



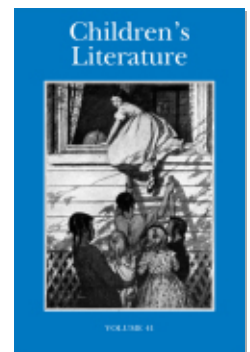
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*The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* ed. by Adrienne E. Gavin, and: *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood* ed. by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (review)

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Children's Literature, Volume 41, 2013, pp. 287-295 (Review)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2013.0003>

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ture studies when she discusses how “. . . *His Dark Materials* dismantles the Romantic myth of childhood innocence and erects in its place a narrative about experience, to emancipate both children and adults from the myth’s dark implications” (540). As we move further into the twenty-first century, faced with unspeakable crimes that are both perpetrated by and acted out upon young people, such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in December 2012, it is likely that we will need to reexamine our conception of childhood innocence. It is a comfort to both the novice and the experienced scholar that such philosophical discussions have been taking place in the field of children’s literature for decades, by and among authors and critics, giving us a common ground from which we can begin to take our first timid steps into a contemporary understanding of childhood.

Note

<sup>1</sup>In addition to paper formats, since September 2012 *The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Literature* has been available online. This version is compliant with standards for assistive technology.

*The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, edited by Adrienne E. Gavin. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

*Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, edited by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011.

Reviewed by M. Tyler Sasser

The ultimate contribution of the scholarship gathered in these two volumes is the offering of new starting points for future research concerned with the British literary child. The introductory essays in both collections—themselves extraordinarily valuable—not only summarize their respective volumes but also establish and point toward new directions in scholarship.

Divided into three parts and arranged chronologically, the deeply historical essays gathered in *The Child in British Literature* focus on the sociocultural positioning of fictional childhood. These child-in-literature experts admirably discuss the evolution of the preadolescent

literary child across a span of more than eight centuries (1200 CE–2010 CE) of British literature. The collection begins with “Medieval and Early Modern Literature,” in which scholars persuasively argue for a (re)consideration of the medieval and early modern child. David T. Kline’s seminal discussion of the child in medieval literature demonstrates probably the greatest merit of the volume—the promulgation of the potential for new beginnings for future inquiry into literary childhoods. No Western family model has been damaged more than has the medieval one by Philippe Ariès’s summation of this period in *Centuries of Childhood*, that child mortality rates impeded the emotional and personal relationship between parents and children. Kline dispels such notions by addressing topical questions of medieval childhood that arise frequently in the literature. For instance, *Pearl*, a dream-vision poetic dialogue between the Dreamer (parent) and the *Pearl*-maiden (a dead infant), “subverts the hierarchy of parent over child and age over youth by making the *Pearl*-child the teacher and the Dreamer the student” (26). Likewise, references to primers and songbooks routinely surface in romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, thus illustrating a topical engagement with childhood. Mystery plays frequently depict the duress of infants under Herod, while many cycle plays also portray Jesus and Mary as precocious and obedient children. Finally, Kline explains how various conduct and courtesy texts feature a threatened child, and in doing so raise questions about the importance of social and state assistance for children.

The other three essays in this first section carry readers across early modern and Caroline literatures. Katie Knowles considers three Shakespeare plays in order to understand how frequently noble children are subjected to violence. For her, the child characters in *Richard III*, *King John*, and *Macbeth* are victimized by patriarchal rulers striving to establish royal legitimacy. Lucy Munro examines childhoods constructed in the juvenile poetry of Cowley, Fane, and Jordan. She demonstrates how these writers—through the poetry they wrote as children—reveal the cultural context of childhood identities in schools, aristocratic households, and commercial theaters. Edel Lamb addresses children’s literature pre-*A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* in order to deconstruct the education/amusement binary that many historians of children’s literature use to organize the genre. She focuses on multiple conduct manuals, advice books, broadsheets, riddles, and grammar texts integrating instruction and delight, raising important questions “about the ways in which books were read by schoolboys, both in and beyond the schoolroom” and exploring how such books created gendered identities (70).

The essays in "Eighteenth-Century, Romantic, and Victorian Literature" engage the well-known theories of Locke and Rousseau by juxtaposing the divine Romantic child with the victimized Victorian one. Andrew O'Malley explores the "peculiar phenomenon" that makes *Robinson Crusoe*—a novel primarily concerned with the solitary life of a man on a deserted island—"arguably the most influential and enduring work of fiction in the canon of children's literature" (87). He articulates how Crusoe's "isolation on the island affords an unparalleled opportunity for constructing a new self divorced from the past" (92). The island setting easily lends itself to the rising theories of childhood by materializing the retreat from society which, Rousseau argues, Emile and other children need for their education. Yet as the eighteenth century progressed, literary childhood began to represent a longing for past innocence, and the child became a symbol of hope for the future. Though we have come to understand much of Romantic poetry as distancing the child from the adult and then constructing her as desirable and nostalgic (e.g., Wordsworth's "Infant Babe Passage" in *The Prelude*), Roderick McGillis urges critics to reassess the Romantic child in Wordsworth and Blake by arguing that such poets provide an "ironic child" with a "forward-looking nostalgia" that fashions "a stronger present and hence a strong future" (110).

The Victorian period—with its emphasis on didacticism, fantasy, evangelicalism, sentimentalism, and depictions of socially neglected children able to become closer to God through a pathos-ridden death—complicated Romantic notions of childhood. Naomi Wood explores the Victorian child in Carroll, MacDonald, Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Yonge, and others in order to explain how authors of both fantastic and realistic childhoods used fiction to critique the "physical and material circumstances of children" (120). Whereas Victorian fantasy writers depict the "child's body idealistically, a mere chrysalis encasing a spirit waiting to be released to elsewhere" (119–20), realists recall childhood as "a time of conflict between desire and necessity, a time of deprivation and subjugation" (120). With an eye on the social neglect that emerges after the Industrial Revolution, Liz Thiel investigates depictions of the dodger in street-Arab tales in order to unearth the "tension between innocence and degeneracy in nineteenth-century portraits of childhood, particularly those of street children" in *Oliver Twist*, *Froggy's Little Brother*, and *Lost Gip* (132). For Thiel, the construction of the dodger complicates childhood innocence and childhood degeneracy by illuminating the social issues surrounding these identities. Moreover, the rise of evangelicalism during this period encouraged

many authors to encapsulate the need to rescue street children from vagrancy. Margot Hillel considers how poetry "was a powerful component of the nineteenth-century child rescuers' tools for raising the consciousness—and opening the wallets—of the middle class to the plight of the poverty-stricken child" (146). The poetry that appeared in child-rescue magazines of the late Victorian era often "personalize[d] the poor," and according to these poems, it was the job of the adult to rescue these street children and, as only an adult can, provide and protect Evangelical, middle-class values such as education, religion, and work (147).

Beginning with the Edwardian idealization of childhood superiority and moving through Modernism's ambivalent depiction of the child and contemporary literature's consideration of children as threatening to the adult psyche, "Edwardian, Modern, and Contemporary Literature" complicates the child's relationship with the adult. According to Adrienne E. Gavin, whereas the adult in children's literature of the first half of the twentieth century existed marginally and rendered "children free to exist in their own worlds," by the end of the century adults returned as "problematic, often dependent figures" (11). Moreover, unlike most Victorian childhoods, the significance of religion in constructions of childhood in the twentieth century radically diminishes, instead creating children who are important "in and of themselves, not because they are heaven sent or set for heaven" (11). Perhaps the most radical change in literary constructions of the child made by the Edwardians is the "rejection of the child-as-victim model" and the move toward children holding "virtually all the power" (12). Gavin surveys this construction in order to emphasize how, unlike Victorian texts that often depict isolated children who can only escape victimization through maturation or death, Edwardian fiction favors groups of children enjoying pleasant childhoods and remaining children (166). "Having no need for adults," she explains, "they are rarely shown as adults themselves, but are captured in various ways . . . in permanent childhood" (166). Similarly, Andrew F. Humphries looks at fiction by Butler, Wells, and Forster to consider how many Edwardian writers "represent childhood as a form of dissent against the adult," fictionally showcasing a "shifting of power" between adult and child (182). For these writers, "the child's 'enchanted garden' of the imagination challenges the conventions of the 'father's house'" (182).

Despite the rise of Modernism, the realities of world war, and the influence of Freud shattering mythologies of innocent childhoods,

many British authors, as Paul March-Russell demonstrates, continue to contrast the idealized child with a corrupted adult society. Focusing on the relationship of childhood with Modernist aesthetics, March-Russell examines the child in Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, and Mansfield and explains how “the child acted as a catalyst for many of the Modernist debates that surrounded identity in terms of aesthetics, minority versus mass culture, classicism versus Romanticism, language and the unconscious, and gender and sexuality” (197). Pat Pinsent’s essay on the “post-war child” covers significant texts between 1945 and the mid-1970s and reveals how authors constructed children in a Rousseauesque way that emphasized a “nostalgia for the past, when values seemed more secure, or a hope for the future personified in the innocence of a child character” (213). Eventually authors began using abandoned children to critique parents who were forgoing their responsibility; after 1970, as Karen Sands-O’Connor explains, “books for children shifted focus, from an emphasis on a child’s burgeoning power to the fear and helplessness of their parents” (226). Such books began to center more on the adult’s needs, not the child’s, as the family structure became increasingly unstable, parental authority was challenged, and children assumed the power to make decisions. Not surprisingly, it was at this time that the young adult novel became popular.

The volume concludes by considering the preoccupation in contemporary novels with policies relating to the modern child. Katherina Dodou analyzes how Ian McEwan’s novels have responded to these topical debates about childhood, and she analyzes how McEwan, like other contemporary British authors, has desentimentalized childhood by negating “the image of the innocent child as a symbol of vulnerability, guiltlessness, and lack of knowledge” (240). According to Dodou, contemporary fiction has come to define “the child as a source of adult anxiety and a threat to the societal order” (240).

Whereas *The Child* surveys literary representations of childhood from medieval to contemporary Britain, *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood* turns to debates pertaining to levels of constructedness in the historical child. Concerned with how children “have served as objects on display,” Miller and Yavneh explain their “interest in considering children as subjects with lived experience that is gendered” (7). These essays investigate gendered childhoods in the paintings, funeral monuments, dream literature, poetry, drama, legal records, and personal correspondences from across early modern Western Europe.

The volume begins with "Conceptualizing Childhood: Loss and Celebration," in which critics reconsider the notion that early modern children were unimportant and their parents affectionless by examining how children instead brought both joy and grief into the domestic sphere. Patricia Phillippy locates visual representations of mourning childhood death in her discussion of the emotional effigies and inscriptions found on children's tombs. Carol Levin surveys dream accounts in the popular *The Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* (1576–1626) in order to illustrate how parents feared the loss of a child as well as the potential power of a surviving child. Naomi Yavneh moves away from England to demonstrate how *Finding of Moses*, a 1580 painting by Venetian artist Paolo Veronese, allegorizes the finding of baby Moses by Pharaoh's daughter. According to Yavneh, the painting depicts important topical issues of Venetian childhood, such as salvation through abandonment, the establishment of foundling hospitals, and the emphasis on maternal nursing. Katherine R. Larson examines several letters written by Lady Arabella Stuart during her time in Queen Anna's court in order to discuss the gendering of early seventeenth-century childhood pastimes. She illustrates how "women used 'childplayes' not only for entertainment and solace but also as a means to negotiate the complex social realm of the Jacobean court" (68).

Possibly the most innovative section of the book, "Imprinting Identity: Education and Social Training" focuses on gendered philosophies of childrearing within the domestic sphere and the classroom. Taken together, these chapters challenge assumptions that both girls and boys belonged to the same "child" gender until boys were breeched and removed from the nursery. Marie Rutkoski's interest in French pediatrics carries her to Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (novel), Montaigne's "Of a Monstrous Child" (essay), and Paré's *Oeuvres* (medical manual), where she explores the debate within the French medical community between pragmatic and mystic approaches to pedagogy. Both Jane Couchman and Sara Mendelson discuss previously unpublished archival material to illuminate their subjects, since, according to Mendelson, "family correspondence and other personal documents offer a detailed picture of children's lives as viewed by adults: we can watch women teaching their sons and daughters in real time, commenting on their development, and sometimes quoting verbatim from children's own speech" (117). Couchman uses the letters Louise de Coligny exchanged with her Huguenot family in France and the Netherlands to illustrate how girls and boys received a gendered Humanist education that was

compatible with the Reformed faith. Mendelson moves from French aristocracy to English gentry with her essay on Anne Dormer's children and the epistolary narratives she shared with her sister. Mendelson uses the children's words, as recorded in the letters, to shed light on the child within the context of domestic politics. The fascinating letters that both Couchman and Mendelson analyze detail the daily lives of aristocratic and gentry children and offer new first-hand accounts of gendered childhood during the seventeenth century.

Kathryn M. Moncrief employs *The Tempest* to explore how historical records of domestic education surface in the educational scenes between Prospero and Miranda. For Moncrief, though the play "shows some evidence of rehearsing potentially progressive strategies for girlhood education," in the end it "endorses and celebrates the dominant cultural narrative of the father's responsibility for educating his daughter" and prepares her for a "prosperous and profitable marriage" (137). Caroline Bicks steps off the public stage and onto the convent stage of student productions established by Mary Ward, a Catholic Englishwoman who founded religious institutions abroad in 1611. Bicks reveals how these girl student-players, ages six through eighteen, "complicate conventional renderings of early modern girlhood as an uncontested space of presexual containment" (140). These girls had "the potential to transform, via their stage training, into females who are not contained within the bounds of acceptable behavior or attached to and owned by any one man" (140).

The final section, "Transitional Stages: Growing Up and Growing Old," addresses liminal "matters of closure, or lack thereof, in exploring social and cultural parameters of 'growing up'—or the departure from childhood into adulthood, and 'growing old'" (Gavin 12). Carole Collier Fricks looks at the sartorial boundary between childhood and adult masculinities through her discussion of the codpieces worn throughout Europe. She reveals that sixteenth-century boys "as young as the age of four" (162) adorned codpieces, thus demonstrating how young children were gendered and dressed as the "adults they were destined to become" (179). Diane Purkiss reads Andrew Marvell's investment in the figure of the preadolescent girl in "Appleton House" as an articulation of how the desire for this "green girl" is not one of conquest or sexuality, but a desire for a "particular and cultural marked moment before the genesis of masculinity can begin" (181). According to Purkiss, the girl's asexuality, as well as her stark contrast to adult masculinity, are golden, Edenic, and desirable.

Introducing a new nationality into the discussion, Emilie L. Bergmann explores the heroic boys in three theatrical works by Spanish author Miguel Cervantes. Considering "the very limited appearance of young children in early modern Spanish literature," these boys are all the more important since the plays depict them as "emblems and active defenders of Spanish Catholic cultural identity" (195). Julia Marciari Alexander surveys Flemish portraits of King Charles's family by Anthony Van Dyck in order to locate a "significant shift" that occurred in the first half of the seventeenth century in "the perceptions of [royal] childhood and family life" in the Caroline court (210). Van Dyke's child portraits "are markers of the king's understanding of how portraits of regal children had been traditionally used as agents in the propagation of dynasty" (220). Gregory M. Colón Semenza concludes the volume with a discussion of "second childishness" in Shakespeare. He examines how old men in Shakespeare become infantilized and how "their descent into childishness is marked by an increased dependence on their own embittered or alienated children" (224). Thus, for Semenza, as for so many other contributors to this volume, ages are much more "states of mind or modes of behavior" than they are "biological phases of the life cycle" (224)—so much so that Shakespeare's characters can, and often do, "exchange positions as parents and children," thus officering a "paradoxical dynamic by which 'second children' are nurtured to maturity by their more 'parental' children" (224).

The potential drawbacks of these two volumes are common to all essay collections, the challenges of finding balance between range and focus. *The Child* admirably covers eight centuries of literary childhood, but some readers may be disappointed to find that the periods generally most underrepresented in scholarship—the medieval and contemporary—are each represented here by only one essay. Moreover, the collection is most innovative when it investigates the child in "adult" literatures rather than child/adult relations in children's literature. Likewise, *Gender* seems unbalanced at times. Of the five essays that deal with literature, Shakespeare is represented twice and English authors thrice. Collectively, the fourteen chapters only consider five nationalities, and nine essays focus exclusively on England. A few essays stray from the volume's announced purpose when they do not address the "gender" portion of the book's title as perceptively as others do.

Both books are strongest when the critics verify childhood as an ever present and fundamental component of human life across genre, time, nation, class, and gender, an accomplishment that appears

ubiquitously throughout both collections. Indeed, the highlights of these important volumes exist in their respective offerings of new beginnings for scholarship. Many of the chapters, especially in *Gender*, begin by announcing themselves as a rethinking of Ariès and Stone, but identifying one's research as a revisionist approach to these two social historians is now a truism in childhood studies. Therefore, the greatest merit of these theoretically astute essays is their forging new roads toward book-length scholarship on their respective topics. *The Child's* sustained investigation of literary children and *Gender's* illumination of the gendered diversity in early modern childhood are long overdue, and once these books receive a wide readership, as they certainly will, we can expect to see more titles like Robert Shaughnessy's *Shakespeare and Childhood* (2007), David Selwyn's *Jane Austen and Children* (2010), and Laura Peters's *Dickens and Childhood* (2012). Indeed, when read together, these projects are testimonials to the dire need for those in the field to illustrate how archival research can at times give us actual words and thoughts of children, which in turn can help us to understand how historical childhoods critique, subvert, reinforce, and negotiate literary ones. The scholarship in *Gender* is exciting and fresh, while the accomplishments in *The Child* provide the most current and theoretically up-to-date survey of British literary childhoods. Both volumes are a necessity for libraries, and I can see the kernels of future dissertations and books within these pages.

*Children's Culture and the Avant-Garde: Painting in Paris, 1890–1915*, by Marilynn Strasser Olson. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Reviewed by Gwen Athene Tarbox

Contemporary art instruction, production, and criticism take place in a global context, enabling artists to learn from each other and to share techniques, philosophies, and materials, often within a digital environment and at a rapid pace. The cultural and technological forces that have combined to bring about such an international, interdependent, and fluid art scene have their origin in Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the hegemony of the major art academies in London and Paris, long the guardians of a highly nationalistic and