

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

NCLC

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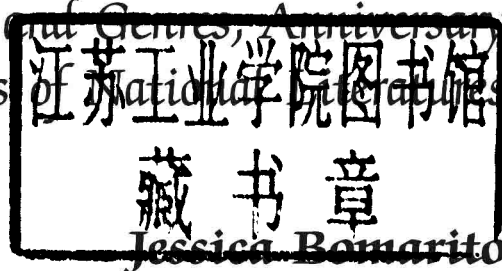
TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 172

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Topics Volume

Criticism of Various
Topics in Nineteenth-Century Literature,
including Literary and Critical Movements,
Prominent Themes and Genres, Anniversary
Celebrations, and Surveys of National Literatures



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Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

Scope of the Series

NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of NCLC is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

Organization of the Book

An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Indexes

Each volume of *NCLC* contains a **Cumulative Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *NCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Frank, Joseph. "The Gambler: A Study in Ethnopsychology." In *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, edited by Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson, 69-85. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 75-84. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

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Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Literature

The following entry contains critical commentary on the treatment of childhood in nineteenth-century literature.

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Émile* (1762), an educational treatise written by French Enlightenment scholar Jean-Jacques Rousseau, holds that the goal of education should be to preserve a child's "natural," perfect state. This work was widely read by important German and English Romantic writers who applied these same principles to their own writings and exerted a profound influence on Victorian conceptions of childhood and education. In various works, including Maria Edgeworth's *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850), and Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), childhood is represented as an ideal state of being. Such works reject the ideas advanced by evangelical writers such as Sarah Trimmer, Mary Margaret Sherwood, and Hannah More, who maintained that children require constant, strict guidance and moral training informed by the Bible and religious traditions. Children are instead viewed as possessing a uniquely informed, accurate view of the world that adults would do well to understand, and as practitioners of an approach to life that adults should emulate. Numerous nineteenth-century writers draw favorable comparisons between adherents of such artistic and political movements as Romanticism and the French Revolution and children possessed of truths about the meaning of life. Many critics have examined Charles Dickens's treatment of childhood in his works, noting how the writer both remarks and expands upon the views offered by Rousseau and Wordsworth and anticipates the work of Sigmund Freud. Leo Tolstoy's works have been similarly analyzed by commentators, who have explored how the author's representation of children and childhood in his works was affected by his personal experiences, as well as by the aesthetics and scholarship of his time. Tolstoy's novel *Detstvo* (1852; *Childhood*) describes a young boy's emotional growing pains, inner conflicts, and his relationships with adults around him. In the novel, which was praised in Russian literary circles, Tolstoy offers support for Rousseau's educational ideas, asserting that children already possess the truth about life and sense what is important, but that their senses can be distorted easily by education and society. Critics have noted

Emily Dickinson's portrayals of children in her poetry as innovative in that the author presents child narrators with adult sensibilities, capable of expressing the wisdom of which children are believed to be uniquely possessed. In general, commentators have maintained that the Victorian literary preoccupation with the concept of idealized childhood, like the use of the imagery of the beauty and virtue of the natural world lost to the blight and evil brought by industrial and urban expansion, is part of the larger nineteenth-century quest to define humanity and morality within a rapidly changing world.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Charlotte Brontë

Jane Eyre. An Autobiography [as Currer Bell] (novel) 1847

Thomas Day

The History of Sandford and Merton: A Work Intended for the Use of Children. 3 vols. (short stories) 1783-89

Charles Dickens

Sketches by Boz, Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People [as Boz] (sketches and short stories) 1836

**Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* [as Boz] (novel) 1837

**Oliver Twist* (novel) 1838

**The Old Curiosity Shop* (novel) 1841

A Christmas Carol in Prose (short story) 1843

**Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* (novel) 1848

**The Personal History of David Copperfield* (novel) 1850

**Hard Times for These Times* (novel) 1854

**Little Dorrit* (novel) 1857

**Great Expectations* (novel) 1861

The Uncommercial Traveller (sketches and short stories) 1861

Maria Edgeworth

Practical Education [with Richard Lovell Edgeworth] (essays) 1798; also published as *Essays on Education*, 1815

Moral Tales for Young People (short stories) 1801

George Eliot

The Mill on the Floss (novel) 1860

Thomas Hughes

Tom Brown's School Days [published anonymously] (short stories) 1857; also published as *Schooldays at Rugby*, 1857

Charles Kingsley

The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby (novel) 1863

Hannah More

Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education. 2 vols. (essays) 1799

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Émile, ou de l'éducation. 4 vols. [*Émile, or On Education*] (novel) 1762

Mary Margaret Sherwood

†*The History of the Fairchild Family; or, The Child's Manual: Being a Collection of Stories Calculated to Shew the Importance and Effects of a Religious Education* (short stories) 1818, 1842, and 1847

Catherine Sinclair

Holiday House; a Series of Tales (short stories) 1839; also published as *Holiday House: A Book for the Young*

Leo Tolstoy

Detstvo [*Childhood*] (novel) 1852; first published in the journal *Sovremennik*

Voini i mir. 6 vols. [*War and Peace*] (novel) 1863-69

Sarah Trimmer

The Guardian of Education, a Periodical Work; Consisting of a Practical Essay on Christian Education, Founded Immediately in the Scriptures, and the Sacred Offices of the Church of England: Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, and Extracts from Their writings; Extracts from Sermons and other Books Relating to Religious Education and a Copious Examination of Modern Systems of Education [founder and editor] (periodical) 1802-06

Mark Twain

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (novel) 1884

William Wordsworth

The White Doe of Rylstone; or, The Fate of the Nortons (poetry) 1815

The Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind, An Autobiographical Poem (poetry) 1850

The Recluse (unfinished poem) 1888

*All of Dickens's novels were originally published serially in magazines, usually over periods of one to two years.

†This collection was published in three parts.

OVERVIEWS

Roselee Robison (essay date 1983)

SOURCE: Robison, Roselee. "Victorians, Children, and Play." *English Studies* 64, no. 4 (1983): 318-29.

[In the following essay, Robison surveys Victorian conceptions—derived from the educational theories of the Enlightenment—of childhood, education, and play.]

'I am tired,' said Miss Havisham. 'I want diversion, and I have done with men and women. Play.'

I think it will be conceded by my most disputatious reader that she could hardly have directed an unfortunate boy to do anything in the wide world more difficult to be done under the circumstances.

(*Great Expectations*, Ch. 8)

Miss Havisham's command might well have bewildered a stronger head than Pip's. Generations of educational theorists, from Rousseau and the Edgeworths to Froebel and Piaget, have attempted to define play and its role in the child's emotional, intellectual, and social development. Pip's inability to oblige Miss Havisham—"I can't play just now"—suggests the mysterious character of this activity. An elusive amalgam of spontaneity and delight, play is like creativity in that it can neither be willed nor precisely defined. The kinds of play in which Victorian children were permitted (or not permitted) to indulge is not only a fascinating study in itself, but it illuminates the ambivalence and inconsistency which marked the thinking of the age.

Victorian ideas regarding children, learning, and play were grounded in the educational theories which emerged in connection with the Enlightenment. As historians have shown, both leisure and education during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution were determined by class, with the result that innumerable children were untouched by the theorizing of which childhood was the subject. Against the hypothetical children of the educational treatises must be set the masses of 'crooked alphabets' fabricated by the industrial system.¹ On paper, however, the eighteenth-century child was a favoured being, his needs, wants, and propensities the subject of painstaking deliberation. In England, this philosophical inquiry into the nature and purpose of education was advanced by four theorists whose influence was to persist well into the Victorian period: Rich-

ard and Maria Edgeworth; Thomas Day; and Wordsworth. Each of these was in turn profoundly influenced by the most famous of all educational treatises, Rousseau's *Emile*.

Emile (1762) is based upon the revolutionary premise that a child cannot be inoculated with knowledge; he will genuinely learn only what he himself experiences. 'Let him know something not because you told it to him but because he has understood it himself'.² Rousseau's model pupil is intellectually a miniature Robinson Crusoe, accepting nothing on hearsay; guided but never coerced by his judicious tutor. It was this aspect of Rousseau's thought, rather than his insistence upon the child's primordial innocence, which the Edgeworths found so attractive. In both their formal educational treatise, *Practical Education* (1798) and the stories which Maria wrote to illustrate it, play is one of the chief means by which Rousseau's empirical approach to learning is implemented. Long before the advent of Froebel and his kindergarten, the Edgeworths had grasped the paradox that play to a child is often deeply serious. Far from being frivolous, his toys and pastimes are thus potent agents of instruction. One of Maria's *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801), 'The Good French Governess', contains a remarkable anticipation of Froebel's concept of educational playthings. In this story, the wise and gentle Madame de Rosier takes her English pupils to a 'rational toyshop'. Upon entering the store, the children are disappointed because they see none of the toys to which they have been accustomed—whips, coaches and horses, dolls, soldiers and drums. Under the tactful guidance of Madame de Rosier, however, they find themselves intrigued by toys which present challenges (Maria Edgeworth's word is 'difficulties')—miniature gardening-tools, a tiny printing-press, an inflatable silk globe, a replica of Priestley's biographical chart, a box of model furniture, kits containing materials for weaving baskets and ribbons. So absorbed do the children become in these purchases that they even engage the interest of their indolent and frivolous mother. Young Herbert in particular benefits from this novel mode of instruction: heretofore almost illiterate, he learns to read so that he may operate his printing-press. Because playing with such toys draws upon the same energies as are exacted by learning, work and play become indistinguishable. In the Edgeworths' educational philosophy, play is 'nothing but a change of employment',³ a continual succession of challenges and discoveries.⁴

Thomas Day was the friend and colleague of Richard Edgeworth; and in *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-9), he dramatizes an educational method which closely resembles that advanced in *Practical Education* and its attendant stories. Guided by their tutor, the intrepid Mr. Barlow, Tommy Merton and Harry Sandford, like the Harcourt children of 'The Good French

Governess', learn a great deal while they are ostensibly playing or being amused. In planting and tending a garden, they learn the principles of agriculture; a conjurer's manipulation of a toy swan introduces them to astronomy; and in building a house, they discover the concept of leverage. This latter activity, which 'fill[s] Tommy's heart with pleasure', is particularly illustrative of the manner in which play can abet instruction. But in Day's philosophy of education, no activity, however pleasurable, can be an end in itself. Mr. Barlow's gratingly didactic voice is never silenced. With ruthless precision, he explains that the will-o'-the-wisp is a gaseous emanation; the conjurer's innocent swan, nothing more than a magnetized needle in a lump of wax. This unrelenting purposiveness, later to be deplored by Dickens, reveals the limitations of 'practical education'.

In certain respects, the pragmatists of the Enlightenment were not without insight into the child's needs and capabilities. Acknowledging that both memory and the attention span are necessarily undeveloped in children, the Edgeworths condemn the contemporary practice of forcing them to recite by rote facts of which they have no comprehension. Moreover, unlike the Victorians, who felt that children should be seen and not heard, the Edgeworths believed that children should be encouraged to 'partake of the pleasures of society', expressing their ideas and opinions without fear of ridicule. ('. . . Nor should they be condemned to sit stock still, holding up their heads and letting their feet dangle from chairs that are too high for them'.)⁵ But the Edgeworths' ideal of social intercourse, with children and grownups engaged in a mutually civilizing dialogue, rests upon the assumption that a child is a fundamentally rational being. From their point of view, neither sentiment nor the imagination has any place in the process of learning. Any penchant for reverie or 'castle-building' must be checked by rigorous application to some 'novel employment'. To the Edgeworths, a toy is always an educational tool; it is never perceived as the focus of emotions and associations. In their enthronement of reason, they took no account of the feelings which can disrupt the course of learning.

Emile underlies Romantic as well as pragmatic beliefs concerning education and the nature of the child. Of Rousseau's two designated masters of human nature, 'experience and sentiment',⁶ the pragmatists emphasized the first, Wordsworth the second. *The Prelude*, which he began to compose in 1799, can be read as educational philosophy as well as a study of the poetic imagination. Like the Edgeworths and Thomas Day, Wordsworth was intrigued by the relationship between play and the growth of the child's mental and moral nature. The opening books of *The Prelude* contain numerous vivid recollections of the poet's games and diversions in childhood: beginning with the vignette of the 'five years' child' bathing in the Derwent, Wordsworth

recalls ice-skating in the moonlight; flying a kite; playing card games or tic-tac-toe by the fire; picnicking on 'the cool green ground'.⁷ For Wordsworth as for the Edgeworths, none of the child's pastimes are trivial. But for the pragmatists, such diversions are significant only because they are potential vehicles of instruction. 'It is surprising how much children may learn from their playthings . . . and when the habit of reflection and observation is associated with the ideas of amusement and happiness'.⁸ To Wordsworth, on the other hand, the pastimes of his childhood are memorable solely for themselves; each is a manifestation of the mysterious 'joy' which reverberates throughout *The Prelude* and which contrasts so sharply with the Edgeworths' rational delight. Moreover, in the education of the poet, a tutor is conspicuously absent. No governess or Mr. Barlow, however well-intentioned, can reduce the poet's universe to an inflatable globe or an astronomical chart.

The Victorians were no less preoccupied than the Romantics and the theorists of the Enlightenment with the nature of childhood and the child's place in the social order. Their concern, however, took the form of social legislation rather than philosophical inquiry. In certain respects, the social position of the child underwent a major improvement during the course of the nineteenth century. If children were not, in Blake's phrase, 'born for joy', at least they were not born to be maimed by the abuses of industrialism and subsequently punished for their deformity. Lord Shaftesbury's reforms, which restricted both the age at which a child could be set to work and the number of hours which could be exacted of him, were followed, albeit much later, by judicial decisions establishing special procedures for juvenile offenders.⁹ Its social consequences apart, such legislation acknowledged that the capabilities and impulses of children differ radically from those of adults. This awareness was also marked by the production of inexpensive toys (a working-class child could have purchased nothing in Maria Edgeworth's 'rational toyshop') and of a literature designed specifically for children. In *Practical Education*, the Edgeworths complain that one of their greatest impediments as teachers is the dearth of books 'fit for children to read'.¹⁰ The abundance of children's books which emerged during the nineteenth century remedied this deficiency; and although most of them were overtly didactic (prompting Charles Lamb's outburst against 'the cursed Barbauld crew'¹¹), their mere existence was a tacit admission that children and adults could not be entertained in the same manner. Yet none of these innovations appear to have altered the fundamentally unimaginative view of children which the Victorians inherited from writers such as Day and the Edgeworths. Late in the nineteenth century, Alice Meynell, herself a parent and an educator, remarked that no one in her generation really cared what children thought. How was it, she asked, that people so morbidly sensi-

tive to the opinions of others 'should care nothing for the opinion of children because it was disguised in the manners they were compelled to wear?'¹²

As Mrs. Meynell's query suggests, the Victorians, like the eighteenth-century pragmatists, tended to visualize children as miniature adults. Alison Mager's innovative *Children of the Past*, a collection of 165 photographic portraits of Victorian children, is a gallery of wooden little beings, their stiffness no less the result of their down-scaled adult attire than of the limitations of nineteenth-century photography. One hapless three-year-old is even posed with a pipe and pince-nez, his feet dangling incongruously above the rungs of the chair in which he is 'reading' a newspaper.¹³ If such portraits inadvertently parody adult behaviour, they also demonstrate the contemporary indifference to genuinely childish postures and gestures. In Victorian literature, this grotesque vision of children as tiny adults is nowhere better exemplified than in Dickens' Christmas story for 1853, 'The Holly Tree'. Later adapted for one of his most popular readings, 'Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn', this story describes the elopement of two young cousins, Norah and Harry Walmers. The children are finally retrieved by their guardians, but not before their solemn game of being affianced lovers has delighted all the adults privileged to witness it ('They was seven deep at the key-hole'.) In running away to Gretna Green, however, Norah and Harry are not really playing the immemorial children's game of 'Let's pretend we're married', any more than the children in Mager's collection are playing dress-up. Rather, they are enacting roles which the adult world, not they themselves, finds entertaining. Dickens' studies in genuine 'premature maturity'—children whom poverty has forced into adulthood—bear no resemblance to the little lovers of 'The Holly Tree'.

From their eighteenth-century predecessors, the Victorians inherited not only the tendency to view children as miniature adults, but a profound abhorrence of the spoilt or petted child. *Sandford and Merton* opens with a memorable picture of the unregenerate young Harry Sandford: '. . . When his father and mother were sitting at the tea-table with their friends, instead of waiting till they were at leisure to attend him, he would scramble upon the table, seize the cake and bread and butter, and frequently overset the teacups . . .'¹⁴ In Victorian eyes, an unhappy or even a sick child was preferable to such a monstrosity.¹⁵ The fears underlying this attitude are complex. Not only did the spoilt child reverse the appropriate relationship between grown-ups and children, but he disrupted the smooth flow of the amenities. Perhaps most significantly, the spoilt child, 'capricious, tyrannical, passionate, peevish, sullen, and selfish',¹⁶ was irrefutable evidence of man's fallen nature.

Even as Wordsworth and the Romantics were proclaiming the child's kinship with the beauty and innocence of

the natural world, the evangelicals¹⁷ were insisting that children no less than adults were the heirs of original sin. In her widely-read *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), Mrs. Hannah More declared that those who believed in 'the innocence and dignity of man' were deceiving themselves.¹⁸ As Ian Bradley has pointed out, one of the most influential ideological developments of the nineteenth century, occurring near its beginning, was this resurgence of the puritan spirit.¹⁹ Leaving untouched almost no aspect of Victorian life, the evangelicals exerted a particularly decisive effect upon education and play. In the first instance, their preoccupation with the imminence of man's latter end engendered an obsession with time. Discounting Rousseau's contention that the happy child does not take clock-making seriously,²⁰ eighteenth-century educators had devoted considerable attention to the role played by time in the process of learning. For theorists such as the Edgeworths', the waste of time was an evil primarily because it led to ennui and thence unhappiness. Maria Edgeworth's 'Lazy Lawrence' is a bored and wretched child rather than a delinquent. For the evangelicals, on the other hand, the waste of time was a sin, wilful disobedience to God's express commands. Notably absent in the educational writings of the Edgeworths are those dreary school time-tables which specify the hours to be devoted to study, meals, rest, and play.²¹ As we have seen, the Edgeworths' made no sharp distinction between work and play; for them, the two forms of activity were corollaries rather than opposites. To the evangelicals, however, one was the antithesis of the other. 'Yes!' exclaims Mrs. More, 'it is a few short but keen and lively intervals of animated pleasure, snatched from between the successive labours and duties of a busy day . . . which, both to men and to children, yield the truest portion of enjoyment . . .'²²

What did the evangelicals comprehend by the morsels of pleasure which could thus profitably be sandwiched between stints of labour and effort? Their primary criteria were that such pleasures be 'simple' and that they enhance, no matter how tenuously, the knowledge of God's will. Diversions which were exotic or contrived could only exacerbate man's innate depravity, awakening sensibilities better left dormant and stirring up 'hidden fires'.²³ These standards disqualified not only the Edgeworths' creative playthings, but almost any activity contingent upon the exercise of the imagination: hence, works of fiction and most games. As a means of recreating children fatigued by the long Sabbath, Mrs. More suggests that they be set to selecting and concatenating biblical texts illustrative of specified prayers. Even such dubious diversions required rigorous supervision. In their belief that the corruption of children was as virulent and contagious as measles, evangelical parents often isolated them from one another, hand-picking their companions and engaging suitably pious tutors rather than sending them to public school.²⁴ The

modern belief that children learn to understand both themselves and other people through play would have struck the evangelical mind as preposterous. As the abundance of autobiographies and memoirs produced during the period shows, what determined the character of the Victorian child's play was less the social and intellectual standing of his family than its religious bias.

Autobiography in the service of cultural history is subject to certain limitations. The experiences and events which it records are necessarily distorted, not only by the writer's distance from his past, but by the conventions exacted by a literary form no less sophisticated than the novel. The themes of unhappiness, loneliness, and privation are among the most persistent of these conventions.²⁵ Nonetheless, the difference between the experiences of autobiographers who fell under the evangelical aegis and those who did not is arresting. This difference in the very tone of the writing suggests that evangelicals had more difficulty than most Victorians in perceiving any relationship between learning and play and in appreciating the role of play in a child's emotional and social development.

Augustus J. C. Hare's *The Story of My Life* (1896-1900), Ruskin's *Praeterita* (1885-89), and Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) all portray the antipathy between evangelical thought and the spontaneity, imaginative vitality, and sense of personal worth which lie at the heart of play. When Hare was five years old, his adoptive mother perceived in him the not uncommon infantile traits of 'reference of everything to himself, [and] greediness of pleasures'.²⁶ Determined to root out this nascent individualism, she relegated his toys to the attic. With similar intentions, Hare's odious Aunt Esther wanted to remove some of the drawers from a favourite little bookcase so that the boy might 'never have the feeling that the cabinet was wholly mine'.²⁷ Often forbidden to do 'anything', a dispensation strangely at odds with the evangelicals' professed abhorrence of idleness, Hare nevertheless cultivated both his imagination and his sense of self by diversions which his mentors did not recognize as such. He talked with the flowers in the garden; drew on every scrap of paper he could find; pored over the 'enchanted woodcuts' in his grandmother's travel-books. The Edgeworthian harmony between learning and pleasure was shattered, Hare snatching his amusements only when he was not 'undergoing education of some kind, and generally of an unwelcome kind'.²⁸

Ruskin and Gosse were subjected to a similarly harsh regime, and they resisted the starkness of their lives in a similar manner, by devising amusements so subtle that they went unnoticed. Margaret Ruskin's immediate confiscation of the Punch-and-Judy presented to her son on his birthday is one of the best-known parental outrages in Victorian literature. Prohibiting even the wish

for 'such things as one saw in toy shops', she allowed him a bunch of keys, a ball, a cart, and two boxes of wooden bricks, a spartan collection even by the Edgeworths' standards. When these resources failed him, Ruskin learnt to amuse himself by comparing the colours in his carpet; counting the knot-holes in the floor; and later, producing tiny imitations of his favourite books, drawing type 'as other children draw dogs and horses'.²⁹ The spirit of levity was even more sternly outlawed in the Gosse household than in the rectory of Hare's uncle Julius and the cloistered garden at Herne Hill. By the terms of his parents' rigorous Plymouth Brethren code, Gosse was forbidden not only toys—the 'drums and flutes and kites and coloured balls' vended in the streets of his Devonshire village—but all books which were not strictly factual. His sole diversions as a small boy were watching the fauna in his father's aquaria and reading the Penny Cyclopaedia. Almost stupefied with ennui, he devised for himself a highly creative form of educational play, writing imitations of Philip Gosse's scientific monographs and illustrating them with brightly-coloured creatures of his own invention.³⁰ When this absorbing pursuit attracted the elder Gosse's notice, it was transformed from play into drudgery. Beneath his father's attempt to teach him to draw, Edmund's joy in his efforts vanished. 'In deep depression of spirits', he could produce nothing but a laboured facsimile of the exquisite drawing given him as a model.

By inventing playthings and diversions for themselves, Hare, Ruskin, and Gosse ironically fostered the very imaginative vitality which their parents sought to suppress. In supplying the components of what modern educators call 'socio-dramatic play'—the games and fantasies which develop the social sense as well as the imagination—they were less successful. The tonal sombreness which broods over *The Story of My Life*, *Praet-erita*, and *Father and Son* arises less from the authors' lack of playthings than of playmates. Young Hare's timid request to play with the neighbourhood children was 'so punished that I never dared to express a wish to play with any child again'. At the same time, he was compelled to play with his cousin Marcus, a malicious child whom he detested. The parents of Ruskin and of Gosse were equally unrelenting in preserving their sons from the contamination of the unregenerate. Dimly aware of John's desolation within the cherished family circle, Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin carefully selected a playmate for him, a decorous boy who exemplified the 'proprieties, true religions, and useful learnings' of their own home.³¹ At the age of ten, Edmund Gosse was at last allowed to associate with another child of his own age. But this unexpected indulgence proved less gratifying than might have been expected. Given the run of the garden, Gosse and his new companion walked about, shook the bushes, and climbed along the wall—'that was almost all we ever did do'.³² Their inertness is revealing. Having been forbidden to play as small chil-

dren, Hare, Ruskin and Gosse found themselves largely incapable of diversion as they approached adolescence. Devoid of the self-confidence which play helps to develop, Ruskin could not acquire the skills and graces of polite society. At the parlour-game, 'La Toilette de Madame', he could only blunder.³³ Hare's capacity for social diversion was similarly impaired. When he went to Harrow, the loneliness of his life at the rectory was for a time unabated: '. . . In playtime I go here, there, and everywhere, but with no one and doing nothing'.³⁴

The aura of loneliness and frustration which pervades the recollections of Hare, Ruskin, and Gosse is markedly absent from a group of autobiographies written by women who were born during the second half of the nineteenth century and who escaped the rigours of the evangelical home: Elizabeth Haldane's *From One Century to Another* (1937); Ethel Smyth's *Impressions That Remained* (1919); Gwen Raverat's *Period Piece* (1952); and Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1945). In the eyes of the autobiographer, the past can be an idyl no less than a nightmare; one distortion is the obverse of the other. But if these works are free of the muted sense of outrage which dominates the earlier autobiographies, neither are they bathed in a sentimental glow.³⁵ Even in the untrammelled household of George Darwin and his American wife, children could be treated as though their sensibilities were imperfectly developed. Gwen Raverat (Darwin's granddaughter) recalls the disgust with which she confronted her daily breakfast of salted porridge. Elizabeth Haldane reflects with similar poignancy upon the contemporary belief that children had no aesthetic sense. Everything ugly or outworn in her home was sent to the nursery. She cannot forget the 'disagreeable smell of the . . . brown cardboard slabs' on which the atlases rested.³⁶ Flora Thompson, a working-class child raised in the Oxfordshire village of Juniper Hill, might easily have depicted her upbringing as a pastoral interlude. What makes her autobiographical trilogy a uniquely valuable document is not only her humble origin, but the honesty and balance with which she recalls her confrontation with adults often embittered by poverty. When she and her brother ask too many questions, they are sent about their business; if they do not do as they are told, their bottoms are 'soundly smacked'.³⁷

Parents at the close of the century were ostensibly no less autocratic than the evangelical mentors of Hare, Ruskin, and Gosse. Underlying their severities, however, was a new incertitude respecting the government of their children. The parents of Ethel Smyth, for example, alternately permitted her to chatter and snubbed her for being forward. Punishment could still be disproportionately severe, as when Ethel was flogged with a knitting needle for stealing barley sugar. But it could also be inflicted with a nonchalance unthinkable for such martinets as Hare's mother or his aunt Esther.

Locked in her father's dressing-room for misbehaving, Ethel and her sister ransacked Mr. Smyth's wardrobe and constructed 'a complete effigy of him lying on his back on the floor in full hunting costume'. As a finishing touch, they pricked out an inscription on the pin-cushion and laid it on the effigy's breast: 'For dear Papa'.³⁸ This mockery of both their punishment and the adult world which inflicted it apparently elicited no reprimand.

A wave of child-raising theories—'fads and foolishnesses'—emerged during the 1880's. '... There were some children who might not ride bicycles, and others who were forbidden to go in boats; some who were forced to play the violin; and others who always had to wear mufflers; some who might not eat currant buns; and others who were obliged to have cold baths . . .'.³⁹ Considered in the aggregate, these theories are negative; they either force or forbid. Nonetheless, towards the close of the century, children began to gain a modicum of independence. Elizabeth Haldane, who was particularly sensitive to the child's sub-ordinate position within the Victorian family, found the changes in methods of child-rearing 'very marked'. In an unwitting return to the fundamental premise of *Emile*, educators began to realize that children were not mere extensions of their parents' wills and desires and that they must be taught to think and act for themselves.

One of the principal signs of this new liberalism, the causes of which remain elusive, was a *laissez-faire* attitude towards play. The small children in Flora Thompson's village were summarily bundled out of doors and told to 'go play' while their mothers did the household chores.⁴⁰ Gwen Raverat even regretted that her mother did not exercise a more active surveillance over her children's vigorous games, one of which entailed jumping from a nine-foot wall into the garden. In Elizabeth Haldane's much more sedate household, a similar forbearance prevailed. She and her brothers were left to play their small stock of games by themselves, 'and were not overset by interfering grown-ups . . .'.⁴¹ The latitude thus afforded the child's imagination facilitated access to the special realm of fantasy whose precise nature continues to intrigue—and to baffle—modern educators. The close relationship between this mysterious world and play is suggested by the highly personalized games and fantasies of Laura and Edward, the autobiographical protagonists of *Lark Rise to Candleford*. In the eyes of the emancipated children, nature assumes a private significance. They pretend that the scabious which lines the brookside falls in a shower from the sky and that a clump of white violets, of which they are the appointed guardians, is their 'holy secret'.⁴² One of the attributes of the child's private world is precisely this clandestine aura. For all their resilience, neither Hare, Ruskin, nor Gosse dared to possess such a world.

Through its connection with childhood and the child's point of view, play is one of the central themes of Dickens' work. But whereas the Victorian autobiographers viewed play only in relation to children, Dickens also perceived its bearing upon the lives of adults. Sleary's famous exhortation near the close of *Hard Times* is meant for Mr. Gradgrind no less than for his maimed children: 'People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a-learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a-working, they an't made for it.'⁴³ Dickens' insight into the child's distinctive mode of perceiving has been analyzed and extolled at length, but what most writers on the subject do not recognise is that the child's feelings and needs are often viewed in relation to the adult sensibilities into which they will presently develop. For Dickens, an adult who does not know how to play is little less pitiable than a child. Despite his comic *grotesquerie*, *Dombey's* Mr. feeder, B. A. shares the melancholy which surrounds his morose little charges at Doctor Blimber's. His room is full of playthings which he cannot allow himself to enjoy: a fishing-rod, a pair of boxing-gloves, a chess set, a Spanish grammar, and 'a beautiful little curly second-hand key bugle'.⁴⁴ Feeder is not an evangelical, but he has been touched by the evangelical obsession with time. His enjoyment is reserved for a future which will never come.

Even religiously moderate Victorians were tempted to extract some moral or intellectual profit from their diversions.⁴⁵ To Dickens, this contemporary endorsement of 'rational recreation' was no less distasteful than the stringent code of the evangelicals. In one of the essays in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, he traces the Victorian zeal for intellectual improvement back to its fountain-head in Thomas Day's Mr. Barlow. The Traveller becomes acquainted with *Sandford and Merton* 'at an unusually early age',⁴⁶ and its relentless pragmatism continues to haunt him. The spirit of the officious tutor spoils the child's first visit to the pantomime: as the curtain rises—'click click, ting ting, bang bang, weedle weedle weedle, bang!'—he is suffused with shame at the thought of Barlow's probable reaction. As the remainder of the essay shows, the Victorians could tolerate frivolity only if it were an excuse for edification. The same purposiveness which reduces the conjurer's swan to a lump of wax presides over the Victorian recreations patronized by the Traveller. At the conclusion of 'an uncompromising pantomime', the female impersonator incongruously delivers 'a random eulogium on the virtues'. The world of illusion for which Dickens prized the theatre and which he himself revelled in creating⁴⁷ is irreconcilable with both Day's empiricism and its latter-day counterpart, the 'rational recreation' of the Victorians.

Despite his comic annoyance with Mr. Barlow, Dickens was not wholly averse to the tradition which combined learning with pleasure. In 'Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings',