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Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature

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Introduction: Approaches to the History of Children's Literature

This volume comprises a selection of papers from the Ninth Congress of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL), held in Salamanca in 1989, and not surprisingly, a variety of approaches to the history of children's literature are represented. Rather than polemicizing with each other, they complement each other, even though these scholars of children's literature come from different traditions and probably have different objectives when they address historical issues. One of the keynote speakers of the Congress, Professor Hans-Heino Ewers from Germany, outlined three principal approaches to the history of children's literature, two of which are radically different from general literary history.

Children's literature, Ewers argued, was from the very beginning related to pedagogics. Children's literature emerged on a larger scale because at some time in the seventeenth century society began to recognize that childhood was a special period in people's lives and that children had their own special needs. Many of the essays in the present volume also make this point. The view of childhood and the educational aspects of reading have been crucial for the evolution of children's literature. It has gone hand in hand with pedagogical views; literature was a means, and a very powerful one, for educating children. Therefore, children's literature has also been studied with this view in mind -- that is, the suitability of books for children's reading.

This pedagogical view has led to a certain bias in the general histories of children's literature. Only books that were considered "suitable" for children have been included in reference sources, according to country, epoch, and the dominating view on childhood. Others have been simply ignored.

As Ewers stated rather provocatively, histories of children's lirtertature written in this tradition were nothing more than highly manipulated recommendation lists for adults who are to serve as mediators for children. The selection in these publications is always subjective and depends on the editor's pedagogical preferences.

Another type of history of children's literature that Ewers singled out and is quite similar to the first is children's literature in relation to society. The study object of this approach is the triangle Child--Family--School. In this model, works of literature have only a functional, or pragmatic, role in their relation to reality.

Ewers encouraged scholars of children's literature to contemplate yet another viewpoint that children's literature research has quite ignored, that is, children's literature as literature. He stated that this approach had not yet achieved any tangible results. Moreover, in some countries the scholars did not seem to be aware of its existence or necessity.

Although I totally agree with Ewers on the desirability of this innovative look at the history of children's literature, I cannot at the same time deny either the purposes of the first two or the impossibility of a more general look before we have gone through the initial stages. We can never ignore the simple fact that most books for children were in fact produced solely for educational purposes. The present volume presents some radically new models for examining literary history, while it also demonstrates the value and indispensability of more traditional ones.

As I see it, the history of children's literature involves two principal issues. First, is there any difference between children's literature and the general literary history--except for the way of treating it, as Ewers points out? Does the history of children's literature have its own Ancient Age, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Modernism? Second, is the history of children's literature national or international? Does it follow the same pattern in different countries, or do national conditions influence the emergence and dominance of themes, genres, and attitudes? I think the present volume gives us at least some answers to these global questions.

When the first books overtly written and published for children appeared, adult literature had already existed as an established literary system for many centuries. Whereas mainstream literature had evolved over several millennia, children's literature developed over only three to four hundred years, and in some countries over a considerably shorter time. The traditional division of literature into epic, lyric, and drama, a tradition dating back to antiquity, was from the beginning irrelevant to children's literature. Even today, poetry and drama for children are, with rare exceptions, marginal phenomena within the system of children's literature. When we speak about children's literature, we most often mean prose stories, that is, the epic form. Thus, the history of children's literature presents mainly the evolution of epic structures.

Children's literature has more or less gone through similar stages in all countries and language areas. First, existing adult literature, as well as folklore (folktales, myths, fables), adapted to what is believed to be the needs and interests of children, according to accepted and dominating views on child upbringing. Next, didactic, educational stories written directly for children appeared. Most often these two periods overlap. Children's literature system began to detach itself from the adult system,sometimes even isolating itself in a kind of ghetto. Usually, books from this period are mentioned only briefly in histories of children's literature. Therefore, I find it satisfying to be able to include some reevaluations of writers from this period in the volume.

Children's literature became established as a literary system with its different genres and modes, and its *canon* came into being. There were clear divisions between books for boys and books for girls, as well as between different genres. The rigid system allowed no deviations, no innovations, or the like. The norms of allowed themes, narrative structures (for instance, "happy ending"), and values were proclaimed.

It is against this established system that contemporary writers for children are revolting, introducing new, daring themes and new narrative devices, bringing children's literature closer to the modern, or if one so wishes, the postmodern novel.

It is illuminating to see the similarities and recurrent phenomena associated with establishing children's literature as a literary system in many different countries. However, before we can come to conclusions, I would like to have examples from countries other than Western Europe and North America. Do the emergence and development of children's literature always and necessarily follow the same pattern? Are we not being ethnocentric in believing that the lines of evolution are predetermined for children's literature and that all deviations are to be perceived as "wrong"? Is there such a thing as national children's literature that reflects national mentality, specific social history, views on education, and so on? Are folktales *always* an indispensable base for children's literature in every country? Are chapbooks an unavoidable companion to the early stages of children's literature? Is humor a universal category?

One impression that we inevitably get from the essays is that in the Western world we indeed share many of the important texts in the history of our literatures for young people. It may be instructive to see in Kari Skjønsberg's essay a reference to the Italian book discussed in detail by Mariella Colin: it seems to have played an important role in Norwegian patriotic education. Children's books in the nineteenth century were much more international than they are today.

While each essay in this volume has a value of its own, together they comprise an interesting unity. Not only do they show the scope of theoretical, methodical, and practical issues, but also they bring us closer to what I personally see as one of the greatest challenges in our scholarship: a comprehensive, universal, and nonbiased History of World Children's Literature.

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Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature

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Literary Ways of Killing a Child: The 19th Century Practice

Judith Plotz

A Trip to Madame Tussaud's

Let me invoke a scene. We are in the dark. The fair-haired boys we contemplate are in the dark too and oppressively close to us, almost touching. They obtrude upon us, invading our safe observer's distance. The space we share is small, crowded, airless; there is barely enough room for the heavy bedstead--carved dark wood, coffin-shaped and shrouded in heavy dark-velvet hangings--where the two black-garbed children huddle together, the 9 year old reading, the 12 year old lost in reverie. The shadows from a chink of light under the heavy closed door fall more darkly in the obscurity of the stuffy bedroom. There is just enough light to make out the English toy spaniel, a fit pet for the delicate children, turning apprehensively, ears cocked, toward the sudden light and the sudden sound. Someone is coming. Something is about to happen.

That's about enough. Let's get out of here. Even describing it makes me uncomfortable, makes me gasp for air. Where are we? Although this may feel like a private nightmare, we are in fact visiting in spirit a place thousands have actually visited before us--and are visiting at this very moment. We are in the heart of London in Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum and we are contemplating two waxwork representations of the doomed princes in the Tower as depicted in Delaroche's famous 1831 painting. The boys are Edward V, boy-king of England, and his younger brother Richard, both murdered--suffocated it is said--sometime during the summer of 1483. First installed in Madame Tussaud's Baker Street premises in 1865, this waxwork effigy of doomed children has been an object of pilgrimage until this very day.

This particular nineteenth-century representation of children on the brink of death is no mere isolated Baker Street irregularity. On the contrary, this particular four hundred-year old child-murder was of general appeal for

nineteenth-century artists; art historian Roy Strong lists seventeen different treatments. As Strong remarks, the destruction of innocence, especially innocence personified by a child, was a veritable Victorian "theme and obsession" (199-227). Even the most cursory reader of nineteenth-century European literature can easily compile a long list of childhood deaths in canonical texts--Dickens's Nell and Jo and Paul Dombey, Dostoyevsky's Ilya, Hugo's Gavroche, and Ibsen's Hedvig and Eyolf, to name only the most obvious. Indeed, two of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century, Dickens and Dostoyevsky, in some sense never really wrote about anything other than insulted and injured children. Such childhood deaths in major texts are not simply poignant but *important*--important in part because they are *obtruded* onto the consciousness and conscience of the reader much as the Tussaud-Delaroche waxworks impinge on the viewer's space and in part because they are central to the major themes in the works.

In his excellent and indispensable *Death, Heaven, and the Victorians*, John Morley reproduces an illustration showing a plaster-of-paris sleeping baby, disturbingly naturalistic, though ghastly white. His caption reads: "Figures of this kind, kept under a glass dome, were used in order to head off tactless questions about the disappearance of a child. 'There's your little brother dear. He's resting'". This is a grotesque instance, but characteristic of an obsessive nineteenth-century drive to contemplate images of a child stilled, "as if embalmed/By nature" (these are Wordsworth's words):

> - through some special privilege
> Stopped at the growth he had--destined to live,
> To be, to have been, come, and go, a child
> And nothing more.
>
> (*The Prelude* 1805, 7:400-404)

Throughout the children's literature as well as the adult literature of the later nineteenth century (1840-1910), we find just such images of "embalmed children," stunning images of children who, like the princes, are arrested. They, too, are dead or doomed and boxed in, contained, fixed, preserved, stilled, revered, and revisited. Thus, in "One Who Lived Long, Long Ago," Frances Hodgson Burnett meditates on "a poor little gray image in a glass case" (*Children*, 86), all that remains of a lively little girl of Pompei. A similar sense of enclosure in equivocal sanctuary is implicit in the titles of such late nineteenth-century works on death as J. Hendrickson M'Carthy's *Inside the Gates*, Burnett's *In the Closed Room*, George MacDonald's *The Golden Key*, and Nehemiah Adams's curious *Agnes and the Little Key* (the last-named work was an American bestseller of the 1860s about a father who carries around with him the key to his dead daughter's coffin). In the same vein, William Canton's *In Memory of W.V.* closes with an evocation of a Danish legend of containment:

> [...] when the walls of Copenhagen, as the legend tells, crumbled and fell as fast as they were built, an innocent little girl was set in her chair beside a table, where she played with her toys and ate the rosy apples they gave her while twelve master-masons closed a vault over her; and then the walls were raised, and stood firm for ever after. (225)

As these examples suggest, death in nineteenth-century literature is less a destroyer than a strange preserver. When children die in literature, they are assimilated to fixity, usually perishing in ways that make them clean, quiet, immobile, and permanent. The endless cold bath of Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* washes little Tom almost as clean as MacDonald's well-bathed Mossy and Tangle or his wind-bleached Diamond who ends up "as white and almost as clear as alabaster" (288). Juliana Horatia Ewing's *The Story of a Short Life* and Florence Montgomery's *Misunderstood* fix boys of quicksilver liveliness into partial paralysis, while *Agnes and the Little Key* explicitly locks a child into security. The troubled lives of Ouida's Nello and Patrasche in *A Dog of Flanders* end in a wintry cathedral among other marmoreal memorial fixities: "They were both dead; the cold of the night had frozen into stillness alike the young life and the old" (55).

What are we to make of all this freezing, bleaching,washing, locking into fixity? Why such insistence on fixing for contemplation the deaths of children? What bearing does it have on the study of children's literature and the literature of childhood? One response, perhaps a human one, is implicit in Oscar Wilde's comment on the protracted death of Little Nell: "Ah Nell! what man of feeling can think of her death without laughing!" Wilde's subtext, as I read it, is that there's altogether too much pleasure, too much gusto in Dickens' depiction of Nell's death. To dwell fixedly on childhood death is a cruelly pornographic delighting in pain and should be avoided. The only humane response is either to laugh with a cheerful bloodymindedness (as Harry Graham so successfully did in his *Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes*, 1899) or to drop (at least to bracket) the subject altogether. Juliet Dusinberre, in fact, has recently argued in her *Alice to the Lighthouse* that the Victorian obsession with death was an obstacle to imaginative creativity that Virginia Woolf and other modernists had to overcome in order to free their art. The death theme, she suggests, inhibited the creative life-enhancing playfulness necessary for the production of major literature. Lewis Carroll, however, taught children's writers (*and* the great modernists) how to bracket death, thus making possible a surge of creativity in children's and adult literature alike. In a word, both Wilde and Dusinberre imply that the privileging of death in the nineteenth century is a morally and aesthetically negative force, one that inhibited imaginative play and does not reward investigation. Futhermore, Dusinberre suggests that the privileging of death is *antithetical* to significant children's literature.

I wish to put a different case. Far from being antithetical to the emergence of children's literature, the death theme seems to be crucial. Not only is the theme pervasive in some of the most important works of the first golden age of children'sliterature, but also the high tide of cultural concern with death is contemporary with the emergence of children's literature as a

recognized genre. Literary representations of childhood death are part of the enabling conditions for creating and recognizing children's literature.

The Superfluous Child and the Essential Child

In nothing more than its preoccupation with childhood death does the nineteenth century seem alien. And so it should. In important ways, especially in some ways germane to our concerns as students of children's literature, the nineteenth century is at once rich and strange and anomalous. In the era roughly between 1800 and 1950, peaking between 1840 and 1910, children achieved a cultural status very different from what it was before and since (a high cultural status does not, of course, guarantee good treatment). It is a matter of the difference between the Superfluous Child and the Essential Child. The child of the early modern period *and* of the late twentieth century (at least of twentieth-century America) is a creature of the cultural margins of society, while the nineteenth-century child was--in a biblical phrase endlessly quoted between 1850 and 1910--"set in the midst," a being of the center.

In speaking of early modern children as "superfluous," I am drawing on John Boswell's new revisionist history of childhood, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1988). Boswell insists that child abandonment, hitherto regarded as a minor, statistically negligible practice was a powerful social institution in Europe until the late eighteenth century. Rousseau's notoriously cool account of child abandonment--"My third child therefore was taken to the Foundling Hospital like the others, and the next two were disposed of in the same way, for I had five at all" (333)--is not, Boswell argues, the anomalous malignity of philosophers, but just the last gasp of a long-standing pattern of socially sanctioned abandonment. Boswell attempts to substantiate four principal theses. He argues first that abandonment of unwanted infants was a mass phenomenon throughout Europe from late antiquity until the age of asylums, with "from 10 to 40 per cent of urban children [...] abandoned" (48) during the eighteenth century. Second, he holds that abandonment was a nonmurderous, though often inadvertently lethal, institution designed to redistribute redundant children. Third, he holds that abandoned children were quite often successfully fostered as slaves, as apprentices, as prostitutes, as oblates, or even as heirs to the childless. Finally, he insists that no guilt attached to those who abandoned a child, evidence that child abandonment was culturally sanctioned. A reading of Boswell on medieval and early modern Europe suggests that it was once culturally *normal* to regard a large portion of a society's children as superfluous, as unnecessary--indeed as potentially damaging--to its continued well-being.

A reading of the cultural signs in late twentieth-century America suggests that postmodern children are once again being deemed superfluous. Because I come from a city in which the *primary* cause of childhood mortality is

homicide and where the infant mortality rate is the worst in the industrialized world, I am inclined to concur with the cultural historians who had labeled this the era of "The Disappearance of Childhood" (Postman), and of "Children Without Childhood" (Winn). What can at best be regarded as simple indifference to children's welfare or at worse as sustained hostility emerges in all kinds of postmodern practices. There is the obvious epidemic of child abuse fueled by drug addiction. There is the invasion of psychologically protective domestic space by television. There is the coopting of childhood privilege by therapeutically minded adults so desperate to nurture their own "inner children" (themselves) that they have no time for external actual children. There is even the increasing condemnation of childhood privilege as "politically incorrect."[1] There is also the widespread image in popular culture of the child as a monster eager to destroy Its parents and anything else It touches (you may recall the Child as Lucifer in *Rosemary's Baby*, the Child as Anti-Christ in *The Omen* and *The Exorcist* and the Child as Zombie or perhaps Ghoul in *Pet Cemetary*).[2] Children themselves are increasingly drawn to works that allow them to identify with Aliens and high-tech Super Friends; far better to be E. T. the Alien or a Bionic Being than a poor unaccommodated human child. Both our own condition and Boswell's study of early modern history suggest that it may be normal to regard the mass of children as superfluous, as impediments to social harmony. If we recoil from such a notion,it may be that we are still living off our Romantic legacy, a frequent source of support for specialists in children's literature.

It is clear that the nineteenth-century cultural ideals were different, for nineteenth-century cultural ideals put children smack "in the midst" of the world. In nineteenth-century writing, children are inevitably *centered*, figured in the coming "century of the child" (to cite the title of a book by Ellen Key) as the "one divine majority" (Canton, *A Lost Epic*, 164). The demographic fact that in Britain the number of children had been increasing decade by decade from 1750 is not irrelevant. One demographer has argued that a "flood of children" in the mid-nineteenth century caused a shift "in the social mentality of the decades after 1850" (Hair, 35-37). This shift is implicit in such a work as Wilifred Meynell's anthology *The Child Set in the Midst by Modern Poets* (1892): "Him the Modern Poets have set in the Midst of us even as He was set in the Midst of Men by the Lord of Poets" (ii).

Literal centering is evident in such nineteenth-century paintings as Runge's remarkable "Morning," Orchardson's worshipful "Master Baby," and Drummond's "His Majesty the Baby." In Runge's painting, all nature, especially the sunlight, is worshipfully focused on the sublime golden figure of an infant; in Orchardson's, a Victorian madonna worships her vastly beautiful, delightedly energetic huge infant; in Drummond's painting the traffic on a busy nineteenth-century street grinds to a halt before the progress of "His Majesty the Baby."

One striking manifestation of such centering is idolatry. The admission of idolatry is widespread and largely unapologetic. Even in the explicitly *religious* comfort books intended for those bereaved of children (a genre that flourished vastly between 1840 and 1910), I found regular reference to the

tendency "of this era" of "substituting the dead child for God" (Logan, 39). Again and again, writers identify a child as "the *idol* of my heart" (Prime, *Smitten Household*, 1); "She was my *idol*" (Anon., "The Lost Darling," in Smyth); or "I [...] hungered for *my idol's* kiss/Before she went to bed" (Stoddard, "A Household Dirge," in Foxcroft, 29). Meynell's injunction "that the worship of the Child should be fostered" (xxii) (despite the upper case c, he means not Christ but Everychild) emerges from the same literary culture that features Dinah Mulock's adulatory address to a baby, "Philip, My King" (Brownell, 202-205) and Canton's rapturous chant: "Take the idol to her shrine; In her cradle lay her!/Worship her--she is divine;/Offer up your prayer!" (*Invisible Playmate*, 23). Such idolatory derives from the high Wordsworthian tradition manifested in such Romantic tributes to the child as "mighty Prophet! Seer blest!" (Wordsworth), "the perpetual Messiah" (Emerson), "Type of the Divinity" (Alcott), "the world's deliverer" (Chapman, 27), and "His [God's] small interpreter" (Whittier in Meynell, ii); as "director of the parent's education" (Froebel in Dusinberre, 15); as "A lively representation to us of the ideal" (Schiller, 87), a "latter revelation" (A. Snith in Russell, 77); and as "a veritable prophet of silence" (Dubois, 99).

This idolatry is, I believe, the consequence of the Romantic transvaluation of childhood which imputed to (and newly perceived in) children a set of qualities that designated the Child--the actual domestic home-grown child, the idol of an age from which a transcendent God was disappearing. These Romantically promulgated qualities, which promote childhood even as they demote adulthood, are related to two convictions: childhood is Nature-in-Man, and the child's is the most representative, most creatively unifying human mind.

Children were equated with "nature"--the dynamic, organic universe of both Romanticism and evolution--in three respects. First, if one conceives nature (as Schiller did, for example) as "the subsistence of things on their own, their existence in accordance with their own immutable laws" (84), then childhood is its human embodiment. Romantic writers regularly note the unself-consciousness, self-completeness, physical harmony, "the identity of body and mind" in children (Coleridge, "On Poesy of Art", in Perkins, 496). Second, in their obvious vitality and power of growth, children are indigenes of nature. Third, in the view of one group of American anthropologists, children are the very prophets of the evolutionary process, foreshadowing in their physiology the future of our changing, ever *immaturing* race whose destiny is to become ever more childlike:

> The child, the infant in fact, alone possesses in their fulness distinctive characteristics of humanity. The highest human types, as represented in men of genius, present a striking approximation to the child-type. In man, from about the third year onward, further growth is to some extent growth in degeneration and senility. Hence the true tendency of the progressive evolution of the race is to become child-like [...] (Brinton, quoted in Chamberlain, 2)

As Nature's own creature--a being of growth and change in a universe of change, the child is the goal as well as the source of the adult.

The Romantic transvaluation also assigned to children a new set of unitary psychological and cognitive powers, making, in Bronson Alcott's words, "nothing [...] too metaphysical for the mind of a child" (Strickland, 40). The innate powers of childhood consciousness were deemed to be idealism, holism, animism, faith, and psychological self-sufficiency--all modes of putting the world and the self at one. "In the child's mind," Coleridge insisted, "there is nothing fragmentary" (*Coleridge on Logic Learning*, 127). In virtually every comparison, the unitary modes of childhood shame the analytic modes of adulthood as the idiot-questioner of "We Are Seven" is flummoxed by the "simple child."

By associating childhood with the forces, energies, growth, and development of nature, as well as with the mental andspiritual capacities to perceive the world as meaningfully unified, the Romantic transvaluers of childhood created the idolatry we have noted. The Romantic transvaluation made the child available as a powerful transhistorical symbol at a time one was needed. Both "the disappearance of God" (to use Hillis Miller's phrase) and the waning of historical utopianism opened a space for such a symbol, especially after 1848. To invest in the symbol of the Romantic Child--a living embodiment of the future, of Nature's abiding dynamism, and of a possible psychic harmony--was to be able to retain grounds for hope without being obliged to make a leap into transcendental faith or historical engagement. But to invest in the Romantic Child symbolically was to make exorbitant demands on the services of actual children; for Romantic children by definition were the creatures of nature, the creatures of the common day. When such a child died, a child so heavily associated with the indomitable life of nature and with the possibility of unifying faith, it was a terrible disaster that brought on a crisis.

"Traps for Childhood"

The death of so significantly freighted a being demands attention. Because the Romantic Child operates as a representation of the *adequacy of the immanent,* the adequacy of nature without revelation (and history without revolution), the only possible way to respond to a death is to *restore presence*. Only a restored presence can restore meaning. Thus death is characteristically represented in nineteenth-century literature as a presence, not an absence.

In Kipling's brilliant story "They," written after the death of his daughter, the narrator happens on a lovely countryhouse lonely in its woods in the Sussex countryside. Here from afar he catches sight of a number of children at play. Later, he meets the blind proprietress of the estate who is pleased with his love of children and invites him back: "Remember [...] if you are fond of them you will come again." A month later he returns, his car

breaks down in the blind woman's woods, and he is half pleased with his mishap:

> I made a mighty serious business of my repairs and a glittering shop of my repair kit, spanners, pump, and the like, which I spread out orderly upon a rug. It was a trap to catch all childhood, for on such a day, I argued, the children would not be far off. (*They*, 350)

"It was a trap to catch all childhood". Indeed, as the narrator discovers, the house, the wood, and the blind woman are all part of a loving "trap to catch all childhood." All the children in the woods are ghosts of dead children, drawn back to the skirts of life by the intensity of the blind woman's desire. Present only to those who wish desperately to see them, the ghostly "They"--lovely and playful and *almost there*--exemplify the nineteenth-century way of killing a child, or representing death as presence, or at least as an invocation of presence.

For the rest of this essay I wish to focus on the three modes of invoked presence which dominate nineteenth-century treatments of childhood death from about 1840 to 1910: the mode of transformation, the mode of intensification through pain, and the mode of intensification through vitality.

In the mode of transformation, which is often--though not always--a version of pastoral, a dead child is assimilated to some other being or state. The child may blend into nature as an object or a genius loci; she may go away to become a ghost, or she may merge into or become associated with a living alter ego; or she may survive in art. Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray" is a virtual summary of all the versions of transformation since Lucy, both living and dead, is a natural object: "the sweetest thing that ever grew/Beside a human door!" In addition, she makes a journey from which she never returns except as a spectre who is still seen from afar "to this day [...] Upon the lonesome wild." And finally, her "solitary song/That whistles in the wind" remains too -- both as the wind itself and as the text of "Lucy Gray; or Solitude". More frequently, however, the modes of transformation come singly.

Absorption into the landscape takes several forms. Most common is the pastoral equation of child with plant or flower, often with a flower that fades in one garden but blooms in another. Often the narrative will foreshadow a child's death with the plucking and fading of a bunch of flowers. In Mrs. Molesworth's *A Christmas Child* (1880), 3-year-old Ted brings his mother a bunch of flowers and leaves which she neglects to put in water. They wither. He is crushed, but she picks up the withered bouquet and promises: "I will *always* keep them" (13). After the boy dies at 12, it becomes clear that the long-preserved withered leaves are the very leaves on which the mother-narrator has inscribed this "sketch of boy life." More explicitly in Montgomery's *Misunderstood* (1869), the healthy Humphrey mistakenly uproots some immature corn. Later, his initial words of apology appear as a reprise appropriate to his death: