Elusive Childhood

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Notes to Introduction

1. As a point in case, Roberta Seelinger Trites describes this bias in _Disturbing the Universe_: “adults are responsible for protecting children. The assertion is one I believe in so firmly that it feels to me like Truth rather than ideology. Nevertheless, it is a sentiment that I recognize as one that directs power away from adolescents and toward adults” (80).

2. One might consider the telling irony that adults often think nostalgically of their own experiences when they were considered children, but no one confuses being “treated like a child” with anything desirable.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Beverly Lyon Clark gives comprehensive commentary on this phenomenon in “Kiddie Lit in Academe.”

2. An excellent source on this issue is Victor Watson’s “By Children, About Children, For Children.”

3. Karen Coats describes the book as “an example of Childhood Studies gone wrong” (“Venting the Child” 206).

4. Although the term “child studies” was suggested by works such as Carolyn Steedman’s _Strange Dislocations_, the alternate “childhood studies” better reflects the field’s attempt to avoid essentializing the concept of “the child” by focusing on the position or concept of childhood.

5. Of these rubrics, that of rationality will be most relevant to my study, as the nostalgia of frustrated intellects tends to cast childhood in an anti-rationalist light.

6. The shift in childcare attitudes that might explain this difference is the focus of “Parent-Child Relationships in the Nineteenth Century” by Rebekka Habermas. In this article she describes the emerging bourgeois sentiment of “disinterested parenting” by which parents could see themselves as loving children selflessly because any need for “mutual dependence” or “reciprocity” (money, labor) in their relations with children was eliminated by their rising affluence (46).

7. In “Structure, Sign, and Play,” Jacques Derrida explains that play is “permitted by the lack or absence of a center [. . .]. The movement of signification adds something,
which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified" (Writing and Difference 289). In this sense childhood studies is self-conscious play—a floating discourse of further supplementation to the absence of a verifiable "child."

8. Recognition of the literariness of Freud's case studies is considered "commonplace" by Peter L. Rudnytsky, who describes the Hans case as a "multilayered text, much like a work of modernist fiction" (39).

9. Consider the contrast evidenced in "real" children observed by Kenneth Wexler et al.: "two thirds of utterances made by mothers to their infants are either imperatives or questions, and only one third are statements, yet the utterances of children are overwhelmingly statements" (paraphrased by Bryson, 27). It would seem our literary children are idealized with more subversive interrogative power than their real-world counterparts.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Historian David I. Macleod reports that "If we define adults as all people age 20 and older and the young as those 19 and younger, there were 128 white young people for every 100 white adults in 1830. But there were only 79 white young people for every 100 white adults by 1890 and just 66 in 1920. The proportion of young people among African Americans was considerably higher but declined sharply, from approximately 117 for every 100 adults in 1890 to 86 by 1920" (3). By the twentieth century, children were outnumbered.

2. In a letter to Mrs. Humphry Ward, dated July 26, 1899, James expounds on his views against "going behind" the character. To do so convincingly, he argues, would require "extreme and calculated selection, or singleness" in order to avoid the appearance of careless speculation (Letters 324). More importantly, he reveals his resulting preference for dramatic representation in narrative.

3. Likewise, she will later tell Mrs. Grose that when Flora goes on an outing, supposedly to visit the ghost of Miss Jessel, "at such times she's not a child" (68).

Notes to Chapter 3

1. According to Virginia Wolf, Laura Ingalls Wilder creates, in her retelling of her childhood, an ever-shifting, enclosed but "felicitous space" ("Magic Circle" 169).

2. The locus amoenus is linked with nostalgia from its inception in Western worldviews—for example, the edenic-garden representation of innocence and the golden age of ancient Greece.

3. For a parallel example see chapter 13, in which Des Esseintes has no appetite but sees a boy in a garden enjoying a simple sandwich and instantly orders the same as comfort food (156).

4. John Fiske describes the quest for novelty as a natural extension of rationalist humanism: "the origins of the desire for the new can be traced back to the ideology of progress that has pervaded the economic, political, and moral domains of post-Renaissance Christian capitalist democracies" (377).

Notes

171–202. Ritter posits that the coloring reflects the racialist and sectionalist discourses of Baum’s time.

6. Stuart Culver (1988) applies this term from Adorno and Horkheimer to Baum’s Oz, particularly in the inhabitants’ knowing agreement to wear green glasses.

7. Denis Wood considers Burton an important examplar in the spatial-visual socialization of children through picture books, particularly as it relates to symbolizing hill structures (167–70).

8. In the definitive exception to the rule of impossible returns, J. M. Barrie allows his Peter Pan to dodge the inevitable growth that comes with experience by having him “always forget” (88). In this way Peter Pan remains free to return to Neverland.

9. Richard Burt brings up a parallel example of adult appropriation of childhood: “The end of childhood is marked in movie-making . . . by the way that even the few G and PG movies that do get made seem geared to adult fantasies about their own childhoods, as in the case of Steven Spielberg’s Peter Pan spin-off, Hook (1993). In Spielberg’s retelling, Peter is a grown-up, Yuppie neglectful father who redeems himself (and saves his kidnapped kids) by becoming Peter Pan once again” (236). Is it a coincidence that Robin Williams plays Jumanji’s Alan, Peter Pan, and a literal child in an adult’s body in Jack?

10. The fundamental tenet explaining rationalist dependence upon reason as the means to truth is Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction: “It is impossible for the same thing at the same time to belong and not belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect.” Contradictions are seen as proof of incompossibility.

11. As in Baudrillard’s Simulations, the map stands here for simulacra to emphasize its constructed (manmade) knowability in contrast to the complex unknowability of nature.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Unchecked generalizing is a consistent problem with childhood discourse on every level. Even today, the most politically correct parents have no qualms stereotyping children as a group when they bring up examples from their own children’s behavior to empirically answer questions about all children.

2. I begin here with British examples because there are none so clear in American literature. U.S. culture is more deeply committed (without much awareness of genealogies) to rationalist developmental thought and as a result is unlikely to examine it so explicitly and brutally. I think these texts set up a fine contrast.

3. For a sample of such criticism, see S. J. Boyd, E. L. Epstein, and Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub.

4. Note the adult-centered method of inquiry. There is no consideration of comparing adult humans with animals of any kind. Perhaps animalizing children was part of a selective defense against accepting our own animal natures in adulthood.

5. For more on this progression of influence, see John Morss, Frank Sulloway, and Peter Gay.

6. Hall notes that “predatory organizations culminate from eleven to fifteen, and are chiefly among boys” (351). Likewise, the mythology that surrounds “primitive” children and recapitulation revolves more around “frogs and snails” than “sugar and spice.” Could Lord of the Flies harbor a feminist critique of masculine socialization? More
research needs to address the gendering of recapitulation and adventure-story constructions of children. As such, *A High Wind in Jamaica* would provide a feminizing counterpoint to *Lord of the Flies*.

7. For example, in Darwin’s “Sketch” he concludes, after studying only his two sons’ and one daughter’s frequency of throwing, that “a tendency to throw objects is inherited in boys” (288).

8. Consider a relevant insight of Marcia Jacobson’s in *Being a Boy Again* concerning the recapitulatory trope in capitalist American culture: “In so neatly compartmentalizing boyhood, the recapitulation theory also comfortably obscured the central fact of everyday adult male life in the period: that it was ferociously competitive” (15).

9. Emily may have escaped Jonsen’s drunken advances (pp. 120–23), but Margaret does not. At best she willingly takes up with the sailors, is deflowered, and in the final scene is pregnant (p. 226).

10. For a contrast, see the work of the British scholars of anti-developmentalist psychology Erica Burman and John Morss.

11. Even Tom’s choice of words in expressing his condescension reveals a typical developmental essentialism—equating grade level with maturity and wisdom, as if mental development is a universal and chronologically measurable phenomenon.

12. Golding likewise creates an implicit critique of Twain’s contemporary, Ballantyne, for lack of realism in *Coral Island. Lord of the Flies* is, in many senses, a dark parody of the earlier work.

13. One could argue that post-structuralist theories of identity merely retranslate the romantic narrative of development as a fall—socialization is seen as a process that leads to fragmentation. If Jameson serves as an applicable model, post-modernist theory seems a continuation on the same theme (see references to Jameson in chapters 2 and 3).


15. Holloway’s (Kuttner’s) concept of conditioning resembles Althusser’s *mêconnaisance* and Jameson’s “sealed subjectivity.”

16. I must comment on the surprising frequency of psychologists in fiction concerning children. It seems that the authors are ensuring the presence of an “objective” interpreter while continuing in the adult tradition of imposing constructions through mediation.

17. Once again, only the young “evolve”: “This was a younger, more adaptable specimen; it succeeded where the older one had failed” (13).

18. This graphic novel pays homage to *Childhood’s End*, among other sci-fi empowerment of youth, by titling chapters in allusion to them.

19. If one considers the language of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Bush administration’s crusade for higher standards, it is uncannily similar.

20. The fact that I feel I have to clarify the difference here is proof of how deeply we conflate nature and nurture: what we usually call “biological age” is, in fact, far more abstract and culturally constructed—we develop biologically at varied paces—but it is often confused with our *chronological* age, the convenient absolute by which we are most often defined.

21. Those who develop too slowly are euthanized.
Notes

Notes to Chapter 5

1. For more on this trend, see the bibliography for titles by Linda Acredolo and Susan Goodwyn as well as earlier work edited by Margaret Bullowa.
2. This explanation sheds more light on the speech patterns of Lurie’s Lolly and Morrison’s Beloved.
4. Beloved’s entire community sees Beloved as “a rememory,” reflecting the past experience of a macroself—Morrison herself reports that she constructed her so to articulate and soothe the pains of history—an interesting inversion of the futuristic functioning of superchildren seen in chapter 4.
5. One might point out that this reads even more specifically like a narrated monologue, or psycho-narration, but in keeping with my earlier reading of Henry James, I am trying to maintain a particular awareness of the fact that Lurie avoids the explicit intrusion of representing her thoughts, of course, all the while speculating and implying what they might be.
6. Mark Twain’s choice to represent Huck Finn through slang and dialect shows an early example of this strategy. The difference is that Lurie’s writing is not dialect but a pictorial style more akin to the favoring of concrete words like nouns, as Grandin describes.
7. Kaspar Hauser, though seventeen when found wandering in 1828, had been confined for at least twelve years and had learned very little language. In Herzog Wernor’s film he exemplifies the subversive potential of escaping socialization.
8. Harry Potter’s Muggle relatives must realize this, as their policy for him is “Don’t ask questions” (Sorcerer’s Stone 20).
9. Jerry Griswold aptly applies Ihab Hassan’s term “radical innocence” to describe this process, using Pollyanna as his exemplar.
10. Kosinsky actually uses his innocent fool character as a satiric device much like Maisie, a blank slate whom all the other characters construct as they wish.

Notes to Chapter 6

2. For evidence in support of this claim, see the reviewers’ responses to the text on amazon.com. The reviews read like a rhetorical profile of “selfless” parenting (in which adult indulgence in and projection of sentimentality become quite clear).
3. For an interesting source on the role that commercialized Christmas has played in Western (particularly German) child-rearing, see Hamlin’s “The Structures of Toy Consumption,” in which he points out that “Toys were [. . .] the beneficiaries of the ambivalences of what Gunilla-Frederike Budde terms the ‘pedagogic double ideal’ of bourgeois life: children were allowed to be children but simultaneously they were to be educated to be good middle-class citizens” (859). And, “The ties of obligation and
affection which flowed from and were represented by gifts reflected the interiorization of the bourgeois family" (862).

4. Harry Potter noticeably often avoids the aid of accessible adult figures during conflict, despite sometimes benefiting from it without asking, which might speak to the popularity of the series. Consider the contrast in recent films similar to Power Pack, where instead the parents both know of and take part in the kids’ superheroic activities to some degree: *Spy Kids* (2001, 2002), *The Incredibles* (2004).