—they remain as strangers among us. They tolerate our patronage and submit to our correction; they even court our admiration and our love. But they take little interest in the things we prize most; their ideals are not our ideals, and they seem to have acquired, in the country from which they came, a standard of values which can with difficulty be adjusted to the facts of this rough-and-tumble world.*

*Moreover they see a universe quite different from that which is familiar to us. Our eyes are lamps in which the oil of reason more or less brightly burns to illuminate the hard and commonplace road of life; their eyes are charmed magic casements through which the moon of imagination pours, bathing the whole landscape in the light which was never on sea or land. [. . . Yet there are a few who have not forgotten. They are not emigrants but exiles, dreaming of Sion by the waters of Babylon. [. . .] These form the second race of strange beings of whom I would speak. They are the super-children, the boys who never grow up, the Johnnies-head-in-air, at whose stumbles the world laughs because it cannot see the stars upon which their gaze is fixed. [. . .] they say ‘Let there be light’, and there is light. And so they have received the name of Makers or Poets.*

— J. Dover Wilson, “Poetry and the Child,” 1916.

The figure of the British Romantic child is typically depicted as an innocent, imaginative, pastoral, androgynous, and universal being embodying the paradox of creative effort and organic inspiration aspired to by adult authors.<sup>1</sup> Defining the child as essentially unsocialized and non-rational, this construction pairs with the Romantic notion of the noble savage to create an idealized subjectivity free of epistemological

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<sup>1</sup> For examples see Jones, Coveney, and Natov.

striving and the constraints of social order. J. Dover Wilson's twin vision of childhood and poetic genius, as quoted above, expresses this traditional legacy of the Romantic child in spades over a century after it emerged. Yet despite the term's frequent use, the degree of criticism dedicated to unpacking "the Romantic child" is surprisingly slim, and as Marah Gubar's excellent *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* argues, there is no singular definition of this formation at any point in the nineteenth century. Instead of using it as a type, nineteenth-century engagements with the Romantic child treat it as a plastic medium, the redefinition of which is central to characterizations of artistic expression. I agree with Gubar that the Romantic child is an inherently flexible category, and my work explores how that very flexibility became a fairly stable mooring for a variety of definitions of childhood creativity. Excavating the Victorian Romantic Child reveals a culture enchanted by paradoxes and ruptured dialectics—tensions that seem more postmodern than even our more informed stereotypes of Victorian life might suggest. Thus, this project illuminates Victorian alignments of children, artistic agency, and the creative process, but it also begs a reconsideration of current critical approaches to the period. More broadly, it invites us to consider areas in which postmodern definitions of creativity fail to acknowledge the paradoxes and even hypocrisies in our own concepts of intellectual property.

So who started it? In playground disputes and discussions of cultural movements alike, the answer to this question typically proves both essential and elusive. Nevertheless, I shall begin a project which in part recovers and contextualizes the unique nineteenth-century phenomenon of published children by echoing Laurie Langbauer's claim that the Romantic child was born of the death of a certain young writer (17). I

think Thomas Chatterton started it. Chatterton the “marvelous boy” eulogized by Wordsworth as well as Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Victorian poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Frances Thompson, wrote poetry that would, after his untimely death at seventeen, become widely appreciated for decades, and would set him up as a poster child for Romanticism for decades more. As Linda Kelly describes it, “Within a few years [of his death] he had become a legend. Caught up in the dawning Romantic Movement he became a symbol of some of its most powerful preoccupations—suicide, the cult of youth, above all Neglected Genius” (xvii). Yet while Chatterton may have been the prototypical Romantic Child, he was not really a child at all.

Essentially a Victorian and Edwardian project, this dissertation loosely defines children as people younger than the early teens, a concept in keeping with the age of consent for females (which rose over the course of the century from 12 to 16) and the psychological category of adolescence that the Child Study movement began to develop in the 1880s. Living alone in eighteenth-century London at 17, Chatterton was as much man as (marvelous) boy. However, as Kelly observes, Chatterton’s iconographic potential quickly eclipsed his written legacy and even the details of his life and death. Yet replace Kelly’s identification of the Romantic interest in suicide with a similarly morbid fascination about dying young, and you have Marjory Fleming, a wonderfully precocious child-writer who died in 1811 at age eight. Why was Chatterton remembered and Fleming forgotten? Actually, Fleming *wasn’t* forgotten, at least not until the twentieth century. Fleming is a touchstone for what I see as a Victorian enthusiasm for unearthing juvenile Neglected Geniuses in the tradition of the Chattertonian Romantic child.

Fleming and her Edwardian counterpart, Daisy Ashford, not only wrote bestsellers that made them household names, but received glowing affirmations from canonical Victorian authors such as Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, and J.M. Barrie. My first chapter, “‘Some Sort of Masterpiece’: Marjory Fleming, Daisy Ashford, and the Challenge of Interpreting Child-Authors,” evaluates why these once-popular young writers receive little consideration in a critical climate which claims to value the recovery of marginalized voices. I contend that critics remain relatively silent on Ashford and Fleming because discussing them proves difficult within persistently adult-oriented, revision-based definitions of authorship. While Victorian adult authors co-opted Fleming and Ashford, they also developed a language for addressing them that could prove instructive in our discourse regarding figurations of childhood and authorship alike. Even more enlightening, however, are the ways in which Ashford and Fleming themselves address the relationship between authorship and socialization by attempting to participate in adult discursive modes even as they resist them.

Adam Phillips identifies childhood as the “last essentialism” (qtd. in Levander 1), suggesting that in the case of children, liberties of categorization continue to be taken that would be considered unacceptable if applied to women or other traditionally marginalized groups. Yet totalizing narratives of “the child” reflect a fundamental difference from other essentialisms because they presume to describe a status that everyone writing about them has experienced. The question of the extent to which a former child can authoritatively discuss childhood has engaged children’s studies at least since Jacqueline Rose argued in 1984 that for the purposes of discussion, the category of childhood is nothing apart from adult interpretations of it. In this dissertation I aim to

challenge Rose's dismissal of the possibility of uncovering childhood as a status outside of adult projection. The very existence of child-writing and collaboration, I contend, offers challenging primary sources through which to interpret both children's self-definition and more general constructions of artistic autonomy.

Since I mentioned essentialism, here are a few thoughts on the critical terminology we deploy when discussing creative children. I want to suggest that twenty-first century critics should be very careful with references to "the child." It is not a useless term, but it becomes dangerously sloppy when used where less reductive diction such as "children" better suits the topic of discussion. In my dissertation, the "the child" will be a singular referent to a discrete member of the category of childhood. "The figure of the child" will refer to totalizing or iconic uses of childhood, whereas I intend "children" and "childhood" to be less culturally-loaded references to a category simply defined by age: pre-pubescent people over age two. Such an attempt to reform syntax is bound to cause confusion when discoursing with other critics, so I will make explicit my understanding of how each critic is using his or her vocabulary whenever the context is not clear within the quotation.

Likewise, I want to be intentional in how I refer to the field with which my literary analysis will intersect. "Childhood studies" would work for those whose interpretations reveal a psychological bent, but I suggest that the most all-encompassing term may be "children's studies," because this leaves room to discuss childhood as a status, experience or symbol, and also allows critics to reflect on individual children's relationship to such figuring. "Children's studies" also parallels "women's studies," a field which has needed to ask very similar questions regarding the silencing nature of

singularizing language and the limitations imposed by pedestalized ideas of influence. Yet the association between women's studies and children's studies must not be read in a one-to-one ratio, for sculpting the two fields of inquiry into some sort of theoretical allegory would further neither field. I simply want to suggest that women's studies can provide some helpful methodology through which to begin my inquiry because women and children have historically been unified in their marginality. Thus, while I deploy a theoretical apparatus inspired by feminist questions of marginalization and recovery, my intent is that it returns bearing not just new voices, but new theoretical doorways through which to reevaluate concepts of authorship.

Comparing adult uses of children's creative expression to the less outwardly-mediated work of children who created on their own suggests that childhood creativity often reveals a common tension between children's aspiration to adult discourse and their resistance to the prescriptive nature of adult forms.<sup>2</sup> While of course the conditions of authorship differ between the individual child-authors I explore and those children whose creative influence we only know indirectly through the acknowledgement of enthusiastic adult writers, the questions of autonomy which arise in both categories are strikingly similar. Juliet McMaster depicts the child as a slave who must learn the language of her captor, suggesting that in order to write, the child must take on socializing language which is both foreign and oppressive. Child-authorship and adult-child collaboration thus embody children's deeply conflicted attempt to both belong to, and declare independence from, adult discursive hegemony. Thus, I do not attempt to undermine critics like Gubar

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<sup>2</sup> This is a key point in Juliet McMaster's "'Adult's Literature,' By Children."



and Catherine Robson, whose explorations of the cultural significance of the figure of the child have enriched nineteenth-century scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Rather, I seek to provide counterbalance through a comparative methodology that gives equal airtime to adult representation of childhood creativity and the expressions of children themselves.

In my second chapter, “Blurred Exposure: Subjectivity and the Agency of the Child-Sitter in Photographs by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and Julia Margaret Cameron,” I explore the then-newborn technology of photography as a means for Victorian adults to harness childhood creativity collaboratively. Catherine Robson argues that Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) found that photographing children more thoroughly merged adult and juvenile creativity because it allowed children a direct and undeniable contribution that aligns with authorial agency. Like child-writing, a photograph in which a child participates raises an interpretive challenge. Where does the adult mediation end and the child begin? I agree with Robson that this question may be fundamentally unanswerable, but it is also fundamentally important because it reveals a truth that applies to all creativity: the fact that even the most rigorously-defended intellectual property has a complex and often untraceable web of influence at its core.

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<sup>3</sup> When I conceived this project, I had not read *Men in Wonderland* and *Artful Dodgers* was not yet in print. These two volumes have done much to advance a fusion of Victorian and children’s studies that considers evidence in a variety of media as well as the published creativity of children themselves. However, I am originally indebted to Americanists such as Karen Sánchez-Eppler, Caroline Levander, and Carol Singley for setting the groundwork for a cultural studies approach to constructions of children in the nineteenth century. While most of the authors discussed in my pages are British, I will always consider this a transcontinental project due to the influence of *Dependent States*, *Cradle of Liberty*, and the essays collected in *The American Child*.

Both children and photography share a conflicted relationship to concepts of objective reality. "The Child and the Photograph owe their 'genius' to their relationship to the real," writes Carol Mavor. She continues:

As Barthes has commented, "the Photograph" itself, because it embodies what we understand as an absolute, true, almost innocent link to the referent, "suggests the gesture of the child pointing his finger at something and saying: *that there it is, lo!*" (*Ta, Da, Ça!*). That is why we might view the Child like the Photograph, and the Photograph like the Child, as beyond philosophy, as a "weightless, transparent envelope," as honest, as faithful (254).

Much critical work –including Mavor's own<sup>4</sup> – has considered alignments between the fantastical and childhood, yet as Mavor points out, adults often construct children as representing objective truth. At once embodiments of creativity and precipitates of reproduction, children and photography share a certain fundamental tension, particularly when being asked to function as evidence.

Frances Hodgson Burnett described her creation of Little Lord Fauntleroy from the expressions of her son as a "plagiarism from life," and this characterization could extend to the way photography copies a moment. Like adult appropriations of children, a photograph can assume a false level of objectivity that converts subject into an object. And yet, as Robson observes, the direct participation of the subject that photography requires allows that subject immense collaborative or subversive potential. A child sitter working with an adult photographer is not a Rousseuan blank slate, but a force who "writes" on *tabula rasa* of a photographic plate. However, the intellectual property rights to a photograph then, as now, belongs to the photographer. Engaging the pattern of inquiry I will follow in discussing both adult appropriation of children's creativity and

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Chapter 5 of *Pleasures Taken*: "Nesting: The Boyish Labor of J.M. Barrie."

children who write, to what degrees do photographed and photographing children reveal socialization or assert autonomy in their art? The answer in each case I explore is elusive at best, but the appeal of this blurred agency hidden in plain view is itself a fecund site for considering the inherent messiness of collaborative agency.

While writing and photography are not completely analogous, the potentials and risks of adult-child collaboration seem strikingly similar. If anything, however, the stakes are higher when a child's physical image is the artistic medium. Dodgson's desire to be absorbed completely into his sitters — to “be present without being present,” as Robson puts it (152) — can easily be read as erotic, and may do a better job of explaining the widespread critical debate about possible pedophilic elements in his work than the handful of potentially voyeuristic images can. An ethically affirming reading of Dodgson's photography would suggest that by photographing children he was creating an environment that would enable their own artistic expression. On the other hand, a negative reading reveals just how ethically risky photographing a child can be. If Dodgson was manipulating children with a false incentive of autonomy, he was taking advantage of children's vulnerability for artistic purposes — a possibility which could have very sinister undertones indeed. Yet I argue that the scandal-free photographs of children by Julia Margaret Cameron, which openly rob children of subjectivity, are actually more clearly parasitic than Dodgson's controversial advocacy of autonomy in dependents.

While I draw on James R. Kincaid's concept of “child-loving” to evaluate the parasitic elements of adult-child collaboration that come particularly to the fore in photography, I do not believe that any of these trans-generational collaborations can be

entirely described in terms of adult predator and child prey. Very few of the adults I examine emerge as entirely mercenary, and all of them are at least partially aware that their appropriation of childhood creativity limits the child's agency even as it celebrates it. Like photographic collaboration itself, my insistence on considering children's claims to autonomy attempts to complicate the false binary of dependence and independence within the usual definitions of the relationship between children and adults both in the nineteenth century and the twenty-first. A child under the age of consent is not the opposite of an adult, and thus my project explores what might come of taking children's claims to autonomy seriously. This commitment demands a respectful consideration of children's work, and also eschews assumptions that read consensual adult/child collaboration as fundamentally violating the child.

When an author credits a dependent (and therefore non-autonomous) minor with an element of his or her work, the challenge is to determine whether the use of the child's voice is a fair-minded attribution or an unequal appropriation, a relevant question no matter what the motive of the adult or degree of consent from the child. Such questions form one major preoccupation of "'Plagiarized From Life': *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Intellectual Property, and Frances Hodgson Burnett's Literary Appropriation of Her Child," my third chapter. Another involves how to generically interpret these attributions, which are often hidden in plain view via extra-narrative accounts by the author her- or himself. Chapter 3 considers ways in which and Burnett hitches the Romantic child construct to her son, Vivian, in order to create the smash-hit *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Both Burnett and Rudyard Kipling, whom I address in Chapter 4, playfully employ the language of intellectual property in depicting collaborations with their

offspring. I argue that Burnett's use is both more consistent and more appropriate. Burnett's definitions of childhood and child-authorship hearken retrospectively to specific Romantic constructions of creativity, while Kipling's prospectively retools the noble savage manifestation of the Romantic child in response to the Victorian evolutionary theory of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny – the idea that over its lifespan, every organism passes through each stage of the evolution of its species.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a burgeoning movement known as Child Study began connecting recapitulation theory to a deemphasized aspect of the Romantic child: primitivism. Romanticism was, of course, a radical movement with a rich but unstandardized conception of childhood, a figuration which, when plucked from the margins of the past and redesigned for a general audience, had become part of the mid-Victorian mainstream. To become a socially-stabilizing cultural icon, the idealized figure of the child had been to be removed from the Romantic wilderness and civilized. Instead of lone, Chatterton-esque geniuses or reclusive Lucy Greys, mid-Victorian Romantic children like Little Lord Fauntleroy were made to function as exemplums of how individuals should contribute to the collective. If socialization is part of the process of growing up, the teleologically-minded Victorians must have initially viewed their construction of childhood itself as a progressive adaptation of an earlier form. However, there is an obvious deconstructive tension in turning a loose category representing uniqueness into a culturally-stabilizing totality. The ultimate rejection of *Fauntleroy* by a reading public which, for its first few decades, had approached the novel with something

not unlike our own Pottermania,<sup>5</sup> may reveal this totality collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions. However, the increasing authority of evolutionary theory surely chipped at the foundations.

Chapter 4, “‘The Daughter That Was All to Him’: Recapitulation and the Legacy of the Child in Kipling’s *Just So Stories*,” discusses Rudyard Kipling’s complex engagement of Child Study in tales about a Neolithic British girl named Taffy – the fictional counterpart of his daughter Josephine. Since Kipling is often typecast as a textbook imperialist, it is tempting to deduce that he situated his autobiographical account of father-daughter collaboration in the remote past in order to make Josephine the locus of an origins myth that affirmed British cultural-linguistic supremacy. However, I argue the opposite. A closer reading of the “Taffy Tales” reveals a Kipling who prioritized the memory of Josephine, who died at age 6, over his politics.

Any critic writing on Kipling’s creative process in the *Just So Stories* must acknowledge U.C. Knoepfelmacher’s seminal essay “Kipling’s ‘Just-So’ Partner: The Dead Child as Collaborator and Muse.” Knoepfelmacher uncovered the way Kipling heartrendingly hid memorials to his dead daughter in his illustrations. Focusing more on the text than the images, I draw on contemporary evolutionary theory to extend Knoepfelmacher’s central assumption that the Taffy Tales are both remarkably complex tributes to Josephine Kipling’s creative autonomy and tenderly veiled monuments to her memory. Though the Taffy Tales may outwardly appear to affirm the recapitulation

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<sup>5</sup> Comparisons between Harry Potter and Little Lord Fauntleroy are a touchstone in discussions of Burnett. See, for example, Polly Horvath’s colloquial introduction to the Aladdin classics edition. Horvath, Polly. Forward. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. By Frances Hodgson Burnett. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004. Print.

theory of evolution which was so foundational to both late-nineteenth century notions of child development and European cultural supremacy, I argue that Kipling put his daughter before his social agenda by establishing her alter-ego within a dead race and language in order to afford her a legacy of creativity that is monumental, timeless, and yet authentically lost to the present. Kipling's tribute to his lost daughter reveals not only another Victorian who privileged the creative influence of a child, but in fact a more nuanced understanding of an author who today is rarely considered outside of his totalized status as the voice of British imperialism.

Though only addressed indirectly thus far, my project consistently sails abreast of questions of evidence. Kipling's Taffy is a signifier of evidence – evidence of the influence of a daughter who was in turn evidence of her father's reproductive creativity; evidence of parent-child collaboration; evidence of the analogous relationships between physiological, linguistic, social, and aesthetic development within individuals, cultures, and even the human species. Likewise, Burnett foregrounds her son's evidentiary status because the absurdity inherent in crediting him with his own genesis underscores its opposite. It is difficult to imagine an account of parenthood that does not focus on the fact that children are very much concerned with asserting a sense of selfhood even as they are also a sort of *habeus corpus* evidence of their parents' union. This joint status as creative and created is not a paradox, but it settles down easily beside the paradox of the Romantic child. As I have indicated, I agree with Gubar's argument that the Romantic child was neither cohesively defined nor categorically affirmed by the Victorians, but I would add that its lack of coherent definition created within it a sort of space which could be repeatedly repopulated with even variant ideas while masquerading as a stable element

of cultural common ground. This flexibility rescued the Romantic child from vestigial decline, and much Victorian adult writing seems focused on attempting to evolve the Romantic child construction in order to develop authentically Victorian definitions of both childhood (human origins) and creativity (artistic origins). To look to a child for an explanation of origins is recapitulative, because as Melanie Dawson and Gillian Brown have established, adult constructions of childhood invariably become nostalgic self-references to our own pasts even as they indicate the future. Additionally, to look at the child for an explanation of origins is empirical, because it consults evidence that will lead to a source. Thus, children are at once subjective source-creators and objective source material. Far from being contradictory, to the Victorian mind this dual status reflects a pattern of catharsis through the unification of apparent oppositions.

Victorian reengagements of the Romantic artful/artless paradox were, after all, products of the same era which popularized a scientific taxonomy of fairies (Silver 51-2) and photographic research into the spirit world. Art historian Tom Gunning writes,

In the second part of the nineteenth century, both the concept of ghosts (or spirits) and the practice of photography were in the process of redefinition. By the turn of the century, photography had moved from providing a record of our visual experience to becoming, as the photography historian Michel Frizot puts it, “in the most scientific way possible, the proof of the reality of the invisible.” Though we think belief in ghosts is archaic, in the mid-nineteenth century there emerged a new attitude toward spirits that saw itself less as the survival of ancient superstition than as the avant-garde of a new rationality fully in concert with recent scientific technology and theory. The ghost itself moved from a terrifying phantom to a figure of reassurance and consolation whose presence could be scientifically established (58-9).

Gunning’s excellent essay reveals a culture captivated by new avenues of evidence collection, and it illuminates how the creator of the entirely empirical Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, could be the same man who championed the authenticity of



photographs of alleged fairies taken by little girls in Cottingley, Yorkshire. Carol Armstrong says to take a picture is to “collect directly from nature” (qtd. in Tucker 21), a statement strikingly similar to Burnett’s claim that she “plagiarized from life” in creating *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. While we may fancy ourselves astute in spotting a Photoshop fraud or scoff at the fact that thousands were fooled by the Cottingley fairy photographs, many twentieth and twenty-first century viewers of Dodgson’s portraits consider them enough evidence to accuse him of pedophilia. Thus, the question of what a photograph can and cannot reveal remains fraught. Throughout its history, photography has raised interpretive challenges relating to its status as both objective evidence and subjective art, as well as the nature of the intellectual property rights of both sitter and photographer. These questions are very similar to those that arise when discussing the artistic autonomy of creative children.

My fifth and final chapter, “‘Fed Up With The Fairies’: Empiricism and the Romantic Child in the Photography of Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright,” returns to independent creative work by children — the Cottingley fairy photographers Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright. Griffiths and Wright’s Edwardian photography slipped between constructions of the empirical reliability of photography and alignments of children, photographs, and the fantastic. Jennifer Tucker writes that the 1880s and 90s were the years when science actively began using the popular press to try to create a more scientifically literate public which “recognized and responded to their authority” (8). Photography was a key tool in the scientific conquest of the popular press that Tucker identifies. She quotes photographic historian William Ivins Jr. as saying that “the nineteenth century began by believing that what was reasonable was true and it wound up

by believing that what it saw in a photograph was true – from the finish of a horse race to the nebulae in the sky” (qtd. in Tucker 2-3). Griffiths and Wright used empirical evidence to prove the existence of fairies to adults, and thus the authority claim inherent in their photography struck a blow against adult constructions of childhood that placed children outside of the margins of grown-ups’ epistemologies and modes of expression.

Yet while Griffiths and Wright attempted to challenge adult authority, the unplanned popularity of their photographs turned them into icons that ratified paradoxes regarding imagination, science, gender, and age. The evidentiary significance of the Cottingley fairy photographs within their milieu reveals a much more complex world than the dialectics typically applied to the nineteenth century might suggest. Notions that men were believed rational while women were sentimental have become conventional when discussing the period, but this cliché operates beside the one claiming that male Romantics advocated fancy while the mainstream success of the women writers of the period reflected an Enlightenment rationalism. Knoepflemacher writes

But what about those post-Romantic women authors whose writings for children could hardly remain unaffected by the success of male fantasists such as MacDonald and Carroll? At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Edgeworth could resist the magic of the ‘wild tales’ that Lamb extols in his letter to Coleridge. But by the mid-century, a new generation of writers saw themselves not only as the descendants of the literary foremothers who had shaped what Summerfield calls the ‘Edgeworthian, empiricist view of what can be said to constitute “reality”,’ but also the rightful heirs of the unlettered female storytellers, peasant woman or nursemaids, whose materials Perrault and the Grimms had co-opted” (*Ventures Into Childland* 23).

The nineteenth century actually seems to reflect epistemological plurality as well as considerable variation in what constituted gendered expression. Enter, once again, the figure of the child. Fairies, children, and photographs all share an ability to unify cultural

values of fancy and reason, progressivism and nostalgia, and of course, the artful artlessness which Fleming and Ashford first embodied.

Attempting to discuss the Cottingley Fairy photographers reveals that the syntactical fog that brews when talking about child-writers grows even thicker when talking about child-photographers. While people often assume that when I refer to child-writers I mean adults who write for children, “child-photographer” usually conjures notions of adults who specialize in portraiture of children. Conflating “child-writer” with “children’s author” reveals a pattern of assumptions that reduces children to passive receptors, but the connotations of “child-photographer” widens the gulf between childhood and agency even further because the word “child” loses even the consumer power inherent in audience status, making, “child” in this sense purely an object. I am not just suggesting a syntactical clarification that reflects a commitment to avoid applying marginalizing assumptions to the interpretation of phrases like child-author and child-photographer, though I certainly wish to advocate such attentiveness. In both my chapters engaging photography, I want to suggest that perhaps the very idea of agency in “making photographs” needs to expand to acknowledge the fact that photographic portraits are made on both sides of the lens.

Yet much like child authors, even children engaged in unsupervised projects on the photographer’s side of the lens do not necessarily escape adult appropriation. The adult “support” of Griffiths and Wright’s claims alienated them from not only empiricism but artistry, bolstering the validity of the photographs by falling back on conventions of artlessness which were actually antithetical to Griffith’s and Wright’s photographic work. Yet the fact that the longevity of the myth was secured not by its creators but by its adult

appropriators actually suggests, in hindsight, a success for the appropriated children. While their adult “advocates” won the day, they did so by allowing themselves to be fooled by children.

I begin my work with child authors who unsettle adult definitions of authorship, and I conclude it by discussing how the work of two creative children promulgated one of the world’s great hoaxes during that collective loss of innocence, the Great War. Children were widely published in the twentieth century and Romantic notions of childhood imagination continue to linger in even twenty-first century culture, but the degree of artistic influence works by children enjoyed in the Victorian era is unique. Recovering the work of creative Victorian children promises more than a trove of ephemera. The questions raised by attempts to interpret childhood creativity prove relevant in evaluating constructions of adult autonomy as well, and thus will lead to new vantage points in the ongoing theoretical debates regarding the very meaning of authorship.

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## CHAPTER 1

### “SOME SORT OF MASTERPIECE”: MARJORY FLEMING, DAISY ASHFORD, AND THE CHALLENGE OF INTERPRETING CHILD-AUTHORS

In 1811 Scottish diarist and poet Marjory Fleming died unpublished. She was not yet nine years old. However, since Fleming's posthumous publication in 1858, nearly two centuries of print life has gained her a varied career as a prodigy, a case-study example of early nineteenth-century childhood, and a victim of revisionist Victorian editorializing. Only recently has Fleming ceased to be a household name. By 1905 bookman Andrew Lang (1844-1912) noted that “It is superfluous to quote from [John Brown's 1863] essay on Marjorie Fleming; every one knows about her and her studies . . .” (73).<sup>6,7</sup> Victorian adoration of Fleming was so widespread that many referred to her familiarly as “Pet Marjorie,” a nickname given to her by her first editor, H.B. Farnie. Indeed, publishing Fleming's writing proved so lucrative that she became the subject of a turf war between competing editors. Her *oeuvre* is available in at least four versions, most of which sold

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<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, Twain, and even Plotz use the spelling “Marjorie,” which Farnie inexplicably originated along with the now-rejected “Pet.” I retain the Fleming family's spelling as it appears in Esdaile's facsimile.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Laurie Langbauer's unpublished article, “Marjory Fleming, Child Writing, and the Total Depravity of Inanimate Things,” for this reference.

multiple editions. Fleming's devotees have released a collotype facsimile of her manuscripts, two biographical novels,<sup>8</sup> and a song cycle composed around her poetry.<sup>9</sup>

Almost a hundred years after Fleming's death, Mark Twain took an uncharacteristic hiatus from his usual pepper-cruised prose to express what nevertheless appears to be sincere admiration of her skill with the pen:

She needs no amanuensis, she puts her message on paper herself; and not in weak and tottering Roman capitals, but in a thundering hand that can be heard a mile and be read across the square without glasses. And she doesn't have to study, and puzzle, and search her head for something to say; no, she had only to connect the pen with the paper and turn on the current; the words spring forth at once, and go chasing after each other like leaves dancing down a stream. For she has a faculty, has Marjorie! Indeed yes; when she sits down on her bottom to do a letter, there isn't going to be any lack of materials, nor of fluency, and neither is her letter going to be wanting in pepper, or vinegar, or vitriol, or any of the other condiments employed by genius to save a literary work of art from flatness and vapidty (457).

Twain suggests that Fleming follows the process of "genius" in creating "a literary work of art," and while his essay is loaded with adoring diminutives towards Fleming herself, he never belittles her prose. In his eyes Fleming embodies the artlessness of *sprezzatura* without the hidden crafting, for she spills out cleverness willy-nilly. Though he writes in 1909, Twain seems to identify Fleming with the carefree genius of the Romantic child.

Ten years after Twain celebrated Marjory Fleming's *sprezzatura*, J.M. Barrie praised the artful artlessness of another nineteenth-century child-writer in strikingly

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<sup>8</sup> See bibliographic entries under "Malet, Oriel" and "Van Gelder, Robert."

<sup>9</sup> Referenced in Works Cited under "Fleming, Marjory and Richard Rodney Bennett."



similar fashion. Regarding the author's photograph included in Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visitors*, Barrie wrote:

This is no portrait of a writer who had to burn the oil at midnight (indeed there is documentary evidence that she was hauled off to bed every evening at six): it has an air of careless power; there is a complacency about it that by the severe might perhaps be called smugness. It needed no effort for that face to knock off a masterpiece. It probably represents precisely how she looked when she finished a chapter (7).

Ashford wrote *The Young Visitors* in 1890 at the age of nine, and rediscovered the novel in 1919 among the possessions of her late mother. Then 35, she shared the story with her friend Margaret Mackenzie, who in turn amused houseguests with it. Among Mackenzie's listeners was Frank Swinnerton, an editor at Chatto & Windus. Detecting a potential literary sensation, he obtained Ashford's permission to present the book to his firm in London for publication. The book was an instant hit, and seeing 18 editions in its first year alone. It became a play in 1920, a musical in 1968, and a movie in 1984. Though its popularity remained more consistent because of these iterations, recent critical response to *The Young Visitors* is as sparse as that dedicated to Fleming, an omission that obscures the fact that both authors were major influences in mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary popular culture.

During the years of her popularity, readers accepted without a murmur the myth claiming Fleming was the darling of Sir Walter Scott, perhaps because it enabled readers to interpret her genius in reference to the endorsement of literary greatness. Daisy Ashford's work was widely considered to be a hoax generated by J.M. Barrie, on the other hand, a fact which I suspect is due to the (accurate) claim by her publishers that *The Young Visitors* was not even indirectly dependent on a mutually influential connection with a grownup. Barrie initially required some coaxing to write the preface to *The Young*

*Visitors*, not because of any disinterest in the book on his part, but due to his well-founded concern that his endorsement might backfire, since “having dealt a bit in children, I might be suspect” (qtd. in Malcolmson 96). Of course Barrie’s fears were realized, since *The Young Visitors* has never quite disentangled from relatively unfounded questions of authenticity. However, Barrie did not consider Ashford a literary dependant, but rather an inspiration. Upon his first glimpse *The Young Visitors*, Barrie wrote Swinnerton, “I find myself turning back to it for advice, instruction, and amusement. [. . .] the thing as a whole is too masterly to come from any brain but a child’s” (qtd. in Malcolmson 97). Though Barrie’s writing is nearly playful, his lifelong dedication to the creative impulse of childhood is widely noted. His praise of Ashford is sincere even as it is whimsical. In fact, Ashford’s work is so original that it is difficult to compare to Barrie’s or anyone else’s, save perhaps Marjory Fleming’s. As Ashford’s biographer points out, “It was difficult to write about the book without quoting extensively from it, as Barrie in his preface discovered. There was no yardstick by which to judge it” (Malcolmson 102). Like Fleming’s own devotees, Barrie hinted that *The Young Visitors* allowed a glimpse at a completely novel form of writing.

This chapter asks why child-authors like Fleming and Ashford are so easy to enjoy but so difficult to interpret. Fleming’s and Ashford’s consistent marginalization as *child*-authors presents their twenty-first-century audience with the daunting challenge of finding the framework with which to respect them as legitimate creators even though they write outside traditional definitions of crafted authorship. Additionally, lingering Romantic notions that children were artless artists and thus share a totalizing bond of originality seem both critically problematic and difficult to escape. While this chapter

seeks to deconstruct some of the paradoxes which consistently characterize over a hundred years of discourse on both authors, I also contend that ultimately a definition of child authorship based on tensions between socialized adult forms and freedom of expression best reflects the unique social position of the child author. These tensions provide the key to an organically child-centric definition of child-writing and its significance within the ongoing theoretical debates over the value, meaning, and implications of concepts of authorship.

### **Marginal Marjory: How a Child-Author Stumps the Critics**

In addition to her extensive Victorian popularity, Marjory Fleming has persevered for over a century as the youngest member of Oxford's *Dictionary of National Biography*, and her first entry in that venerable resource came directly from Leslie Stephen's pen. The 2004 edition of the Dictionary optimistically suggests that "her status seems assured" (Sutherland). Curiously, however, Fleming's once-steady stream of biographers and reviewers has resulted in but a trickle of recent criticism, and the "new consideration" the dictionary expects remains slow in coming.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> While Fleming's popularity peaked with the Victorians, she has never been entirely ignored. Twain and MacBean kept her name in circulation into the twentieth century, and Sidgwick and Esdaile committed her to more serious scholarship in 1934. Robert Van Gelder's novelistic version of Fleming's diaries came out in 1940, Oriel Malet's immediately followed World War II, and Plotz and Johnson historicized her in the 1990s. She appears regularly in quotation books, and not long ago I encountered her in Dorothy L. Sayers' murder mystery *Gaudy Night*. At least one recording exists of Richard Rodney Bennett's song cycle based on her poetry, and a recent Google search revealed that Bennett's piece recently aired on the BBC and is considered part of at least one professional soprano's repertoire. I continue to marvel at how often Fleming references crop up, and yet how rarely she is treated with anything more than a passing smile.

The relatively rare twenty-first century readers who discover Fleming consistently delight in her amusing rhymes, her candor regarding matters the adults of her era would have considered too quotidian or delicate to write about, and the catharsis she affords by throwing tantrums about such pesky elements of life as “. . .the horrible and wret[ched] / plaegge that my multiplication / gives me you cant conceive it-- / the most Devilish thing is 8 times 8 / & 7 times 7 it is what nature itselfe / cant endure” (46-7).<sup>11</sup> Fleming’s twenty-first century readers also often express surprise that the potential she offers critics remains relatively unplumbed. Why would the fields of Victorianism, women’s studies, cultural studies, and literary theory allow such a fecund figure to slip out of sight, particularly in this moment when the current critical climate provides so many theoretical tools with which to recover and address marginalized writers? Perhaps Fleming’s dual identity as child and author has postmodern critics tongue-tied. It seems that we do not know what to do with a writer who never grew up.

The following passage provides a longer sample of Fleming’s writing, revealing both her appeal and the challenges she poses:

[. . .] Repent & be wise saith the  
 preacher before it be to late.—Regency  
 bnnets are become very fashionable  
 of late & every gets them save poor me  
 but if I had one it would not become  
 me.—A Mirtal is a beautifull plant  
 & so is a Geramem & nettle Geramem  
 Climbing is a talent which the bear  
 excels in and so does monkeys apes &

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<sup>11</sup> In keeping with Sidgwick’s emphasis on printing Fleming’s journal as close to the manuscript as possible, I retain all grammatical and spelling inconsistencies and her original line breaks. Whenever I quote Fleming in this chapter, the page number referenced parenthetically refers to Sidgwick’s collection.

baboons.—I have been washing my  
dools cloths today & I like it very much (3-4).

In eleven breathless lines we read a Calvinist homily, a fashion review, reflection on personal appearance which sounds like it could be straight-up parroting of a caregiver's opinion, botanical and zoological considerations, and a discussion of a day's pastime. At times one can attempt to trace a stream of consciousness, hypothesizing, for example, that Fleming's restatement of Sunday's sermon triggered a recollection of all the new bonnets that appeared in church that day. At best this remains conjecture, however. While Fleming's passages offer obvious riches for scholars of history and culture, a starting-point for literary analysis proves both intuitively promising and harder to decipher.

Despite both current neglect and previous editors' tendency to bury her words in sugar-coated paraphrase, critical consensus throughout her entire literary existence ultimately suggests that Fleming remains her own best representative. A century after he wrote it, editor Arundell Esdaile is not too far off in stating that when her work is placed alongside that which her editors wrote about her, "everything readable . . . is Marjory's (ix). Fleming's case sometimes seems a sort of sword-in-the-stone challenge at which none but the child herself can succeed. Besides being cowardly, however, deeming Fleming beyond the reach of adult analysis would overlook the significant insight already offered by Alexandra Johnson's treatment of Fleming's socialization as an author and Judith Plotz's discussion of Fleming as a Romantic child. Most significantly it would fail to do justice to a writer who, in Twain's words, "if it had occurred to her that the Laws of Rome needed codifying . . . would have taken a chance at it" (463).

This section begins by contrasting feminist and genre criticism's surprising neglect of Fleming with her Victorian popularity as an embodiment of the artfully artless

Romantic child. I reveal that while Victorians typecast Fleming, they developed a language for addressing her that we lack in contemporary consideration. I analyze the legendary accretions surrounding Fleming and Sir Walter Scott with regards to Fleming's own authorial identity, situating her within what I consider the unique Victorian phenomenon of the child muse. Victorian authors, I argue, co-opted children as muses because lingering Romantic ideals defined the child as the wellspring of creative force. Thus though Victorians embraced a non-canonical figure such as Fleming, the categorization inherent in their treatment of her proves troublesome to twenty-first century readers because of our poststructural disavowal of the marginalizing nature of iconization.

Fleming's twentieth and twenty-first century readers love to hate her sentimental Victorian editors, Farnie, Brown, and MacBean, who probably deserve any accusations of maudlin, pontificating revisionism leveled at them. Yet while they undoubtedly patronized Fleming and appropriated her as an icon of their own ideals of childhood, at least they kept her in print. One would particularly expect feminist and genre critics to express interest in reclaiming Fleming, since she represents both a marginalized female figure and a practitioner of a marginalized form that is itself often aligned with the feminine. Rachel Cottam points out a trend within genre theory to consider diaries as an example of *l'écriture féminine* because they seem to eschew the symbolic order in favor of natural, unmediated self-expression. Cottam states:

It is often suggested that the diary is a feminine genre, in both in form and content. . . . It is argued that the subversion of traditional linguistic structures and conventions of representation – in particular, through nonlinearity, interruption, and lack of closure – allow meanings to emerge that have been repressed by (phallogentric) realist discourses, and call in to question the patriarchal order those discourses sustain (269).

Cottam establishes a connection between the diary, feminism, and marginalization that suits Fleming beautifully. Yet despite the fact that her diary meaningfully and unforgettably embodies “nonlinearity, interruption, and lack of closure,” the two volume *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* which includes Cottam’s article denies Fleming an entry.<sup>12</sup> While genre theorists recognize diaries as representing *l’écriture féminine*, they largely fail to consider any correlative within the unique self-expression of diary-writing children such as Fleming.

In one of the most comprehensive considerations of Fleming to date, Alexandra Johnson states: “While feminist scholars such as Margaret Homans and Anne K. Mellor have written authoritatively on the primacy of language and female literary experience, even feminists have tended to overlook literary children like Fleming” (“Drama of Imagination” 84). Johnson provides a catalogue of relevant feminist diary collections which omit Fleming, concluding that

There is a terrible irony at work here. If, as a genre, diaries have been considered footnotes to larger literature, so, in turn, have children often assumed secondary status to their adult literary counterparts. Yet if Marjory Fleming’s diary teaches us anything, it is the literary potency of the diary and the wonders of the child who kept it” (“Drama of Imagination” 84).

Johnson champions Fleming on grounds of genre and gender, yet her advocacy does not prove popular even with a sympathetic reviewer. *New York Times* critic Nancy Caldwell Sorel praises the “gallery of women diarists” Johnson surveys in *The Hidden Writer* as “thoroughly absorbing” with two exceptions: Johnson’s attempt to establish a theory of

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<sup>12</sup> Despite a title which perfectly describes her, Langford and West’s *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* neglects Fleming as well.

the diary, and her subsequent chapter “about a Scottish girl named Marjory Fleming – clever as can be, but out of place in this high company.” Since Sorel considers Fleming “clever,” her desire to exclude her from the “high company” of diarists appears to be simple ageism. Sorel continues: “My advice: gulp down these pallid hors d'oeuvres and move on quickly to the savory and satisfying banquet that follows.” While Sorel ostensibly affirms the literary validity of the diary, she discounts both Johnson’s theoretical discussion of the genre and her treatment of one of its most marginalized practitioners. Despite her positive review of Johnson, in belittling Fleming Sorel aligns herself with those Johnson criticizes for their narrow-sightedness toward the child-author. Could it be that for all our commitment to foster the consideration of previously marginalized texts, in neglecting Fleming, canon-breakers become canonizers?

Perhaps Fleming raises a deconstructive tension within the critical community itself. We can recognize her merit as an example of what we might, to update Farnie’s subtitle, call “Child-Life Two Hundred Years Ago.” However, we stumble on Fleming’s “simecolings nots / of interrogations peorids & com / -moes” (60), those inconsistent uses of grammar and spelling that I submit as symbolic representation of the fact that her text does not align with our adult-centered, revision-intensive definition of authorship. We can join two centuries of readers in delighting in her self-expression insofar as we consider it coming from a child, but evaluating her as a stylist is an endeavor for which we lack framework. Some still call Fleming’s journals juvenilia,<sup>13</sup> but that term typically applies to the early writings of someone who later becomes a so-called “established

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<sup>13</sup> Consider Judith Plotz’s title, “The Pet of Letters: Marjorie Fleming’s Juvenilia.”



writer.”<sup>14</sup> Yet if the perennial Fleming is not an established writer, than what is she?

Fleming creates an element of anxiety in well-bred twenty-first century critics, because while we feel that we should be able to drop the patronization inherent in the qualifier in “*child*-writer,” we also consider her status as a child essential to our understanding of Fleming’s cultural identity.

Perhaps the difficulties Fleming raises in twenty-first century analysis ultimately stem from the reason so many readers love her in the first place: her spontaneity and complete lack of revision. Because our definition of writing is shot through with concepts of intentionality that spring from craftedness, it is hard to know where to begin with an author who rhymes one couplet and then the next without ever deleting or even moving her text. The most memorable example of Fleming’s disinterest in revision occurs in her tendency to say something silly when she has “not got a rhyme,” a technique uses in her Mary, Queen of Scots poem, her poem on the life of King James, and her sonnet to the Keith’s pet monkey (144, 149, 151). Granted, she sometimes seems to simply use a nonsense line to retain the rhyme without pointing out her reasoning, as I suspect is the case in her poem about the morning light, in which she states “Its splendid rays indeeds full sweet / And takes away our tast of meat” (30). Indeed, the unjustified nonsensical quality of the previous quotation is closer to what we might expect from a child-author,

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander and McMaster expand the definition of juvenilia to child-writers who never wrote as adults, naming Fleming as a key example (2). However, I contend that there is a difference in reception between the writing done by an adult’s child-self and that of a child who died before puberty. Readers tend to see an adult’s juvenilia through the lens of the writer’s adulthood – viewing it as a passing snapshot of the author’s development into something else. Fleming’s death thereby allows her writing a stand-alone sense of authority free of the retrospective encumbrances of realized adulthood. Thus, in my opinion, writing by children who did not become adult writers should not be lumped into the term “juvenilia,” but rather treated as a distinct category.

so the fact that she more often points out her failure to find an apt rhyme complicates matters because it demonstrates a good deal of awareness toward meaning even as it betrays her unwillingness to revise.

Fleming's voracious readership of adult-authored texts also complicates her own self-expression as a child author. Attributed and un-attributed examples of Fleming's debt to other writers abound in her journals, but I find the ways in which she plays with conventions of love poetry particularly fascinating. With Petrarchan flair she deems herself "as fair as the sun & beautiful as the moon," even though she told us just a few lines before that she is "not of the delicate sex / nor of the fair but of the deficient in look" (6). Likewise she sets up a poem in which she walks with her "lover Isa," and then immediately explains "my lover I am sure shes not" (20). In blithely contradicting herself for the sake of formal concerns, Fleming revealing the frailty of such forms even as she seeks to pay them service. Arguing that Fleming was deliberately trying to deconstruct adult modes of writing may be reading too deeply, yet nevertheless her text accomplishes this deconstruction.<sup>15</sup> Even when Fleming attempts to affirm adult literary conventions,

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<sup>15</sup> Reading too deeply is tempting when one values taking Fleming seriously, and here I should note that while I greatly appreciate Johnson's perspective on Fleming, I find her guilty of over-analysis at times. This tendency proves most evident when she reads the separation of "our" in "behave-our" as Fleming bearing witness to the collaboration between herself and Isabella Keith, when she deems Fleming's upside-down script as intentionally imaging the sleeping at the foot of Keith's bed Fleming describes in the passage, and when she suggests that Fleming expresses her frustration with her lessons by not capitalizing the first letter of "bible." ("The Drama of Imagination" 92, 93, 95). Johnson's readings are certainly attractive, as is her respect for Fleming's authorship. However, I am not sure that we can accept the sort of intentionality Johnson proposes when it does not bear out in the rest of Fleming's writing.

they fail to provide her with descriptive framework on which to accurately display her life.

Fleming's surprising reluctance to write letters, on the other hand, reflects the negative aspect of her internal tension with regard to the rigidity of adult forms. The avid diarist remains amusingly non-committal about writing to even her beloved Isabella Keith, stating "I will write to you as often as I can but I am afraid I shall not be able to write you every [week]" (167). In her November 1811 letter, Keith petulantly responds "I cannot see that a letter once a week can be a great hardship to you . . . ," and in April of that year she had apologized to Isabella Fleming for the "shortness" of Marjory's message (*Complete Marjory Fleming* 179). Fleming lived during what might be considered the peak of formalistic epistolarity, in which people like Madame de Sévigné earned fame for letters that became the published standard for others to emulate (Bray 552). A culture in which one could earn celebrity through letter-writing obviously placed exceptional value on the craftedness of letters, which, judging by Fleming's absolute eschewal of revision, probably did not agree with her personal sensibilities as a writer who embodied true artlessness. In fact, as Bernard Bray establishes, formal considerations of letter writing require *sprezzatura* in all its doubleness:

[ . . . ] the writing of letters is, in principle, spontaneous and rapid, for letters are expected to be artless expressions of the writer's personality. Making rough drafts, or copies, is exceptional when it comes to intimate letters, which should accordingly disguise any skill or study, and promote the appearance of being natural. The great letter writers can be recognized by their easy mastery of this double and contradictory requirement for art and nature, labour and negligence, talent and grace (Bray 552).

The calculated artlessness of epistolary forms stands in opposition to Fleming's true spontaneity, a quality common in childhood, and one which probably bears the responsibility for her reluctance to compose in such a closed-ended genre.

Critics have always taken Fleming's status as a child into account; after all, she always was one. Yet for all their sentimentalism and voyeuristic appropriation of her childhood, it was Fleming's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators who most heartily credited her as a stylist. Robert Louis Stevenson's 1894 letter to W. Archer bears no indication of patronization: "Marjorie Fleming I have known, as you surmise, for long. She was possibly, no I take back possibly – she was one of the greatest works of God. Your note about the resemblance of her verses to mine gave me a great joy, though it only proved me a plagiarist" (260).<sup>16</sup> While Stevenson's "greatest works of God" sentence is frequently quoted in praise of Fleming, perhaps more revealing is his admission of the influence of her verse on his own. Likewise, we have already seen that Twain considered Fleming's artful artlessness worthy of other authors' envy and notice.

Judith Plotz compellingly suggests that Fleming's proficiency as both a child and a stylist makes her a rare incarnation of the paradox of Romantic genius, a trait which may be responsible for her nineteenth-century popularity.<sup>17</sup> As it both defines the

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<sup>16</sup> Stevenson's editors note that he writes in response to Archer's observation, in a 22 February 1894 *Pall Mall Budget* review of a reprint of Brown's essay on Fleming, that Stevenson's *The Child's Garden of Verses* reflected Marjory Fleming's style.

<sup>17</sup> Plotz's consideration of Fleming as a romantic child proves excellent, yet her overall research is limited. Her bibliography lacks the Sidgwick edition of Fleming's journal, instead relying on the more corrupt MacBean. She also accepts the unsubstantiated mythology Brown promulgated about Fleming's relationship to Scott.

Romantic child and situates Fleming within that construct, Plotz's discussion merits extensive quotation:

Marjorie Fleming seemed to her nineteenth-century admirers to be a very special kind of genius. She was not a child prodigy but rather a prodigious child: a genius at being a child. . . . Marjorie here is squarely within the romantic tradition of childhood greatness which valorized *normal* rather than *extraordinary* childhood. It is the normal child in Wordsworth who is the "best Philosopher" and "seer blest." . . . Marjorie possessed an extraordinary verbal power to convey the freshness, enthusiasm, and affection which was once deemed natural to all children and which was indeed natural to her. She was able to put into conscious written language what other children were able only unconsciously to embody. Marjorie not only embodied the exuberance and affection and mental play of the child, but fashioned those qualities into art. Thus she is both a child and artist who possesses what Coleridge held "the character and privilege of genius," which is "To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood" ("Pet of Letters" 6-7).<sup>18</sup>

Plotz describes notions of Romantic children and Romantic artists in binary: Romantic children are artless; Romantic artists attempt to use art to re-access the very artlessness of childhood that the artist lost in maturation. Thus the Romantic artist is trapped in a paradox, for she or he is always scrambling to regain something that is lost as soon as it is self-consciously sought. Fleming's status as child-author allowed her to resolve the inherent tensions of Romantic conceptions of artistry within herself, which may explain why she so deeply satisfied her nineteenth-century readers.

While Fleming was a Romantic child via both her birthdate and her qualities as an artless artist, the nature of her rise to fame still renders her a Victorian figure. The 2004 Oxford Dictionary of National Biography claims that her initial publication in 1858 "began the mawkish Victorian construction of the child genius" (Sutherland). Whether or

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<sup>18</sup> Plotz quotes Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.

not one agrees with the dictionary's assessment of Fleming as the source of Victorian definitions of childhood prodigy, Fleming exemplifies the continued influence of the Romantic child in the Victorian era. Despite overwhelming Victorian appreciation for Fleming's writing, one must note that her popularity built much of its steam in correlation with the myth perpetuated by male authors that she was the muse of Sir Walter Scott. Examining Fleming's tripartite identity as muse, child, and writer sheds substantial light on Victorian perceptions of the artistically generative figure of the child. Subsequent chapters will discuss the influence specific children held over adult authors, but here I wish focus specifically on the impact that Victorian employments of the construction of the Romantic child had on Fleming's textual history.

In the desire to tap the unspoiled creativity of childhood, Victorian appropriation of the child can form a sort of textual vampirism. Brown's presumably fictional identification of Fleming as Scott's muse proves an excellent example of such predation, for in creating a muse for Scott he drew on both Scott and Fleming in order to write his own meal ticket.<sup>19</sup> After all, Scott's publishers did not need a mythical child-muse to drive book sales; Scott's popularity was enormous. Since Fleming's writing is lively enough to stand on its own and was, in fact, already in print, her posthumous musedom at the hands of Brown likewise was not necessary to the marketing of her own work. Brown essentially fashioned Fleming into a muse-of-the-marketplace who provided him with

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<sup>19</sup> Fleming was a distant relative of Scott's and lived quite near him when in Edinburgh. While Scott was likely aware of the little girl, no positive evidence of a relationship exists. Arguments from omission are never foolproof, but since Fleming mentions Scott as the author of one of her favorite poems, I suspect that she would have recorded a meeting had it occurred.

used Fleming's work as saleable material on which to piggyback his own rather commonplace writing.<sup>20</sup> Judith Plotz argues that Romantic authors found in the child "a separate sphere of being that offers the adult a professional and personal vocation: a profession devoted to exploring, describing, circumscribing, worshiping, preserving childhood; and an inner life invigorated by a connection to the taproot" (*Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* xvi). Extending Plotz's theory to Brown, we find a capitalistic Victorian who not only makes Romantic childhood his vocation, but actually converts it into a source of revenue. If Fleming was forced to play anyone's muse, it was to men like Farnie, Brown, and MacBean, who profited parasitically on her unique creativity.

Despite all of the appropriation and editorializing committed against Fleming in the nineteenth century, however, her status as a Romantic child made her Victorian readers more accepting of her dual identity as child and author than are we. As I have established, nineteenth-century admirers such as Twain and Stevenson *did* recognize her writing as gifted. Due to the duality implicit in ideals of the Romantic child, Fleming's genius heightened her initial readers' experience of her childishness, and her childishness strengthened their appreciation of her genius. As Plotz points out, "At the same time that her *extraordinary* powers are emphasized, however, virtually all her admirers insist on how *ordinary* and childish she was" ("Pet of Letters" 4). Plotz later adds: "To an era which looked to childhood for authority, Marjorie Fleming was irresistible in her striking combination of exuberant *normal* childishness and her fertile talents" (7). Thus when her

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<sup>20</sup> It worked too; even Twain considered shaking Brown's hand one of "the prides of my life" (455).

third editor, Lachlan MacBean, notes the incongruity “that we catch her washing her doll clothes and enjoying an action that is so unlike an author!” he “start[s]” with “surprise and joy” (111). Fleming’s pen may produce delightful results, but in MacBean’s eyes it does not belong to her, and indeed, her verbal charm directly results from this incongruity. He states: “It is always interesting to watch children trying to wield the words of an adult world, much as a new apprentice wields the tradesman’s tools with a kind of amateur originality. But no one ever produced quainter effects with common English words than does our Maidie” (MacBean 42). By implying that verbal expression is a fundamentally adult pursuit, MacBean asserts Fleming’s otherness from adult discourse. The nineteenth-century stability of the canon actually allowed Victorians to enjoy Fleming without reservation, sharing none of our commitment to expand the bounds of literary consideration to accommodate a marginal voice.

Fleming’s current print status reveals that for all its challenges to the canon, twenty-first century discourse still “others” the authorial assertions of children. The only anthologies Fleming currently occupies are collections of journals or light verse. Anthologizing Fleming’s diaries in a journal collection suits her primary genre, but classifying her work as light verse seems an insult to a poet who clearly aspired to serious expression.<sup>21</sup> The only complete edition of Fleming’s writing currently in print is the

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<sup>21</sup> For a list of journal anthologies which include Fleming, see Johnson’s “Marjory Fleming,” 83-4. The light verse anthologies which feature Fleming include the 1957 *Silver Treasury of Light Verse* and the 1986 *Norton Book of Light Verse*. I am indebted to Plotz’s “Pet of Letters” for these references. I also found citations for some of Fleming’s verse in two songbooks: the 1978 *Calico Pie & Other Nonsense Rhymes: Songs and Rounds for Children*, and Bennett’s *A Garland for Marjory Fleming* (listed in my bibliography under Fleming and Bennet).



illustrated 1999 publication from Mercat Press. The Mercat *Marjory's Book* demonstrates satisfactory scholarship, yet its layout and design targets the children's market, therefore reinforcing the problematic assumption that writing by children must primarily be read by children.

In some fundamental way child-writing does not count as authorship within adult judgment, a fact which ironically allows the child author a good deal of freedom. Because their thoughts are typically marginalized, children are often able to express those thoughts without fear of censorship.<sup>22</sup> Rarely did Fleming's cousin and tutor Isabella Keith concern herself with the content of Fleming's journals, which she assigned in order that her charge's penmanship might improve. Thus while Fleming's environment was undoubtedly supportive, it does not seem to be one in which her thoughts were given very serious consideration. In 1811 Keith wrote to Fleming's sister, Isabella, that "[Marjory] continues her journal every day entirely by herself it is a very amusing production indeed, and when finished I shall send it over for your Mothers perusal, and I hope she will find it more correct and better written than the last" (*The Complete Marjory Fleming* 180). Keith's primary concern seems to be with Fleming's handwriting and grammar.<sup>23</sup> She

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<sup>22</sup> Granted, there are notable nineteenth-century exceptions to this rule. The Alcott girls, for example, were expected to read their journals aloud and discuss them with their parents, ostensibly so that Bronson and Abba Alcott could oversee their daughters' mental and moral development. However, scholars of the diary such as Blos, Johnson, and Cottam repeatedly note its attraction to women in particular when it is figured as a private outlet for expression.

<sup>23</sup> Both Keith and Fleming refer to penmanship when mentioning "writing." Consider, for example, Keith's note in Fleming's journal that "Marjory must write no more journal till she writes better," which Fleming immediately follows with repeated practice of the words "communications," "expectations," and "forwardness" (88-9).

promises that the journal is “an amusing production,” and one could read “amusing” as referring the pleasure of either the reader or the writer. Either way, Keith does not appear to take the journal’s content very seriously.

Although Fleming’s verbal alienation seems primarily due to her youth, her youth does in turn protect her from the more rigorously defined constraints she would have faced as an adult female. Plotz suggests:

Indeed Marjorie Fleming’s juvenilia, arguably the finest ever written by such a young child, attests to unusual powers. The recognition of those powers, however, was very much a function of the romantic view of childhood which enabled her . . . to earn a consideration as a young girl which she could never have obtained as a grown woman (“Pet of Letters” 9).

Plotz implies that regardless of the polish her prose might have attained had she grown up, Fleming’s hypothetical adult work would have never gained the unrestrained esteem among nineteenth-century readers that her “juvenilia” did. Johnson accords, “A child’s written words never threaten to achieve the permanence of an adult’s” (“The Drama of Imagination” 87). Both Johnson and Plotz argue that had Fleming matured, social convention would have eventually encouraged her to set aside her writing in favor of domestic arts, since serious writing was primarily considered the realm of adult males. Johnson references Southey’s letter to the child Charlotte Brönte as evidence that in mainstream early nineteenth-century thought, proper womanhood and writing were at least somewhat mutually exclusive (“The Drama of Imagination” 87).<sup>24</sup> Johnson then concludes that that due to her death, “Fleming’s juvenilia, unlike the Bronte’s, never

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<sup>24</sup> Southey’s famous statement, of course, claims that “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation” (qtd. in “The Drama of Imagination” 87).

threatened to become adult (and female) literature” (“The Drama of Imagination” 105). Fleming was safe to adore because she was dead and therefore preserved forever as the perfect Romantic child whom one could mourn and idolize without fearing the onsets of full-blown sexuality and mature female genius. However, it is important to note that Charlotte Brönte eschewed the perspective she solicited from Southey, as did many other female writers and their readers. Perhaps the hypothetical adult Fleming would have preceded Brönte down the road less traveled, but the simple act of putting pen to paper would have become inherently coded with agenda (and therefore controversy) upon Fleming’s coming-of-age.

Yet are the choices of a child any less loaded than those of an adult? It seems to me that child-authors like Fleming are not only aware of their subjection to culturally-controlled identity construction, but write in order to challenge the adult hegemonies of expression that declare that “children should be seen and not heard.” After all, Fleming’s authorial aspirations were forceful enough to persuade her parents to allow her to write a poem even when it jeopardized her health days before her death. She claims that “. . . I hav / so many talents,” and “I composed myself & no / -body assisted me I am sure,” statements which reflect a significant sense of authorial ownership (63, 120). Johnson suggests that the nature of Fleming’s output alone implies aspirations toward canonical literature, stating:

Few could argue with MacBean’s observation that “she is not so much a child of genius as the genius of childhood” (22). Yet how many children’s journals boast 9000 words, 560 lines of poetry, including a 208-line historically accurate poem on the life of Mary Queen of Scots? This is no ordinary child’s diary . . . from start to finish, Marjory thought of herself as an author (“Drama of Imagination” 85).

Fleming's insistence on the independence of her authorship reflects her determination to compete in an adult sphere.

Juliet McMaster suggests that children do not seek to write to other children, but rather to participate in mainstream literary discourse. She states:

The slave who wants power doesn't yearn to be a slave-driver; he would rather be the master who gives the orders to the slave-drivers. Similarly, when a child writes, I suspect, she's not usually writing for other children.. . . the child is not trying to produce 'children's literature' (whatever that is). She has her eye on the Canon (281).

McMaster does not unpack her slave metaphor, but it seems a telling choice in an article which celebrates children's writing. She may not have intended it, but by setting up children as slaves who wish to learn the language of their captors, McMaster suggests that in order to express their ideas in written discourse, children must take on language which is both foreign and oppressive. Upon successful adoption of this language, child-authors become socialized to the adult world, thereby viewing their writing as a developmental stage that should naturally be discarded once its purpose is fulfilled.

Fleming's authorship may ultimately point toward accelerated socialization rather than freedom. To extend Johnson's thesis, child-authorship is not only something to shed with maturity; it actually becomes part of the machinery that renders itself obsolete. According to Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter, Fleming "wrote of the difficulties of achieving an ideal of feminine goodness even before she learned to punctuate" (qtd. in Johnson, "Drama of Imagination," 82). While her expression frequently bears a free-thinking creativity that seems unique to childhood and perhaps even to the narrower category of childhood genius, aspiring to be an author in any of the traditional definitions jumpstarts Fleming's process toward the societal and canonical constraints one might call

“growing up.” Herein lies the sticky duality of childhood and authorship. In Johnson’s calculus of socialization, the more Fleming asserts her authorship, the farther she moves from childhood.

No longer satisfied with the paradox of the Romantic child, it seems that twenty-first century critics stumble into another paradox: the fact that adulthood, an inherently socialized state, is a prerequisite for authorship, which carries connotations of originality. Johnson explains:

By definition and design, a diary involves two simultaneous if contradictory processes: the emergence of a concrete language of feelings and the learned overlay of censorship through socialization. Language, the vehicle of self-expression, also becomes in time the instrument of self-censorship. The tension between confession and censorship in the diary underlines the eroding effects of socialization on talent and identity (“Drama of Imagination” 97).

In Johnson’s definition, becoming an author in the typical, adult form implies a *loss* of originality and selfhood — a loss she traces in the evolution of Fleming’s writing. The points at which Fleming offers a child’s-eye critique of society are the ones that have always delighted her readers the most, yet the very fact that Fleming is engaging culture at all betrays her journey toward adult conformity. After all, precocity is defined as children attempting to behave like adults, a slippage which proves both comic and unsettling. Johnson states:

Like Dickens’s child protagonists withstanding the false maturity of adult society, its rules and social rigidities, the Victorian reading public found in Fleming’s diaries the unselfconscious pluck of childhood itself. Indeed, the timeless appeal of Fleming’s diaries, as her third editor, Lachlan Macbean, noted is that “we watch that mind, unconscious of its own immaturity, passing fearless judgments from the standpoint it has for the moment gained” (“The Drama of Imagination” 84).

Fleming's inability to fully conceive of her status as a non-adult emboldens her critiques of the adult world, yet she nevertheless proves its "false maturity" more effectively than would a mature author. Consider MacBean's contradictory reflection on Fleming: "Her artless writings have been classed with the wonders of the world, though indeed she was often but a merry, inconsequent babbler, as every real child must be" (1). In MacBean's mind, Fleming achieves authority through an artlessness rooted in her deeply inconsequential but authentic status as a "real child." Yet while Johnson establishes Fleming's socialization persuasively enough to debunk notions of Fleming as the *tabula rasa* Romantic child, she leaves us with the question of what precisely this socialization means in seeking any sort of concrete definition of child-authorship.

In comparing her poetry, letters, and journals, we see Fleming as both aspiring to adult expression and resistant to the prescriptive nature of adult forms. It seems that in seeking a definition of Fleming's paradoxes, the question is also the answer. In other words, perhaps Fleming cannot be defined outside of the tensions she embodies any more than one can satisfactorily define the status of a child as completely separate from the influences of the adult world in which the child is by definition preparing to take part. In her writing we see Fleming's emerging awareness of child and adult spheres, and the subsequent conformity that cannot help but occur when a child discovers the marginalization of her or his status as a non-adult. Yet while I affirm Johnson's observations of Fleming's journals as evidence of her process of socialization, I also see Fleming's mixed resistance and acceptance of this socialization as indicative not only of her burgeoning self-awareness, but as evidence of a tension that defines both child-writing and growing up. The tempestuous child who stomps and throws her new hat

when asked to do her lessons is also the child who avidly reads and quotes adult writing, revealing herself both resistant and complicit to the nearly inevitable process of maturation.

### **Daisy Ashford: Accidental Genius or Littlest Satirist?**

The questions of socialization Fleming raises also befit Daisy Ashford's own engagement of social and literary conventions. The connection between the two authors was not long neglected by reviewers. In fact, "Topics of the Week – Marjorie or Daisy?", a 1920 *New York Times* article, suggests somewhat jocularly that Fleming herself may have written *The Young Visitors*:

In quaintness of expression, orthography, punctuation, Marjorie's "diary" is amazingly like "The Young Visitors": enough so, indeed, to suggest the theory—to those gifted in such matters with the true Baconian afflatus—that the latter is a posthumous work of Scott's "pet," hidden away for all these years, and now brought out, with a few modern touches and a contemporary name, to give it the needed impulse for a great success. Mr. Barrie wrote "The Young Visitors"? Not at all! Marjorie Fleming wrote it, then gave it to her friend Walter Scott, to edit, and in some forgotten corner of the Abbotsford library it has slumbered all these years, whence it has suddenly been dragged forth into the appreciative light of the twentieth century. That is the true explanation of "The Young Visitors" – disprove it who can!

Though it removes Barrie from the picture, by invoking Scott this article still playfully imagines child authors as requiring the editorial influence of a literary celebrity. It implies that whether Ashford or Fleming wrote *The Young Visitors*, a child could not have written it alone any more than an adult could have written it at all.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Though the article's author references Baconian Theory, it is not a perfect analogy for the point he or she is making, claiming as it does that Bacon, not Shakespeare, was the *sole* author of the Shakespearian canon.

This combination of originality and dependency in definitions of childhood is, like artful artlessness, an orthodox paradox – a logically uneasy relationship ratified by its pervasiveness, under which Marjory Fleming and Daisy Ashford can at once share a common bond and be totally unique. A 1919 *New York Times Book Review* article entitled “A Child’s Humorous Venture in Fiction” explicitly reveals notions of Ashford and Fleming’s paradoxically similar originality. The article focuses on Ashford, but begins by quoting an earlier piece (Bullis, “A Four-Year Old Poet,” 1913), which claims the following about Marjory Fleming: “Sir Walter Scott’s Pet Marjorie is unique because she is so universal. She is every child, but she is the only child who has been able to express that everyness. That is what we mean when we say she is ‘natural,’ and that is why we love her and shall love her, while there is one phrase of the ‘journals’ and ‘poems’ left to follow another.” The ability to express – and thus preserve -- the originality of childhood formed Fleming’s and Ashford’s common ground, according to the 1919 article. They both excel in invoking adult delight at

the inevitable absurdity which results when the innocent and ignorant child mind, with its knowledge of life confined to its own door yard and the scraps of information about the big world outside which it half hears in the conversation of its elders, ventures boldly out to write about grown-up doings in that, to it, far-off land.

Patronizing though this passage may be, certainly a good deal of the charm of both authors *does* stem from their earnest and often surprisingly prescient attempts to make sense of a world about which they are denied thorough knowledge. David Sadler calls the style of *The Young Visitors* a “deliberately artless manner of writing” (24). Likewise, Pamela Pasak Sawallis says that Ashford’s book is “unintentionally charming,” but that its author “does nonetheless merit serious consideration for her accomplishment”



(Sawallis 255). Attempting to determine how to allow an author “serious consideration” for a work that is “deliberately artless” and “unintentionally charming” is, of course, a major preoccupation of this chapter.

It is important to note that the two authors I address in this chapter bookend the nineteenth century, and the cultures they engage are radically different, as are the conditions of their readership and the genre of their authorship. While Fleming primarily wrote the autobiographical non-fiction of an outsider who was not entirely aware of her marginalization, the slightly older Ashford directly engaged her outsider status through fiction.<sup>26</sup> Writing a novel enabled Ashford to create adult characters through which to work out childish questions, a fact which makes one wonder about the degree to which she was conscious of her own genius. *The Young Visitors* is almost universally acknowledged to be funny, and much of the text’s humor is due to the way it strips off the trappings of adult novelistic and social convention, baring the absurdities of these constructs for all the world to see. The interpretive problem regarding *The Young Visitors* resides in the almost impossible yet critically essential process of determining how much of this humor was intentional. In this section I will argue that as an outsider, Ashford engages adult-defined social and artistic conventions in a way that slides fluidly and almost untraceably between intentionality and unintentionally. Seeking the almost indeterminable nature of intention in child authorship sends us on a quest that is most

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<sup>26</sup> Like Laura Ray, I apply the terms “insider” and “outsider” to *The Young Visitors* to demarcate the lines of marginalization typical to child authors. While both of us are drawing on extant critical tradition in our use of these words, I insert this note to affirm that Ray originated the application of this critical framework to *The Young Visitors*, though reviewers have made the insider/outsider distinction to some degree since the novel saw print.

likely impossible, but is nevertheless a worthy endeavor because of how it reveals similar tensions within the definition of childhood and that of artistic expression.

Alan W. Friedman, scholar of the modern novel, makes a convincing case for not only the merit of Ashford's novel, but its intelligent design – in other words, the way in which the multivalent formal success of *The Young Visitors* makes it difficult to claim that it was the totally artless outpouring of an unconsciously creative mind. He states:

Unquestionably, the book is some sort of masterpiece: it has a brilliantly managed, complex, and unified plot, a broad and sensitively rendered social milieu, a large number of astonishingly carried and vividly realized characters, a luxuriant surface of sensuous and material details integral to the psychological moment, technically admirable suspense and a firmly controlled point of view, incisive insight and deep irony, even a final fullness of meaning – all filtered through immature spelling and punctuation, and the immature, if not altogether innocent, mind of its author (*Turn of the Novel* 3).

“Some sort of masterpiece” seems an excellent way to class *The Young Visitors*, because like Marjory Fleming's writing, it is hard to know what Daisy Ashford's work is, besides wonderful.

Predating Friedman, the author of “A Child's Humorous Venture in Fiction” argues that Ashford balances the conventions of her genre quite effectively, claiming that “[Barrie's] bit of praise is deserved, for the story, filling nearly a hundred pages, is mapped out on a definite pattern, it has plot and incident, its characters remain true to form, and its affairs are all wound up at the end with a completeness that goes even one better than Dickens.” Both Friedman and the author of “A Child's Humorous Venture in Fiction” celebrate the novel's skill and locate its appeal in its absurdity, but Friedman defines that absurdity as something beyond the humorous audacity of a marginalized other's naive authority claims. Friedman's use of “absurd” connotes participation in a

specific form. He claims that *The Young Visitors* “constitutes not only a precocious unconscious parody but also a very reasonable facsimile of the genus Novel for the first two centuries of its existence. Perhaps it deserves to be honored as the last traditional novel, the *reductio ad absurdum* which looks backward, as Joyce’s looks forward (*The Turn of the Novel* 4). Both Fleming and Ashford aim for the canon, but Fleming’s work resists generic considerations while Ashford’s employs a remarkably sophisticated awareness of adult novelistic conventions that allows it to effectively satirize adult social conventions. Thus, Ashford’s novel is interesting both because of how well it competes at an adult game and how it reveals the frailties of both the game and its adjudicators.

Friedman implies that *The Young Visitors* is worthy of recognition within the generic categories of absurdism and the modern novel, a statement that affords Ashford’s authorship a degree of respect that few critics, however affirming, allow. Yet Friedman’s decision to call Ashford’s work an “*unconscious* parody” (emphasis mine) reveals that despite his enthusiastic opinion of the literary merit of *The Young Visitors*, he is unwilling to assume that Ashford’s success springs from complete authorial intentionality. Yet it also seems to be a fair assessment of Ashford’s own impulse as a writer, for the book is charming because of how well Ashford deploys the novelistic form to which she aspires, but also because of the ways in which it unconsciously reveals the shallowness of novelistic priorities such as the marriage plot and the sewn-up ending. Friedman compares Ashford to Joyce, and while Joyce revolutionized the novel rather than parodying it, the comparison is relevant because his intentionally nonsensical style sounds very much like Ashford’s work. It is tempting to consider Joyce the better writer simply because we know that unlike Ashford, he *could* produce writing more closely

compliant with standard adult forms. Yet should the extent to which an artist is capable of achieving proficiency within a form have any bearing on our assessment of the degree to which his or her more groundbreaking work achieves genius? There are many reasons one could make the case that Joyce is a better writer than Ashford, but nevertheless it seems to me that while genius certainly can be observed within authorial intentionality, it can also reside in the unconscious merit of a work itself. Thus, *The Young Visitors* can be a brilliant parody even though its author was not a parodist.

Yet might deeming the novel an unconscious parody do violence to Ashford's authorial agency? After all, parody is not only external, but contrary to an authorial intent she would later describe in terms of "solemn seriousness" (*Daisy Ashford: Her Book* vii). A 1919 review in *The Living Age* reflects this concern to some extent, claiming that the fact that Daisy Ashford was grown up when the novel came to press

helps to mitigate, though it does not altogether dispel, the reviewer's feeling that his merriment over the quaint characters and queer episodes of *The Young Visitors* is something to be ashamed of. To laugh at a child's story is almost as bad as laughing at the child herself; and he, the reviewer, who has secretly read stories written by his own little daughter, cannot think it makes much difference if, owing to the horrid business of growing up, the child that wrote it has mysteriously vanished beyond the blue hills of Time. It is laughing at childhood anyhow -- at the sacred simplicity, like dew on morning flowers, and the fresh wonderment of young things that are in, but not of, our cold and calculating world of self-seeking affairs ("Mr. Barrie Introduces a Child's Novel" 21).

This writer reveals his cultural context when he fears that laughing at an individual child makes one run the risk of laughing at childhood itself, thus violating a sacred, totalizing ideal. Yet beyond his obvious concern with preserving a culturally-sustaining construction of childhood, the reviewer raises a relevant question for critics who succeed him. Ashford's work inevitably produces laughter, but does this make our amusement at

her serious-minded literary efforts excusable? I have argued that it is hard for twenty-first century critics to know what to do with Marjory Fleming because she worked outside of genre and eschewed the revision so central to even postmodern constructions of authorship. Ashford may be even harder to write about fairly, however, because she placed her work smack in the middle of an adult genre, and her accounts of her writing process reveal that she labored over her words.<sup>27</sup> Yet I contend that with regards to parody, the joke is not on Ashford but the novelistic genre. We can read Ashford as an unintentional parodist without eroding her authorial agency because we are not unfairly laughing at her inevitable stylistic immaturity, but rather finding amusement in the cracks her work innocently reveals in adult-defined literary constructions.

Considering Ashford's parody of the novelistic form to be unconscious ultimately reveals no greater limitations to her authorship than those natural to her age, but assuming that her *satire* is unintentional luck rather than crafted success is more problematic. Her work is rife with brilliantly funny exchanges, such as the moment – right before the carriage arrived in “a beautiful drive with tall trees and big red flowers

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<sup>27</sup> We know that Fleming never re-wrote, but I am aware that I am making an assumption by implying that she did not labor over her words. However, her carefree leaps into nonsense when she had “not got a rhyme” do contrast somewhat with Ashford's reminiscence of how she used to ask her family for the right word, to varying effect: “I very occasionally asked for a word to describe something and wrote whatever they suggested in all seriousness . . . My father always refused to give me even a word saying it was my story and not his, but my mother and grown-up step-sisters would always come to the rescue . . .” (qtd. in Malcomson 98). Ashford's father insisted that Ashford preserve her authorial autonomy, while her mother and step-sisters were more collaborative. These responses are both divergent and stereotypically gendered, but the combination seems to have contributed to an environment which, though very different from Isa Keith's hands-off approach to Fleming's composition, fostered the development of Ashford's authorial identity.

growing amid shiny dark leaves” – that Mr. Salteena asks: ““Now my dear what do you think of the scenery?’ ‘Very nice said Ethel gazing at the rich fur rug on her knees’” (25, single quotation marks added for clarity). Though it could be simply an example of Ashford’s own preoccupation with the trappings of décor and dress, the way she sandwiches Ethel’s fixation on the fur between Mr. Salteena’s reference to scenery and her description of that scenery forms a rather delicious spoof on late-Victorian materialism that one would assume to be richly intentional if it is written by an adult.<sup>28</sup> Friedman is one of the few critics who read Ashford as intentionally satiric, claiming that “She is an ironist [ . . . ] But most of all, even as she shows us a world of buffoons – for no on escapes – she does something that only the greatest writers can do. Without abating her irony one jot, she causes us to love them” (“*The Young Visitors: The Deeply Flabbergasting Wit of Daisy Ashford*”).<sup>29</sup> Friedman’s concluding sentence, “Her art

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<sup>28</sup> I do not mean to suggest that children's expression should be read as if coming from adults, though I have already made it clear that I feel that children do merit a serious consideration similar to that afforded to their elders. However it is all too easy to limit our expectations of what they can do. Why, after all, would one assume that Ashford could not write satire, when every child who has ever held a comic mock funeral for a dead bird has shown him or herself a satirist? Marjory Fleming did it, and wrote her famous elegy to the dead Turkeys. Samuel Johnson reportedly stepped on the eleventh of a flock of ducklings, and wrote “Here lies good Master Duck, / Whom Master Johnson trod on: If he had lived it had been good luck,/For then we’d had an odd one” (qtd. in “When Infant Prodigies Grow Up”). In *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Boswell claims this to be but the embellishment of family lore, yet even the fact that such a story would be popularly circulated in the nineteenth century suggests that a satiric child was not an impossible idea even in that sentimental era.

<sup>29</sup> Earlier in his article Friedman claims that “it would be unwise to imagine that the dissonance of Daisy Ashford’s wording is accidental when, like great Homer, she seems to nod: “‘Then he sat down and eat the egg which Ethel had so kindly laid for him.’” He continues by addressing the scene where she feigns unawareness of Bernard’s romantic intent, stating, “The author’s exposure of Ethel’s hypocrisy is gradual and stunning.”

takes one's breath away," connects directly with his claims that that Ashford's characters are at once sympathetic and ridiculous, thus implying that such a delicate balance could not have been attained without the author's intent.

While it rather puzzlingly implies that fiction and satire are mutually exclusive, a *Daily News* article quoted by Ashford's biographer and second cousin, R.M. Malcolmson, also affirms Ashford's satiric wit. Malcolmson states: "The *Daily News* doubted whether it could be classed as fiction at all; 'It is more like satire,' was the conclusion. 'The public owe Miss Daisy Ashford a debt of gratitude,' the article goes on, 'for the privilege of being allowed for once to know something of how the world looks to a child of nine, even if the child be a somewhat sophisticated girl' (102). The fact that the *Daily News* article concludes with the caveat that Ashford's insight is worthwhile *in spite of* her sophistication illuminates the "problem" with admitting to artistry in the work of a child. The more creatively sophisticated that child becomes, the less she is able to fulfill the function of an authentic primary source. Ashford has always been valued for the glimpse of child-life she affords, but the function of *The Young Visitors* cannot be purely evidentiary because it is creative fiction. In yet another paradox, Ashford was asked to be both an active creator and a passive observer.

Due to the passivity projected on her work, perhaps Ashford's early readers assumed that the satiric elements in her writing did not necessarily imply satiric intent. In other words, to readers who affirmed her social critique, the outsider-status of a child-author like Ashford established her as a reflective surface that unconsciously revealed the inherent absurdities of her society, much as her unintentional parody revealed the limitations of the novelistic form. The problem with assuming Ashford's text is

unconsciously satiric is that it renders her little more than reflective surface, which is of course highly marginalizing. Under such a construction child-writers are not artists or even scribes – they are evidence. Defining *The Young Visitors* as primarily a means through which adults could see how they appeared to a child is somewhat analogous to the Medieval tradition of speculum literature, in which a book was defined as a magical mirror which allowed the reader to see both what he or she was and what he or she should be. Of course placing Ashford within such a tradition would be anachronistic, but nevertheless it provides an analogy through which to consider the way Ashford's authorship became objectified within her own culture. Social critique by adult authors is generally viewed as the creative product of conscious effort, whereas discussions of *The Young Visitors* often blurs the distinction between the author and her text. Similar to the way in which Fleming's work was often described as thoughts simply spilling unfiltered onto the page, Ashford's text is often read as if it is her mind, crystallized.

Laura Ray reveals a similar assumption when she reads Ashford in contrast to Henry James's title character in *What Maisie Knew*:

As an authentic outsider, [Ashford] sees and sees only that privilege attaches to social rather than moral forms. She shares the obsession with mere form common to all outsiders and to all children; she seeks initiation and not enlightenment where Maisie seeks both. Thus, in contrast to the literary and moral achievement of *What Maisie Knew*, the value of *The Young Visitors* lies in the purity and power with which it reveals the mind of the child fascinated by the conventions of both society and the novel (105).

Ray is certainly justified in reading Ashford's novel in terms of its fascination with both social and novelistic convention. However, the way in which she contrasts James's "literary and moral achievement" with the notion that the novel is, so to speak, an unfiltered transcript of Ashford's sense data more than an analytical literary effort seems



not only unfair, but unfounded. The passages in which Ashford's characters ponder over puzzling aspects of adulthood suggest that Ashford sought both initiation and enlightenment, considering each a key to the other. In claiming that Ashford sought nothing but insider conformity, Ray implies that belonging is not only Ashford's chief end, but her only one. I wish to argue that Ashford was actually much more conflicted – a position that I believe rings truer to childhood.

Though they may not be grounded in an entirely conscious satiric intent, the passages in which Ashford dwells on questions unanswerable to both her characters and herself reveals that she is not ashamed to reveal her outsider status by pointing out the baffling elements of adult life. To me this implies that while Ashford was interested in getting inside adult secrets, these secrets were not so sacred to her that she could not point out the peculiarity of adult determination to keep them. Like Fleming, Ashford's desire for insider status tugs against her urge to rebel against adult forms. If childhood is defined in terms of tension between socialization and rebellion, then it is entirely plausible that Ashford could be at once serious about her desire for novelistic insider status and yet critical of that status.

Another of Ray's points may actually provide a means to help us interpret the passages which I feel provide the most direct challenge to her argument that Ashford is exclusively seeking initiation. Ray observes that Ashford's characters are not actually adults, but children in adult form. While the author was most likely unaware of the childlikeness of her characters, she must have been conscious that she shared their confusion about certain elements adult life. In fact, all of Ashford's "young visitors" are described in terms of their lack of sophistication. For example, Mr. Salteena gets

“flustered with his forks” (30), and Ethel puts on too much “rue” (22), and even the urbane Bernard finds himself confounded by some of the bends in his family tree. Ashford’s characters continually struggle to participate autonomously in a world which is only partially revealed to them. When Bernard is showing Ethel and Mr. Salteena the portrait of “a lady with a very tight waist and quearly shaped,” the scene unfolds thus: “That is Mary Ann Fudge my grandmother I think said Bernard she was very well known in her day” (31). Due to the absence of commas it is impossible to know for certain if Bernard thinks Mary Ann Fudge was his grandmother and is certain she was well known in her day, or vice versa. In either case, however, Ashford gives the reader (and curious Ethel) the sense that there is something mysterious about Mary Ann Fudge. One could conjecture Ashford overhearing a similar conversation among adults, in which “very well known” was the answer supplied to her question of what the adults meant by a loaded word – “infamous,” perhaps. In any case, this conversation is thick with both the bewilderment and fascination children must feel when overhearing hushed or suggestively-phrased conversations regarding family breeding and pedigree. One gets the sense throughout the scene that Ashford is aware that she has not been told the full story on such topics, and one cannot help but admire her courage in attempting to sort them out on the page.

If Ashford only sought the appearance of conformity, she would have hidden her questions about adult life instead of openly raising those questions and attempting to work them out through her characters. Instead, the trio’s effort to understand a world veiled from both them and their author becomes even more overt as the discussion of Bernard’s “ancesters” continues. They move on to a picture

of a man with a fat smiley face and a red ribbon round him and a lot of medals. My great uncle Ambrose Fudge said Bernard carelessly.  
 He looks a thorough ancestor said Ethel kindly.  
 Well he was said Bernard in a proud tone he was really the Sinister son of Queen Victoria.  
 Not really cried Ethel in excited tones but what does that mean.  
 Well I dont quite know said Bernard Clark it puzzles me very much but ancestors do turn quear at times  
 Perhaps it means god son said Mr Salteena in an inteligent voice.  
 Well I dont think so said Bernard but I mean to find out (31-2).

Here it is as if Ashford knowingly presses her finger on a topic of adult preoccupation, and then unconsciously twists it. If we are to take the words at face value, Bernard's "thorough ancestor" is not thorough at all, but in fact the bastard son of a famously-decorous queen. The shock value, improbability, and gender reversal in this implication is funny enough in its own right, but the fact that Ashford makes it a point of pride for Bernard is even funnier. Most likely a good deal of the delicious irony in this passage is unintentional, yet it seems that Ashford knows that there is something amiss in the genealogy she writes even as she makes her characters celebrate it. The line about ancestors turning "quear at times" reveals a partial awareness of the stickiness of her topic which suggests at least a touch of intentionality even in one of her most unconsciously humorous passages.<sup>30</sup>

Even Ashford's choice of names for Bernard's ancestor reveals her strikingly attentive mind. The implication that Bernard's pedigree itself might have been "fudged"

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<sup>30</sup> The quotations I address in this paragraph were often used to disprove the legitimacy of the text's own provenance, and those who believed Barrie wrote it claimed that an innocent child could not have been aware of phrases like "sinister son" and "born on the wrong side of the blanket." In response, the correspondence section of the 20 September 1919 *Saturday Review* features letters providing anecdotal evidence of Victorian children being aware of each of these controversial references.

was too beguiling to resist, so I turned to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, which indicates that “fudge” was a slang reference for foolishness long before Ashford’s birth. The verb form, of course, refers to last-minute or negligent workmanship, and at least one eighteenth century text uses the word in noun form to indicate to an impostor. While Ashford may or may not have been aware of these rich connotations, she was most likely *not* simply naming a character in honor of a favorite candy, as the American confection known as chocolate fudge was not even named in print until 1896. A little genealogical research reveals that the surname “Fudge” probably developed from the early medieval “Fulcher” (Reaney 140). Bardsley’s 1901 *A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames* has no specific entry for Fudge, but it parses “Fulcher” as “lord of the people” (302). Writing half a century after Bardsley, Reaney translates “Fulcher” as “people-army” (140), which may be seen to lack the aristocratic connotation. While most likely coincidental, the etymological tension in Ambrose Fudge’s name mirrors the instability of his reputation remarkably gracefully. What is more, the surname “Fudge” is most common to Somerset (“Fudge,” *Dictionary of American Family Names*), the home of Ashford’s paternal grandfather. One wonders if further inquiry might reveal that Ashford was loosely basing Bernard’s ancestors on her own. Whatever its degree of coincidence, my side trip into etymology renders one wary of making assumptions about the limits of a child’s awareness or intentionality.

A similar instance of Ashford’s sensitivity to delicate questions of pedigree occurs later in the novel, when she has Bernard describe Mr. Salteena as “not quite the right side of the blanket as they say in fact he is the son of a first rate butcher but his mother was a decent family called Hyssopps of the glen so you see he is not so bad [. . .]”

(46). “Born on the wrong side of the blanket” is a British phrase for illegitimacy which Ashford transforms into a suggestion of an alliance out of station. Clearly she heard the phrase and understood its context if not its precise meaning, but the resultant use holds similar social implications for her character. Ashford’s use of “sinister son” in reference to Bernard’s great uncle Fudge may appear to contrastingly transform a term for illegitimacy into a badge of honor, yet it is the association with royalty over which Ethel effuses. When the characters attempt to define that association, they are immediately nonplussed by its “quear” -ness. The reader of this passage may find her/himself in the bizarre position of assuming that Bernard’s grandmother and great uncle, as well as Mr. Salteena himself, are possessed of backgrounds more sordid than their creator could understand.<sup>31</sup>

Authors often speak of how characters take on lives of their own, yet even in those cases the author is still presumed to control the prose. In all the moments in which Ashford addresses pedigree in this passage, however, she uses her words in grammatically correct but syntactically unstable ways. Thus, while I disagree with Ray’s claim that Ashford’s work merely reflects a culture through the eyes of one who sought to belong to it without understanding it, her claim that Ashford destabilizes assumed standards of social and novelistic form proves more fruitful. She states, “In Daisy’s hands, conventions of fiction and of conduct assume a new ambiguity: they are partially emptied of their common significance, and the reader must at every point decide whether

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<sup>31</sup> Friedman makes a similar observation when he states that “Ethel Monticue’s innocence, confidently assumed by her author, is gradually and conclusively eroded by her story” (*Turn of the Novel* 6).

form conceals or consumes meaning” (91). Ray’s argument could be extended to Ashford’s use of language itself. Most experts on a given author would contend that their author inflected certain words or concepts to a degree, but these instances are usually undergirded by the assumption that the author understands the lowest-common-denominator use of the word in question. Ashford, by contrast, uses words she does not understand, sometimes openly claiming them to be puzzles and other times redirecting them (either consciously or unconsciously) toward her own ends. Ashford uproots language and replants it within her own meaning-construction, suggesting that juvenile applications of language are more fluid. The liberties she takes with textual meaning actually reveals a new meaning: the creative potential of destabilized words. In other words, the emptying of meaning Ray perceptively observes in Ashford’s text may not reveal Ashford’s limitations, but rather the flexibility of the outwardly ridged system of signifiers that is language.<sup>32</sup> While Ashford is a marginalized author who is trying to speak the language of the insider, she also repurposes that language to suit her own aims.

If Ashford’s language exhibits the tension of the outsider, her title character wears it on his sleeve. While Mr. Salteena’s outsider status is due to his breeding, it is outwardly signified by his clothing. Upon arriving at the Crystal Palace, which Ashford has redefined as a finishing school for social climbers, Mr. Salteena discovers that he lacks the proper attire. He is assisted by Procurio, the “Groom of the Chambers,” in preparing for a party at Buckingham Palace:

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<sup>32</sup> Perhaps this is also something of what was meant by the tenebrous but provocative suggestion made in “Who Wrote it?,” the 1919 *New York Times* article which suggested that Ashford’s work could in fact be the first cubist novel.

Mr. Salteena was fearfully excited. What shall I wear he gasped.

Well of course you ought to have black satin knickerbockers and a hat with white feathers also garters and a star or two.

You surprise me said Mr Salteena I have none of those articles.

Well said Procurio kindly his lordship will lend you his second best cocked hat as you are obliged to wear one and I think with a little thought I might rig you up so as to pass muster.

Then they rummaged among Mr Salteenas things and Procurio got very intelligent and advised Mr Salteena to wear his black evening suit and roll up his trousers. He also lent him a pair of white silk stockings which he fastened tightly round his knees with red rosettes. Then he quickly cut out a star in silver paper and pinned it to his chest and also added a strip of red ribbon across his shirt front. Then Mr Salteena surveyed himself in the glass. Is it a fancy dress party he asked.

No they always were that kind of thing [. . .] (52).

The fact that Mr. Salteena and Procurio are satisfied with the artifice of paper stars and rolled trousers initially implies an inability on behalf of the child-author to differentiate substance from appearance, though Mr. Salteena's subsequent jealousy over the earl's "proper" clothing reveals that Ashford is at least somewhat aware of the absurdity of such a charade. More significant, however, is the way in which this passage uses the experience of an adult character to reveal a central experience of childhood: namely, the way in which children are given non-functional toy versions of the trappings of adulthood. Adults give children items like doll prams and cap guns in order to both allow them to practice being the adults they will become and to appease them for the ways in which they are denied participation in actual adult pursuits. Toys are coded with the insider-outsider tension of childhood itself.

Unlike toy guns which do not shoot or prams which contain a doll rather than a baby, there is nothing toy-like about child writer's pen. Adults tend to read child-writing itself as toy – in other words something that is not "real," but rather is charming because of how it miniaturizes and approximates the real. Yet while adults tend to construct a

child-author's work as a form of play, the act of writing is not a dematerialized plaything for children so much as a process that produces a toy *for adults*. Things get even more complicated when one considers the fact that child-writers in this period are not so much constructed as toymakers for adults, but rather as toys themselves – the “Pet” which always preceded Marjory Fleming's nickname being a good example. One could argue that child-writing is analogous to a doll's doll, yet this simply shifts the hierarchy down a notch, with the adult functioning as a child and the child as a doll. Such a formula does not take into account the fact that adults often depicted themselves as the playthings of charmingly authoritative children, though it does hint at the way constructions of child-authorship collapse producer and product. Perhaps a better analogy would be that of nesting dolls, in which the child's writing is literally contained inside of the child herself. Such an idea is brought to bear in Ray's analysis and the countless contemporary newspaper articles which construct Ashford's text as a replica of her mind untainted by conscious artfulness – to these authors, her writing is literally a doll identical to the doll which encloses it. Subsequent chapters will explore adult constructions of children as playthings, as well as the inversions of this construction which occurred when authors described themselves as subject to the whims of children, but here I wish to focus on the inversions Ashford accomplishes through her own game of pretend.

Of course all fiction is a game of pretend, regardless of whether one wants to view Ashford as a pretend novelist or a real one. Yet Mr. Salteena's sham nobility ups the stakes of Ashford's game even further, because he is, quite literally, a pretender. Mr. Salteena's dress-up box approximation of court attire seems particularly apt in a narrative by a child, since children so often enact adulthood in their play. Barrie understandably



calls Ashford a “cruel authoress” for the ways in which she rather blithely sends Mr. Salteena down paths of humiliation (13), but the fact that she flouts novelistic convention to spare her impostor his comeuppance suggests that Ashford may identify with her title character more than it initially appears. Perhaps Ashford dealt gently with her character’s false claims because she understood, at least subconsciously, that children themselves are cast as pretenders. Both Ashford and Mr. Salteena take their “pretend” seriously, and it seems to me that simply by enacting it, they each gain a degree of the insider status they seek.

If Mr. Salteena is Ashford’s vehicle for exploring the troubles of outsider-ness, Ethel is her mode of wish-fulfillment. Ethel follows a smooth road to marriage, that greatest novelistic signifier of social belonging. Besides her lack of knowledge on how to properly go on a visit (25) and the touchingly childish embarrassment of outgrown sleeves (19), the only real obstacle she experiences is the power struggle with Mr. Salteena. He repeatedly expresses a concerned hope that Ethel “will behave properly” while he is gone, to which Ethel finally responds “in a snappy tone” that she always does (38). Clearly this patronization by a fellow outsider has become wearing long before Mr. Salteena paternalistically declares “goodbye Ethel my child” (39). Take for example the scene in which Mr. Salteena asks their host, Bernard, for a private audience: “Cant I come too muttered Ethel sulkily” in a moment that sounds exactly like childhood. Mr. Salteena authoritatively answers “No my dear [. . .] this is privite.” Bernard placates her in exactly the way an older sibling or an adult placates a child in such a situation: “Perhaps later I might have a privite chat with you Miss Monticue” (35). One senses that Ashford took considerable pleasure in ensuring that for once this was not an empty

promise. Bernard promptly dispatches Mr. Salteena to London, and within the day Ethel and Bernard have left on the holiday that will result in their engagement.

Mr. Salteena may behave paternalistically to Ethel, but their rivalry and dependency on Bernard reveals that they are both outsiders. The fact that Mr. Salteena is “an elderly man of 42” (19) reveals that in the universe of *The Young Visitors*, outsidership is not simply a function of age. The dependency of Ashford’s adult characters resembles childhood, but it also calls to mind the secret insecurities of adulthood. Perhaps in this case the outward absurdity of adults behaving like children is actually the text’s biggest attraction. It poignantly reflects the fact that no adult is fully and insider, and that every adult is a dependent. *The Young Visitors* is endlessly engaging because it simultaneously aspires to and debunks the myths of adult completeness. What is more, it enables its characters to find belonging without totally conforming to the hegemonies which marginalize them. Though they have children of their own, Ashford’s characters never find the answers to their questions about “sinister sons” and “very well known” women. Of course Ashford could not have provided these answers, yet she unconsciously proves to us that she does not have to do so in order to grant happiness to her characters. The work of a child is simultaneously the work of a novice who seeks to conform to an external order and of an iconoclast who reveals the unnecessary nature of adult constructs.

To succeed at convention is to become conventional, so in a sense it is little wonder that those who celebrate creativity in children view growing up with such regret. It is as if Ashford’s later work begins to look more like cheap imitations of adult writing

than the intricate, “play” miniatures adult readers find so charming.<sup>33</sup> Her arrival at a more thorough semblance of adult style is her stylistic undoing, and one wonders if she would have stuck with writing had her increased awareness of adult literary conventions arrived later, allowing her skills to develop unfettered by self-criticism. Perhaps it was Ashford’s very precocity which ended her authorial career. Reflecting upon *The Young Visitors* as an adult, she said:

Since the publication of “The Young Visitors,” I have often been asked if I don’t myself think it is funny. When I first discovered it—not having seen it since it was written—I certainly did. That is one of the most curious things about it—to be able to laugh at what one wrote in such solemn seriousness— and that is why I can never feel all the nice things that have been said about “the Young Visitors” are really due to me at all, but to a Daisy Ashford of so long ago that she seems almost another person (*Daisy Ashford: Her Book* vii).

Ashford makes it clear that the “nice things” were said not about the insider adult, but the outsider child. Ironically, the same adult status which enables Ashford to see the unconscious humorous elements in her serious childhood efforts alienates her forever from both the world of authorship and from her childhood self. No doubt Ashford the

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<sup>33</sup> Ashford’s other four surviving childhood stories feel more sterile in spite (or, more likely, because of) their greater technical correctness. The characters in the work which follow *The Young Visitors* – “The True History of Leslie Woodcock,” “Where Love Lies Deepest,” and “The Hangman’s Daughter” – are mostly self-sustaining adults, and thus much less interesting. About “The Hangman’s Daughter,” which she wrote between her thirteenth and fourteenth year, Ashford said:

I always consider [it] the greatest literary achievement of my youth, for the reason that I put so much more effort into it than any of the others. By this time I had really determined to become an authoress (an ambition which entirely left me after my school days), and I put solid work into “The Hangman’s Daughter” and really tried to write well (*Daisy Ashford: Her Book* vi).

Later works like *The Hangman’s Daughter* resembles popular sensation novels so well that at times one forgets one is reading something by the author of *The Young Visitors*, or indeed, by a child at all. To those expecting something like *The Young Visitors*, this is a misfortune rather than an improvement.

child-author would have been sorry to know that her adult self would abandon writing, and that *The Young Visitors* became a bestseller partly because of her *failure* to gain the insider status she so charmingly attempted. On the other hand, one cannot help but imagine that little Daisy Ashford would also have been intrigued to know that her work would invert the entire insider/outsider, adult/child binary by revealing that childhood creativity is itself an insider status that, once lost, cannot ever quite be regained.

Child authorship, like childhood itself, is fundamentally defined by the outsider tension between competing impulses to rebel against adult hegemonies and to learn the language of that hegemony in order to gain admission to it. It is little wonder that Romantic constructions of childhood paradox continue to thrive, because childhood's transitional status renders it a prime location in which to reconcile conflicting elements within our definitions of the artist. Like language arts themselves, originality is the common denominator in the definition of childhood creativity. Their lesser socialization allows children to embody the oxymoron of a shared uniqueness. Since originality is by definition something unique, the only way *every* child could be original is through the gaps in their socialization. Both Fleming and Ashford are celebrated for being "everychildren" who nevertheless possess the exceptional ability to communicate the experiences indigenous to all of childhood. Ashford and Fleming are perhaps the best embodiments we have of the Romantic paradoxes of artful artlessness and original everyness, but these child-authors are more than paragons of imaginative childhood. Their ability to re-cast language, which is by nature conventional, reveals them to be artists. It also reveals the paradox in our definition of art itself.

I have argued that Fleming's and Ashford's dual status as both children and authors invites us to define a sort of *l'écriture enfantine* based on the tensions of art and artlessness, socialization and resistance. Yet recovering child-writing offers more than simply a new field to explore or a fresh vista from which to survey Victorian culture, however promising those potentials are in themselves. The paradox these writers embody by being simultaneously an artless child and artful author brings us face-to-face with a tension within our own theoretical climate: the question of how to reconcile concepts of artistic originality with the post-structural death of the author. Correspondingly, since these case studies suggest that the act of writing is at once socialized and socializing, might this not radically destabilize the negative connotations associated with the infantilization of the marginalized (and thus perhaps less socialized) "other?" I have argued that the relative neglect of child-authors in the twenty-first century stems from ageist definitions of writing, yet making critical room for them reflects more than our ethical duty to marginalized voices. Marjory Fleming and Daisy Ashford are not just interesting bits of ephemera; they are authors, and as such they call us to account. In the end, the fact that we struggle to know what to do with child-authors is precisely why we should not let them go.

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## CHAPTER 2

### BLURRED EXPOSURE: SUBJECTIVITY AND THE AGENCY OF THE CHILD-SITTER IN PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON AND JULIA MARGARET CAMERON

Two years after John Brown spun his tale around Marjory Fleming and Sir Walter Scott, Julia Margaret Cameron photographed the painter G. F. Watts flanked by a pair of young sisters (see fig. 1). She called the two results “The Whisper of the Muse.” Cameron in fact photographed these girls often, always as abstractions. Her titles refer to them as stars, as roses, as characters from scripture or fiction, and of course, as muses. Yet while Fleming’s early editors celebrated her individuality even as they conscripted her to musedom, Cameron’s images efface the subjectivity of her child-sitters.<sup>34</sup> She never even tells us their names. On the mounting of the print that now resides in the Getty Museum, Cameron duly cites the adult male sitter, the date, and even the locale of the unrecognizable background, but wholly omits any reference to the girls. Scholars have determined that the titular muse bending beside the ear of artist G.F. Watts in both images is Elizabeth Keowen. On the other side of Watts is Kate Keowen, leaning with her head against him like some kind of photographic *putto*. Cameron does not allow Kate even an abstracted reference in the title, so it is hard to know why Kate appears in the

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<sup>34</sup> My use of “subjectivity” and “objectivity” in this chapter respectively relate to portrayals of individuality versus the act of posing sitter to represent something abstract and outside of his or herself.

photograph at all. However, it is Kate's intensity that most intrigues me in these images. In both photographs she is the only figure making eye contact with the camera, and what a glowering gaze it is. The Getty Museum's cheerful suggestion that she "appears to be entranced by [Watts's] violin playing" made me chuckle; I see a brewing tantrum, not an admiring trance. Most likely we will never know what Kate was expressing, but the important thing is the notion that she was expressing *something*.

When photographing a subject who is aware of his or her presence, a photographer intrinsically cedes an indeterminate portion of control to that subject.

Certainly Kate Keowen's photographic identity was somewhat censorable in that Cameron could dispose of plates that did not please her. Even so, Kate's surviving photographic expressions – comprised of her subjectivity, in two senses of the word – were her own. Photographic portraiture cannot help but be collaborative, though the nature of that collaboration could vary widely. In this,

photography is a highly unique medium. An author or a painter can alter the representation

of his or her child-subject or even create a patchwork figure without a singular source, but a photographer is, to an extent, at the mercy of the sitter. Victorian photographers' child-sitters could be bribed, but they would have had to be either complicit with such manipulation or entirely unaware of it, because the nature of the process would have

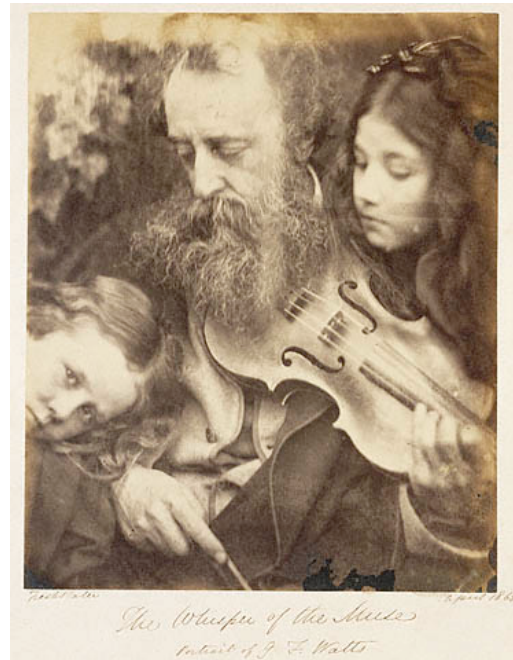


Fig. 1 *The Whisper of the Muse*. Photograph of G.F. Watts, Elizabeth Keowen, and Kate Keowen, by Julia Margaret Cameron. 1865.

revealed any resistance. What is more, a sitter can subtly hijack a work by defying the mandates of the photographer in ways that the photographer ultimately values when the image is developed. This, of course, deeply unsettles the “auto” in the credited artist’s autonomy.

Catherine Robson’s *Men in Wonderland: the Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* directly explores the notion that photographs of children can, and indeed *must* preserve an element of those children’s subjectivity. Writing on three of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson’s<sup>35</sup> most controversial photographs, *Agnes Grace Weld as Little Red Riding Hood* (see fig. 2), *Alice Liddell as the Beggar-Maid* (see fig. 3), and the nude *Portrait of Evelyn Hatch* (see fig. 4), Robson argues that they:

share the ability to confound distinctions: the little girl is made mesmerizingly enigmatic by her ability to be both a thing and its opposite. Although the pictures are obviously the result of an unequal partnership between Carroll and his models, it will never be possible to say exactly how wide that inequity may have been on any given occasion: did the photographer stage-manage the whole show, or was something always intrinsically of the girl’s own making? Such questions may be unanswerable, but it certainly appears that Carroll had no wish to represent within these photographs any trace of his own dominant role. In consequence, because she herself lays claim to adult power, the little girl is never diminished, or otherwise defined, by a relationship to an adult presence that stands outside of her. In Carroll’s photographs of girls, the form’s technical ability to combine past and present within a single image is complemented by the subject’s simultaneous existence within the realms of childhood and adulthood. The photographic medium, then, offered Carroll both satisfaction and the freedom of self-effacement: the relationship of the adult male and the little girl could be captured without the necessity of bringing the man into the frame (144).

Robson’s argument that Dodgson was attempting to completely dissolve himself into his images by affording his child-sitters the appearance of an adult portion of agency seems

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<sup>35</sup> Since Dodgson’s photographs were created within his real-life social circles, I refer to him by his actual name rather than his pen name, Lewis Carroll.

solid, and we probably will never be able to determine what the actual balance of power in any image actually was. The language of photography actually reflects this, for we could easily be referring to the same image when we speak of “Dodgson’s photograph” or “Alice Liddell’s photograph.” But while photography is undeniably mediated and therefore not entirely empirical, it is mediated by both the subject (if animate) and the creator. I believe that the simple presence of each girl in her photograph means that something *was* “always intrinsically of the girl’s own making.”

Both Robson’s argument and my own stand in contrast to Lindsay Smith’s contention that a child-sitter is entirely robbed of agency by being photographed. For example, in *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century*



Fig. 2 Agnes Weld as Little Red Riding-Hood.  
 Photograph by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.  
 1857.

*Photography*, Smith reads Benjamin’s observation of the photograph of a young Kafka as follows: “Such a straight photographic display of disempowerment in the photographic portrait becomes for Benjamin tantamount to the humiliation of child subjects. For the child’s relation to the album, in which is compounded his or her lack of agency, is not only one of powerlessness but of a new brand of humiliation inherent in the lack of control of having one’s likeness ‘taken’ in order for it to be displayed” (5). While Smith’s intent to

point out ways in which nineteenth-century children were robbed of agency seems noble, painting these children as absolute victims is actually illogical because it suggests that

they never really had any agency to rob in the first place. It also overlooks the assertions of agency demonstrated by children – even the children she discusses, such as Kafka.

After all, Benjamin phrased the passage quoted by Smith in a way that casts a good deal of ambivalence toward the relationship between photographer and sitter. He writes that “[the young Kafka] would surely be lost in his setting were it not for the immensely sad eyes, which dominate this landscape predestined for them” (qtd. in Smith 5). Benjamin describes Kafka in terms of both his sadness, which presumably stemmed from discomfort in the way in which he was being photographed, and his power, which is realized in the dominance of those eyes. The fact that Benjamin defines the setting, an element typically entirely controlled by the

photographer, as both “predestined” and “dominate[d]” by the emotion in Kafka’s eyes suggests a deliberate lack of clarity in interpreting who controls the success of the photograph. Can we be sure that the photographer wanted Kafka’s eyes to appear sad? Smith’s contention that the photographed child is always manipulated seems

supportable in Benjamin’s text, but I also find it totally one-sided in light of what I see as a

calculated ambivalence on Benjamin’s part. While I would concur with Smith that photographing children can prove exploitive, I wish to challenge her sense that photography exploits a fundamental and total lack of agency on the child’s part – the



Fig. 3. Alice Liddell as “The Beggar-Maid.”  
Photograph by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.  
1858.

notion that every photograph of a child can be reliably read in terms of a power differential that is completely stacked on the side of the adult photographer.

This chapter explores how photography not only extends the boundaries of adult-child collaboration, but amplifies tensions of agency and subjectivity akin to childhood itself. It argues that while Cameron asserted her artistic authority by abstracting child-sitters to romanticize childhood as a muse-like state, Dodgson photographed children in order to himself gain the

artful artlessness of a

Romantic child. The

collaborative blurring of

authority inherent in a genre

in which the sitter has so

much control allowed



Fig. 4. Photograph of Evelyn Hatch by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. 1879.

Dodgson's work to embody the paradox of art and artlessness. Dodgson's images unsettle many critics – particularly post-Freudian ones – because they emphasize a relationship in which the photographer is visibly but untraceably infused into the sitter's expressions. Cameron's images avoid this potentially predatory taint by effacing any trace of a relationship between photographer and sitter, but at times they nearly efface the autonomy of that sitter as well. When compared to her photographic treatment of great men, the abstraction Cameron applies to children appears not just as a stylistic technique, but as clear-cut evidence that for Cameron at least, efforts at photographic verisimilitude were reserved for the culturally elite, a category which was closed to children of any class within her work.

Many critics contrast Dodgson and Cameron, and most (including Dodgson himself) read Cameron as Dodgson's stylistic antithesis. Where Dodgson aimed for technical perfection, Cameron was known for a *laissez faire* attitude toward flaws on her plates, and she not only tolerated but actually exploited her camera's inability to consistently focus.<sup>36</sup> Dodgson's images function as both art and historical documentation of his subjects, while Cameron's express a spiritual quality and a commitment to the abstract. Both photographers appear interested in defining the category of childhood, but unlike Cameron, Dodgson's images claim to be realistic celebrations of an individual child's uniqueness at the same time that they function in the realm of microcosm. Cameron's and Dodgson's differences in gender and photographic style have resulted in different critical histories, yet they both practiced an avid appropriation of children. From a twenty-first century perspective, such appropriation seems a sort of identity theft. Yet this chapter argues that because of the direct participation of the subject, photography may also be the place in which creative children can most directly challenge their alienation from agency.

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In *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, Marah Gubar persuasively challenges tired critical notions that Dodgson was heedless of the ethical challenges inherent in either denying or hyperextending the autonomy of the

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<sup>36</sup> Debate over the source and merit of Cameron's distinctive blur has raged since her time. A lens incapable of sharpness at certain focal lengths, particularly when combined with cameras that took large negatives, offers one explanation. Other speculation includes Cameron's possibly defective vision, her known sloppiness in the darkroom, or simply preference (Cameron and Ford 42). Ford quotes Cameron as indicating that her camera was difficult to focus, but also gladly claiming her soft images as an intentional assertion of personal style (42). See also Gernsheim 70-1.



children with whom he collaborated. Along with predecessors such as Karoline Leach, Gubar's work provides a much-needed critical shift away from the pedophilia panic that gripped Dodgson scholarship and even public opinion for so long. She is not the first to suggest that Dodgson was concerned about the potential for abuse in collaborating with children, but she is the most comprehensive. According to Gubar, Dodgson "hopes that children can function as empowered collaborators, but [ . . . ] he fears that the power imbalance inherent in the adult-child relationship insures that all adults can offer children is a fraudulent illusion of reciprocity" (96). She also challenges the idea that Dodgson replicates older definitions of childhood rather than interrogating them:

Although he frequently raved to mothers about the beautiful naïveté of their daughters—as when he described one potential sitter as a 'perfectly simple-minded child of Nature' (Letters 1:338)—many of his photographs subvert such rhetoric by characterizing girls in particular as wily, aggressive, artful beings who have more in common with the chameleonic child actresses Carroll and other cultists flocked to see than with flowerlike Wordsworthian waifs such as Lucy Gray" (95).

While I agree with Gubar's key points, I do think she over-simplifies her definition of Romantic childhood here, which is especially unfortunate in light of her affirmation in the introduction to *Artful Dodgers* that there was no single definition of the Romantic child, or even the Wordsworthian child. Here she typecasts Lucy Gray as a frail flower, but the poem only makes one subtle use of any vegetative metaphor. It more thoroughly characterizes Lucy as a roe that, while vulnerable to nature's ravages, also possesses independence and mobility. In some ways it is this same independence and mobility that Gubar convincingly notes in Dodgson's praise of child actors.

Though Anna Rosa Scrittori's earlier reading of the theatricality of Dodgson's photographs does not focus as overtly on questions of childhood artfulness as does

Gubar's, she also treats children as actors (in both a literal and figurative sense), rather than passive objects of the photographer's gaze. Scrittori suggests that Dodgson used photography to write against the grain of Victorian gendering:

The image of womanhood, or better, of girlhood that his photos convey is thus essentially in contrast with current Victorian ideas about the passive role of femininity, the angel-in-the-house ideal. Many of Carroll's photographs tell stories, describing characters remarkable for their mobility, their promise of perpetual activity and to represent them acting a part or surrounded by theatrical equipment [. . .] Xie Kitchin (Gernsheim 1966: n.62), for instance, in Chinese dress, seems to have just come out from a series of boxes, maybe with the aid of a magician (63).

Following this reference, Scrittori moves away from the photograph of Xie Kitchin and



Fig. 5 *On Duty*. Photograph of Xie Kitchin by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. 1873.

the tea boxes (see fig. 5), but I find her speculation on the story it tells worthy of exploration. It is tempting to read the “magician” who drew Kitchen out of her boxes as Dodgson himself. If Scrittori is correct that Dodgson sought to free little girls from the categorizing “boxes” of passive Victorian femininity, then photography for him was magical not for its ability to make the active passive by creating inanimate objects (photographs)

which depicted animate ones (sitters), but instead for its paradoxical ability to capture a sense of dynamism in still form. A tea merchant – a person who would undoubtedly be adult, male, mercantile-class, and a racial “other” – represents a little upper class Victorian girl's social opposite. This scene is so thick with calculated artifice that no

viewer would think it represents a candid moment, yet it shows a little girl right at home in a context that is about the farthest place one could imagine from her natural habitat. This is the stuff of juxtaposition, which can become the stuff of cuteness, yet there seems to be something beyond mere whimsy in the image because of Xie's evident sense of ease. Dodgson may have intended the artifice around Xie to contrast with the sincerity of her natural individualism. His image seems to suggest that little girls can slide in and out of adult boxes and yet remain wholly distinct. Perhaps Dodgson is applying the same sort of shape-shifting ability to Kitchin that MacBean celebrated when he rejoiced over Fleming's contentment to balance writing epic poetry and washing doll clothes with equal priority. Yet Fleming's ability to flit in and out of adult categorization was her own, while evidence for or against Kitchin's agency in Dodgson's photographs is of course much harder to trace.

Yet for all of a child-sitter's freedom of expression in front of a camera, his or her autonomy is of a different, and possibly lesser, nature than that of a child-writer like Fleming because it is adult-granted. Perhaps the fact Dodgson's treatment of children proves so controversial suggests that adult-conferred childhood autonomy is really no autonomy at all. In other words, the tension at the center of the Dodgson controversy resides in the fact that his decision to offer autonomy to those who cannot claim it on their own could be viewed as either admirably egalitarian or deeply manipulative. Smith states:

According to the reminiscences of his 'child friends,' Carroll apparently always made it plain that children should not be persuaded to do anything that they did not wish to do. Thus, by effectively granting consent to children of all ages (taking all children at their word, giving them the right to decide what they will assent to in terms of photographic poses and costumes), he paradoxically negates the legal status of the term. While

such license may be regarded as a radical liberation of the child subject, and clearly in one sense Carroll rationalized it in this way, it is difficult to separate his attribution of consent to a child of five from that which Carroll clearly wants to gain from it for himself (102).

Does allowing children agency simply expose them to harm? And if so, is it really agency if it must be bestowed? Dodgson's decision to grant children some authority created a collaborative destabilization of power that he seemed to enjoy, yet as photographer he of course had exclusive say on which images were kept and which destroyed. The child was never granted complete equality in these collaborations, yet Dodgson was also utterly dependent on those dependents he chose to photograph, and as Robson suggests, he seemed to relish this. Interestingly, a good deal of critical anxiety about Dodgson's possible abuse of children focuses not just on the nude and recumbent poses Dodgson captured, but on two fully-clothed images which also happen to be two of his most famous photographs. Critics have variously noted an alarmingly knowing expression in Alice Liddell's eyes in her portrait as Tennyson's beggar-maid, though speculation on what caused such a gaze range from premature sexual knowledge to the fear that she is alienated by becoming "the victim of an obscure adult jest" (Bartram 151, caption). Likewise, resistance is often seen in the eyes of Agnes Grace Weld as Little Red Riding Hood, which critics read varyingly as anything from rebellion against Dodgson's photography to a wolfishness that reflects some other, more sinister victimization in keeping with the allegory of Red Riding Hood's story. Gubar turns the tables, suggesting that these images are simply the frank acknowledgement of the potential for victimization inherent in adult-child collaboration that most photographers veil. She states:

Though he has been widely attacked for his voyeurism, Carroll declines to objectify these girls, preferring to evoke a sense of charged complicity between viewer and viewed. Indeed, even when his source material explicitly calls for the child performer to function as a passive object of desire, Carroll refuses to comply, as his photograph of Alice Liddell as "The Beggar-Maid" illustrates. [. . .] Rather than selecting a strong character and enfeebling her, Carroll chooses a weak one and endows her with newfound power and agency, since the heroine of Tennyson's 1842 poem exists only to be observed and idolized (104).

Gubar's notion that these potentially erotic photographs actually represent a *refusal* to



Fig. 6. *The Turtle Doves*. Photograph of Alice Jessie Keown and Elizabeth Keown by Julia Margaret Cameron. 1864.

objectify children radicalizes the way we consider the images as evidence. Critics prior to Gubar cannot agree on exactly how to interpret the expressions of Liddell and Weld, but they share the concerned assumption that it is not only some sort of victimization, but that is essentially reflexive – a response to some imposition of Dodgson's. While these readings are certainly plausible, they overlook the possibility that the child was acting (either according to Dodgson's directions or her own interpretation of the role she played), that she was revealing an interiority

(erotic or otherwise) outside of Dodgson's influence, or that we simply cannot assume understanding of her expressions. While it is dangerous to understate children's vulnerability, it seems unfair to both Dodgson and his sitters to insist that these images reveal a knowingness and subjectivity that could not possibly belong to a child naturally.

While Dodgson's photographs cause the most critical alarm, he was not the only Victorian photographer whose images appear sexualized. Cameron took many nude and

semi-nude images of children, and in fact some of them, such as the open-mounted kiss in “The Turtle Doves,” (see fig. 6) seem nearly as erotic as Dodgson’s most controversial photograph, the odalisque-style nude of Evelyn Hatch.<sup>37</sup> Carol Mavor’s *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* evaluates how Cameron’s photographs avoided the controversy Dodgson faced. Mavor states:

Cameron’s work has managed to escape the label of “perversion” that has encumbered Carroll’s photographs. Clearly, as the text on Cameron attest to, she has been saved by her maternal life-style, which included a house full of children [. . .] Like good Victorians, historians have preferred to bathe in the apparent “neutrality” (as conventionally defined) and “purity” of her pictures. But I can see the *neutre* in her little girls, and in his too (25).<sup>38</sup>

On one hand, Mavor’s assessment that that Cameron stays off the hook of critical suspicion because of her maternity rings true with mid-Victorian definitions of mothers as libido-less domestic angels. Regardless of the fact of her motherhood, however, I suspect that a more interpretable reason Cameron’s erotic photos do not garner much suspicion resides in the fact that they rarely suggest an unquantifiable (and thereby unnerving) agency bargain between the adult photographer and the child sitter. Namely, they do not (to borrow Smith’s words for Dodgson) allow child-sitters an autonomy that “personate[s] consenting adults,” so Cameron’s photographs do not bear the smack of

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<sup>37</sup> Dodgson’s odalisque of Evelyn Hatch is admittedly hard for a twenty-first century audience, including myself, to view without alarm. I suspect Dodgson was deploying a sort of visual irony that challenged the adult dialectic of childhood artlessness and adult experience. However, this reading does not completely ease my mistrust of this image, nor do I think that it should. My point is not that Dodgson never eroticized and objectified his sitters, but rather that he actually provided a more nuanced perspective on childhood autonomy than then the less controversial Cameron.

<sup>38</sup> Mavor’s use of “*neutre*” is informed by Roland Barthes and Louis Marin. She defines it, in part, as “a neither-nor ambiguities which include the sexual” (*Pleasures Taken* 21).

subtle manipulation that makes Dodgson's images of even fully-clothed girls – and the relationships that allowed him to take them – remain suspect. Of course her sitters still have some agency, or they would not appear amenably in the pictures. That is where their agency ends, however. While Dodgson's *raison d'être* seems to have been to explore the boundaries of collaboration, I will argue that Cameron minimizes it by objectifying her child sitters, costuming them and posing them to represent archetypes, fictional characters, and abstractions rather than individuals.<sup>39</sup>

Victoria Olsen contrasts Dodgson and Cameron's photographs of children within the familiar binary of focus so often applied to them, but she does so in a way that refers directly to the degree of individuality ascribed to the sitters:

Like Cameron, [Dodgson] aimed to make artistic photographs and he concentrated on children. Like her, he often posed them in costumes or narratives. But unlike Cameron, his style was so much more sharply focused and "objective" that the works tend to direct the viewer emphatically toward the "real" child and Dodgson's relationship with him or her. These children, often named by Dodgson on the print, sitting in the middle ground of the composition, at ease on Victorian furniture in recognizable rooms, were undeniably *there* before his camera. Their "thereness" makes them available for all sorts of projections by viewers: they are victims or aggressors, innocent or seductive, before we know anything about them. Cameron's children, on the other hand, are often unrecognizable and indefinite in the haze of light, shadow, and emulsion that obscure and reveal them. Without the markers of their everyday life,

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<sup>39</sup> I am aware, of course, that Dodgson sometimes used fictional settings for his photographs as well, but he did not do so as frequently as Cameron, and rarely with the lack of eye contact, dreamy focus, and extreme profiles that Cameron tended to employ. Nor can I think of an example in which he practices the sort of inverse-reification necessary for a sitter to portray an abstract concept. Additionally, Gubar compellingly interprets many of the fantastical portraits as subverting the story they convey. (See *Artful Dodgers* 99-108).

they temporarily loose themselves. Cameron gloats in the changeability of children, whereas Dodgson tries to stop the clock (136-137).<sup>40</sup>

Olsen seems to imply not so much that Dodgson's photographs were empirically true to the sitter, but that they purported to be, a notion bolstered in her assessment that his photographs are inside time. She suggests that Cameron's pictures, on the other hand, do not aim to represent the model at all, but rather to objectify the model to create representations of the abstract. Olsen's point agrees particularly well with the two photographer's radically variant pictures of Alice Liddell.

Two years after Dodgson made his last portrait of his beloved dreamchild, Cameron photographed her. The images could not be more different. In Dodgson's image (see fig. 7), the 18-year-old Liddell is seated in one of his chairs, stylishly gowned and coiffed, with hands folded primly in her lap. Dodgson has angled the chair so that her body is in quarter profile, while her head is turned toward the camera and downward.



Fig. 7. Photograph of Alice Liddell at 18 by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. 1870.

Dodgson's composition is remarkable only in the fact that it flatters his sitter, but the look in Alice's eyes, which angle up but slightly away from the camera, is heartbreaking. Biography tells us that whatever Mrs. Liddell's reason for bringing her daughters to Dodgson after a lengthy separation, it was a surprise to Dodgson and possibly to Alice as

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<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Olsen's diction construes "objective" to refer to the real-life identity of the sitter. Though objectivity and subjectivity are often read in binary, Olsen's use of "objective" parallels the way I use the term "subjective" in this chapter.



well.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps Alice Liddell's eyes reveal the awkwardness of being so abruptly thrown back together with someone whose sudden breach with her family must have caused her great pain. The subjectivity of her emotion is the subject of the photograph. By contrast, Cameron diluted the subjectivity of Liddell's gaze. Cameron's four images of Liddell depict her as St. Agnes, Alethea, Pomona, and Cordelia. In each image, Liddell is loosely and nondescriptly dressed, with flowing Pre-Raphaelite hair. Dodgson of course employed theatrical roles and costumes as well, and in fact Cameron's Pomona (see fig. 8) is posed almost identically to Dodgson's Beggar-Maid. The dramatic difference resides in the registry of Liddell's expression. Her face (which was soft and emotionally expressive in even Dodgson's portrait of her as a young adult) appears statuesque, possibly due to Cameron's lighting. To my eyes at least, it is totally blank. Margaret Harker suggests that Liddell may not be the true subject of the similar Alethea photograph (see fig. 9) at all:



Fig. 8. *Pomona*. Photograph of Alice Liddell by Julia Margaret Cameron. 1872.

Both Alethea and Pomona (a Roman version of the same) were goddesses of fruitfulness and therefore to be surrounded with natural bounty; Alice herself, however, is not an obvious choice for depicting earthly fertility, given her slenderness and pointed, almost cat-like face. Julia Margaret always liked to use the best of her garden produce in her photographs, so perhaps it was the fruits of the season rather than the model herself who gave rise to the title (qtd. in Hopkinson 60, n. 19).

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<sup>41</sup> Dodgson's fame as the author of the lately-released *Alice in Wonderland* had won him the chance to photograph the children of Lord and Lady Salisbury, and perhaps the socially-conscious Mrs. Liddell saw a two-for-one opportunity for to increase the girls' social standing through their association with a famous author and a photographer of the aristocracy (Clark 131).

If Harker is correct, Liddell is not only defined by her environment, but actually takes a background role to the background. Cameron literally blurs distinctions to the point that the women and children she photographs become archetypical embodiments at most. Dodgson may have manipulated Liddell's emotions, but Cameron seems to erase them. Instead of a young Victorian lady whose expressions appear to register a relationship with the photographer even when in costume, Cameron's Liddell is an abstraction outside of time. To be fair, veiling their individuality could have been Cameron's attempt to protect female and child subjectivity from the intrusiveness of the male gaze, and the hardness of Liddell's face could reflect one or both of the women's resistance to traditional categorizations of softness and pliability.

However, I will argue that Cameron's own accounts do not support this sort of subversion.

A few years ago while trolling ArtSTOR, a scholarly art database, I found a Cameron photograph depicting a young woman gazing into a mirror. "The Original Alice in Wonderland" touted the title. Overjoyed at the discovery, I rattled out several pages discussing how Cameron



Fig. 9. *Alethea*. Photograph of Alice Liddell by Julia Margaret Cameron. 1872.

engaged Dodgson's concepts of autonomous interiority through both his literary depictions of looking glasses and his use of photography. Then I realized that this image could not possibly depict Alice Liddell; the sitter's earlobes were too small. After further sleuthing, I found the image in Gernsheim, attributed to be May Prinsep. I am certain

that Gernsheim is correct, and while I lost one point, I found another. This misidentification reveals that Cameron not only gravitated toward a certain type of physical beauty in her regular sitters, but rather that she also tried to make her more occasional sitters conform to it.

Ford notes that Cameron's chief female models, Mary Hillier, Mary Ryan, and May Prinsep herself "look so alike that one has often to look extremely carefully to be certain which is which; the Cameron literature has a considerable number of misidentifications" (Cameron and Ford 55). Cameron was truly remarkable in her ability to make her sitters reflect the qualities she wished to portray, to the point that the individual is nearly entirely effaced by the ideal. In his caption to Cameron's *The Kiss of Peace*, Bartram suggests that "By suppressing detail, she believed that she could reveal the divine within the human [. . .] William Michael Rossetti compared her work to Ruskin's art criticism: Cameron's photography and Ruskin's writing alike transfigured the subject 'and the reproducing process itself, into something almost higher than we know them to be'" (166). While such references to the inner nature of the sitter initially seem to suggest a great deal of respect toward the sitter's autonomy, the elevation Bartram (and Rossetti) attribute to Cameron actually diminishes the sitter's individuality, because the "suppress[ion] of detail" which reveals the divinity in their natures also renders them idealized and indistinct. Such an approach affords Cameron a great deal of stylistic leverage, and in some ways it protects the identity of the child simply because of the very limited degree to which that identity comes into play. Yet in this case protection comes at the cost of autonomy.

Liddell does not lose her individuality in Dodgson's portraits like she seems to in Cameron's, but Dodgson portrays an individualism blatantly colored by relationship and loss. Dodgson's portrait is deeply personal and intimate, a fact that allows Liddell subjectivity, but only through the reference point of Dodgson's own subjectivity. Dodgson's portraits are not simple crystallizations of an objective moment, but rather the result of a complex set of variables, which in some cases probably had a profound but nearly untraceable effect on the autonomy of the sitter. In simpler terms, Dodgson's impressively capable handling of glass and emulsion created tidy images for his objectively messy portrayals, while Cameron's beautifully messy plates revealed images that almost clinically turn individuals into representations. Cameron and Dodgson thus represent not a dichotomy of projected idealism versus objectivity, but rather two examples of the variables at play in a genre that outwardly appears to create empirically airtight "likeness."

Dodgson's relationships with children enabled him to achieve what by now is a familiar paradox. Though it may have come at an unknown cost – either to the children involved or to Dodgson's own ability to function as an adult – Dodgson's behind-camera collaboration with child sitters enabled him to become artfully artless. Yet unlike Dodgson, Cameron bears no semblance to a Romantic child. The fact that women and children were aligned in their marginality suggests that a woman artist such as Cameron would find herself wishing not to use a photographic relationship to return to the "lost girlhood" identified by Robson as the quest of male depictees of children, but rather determined to seek an authority that was locked up in masculine hegemonies. Cameron

was more interested in excelling at what was generally a man's game<sup>42</sup> than in advocating childhood agency or contributing to a separatist movement of female art, though Smith's interpretation of Cameron's unconventional focus as a political act holds water. Yet while her strong-mindedness, tireless ambition, and confident assertions of her unique artistic agency have all rightly served to establish Cameron as an icon of nineteenth-century women in the arts, she was not without gendered elitism.

Many critics and biographers have called Cameron a "lion-hunter,"<sup>43</sup> and the metaphor fits. She gained access to many of the kings of the Victorian jungle, and she never cowered before them either. Much (potentially misogynistic) evidence reveals how exacting she was with her famous sitters. Carlyle called his sitting "an inferno" (qtd. in Gernsheim 35) and Tennyson warned Longfellow "You will have to do whatever she tells you. I will come back soon and see what is left of you," when posing for Cameron (qtd. in Gernsheim 35). Cameron even went so far as to insist that the astronomer J.F.W. Herschel wash his hair before she photographed him. She evidently demanded artistic control over her famous sitters just as she did with women and children, yet unlike her portraits of women and children, Cameron's images of great men leave no doubt that the photographer composed the photographs to capture their individuality for the ages. As Cameron herself stated in her unfinished autobiography, "When I have had such men [as Carlyle] before my camera my whole soul has endeavoured to do its duty toward them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man"

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<sup>42</sup> Tucker states that the Victorian popular press debated whether women even had the reasoning skills to interpret photographs (6).

<sup>43</sup> See Olsen chapter four, for example.

(*Annals of My Glass House* 15). Cameron seems to suggest that photographic verisimilitude is the unique privilege of society's elite.

In a very tangible way Cameron reduced her female and child models to bodies. She not only participated in the Victorian binary that cast men as subjective individuals but women as objective (and objectified) representations of ideals, but she coded children feminine according to this binary. Thus, while Cameron went to great pains to capture the fiery essence of Carlyle, she wrote on the back of the Philpot family's copy of her first photograph, for which the young Annie Philpot modeled, "My first perfect success in the complete Photograph owing greatly to the *docility and sweetness* of my best & fairest little sitter" (qtd. in Olsen 134, emphasis mine). The psychological as well as physical complexities of a great man merited the dedication of Cameron's "whole soul," while little Annie Philpot satisfied Cameron's objectives for her portrait simply by sitting still and obeying. Though she did remunerate them with presents and praise, Cameron demonstrates almost no sense of ethical responsibility toward the identity of her child sitters. Cameron enjoyed portraying herself as an artist in the service of great men, but clearly purposed children to be in her service artistically.<sup>44</sup>

Such distinctions reveal a number of things. First, that Cameron had great faith in the camera's ability to almost empirically reveal the inner qualities of a person. It could thus unite evidentiary aims with art, but could also legitimately blur evidence for effect if

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<sup>44</sup> I should add that the question of who is serving whom seems to hover at the edges of all Cameron's portraits. Many of her abstracted female sitters were her servants, and she "collected" lower class children almost like Dodgson collected upper-class ones. Additionally, her portraits of females of some social standing (such as those of Julia Duckworth and Ellen Terry) seem to reflect an attention to the sitter's individuality that those depicting servants and children lack. The sum of a person's class, gender, age, and social influence determined how Cameron depicted them.

the model in question was not someone of confirmed historical importance. Second, it suggests that if evidentiary photography was the tribute due only to great men, then to Cameron empiricism was held the status of privilege even if Cameron celebrated abstraction in her other work. Third, it reveals that Dodgson was at least in part allowing children a photographic status that connoted privilege to at least one other high-profile photographic contemporary.

Though playful, the predatory diction applied to Cameron's interaction with children by both her friend Anne Thackeray Ritchie and her great-niece Lady Troubridge (née Laura Gurney, who sat for her as a child ) makes it clear Cameron afforded little of the privilege of realism – or of autonomous choice – to children. Thackeray Ritchie describes her as

a kind, exacting, though benevolent tyrant. Children loved but fled from her. I can see her now, clad in the never-failing wrapper, stained – as were her hands and eager face – with the chemicals she used in her work, her hair falling any way but the right way, lying in wait some fine morning at her garden-gate for the young ones passing down the road on their way to Farringford or the sands of Freshwater bay.

‘She’s coming! She’ll catch one of us!’

And sure enough an arm would intercept the passage of some luckless wight, and, bribed by jars of preserve or other toothsome dainty, the victim was led away to spend the sunny hours posing in the studio. Endless were the poses, especially if, as was often the case, the chosen victim was to represent some character in poem and story (qtd. in Cameron and Ford 62).

Here Cameron is a sort of troll, luring children with sweetmeats to come into her dungeon and be devoured by her camera.<sup>45</sup> Certainly Thackeray Ritchie employs irony in this passage, but the fact remains that in reluctantly posing in a guise not their own,

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<sup>45</sup> Gernsheim establishes that Cameron was relentless in pursuit of *all* the sitters she wished to photograph, be they aristocrats or cooks. Yet one can imagine that children were in some ways easier to coerce, and that she took advantage of this.

Cameron's child-sitters were alienated from their natural selves in Cameron's pictures.

Lady Troubridge's account corroborates the combination of fear and fascination

Thackeray Ritchie attributes to Cameron's child-models:

Aunt Julia appeared as a terrifying elderly woman, short and squat, with none of the Pattle grace and beauty about her. Dressed in dark clothes, stained with chemicals from her photography (and smelling of them, too) with a plump eager face and piercing eyes, and a voice husky and a little harsh, yet in some way compelling and even charming. We were at once pressed into the service of the camera . . . No wonder those old photographs of us, leaning over imaginary ramparts of heaven, look anxious and wistful. This was how we felt . . . "Stand there," she shouted, and we stood for hours . . . (qtd. in Cameron and Ford 65).

Lady Troubridge makes it clear that Cameron's child-sitters felt they had little choice (and even less pleasure) in their sittings, though she also suggests that their emotions did sculpt the mood of the resulting photographs.

Victoria Olsen reads a similar instance of the attitudes of the child-models breaking through in 1864's *Paul and Virginia* (see fig. 10), raising the question of whether or not Cameron viewed her idealized portraits as at odds with the children's petulance, or if she in fact relished the contrast. Olsen states:

as a "romantic" work of art, Cameron's *Paul and Virginia* seems implausible. Like the umbrella, the children are insistently real. The caption may read "Paul and Virginia," but it is not surprising to learn that these children are in fact Freddy Gould and Lizzie Keown, young neighbors of Cameron's on the Isle of Wight in the 1860s. These two often modeled for Cameron, and indeed they look tired, bored, even a little sulky. They don't really look like children of Paradise. This tension between the inescapable reality of Cameron's models, props, and locations and the fictional narratives that they are supposed to embody is a constant in Cameron's work (24).

Olsen sees the umbrella in the image as evidence of a purposeful and reoccurring tendency in Cameron to interject "real" things into her abstract images, so as to give her fictionalized images a flavor of "verisimilitude" (24). She makes her point in passing,



probably because her work is a biography, not a critical consideration. However, judging by her reference to the umbrella she seems to suggest that Cameron *intended* to depict the tension between real children and fictionalized ones in the images, so much so that it becomes a stable trope. I disagree with Olsen, but even if she is right this does not afford Cameron's child-models as much agency as it initially seems, because the omnipotent photographer scripts their rebellion.

Cameron's real-world relationships with children took on a practicality that markedly contrasts with their idealized photographic status. Olsen describes an album given by Cameron to her friends the Thackerays that reveals a different view of children than those idealized ones revealed in images like "The Whisper of the Muse" or "Cupid's Pencil of Light." She tells us that Cameron inscribed the album with a warning: "Fatal



Fig. 10. *Paul and Virginia*. Photograph of Freddy Gould and Elizabeth Keown by Julia Margaret Cameron. 1864.

to Photographs are Cups of tea and Coffee, Candles & Lamps, & Children's fingers!" Olsen continues by referencing a scholar of the album, Joanne Lukitsh, who contrasts Cameron's small homily on the care of her album with the more "reverent" inscriptions Cameron wrote in albums given to other great men (178). Substituting adoring praise for a homey bit of domestic advice underscores the intimacy of Cameron's relationship with the women of the Thackeray family, figuring her as both an artist anxious to protect her work

and as a Victorian mother familiar with the quotidian objects of household life. It also aligns children with those quotidian objects. Here we see another objectification of children, but it is far from idealized. The existence of such a down-to-earth (if artistically protective) statement and its contrast with both Cameron's more formal inscriptions and her abstract idealization of children through the camera simply suggest that her child-models were a vehicle for her depictive aims, and that these depictions only reflected one facet of her life. Children functioned within two separate spheres for Cameron, a bifurcation that may have severely limited the autonomy of her child-models but which is also free of the obsessive elements of Dodgson's child-loving.

Though not always sexual, Cameron's photographic treatment of women and children nearly always objectified them. Though perhaps occasionally sexual, Dodgson's photographically treatment of children probably never entirely objectified them. Dodgson's images seem to claim to authentically portray the interiority of their subjects, a claim that could fall somewhere along a spectrum that at one end features an egalitarian collaboration and on the other a predatory manipulation. Cameron effaces the individual autonomy of her child sitters, an act that is undeniably manipulative but also avoids voyeurism. In other words, Cameron's blur – literally achieved through her unconventional focusing – is abstraction openly acknowledged. Yet for all his sharp focus, Dodgson also used blur – in his case the blur of collaboration – to create an artistic subjectivity ostensibly designed to eschew identity plagiarism. Is Dodgson's collaboration with his child models, potentially false and manipulative though it may be, any more freeing to children than Cameron's unapologetic inverted reifications? Dodgson's and Cameron's varied appropriations of childhood creativity raise similar

questions of the degree to which an adult can engage the creative identity of a child without doing violence to his or her subjectivity. My next two chapters continue to plumb this question by engaging a type of adult-child collaboration that blurs agency perhaps more than a photograph ever could: creative partnerships between parent and offspring.

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### CHAPTER 3

#### “PLAGIARIZED FROM LIFE”: *LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY*, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, AND FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT’S LITERARY APPROPRIATION OF HER CHILD

In an 1890 letter to the readers of *The Era*, Frances Hodgson Burnett blithely admitted that she “plagiarized” the eponymous character of her immensely popular 1886 novel, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, from her son Vivian:

[ . . . ] I have one confession to make. There is one person to whom I am slavishly indebted for all that Fauntleroy is: but for that person the book never would (and never could) have been written. When it occurred to me to write it he was a small man of seven with the sunniest, sweetest nature that ever made brighter a little fellow’s beauty. There is not a speech of Fauntleroy’s which is not a plagiarism of his quaintness.

Yet while *Little Lord Fauntleroy* became the effigy for sentimental, appropriative depictions of children, any reader of late-Victorian children’s literature knows that Burnett was certainly not the only successful adult author who based a child-character on a real child. I have already discussed the identity appropriations of Charles Dodgson. Those of J.M. Barrie are critically addressed so thoroughly that they will serve as a touchstone in the next three chapters, rather than foci in their own right. This chapter and the one to follow will instead consider the conditions of appropriation within a literary relationship between biological parent and child. I will compare the nature and critical outcome of Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* with Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories*,

which were written collaboratively with Kipling's daughter Josephine, who also formed the basis for one of the characters.

When an author credits a dependent (and therefore non-autonomous) minor with an element of his or her work, the challenge is to determine whether the use of the child's voice is a fair-minded attribution or an unequal appropriation, a relevant question no matter what the motive of the adult or degree of consent from the child. Such questions form one major preoccupation of this chapter and the one to follow. Another involves how to generically interpret these attributions, which are often hidden in plain view via extra-narrative accounts by the author her- or himself, in light of what Sean Latham terms "one of literary criticism's deadliest sins" – autobiographical readings of fiction (3).

Latham's *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* provides a methodology for interpreting these accounts, which both bridge the gap between fiction and non-fiction for the external text, and also shape-shift between fictional and non-fictional modes themselves. *The Art of Scandal* explores the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century profusion of *roman à clef* in terms of the radical interpretive position which the genre forces us to take against "the intentional fallacy, that sturdy foundation stone of the modern critical enterprise upon which the author and or his or her intensions have been ritually sacrificed, [which] has long proven a reliable bulwark against such reading strategies, insisting as it does on a firm divide between fiction and nonfiction, between the worlds inside and outside the text (4)." Unlike *roman à clef*, Kipling and Burnett's depictions of their children celebrate rather than satirize. However, like *roman à clef*, these stories contain an autobiographical interpretive imperative, as well as the "key" – the separate, explanatory resource that gives the genre its name.

These chapters draw on Burnett's and Kipling's accounts of their children's influence to reflect on the riddle of childhood dependency and creative agency within parent-child collaboration. Kipling's introduction to the *Just So Stories*, as well as Burnett's "How Fauntleroy Occurred" and her 25 January 1890 letter to *The Era*, give us the means to assess their author's sensibilities about not only the creative capacities of childhood, but their concepts of intellectual property itself. This is particularly the case with Burnett, who was involved in two copyright battles over *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Her response to these contrasts with her playful (and thus insincere) confession that she plagiarized her son. Burnett, I argue, employs a sense of separate spheres for adults and children by applying a Romantic child construct that may in fact connect with early nineteenth-century definitions of plagiarism that justify appropriations of the works of others in a way that contrasts with the more individualized late nineteenth-century sense of intellectual property that she demanded for her own work. As I mentioned in my introduction, I affirm Marah Gubar's observation that there is no single definition of the Romantic child, but nevertheless I suggest that the dramatic rejection of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* two decades after it earned nearly universal acclaim may have something to do with a shift in application which deemphasized the Romantic child's role as a moral exemplum in exchange for a focus on the noble savage which better accommodated the burgeoning Child Studies movement that I will address further in Chapter 4.

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Though it is difficult to imagine in our own century, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* emerged under a year after its serialization as one of 1886's three best-selling novels in America. By 1893 the only title more likely to be held by American libraries was *Ben-*



*Hur* (Clark 18). Britain was likewise charmed by the little lord, and Prime Minister William Gladstone told Burnett that *Fauntleroy* “would have great effect in bringing about added good feeling between the two nations and making them understand each other” (qtd. in Thwaite 108). Fauntleroy’s name became more famous than that of Burnett herself (Thwaite 246), and the story also fueled an explosion of merchandize ranging from perfume to playing cards. However, no Fauntleroy item remotely approached the popularity of the velvet suits with lace collars, sashes, and silk stockings that comprised the little lord’s Van Dyke-revival costume, and which gained such an avid but controversial following as a fashion for late nineteenth-century boys. It was not to last, however. An object of intense scorn just a few decades after capturing the love of a massive readership, the little lord’s rocky career proves a perennial subject of critical discussion even as the book itself gathers dust in most libraries.<sup>46</sup> Skepticism toward *Fauntleroy* may have arose from the suspicion – understandable though itself culturally-defined – that Burnett’s fictional children spring more from a passé mid-Victorian sentimentality rather than a realistic (i.e.: post-Victorian) concept of childhood. However, the charges of sentimentality actually began upon the story’s publication. Burnett responded by claiming that Fauntleroy’s personality was not sentimentalized, but rather modeled in every way on her living son. I suspect that this very justification of the story was what denied it the chance to slip quietly out of fashion with many other

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<sup>46</sup> For more on *Little Lord Fauntleroy*’s rise and fall with reference to recapitulation theory and American attempts to redefine childhood in order to support claims of cultural supremacy, see my “Little Lord Fauntleroy and the Evolution of American Boyhood.”

sentimental novels, because it came at a time of increased concern over creative appropriation.

Burnett's above quoted admission of plagiarism in her letter to *The Era* was clearly calculated to charm. She continues:

It was his guileless, frank freedom of manner, his entirely friendliness with every human thing, and his delightful little excited political interests which suggested to me the idea of contrasting an innocent small republican with an English class entirely opposite in type. Every day he unconsciously wrote "Fauntleroy" for me, and for all that is sweet, all that is childishly brave and loving, all that speaks from the pure, generous unspoiled heart of a child, I must thank him alone, and so must everyone who has been touched by the little story. If I had not plagiarized from life, Cedric would not have lived!

Calling Vivian "guileless," and an "unconscious writer" establishes him as an artfully artless Romantic child. There is no reason to doubt that Fauntleroy is Vivian in fictionalized form. However, the fact that Burnett affected an air of false chivalry about her "confession," calculated on the assumption that her readership would find it charmingly arch rather than literally contrite, suggests that she felt no compunction about using children as source material.

One cannot help suspecting that her literary relationship with Vivian embodies not just identity plagiarism, but a sort of ventriloquism in which she puts words in the child's mouth and then credits them as his own. This tendency appears strikingly overt in "How Fauntleroy Occurred," in which Burnett consistently projects authorial intent onto Vivian where it was not present:

It has always been rather interesting to me to remember that he first presented himself in an impenetrable disguise. It was a disguise sufficiently artful to have disarmed the most wary. I, who am not at all a far-sighted person, was completely taken in by him. I saw nothing to warrant in the slightest degree any suspicion that he had descended to earth with practical intentions; that he furtively cherished plans of making

himself into the small hero of a book, the picturesque subject of illustrations, the inspiration of a fashion in costume, the very *jeune premier* in a play over which people in two continents would laugh and cry [ . . . ] But beneath this disguise there he lurked, the small individual who, seven years later – apparently quite artlessly and unconsciously – presented his smiling, ingenious little face to the big world, and was smiled back upon by it—Little Lord Fauntleroy (159-60).

While Burnett's tone is whimsical, her depiction of Vivian as artfully artless and wiser than the adults in his orbit reflects concepts of the Romantic child in the same way that the letter to *The Era* did. Her account of her son's creativity is not out of place within Victorian constructions of the Romantic child, but in her description his creativity extends not to some external product, but simply to himself. Within Burnett's tongue-in-cheek account, the child is not only a piece of art, but art of his own creation. While this may initially appear to afford her son some creative subjectivity, in so doing Burnett establishes herself as Vivian's unsolicited creative interpreter without any affirmation that such a venture may expose her son to misrepresentation. What is more, the wryness of Burnett's attributions of Vivian's creativity undermines serious consideration.

Burnett's playful nonsense foregrounds Vivian's artlessness, and thus his *lack* of artistic rights to her story. This is particularly clear in her frequent descriptions of Vivian as shaping his physical features. *How Fauntleroy Occurred* contains many passages like the following: "His eyes were brown, and having heard their color remarked on in a complimentary manner, he, with great artistic presence of mind, stealthily applied himself to developing on his hitherto bald head golden hair with a curl in it" (*How Fauntleroy Occurred* 167). A child's physical development is not voluntary, so pretending her young son showed agency in areas where it would be

patently impossible is one way Burnett effaces any actual autonomy Vivian may have claimed.

Burnett's passages that place assertions of a child's agency in the realm of the absurd negate any real notion that she credits her *artistic* success to her son. In fact, her appropriation is really hidden in plain view: "I will write a story about him," I said. "I will put him in a world quite new to him, and see what he will do" (*How Fauntleroy Occurred* 214). Many authors speak of how characters take on lives of their own, yet nevertheless this statement is actually an assertion of authority on Burnett's part. By entirely conflating her child with her character, she subjects him to her creative control even as she credits Vivian with "writing" Cedric.

In addition to furnishing the material of the story, Vivian and his brother Lionel functioned as a test audience, but even in this capacity they had no editorial control.

Burnett states:

When the first appearance of the false claimant occurred, he turned quite pale; so did his brother. "

Oh, dearest!' they gasped, why did you do that? Oh, don't do it!"

"What will he do?" the occupant of the armchair asked. "Won't he, dearest, be the Earl's boy any more?"

"That other boy, said Fauntleroy, tremulously, to Lord Dorincourt, the next day, 'he will have to—to be your boy now—as I was—won't he?

[. . .]But it was a real little heart that had beaten at the thought (*How Fauntleroy Occurred* 219).

Instead of an active, positive force who insists that that the parent-author retain a story's authenticity by continuing to tell it "just so," Vivian's *negative* reaction is used to confirm Burnett's plotting. I do not mean to suggest that Vivian was arguing that he did not think that his mother's plot twist was an effective artistic decision. He was most likely just using his imagination to place himself inside the story. My point is that

emotional response is all Burnett sought from him. Burnett never suggests that Vivian had any real editorial authority or creative control outside of his status as an inspiration and test audience. The entire passage I quoted above functions to reinforce the continuity of Vivian and Fauntleroy, even erasing the demarcations of fact and fiction in moving without transition from Vivian's reaction one day to Fauntleroy's sayings the next. On one hand, this gives an incredible amount of agency to Vivian, but on the other it robs him of his subjectivity because his mother allowed herself to appropriate his identity and collapse it into that of a fictional character.

Burnett did not exempt her own childhood self from such treatment, a fact that suggests that her textual treatment of Vivian is based on a definition of childhood as a separate sphere. Burnett's autobiography of her own childhood, *The One I Knew the Best of All*, explicitly reinforces the tradition that children – her child-self included – come trailing Wordsworthian clouds of glory. She separates her adult and child selves throughout the entire work, referring to her adult identity with the first-person pronoun “I” but never calling her childhood self anything but “The Small Person.” Burnett's childhood self is thus mutable and lost to the present. She also seems to extend the cliché that babies resemble one another more than they do their parents, implying that the entire category of childhood is comprised of Small People of whom she was but one representative sample. Thus she removes any individuality from even her own child-self. Burnett states:

What I have tried to do has been to make a picture, not of a particular child, but of the impressions made upon a child mind as the panoramas of Life passed before it, explained only by itself—a picture of the mental impressions of a little unit of whose parallels there are tens of thousands. The Small Person has gone to that far away country where all other small

persons emigrate as time goes by—the land to whose unknown countries there wandered some years ago two little fellows I have longed for since [. . .] (*The One I Knew the Best of All* viii).

Burnett conflates her own departure from childhood with that of both of her sons – one living, the other by then dead – as if loss of childhood and death are in some way synonymous. In another passage, she uses ghostly language to represent childhoods past: “As I might write freely of these two small shadows, so I have also felt I might write freely of this Small Person who has so long been a shadow like themselves” (vii-ix). The Copyright Act of 1842 prescribed that a work passed into public domain seven years after the author’s death. Though Vivian was not seven years outside of childhood at the time of *Fauntleroy*’s publication, Burnett’s diction still seems to suggest that the transience of childhood identity renders it public property.

Burnett totalizes childhood identity in concert with her emphasis on the uniqueness of children, which is of course a typical a Romantic child construction. More interesting, however, is the way that she deploys the Romantic child motif in order to justify accounts that she implies might otherwise be considered domestic and personal, and thus unbefitting of public notice. Her introduction to *The One I Knew The Best of All* is a sort of brief apologia for any immodesty in considering her early years fitting subject for a book. She states:

I should feel a serious delicacy in presenting to the world a sketch so autobiographical as this if I did not feel myself absolved from any charge of the bad taste of personality by the fact that I believe I might fairly entitle it “The story of *any* Child with an Imagination. My impression is that the Small Person differed from a world of others only in as far as she had more or less imagination than the other girls (vii).

Such a claim essentializes both Burnett’s childhood self and children in general, and leaves no doubt that Burnett expected this to appeal positively to her readership.

Removing the subjectivity of a child-self – either one’s own or another’s – appears a unifying and ennobling gesture in Burnett’s logic. Yet her notion of the single distinguishing characteristic between individual children is telling. To Burnett, child is defined exclusively by his or her degree of imagination. Celebrating her own childhood virtue or dwelling on the specifics of her early experiences would have been immodest, but exploring her imaginative past was not. Here Burnett seems to conform to notions that an individual child’s imaginative subjectivity within private life became relevant in literature only when able to represent objective concepts of childhood and the creative process.

While Burnett’s attitude toward the loss of childhood is undeniably wistful, she identifies the arrival of her first acceptance letter – a moment of creative triumph – as the instant at which she grew up. This suggests that for Burnett, adulthood and authorship are both tied to assertions of agency that earn one a right to participate in a world defined outside the self. Explicitly employing language of intellectual property, Burnett depicts her first exchange with a publisher as a rite of passage in which she is screened for authenticity regarding nationality and the ability to compete in a male market. The Small Person, who initially claims authorship “almost apologetically” (*The One I Knew The Best of All* 182), decides to pick and sell grapes with her sister until they have earned enough money to buy the postage necessary to submit her manuscripts. In response to her submission, she receives a response observing that ““Your story, ‘Miss Desborough’s Difficulties, is so distinctly English that our reader is not sure of its having been written by an American. We see that the name given us for the address is not that of the writer” – and here Burnett interjects that they had used the return address of a friend so as to

“evade the boys.” “Will you kindly inform us if the story is original?” the letter concludes (319). From selling grapes to drawing on the aid of a friend so as to avoid male interference, Burnett’s entire submission process reveals notions of American resourcefulness meant to belie the editor’s suggestions of disqualifying foreignness and deception. I read this as Burnett’s subtle assertion of not only her writing abilities, but her ability to claim authorial agency in whatever venue she wished to compete. Burnett tells us that she and her sister were “immensely edified at being called Sir,” revealing that they were more interested in participating in an adult and male sphere than they were in championing any other form of *l’écriture*. As she’d written in an earlier submission letter, “My object is remuneration” (312). Unlike Marjory Fleming before her or Daisy Ashford after, Burnett was entirely willing to play on an adult-defined field.

The reward for Burnett’s first assertion of intellectual property was both authorship and adulthood. The “Small Person” managed to convince the editor of the authenticity of her work by submitting a second story, and the magazine ultimately ran both of them. At this point in the narrative she proudly announces her success to her older brother, proffering the check as proof of her success:

He took it, and looked at it, and broke into a good-natured, delighted, boyish laugh.

‘Well, by Jove!’ said he, looking at her, half-amused and half-amazed. ‘That’s first class, isn’t it? By Jove!’

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘It is. And they want some more. And I am going to write some – as many as I can—a whole lot!’

And so she did.

But she had crossed the delicate, impalpable dividing line. And after that, Life itself began, and memories of her lose the meaning which attaches itself to the memories of the Mind of a Child (325).

Burnett pins the end of her childhood squarely to the moment at which she announces herself as an author to her teasing older brother. Her publications earn her esteem from



adult males as well as the ability to support herself financially – two marks of success that Burnett cherished throughout her career. Yet this sort of success seems deeply conflicted, for it renders childhood and competitive authorship mutually exclusive, affirms male authorial hegemony, and alienates Burnett from her childhood self.

Since she often spoke of how adults should hang on to the innocence and creativity of childhood, it is difficult to square the door-slam ending of *The One I Knew the Best of All* with her entire philosophy of childhood, though it is consistent with the way she underscores the separation between her childhood and adult selves by switching between first and third person pronouns. A successful self-promoter if ever there was one, the variation in Burnett's statements may be due to her acutely tuned barometer regarding what people wanted to hear. Burnett's biography amply demonstrates that she believed that she was able to retain the essential creativity of childhood, but it also demonstrates that she surrounded herself with a coterie of young people her entire life in order to preserve her artlessness amidst her substantial (and successful) commercial aims. Burnett claimed in 1905 that "I always remember that little creature which I once was, and so I can understand just what other little creatures would like when I meet them" (qtd. in Pendennis). If her appropriation of Vivian is any indicator, these "little creatures" did much to help Burnett develop both her style and her ability to market herself as their champion. Like Marjory Fleming's editors and Daisy Ashford's publishers, Burnett knew that the Romantic child was a cash cow.

Burnett drew on the paradox of the Romantic child in accounts of both her childhood and her son, but it was not her only complex reengagement of a Romantic form. In smilingly acknowledging her plagiarism of Vivian even as she defined her authorship in terms of her ability to defend her own authenticity, she was also reflecting a

Romantic definition of intellectual property. Tilar J. Mazzeo compellingly posits that the originality celebrated by the Romantics was actually something rather different than what we usually imagine. Mazzeo claims that “During the Romantic period, plagiarism was primarily concerned neither with textual parallels nor with moral failure. In fact, writers of the period were as concerned with strategies of collaboration and assimilation as they were with the category of originality – values that were not seen as mutually exclusive in the nineteenth century” (xiv).<sup>47</sup> These values do not seem mutually exclusive to Burnett, either, at least when speaking about her appropriation of her child. While such a definition of plagiarism would probably have been contestable within late Victorian copyright law – and even within what Mazzeo suggests is a revisionist sense of Romanticism perpetuated by both the Victorians and ourselves – perhaps the longevity of Romanticism’s constructions of childhood carried with it this older sense of the fungibility of creative identity.

Gubar and I have both argued that Romantic definitions of childhood, nebulous enough in their own time, were neither hermetically sealed nor universally accepted by

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<sup>47</sup> While his argument is more moderate, Robert MacFarlane also contends that the Romantics celebrated artful appropriation as well as aspirations of artlessness: no unified nor consistent doctrinal position toward originality and literary resemblance can easily be abstracted from contemporary Romantic documents. Undeniably, Romantic writers can be shown to have espoused the idea that the authentically great creator should be intellectually aloof from his or her place and time, and they can be shown not have coveted novelty and lack of influence as vital poetic criteria. However, they can also be shown to have written in direct response to social and political events, and to have addressed with varying degrees of cynicism and disbelief the concept of originality as creation out of nothing. They did associate genius with originality, but they also perceived creativity as a function of description, assimilation, and arrangement. They did deplore allusive relationships with many of their literary predecessors, notably Shakespeare and Milton (29).

the Victorians. I suspect that the same is true of Romantic concepts of intellectual property, particularly since authorship and childhood creativity orbit each erratically across the entire nineteenth century. Robert MacFarlane's history of nineteenth-century concepts of plagiarism and originality reveals that the topic was particularly fraught in the late nineteenth century. "Plagiarism hunters" made a living off of attempting to defame authors by locating their source materials and writing about it in the press (41). This inspired a spate of essays defending aesthetic appropriations. For example, MacFarlane quotes Charles Reade's 1875 claim that Sir Walter Scott's "works are literally crammed with diamonds of incidents and rubies of dialogue, picked from heterogeneous works, histories, chronicles, ballads, and oral traditions. But this is not plagiarism – it is jewel-setting" (63). Burnett clearly thought she was jewel-setting Vivian in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and it seems likely that this concept, which already had some credence in the period, would be considered particularly acceptable when applied to a dependent. This would certainly help to explain why, in the very same letter in which she pulls no punches in opposing the violation of her own intellectual property, Burnett could calculate to charm an audience with her affirmation that she plagiarized her son.

The passage from the letter to the *The Era* that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter was not simply a germinal version of *How Fauntleroy Occurred*. It came at the end of a lengthy defense of her own creative pedigree in answer to a charge by a Mrs. Winthrop that *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was plagiarized from one of her own stories. Besides Burnett's assertion that her son was her source material, she also included a Romanticized account of her child-authorship:

The worst of such persons as these is the one has no defense against them. I can only suggest to sensible persons that Mrs Winthrop's statements

wear a slight air of improbability; that it is hardly likely that I, who have written stories since I was seven years old, some of them not entirely unknown, should find it necessary to steal material I can create as easily as I breathe. I can only ask that the statement of a woman who has written stories since her earliest childhood, and whose second nature is to write them, should be entitled to as much consideration as that of a woman who apparently has written but one, which remained in entire obscurity until the happy, if audacious idea of floating it by her accusation occurred to her or her extremely sharp business advisers.

Burnett draws a distinct line between authentic and inauthentic writers that is based almost entirely on evidence from childhood. “Such persons” as Mrs Winthrop may write a story or two in adulthood, but it is a fluke compared to someone who has displayed the *sprezzatura* of the Romantic child since infancy. Burnett claims artlessness in contrast to Mrs Winthrop and her artful “business advisers,” but her shrewd management of her career and her savvy (if exploitive) appropriation of her son’s childhood both point to someone who was an extremely artful in promoting her work. Burnett considered herself artfully artless – a grown-up Romantic child who channeled the creativity of children but demanded, and even sought to expand, the full intellectual property rights of a Victorian adult.

The fact that Burnett’s “confession” of plagiarizing Vivian immediately follows her self-exoneration in the Winthrop case suggests that plagiarism of an adult’s work was clearly a serious offense which demanded her response, yet plagiarism of a child was such a weightless concept that Burnett could actually use it as evidence of her text’s authenticity. Yet she may have even evolved *this* double standard from the Romantics. Mazzeo continues by claiming that Romantic plagiarism was divided into two categories: “culpable” and “poetical.” If the borrowed elements of a work were neither acknowledged, familiar to the average educated reader, unconsciously used, or improved

by the borrowing author, that author was culpable. If even one of these four qualities were present, however, the work was but a poetical plagiarism that was considered both innocent and artistic (2). Burnett's appropriation of Vivian seems to embody Mazzeo's category of improvement, which she elaborates as follows:

By far the most important element of any Romantic-period charge of plagiarism, a successful improvement justified any borrowing, regardless of extent, and no other elements were necessary to defend an author from allegations of illegitimate borrowing. [ . . . ] Improvement did not necessitate an author making any change to the phrasing or wording of another author's text; it was sufficient to alter the context of the borrowed work, which could include extending the idea, adding new examples or "illustrations," or seamlessly integrating the borrowed text into the voice or style of one's own production (3).

Perhaps Burnett's "improvement" on Vivian's "text" was, first and foremost a generic transformation. She integrated into the permanency of her fiction the creativity of a flesh and blood boy whose medium was mutable life itself. She did it tidily, too. Though the Fauntleroy of the text is far more boisterous than the straw man that now stands in his place, Burnett's character has an air of internal order that was read as purity before it was read as sterility.

While the way Burnett contained her son in a novel bears negative associations of captivity and confinement in the late Victorian period and onward, it does seem to suit the older aesthetic Mazzeo identifies. Mazzeo continues:

Most often, discussions of improvement rested upon this matter of "seamlessness," an unimproved texts were frequently described as monstrous, patchwork, or unassimilated, suggesting that the evaluation of literary work depended upon precise definitions of textual unity. Unity of style was paramount, and seamlessness depended more upon stylistic qualities of voice and tone than upon other narrative elements. This critical emphasis was supported in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century law, which recognized style as an element of literary property. Improvement represents one of the clear ways in which Romantic-period assessments of plagiarism rested upon aesthetic judgments, and the

discourse surrounding it illustrates how invested early nineteenth-century writers were in appropriation, textual mastery, and the control of voice within a literary work (4).

Rather than decrying it as exploitive, Romantics dedicated themselves to the appropriation of other authors' material. Within this tradition, Burnett's work is not "his mother's cruel crime," – one of the *fin de siècle* accusations that I will discuss later in this chapter – but rather an artful arrangement of raw material she selected from her son's life. And yet the idea that Burnett could consider her child and his rights as throwbacks to an earlier (and presumably less progressive) era than she would countenance for herself still seems to carry the taint of hypocrisy, no matter how artfully artless she was in inventing it.

As I've indicated, Burnett was far from *laissez faire* about plagiarism of her own work, and in fact was considered a nineteenth-century champion – perhaps *the* champion – of author's rights when she went to the boards with a man named Seeböhm over the theatrical rights to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. An 1888 edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette* celebrates her victory as follows:

Mrs. Burnett bears her splendid success, as you would suppose she does, very modestly, and if she can be induced to speak of her recent legal triumph in London, where she stood in the breach and won for the profession of authorship concessions from the courts that the authors had hitherto been denied and for which they had lost all hope, she will say with a winning smile, "I did it for the clan." [. . .] She says that authors have for so many, many years been at the mercy of publishers and pirates that she felt it about time to do what she could in defense of the profession. Authors, she says, have in the past been practically compelled to take only what the publishers were willing – not what they were able – to give them, and they had so long suffered from the piratical editions that they almost believed that they had no rights worth speaking of. "Why," she says, "if there is any virtue in the law of supply and demand, the successful author should reap the harvest, and not the publisher alone. There is a steady demand for authors, and the publishers cannot make books without them, nor can the stage have plays without them.

Authorship is a gift, and cannot be taught, and yet authors have been unjustly dealt with from generation to generation (“Little Lord Fauntleroy”).

Burnett’s high view of author’s rights may appear hypocritical next to her credited appropriation of Vivian’s witticisms and very identity, but such a blatant contrast suggests that her double standard was so socially acceptable that it was essentially invisible to her entire readership. Children were defined by their developmental status, and thus it is as if childhood’s fluidity places children in the public domain until they have a fixed (and therefore adult) identity to defend. However, this was changing. If Burnett felt secure that there would be no censure in plagiarizing a child, she did not anticipate the looming shift in definitions of both childhood and libel law.

As I argue in my article “Little Lord Fauntleroy and the Evolution of American Boyhood,” within twenty years of its nearly unprecedented success, the Fauntleroy ideal came to be seen as a developmental dead-end. I suspect that this was due in large part to the Child Study Movement spearheaded by psychologist G. Stanley Hall at the end of the century. Hall based his burgeoning concept of adolescence on the evolutionary theory known as recapitulation, which claims that each human passes through every milestone of human evolution in his or her individual development. Since Hall constructed recapitulation as social as well as physiological, the little boy did not come trailing Wordsworthian clouds of glory, but remnants of savagery.<sup>48</sup> Thus the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century shift away from sentimental idealism was suited to – and

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<sup>48</sup> Kidd and others connect this sense of social recapitulation with the emphasis on Native American-inspired ritualism among groups like the Boy Scouts.

fostered by – increasing acceptance of extant notions of evolutionary child development.

Claudia Nelson states:

While the early Victorians believed that Nature is what we are put in this world to rise above, by the end of the century—two generations after the *Origin of the Species*—over-ruling nature seemed neither possible nor desirable. Over the course of the century, too, ideas of the right and the proper came to focus less and less on the exceptional, on the tract heroes who could achieve a saintliness beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Within increasing emphasis, glory fell on the normal (29).

Not only did Fauntleroy cease to be the ideal child, but idealness as a relevant category went underground in favor of a new emphasis on (and redefinition of) the rhetoric of normalcy. Little Lord Fauntleroy became the whipping boy for everything that was considered unnatural in previous definitions of childhood, and Burnett the bad mother.

In Vivian's college years a bumper crop of press addressed his relationship to Fauntleroy. The 1896 *New York Journal* article entitled "His Mother's Cruel Crime: Stalwart Vivian Burnett Persecuted by Fauntleroy" sets up Fauntleroy as a sort of inexorable doppelganger hounding every aspect of Vivian's life. The article claims "He has gone on his summer vacation—and needs it, for life probably has fewer charms for him than for any young man who ever went to Cambridge." Featuring similar invective throughout, the article suggests that one could only expect Vivian's peers to ridicule him about Fauntleroy: "Harvard wouldn't be Harvard—or any sort of American college at all—if it gave Burnett any chance to forget that he is the original Lord Fauntleroy. It doesn't make any difference how masculine he may grow to be." In other words, brutal teasing is simply a natural (and thereby forgivable) outcropping of American masculinity. Thus, according to this article, the blame for Vivian's hounding lies not with his persecutors, but with his mother's unnatural depiction of him in childhood.



Burnett ultimately paid dearly – perhaps too dearly – for her appropriation of her son’s childhood identity. Changing attitudes toward the cultural function of childhood formed one of her accusers, particularly in increasingly jingoistic turn-of-the-century America. The other came in the form of a shift in the definition of plagiarism itself. *Romans à clef* are oxymoronically a branch of fiction drawn from life, and as such form a genre that not only challenges the boundaries of fiction, but also the nature of defamation laws. Several high-profile libel lawsuits regarding *romans à clef* occurred concurrently with the shift in reaction toward *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. In fact, one could make the case that *Fauntleroy* is itself a *roman à clef*. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* defines the *roman à clef* as

A novel that represents real people in the guise of novelistic characters bearing fictional names. Usually the author makes the identities of the characters readily apparent, at least to contemporary readers. This is particularly true when the novelist has written a *roman à clef* to satirize an individual or individuals, or some associated event (345).

This definition reveals that a novel does not have to be satiric to fit the genre, and the glossary gives examples of texts in which only a few characters have a real-life corollary. While Cedric and Dearest are certainly taken from life, even some of the minor characters in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* are based on people Vivian befriended (Gerzina 108). This in itself qualifies the text as a *roman à clef*, but there is an additional connection that makes this categorization even more plausible. *Roman à clef* is a French phrase meaning “novel with a key,” and thus the term implies that a rubric exists for decoding which character corresponds with which of the author’s associates. These keys might be unearthed by scholars in the author’s papers, revealed in independently written reviews, or simply passed along by informed readers via word-of-mouth, but sometimes

the key was released by the author him/herself in a separate work (Latham 7). The letter to *The Era* and *How Fauntleroy Occurred* are unmistakably the keys to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, though we have no reason to assume that Burnett was consciously participating in this genre.

It would be taking things to extremes to argue that Burnett's portrayal of her son is libelous, since it is clearly affectionate in intention. However, the radical change in definitions of boyhood which at least in part precipitated the book's fall from grace could have also combined with the fact that such high profile libel cases involving *roman à clef* undoubtedly established a more acute public sensitivity to identity appropriations in general. Suddenly a mother's affectionate paean to her son's sweetness, regardless of whether it was actual or embellished, acquired taints of exploitation and misrepresentation which remain the prevailing reader response to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

I do not mean to vilify Burnett as retrograde or predatory, despite what I consider the ethical problems with *Fauntleroy's* origins. Though a sentimental appropriation of her son, the novel was itself unfairly appropriated by advocates of an anti-feminist new model of childhood that, in America, was further employed to increasingly xenophobic ends. More significantly, Burnett was a savvy businesswoman who was able to work the literary system to a degree of unprecedented success, the heyday of which has more than once been compared to the Harry Potter phenomenon. Her victory in intellectual property law is, if anything, undersung today. And after the smashing success of her first children's novel gained her an audience, she was able to write the nuanced, beautifully-crafted *Secret Garden*, a late bloomer that has now earned the mantle of a timeless classic.

If one is concerned with literary merit, it is unjust to compare Burnett's most outmoded children's novel with one of Kipling's more classic collections of stories, as I am about to do. It would be perhaps more reasonable to match *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* with *Kim* and discuss Anglo-Indian childhood. Such a comparison is outside the bounds of this project, but it bears suggestion as an opportunity for a more equal pairing. My own work reads *Little Lord Fauntleroy* beside the *Just So Stories* because these are the two books that use similar analogies and diction in their origin narratives, and thus illuminate the stakes of two late Victorian authors' alignment between definitions of authorial collaboration and creative childhood. I am not, however, unaware of the fact that Kipling's status as a male author with a more established readership potentially gave him more freedom to take the sorts of literary risks that can give a work critical longevity.

One of these risks was, perhaps, an acknowledgement of the biological connection at the base of parent-child collaboration. Early in planning this project, I identified ventriloquism as the best analogy to represent the appropriation of children I trace in this chapter as well as chapters 2 and 4, and in fact Gubar deploys the same idea in her recent *Artful Dodgers*. When it comes to parent-child collaboration, the analogy of ventriloquism can extend beyond a projected voice, however, because it also embodies questions of origin. Steven Connor defines ventriloquism as an effect without a cause (245). Of course his definition assumes a suspension of disbelief, for obviously ventriloquism's cause is the ventriloquist. However, ventriloquism remains a fitting analogy for the sensation of blurred and displaced agency we find in Burnett and Kipling's appropriations of their children, because it captures the confusion of source in

such relationship. Is Frances Hodgson Burnett or Vivian Burnett Fauntleroy's source? And who, for that matter, is Vivian's source – himself or his mother? By setting up her son as his own creator, and the source material from which she plagiarized, Burnett elides the complexities of a metaphoric collaboration with someone who is, in a sense, her biological creation. Of course the idea of a creator-parent fashioning a dependent creation who paradoxically has free will has theological antecedents which are probably even older than the book-as-baby trope, and Burnett takes on a god-like ownership of her child's creative autonomy even as she credits it. Whether from a sense of Victorian propriety about the topic of reproduction, or simply because it did not interest her, Burnett did not directly address the connection. By contrast, Kipling's writings about his eldest child, Josephine, extensively explore metaphors of reproduction. In Chapter 4 I will argue that Kipling evolves an old trope -- one's book as one's offspring -- in order to reimagine constructions of the Romantic child within the frame of Child Studies theories of evolutionary development.

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## CHAPTER 4

### “THE DAUGHTER THAT WAS ALL TO HIM”: RECAPITULATION AND THE LEGACY OF THE CHILD IN KIPLING’S *JUST SO STORIES*

Rudyard Kipling’s 1897 introduction to the serialization of the first three Just So Stories describes his daughter, whom he affectionately called “Effie,” as an exacting textual arbiter: “. . . in the evening there were stories meant to put Effie to sleep, and you were not allowed to alter those by one single little word. They had to be told just so, or Effie would wake up and put back the missing sentence” (“The Just-So Stories,” *St. Nicholas* 89). The *Just So Stories* are Lamarckian tales of acquired evolutionary traits – of “How the Whale Got Its Throat,” “How the Camel got Its Hump,” “How the Rhinoceros Got Its Skin,” and so on. Kipling’s introduction thus mimics them in telling us how the collection itself was made. Certainly Kipling’s depiction of his daughter’s agency in establishing the definitive edition of stories could be as fantastical as the stories themselves, yet the collection bears further evidence of her influence through the Taffy tales – three autobiographical Just So Stories,<sup>49</sup> two of which depict a prehistoric father and daughter inventing written language.<sup>50</sup> U.C. Knoepfmacher’s seminal essay

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<sup>49</sup> Sue Walsh primarily draws on the Taffy tales in her argument against the limiting nature of autobiographical interpretations of children’s literature. Her point is well-founded, however I don’t think even valid wariness should preclude exploring an autobiographical reading when the evidence seems to support it.

<sup>50</sup> The two Taffy Tales dealing with written language, “How the First Letter Was Written” and “How the Alphabet Was Made,” appear in nearly every edition of the *Just*

“Kipling’s ‘Just-So’ Partner: The Dead Child as Collaborator and Muse,” is in part dedicated to detailing the autobiographical elements of the Taffy Tales by tracing the tributes to Josephine – who died at age 6 – concealed in Kipling’s illustrations. While this chapter does not address illustration, it does accept Knoepfelmacher’s contention that the *Just So Stories* invite, and perhaps even demand, a biographical interpretation.

The *Just So Stories* are nested narratives of origin. The Taffy Tales could themselves be considered *roman à clef* in much the same way that I used the term in reference to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*’s genesis in the sayings and doings of Vivian Burnett. However, Kipling’s description of his collaborative relationship with Josephine as he described it in both the Taffy Tales and his *St. Nicholas* introduction, is not simply a “*clef*” for interpreting the autobiographical elements of those tales. To borrow the titular language of the stories, Josephine’s editorial influence on the early animal tales is central in understanding how the *Just So Stories* were made, and the Taffy Tales she inspired are Kipling’s way of telling how the human race got its most distinguishing feature: written language. In that sense, then, the Taffy tales do not just tell the origin narrative of Kipling’s stories, but of *all* stories, and of humanity as we know it. Rather incredibly, they achieve this lofty, macrocosmic thesis while simultaneously celebrating the subjectivity of a single child.

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*So Stories*. (Like J.M. Barrie and *Peter Pan*, Kipling continually revised and re-organized his work, so determining a definitive edition is rather fraught.) The other story featuring Taffy, “The Tabu Tale,” depicts her adoption of the social contract. It only appeared in one *Just So* edition before Kipling removed it, and apparently is the only Taffy tale written while Josephine was alive. Though interesting, “The Tabu Tale” does not address language acquisition directly, and thus will not be examined in this chapter.



This chapter will explore how a shared sense of development between parent and child can be read in terms of late-Victorian evolutionary theory as a generative step in cultural evolution itself, but I will also argue that Kipling subtly *inverts* theories of cultural evolution in order to memorialize Josephine as a subjective individual rather than an archetypal Romantic child. While Burnett spoke openly of her son's inadvertent contribution to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Kipling wrapped his lost daughter's creative influence in a shroud of inverted metaphors. Yet though she was the one who straightforwardly cited her source, Burnett's employment of Vivian seems more exploitive than does Kipling's, simply because she seems to consider herself entitled to do it. The difference between Burnett and Kipling's appropriations of their children is not so much that she appropriated and he did not, but rather that he wrestled with the ethics of his appropriation in a way that she did not.

Burnett advocated a vigorous definition of individuals' intellectual property rights for adults that she did not afford to the creative children she idealized. She credited her son as an original source, yet eclipsed his subjectivity by denying him the copyright belonging to an originator. By contrast, Kipling never insinuates that he is actually putting his child wholesale into the text. His character is a creative rendition of his daughter that represents her but does not directly claim to *be* her. Knoepfmacher describes the introductory paragraph that Kipling wrote for the serialization of "How the Camel Got Its Hump" and "How the Whale Got Its Throat," as a sort of attribution of intellectual property. He argues that Kipling's introduction, "asserts the privileges due that original listener, the vibrant Effie. She holds the rights to stories that must, according to her father, be set down and retold by the adult exactly the way in which she

first heard them – ‘just so’” (27). The idea that Josephine held symbolic copyright of the Just So Stories’ seems authentic to her father’s depiction of her influence in the Taffy tales, and it gives us means to discuss Taffy as a representation of Josephine rather than her clone or creation. Yet the question of whether or not any appropriation of children can fully respect their autonomy remains.

My last chapter dealt with intellectual property as a function of original authorship, a topic that is particularly loaded when discussing childhood creativity or parent-child collaboration due to the fact that dependent children are more immediately defined by their status as reproductive outcomes. This chapter will continue to address this relationship in terms of another question of origins that occupied Victorians: the origin of the species. Earlier nineteenth-century generations frowned on infantile “creeping” because crawling on all fours bore an uncomfortable resemblance to animal life (Calvert 44), but by the end of the nineteenth century evolutionary theories of development had lost some of their horror for the average parent. Nowhere is this more evident than in recapitulative theories of child development popularized by the Child Study movement. Born in America in the 1880s, Child Study drew on German evolutionist Ernst Haeckel’s already somewhat outdated 1866 theory of recapitulation – the idea that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. In other words, Haeckel’s theory suggests that every individual advances through each stage of the developmental history of its species within its lifecycle, moving from simplest organism (as an embryo) to primitive savage (as a child) to civilized adult. As I have suggested, the fall of Lord Fauntleroy is traceable to the burgeoning Child Study movement’s advocacy of childhood roguishness rather than innocence, particularly for boys. Child Study

practitioner William Byron Forbush begins *The Boy Problem: a Study in Social Pedagogy* by defining childhood in terms of both pre- and postnatal recapitulation. Once Forbush has explored the atavisms of an unborn child, he states: “After birth this ‘candidate for humanity’ continues this evolution, in which he has already repeated the history of the animal world, by repeating his own race-life from savagery unto civilization” (Forbush 9). He then reveals the explicit connection between recapitulation and a new revision of the Romantic child by quoting A. F. Chamberlain: “‘The Child,’ says Chamberlain, is the father of the man, and brother of the race” (qtd. in Forbush 9). And so the *fin de siècle* child recapitulates the Wordsworthian one in a somewhat circular proof of recapitulation itself.

Childhood – particularly masculine childhood – suddenly became the litmus test of a culture’s evolutionary fitness. Yet simply returning to the traditional construction of the Romantic child would have posed just as much of a problem in a world influenced by Child Studies as would keeping the angelic Victorian redefinition intact. If children are the highest form of humanity, according to most Romantic portrayals, then growing up is a process of devolution redolent of that great Victorian fear of degeneracy. Such a tension was resolved through the idea of separate age-based spheres – in other words, that a child should not act like an adult any more than an adult should act like a child.

Late nineteenth-century constructions of the child as a noble savage took hold especially strongly in America, where they became attached to increasingly jingoistic and masculine definitions of national identity as a response to perceived European decadence. Of course Britain was not immune to these concerns, and one would expect them to emerge particularly strongly in Kipling, the premiere literary mouthpiece of British

imperialism. Yet I actually think Kipling suspends the possibility of a Child Studies interpretation of the Taffy Tales, because Kipling is playing with the notion that Victorian children would have inherited traits from primitive *children*, not prehistoric “savage” adults like Child Study implies. However, the stories actively engage the concept in a way that appears to advocate such an interpretation on the surface. While the divergence in reception history between *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and the Taffy Tales surely had many contributing factors, the emergence of Child Studies in the social consciousness most likely dealt the fatal blow to Burnett’s sentimental version of the Romantic child. To borrow a metaphor from the topic of this chapter, it became vestigial, while Kipling’s prescient interest in the primitive gave his own depiction of a Romantic child the fitness to survive into the next century.

In Kipling’s literary recapitulation narrative, a major moment of cultural development occurs not within a savage adult male, but within a savage female child. Thus, in this chapter I argue that Kipling at once harnesses and deconstructs recapitulation by recapitulating the primitive Romantic child. Contrasting with the other critics who read an evolutionary narrative in the Taffy tales, I contend that by establishing an immature stage of prehistoric human existence as the fountainhead of creativity, Kipling’s autobiographical stories of father-daughter collaboration invert a developmental paradigm. Here phylogeny actually recapitulates ontogeny, both within the parent-child relationship and the larger depiction of cultural-linguistic development. In the Taffy Tales Kipling constructs a definition of childhood that paradoxically both advocates an individual child’s creative autonomy and shields her behind essentialist constructions of childhood timelessness. I will argue that while the Taffy tales celebrated

Josephine's creative development, they ultimately establish her as a catalyst for evolution in her father's concept of himself as an author.

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Following Josephine's birth in 1893, Kipling described his daughter as having "a chin ear and nose which is a ridiculous plagiarism from her father" (qtd. in Ricketts 196). The preposition "from" is not enough to clarify who the enactor of the plagiarism is, or even who is being plagiarized. One possibility would be that Kipling is ascribing false agency to his child in a means similar to Burnett's depiction of Vivian as becoming beautiful through force of will, which would result in the whimsically absurd notion that the child was plagiarizing her father. Or, as the biological co-creator of Josephine, Kipling somehow could have somehow plagiarized himself, or even a divine creator. Yet in all of these cases, the metaphor quickly breaks down. Like Burnett, Kipling used the word "plagiarism" in speaking about his child, and one way of approaching his metaphor allows an interpretation suggesting that he is projecting an impossible agency onto his child in order to bolster his own. Kipling did, in fact, afford Josephine an absurd amount of agency in his account of her birth when he and Carrie "congratulated her on her sense of the fitness of things" because she was born on the day that separated her parents' birthdays (*Something of Myself* 124). This is very much like Burnett's own depiction of Vivian's "artistic presence of mind" in growing curly golden hair. By using the language of literary property to celebrate his reproductive creation, Kipling speaks of his baby as a literary product, which further aligns with Burnett, who collapses her child and her character. However, at this stage Kipling is not talking about a literary character based on his child's creativity, but rather about his child herself. Kipling uses the word

“plagiarism” in a way that confuses the cause and effect of their connection rather than to clarify (either accurately or, playfully like Burnett) the origins of an external literary work. Thus, Kipling allowed even the infant Josephine slightly more subjectivity than Burnett gave the older Vivian.

Calling his infant daughter a “plagiarism” did not entirely violate the voiceless Josephine’s subjectivity, but the metaphor does cast her as a literary product rather a producer. By the time she was two, Kipling was ventriloquizing her as a writer. The University of Sussex holds two typewritten letters attributed to be copies of dictations two-year-old Josephine gave to her father. The letters charmingly reveal a wry little sage who offers straight-to-the-mark critique of the adult world even as she teethes on her new slippers and terrorizes her parents by throwing a brush into the fire.<sup>51</sup> The dates of the letters’ composition allow us the certainty that they were not actually written by Josephine – an assumption which would be unfair in cases where the child-author in question was older, such as those of Marjory Fleming, and (a few decades later) Daisy Ashford.<sup>52</sup> In some sense Kipling colonized Josephine’s autonomy by forging letters in her name, and yet from start to finish these letters characterize her in terms of rebellion against adult strictures. From throwing things into the fire to raising her skirts to her waist to concluding that “the only time you are happy is when you are naked and rolling about,” the Josephine of these letters is ever-active in her protest against adult efforts at containment. She is, of course, a little noble savage, though equally evident is an

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<sup>51</sup> Kipling, of course, joins contemporaries such as Carroll and Barrie in taking a Victorian pleasure in satirizing adult norms through the appropriated eyes and voices of children.

<sup>52</sup> While it is possible that another adult close to Josephine could have written them, their allusions and style strongly suggest that Kipling himself wrote the letters.

attempt, through adult epistolary conventions as well as the diction redirection of “nursery,” to participate in adult forms. Kipling astutely captures the tensions of the child writer even as he engages the noble savage permutation of the Romantic Child. Yet is ventriloquizing a small child – even in a way that seems true to the tensions expressed by older children – any less an abuse of her autonomy than plagiarizing or discounting the authenticity of an older one’s work would be?

Perhaps more relevant than trying to arrive at an answer to that question here is the fact that they apparently occupied Kipling as well. The passages in the *Just So Stories*’ Taffy Tales which address the collaboration between father-daughter pair Tegumai and Taffy all seem to try to reconcile constructions of the Romantic child genius with the dependency and inherent inequality in a parent-child collaboration. From the initial sentence of the first Taffy Tale, “How the First Letter Was Written,” Kipling implies that it is children, not adults, who are naturally inclined to creativity. “Once upon a most early time,” the story begins,”

was a Neolithic man. He was not a Jute or an Angle, or even a Dravidian, which he might well have been, Best Beloved, but never mind why. He was a Primitive, and he lived cavily in a Cave, and he wore very few clothes, and he couldn’t read and he couldn’t write and he didn’t want to, and except when he was hungry he was quite happy”(91).<sup>53</sup>

In telling us that Tegumai does not care to read or write and fusses when he is hungry,

Kipling depicts the primitive father as a baby. This aligns with a Child Studies

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<sup>53</sup> In typical form, Kipling manages to layer many jokes and allusions into even the short sentences quoted above, and the reference to Tegumai being neither Jute, Angle, nor Dravidian refers both to Kipling’s personal sense of fractured national identity as an Anglo-Indian child (see Knoepfmacher 30), and also to the fact that Tegumai lived before such categories. It may also point to the fact that the story takes place in prehistoric Surrey, which was the territory of the Saxons – the only member of the three post-Roman people-groups in England that Kipling did not list.

construction of early humanity, but within recapitulative reasoning the primitive human's child would then possess sub-human characteristics. There is nothing animalistic about Taffy, a fact that lays the groundwork for this prehistoric Romantic child to step in and "father" the man.

Through the collaborative, autobiographical Tegumai and Taffy, Kipling effaces the boundaries between fact and fiction, parent and offspring. Instead of childhood "savagery" being just a stage to pass through, valuable only for its promise of well-adjusted adulthood, in Kipling's narrative the child's capacity to influence adult behavior remains legitimate – essential, even – to the growth of the adult author. Kipling relies on his daughter to help him develop what Coleridge defined as "the character and privilege of genius," – the ability "To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood" (qtd. in Plotz "Pet of Letters" 6-7).<sup>54</sup> In her discussion of recapitulation and social evolution in the Taffy tales, Tess Cosslett quotes an 1876 article by French Child Study Linguist Hypolite Taine entitled "The Acquisition of Language by Children." "For Taine," Cosslett tells us, "'the mental state of a child' is in many respects 'that of primitive peoples at the poetical and mythological stage'" (479). The "poetical and mythical stage" is where a literary artist aspires to operate, so it is little wonder that Kipling turned to his daughter for inspiration, particularly in a work that directly engages questions of origin.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> It is the same experience Wordsworth expresses in "Tintern Abby" when he describes how returning there with his younger sister allowed him to recapture some of his lost childhood and temper it with adult wisdom. Plotz quotes Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.

<sup>55</sup> Freud would later write in *A Question of Lay Analysis* that "[Children's] imagination has created the same product as the imaginative activities of primitive man



The *Just So Stories* are widely considered unique within Kipling's *oeuvre*. Yet while several critics have noted the influence of recapitulation theory on the Taffy Tales, until U.C. Knoepfelmacher's essay, few critics gave more than a brief nod to Kipling's references to Josephine's contributions. In 1965, for example, R. Lancelyn Green made much of the stories' stylistic uniqueness, but assumed it came virtually *ex nihilo*:

*Just So Stories* is a difficult book either to criticize or to assign a place in the history of children's literature. Even more than the *Jungle Books* and *Puck of Pook's Hill* it has no real literary ancestors: unlike *Stalky & Co.* it has no descendants. [. . .] the *Just So Stories* seem to be a new creation out of nothing: in hardly any of them can we trace even the clay that formed the image into which Kipling's genius was to breathe the breath of life (178).

Green defines Kipling's non-*Just So* work as a sort of familial system in which texts beget other texts. Thus to Green Kipling is not so much the father of these other individual works as he is the deity in a theistic evolution – an author who develops a taxonomy of self-sustaining works having antecedents in other forms, yet each adapting into something almost entirely unique. In contrast, Green imagines the creation of *The Just So Stories* in terms of the Genesis account of a father-God molding Adam out of earth and then breathing life into his nostrils. It would be easy to suggest that Josephine is the undefined “clay” in Green's depiction, particularly since as his daughter she was the result of his reproductive authorship. Reading Josephine as analogous to Kipling's book does not square with his depiction of her definitive editorial influence, however, and it eliminates the compelling possibility that her involvement itself could be the force behind the uniqueness of the collection. Yet of course editorial influence is an additional

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of which myths and fairy tales are the precipitate. . . . [I]n the mental life of children today we can still detect the same archaic factors which were once dominant generally in the primeval days of human civilization (qtd. in Baum 88).

form of agency to the generative causality which Kipling claims for the prehistoric child, and thus in describing his daughter as an editor who exercises the ultimate authority over the nature and name of the work, Kipling makes Josephine analogous to Tegumai as well as to Taffy.

By depicting Tegumai as a baby Kipling is probably also tapping into the conceit that children “birth” parents by making them parents, an example being Alice Meynell’s 1913 poem “Maternity,” in which a mother observes her dead child’s birthday because though the child was gone, the date marked the anniversary of when “a mother was born.” In any case, the child’s inherent creativity causes the father’s creative awakening. This suggests a pattern of development in Kipling’s definition of childhood creativity that was rooted in his observation of Josephine, rather than preconceived notions of child development. Taffy is thus a Josephine-inspired revision of his earlier, non-collaborative depictions of his daughter that were couched in language of plagiarism and ventriloquism. When Taffy starts making letters in “How the Alphabet Was Made,” her heretofore resolutely illiterate father exclaims that “there’s more in this game than you think. Taffy, dear, I’ve a notion that your Daddy’s daughter has hit on the finest thing that there ever was . . . I believe we’ve found out *the* big secret of the world” (113-14). The father’s chief role in the story is to advocate the child’s genius, and while this is a complementarian collaboration, it is based on mutual dependence and the child’s instigation.

The fact that at this key juncture Kipling has Tegumai call Taffy “your Daddy’s daughter” illustrates the collapsing of reproductive and collaborative authorship in the text. Had Tegumai referred to his daughter in such a way to another person – calling

Taffy “*her* Daddy’s daughter” – it would be a flat-out claim of ownership which erased the child’s autonomy. As it stands, however, the reflexive “your Daddy’s daughter” functions as a playful acknowledgement of both his pride in their connection and the sense that while the father reproductively “authored” Taffy, it was Taffy herself who begot the alphabet that her father helps her string into words.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Kipling is also recasting an alignment between literary composition and childhood that is even older than the Romantic Child – the idea of the text as the author’s baby. In this case, however the text is also his baby’s baby. By making his female child the begetter of the literary work he co-created and carried to term (i.e.: publication), Kipling complicates the metaphor. He is both father and mother, while his daughter also acts as a sort of father. Unlike J.M. Barrie or Lewis Carroll, Kipling is not trying to restore himself to childhood status through alignment with a child,<sup>57</sup> but like Carroll and Barrie, he is casting his collaboration with a child in reproductive diction. As her father, Kipling of course has a reproductive relationship with Josephine, but it is interesting that his accounts of partnership with Josephine sometimes place her in a parental role, and always circumvent her mother’s influence entirely. This is true in both the nonfiction and the Taffy Tales themselves, which feature a mother who amusedly condones but never participates in the partnership of father and daughter. Interpreting such parent-child partnership as a sort of

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<sup>56</sup> Though he applies it in discussion of the veiled memorial symbolism in Kipling’s necklace drawing at the end of “How the Alphabet Was Made,” this diction of begetting is originally Knoepfmacher’s: “Just as Taffy begot the individual letters her father then worked into this fuller construct, so is Effie implicitly credit as the begetter of a mode her father perfected after her death” (41).

<sup>57</sup> Making this comparison to a slightly different end, Knoepfmacher states that “Although born of acute personal loss, Kipling’s buoyant tales resist sentimentality in ways that seem saner and more self-knowing than the nostalgia for a lost childhood that sometimes seeps into classics such as the *Alice* books or *Peter Pan*” (25).

literary incest is possible within a certain kind of logic. However, like the pedophilia allegations against Dodgson/Carroll and Barrie, it tends to overlook the evidence provided to us by child-authors that children are in fact capable of a degree of creative agency that we neglect but that the Victorians, albeit imperfectly, could recognize due to lingering constructions of the Romantic child.

Ambreen Hai reveals that the means by which Kipling depicts the origins of the *Just So Stories* is based on a complication of the book-as-baby trope that he developed *before* Josephine's birth. Hai claims that Kipling's 18—essay, "My First Book," offers of a racially-inflected manifestation of the text-as-child. She describes Kipling's work as an

interracial offspring of letters [which is a] triply produced progeny of Empire, conceived between Kipling (himself a product of empire), India, and England. [. . .] Clearly there is a strong suggestion of something extraordinary about all this: if his book of poems is a "child's child," then Kipling represents himself as a precocious child-parent, abnormally and perhaps monstrously generative in the latitudes of colonial India (50).<sup>58</sup>

Hai's diction invokes the tradition of the book as a monstrous birth that is central to Anne Bradstreet's "The Author to Her Book," and which Kiran Toor argues is present in Coleridge's aesthetic theories. Toor finds "the idea of pregnant male poets and their brain-wombs" abounding with ancient Greek philosophers and Renaissance poets (261) before arriving at her discussion of the trope in Coleridge. Interestingly, the "monstrosity" of the metaphor has nothing to do with the fact that it makes a man a

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<sup>58</sup> Hai's point also jives with Kipling's depiction of Tegumai as not "a Dravidian," which references a people group from India and thus alludes to Kipling's own colonial birth and early upbringing.

mother,<sup>59</sup> but rather with the alienation experienced between a mind and its output, which parallels the alienation of mother and child postpartum. Toor glosses a passage in

Coleridge's *Opus Maximum* as follows:

Severed from its original unity and wholeness, the child is now 'othered' and therefore alien, 'deform[ed]'. Put differently, *all* birth is monstrous and *every* child is a monstrosity . . . By analogy, the poet, like the mother with her child, must also confront a radical split between one's self and one's text. Inevitably, and paradoxically for the writer, all utterance/outerance is a *deformity* of an original unity and oneness; it is the necessary consequence of having to sever a poetic utterance from its creative source" (267).

For a father, birth is not a partitioning from his biological product, but a reunion with it, and Josephine's influence resulted in a shift in Kipling's application of reproductive metaphors of authorship. Collaborating with his offspring reconnected the father with an entity he helped create but could not gestate. Read against the alienation caused by the "outering" of authorship, father/child collaboration could be reified to symbolically restore the "original unity and oneness" of his text. Furthermore, collaborating with Josephine resulted in a series of stories bound together by tales based on the nature of the collaboration, unifying both narrative and reproductive cause and effect.

Kipling wrote "My First Book" around the time Josephine was born, which reveals that he was already portraying language as the offspring of parent and child prior to the *Just So Stories*. This chronology suggests that his daughter became the screen for some of his projections, but the development of this trope also played a very real role in helping him develop his concept of authorship. The Taffy tales actually literalize the

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<sup>59</sup>Those interested in pursuing the connection between appropriation of children's creativity and appropriation of metaphors of female reproduction would obviously find the monstrous birth trope to be a rich site of inquiry.

metaphor of “My First Book,” because when parent and child collaborate, the resulting “book” is not just an external product of an author and his parent-culture, but rather a sense of development *within* parent-child co-authors as well.

Rather than being out of place among Kipling’s animal stories, the Taffy tales lend a sense of completion to a collection dealing so directly with questions of origin and individual development. Yin Liu situates the two regularly-published Taffy tales at a pivot in the evolutionary narrative of the collection – the place in which the developmental narratives shifts from passive to active:

“How the First Letter was Written” and “How the Alphabet was Made” seem like anomalies in Kipling’s *Just So Stories*. The quintessential Just So Story, it is easy to think, concerns the acquisition of a distinctive physical trait by some distinctive animal. But two-thirds of the way into the collection, between the stories in which animals with attitude are physically transformed by their circumstances and the three final stories in which animals with attitude transform the world around them, we find two stories about the invention of literacy. These two stories, far from being anomalous, are in fact the heart of the collection, as they seem also to have been closest to Kipling’s own heart; for they explore the intersections between child and adult, between orality and literacy, and between image and text that serve as the central structures of the whole book (n. pag.).

The fact that a prehistoric British father and daughter invent written language at the core of Kipling’s Lamarckian collection of origin tales empowers human beings within the *Just So* universe to shape their own evolution. In turn, the fact that the engine of this empowerment is language – both within children and within civilization – is highly recapitulative.

Liu continues: “Recapitulating the phylogeny of the human learning to write in the ontogeny of the child learning to read, *Just So Stories* brings us back to [the] point of discovery, remembered or imagined, when the shape of an object came to stand for a unit of meaning, defamiliarizing text into image and remaking it into text again” (n. pag.). Yet

there is more to the story than a simple allegory of Josephine's linguistic development, because Kipling establishes the creative child as an architect of language rather than as a literary dependant. Through Taffy, Josephine herself is "defamiliarized" from actual child to a objective figuration of childhood, and then back to a nuanced, hidden subjectivity. As such, Liu's term is serendipitously apt, because Josephine and Taffy are at once deeply enmeshed in a family (i.e.: "familiar") story and diffused into a much more general chronology of the development of the human race.

Taffy's experience is not simply that of a child's initiation into literacy, for her initiation is also the initiation of her entire pre-literate culture. Thus the child is not only defined by her status as a future adult who is developing to fit the world that produced her, but actually a creative producer who can actively shape her world.<sup>60</sup> Yet the fact that Taffy makes the initial discovery renders the child the locus of evolutionary advancement, but it also reveals a child's resistance to adult appropriations of her creativity. "How the First Letter was Written" ends with a curious example of the *Just So Stories*' signature Lamarckian "because:" "But from that day to this (and I suppose it is all Taffy's fault), very few little girls have ever liked learning to read or write. Most of them prefer to draw pictures and play about with their Daddies—just like Taffy" (106). Since Taffy twice expresses her longing to be able to write (93, 106), this assessment of her legacy seems rather contradictory. Yet while the experience of attempting to

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<sup>60</sup> Knoepfelmacher's essay thoroughly explores Taffy's status as active rather than passive. A particularly memorable example is his analysis of Kipling's hand-drawn, axe-shaped letter "T" which begins "How the Alphabet Was Made." He argues that the embryonic chick's head at the handle represents Taffy's position as a source of artistic power" (39-40).

prototype written language through the use of pictures seemed pleasurable to Taffy, having her language misunderstood by adults in this first story was certainly unpleasant. Thus, I suspect that the glaring contradiction between Kipling's final lines and the rest of the story is his way of highlighting the fact that adult-child collaboration is inevitably unequal and imperfect even when its primary function is to engage the creativity of the child. Additionally, he seems to suggest that inherited memory of marginalization from adult understanding is what caused the Lamarckian legacy of childhood resistance toward early lessons, rather than the actual act of reading and writing. In other words, perhaps Kipling is claiming that playing and drawing are the creative forms native to both primitive and modern children, and that the language Taffy invented was colonized by adults in a way that alienates young people.

Kipling went to great lengths to advocate his dependent's creative autonomy despite the inevitable impossibility of such an act. If Kipling's appropriation of his daughter in the Taffy tales can be justified, it will be through the fact that in taking steps to assert that Taffy's (and by extension, Josephine's) heritage is a creative individualism unmediated by tribe and extra-domestic Victorian world alike comes at some sacrifice to him. Though it has mostly escaped critical notice, within the Taffy Tales an author known for his cultural imperialism openly deconstructs a commonly-invoked biological justification for British supremacy for the sake of memorializing his child. It is a poignant, intentionally humble step that creates ruptures of chronology in order to preserve the memory of a literary collaboration that would otherwise be lost to all but familial history.



The lack of chronological continuity in the Taffy Tales reflect the same sense of timelessness embodied by the Romantic child, yet instead of absorbing Josephine into an essentialism, this timelessness more effectively preserves her uniqueness.<sup>61</sup> In “How the First Letter was Written,” Taffy says “it’s an awful nuisance that you and I don’t know how to write, isn’t it?” (93) before they even conceptualize the pictographs that the chief predicts “someday men will call [ . . . ] writing” (103). Of course we are told that writing has not been invented yet, so Taffy’s wish for it is an overt anachronism – a nonsensical statement that actually undermines any sense of progression through phylogenic heritage. The fact that Taffy’s linguistic development does not recapitulate an earlier form reveals an originality that squares with the widely-held notion that Josephine’s collaboration enabled Kipling to write in a style he could never return to on his own.

Those familiar with Kipling’s biography know that while aesthetically compelling in their own right, these inversions and suspensions of developmental paradigms serve a heartrending and specific personal purpose. Between the writing of the first three Just So Stories and the two Taffy tales discussed here, six-year-old Josephine died, leaving her father to suffer a grief from which he allegedly never fully recovered. Thus, constructing Taffy/Josephine as the parent of her parent gives her a legacy that surpasses her short lifespan, even as it allows Kipling to lay her to rest within a universalizing yet original construction of childhood. Knoepfelmacher references “Morrow Down,” the poem that concludes “How the Alphabet Was Made,” when he describes the process of universalizing Josephine’s legacy: “If Kipling’s final poem is an elegy, it also celebrates

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<sup>61</sup> Kipling’s explanation of the first three Just So Stories’ soporific potential included the caveat that “Of course little people are not all alike” (St. Nicholas 89), which reveals that he eschewed the essentialism of children while Josephine was living as well.

the possibility of an imaginative blending. It is therefore closer [ . . . ] to Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray" than to Carroll's farewell verse" ("Kipling's 'Just-So' Partner" 42). Though he does not quote "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" specifically, Knoepfelmacher's reference to Lucy Grey calls to mind the diffusion of the dead Romantic child as she is "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course / with rocks, and stones, and trees" -- a "thing that could not feel/the touch of earthly years." I agree with Knoepfelmacher's notion that the Taffy tales afford a permanency to Josephine's legacy and provide a means for Kipling to leave her "deposited in the safe haven of a prehistoric past" (30). However, the tales also reserve her a place in the present and the future. "Merrow Down," which one could see as Josephine's epitaph, explicitly breaks with linear time:

Of all the Tribe of Tegumai  
Who cut that figure, none remain, –  
On Merrow Down the cuckoos cry –  
The silence and the sun remain.

But as the faithful years return  
And hearts unwounded sing again,  
Comes Taffy dancing through the fern  
To lead the Surrey spring again.

Her brows are bound with bracken-fronds,  
And golden elf-locks fly above;  
Her eyes are bright as diamonds  
And bluer than the skies above.

In moccasins and deer-skin cloak,  
Unfearing, free and fair she flits,  
And lights her little damp-wood smoke  
To show her Daddy where she flits.

For far–oh, very far behind,  
So far she cannot call to him,  
Comes Tegumai alone to find  
The daughter that was all to him (128).

The chronology of the poem is unclear, for the child at once outpaces her father and returns to greet him within a sense of time that enfolds on itself. The child diffuses into something universal and untraceable, wearing overtly Native American garb<sup>62</sup> on the Surry soil that we now know bears no descendants of her dead race – a race whose language is presumably only a memory as well.

By definition, Taffy's Neolithic family occupies a place outside of British history. Reaching past the contentious melting pot of Romans and Germanic tribes which usually begin chronological British history lessons, Kipling initially appears to be designing a sort of British common ancestor in Taffy, and the text seems to lead the reader to assume that Taffy and her father prototyped the English language. However, a closer reading of "Merrow Down" with a basic knowledge of philology reveals that Kipling could not have been linking his fictional family to any actual historical tradition. Taffy and Tegumai's legacy (and by extension, Josephine's) is subtly but fundamentally ahistorical and extra-national, but as such it is deeper than a more straightforward progression would allow. Without a finite place in a linear historical narrative, Josephine's legacy is released to the abstract and the infinite, and to universal identifications with civilization itself.

While critics have widely noted ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny in the Taffy Tales,<sup>63</sup> the ways in which Victorian recapitulation theory addressed the same questions

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<sup>62</sup> Knoepfelmacher describes her as "a little Pocahontas" ("Kipling's 'Just-So' Partner" 43).

<sup>63</sup> Many of these references occur in passing – a few paragraphs by Liu, and, even more diffusedly, Knoepfelmacher's suggestion that Josephine is symbolized by an embryonic chick in the capitals which begin "The Beginning of the Armadillos" (34) and "How the Alphabet was Made" (39-40). Cosslett is the only author I have found who

of linguistic development Kipling engages is almost entirely unexplored, and it squares remarkably with the kind of diffused universality Kipling attempts to harness for his daughter's legacy. In establishing recapitulation theory, Haeckel abandoned Darwin's notion of a common African human ancestral pair (monogenesis) in favor of claiming that human beings evolved from speechless, post-simian "Urmenschen" within twelve proto-races from different regions. In concert with linguist August Schleicher, Haeckel claimed that the key societal difference between these early human "species" was the variation of their languages.<sup>64</sup> Thus language, within the branch of evolutionary theory that most informed Child Studies, was actually what made humans human.

In taking the first steps toward written communication, Taffy forms a sort of missing link – the final step in these fictional prehistoric English people's evolution away from Urmensch status and thus to full human status. However, a missing link by definition has left no trace except the sense that it existed, and it is the same with Taffy's dead language. Through her alignment with the development of writing, Kipling both gives his daughter a timeless legacy and renders her vestigial. For all their sweetness and fun, the Taffy tales ultimately bear quiet but heartbreaking testimony to a nature red in tooth and claw, in which even Best Beloveds may not prove fit enough to survive.<sup>65</sup>

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addresses recapitulation and any of Kipling's children's fiction with a significant degree of thoroughness, and her article focuses on the talking animal tales.

<sup>64</sup> Besides the linguistic distinction, Haeckel posited hair type as a physiological indicator of difference.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Sands-O'Connor contrasts Victorian folklorist Andrew Lang with Kipling, claiming that "Like Lang, Kipling took folk source material and made it his own. However, his methods were different. The second mode of 'anthropological' Edwardian children's literature is one that does not accept the link between 'primitive' and 'civilized.' This style of writing is exemplified by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling privileges white European children in his Edwardian fiction, from the *Just So Stories*

Diffusing Josephine into the paradox of an entirely lost but all-important heritage gave her father a space in which to both honor her and try let her go. Kipling rarely spoke of his lost little girl, but three years later in 1902 he wrote to his friend Edmonia Hill that “I think that that is the one grief that grows with the years. The others only stay still” (qtd. in Ricketts 277). Kipling’s father describes even more vividly how the memory of Josephine haunted her father: “Rud told his mother how he saw her [Josephine] when a door opened, when a space was vacant at table, coming out of every green dark corner of the garden, radiant -- and heartbreaking” (qtd. in Dillingham 402). Relatedly, Walter B. Dillingham argues that “They,” Kipling’s 1904 tale of a man who visits a clairvoyant blind woman and eventually discovers that her home is a sort of safe haven for the spirits of dead children who miss their earthly lives, is Kipling’s way of honoring his sister Trix’s psychic capacities while distancing himself from the agonizing implication that his beloved daughter could commune with him from beyond the grave.

I suspect that Kipling also uses *Puck of Pook’s Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, the stories he wrote for his younger two children, to effect a similar distancing from memories too painful and precious to carry in the present. The chronology of these two interlocking collections of historical fiction for children notably begin at the end of the Neolithic era – in the story “The Knife and the Naked Chalk,” which depicts the moment

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(1902) to *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), by adapting the tools of physical anthropology for children’s fiction” (183). I agree with Sands-O’Connor’s sense that Kipling is more inclined than Lang to nuance applications of recapitulation to definitions of childhood. However, she neglects the submerged but pivotal evidence in “Marrow Down” that Taffy’s civilizing advancements are but lost potential. I argued that *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is a *roman à clef*, and though the term only applies loosely to the Taffy Tales, I do believe that “Marrow Down” is a key to their interpretation.

when stone age mortals acquire iron weapons. The contrast between Josephine's prehistoric autobiographical character and Elsie and John's associations with recorded history and the present in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* ties even more directly with the notion of distancing when one considers Kipling's treatment of fairies in the latter two works in terms of Victorian alignments between spirits and fairies.

Victorian spiritualism often interpreted fairy mythology as evidence of a realm of spirits coexisting with humans, and even attempted a parallel evolutionary taxonomy.<sup>66</sup> Regarding accounts of "the fey," Carole Silver informs us that folklorist J.F. Campbell wrote that "they were based on dim memories of the skin-clad warriors who made and shot flint arrowheads (elf-shots) but lost England to the iron-weaponed ancestors of the modern British" (47). Whatever Kipling privately believed, both the idea an extant taxonomy of spirits and the notion that fairies were actually Neolithic people most likely would have informed his depiction of his dead daughter as a Stone-Age girl. Regarding "Dymchurch Flit" in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Diane Purkiss suggests that "Kipling [. . .] makes something of the notion that the fairies are a memory-trace, a living voice of the past -- a way, in fact, to speak with the dead" (Purkiss 262). What is more, as Silver, Purkiss, and others all point out, a central convention of English fairylore is departure: that the fairies must quit England due to the failures of British culture. The connection is even more distinct when one considers "Cold Iron" in *Rewards and Fairies*, in which the

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<sup>66</sup> Carole Silver quotes Emma Hardinge-Britten, who wrote an article in the Spiritualist journal *Light*, wondering how "can the Spiritualist be content to supplement Darwin's merely materialistic footprint and utterly ignore the existence of Spiritual realms of being as the *antecedents* of matter?" She proposes that there is a traceable Darwinian range of descent for spiritual as well as material life forms (51). Charles W. Leadbeatter drew it (52).

presence of iron is what separates the human world from the fairy realm. The Iron Age succeeded the Stone Age, rendering obsolete the Neolithic people and the fairies with which Kipling associates them. In a sense, *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* are Josephine's cold iron, because while the Taffy tales establish her in prehistory, the stories Kipling wrote for his other two children explore prehistory with the sole objective of leaving it behind. These newer collections, written in the twentieth century and in completely different style, represent a place into which the little girl who died in 1899 could not enter.

Like much early twentieth-century writing, *Puck* and *Rewards* shed innocent optimism for a more guarded worldview. Mary Lascelles evaluates Kipling's warping of chronology and genre in these collections in terms of their sober tone: "In the treatment of time, Kipling set himself a peculiar problem by going outside the natural order of things. What he is writing, in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, might be called fantasy; but it is so radically serious that I would rather call it myth" (55). She continues by considering how all the visitors who come to share first-hand historical accounts with the children are dead, and that they can talk about past with detachment. "How can the gossamer web of illusion bear this strain?" she asks (56). Lascelles' immediate answer is "It holds because it is intricately woven," and while she may be right, I suspect that Kipling employed his craftsmanship in order to make the stories more mythic and less autobiographical when it comes to the dead. He could not let the shade of Josephine, whom he saw peeping around corners and creeping into "They," appear in the stories for his living children. It would be too much – too much for them, too much for him, and perhaps even too much for the myth. The "gossamer web"

Lascelles mentions may hold together as myth because it takes on the unemotional style of a fairy tale or bible story, completely unlike the Taffy Tales' tender humor. By publishing the Taffy tales, a father who is "Far, oh very far behind / So far she cannot call to him" both celebrates his lost daughter's life and removes her from the present.

In the final stanzas of the Taffy Tales' final frame poem, just where we would expect a *dénouement* in which Kipling ties together all the threads he's spun in such away that allows Josephine to live on in a traceable (if fictive) historical legacy harnessed to imperialistic notions of British cultural-linguistic supremacy, he instead utterly breaks from teleology and closes the door. If you're listening, the silence is deafening. Josephine and her alter-ego are ultimately both generative missing links and barren evolutionary dead-ends, subjective creators and objective essentialisms, appropriated voices and carefully protected autonomies. They are captives of time and they are utterly free of it. They are, in short, the daughter that was all to him.



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## CHAPTER 5

### “FED UP WITH THE FAIRIES”: EMPIRICISM AND THE ROMANTIC CHILD IN THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF FRANCES GRIFFITHS AND ELSIE WRIGHT

[ . . . ] I remember to have  
read about a lady who dressed  
herself in mans cloths to fight for her  
father, woman are not half so brave  
as her, but it is only a story out of Mo-  
thers Gooses Fary tales so I do not give  
it cridit, that is to say I do not belive  
the truth of it but it matters little  
or nothing (125-6).

So wrote eight-year old Marjory Fleming in 1811, and her implication is clear: fairy fiction is not a reliable source on which to base conclusions about human nature.

Incarnated Romantic child though Fleming was, her dismissal of Mother Goose would have disappointed the Romantic poets, who believed that folklore and fairy tales were the very best influences for children outside of childhood imaginings themselves. In my last chapter I claimed that Kipling’s depiction of his lost daughter as a Neolithic child parallels a body of literature that theorized historical and biological bases for fairies. I argued that Kipling subtly but radically subverts evolutionary narratives of British cultural supremacy to honor his child. Yet the uniqueness of Kipling’s depiction lies in the *supremacy* he affords primitivism and childhood. There is nothing is nothing inherently subversive about aligning a child with fairies. Diane Purkiss supports the

notion that Enlightenment reasoning was the last thing a nineteenth-century adult would wish to see in a child:

The link between children and fairies came naturally. [ . . . ] In the mid to late Victorian era, imagination became a necessary feature of childhood, and the child had to demonstrate it by believing in fairies. Any child heartless enough to insist that fairy rings were caused by mushrooms was dismissed as an emotional cripple. If such children were unluckily discovered, their parents or schools were usually to blame; for Edith Nesbit, books merely dimmed the bright fairy-seeing eyes of childhood, while for Compton Mackenzie, the progressive Newalls who surrounded their children with mechanical toys and aeroplanes neglect to tell them 'stupid stories about fairies or ghosts of the heroes of the past'. The most famous of such children is perhaps C.S. Lewis's Eustace Clarence Scrubb, (not Edwardian, but consciously retro), who almost deserves his fearful name, and whose academic parents make him preternaturally skeptical. Of course he soon unlearns all that. Such unlearnings are invariably portrayed as liberations for the child in question, but really in the Edwardian era it was almost compulsory to be so liberated. Children *had* to be dreamy and sensitive, gazing into corners and peopling them with supernatural beings, in order to qualify as appropriately childlike. Any resistance to this behavior was regarded as precocity and ruthlessly shunned. It is just as burdensome to be obliged to see fairies lurking around every corner as it is to be obliged not to see them (254-5).

Purkiss's notion of seeing fairies around a corner rather uncannily echoes John

Lockwood Kipling's description of Rudyard's haunting glimpses of Josephine *being* the fairy around the corner.<sup>67</sup> One could argue that these sorts of glimpses of or by a lost and luminous girlhood are exactly what Fleming's editors sought by unearthing her writing from domestic obscurity. Consider MacBean's fairylike vision of Fleming:

All her writings reveal the same fond, impulsive, affectionate creature; frank and artless in her innocence, yet unconsciously showing signs of a generous richness of nature, avid of the glad life of the earth, but ever with a suggestion of something dainty and ethereal, lustrous and fair as the dew of the morning (134-5).

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<sup>67</sup> See Dillingham 402.

Fleming's writing is all that MacBean describes, yet she was really rather noncompliant at seeing – or being – a fairy. Evidence such as her conclusion that Mother Goose could not be a reliable source reveals a rationality that her Victorian editors downplayed. In this, Marjory Fleming very much represents a woman writer of her time.

When Charles Lamb famously dismissed the “the accursed Barbauld crew, those Blights and Blasts of all that is Human in man and child” in an 1802 letter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, he was denouncing the influence female authors in the period who emphasized Enlightenment rationalism over fancy.<sup>68</sup> Through much of the rest of the nineteenth century, fairy fiction was a man's business. Nicola Bown's absorbing *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* lists a slim but fairly comprehensive catalog of female artists and authors who depicted fairies in the period, and concludes that “In the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, then, it was overwhelmingly men who were interested in fairies, who wrote about and painted them; women were largely indifferent” (13). The resistance toward fairies revealed by creative females was not due simply to a different philosophy in childrearing, but rather concerns about gender stereotyping, at least in Bown's view. She continues by discussing Thomas Keightley's notion that “fairies are, in small and local forms, the vestiges of ancient deities, viewed by Keightley from an Enlightened perspective as consoling fictions for the common people” (15). Bown cites John Black, “Another connoisseur of fairy lore,” as posing “a slightly different explanation of fairy belief. Black maintained that fairies fill up the gaps in the

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<sup>68</sup> The same impulse drove Dickens to create the notorious educator Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. Until softened by the fairylike Sissy Jupe, Gradgrind demands “. . . facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them” (7).

common people's empirical knowledge of the natural world" (15). According to Bown, a woman writing about fairies would find herself associated both with fairylike qualities and ignorant classes. This was tantamount to implying that she was incapable of reasonable, culturally relevant thought.

For a woman to write about or paint fairies would be to embrace femininity characterized by primitive simplemindedness, but to reject fairy tales would also mean rejecting the male-appropriated voices of women of the past. It is the old question of *l'écriture féminine*. Bown writes:

When the Grimm brothers went looking for traditional stories, they asked women to tell them fairy tales. Women are the bearers of tradition, the adherents to superstition (as the phrase 'old wives' tale' suggests), the gossips and witches, and of course, they think with their hearts rather than with their heads. The wearisomely familiar idea that women have no access to reason, and therefore cannot be fully educated, become political subjects or citizens, or escape from the guidance of fathers and brothers, was repeated in the eighteenth century across a whole range of discourse from political theory to the novel. Early feminism had to make the claim for political subjecthood; indeed, women's claim to rationality was feminism's most important, foundational assertion. That assertion had its costs, because reason had to be claimed at the expense of emotion, tradition, superstition, and so on. The association between women and what Gadamer calls the 'unreflective life' of myth and unreason had to be broken in order to secure for women an equal stake in Enlightenment modernity. That is why the 'counter-Enlightenment' could not appeal to women in the same ways to men; why the world of the past imbued with poetry and enchantment held little nostalgia for them; and why women, by and large, did not turn in their writing and art to the figure of the fairy. It was, in a sense, a metaphor for all that feminism was struggling to rescue women from (*Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* 18).

Bown's case is compelling, but its assumption about Victorian empiricism may overlook an important distinction: the fact that by the middle of the nineteenth century, science's ability to reveal unseen wonders seemed limitless. It must have been awe-inspiring to live in an era in which folklorist Sophia Morrison could claim: "There is nothing

supernatural [about the fairies] . . . what used to be so called is something that we do not understand at present . . . our forefathers would have thought the X-rays, and wireless telegraphy . . . ‘supernatural’” (qtd. in Silver 51 via Evans-Wentz 119). Victorian woman belonged to a culture for which the empirical and the spiritual were not necessarily at odds.

An alternate but indebted perspective on Bown’s excellent research would point out that while few women writers took up the fairy trope, females were deeply invested in Victorian fascinations with the spirit realm. Spiritualism got its populist start with the séances of two young American girls in the middle of the century, and it quickly took Great Britain by storm. A vast majority of British mediums were women, and as I have mentioned, this category included Kipling’s sister Trix. Burnett and Cameron both played with notions of the spirit realm and magic in their work. It appears, then, that Victorian women were not uniformly resistant to associations between themselves and the paranormal. The difference, perhaps, was that creating art about fairies did not offer the same sort of tangible, actual sense of experience that trying to channel the dead could provide. Perhaps Victorian women writers avoided fairies not because they found the narrative legacy of the aforementioned foremothers damning, but rather because they took it seriously enough to believe it merited empirical treatment rather than simply artistic re-appropriation. If this is so, Victorian women were attempting to hybridize the Mother Gooses with the Barbauld crew – a project of reconciliation rather than dialectic opposition. Dare I mention that such a unification of apparent opposites reminds me of the artfully artless Romantic child?



The paradox of the Romantic child is very similar to a paradox at the core of nineteenth-century definitions of photography. Like fairies and children, photography's cultural fascination lies in its magical ability to shape-shift, in this case between artistic expression and scientific evidence-generation. Drawing substantially on her interpretation of Benjamin, Lindsay Smith reads photography as defined both in terms of magic and science because its "magic" resides in its (explainable) technological precision. She writes:

Following the public announcement of the daguerreotype in Paris in 1839 debates around the ontological status of photography are rooted in its indexical link to a referent, its radical empiricism together with its analogous authority on deception: the camera will always lie, and the magical status of its deception is different from that of previous mediums" (4).

Perhaps Smith was playing on words when, in a passage on photography's hybridization of magic and empiricism, she referred to photography as a "medium." Even if she was not, Carol Mavor does:

[. . .] romanticism of the magical and alchemical qualities of photography as a medium was there from its very onset. For example, the great nineteenth-century French photographer Nadar claimed that the miracles of the steam engine, electric light, bacteriology, anesthesiology, the radio, psycho-psychology "pale when compared to the most astonishing and disturbing one of all . . . the power to give physical form to the insubstantial image that vanishes as soon as it is perceived, leaving now shadow in the mirror, no ripple on the surface of the water." In sum, "seeing is believing" and the photograph, like Frances and Elsie was the perfect *medium* (*Reading Boyishly* 233).

Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright, whom Mavor references above, were children who allegedly photographed fairies in Cottingley, Yorkshire. Like their predecessors the Fox sisters, these child-hucksters supposed ability to render the supernatural observable took Great Britain by storm. Their story reveals a culture so invested in notions of artfully

artless childhood that it was easier to believe in children who photographed fairies or spoke to ghosts than it was to deny the plausibility of such evidence.

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One of the most enduring mysteries of the twentieth century was born of one of the most prosaic elements of British life: wet feet. Scolded for her repeated tumbles into the water when playing at the brook near her cousin's house in Yorkshire, ten-year-old Frances Griffiths claimed that she could not help but go near the brook because she wanted to see the fairies. When questioned, her sixteen-year-old cousin Elsie Wright affirmed that she too had seen fairies in Cottingley Beck. Wright persuaded her father to let them take his camera and one photographic plate to the streambed. The darkroom chemicals revealed a lovely image of Griffiths surrounded by five fairies (see fig. 11). Later in that summer of 1917, the girls borrowed the camera again, this time returning with an image of Wright with a sort of gnome or brownie. Wright's parents searched



Fig. 11. The first Cottingley fairy photograph. Frances Griffiths, sitter, and Elsie Wright, photographer. 1917.

both the brook and their home for evidence of forgery, finding nothing. Both girls' mothers were interested in theosophy, and were thus predisposed to believe in fairies. The photographs eventually reached the hands of Edward L. Gardner, the president of the London lodge of the Theosophical Society. Gardner

used the images in lectures, attracting the interest of Arthur Conan Doyle. The two prominent men coaxed the girls to take more images, and they made three additional photographs in 1920. It was not until the early 1980s that Griffiths and Wright confessed to falsifying images with cut-outs of fairies from the 1914 *Princess Mary's Gift Book*, Wright's drawings, and hat pins. However, Griffiths claimed that the fifth image was real and maintained that she had seen fairies, regardless of the veracity of the first four photographs.

This story may sound familiar. The case of the Cottingley fairies has generated numerous books, articles, television and radio features, and two recent screenplays. Some of these sources revel in the sensationalist pleasure of unveiling the photographs as a hoax, while others use the photographs in presenting evidence for the paranormal. What they all share, however, is the nearly obsessive desire to allow the photographs to function as objective evidence in support of their disparate claims. Bown critiques the “detective mode” (“There Are Fairies” 57) through which the images continue to be approached even now that the artifice of their creation is known. To Bown, discussion of the authenticity of the photographs should not be defined in terms of empiricism, which she argues was imposed on them by adult theosophists, but rather in terms of the expressive aims of the photographer-models themselves. She insists that we “release [the images] from being documents, and allow them to be what – at least for Frances and Elsie, they always were: works of the imagination, works of art” (“There Are Fairies” 76)<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Bown makes the same point in *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, arguing that “Frances and Elsie did not intend to produce fakes or to stage a

Bown does an admirable job establishing Griffiths' and Wright's artistic aims. However, based on the motives that caused the girls to create the photographs to begin with, I disagree with her insistence that they be read exclusively within aesthetic genres. That said, I commend Bown's bold claim that the entire history of discourse regarding the Cottingley fairies has focused on the wrong element of the pictures, treating the images of the girls (and indeed the girls themselves) as "prop[s] to the fairies" rather than the primary subject of the images. Bown resets inquiry about the photographs, compellingly insisting that their real value lies in the analytical goldmine they promise to those interested in the relationships between little girls, imagination, and what she calls the "iconography of fairies" ("There Are Fairies" 77). Thus I will base the following analysis in the critical tradition set by Bown's article, but will focus on the girls' interrogation not just of the iconography of the fantastic, but on its intersection with the iconography of the empirical – namely, the way in which contemporary alignments between empiricism and adulthood functioned as a means to exclude children from serious consideration.<sup>70</sup> Once upon a time two little girls photographed fairies in the name of teaching their parents to believe – to believe in fairies, certainly, but more than

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fraudulent proof of the existence of fairies, because, for the two girls, their photographs were works of the imagination" (192).

<sup>70</sup> I should add that even with her insistence on reading the images as art, the empirical implications I intend to explore are not entirely outside of Bown's field of view. After all, she states "The Cottingley photographs bring into question the referentiality of the photographic image (at the same time they depend for their effect upon it) because, like other representations of fairies at the time, they play with the idea of truth and falsity, invoking conventions by which realism and objectivity are signified, in order to subvert them" (74). Her argument suggests that empiricism was entirely a means to an artistic end which ultimately discounts it, whereas I hope to demonstrate that the images function simultaneously within the realm of art object and (false) evidence, and that their striking longevity can be attributed to the ways in which they play with these two categories.

that, to believe in little girls. That is to say, believing in fairies was the machinery of the exercise through which Griffiths and Wright led their parents, but it seems that the ultimate goal was to score a point not for fairyland so much as for their own autonomy. This, then, is the story of how two children's autonomy-building enterprise went public, and how this "going public" simultaneously empowered and totalized them.

First, some clarification of the girls' motives. Griffiths and Wright did not decide to take the first photograph just to justify their soggy excursions, as is widely held. Griffiths indicated in the early 1980s that Wright suggested the idea to Griffiths because she was so upset by the teasing she had received from her parents and aunt (Wright's mother) after she blurted out the excuse that her shoes and clothes were wet from visiting the fairies (*Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photography*).<sup>71</sup> The two girls thus did not go to elaborate photographic ends simply to manipulate their parents into allowing them their favorite way of amusing themselves, though this is often how it is represented. Rather, they did so out of the frustration of being denied credibility.

On the most basic level, the girls created the first image to prove their parents wrong within an epistemology those parents would recognize. That alone seems quite enterprising, but Bown reads even more sophistication in the images themselves. She convincingly suggests that the way in which Griffiths and Wright composed the pictures emphasizes not the fairies, but the girls. From a standpoint of composition, the fairies are more like "decorative props" of portraiture than they are evidentiary documents (78). I agree that a second glance at the images' compositions reveals the potential for a layer of

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<sup>71</sup> As far as I know, this chapter represents the first critical engagement with much of the important primary source material found in the Arthur C. Clarke film *Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photography*.

meaning beyond just a claim of empirical credibility, but I also think that the sheer shock value of the presence of the fairies allowed the photographers to simultaneously employ and subvert principles of composition. In trying to reset assumptions about the photograph's genre, Bown's argument naturally diminishes the photographs' empirical claims in favor of their status as art, whereas I am more interested in discussing how the works stand with feet equally planted in both discourses. In my mind it is not an either/or situation, but rather an example of both/and. Griffiths and Wright reveal that art and evidence are not diametrically opposed categories any more than are childhood and adulthood.

Even if I do not support her exclusivist reading of the images as solely art, however, Bown's suggestion that Griffiths and Wright compositionally use scale in order to subtly claim greater authority seems spot-on. She states:

If the girls are to be taken as children, it is a monstrous childhood, in which they tower over the fairies, which, – fashionably attired and coiffured as they are – resemble miniature adults. Furthermore, the fairies appear to supplicate the girls, offering flowers, dancing and leaping for them. In both these aspects of the images the relation between adult and child is turned upside down, the girls appearing as children perceive adults to be: huge, powerful, and needing to be propitiated (“There Are Fairies . . .” 78).

Griffith and Wright invert Philippe Aries's identifications of children as miniature adults by casting themselves as larger than the grown-up beings that they photograph. But is turning adults into fairies the same as turning them into children? Bown's essay explores the intersection of girls, adolescence, and fairies as a liminal state, arguing that “when they took the pictures, Frances and Elsie looked at themselves and each other and recorded what they saw: girls-who-see-fairies, beings between childhood and adulthood, illusion and reality, playing with these distinctions as if they were imaginary” (*Fairies in*

*Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* 195). She doesn't state it outright, but I draw from Bown's argument the idea that the scale and positioning of the adult fairies (particularly in the first photograph) reflects not just a simple attempt on behalf of Griffiths and Wright to be larger and more dominant than someone.<sup>72</sup> Rather, it is an attempt (subconscious or intentional) to subvert the adult : reason :: children : imagination equation by making the *children* the fully materialized, frank-gazing locus of individualized power,<sup>73</sup> while the adults-cum-fairies frolic within the fanciful, totalizing stereotypes typically applied to children. If we dare read so much intention into the images, we find that a much-critiqued "weakness" of the fairy figures – their conventionality – is actually a strength when read symbolically instead of empirically. Yet where does this leave the empirical appeal that the girls were clearly making by submitting their photography to their parents as proof?

Griffiths and Wright's decision to use empiricism in order to earn themselves a hearing reveals an awareness of the epistemological formations of their time. However, intentional or not, the photographs deconstruct the very epistemology to which they appeal. The Cottingley fairy photographers ultimately based their work on the suspension of disbelief, because even though they used empirical evidence to make their case, the adults looking at the images would still have to be willing to put aside the assumption that the photographs could not be valid because fairies do not exist. Joe

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<sup>72</sup> Of course one can only make limited arguments about scale, because undoubtedly the girls were limited by the size of the illustrations they used for the models, though I should add that the degree of ingenuity they demonstrated does suggest that if they'd *really* wanted to make larger fairies, they might have.

<sup>73</sup> For a more thorough discussion of Griffith's frank gaze and the argumentative challenges it created for Gardner, see Bown, "There Are Fairies . . ." 77-78.

Cooper, a researcher who interviewed both Griffiths and Wright extensively as adults, describes their original motivations this way:

Partly to take Frances's mind off her troubles, and partly to play a prank on grown-ups who sneered at the idea that fairies could be seen, but who cheerfully perpetuated the myth of Santa Claus, they conspired to produce fairy figures that they could photograph convincingly [. . .] (qtd. in Smith 396-7).

As with most accounts regarding the Cottingley fairies, Cooper's is at times rather eccentric, and we cannot know for certain if the Santa Claus phrase was drawn from Griffiths and Wright's testimony or his own analysis. However, the concept seems apt enough to expound upon. Griffiths' and Wright's work challenges the sort of preservationist manipulation of childhood expression reflected in Peter Pan's request that the children in his audience clap if they believe in fairies. Clapping to revive a *pretend* fairy gave children an illusion of influence but no actual agency. Snapping a photograph of a fairy (pretend or otherwise) to persuade others to believe in it reveals children so desirous of agency that they were willing to reconstruct reality to do it. The images poke holes in cherished adult iconography of childhood even as they challenge conventions of photographic veracity. One could say that the photographs are not true/false questions but trick questions. They shield themselves with at least two widely held assumptions, which makes the fact that so many people believed in them a bit more understandable.

The Cottingley fairy photographs use empirical evidence to prove the existence of fairies to adults who are not supposed to believe in such things without proof, thus shattering the intellectual superiority of those adults. Though it may not seem so, the fact that at least one of the girls actually *did* believe in fairies is not particularly problematic to such a challenge, for what is most compelling here is the children's ability



to harness a complex set of cultural assumptions to beat adults at their own game. By forcing adults to suspend their disbelief, Griffiths and Wright freed children from the adult mandate that they maintain a belief in an untested supernatural creativity that places them outside of the boundaries of grown-up reality.

But did they succeed? On one hand, proponents like Conan Doyle and Gardner repeatedly sounded the call for adults to pay greater attention to the wisdom of children. On the other, Griffiths and Wright received very little financial remuneration for the international press extravaganza they unwittingly started. The symbolic and epistemological sophistication of their artistic work was widely deemphasized in order to foster their advocate-appropriators' needs for un-subverted empiricism. Like Marjory Fleming, the girls became the child-genius heroines of a story that was shaped by adults for their own ends. Paul Smith argues that the girls' photography was appropriated by Gardner and Conan Doyle not necessarily to prove that fairies existed, but to lead viewers through a process of evaluation that resulted in greater openness to the paranormal (401). The little girls and adult men were all asking for beliefs to be suspended, but which beliefs they wanted to suspend was another matter, and the situation grew embarrassing for the Griffiths and the Wrights even before the girls took their last photographs in 1920.

Time and again in accounts of the Cottingley fairy photographs, the children are associated not with their adult supporters, but with the fairies in their images. Bown dedicates a substantial amount of her article to claiming that Gardner's extensive body of photographs of Wright eroticize her and align her adolescent liminality with the fairies. Bown's passage on the subject adopts much of the same language used by Kincaid, Robson, and others to refer to the child-loving of the Victorian male. Like Marjory

Fleming and Alice Liddell. Wright in particular is appropriated to play the eroticized child-muse to adults with their own ideological motivations. Conan Doyle repeatedly claims that many children have seen fairies, but repress this due to adult oppression,<sup>74</sup> yet his attempts to right such oppression prove limited, for they feed directly back into seeking a definition of children that puts them in a separate sphere that is at once pedestalized and belittling. Not surprisingly, the dividing line between the spheres of adulthood and childhood is a relationship between rationality and artfulness from which children are excluded. Conan Doyle quotes a “seer” named Lancaster, who further divides children from both an adult-specific definition of reason by aligning them with not just fairies, but of lesser species of primate. Of fairies Lancaster states:

The nearest approach I can get to [fairies] is to say that they are spiritual monkeys. They have the active brains of monkeys, and their general instinct is to avoid mankind, but they are capable of becoming extremely attached to humans – or a human – but at any time they may bite you, like a monkey, and repent immediately afterwards. They have thousands of years of collective experience, call it “inherited memory” if you like, but no reasoning faculties. They are just Peter Pans – children who never grow up (153.)

This trinity of child, fairy, and ape removes the child from adult modes of thinking, suggesting that children are not just fond of fancy, but actually incapable of anything completely outside of it. Lancaster, who is invested in proving the existence of fairies, thus undermines the rational credibility of the very children who generated his evidence.

Much Victorian engagement with the iconography of childhood reveals attempts to reconcile the privilege ascribed to childhood imagination with assumptions of its inferiority to adult reasoning. Heather Montgomery identifies a 1878 passage by Charles

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<sup>74</sup> See 127-129, for example.

Staniland Wake which predates the apex of the Child Study movement. According to Montgomery, Wake's passage aligns stages of child development with stages of human evolution and denies that children have the ability to reason or think empirically.

Montgomery states:

"In *The Evolution of Morality* Wake attempted to trace these stages in relation to understandings of morality in both children and savages. He identified five stages in moral development, which he characterized as 'the selfish, the willful, the emotional, the empirical and the rational' (1878:6). Each of these stages corresponded both to a stage in a child's development and to particular groups of people who represented different developmental stages of the human race.

[. . .] It was only when a child finally reached the rational stage, with a fully formed moral character, that he became an adult. Similarly, in Wake's view, it was only when the races had reached rationality, characterized as being when 'imagination comes to be controlled by the reflective or regulative faculty and when reason has established its influence' (1878:6), that they were fully civilized. This stage was attained, of course, only by members of Northern European and American societies, and only by men" (19-20).

Griffiths and Wright were qualified to present evidence for fairies precisely because as children and females, they were presumed to lack the logical capacity to falsify it. In a considerably ironic plot twist they most likely did not foresee, the girls' images succeeded precisely because their claim to rationality failed. Adults would sooner believe in fairies than in the notion that children had the ability to plot such a scheme.

Griffiths and Wright's adult "advocates" also felt it necessary to downplay the girls' artistic abilities in order to support the notion that they could not possibly have falsified the images. Conan Doyle quotes Gardner as stating that

I ascertained that Elsie was described by her late schoolmaster as being "dreamy," and her mother said that anything imaginative appealed to her. As to whether she could have drawn the fairies when she was sixteen I am doubtful. Lately she has taken up water-colour drawing, and her work, which I carefully examined, does not reveal that ability to a marked

degree, though she possesses a remarkable knowledge of colour for an untrained artist (qtd. in Doyle 66).

Gardner depicts Wrights' creativity as both real and passive. He describes a sensibility that would be able to see the fantastic, but could not produce it, and casts Wright's art as a sort of young lady's accomplishment. One wonders if he is not subtly suggesting that her sensitivity to color was not even hers, but rather trained into her by the fairies, which are described in terms of their unique coloration elsewhere in Conan Doyle's account.

Likewise, Gardner responds to discussion on how the children could have forged the photograph, claiming that

Seriously to suggest that a visit to a cinema show and the use of an apt illustration implies 'a very considerably knowledge of photography is on par with the supposition that to be employed as an errand girl and help in a shop indicates a high degree of skill in that profession! We are not quite so credulous as that, nor were we able to believe that two children, alone and unaided, could produce in half an hour a faked photograph of the type of "Alice and the Fairies" (Doyle 83).

In Gardner's mind, believing in the children's testimony demanded believing the children to be artistically inept.

More than just the photographs can prove that the girls were far from artistically inept. Joe Cooper notes that Wright had been an avid artist for years prior to 1917, was known for her paintings of fairies, and had been allowed to remove spots from images during her six months as an errand girl at a photographic studio (82). She initially wanted to make the fairy photographs in order to try her hand at coloring them, and in fact Gardner owned a reproduction plate that Wright did hand-color (Bown, "There Are Fairies," 78). This is now in the Brotherton Collection at the University of Leeds, along with two of Wright's fairy watercolors. One must give Griffiths and Wright some credit, too, for the success they had as first-time photographers with but a single plate, despite

the fact that it and the second image were quite over-exposed. The deftness with which the girls cut out the fairies alone demonstrates artistic investment, as does the modifications they made to them (even adding a fairy made from composite parts), the care they took to lighten the edges of the cut-outs, their arrangement of the hat-pinned fairies, and the composition of the photographs



Fig. 12. Illustration from *Princess Mary's Gift Book*. 1914.

themselves. In fact, when one consults the *Princess Mary's Gift Book* from which Wright traced their fairies, one discovers that she skillfully altered the images, removing wispy costumes which would not show up well and adding wings of her own creation that would photograph better than those originally in the illustration (see fig. 12).

One of the arguments against the validity of the first photograph came from author Maurice Hewlett: “if the dancing figures had been dancing beings, really there, the child in the photograph would have been looking at them, not at the camera. I know children” (qtd. in Doyle 88).<sup>75</sup> According to Hewlett, children are knowable, stable, and predictable to the point that one could make a bold claim such as his without hubris. Yet if the Cottingley fairy photographs reveal anything, they reveal that children are far from subject to the predictable laws codified for them by adults, and in this we see Griffiths

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<sup>75</sup> Gardner countered by saying that the girls were used to seeing fairies, whereas a camera was much more “novel” (qtd. in Doyle 91).

and Wright cracking their way out of limiting definitions of childhood. Griffiths and Wright were not artless nor passive nor unskilled, and adults were so prepared to assume such qualities that they looked right past their absence. Would the images have gained as many believers had they been made by adults? It is difficult to say. Nevertheless, it is clear that adult misinterpretation of children's capacity for artistic agency could be substantially responsible for the longevity of the myth.

Interestingly, Griffiths and Wright played with the notion that falsification of the images was antithetical to the nature of childhood for most of their adult lives. In 1976 Griffiths told a Yorkshire TV interviewer, "You tell us how she could do it and then we'll tell you . . . remember, she was sixteen, and I was ten."<sup>76</sup> Wright said "It was very embarrassing because . . . I mean . . . two village kids and a brilliant man like Conan Doyle . . . well, we could only just keep quiet" (excerpted in *Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photography*). It seems that the girls felt early on that their plan was backfiring through widespread misinterpretation, and most critics interpret their silence about the truth of the matter to be an attempt (motivated either by intimidation or goodwill) to protect men like Conan Doyle and Gardner. They may also have felt some responsibility for their "dear believers," as Griffiths would later call them (*Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photography*). The photographs provided a link to the spirit realm that served as a beacon of hope for those who lost loved ones during Great War, and likewise, the

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<sup>76</sup> Griffiths' switch from singular to plural language here seems an amusing slip now that we know that Wright created the cut-outs. In the interview she tacks on "I was ten" almost as an afterthought, as if she remembered her lines a little late.

emergence of visual proof that the fairies had not left Britain may have provided just the portent a struggling nation needed to trust that it would survive its greatest trial.<sup>77</sup>

Of course, female children protecting the reputation of adult males is an interesting reversal, and the notion that these children may have perceived their own stabilizing cultural function enough to preserve it for the believers is both plausible and remarkable. Yet the situation grows even more complicated when one considers the fact that they continued to allow the myth to stand for 13 years after Gardner (who lived to be 100) died. When asked in 1984 if she felt guilty for allowing people to believe in the photographs, Griffiths said

I never even thought of it being a fraud. It was just Elsie and I having a bit of fun, and I can't understand it to this day why people were taken in – they wanted to be taken in. But people [. . .] often say to me “Don't you feel ashamed that you made all these poor people look fools? They believed in you.” But I don't because they wanted to believe. We didn't have to tell a lie about it at all because always somebody came out to justify it” (*Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photography*).

The body of the women's testimony does not fully jive with the assertion that they never lied, but it does reflect a pattern of simply allowing people to reach their own conclusions. As Joe Cooper read it, “The attitude of Elsie and Frances to the whole

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<sup>77</sup> Tucker writes: “Photography also helped move the issue of observation mediated by scientific instruments to the center of arguments about “Englishness” and the cultural superiority of British civilization” (9). If photographs of well-turned English people evinced national supremacy, than photographs of fairies – which were both cherished British icons and bellwethers of the health of the nation – would have packed a double punch. It brings to mind how tourists at the Tower of London learn that from the nation's infancy ravens have occupied the Tower grounds. If they leave, the story goes, England will fall. This myth is probably Victorian or later, but it was revisited obsessively during the Second World War. See Sax, Boria. “The Tower Ravens, Invented Tradition, Fakelore, or Modern Myth?”. *Storytelling, Self, Society*. 6 (2010): 231-40. Print.

question of the fairy photographs is a typical Yorkshire one—to tell a tall story with a deadpan delivery and let those who will believe it do so. Indeed, Elsie has often said as much: ‘I would rather we were thought of as solemn faced comediennes’” (Cooper 76). Does such evasiveness reflect ethical passivity, unethical passivity or an active manipulation of the situation, and if so, how does it relate to their initial childhood assertion of autonomy through artfulness? Were the two women responding as best they could to a simple childhood plot that got hijacked by adults with far different plans, or were they continuing to manipulate the situation for their own profit? And if it is the latter, can we blame them?

The response of the adult Griffiths and Wright to the ways in which their childhood mythmaking took directions they never dreamed of or planned for orbits outside of my argument, except for its potential to help us understand the evidence about childhood that initial mythmaking offers. What we can deduce from the girls’ initial assertions of artistic agency was that they hoped to gain autonomy within a private, domestic space. They were not constructing work in interaction with an adult-mediated artistic cannon like Marjory Fleming was; they wanted to be taken more seriously by their parents, and saw engaging canonical epistemology and iconography as the best way to do it. They did not initially intend to assert their artistic agency outside of their joint wartime household, and only became famous because their mothers took their images to a theosophical meeting. The endless press attention grew tiresome, and when looking at a 1921 picture of herself and a psychic who had come to the beck to verify the girl’s account, Wright said to Cooper, “Look at this one. Fed up with the fairies.” When she was asked what she meant, Wright expounded, “Well, I look fed up, don’t I? I was so



tired of saying the same things over and over again, it got to be boring. Frances looks fed up too” (qtd. in Cooper 118). Endless demands for replication must have made the girls’ originally creative expression feel like an empty litany. Suddenly their assertion of autonomy became commodified, and thus subject to external demand.

When the girls started making more images and meeting with researchers in response to Gardner’s and Doyle’s requests, they lost their autonomy even as they gained public notice. With regards to their creative integrity, it does seem like they were trapped. They could confess and gain censure in both the public and the private world, or they could appease adults with a few more images before invoking the old cliché that children stopped seeing fairies when they grew up. Griffiths and Wright may have found themselves at the margins of their own story, so tying it up and stepping away must have felt like the only way to regain some control. Confessing would have upset or embarrassed everyone involved, whereas keeping the secret at least enabled them to get on with their lives and one day have the last laugh.

In fact, the way in which the Cottingley fairy photographers gained their last laugh does perhaps suggest that they were able to hang on to considerable control of the situation in spite of all of the adult appropriation. Though it is perhaps arguable, Bown’s contention that Griffiths and Wright never intended their work to be anything but art is immensely productive. Bown argues that the photographs directly engage in extant iconographic alignments between little girls and fairies, and while it does not exactly square with the girls’ initial empirical motivation for making the pictures, Bown correctly characterizes the position taken by Griffiths and Wright through most of their lives: they refused to outright deny the veracity of the photographs for over fifty years, often

responding to questions of the fairies' origins with statements that were *technically* true, such as "I can't say" (Doyle 68). Wright at times put it more directly, stating, "they are pictures of figments of our imaginations" (qtd. in Cooper 76). The implication of such statements seems clear, and illuminates why the two women later expressed such incredulity that anyone would ever believe the photographs to be real. One could argue that Griffith's and Wright's evasive answers never fully let go of the pleasure of stringing people along, but by and large their hands-off approach seems to suggest that they viewed their photographs, once publicized, not as empirical evidence, but as a bit of visualized fiction.

I have already established the recent critical alignments between literature and photography, and if we do indeed have such an example here, we might say that Griffiths and Wright came to openly recast their work as a sort of realist fiction instead of a scientific empiricism. Or, if the argument I built on Bown's is correct and girls *always* intended their work to be artistic commentary on adult reasoning, it seems that what they created was works of art masquerading as science in order to make a mockery of the dialectics which excluded children from adult spheres of thought.

The Cottingley fairy photographs are remarkable for their incisiveness regarding a variety of questions. Griffiths and Wright's work use a supposedly non-fictional medium to carry off fiction with blazing success. They form some serious cracks in the belief that photography is forensic, that empirical observation is objectively reliable, and that children are both artless and easily codifiable. While Paul Smith is correct in concluding that the entire affair became something that none of its key participants would have

intended on their own (402), it provides a truly stunning example of ways in which children are capable of unsettling adult assumptions.

Yet at least one nagging question remains. If the girls were just generally trying to establish credibility, why would they deliberately seek out a false scenario by which to establish it? We have no reason to believe that the children were not treated with respect by their parents in everyday situations, but even if they were not, photographing fairies would have been a mighty strange way to seek restitution. We have to remember that all the evidence suggests that both girls believed that they had seen fairies in the Cottingley beck, and at least one of them went on believing it her whole life. They thus would not have believed that they were creating bald-faced lies so much as falsifying evidence for the sake of proving something they believed to be true. Thus I do *not* think that Griffiths' and Wright's photography was simply a partially-failed exercise in subversion. All the same, their parents' teasing must have touched some pretty raw nerves to make the girls go to such extraordinary ends. But were their parents unfair? Probably no more than any well-meaning parent occasionally is. What seemed to be at stake for Griffiths and Wright was not just the desire to be treated reasonably by their parents, but actually a greater will to power – the wish to one-up the adults. The Cottingley fairy photographers throw into bold relief a pattern that we saw to some degree in Fleming and Ashford as well: a voracious appetite for control that seeks not just to be treated as well as adults, but to be better than adults.

Clearly I am of the camp that the Cottingley fairy photographers should be celebrated for using art to offer a more authentic view of childhood. But this is ethically risky, because besides celebrating a form of fraud, it potentially effaces childhood in its

application of adult values of independence. In short, it is celebrating children's efforts to become socialized adults – more or less the same issue we face when watching child authors integrate with adult-defined literary forms. This is tricky, and the outwardly empowering notion that we should honor the children's artfulness brings with it the taint of oppressiveness, because it is celebrating assimilation to a system that deconstructs by collectively *opposing* assimilation. I think this was what Arthur C. Clarke was getting at when he said in rather disillusioned tones, "The Cottingley fairies were great fun while they lasted, which was most of the century, and the case is very instructive. It shows that claims made by sweet, innocent children must be treated as cautiously as those by adults" (*Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photography*). Iconoclasm is never pleasant, but it seems that whatever the ethics of this complex situation should have been, Griffiths and Wright cut a significant blow for children's studies by removing children from their pedestal of totalized innocence and revealing that they are not exempt from the complex economy of power that defines human life.

Time and again my study has unearthed evidence of children attempting to wrest agency from an adult-centric culture which defines them as dependents, an effort which is at once rebellious and socialized within a culture which paradoxically places a corporate value on individuality. Thus I admit that in some ways I speak from the center of my culture when I value childhood assertions of artistic autonomy, even though that culture also often marginalizes such efforts when asserted by children. Throughout my research I have found myself nagged by the question of whether it actually *is* uniquely acceptable – essential to their well-being, even – to "other" children by limiting their autonomy. Even the most egalitarian person would probably agree that adults should place

boundaries on children under their guidance. Though we might find Marjory Fleming's rebellion satisfying, I suspect most of my readers would not have wished for her a childhood entirely outside of adult discipline. But if household rules in the rearing of children are ethically productive, is the same true for artistic mediation? Should a child's assertion of artistic autonomy be encouraged even as his or her personal autonomy is necessarily limited? Can the two even be separated? And why value assertions of artistic autonomy when they deconstruct at the moment they become collectively valued?

Children do seem a sort of special case when questions of autonomy are considered, yet in spite (or more likely, because) of this they raise compelling questions on the ethics of the relationship between authorship/artist-ship and socialization. And this is why I conclude my study with Griffiths and Wright. Throughout these pages we have seen children's creative output negotiate questions of the author-function both alone and in several forms of collaboration with adults. The children who photographed fairies, however, primarily collaborated with each other. Thus Griffiths' and Wright's assertions of agency embody yet another paradox, for they sought autonomy through the harmony of equal collaboration. Perhaps, then, the most ethically instructive agency claims of children are those that seek not demagogue status, but those that simply ask to sit with the grownups at the table of discourse.

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