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## Childhood in Victorian Literature

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### Introduction

As the Victorian period began, literary depictions of childhood were influenced from two main directions. On the one hand, there was the figure of the idealized Romantic child, typically conceived as naturally innocent and close to God, most famously in Wordsworth's poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807), in which children arrive into the world "Trailing clouds of glory [. . .] From God who is our home." On the other hand, there was the child of Evangelical tracts, thought to be naturally sinful and in need of constant discipline and vigilance. At the same time, the ongoing legacy of Rousseau's conception of childhood as a space of natural freedom, as laid out most fully in his *Émile, or On Education* (1762), continued to exert an influence. As many critics have observed, the literature of the Victorian period not only registered and developed these dichotomous visions of childhood, but also added new perspectives of its own. Increasingly, scientific and evolutionary accounts of childhood emerged, driven by the new theories and discoveries of the age, such as the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Charles Kingsley, H. G. Wells, and Rudyard Kipling were among the writers who explored these theories. Material factors also had an impact, including reductions in child mortality brought about by improvements in sanitation and disease prevention, although mortality rates for infants under age one remained stubbornly high in 1900 at over 15 percent, ensuring that childhood illness and death remained powerful themes throughout the period. Perhaps the most important development within Victorian fiction, though, was psychological in nature, as childhood came to be seen as a time of complex and unruly passions that formed, foreshadowed, and at times threatened the adult world. This tendency was particularly acute in the realist novel, where it contributed to the ongoing evolution of the *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age novel, as a genre. For literary scholars, a relatively small group of novels and novelists have often been taken as emblematic of Victorian conceptions of childhood, including Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847); Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *Great Expectations* (1860); George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860); Lewis Carroll's "Alice" stories (1865 and 1871); and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). More recently, critical interest has also turned to writers of children's fiction and fantasy, such as Charlotte Yonge and George MacDonald, and to popular children's periodicals, including the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Girl's Own Paper*. For more information about the latter, the related *Oxford Bibliographies* article in Victorian Literature "Children's Literature" is of interest. Probably the most influential line of modern criticism, inaugurated by scholars such as Philippe Ariès in the 1960s and Jacqueline Rose in the 1980s, has developed the idea that Victorian childhood was socially and discursively produced by and for adults, rather than being a preexisting natural state. Studies in this tradition continue to bear fruit and often intersect with issues of gender, sexuality, and family life or with major social changes, such as the growth of economic individualism, the expansion of the British Empire, and the development of the modern education system. By contrast, research on Victorian poetry and drama has been limited, leaving significant scope for original work in these fields.

### General Overviews

Two classic studies of modern childhood are Ariès 1962 and Coveney 1967, both of which place the Victorian period within the wider context of the longue durée of post-medieval Western culture. Of the two, Coveney's book devotes more time to literature. Boas 1966 also helped to frame the terms of contemporary debate, which defines childhood as a modern-day cult that seeks a symbolic return to nature. Fass 2013 and Roberts 2002 are helpful short introductions to the current state of the field, whereas Banerjee 1996 and Frost 2009 are longer overviews of childhood in Victorian literature and culture. For those interested in literature aimed at children, McCulloch 2004 is particularly important, though its discussion of the ideological production of childhood also gives it a wider appeal. Berry 1999 is one of the best treatments of canonical Victorian novels in relation to childhood, laying out a convincing narrative around the transformations effected

during the period. Locke 2011 considers Victorian childhood in the context of analyzing ten self-selected “great novels” but his text is less focused than those by Banerjee, Frost, or Berry.

**Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood*. Translated by Robert Baldick. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.**

Originally published in French, this classic text lays out the argument that European childhood was invented or “discovered” in the 17th century, rather than being a natural state. Very influential within literary studies, including Victorian studies, but remains controversial as a historical account.

**Banerjee, Jacqueline. *Through the Northern Gate: Childhood and Growing Up in British Fiction, 1719–1901*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.**

Argues both that childhood was a major literary concern before the Romantic period and that children in Victorian literature should be considered as psychologically complex. A good introduction to the field. Writers considered include Dickens, the Brontës, Eliot, and William Makepeace Thackeray.

**Berry, Laura. *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.**

Significant account of how cultural conceptions of childhood shifted in the Victorian period to reposition children as victims, driven partly by growing secular individualism. Uses *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Adam Bede* as reference points.

**Boas, George. *The Cult of Childhood*. Studies of the Warburg Institute 29. London: Warburg Institute, 1966.**

Opposes two different models of history—the progressive “millenary” conception and the regressive “Golden Age” conception—arguing that although childhood engages with both, it predominantly represents the dream of a return to nature. Tends to make broad generalizations, but is impressive in its range of scholarship.

**Coveney, Peter. *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1967.**

Classic account of childhood and literature, revised and updated following its initial publication as *Poor Monkey* (London: Rockliff, 1957). Tracks society’s view of the child from the time of Wordsworth and Blake into the early 20th century. Proposes that childhood gained an unparalleled symbolic significance in this period, initially standing as a symbol for social renewal before degenerating into an image of social stasis and malaise, as represented by Peter Pan. An important starting point for many scholars.

**Fass, Paula, ed. *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*. London: Routledge, 2013.**

A very broad historical overview of Western childhood that seeks to update and supersede Philippe Ariès’s groundbreaking work. Part 2, “Creating Childhoods in the Western World since 1500 (pp. 101–328), covers material relevant to the Victorian period. Aimed toward undergraduate students.

**Frost, Ginger. *Victorian Childhoods*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009.**

Social history text that gives useful context for those working on literary topics. Aims for breadth of coverage rather than putting forward a particular agenda.

**Locke, Richard. *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.**

Considers canonical depictions of children in ten major novels from the 18th to the 20th century, with the Victorian novel represented by *Great Expectations* and *The Turn of the Screw*. Does little to challenge existing accounts of the texts, but is worth consulting for those studying Dickens or James.

**McCulloch, Fiona. *The Fictional Role of Childhood in Victorian and Early Twentieth-Century Children's Literature*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2004.**

Theoretically informed study of the ideological construction of childhood within Victorian and Edwardian children's literature, with chapters on Lewis Carroll, R. M. Ballantyne, Robert Louis Stevenson, George MacDonald, and Charles Kingsley.

**Roberts, Lewis. "Children's Fiction." In *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Edited by Patrick Brantlinger and William Thesing, 353–369. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.**

Provides a general introduction to Victorian children's literature and its relation to developing conceptions of childhood. Takes Carroll's "Alice" as its starting point and traces the origins of Victorian ideas on childhood in 18th-century debates involving Locke and Rousseau, as well as Romantic writers. Offers students a good place to start on fairy tales, moral stories, adventure tales, and family narratives.

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## Essay Collections

Two of the essay collections here—Avery and Briggs 1989 and Lesnik-Oberstein 2004—focus on children's literature, an area that has seen significant scholarly interest in recent decades. Although neither collection is essential, both contain some material of relevance to Victorian childhood. Gavin 2012 is widest in its scope, covering British literature from the medieval to the early 21st century and helpfully putting Victorian writing in a wider context, although losing some specificity in the process. At the other end of the spectrum is Phillips 1971, which exclusively collects essays that address Carroll's "Alice" books from the Victorian period on. Denisof 2008 examines the links among childhood, capitalism, and consumption in the 19th century, retaining an effective and compelling focus despite its broad range of contributors, whereas Jacobson 2000 takes empire as its focus and pays attention mainly to Dickens.

**Avery, Gillian, and Julia Briggs, eds. *Children and Their Books*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.**

This essay collection celebrates the work of Iona and Peter Opie, both scholars of children's literature. Chapters 9 to 15 (pp. 181–336) are concerned with Victorian and Edwardian topics, including *Alice in Wonderland* (chapter 9, pp. 181–200) and the children's illustrator Arthur Hughes (chapter 10, pp. 201–220).

**Denisof, Dennis. *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008.**

A notable collection of essays concerned with the links between childhood and literal or metaphorical consumption. Many chapters have a literary focus, covering, for example, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, boys' adventure fiction, and 19th-century theatre.

**Gavin, Adrienne, ed. *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2012.**

Chapters 8 to 10 (pp. 116–161) of this wide-ranging volume focus on the Victorian period. Naomi Wood makes the interesting argument in chapter 8 (pp. 116–130) that Lewis Carroll's "Alice" represents a synthesis of fantastical and realistic depictions of childhood.

**Jacobson, Wendy. *Dickens and the Children of Empire*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2000.**

A collection of essays looking at colonial and postcolonial themes in relation to childhood, in Dickens and other writers. Features work by major scholars of Victorian literature, such as Catherine Gallagher and Kate Flint. Of limited general interest, but important in its field.

**Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin, ed. *Children's Literature: New Approaches*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2004.**

Chapter 3 (pp. 51–77) by Christine Sutphn analyzes the cultural construction of home and childhood in the mid-19th century and urges caution around received ideas of Victorianism. Chapter 5 (pp. 93–117) by Neil Cocks on the implied reader is of general interest, and chapter 6 (pp. 118–143) by Lila Harper explores Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*.

**Phillips, Robert, ed. *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen through the Critics' Looking-Glasses, 1865–1971*. New York: Vanguard, 1971.**

Collects major critical essays on Carroll's "Alice" stories published until 1971. Given the centrality of Carroll's novels to popular and critical conceptions of Victorian childhood, this text is worth consulting beyond its primary audience of Carroll scholars.

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## Websites and Databases

Other than the website Representing Childhood, which looks at childhood from a broad historical standpoint, the major online resources in this field are subsets of websites that cover Victorian or 19th-century literature in general. Most substantial of these is Nineteenth Century Collections Online, an online scholarly archive that is the most extensive of its type for this period but requires a subscription. Victorian Web and Childhood and Children's Literature are useful for students seeking a general introduction to the topic. Among the best Victorian blogs to include material on childhood are The Little Professor and The Victorianist.

### **Childhood and Children's Literature.**

Literature about children in the Romantic and Victorian period is the focus of this British Library website. Contains several short essays by academics that may be useful for students or general readers on such topics as *Jane Eyre* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

### **The Little Professor.**

An active and readable blog by Miriam Burnstein, a Victorianist who specializes in religious (especially Catholic) literature. Contains occasional discussions of the representation of children in 19th-century literature. Also includes a substantial set of links to other online Victorian resources.

### **Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO): Children's Literature and Childhood.**

A multidisciplinary database that gathers library and archive content, including a substantial section related to childhood. Contains literary, historical, and periodical texts. Available online by subscription.

### **Representing Childhood.**

Scholarly website interested in representations of childhood from the medieval to the early 21st century, hosted by the University of Pittsburgh. Includes an introductory essay on the "Victorian Child" by Marah Gubar, as well as a short bibliography and links to further resources.

### **The Victorian Web.**

This regularly updated scholarly website covers a wide range of Victorian topics. Contains a section focusing on children's literature, with essays by Jacqueline Banerjee on "Ideas of Childhood in Victorian Children's Fiction" and the "Death of Children." The website's layout is now somewhat dated.

### **The Victorianist.**

A UK-based blog covering a range of Victorian topics. Has not been updated since 2014, but remains an interesting archive for students and general readers. Posts on childhood include a popular 2010 article on "Working Children of the 19th Century."

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## **Childhood and the Family**

Although it has become commonplace to state that the Victorians fetishized middle-class family life, several critics have probed familial relations in more depth, often emphasizing instances in which ideal families are undermined or placed in question. Grylls 1978 is one of the first major studies of the parent–child relationship in Victorian literature, seeing it as complex and dichotomous. Segal 1992 and Bowlby 2013 focus primarily on the parental side of the relationship. Both are theoretically informed and put forward a strong thesis, although the latter is more directly relevant to Victorianists. Peters 2000 and Thiel 2008 consider broken or nonstandard families, the former through the trope of the orphan and the latter by addressing a range of alternative family structures operating in the period. Adrian 1984 and Schor 1999 (both cited under Childhood in Dickens) look specifically at Dickens's depictions of family, whereas Navailles 1983 considers the Victorian working-class family from a historical perspective.

### **Bowlby, Rachel. *A Child of One's Own: Parental Stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.**

Bowlby's fascinating book reconsiders canonical literature by approaching childhood from the perspective of parenthood. An exemplary demonstration of the way in which historical texts continue to address contemporary concerns—in this case, around reproduction, childhood attachment, and adoption. Discusses *Great Expectations*, *Esther Waters*, *What Maisie Knew*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, among others.

### **Grylls, David. *Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in Nineteenth Century Literature*. London: Faber and Faber, 1978.**

Classic work on parent–child relations and still a good starting point. Although taking a predominantly literary approach, Grylls draws on a range of interdisciplinary sources in exploring this topic and considers the Victorians' paradoxical belief in both natural innocence and original sin.

### **Navailles, Jean-Pierre. *La famille ouvrière dans l'Angleterre victorienne: Des regards aux mentalités*. Paris: Champ Vallon, 1983.**

A French historical study of the working-class Victorian family. Takes account of writers and reformers such as James Kay-Shuttleworth, Edwin Chadwick, John Ruskin, and Alexis de Tocqueville.

### **Peters, Laura. *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000.**

Explores the figure of the Victorian orphan in the literature and culture of the time, suggesting that the orphan represented a threat to the security and stability of the family unit. Has a particular focus on travel and colonialism.

### **Segal, Naomi. *The Adulteress's Child: Authorship and Desire in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1992.**

Looks broadly at mother–child relationships in British and European literature of the 19th century, taking a feminist and psychoanalytic approach. Pays most attention to French authors, including Stendhal, Flaubert, and Maupassant.

**Thiel, Elizabeth.** *The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal.* New York: Routledge, 2008.

Focuses on lesser-known children's literature to explore how Victorian literature not only propagated reassuring myths of the ideal family with the child at its center, but also depicted "transnormative" families, which have nonstandard familial structures. Chapter 2 (pp. 43–72) on the figure of the destitute child is especially strong.

## Childhood in Dickens

Dickens has attracted more dedicated scholarly work on childhood than any other Victorian writer, extending far beyond the primary reference points cited in this section. His novels have often been read as opening debates with far-reaching significance for both Victorian and childhood studies. Two important early texts are Donovan 1968 and Wilson 1970, both of which emphasize the centrality of childhood to Dickens's work. These studies set the stage for Adrian 1984, Andrews 1994, Sadrin 1994, and Schor 1999, which delve in more detail into various aspects of Dickens's concern with childhood, covering the parent–child relationship, young–old characters, money and inheritance, and dichotomous daughters, respectively. Somewhat more general in its approach is Merchant and Waters 2015, an essay collection using memory and imagination as a loose theme. Newsom 2001 and Furneaux 2011 are both helpful but short introductions to the topic. The most comprehensive overview available is Peters 2012, an excellent collection of previously published essays in the *Library of Essays on Charles Dickens* series (published by Routledge).

**Adrian, Arthur.** *Dickens and the Parent–Child Relationship.* Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984.

This short book begins by considering Dickens's own position as child and parent, before moving to analyze the parent–child relationships in his fiction. Also discusses parent–child role reversals, but not in depth. Useful for biographical information, but of limited analytical value.

**Andrews, Malcolm.** *Dickens and the Grown-up Child.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994.

Andrews discusses Dickens's characters that complicate straightforward categorizations of age, arguing that Dickens forms part of a tradition interested in the relation between childhood and adulthood. Seeks to turn focus away from Dickens's biography. Includes chapters on *Dombey and Son* (Chapter 7, pp. 112–134) and *David Copperfield* (Chapters 8 and 9, pp. 135–148 and 149–171).

**Donovan, Frank.** *Dickens and Youth.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1968.

A historicist study suggesting that Dickens used children to reflect on the society in which he lived by drawing out both its best and worst aspects. Utilizes a broad range of Dickens's novels.

**Furneaux, Holly.** "Childhood." In *Charles Dickens in Context.* Edited by Holly Furneaux and Sally Ledger, 186–193. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Rather short but solid introduction to the topic that takes a historical and historiographical approach to Dickens's engagement with childhood. Touches on key works such as Ariès 1962 (cited under General Overviews) and Andrews 1994.

**Merchant, Peter, and Catherine Waters.** *Dickens and the Imagined Child.* Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015.

Part of the expanding literature on Dickens and childhood, this essay collection is not groundbreaking but is helpful on the rich theme of the way in which childhood and adulthood relate in Dickens's work, especially through the working of memory and the imagination.

**Newsom, Robert. "Fictions of Childhood." In *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. Edited by John Jordan, 92–105. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.**

Good introduction to the place of childhood in Dickens's work. A sensible starting point for students and scholars new to the topic.

**Peters, Laura, ed. *A Library of Essays on Charles Dickens: Dickens and Childhood*. London: Routledge, 2012.**

Hard-to-locate but excellent reference work that collects key critical essays on Dickens and childhood. Covers most major themes, including the Romantic child, family, empire, and critical theory.

**Sadrin, Anny. *Parentage and Inheritance in the Novels of Charles Dickens*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994.**

Attends to the centrality of wills and inheritances in Dickens, a subject that involves frequent engagement with childhood and family relationships. Novels covered include *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Bleak House*. An acute analysis that also speaks to the field of economic criticism.

**Schor, Hilary. *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.**

Proposes a strong and intriguing thesis that Dickens's "good daughters" are opposed or balanced by their angry or uncanny counterparts. An important text for those interested in feminist readings of Dickens. Covers all the major novels.

**Wilson, Angus. "Dickens on Children and Childhood." In *Dickens 1970*. Edited by Michael Slater, 195–231. London: Chapman & Hall, 1970.**

A classic introduction to the topic that argues Dickens was fascinated by the mystical and ambiguous nature of childhood. Now largely superseded, however.

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## Childhood and Gender

In line with the growing interest in gender in Victorian studies since the 1970s, work on the relation of gender to Victorian childhood and literature has generated a large number of books, in both cases driven partly by the development of feminist and gender studies as academic disciplines. Among the most relevant of the early feminist studies is Moers 1976, which discusses the lasting impact on many female writers of their own childhoods. Avery 1965 is an early historical study of the differing roles of male and female protagonists in children's literature, a topic that Gorham 1982 and Bristow 1991 develop—Gorham focusing on female role models and Bristow on male role models. Nelson 1991 complicates this picture. Works that take authorial gender as a starting point include Brown 1993 and Knoepfmacher 1998, as well as Robson 2003 (cited under Childhood and Sexuality). Ferrall and Jackson 2010 and Rodgers 2016 both make related arguments concerning the production of adolescent girlhood and boyhood in the latter 19th century, whereas Gonzalez 2011 considers gendered forms of identity production in relation to the popular "doll tales" genre aimed at Victorian girls.

**Avery, Gillian. *Nineteenth Century Children: Heroes and Heroines in English Children's Stories, 1780–1900*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965.**

Classic account of child protagonists in juvenile literature. Traces the rise of gender-specific fiction in the period.

**Bristow, Joseph. *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*. London: Harper Collins, 1991.**

Explores the construction of an ideal of imperial masculinity for boys in texts published between 1860 and 1920. Major figures covered include Robert Baden-Powell and Rudyard Kipling.



**Brown, Penny.** *The Captured World: The Child and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in England.* New York: St. Martin's, 1993.

Identifies a range of different types of childhood in women's writing, with sections on the Brontës and George Eliot. Considers the conflict between Romantic and Evangelical perspectives as well as growing psychological interest in the period.

**Ferrall, Charles, and Anna Jackson.** *Juvenile Literature and British Society, 1850–1950: The Age of Adolescence.* New York: Routledge, 2010.

Argues that the Victorian period produced a new and distinctive idea of the adolescent, which persisted into the 20th century. The authors trace this process primarily through serials and periodicals aimed at boys and girls, such as the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Girl's Own Paper*. Particularly valuable for its original research on these periodicals.

**Gonzalez, Eugenia.** "'I sometimes think she is a spy on all my actions': Dolls, Girls and Disciplinary Surveillance in the Nineteenth-Century Doll Tale." *Children's Literature* 39 (2011): 33–57.

Focusing on the minor subgenre of "doll tales," Gonzalez argues that these stories, directed mainly at girls, dramatized and enforced a form of Foucauldian discipline. An interesting example of the way in which literature actively contributed to the production of dominant modes of Victorian childhood.

**Gorham, Deborah.** *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal.* London: Croom Helm, 1982.

Considers the prominent Victorian designation of women as the "Angel in the House," and explores how the upbringing of girls contributed to this ideal. Draws on fictional and nonfictional sources and focuses in the final section (Part 3, pp. 125–208) on the documented experiences of specific middle-class women. Remains an important work on middle-class girlhood.

**Knoepfmacher, U. C.** *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Offers a provocative interpretation of Victorian children's writers, arguing that male authors idealized and sentimentalized girlhood, whereas female authors presented a more realistic account of child development. An important reference point for scholars interested in gender.

**Moers, Ellen.** *Literary Women: The Great Writers.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976.

This agenda-setting feminist book argues for the specifically female dimension of works by major women writers, including many from the Victorian period, such as Mme de Staël, Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, and George Eliot. Moers stresses the importance of family relations, as well as the desires and sufferings of girlhood, when analyzing such writers. Still relevant for scholars of Victorian literature and gender. Reprinted by Oxford University Press in 1985.

**Nelson, Claudia.** *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857–1917.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Argues that the feminine and angelic ideal of childhood established in Victorian literature and culture applied to boys as well as girls. Focuses on stories aimed at boys in the latter 19th century.

**Rodgers, Beth. *Adolescent Girlhood and Literary Culture at the Fin de Siècle: Daughters of Today*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.**

Takes a similar line as Ferrall and Jackson 2010, arguing that adolescent girlhood became a distinct cultural and literary preoccupation around the end of the 19th century. Draws on periodicals, girls' school stories by L. T. Meade and others, and New Woman fiction by Olive Schreiner and Sarah Grand.

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## Childhood and Sexuality

The essential starting point on this subject is Kincaid 1992, which proposes that virtually all representations of childhood are overtly or covertly sexualized. Kincaid should be read alongside Felman 1977 (cited under Uncanny and Marginal Children) and Rose 1984 (cited under Ideal, Mythical, and Impossible Children), both sophisticated psychoanalytic readings that engage with childhood sexuality and adult desire. Also in this tradition is Edelman 2004, an influential book that calls for an alternative, queer form of sexuality, as opposed to the "reproductive futurity" of the child. Cox 1996 is worth consulting alongside these works, whereas Robson 2003 proposes a less-sexualized reading of the obsession with young girlhood evident in works by prominent Victorian men such as Carroll and Ruskin. Covering similar ground to Robson, Polhemus 1995 links Dickens to John Everett Millais through an aesthetic of childhood and eroticism. Also useful is Segal 1992 (cited under Childhood and the Family), which explores the illicit sexuality of adultery in relation to children, and Shuttleworth 2010 (cited under Science, Health, and Education), which discusses Victorian psychologists' understandings of child sexuality.

**Cox, Roger. *Shaping Childhood: Themes of Uncertainty in the History of Adult–Child Relationships*. London: Routledge, 1996.**

Develops and extends Ariès's work on the history of childhood, taking a wide view of the topic from the 17th to the late 20th century. Chapter 6 (pp. 128–162) considers the Victorians, taking gender and sexuality as a focus. A complement to the more substantial work on the period of Kincaid, Robson, etc.

**Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.**

Much-discussed polemic that brings the tools of queer theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis to bear on childhood. Argues that queers have been positioned as socially negative, as opposed to the "reproductive futurity" represented by the child, but proposes that queer subjects should embrace this anti-reproductive position. Victorian literature is an important plank of Edelman's argument, with sections on *A Christmas Carol* and *Silas Marner*. Essential reading for those interested in childhood and theory.

**Kincaid, James. *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.**

Now classic but still controversial account of childhood and sexuality that argues children in Victorian and contemporary culture and literature are produced by and for adult desire, even when they appear pure and innocent. Informed by psychoanalysis, Foucault, and deconstruction.

**Polhemus, Robert. "John Millais's Children: Faith and Erotics: *The Woodman's Daughter*." In *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*. Edited by Carol Christ and John Jordan, 189–312. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.**

Links Millais's depiction of childhood to Dickens's novels, arguing that both men employed children as highly overdetermined affective symbols. Worth consulting on the relation between art and literature in the Victorian period.

**Robson, Catherine. *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.**

Robson analyzes the sometimes obsessive fascination with little girls of male Victorian writers, Ruskin and Carroll in particular. Seeks to present a less overtly sexualized reading than Kincaid and others by suggesting that the female child was seen as a developmental stage on the path to full adult masculinity.

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## Childhood and Society

Although all the sources cited in this article discuss, to some extent, the way in which society views childhood, this section is aimed primarily at framing childhood within wider social, cultural, and economic concerns. Two texts—Cunningham, et al. 2004 and Cunningham 2005—are included as general introductions to the topic. The references cited under Economics, Law, Empire, and Religion focus on the large, impersonal social forces of economics, law, empire, and religion, while those under Science, Health, and Education consider the fields of science, health, and education, fields that closely examined the minds and bodies of individual children over the course of the 19th century. In addition, Berry 1999 (cited under General Overviews) discusses childhood and society, as well as the Victorian state.

**Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*. 2d ed. Oxfordshire, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2005.**

Provides a panoramic social history of childhood from 1500 to the early 20th century in the tradition of broad synthesizing accounts such as Ariès 1962 (cited under General Overviews). Although it is a social history rather than a literary study, the book covers key areas for understanding childhood, including middle-class ideology, family, school, the state, philanthropy, and child exploitation.

**Cunningham, Hugh, Caroline Arcscott, and Sally Shuttleworth. "Roundtable: Victorian Children and Childhood." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9.1 (2004): 90–113.**

This roundtable, consisting of three articles, offers a good overview of the current (at the time of writing) state of critical work on Victorian childhood and society within the humanities. Now slightly outdated, but still of interest for materialist scholars, in particular.

## Economics, Law, Empire, and Religion

On the relation between children's literature and capitalism, Parkes 2012 is a significant source, whereas Denisof 2008 (cited under Essay Collections) explores the related area of consumer culture. Himmelfarb 1984 and Himmelfarb 1991, taken together, constitute a substantial study of Victorian poverty and its representations. Boone 2005 looks at childhood and class in the age of empire, a topic previously touched on by Jacobson 2000 (cited under Essay Collections). Krueger 2002 is a good starting place on law and childhood. Maeyer, et al. 2005 offers a comprehensive picture on religion and childhood.

**Boone, Troy. *Youth of Darkest England: Working-Class Children at the Heart of Victorian Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2005.**

Looks at the representation of working-class children in fictional and nonfictional texts concerned with imperialism, including popular adventure stories such as *Jack Sheppard*, *Treasure Island*, and *She: A History of Adventure*. Boone identifies an original and productive angle on Victorian childhood.

**Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*. New York: Knopf, 1984.**

This major study from a historian of ideas covers the period 1750–1850, exploring how poverty was perceived across the century. Childhood features throughout as an important dimension of social conceptions of poverty, including in relation to the introduction of the new Poor Law in 1834. Part 4 (pp. 403–521) looks at Victorian writers including Dickens, Gaskell, Disraeli, Ainsworth, and Reynolds. Highly historicist in its approach.

**Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *Poverty and Compassion: The Social Ethic of the Late Victorians*. New York: Knopf, 1991.**

Building on Himmelfarb 1984, this work explores poverty and its representations from 1850 onwards, including in relation to childhood, with a special focus on the moral purpose of the Victorians. As in her previous study, Himmelfarb is hostile to both left-wing criticism of middle-class Victorian values and much modern critical theory. An informative, if resolutely traditionalist, text.

**Krueger, Christine. "Legal Uses of Victorian Fiction: Infant Felons to Juvenile Delinquents." In *Functions of Victorian Literature at the Present Time*. Edited by Christine Krueger, 115–136. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002.**

Offers a historically focused analysis of law and criminality in relation to a range of Victorian fiction and nonfiction.

**Maeyer, Jan de, Hans-Heino Ewers, Rite Ghesquière, Michael Manson, Pat Pinsent and Patricia Quaghebeur, eds. *Religion, Children's Literature, and Modernity in Western Europe, 1750–2000*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2005.**

This exhaustive exploration of religion and children's literature in the modern age covers the major European traditions, including those of Britain. Contains detailed discussions of the way in which Catholicism and Protestantism informed and gave rise to writing for children. Of minor interest outside its primary field.

**Parkes, Christopher. *Children's Literature and Capitalism: Fictions of Social Mobility in Britain, 1850–1914*. Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.**

Useful account of the way in which capitalism informed and responded to childhood in the latter 19th century, with sections on youth employment, family businesses, adventure fiction, and education.

## Science, Health, and Education

The fields of science, health, and education can be taken together as technologies for forming or interpreting the mind and physiology of the developing child. All have attracted growing critical interest within since the beginning of the 21st century. On science and medicine, Shuttleworth 2010 has set the agenda within recent years, whereas Boehm 2013 uses Dickens to focus its interest on the fields of education, science and health. Straley 2016 differs from Shuttleworth and Boehm in being concerned mainly with evolution. Silver 2002, Flegel 2009, and Benziman 2012 look at childhood health through the lens of neglect and suffering. On literature and Victorian education, Digby and Searby 1981 and Gargano 2008 both provide a good overview. The former is more straightforwardly historical, whereas the latter engages with a number of canonical literary texts.

**Benziman, Galia. *Narratives of Child Neglect in Romantic and Victorian Culture*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.**

Explores the image of the neglected or abandoned child in Romantic and Victorian fiction, and argues for an ongoing interchange between Romantic and Puritan conceptions of childhood in the 19th century. The second half of the book covers Victorian writers (Frances Trollope, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Dickens, and Thomas Hardy).

**Boehm, Katharina. *Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood: Popular Medicine, Child Health and Victorian Culture*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.**

Brings Dickens's novels together with the new science and medicine of childhood. Includes chapters on *Oliver Twist* and mesmerism and on Dickens's involvement with the Great Ormond Street Hospital.

**Digby, Anne, and Peter Searby. *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England*. New York: Macmillan, 1981.**

Work of social history that argues 19th-century education served as a means of social control. Covers topics including religion and morality, social class and the economy, and girls and education.

**Flegel, Monica. *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England: Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2009.**

Explores the social construction of the figure of the abused child through literary and nonliterary texts, taking the founding of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) as its starting date. Includes discussion of Caroline Norton, Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens, and Wilkie Collins.

**Gargano, Elizabeth. *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms: Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2008.**

Draws on writers including Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Lewis Carroll to consider the growth of institutionalized education in the period and the ways in which novelists dramatized and resisted this process. A solid account of how Victorian literature and schooling intersect.

**Shuttleworth, Sally. *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science and Medicine, 1840–1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.**

Impressively researched volume that considers the origins of child-development studies in the Victorian period in relation to the literature and culture of the time. The author helped to develop scholarly understanding of pre-Freudian accounts of child psychology.

**Silver, Anna Krugovoy. *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.**

Covers childhood in chapter 2 (pp. 51–80), focusing on children's literature as helping to promote a culture of anorexia, which became widespread in the Victorian period. A thorough and largely convincing work.

**Straley, Jessica. *Evolution and Imagination in Victorian Children's Literature*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016.**

With chapters on Margaret Gatty (Chapter 1, pp. 31–56), Charles Kingsley and Herbert Spencer (Chapter 2, pp. 57–85), Lewis Carroll (Chapter 3, pp. 86–117), Rudyard Kipling (Chapter 4, pp. 118–145), and Frances Hodgson Burnett (Chapter 5, pp. 146–175), Straley's book explores the implications of the connection made in the 19th century between children and animals, particularly through the theory of recapitulation. Part of an ongoing interest in literature and evolution developed by Gillian Beer and George Levine in the 1980s.

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## Ideal, Mythical, and Impossible Children

Boas 1966 (cited under General Overviews) and Ariès 1962, in particular, both offer field-defining analyses of how the impossible ideal of childhood was constructed in the West, with the Victorian era playing a major part. Wilson 1980 and Vann 1982 respond to and develop Ariès's book, whereas Higonnet 1998 discusses a similar topic from an art-historical perspective. Gubar 2009 challenges this narrative, suggesting that Victorian children's literature shifted away from the ideal Romantic child of the early 19th century. Many theoretical studies of childhood and literature are indebted to Rose 1984, which presents a case for the structural impossibility of fiction that genuinely addresses children. On the way in which the ideal of childhood is both reproduced and threatened by 19th-century fiction, Gorham 1982 (cited under Childhood and Gender) and Malkovich 2013 are informative, as well as parts of Higonnet 1998. Steedman 1995 considers the way in which childhood came to represent an ideal model of the interior self during the period 1780–1930.

**Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood*. Translated by Robert Baldick. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.**

The classic account of the way in which an ideal of childhood was produced and refined in modern Europe. An important influence on many other texts in this section. Translated from the French.

**Gubar, Marah. *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.**

Reconsiders canonical and noncanonical children's literature to argue that the Victorians embarked from Romantic conceptions of the ideal child. Challenges James Kincaid's notion that the innocence of the Victorian child was eroticized (see *Childhood and Sexuality*). Contains new research on children's theatre and on lesser-known female authors such as Hesba Stretton and Juliana Ewing.

**Higonnet, Anne. *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998.**

Wide-ranging visual history of ideal childhood as a product of the modern age, originating with the Romantic child. Lewis Carroll features prominently.

**Malkovich, Amberly. *Charles Dickens and the Victorian Child*. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.**

Uses Dickens as a reference point to consider how literary depictions of imperfect childhood oppose the figure of the ideal Victorian child. Contributes to the construction of childhood study. In addition to Dickens, texts by Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald, Hesba Stretton, Christina Rossetti, and E. Nesbit are covered.

**Rose, Jacqueline. *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.**

Although not focused on the Victorian period, this is an important reference point for many Victorian scholars, as one of the first texts to use theoretical tools to develop the argument that fictive accounts of childhood innocence function as realms of myth-making by and for adults. Draws frequently and effectively on psychoanalysis.

**Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.**

Steedman's bold argument is that shifting attitudes toward childhood in the 19th century meant the child became the privileged representative of a new kind of human interiority, culminating with Freud's conception of childhood as the origin of the self. This thematically arranged book is a good example of multidisciplinary work in the field.

**Vann, Richard. "The Youth of Centuries of Childhood." *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 21.2 (1982): 279–297.**

Vann provides a "biography" of the first two decades of Ariès 1962, giving a helpful appraisal of the book's background, reception, and influence.

**Wilson, Adrian. "The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Philippe Ariès." *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 19.2 (1980): 132–153.**

Response to Ariès 1962 that lays out the key critical disagreements to which it gave rise. Many of the debates within social history Wilson describes—including around the relation between life and representation—remain relevant for literary scholars.

## Uncanny and Marginal Children

The works in this section can be read as a complement to those cited under Ideal, Mythical, and Impossible Children. What distinguishes the references in this section, however, is a commitment to exploring moments in which childhood becomes twisted, or breaks down in peculiar ways. These draw attention to the uncanniness of Victorian childhood and its capacity for transformation. Felman 1977 is essential reading on this topic, which is also discussed by Cocks 2014 (in part a response to Edelman 2004, cited under Childhood and Sexuality). Goetsch 2005 and Nelson 2012 analyze the trope of age inversion or confusion in Victorian literature, which Moore 2016 develops as having the potential for social critique. Flegel 2009 and Cocks 2014 look at marginal childhood in relation to class boundaries and the narrative politics of representation, respectively. Finally, Sattaur 2011 and Pike 2010 turn to the end of the 19th century, uncovering the fantasies of childhood it generated.

**Cocks, Neil. *The Peripheral Child in Nineteenth Century Literature and Its Criticism*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.**

Taking the minor, neglected, and marginal child within canonical fiction as his topic, Cocks presents a theoretically informed account of the way in which childhood both activates and escapes representational meaning. Authors covered include Jane Austen, Ann Brontë, Christina Rossetti, and Dickens. Engages cogently with psychoanalysis and queer theory.

**Felman, Shoshana. "Turning the Screw of Interpretation." *Yale French Studies* 55–56 (1977): 94–207.**

This seminal work of psychoanalytic literary analysis takes as its object Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Felman considers childhood in relation to madness, narrative, and the extent and limits of psychoanalysis. A theoretically demanding but highly rewarding essay. Reprinted in Felman's *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 94–207.

**Flegel, Monica. "'Masquerading Work': Class Transvestism in Victorian Texts for and about Children." *Children's Literature* 37 (2009): 61–83.**

Looks at "transformation scenes" in which children cross class boundaries in a range of narratives, including *Oliver Twist*; texts concerned with child labor by E. B. Browning, Caroline Norton, and Frances Trollope; and O. F. Walton's book *A Peep Behind the Scenes* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1877). Relevant for those interested in child cruelty as well as class.

**Goetsch, Paul. "Old-fashioned Children: From Dickens to Hardy and James." *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie* 123 (2005): 45–69.**

Goetsch uses Dickens's "old-fashioned child," Paul Dombey, as the starting point to consider the recurrence of adult-like children across the Victorian period, arguing that such figures served to dramatize the plight of real children.

**Moore, Ben. "The Dolls' Dressmaker Re(ad)dressed: Jenny Wren's Critique of Childhood, Femininity and Appearance." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 44.3 (2016): 473–490.**

Argues that Jenny Wren from *Our Mutual Friend* radically unsettles conventional Victorian models of childhood and femininity, partly through the use of dolls. Draws on Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and the work of Walter Benjamin to develop its analysis, which is also concerned with the philosophy of appearance.

**Nelson, Claudia. *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.**

Explores the frequent blurring of child and adult in Victorian fiction, and links this confusion to social, economic, and scientific developments. Authors covered include Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Thackeray, Bram Stoker, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

**Pike, David. "Buried Pleasure: Doctor Dolittle, Walter Benjamin and the Nineteenth-Century Child." *Modernism/Modernity* 17.4 (2010): 857–875.**

Pike draws on his previous work on the underground in modern culture to propose a reading of the 19th-century child as a figure able to take pleasure in hidden and secret spaces in ways others could not. This figure of the child, Pike argues, in turn informs writers of the modernist period. An original and suggestive article.

**Sattaur, Jennifer. *Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2011.**

Explores anxieties and changes around childhood in late Victorian literature. Considers dichotomous depictions of the child (e.g., monstrous, idealized, uncanny, or criminal). Useful for its contextualization of these different figures and its comparison of adults' and children's fiction.

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## Poetry, Drama, and Aesthetics

Victorian poetry and drama have attracted far less attention in studies of literary childhood than have novels or periodicals, but Gubar 2014 on theatre and Ruderman 2016 on verse are among the exceptions. Of Victorian poets, Christina Rossetti has been most regularly discussed, including by Moers 1976, Sandner 1996, and Malkovich 2013 (the latter cited under Ideal, Mythical, and Impossible Children). Specific studies of Rossetti include Kooistra 1994, which looks at the publication history of *The Goblin Market*, and Hassett 2005, which focuses on close reading. Sandner's works are also among those aiming to theorize a distinctive aesthetic for either childhood or children's literature, along with Dusinberre 1999 and Natov 2003. Although all three texts are intriguing, none is wholly convincing. Dusinberre's is perhaps the most theoretically ambitious.

**Dusinberre, Juliet. *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1999.**

An ambitious work that seeks to relate Victorian children's literature to modernist art and writing, particularly those by Virginia Woolf. The late-Victorian and early-20th-century interest in child development is understood as informing new experimental literary and art forms. An edited reissue of a book first published in 1987.

**Gubar, Marah. "Entertaining Children of All Ages: Nineteenth-Century Popular Theater as Children's Theater." *American Quarterly* 66.1 (2014): 1–34.**

Although focusing primarily on American theatre, Gubar's article takes account of English traditions, such as pantomime. It is significant as one of the few attempts to explore childhood in 19th-century theatrical culture.

**Hassett, Constance. *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style*. London and Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005.**

This careful study of Rossetti's poetic style includes analysis of *The Goblin Market* (chapter 1, pp. 15–63) as well as Rossetti's book of nursery rhymes for children, *Sing-Song* (chapter 3, pp. 117–153). Close reading predominates, often with reference to the presumed effect of the poems on child readers.

**Kooistra, Lorraine. "Modern Markets for *Goblin Market*." *Victorian Poetry* 32.3–4 (1994): 249–277.**

Discusses the reception of Rossetti's poem by both adult and child readers. Shares the interest in the tension between the presumed child audience and the poem's sexual subtext with that in Hassett 2005. Kooistra is particularly interested in the various illustrations that accompanied the text in different editions.



**Moers, Ellen. "Female Gothic." In *Literary Women: The Great Writers*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976: 90–98**

Influential essay that links Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, and Christina Rossetti (*The Goblin Market*) as writers of a form of Gothic literature that engages with female experience and what Moers calls the "phantasmagoria of the nursery." Excellent on the way in which the desires, fears, and savagery of childhood emerge in the three writers examined. Reprinted by Oxford University Press in 1985 and excerpted in *The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985).

**Natov, Roni. *The Poetics of Childhood*. New York: Routledge, 2003.**

Considers literature for children and adults to explore how writers have sought to develop a particular mode or poetics appropriate to childhood experience. Often takes a phenomenological approach. Victorian authors covered include Dickens and Carroll.

**Ruderman, D. B. *The Idea of Infancy in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*. New York and London: Routledge, 2016.**

Although largely concerned with the Romantic period, chapter 5 (pp. 182–224) of this theoretically engaged monograph covers Tennyson in relation to stillbirth. The author's psychoanalytic afterword may also be of interest to Victorian scholars.

**Sandner, David. *The Fantastic Sublime: Romanticism and Transcendence in Nineteenth-Century Children's Fantasy Literature*. Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood, 1996.**

Argues that Romanticism, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, opened ways of thinking about childhood that informed the development of fantasy literature for children. For Sandner, moments of sublime transcendence are key to this aesthetic. Whether or not its central thesis is accepted, the book gives a good overview of major developments in Victorian children's fantasy, with a focus on George MacDonald, Kenneth Grahame, and Christina Rossetti.

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