

Eternal Innocence: The Victorian Cult of the Dead Child

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2020

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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2020

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This dissertation argues that Victorian subjects' increased idealization of childhood as a distinct phase of life marked by freedom, helplessness, innocence, and unproductiveness relied upon the figure of the dead child. Working through literary texts, in conjunction with cultural and social histories of childhood and of death, I argue that excessive mourning for dead children in the Victorian era functioned not only as an expression of sorrow for the loss of a particular child but also as a celebration and confirmation of the figure of "the child" as a distinct category of humanity, and bearer of human value. Child death worked alongside eugenicist politics to establish and preserve an image of the ideal child as white, "innocent," and in need of protection. My chapters examine the figure of the ideal Victorian dead child in both fiction and memoir, while also drawing attention to the many dead children whose childhoods and deaths are erased because they do not fit this ideal. This focus on the dead child helped to cement the image of the child as defined by innocence and unproductiveness that began in the Victorian era, and this image of the child excluded most Victorian children. These nineteenth-century depictions of child death still shape who is recognizable as a dead child for contemporary audiences.

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Introduction: Child Death, Eugenics, and the Fiction of the Unproductive Child

In the nineteenth century, children were more likely to die than they were to lose a parent. Victorian Great Britain had a steady infant mortality rate of about 15%, and one in every four children died before the age of five.ⁱ While scholars of childhood have often linked the increase in mourning for dead children during the nineteenth century to a decrease in child mortality, based on the assumption that parents became more attached to children whom they expected to live, these statistics call that causality into question.ⁱⁱ Although Victorian children died less often than children of previous generations (prior to the nineteenth century, *most* children probably died before they were five),ⁱⁱⁱ childhood death was common, and was fundamental to the Victorian understanding of childhood. The figure of the child that emerged from the Victorian era is still the dominant model through which people in the twenty-first-century United States and Great Britain understand childhood, and, I argue, it is impossible to understand the way in which childhood is imagined in the modern era without centering the idea of the child's death.

The mid-to-late nineteenth century saw a proliferation of texts about the death of children, both by popular authors such as Charles Dickens, and by lesser-known writers wishing to share their personal experiences with death. While the prevalence of these texts may suggest that they upheld earlier notions of childhood death as an unfortunate, but common, fact of life, they in fact did the opposite, framing the deaths of children as great and unique tragedies (as they are typically framed today). In contrast to earlier moral tales about the death of children, these deaths are not presented as warnings to other children, but instead as something linked to Victorians' increased idealization of childhood as a distinct phase of life marked by freedom, helplessness, innocence, and unproductiveness, which relied upon this figure of the dead child. From this perspective, the

dead child is frozen permanently in its ideal form, unable to grow up or change. The notion of childhood as a separate category (which became prevalent in the nineteenth-century) is constantly belied by the liveliness of actual children, who grow, change, and move in and out of it. Made into objects rather than people, dead children fulfill the need for a stable, unchanging model of childhood in ways that living children cannot. The dead child becomes a literalized version of Peter Pan, the boy (or girl) who never grows up, and who therefore embodies perfect childhood.

British Poet and essayist Leigh Hunt (who himself had a daughter who died in infancy) explains in his essay “The Deaths of Little Children,” which circulated widely during the 1840s-1870s, how the death of a child can be a blessing to parents: “those who have lost an infant are never, as it were, without an infant child. . . . The other children grow up to manhood and womanhood, and suffer all the changes of mortality. This one alone is rendered an immortal child. Death has arrested it with his kindly harshness, and blessed it into an eternal image of youth and innocence” (3).^{iv} Hunt’s essay makes explicit two ideas that are central to this dissertation: that death defines childhood, and that it is the only way, in the real world, to create eternal children. It is not only that the very real threat of death makes children seem more precious, but that the death of the child is, sometimes, desirable, or that dead children are desirable. Children preserved through death, in turn, act as preservers of the idea of childhood. If removed from the cycle of physical reproduction, the dead child can still play a major role in cultural reproduction—though this role is obviously beyond the child’s control. According to Hunt, if no children ever died, “we should regard every little child as a man or woman secured; and it will easily be conceived what a world of endearing care and hopes this security would endanger” (3). Hunt reverses the traditional explanation for Victorian parents’ increased care for their children, saying that children are not more beloved when their parents can safely invest in them, but when they are at risk of being lost.

Childhood is not only made precious and distinct by the threat of death, though, it is literally created by it: Hunt goes on to explain that, if children did not die, “The very idea of infancy would lose its continuity with us. Girls and boys would be future men and women, not present children. They would have attained their full growth in our imaginations, and might as well have been men and women at once” (3). The idea of childhood as a separate and unique part of life is predicated upon this refusal of the logical continuity, and necessary overlap, between “child” and “adult.” For Hunt, this makes sense because the continuity is actually not a given—children *don’t* always become adults.

In the nineteenth century, newly popular evolutionary theories of development formulated childhood weirdly as both the recapitulatory past *and* the future of the species, with little regard for the experiences of actual children. New narratives of development based on evolution and developmental psychology further emphasized childhood as a step on the way to proper adulthood, rather than a time with meaning of its own (Steedman 1995; Castañeda 2002). The modern idea of childhood relies on a unique and bizarre temporality: one that figures the child always as an adult’s past, or as a future adult, but never in terms of the present reality for the people who actually live in the bodies that are designated “children.” Hunt’s essay suggests that any figuration of childhood other than this one, any notion of the child in the present, depends upon the knowledge that all children do not become adults. In Hunt’s formulation, the only way to imagine living children in their own right is to imagine their deaths. The notion of childhood as separate, as deserving special care and freedoms that aren’t available to adults, requires the death of some children.

Paradoxically, however, this notion of childhood as separate from adulthood is also what gives the figure of “the child” so much power—the ability to imagine the child as distinct from the adult means that people currently living in the bodies of children cease to be viewed as holistic

beings in the way that adults are. The cry to “think of the children” that Lee Edelman (2004) rails against refuses to think of the people who were children only a few years ago, or the adults who those who are children now will become. The insistence on childhood as a completely separate part of life, rather than as part of a continuum, seems to insist that *all* children must die—either metaphorically, when they grow up and the child-self dies, or literally. The dead child, then becomes the perfect embodiment of childhood, both free from normative ideas of teleological growth, and preserved forever in the state in which she has the least power, and is most appealing to adults.

As Hunt’s writing about his own child’s death suggests, the excessive mourning for dead children that began in the Victorian era functioned not only as an expression of sorrow for the loss of a particular child but also as a celebration and confirmation of the figure of “the child” as a distinct category of humanity, and bearer of human value. Literary depictions of child death established and preserved an image of the ideal child as white, “innocent,” and in need of protection, and worked as a central element of eugenicist politics. Rejecting the more obvious Darwinian logic that the ideal specimen should survive and reproduce, it instead became preferable that the child be preserved at the height of its appeal, for future generations to gaze upon, like the taxidermized specimens in museums. These specimens, as Donna Haraway notes, capture nature in a more “real” way than seeing a live animal in a zoo would—in death, the animals are frozen in poses mimicking their “wild state.”^v The frozen image of the dead child similarly represents perfect childhood innocence in a way that living children, who are often awkwardly non-innocent, and who, most importantly, grow up, cannot. The dead child exists in a unique temporality, one that makes it particularly useful for cultural reproduction, as its eternally deferred, eternally bright future allows it to act as a prism for ideals of racial and sexual purity.

The Victorian figure of the child rose to prevalence alongside and in conjunction with new ideas about humanity and bodies influenced by Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859). Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, borrowed Darwin's theories of evolution for his own science of "race improvement." Galton published his first book on what he termed *Hereditary Genius* in 1869, and, in 1883, coined the term "eugenics" to describe "the science of improving stock . . . which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend . . . to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable (*Inquiries* 24-25).^{vi} In Galton's formulation, eugenics is not just concerned with white "race death" and racial superiority (although it is certainly concerned with those things), but also with doing away with bloodlines that he deemed inferior in order to create a race of Anglo-Saxon supermen. For Galton, criminality and "pauperism" were genetic, not social issues, and could be solved not by helping the lower classes, but by letting them die. In this formulation, some children's deaths were tragic, while some were desirable. The figure of the perfect child who was destined to die because she was too good for the world thus came up against the figure of the child who was destined to die because of her imperfection, because she was, in Galton's terminology, "unfit."

Galton played into pre-existing narratives of sentimental childhood to support eugenics. One of his major projects was encouraging British families to document the physical and mental progress of their children in special books containing photographs and biographical accomplishments. As Shawn Michelle Smith points out, Galton's "Life History Albums" were the direct precursors to today's popular "Baby Books," in which parents record the weight, height, and general "progress" of their child. These "Baby Books" have their roots in a process meant to record white supremacy, and aid in the creation of a white master race.^{vii} The predecessor for Galton's books, though, were post-mortem photographs. Most photographs of babies (and many

photographs of children), were, until the second half of the nineteenth century, of corpses.^{viii} The rise in popularity of the photography of live babies coincided, as Smith shows, not just with lower exposure times, but with a eugenicist interest in the preservation of the white child's body. For Smith, "In a period of eugenicist anxiety about the "death" of the Anglo-Saxon race, images of dead white babies may have served not only as memorials, highlighting the importance of every member of the race, but also as reminders to white adults of the "need" to continue procreating. . . transforming private grief into a public mandate to reproduce." (201). While this may have been partially true, postmortem photographs also worked in much the same way as modern baby pictures—they were treasured heirlooms, and meant to be taken at face value as appealing portraits, not as something unsettling or threatening. If they showed the white child in danger, they also showed that child preserved, for eternity, in her purest, whitest state, an emblem of perfect childhood. The fact that photographers traveled with flowers and "angelic figures"—"the props of nineteenth-century mourning" (Smith 201)—also suggests that they were trying to provide a classed experience of mourning to bereaved parents, lending objects that the family lacked to allow the images to conform to a specific national experience of mourning. The postmortem photograph was a performance of mourning, complete with "props," that solidified the child's position in an exclusive class of dead children who were transformed into treasured icons of family, nation, and race.

The image of the dead white child became an icon for a biopolitical regime concerned with race purity. In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault explains how "evolutionism, understood in the broad sense . . . naturally became within a few years during the nineteenth century not simply a way of transcribing a political discourse into biological terms, and not simply a way of dressing up a political discourse in scientific clothing, but a real way of thinking about the relations between

colonization, the necessity for wars, criminality, the phenomena of madness and mental illness, the history of societies with their different classes, and so on. Whenever, in other words, there was a confrontation, a killing or the risk of death, the nineteenth century was quite literally obliged to think about them in the form of evolutionism” (256-257). In Foucault’s conception of biopower, racism is necessary for the state to kill. The focus becomes not on protecting the nation’s population or lands, but on protecting the purity of the race, and purging impurities within: “It is no longer a battle in the sense that a warrior would understand the term, but a struggle in the biological sense: the differentiation of species, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest species” (80). In a system of biopolitical power, now “directed not at man-as-body, but man-as-species” (243), the child as an individual, or even as a biological being did not really matter—what mattered was the importance of the child as a symbol to the biological whole. This child is not a citizen, or a person, but instead a powerful symbol of racial and national perfection.

While Foucault’s conceptualization of racism is sometimes difficult to understand in terms of US institutional racism, so much of which is based in anti-blackness rooted in US chattel slavery, biopolitical racism is useful to understanding not just Victorian colonialism, but the colonizing impulses of British “reformers” on other English citizens. Writers like William Stead and Henry Mayhew (discussed in more detail in chapters two and four) framed their forays into the slums of London as if they were entering a new and dangerous country. In Mayhew’s formulation, in particular, “the poor” are framed as racially other than Mayhew’s readers, their poverty and intermittent employment explained by their genetic inferiority. Although Mayhew intends his writing to be a call for help for these people, it is unclear how they can be helped if their actual problems are hereditary. Mayhew’s formulation leads naturally to Galton’s, framing the poor as a weak link in the Anglo-Saxon race.

The suddenly enormous appeal and importance of the figure of the child in Victorian culture was tied up in this increased obsession with “purity” in the new, biopolitical society. The dead child becomes the perfect icon of racial and sexual purity—unlike most children, whose innocence was destined to be lost, this child was not only pure, but eternally incorruptible. The deaths of children work in two ways to support eugenicist programs. The figure of the ideal child, preserved in death, on the one hand, acts as an incorruptible representation of childhood—eternally pure, beautiful, and under someone else’s control. On the other are the deaths of numerous actual children and young people, deaths that were expected and even encouraged because they did not conform to the ideal of childhood established by this first figure. The extreme mourning for children whose class, race, and way of death allowed them to (at least ostensibly) fit inside the Victorian figure of the ideal dead child worked to cover over an ambivalence about, or even a desire for, the deaths of other children who did not quite fit this ideal. It also created a generic figure of the mournable child—and, by extent, of the child—that excluded most children.

The Victorian focus on dead children also coincided with the rise of anti-child labor laws. These laws attempted to ensure that childhood was a space of freedom, play, and education for everyone, yet the actual result of was often not that children did not work outside of the home, but that children who did have to work were not seen as children. The bourgeois notion of childhood as a space of freedom is one that is still unattainable to many children (and that, paradoxically, often conflicts with contemporary mandatory schooling), and the insistence on this freedom as definitive of childhood still robs many young people of the ability to be included in this category. Focusing on the dead child helped to perpetrate the fiction that childhood was a space of romantic unproductiveness in a time when most children were not unproductive. Victorian children were, actually, a productive group, and most of them worked: in factories, on farms, as servants, as sex

workers, or, at least, in their own homes. In literary representations, though, what children are best at is dying. The only thing that they produce is cultural ideals. Part of the appeal of child death is the fantasy of a life in which one has never had, and will never have, to work, or to worry, but also the fantasy of an impossible childhood so defined by innocence that work and worry were not a part of it.

When “innocence” became essential to childhood in the Victorian Era (as it still is today), childhood was suddenly based entirely on privilege and the fear of loss. To retain her “innocence,” a child must be privileged enough to be ignorant of knowledge that would spoil it—knowledge of sexuality, certainly, but also of work or poverty. The panic over the inevitable loss of innocence meant that the ideal Victorian child was associated, not just with reproduction, but with the death drive—an imagined child so pure that she would rather die than lose that purity. The most famous literary children of the nineteenth-century—Little Nell Trent, Beth March, Paul Domby, Eva St. Clair, Peter Pan—are all children who seem to desire death. When Lee Edelman (2004) pits the figure of “the Child,” associated with reproductive futurism, against the queer death drive, it’s a figure of the child that is easily recognizable from political rhetoric. Edelman’s Child, though, ignores how associated the ideal child still is with death. After all, even in Edelman’s argument, a prime example of the Child is a fetus threatened with abortion—a child so perfect that it has never even lived. The child who is preserved through death is actually, like Edelman’s *sinthomosexual*, defined by the fact of its removal from the cycle of reproductive futurity. This child is so useful as an image of cultural reproduction precisely because it can never physically reproduce and end its childhood (like Dicken’s Dora Copperfield, David’s “child-bride” whose childishness could have only been marred by her becoming a mother herself).

That this ideal childhood is so defined by unproductiveness lays bare a contradiction at the heart of the eugenicist project: a separate, innocent childhood is a requirement of a healthy society, but such a childhood can only exist if some of the children who partake of it die—the ideal child is one who does not grow up or reproduce. The eugenicist fantasy becomes not just, as Foucault suggests in the case of Nazi Germany, a fantasy of race purity the inevitable end of which is race suicide, but a fantasy of total extinction. The obsession with childhood innocence, with the “innocent” child who never grows up as an ideal, creates this unsustainable paradox. The child is the future, but the future isn’t real, and never will be.

This dissertation traces this figure of the ideal, dead child through Victorian fiction, memoir, and journalism. While there are real children present in this dissertation, there is no way to recover those children’s stories, and that is not my project here. Instead, my focus is on how the figure of the child that emerged in the Victorian Era was established and understood through the image of the dead child, and the work that was needed to exclude or include actual children in this narrative.

The children discussed in the first chapter embody this ideal figure of the child to the fullest. They are beloved, lavishly mourned, middle- and upper-class, their memories carefully preserved through writing. This chapter focuses on “comfort books:” texts about children’s deaths written by and for bereaved parents in the US and Great Britain, and circulated transatlantically, during the nineteenth century. In these texts, the dead child emerges as the ideal child: passive, forever innocent, and forever possessable. Children who die quite literally become objects—beautiful, smiling corpses who are apparently happy to die (a formulation that elides and obscures the actual reasons that many nineteenth-century young people died). Comfort books focus, almost exclusively, on the dead child’s body: even the child’s soul is imagined to resemble the body.

Although the children in these texts are typically described as virtuous and pious, these qualities are less important to the comfort book narrative than the conformity of their small bodies to a set of physical norms typified by blue eyes, pale skin, and delicate beauty. These texts, which repeatedly frame the children that they discuss as homogeneous in terms of class, race, and “purity,” insidiously suggest that children must belong to specific identity groups in order to be recognizable both as children and as mournable.

Chapters two and three think through the ways in which gender affected the ways in which a child could be preserved or made perfect in death. Chapter two explores how women and girls are made into “children,” or denied that designation, by male, Victorian writers. What cultural constructions made it seem not only possible, but natural, that Charles Dickens’s feelings towards his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth could be, at the same time, those of a father, brother, and husband, and how did both Mary’s death and the insistence that the nearly eighteen-year-old Mary was a “child” play into how these feelings were read? I focus on two of Dickens’s fictional female “children,” the teenaged “Little” Nell Trent, and the adult, married, Dora Copperfield, suggesting that the label of child enables a sort of violent possession that ends in death, keeping the female character both “pure,” and in the author’s power. I then turn to nonfictional accounts to suggest how an ideal femininity based on childishness, powerlessness, and, ultimately, death affected real Victorian women and girls, implicating figures like Little Nell—Dickens’s impoverished, virginal, teenaged “child”—in the rhetoric that allowed non-fiction writers and political actors to frame young sex workers as either totally barred from childhood, or, as in the view of reformer William Stead, as “children” who totally lacked agency—a way of thinking that is still prevalent in anti-sex-work rhetoric today. Chapter three explores the queer potential of death as liberatory in texts including *Peter Pan* (1904), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *The Author of Beltraffio* (1884), and

Tim: A Story of School Life (1891), arguing that such potential is limited by the fact that these texts are adult fantasies, rather than based upon young people's actual desires, lives, or needs. I begin by comparing *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan*, thinking through the ways that the two texts frame queer boyhood as an ideal that is threatened, not by the queer men who appear as the texts' ostensible villains, but by the intrusion of female sexuality into the relationship between queer boy and man. With queer ghosts and murderous women, both texts offer a fantasy of escape through death that is at turns horrific and liberatory. James's realistic *The Author of Beltraffio* figures as an important precedent to *The Turn of the Screw*, making explicit the themes of murderous, "protective" motherhood lurking in the later novella. James's novellas differ from Barrie's play in that they indict not just feminine sexuality, but the discourses of protection present in comfort books that, at their logical ends, insist that a dead child is better than a "corrupted" (or queer) child. When paired with James's *The Pupil* (1891), these texts form a sort of "dead erotic child trilogy" that posits the death of the erotic child as a sort of ultimate consummation, possession without desecration of the desired child. I then turn to Sturgis's *Tim: A Story of School Life*, a realistic (if extremely sentimental) text whose eponymous character's queerness makes him one of the kind who "like to die," thinking through the ways in which schools like Eton served as real-life Neverlands for upper-class boys, and the ways in which Tim's ambiguous gendering shapes his death. While all of these texts complicate the ideal established in comfort books and in the works of authors like Dickens by explicitly marking children who die young as somehow queered, they still rely on familiar motifs of death as a preserver of childhood, purity, and the adult's possession of the child.

Chapter four turns to the children on the other side of the eugenicist working of the ideal dead child—children who are "let die." The chapter considers rare cases in which children appear

to gain agency through death—in which child characters take their lives, and deaths, into their own hands. I take up *Jude the Obscure*'s (1895) “Little Father Time” as a case study, contrasting the dramatic murder/suicide enacted by this fictional child with newspaper accounts of real children and young people who died by suicide, showing the ways in which these children, and the abuse that they often endured, are absent from fictional accounts of child death. Unlike the deaths of these children, Little Father Time's actions are framed as a political, rather than personal, tragedy. Jude's nine-year-old son “Little Father Time's” execution of his half-siblings works as a mockery of state power (he hangs them), and is framed as a direct challenge to the reproductive futurity championed by his parents, even in the face of crippling poverty. Father Time's actions at first bring to mind arguments by queer theorists such as Edelman, which question the desirability of the futurity that has for so long been linked to the figure of the child. However, Father Time's agency is called into question by the fact that he fails to successfully shape the meaning of his own and his siblings' deaths, suggesting that even suicide ultimately fails as a protest against futurity, since its interpretation is out of the child's hands. Here I argue against Foucault's notion that death itself is “the term, the limit, or the end of power, too. . . . Death is beyond the reach of power” (*Society Must be Defended* 248), arguing that systems of power continue to shape the meanings of individual lives and deaths long after they have occurred. In fact, Little Father Time and his real-life counterparts' actions are better thought of as caused by a eugenicist biopower, the logical conclusion of Frances Galton's insistence that aid is better directed at the “fit,” so that the “unfit” may die out.

1.0 “The sweetest little thing that ever died”: Nineteenth-Century “Comfort Books” and the Pleasures of Mourning Children

This chapter focuses on “comfort books:” nineteenth-century British and American texts about the death of children, apparently geared towards, but often also written by, parents who had lost children.^{ix} These texts circulated transatlantically, and comfort book authors borrowed freely from each other across the Atlantic—collections of poetry and prose on the deaths of children published in the United States almost always include work from British authors, and vice versa. Comfort books were distinct from the religious tracts that were also popular during the period (particularly in the United States), in that, although they often had some religious content, their main purpose was comfort, not conversion. In comfort books, the child’s salvation is seen as assured, not hard-earned, and the child’s life and death are presented for the pleasurable consumption of adults, rather than for the instruction of other children (both tracts’ content and their typically small size mark them for children’s consumption).

These “comfort books” exemplify new ideas about both childhood and the body that were becoming prevalent in Western Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century. As middle-class children’s roles in the family became more about emotional support, and less about more literal support (through working, either in or outside of the home), what it might mean to be an “ideal child” shifted. Authors of comfort books describe their dead children as providing unchanging comfort, often in direct relation to the “bad” behavior of the child’s living siblings. Comfort book authors’ focus on the dead child’s body also exposes complicated beliefs about bodies—their permanence (or impermanence), what an ideal body might look like, and how it

might be eternally preserved (literally or figuratively). Although the children in these texts are typically described as virtuous and pious, these qualities are less important to the comfort book narrative than the conformity of their small bodies to a set of physical norms typified by blue eyes, pale skin, and delicate beauty. These texts, which repeatedly frame the children that they discuss as homogeneous in terms of class, race, “purity,” and, often, gender, insidiously suggest that children must belong to specific identity groups in order to be recognizable both as children and as mournable. While comfort books themselves do not necessarily create this generically mournable child, they work with and respond to sentimental fiction in a way that lends credence to the latter’s image of the ideal dead child. These texts show that, although its appeal was obviously not universal (Oscar Wilde’s famous quote that “one must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing” comes to mind), sentimental fiction was taken very seriously by some people. The genre of child death that emerged from sentimental texts was powerful enough that even parents writing about their own dead children felt compelled to (or desired to) shape the narratives of their children’s deaths to conform to generic convention.

Comfort books are a body genre—their intended effect is to elicit a bodily response. As defined by film scholar Linda Williams (1991), body genres include horror, pornography, and melodrama. Comfort books, like melodrama (a genre that they often participate in), are intended to elicit tears, in a controlled and pleasurable manner. They also have commonalities with Williams’ other body genres: a parent could certainly read comfort books to feel a controlled sense of terror at the prospect of their own child’s death, and the texts’ descriptions of the bodies of pure, beautiful children are often erotic (a link that becomes more explicit in the texts discussed in the second and third chapters). Comfort books are also a “body genre” in a more literal sense—they

are about bodies, they focus on the possession of objectified child bodies, and they participate in the creation of a genre of bodies that are recognizable as objects of mourning.

During the period in which comfort books and works of sentimental fiction flourished, and dead children were depicted as lovely, suffering, and greatly mourned, London newspapers told a darker story (which I discuss in detail in the second and fourth chapters of this dissertation). Newspapers from Victoria's reign report numerous cases of children who died by or attempted suicide because of abuse (sexual, physical, or otherwise). These children were typically blamed for their "crimes" (since suicide, or attempted suicide, was still illegal in Victorian Britain), and, if they survived, were sometimes put on trial. Likewise, these newspapers contain hundreds of reports of parents or guardians murdering young children. While these events are invariably described as "shocking," "extraordinary," and "insane,"^x the frequency of their appearance calls their shock value into question. Certainly, these child deaths were not framed as actionable, despite the fact that they were typically fairly clearly caused by extreme poverty and/or the rampant sexual abuse of young women. Many of the people described as "children" who attempted or died by suicide, in fact, seem to have been young, pregnant girls (although newspapers often avoided explicitly stating this), and many of the mothers who murdered their children were young, unwed, and deeply impoverished. The many children who died under British colonial rule are never mentioned in these papers. Thus, the sublime grief depicted in comfort books works to cover over a wider societal ambivalence about the death of children: the death of a child was an exquisitely mournable tragedy, but only if that child's death reinforced deeply held beliefs about nation, race, gender, and class. The literary focus on the white, upper/middle class children who died from diseases such as consumption and scarlet fever, for which the cure was not known, both framed that child as the only child whose death mattered, and obscured more common (and, perhaps, more

actionable) causes of child death. In comfort books, the bodies of dead, white, upper-class children not only appear as the only bodies that count as those of children, but sometimes quite literally obscure the bodies of dead children of color, as when the unnamed author of *The Cradle and the Grave: Thoughts on the Death of Little Children, by a Mother* writes of dead British children filling graveyards in India, assuring her readers that the “sunny head[ed]” British children who die in the colonies can still carry out the work of colonization after death, imagining the Indian cemetery that holds these children’s corpses as a British “city of the dead—the infant dead!” (13).^{xi}

This chapter gestures towards these dead children that comfort books erase, while also examining these texts’ complicated relationships with the children that they do depict. Judith Plotz, whose scholarship provides the most comprehensive analysis of comfort books to date, argues that their rise in popularity around the middle of the nineteenth century suggests that the death of a child was becoming “increasingly hard [for parents] to endure” (Plotz 173). According to Plotz, the Victorians’ increased interest in child death was born in the Romantic era, and the popularity of Victorian literature (both fictional and non-fictional) about the deaths of children stemmed from a great “need for consolation for the loss of so precious a being as the Romantic child” (170). The comfort books themselves, however, express an ambivalence about children’s deaths that does not quite fit with Plotz’s thesis, and that seems to me to lie at the center of the Victorian Cult of the Child. These texts, I argue, treat grief as a sensual experience; they seem at times almost to revel in it, as parents go on at great length about their beautiful, dead children. Death, in these texts, preserves the child, cementing its status as a precious and unchanging object. Rather than marking the loss of a Romantic child, comfort books actually celebrate the pleasure of the eternal possession of that child.

Throughout this chapter, I typically refer to the dead child as “she,” except when referring to a specific child whose gender is given as male. While I agree with James Kincaid that both actual age and gender matter little to who can be “hollow[ed] out” and made to fit the figure of “child” (*Child-Loving* 5), it is also true that the ideal Victorian dead child of comfort books and literature is usually gendered female—she’s often a girl, but even boys like Paul Dombey or Johnny, the child who weirdly shows up just to die in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), typically exhibit characteristics of purity and passivity that are in line with Victorian ideals of femininity (this linking of childhood, death, and feminine ideals is discussed in detail in the second chapter of this dissertation). Dead, masculine boy ideals are rarer, and can only really exist in fantasy—Peter Pan and *The Water Babies*’ (1863) Tom may be “dead,” but they still get to go on adventures. In comfort books, the large majority of dead child subjects are girls, even at the exclusion of their male siblings who are also dead—while the unnamed author of *Our Children’s Rest* (1863) has lost two sons, it is only her daughter’s death that inspires her to write a comfort book.

1.1 “the most chaste and exquisite tomb:” Class and Proper Mourning

The rise in popularity of comfort books during the mid-nineteenth century was aided by a general trend towards elaborate forms of mourning, and by a shift in the perceived value of children. According to Vivian Zelizer, as child labor laws and increased urbanization rendered children less valuable in their capacity for physical labor or support in old age, they became valuable instead in terms of emotional labor. While many children certainly still performed physical and paid labor despite child labor laws, these laws signaled a cultural shift in the definition of childhood, insisting that childhood and parenthood should conform to specific, classed markers

in order to be recognizable. Zelizer details the strange circumstances that lead to life insurance for children becoming popular around the same time that children's actual monetary "value" was decreasing along with child labor. Children's life insurance, according to Zelizer, was framed mainly as "burial insurance for poor children" (114). While it did not become popular in the US until the late nineteenth century, life insurance for children had existed in England since 1854, and, by the late nineteenth century, "burial insurance for working-class [English] children had become the norm" (116). Since this insurance was presented explicitly as burial insurance, it is clearly not a coincidence that life insurance for children became popular around the same time that excessively mourning children's deaths became popular—while there were panics surrounding the idea that parents would use this insurance to profit from their children's deaths, the demand for this life insurance for children, was, as Zelizer suggests, simply evidence that "working-class parents adopted the middle-class cult of child mourning" (131).

The obsession with being able to properly mourn the (potentially) dead child sometimes came at the expense of the living child. Zelizer cites several sources from turn of the century New York suggesting that life insurance for children was one of many working-class families' most important expenses—one states that "a family is frequently willing to be dispossessed or to go without food or clothing or fuel in order to keep up the insurance" (130). John Morley confirms the importance of a "good burial" for working-class Victorians, citing an 1848 letter describing an English mother who said that she "would like to" send her foster son to school, but could not afford it because of the money that she paid for his burial insurance (Morley 25). She deemed a good burial for the child a better investment than his education might have been. Critics of child insurance, of course, pointed to the bizarreness of this—wouldn't that money be better spent on keeping the child alive, rather than on a showy burial for him? While the validity of these criticisms

is often complicated by explicitly classist sentiments—rich parents explaining to poor parents how to manage their incomes and raise their children—they also fail to account for how the shift in value of the child from laborer to useless but emotionally precious luxury item changed precisely how those children were valuable. A fine burial was seen as a last act of love towards the child, and as an assurance that there would be no shame attached to the memory of her death (as there might be if she was buried in a pauper’s grave). Instead of making up for lost wages of working children, insurance guaranteed the child’s continued emotional and social value even after death.

Comfort books stem from this culture in which mourning a child properly at her death was at least as important as caring for her properly during her life. The texts themselves not only model the proper emotions of mourning, but, sometimes, detail the more material aspects of “proper” mourning. The author of *Our Children’s Rest; or, Comfort for Bereaved Mothers* (1863), a Victorian woman who identifies herself only as a mother who has lost three children, stresses the importance of a proper burial for the dead child. “For this departed child, so fondly loved in life, so deeply mourned in death,” she says, “the most chaste and exquisite tomb must be erected that wealth can purchase, art design, or sculptor execute” (34). Chastity here is linked to class, and parents who cannot afford such a tomb either appear to be defiling their dead children through an improper burial, or to be burying children who were never so chaste to begin with. The author is, of course, quick to admit that some parents cannot afford such a burial: “The less affluent, not the less loving, have only means to express their grief in a more simple style” (34). As she continues, though, it becomes clear that a main cause of the sorrow of these bereaved families should not be that their child is dead, but that they cannot afford to mourn it properly:

Descending still, we find the infant sleepers upon whom wealth has lavished none of her luxuries, whose little bodies wear no lace, not rich embroidery, nor are they laid on softly quilted

satin. Rough hands performed the last sad rites, but oh how *tenderly*; rough hands made up their coarse and scanty grave-clothes, and as they worked wiped away many a genuine tear . . . “No knell toll’d on their burial day;” no plumed hearse was seen, nor mourning coach, nor mute, nor pall-bearers, nor pall, nor anything that makes a “*funeral*” (35, emphasis in original).

The funeral of the impoverished child is defined by all of the things that it lacks—in fact, without these things, it is not really a “funeral” at all. Despite the author’s care to assure us that the tears of the bereaved mother who makes her own child’s grave-clothes are “genuine” (something that she never feels the need to do for the parents of children whose “chaste and exquisite” tombs prove that they are truly mourned), it is clearly implied that these parents should *want* a plumed hearse, mourning coach, and the rest a long list of luxuries for their dead children. While the author stresses that she is not questioning any parents’ love for their children, she is certainly suggesting that the proper way to bury a child is an expensive one. It is perhaps no wonder that some poor parents considered life insurance for their children a necessity, if the only way to show that a child was “fondly loved” and “deeply mourned” was to provide her with a costly funeral and burial site.

It was not just the public display of mourning, though, but mourning itself, that required time and wealth. When the author of *Our Children’s Rest* asserts that “nature demands the privilege of REST and TEARS” after a child’s death, she may be correct, but she is also correct in (perhaps inadvertently) suggesting that this is a “privilege,” and one that few can afford (39). Most mothers would not only have had to “attend immediately to a change of dress for herself and her household” (41), but to cook, clean, and care for other children (and perhaps also do these tasks for other families, in addition to her own). Even the time needed to write a comfort book was a decidedly upper-class commodity.

This commodifying of mourning helped to frame the ideal dead child, and, by extension, the ideal child, as middle- or upper-class. While reporters and authors such as Dickens, Kingsley, and Mayhew wrote impassioned pleas for help for impoverished children, these pleas were still typically couched in classed sensibilities surrounding death and childhood. The *Old Curiosity Shop*'s (1841) Little Nell dies in a comfortable home, surrounded by flowers and loved ones, not on the streets (where she spends much of the novel). *The Water Babies*'s (1863) Tom may be filthy during his life as a chimney sweep, but he is washed clean when he drowns and becomes a water-baby. Mayhew's most famous subject, the "little watercress girl," does not die, but he still feels the need to frame her in terms of an idea of childhood that she does not understand, asking her about candy and games rather than the realities of her life as a working child. A certain type of child's life, and death, emerges as representable. There has likely never been a point in any culture when all young people were defined, in the same way, as "children"—the definition of "child" varies widely depending on a variety of factors, perhaps most importantly gender and race (as Robin Bernstein shows in *Racial Innocence*). These comfort books, though, helped to define childhood in terms of class, as something that could only be properly mourned, and therefore properly celebrated, by those with access to the objects that defined it. If mourning the death of the child requires one to possess time to mourn, time to write, and precious memento moris, then many families' mourning suddenly becomes unrecognizable. The child whose death is not celebrated with the writing of books or lavish displays of sorrow becomes unmournable.

1.2 Death, Immortal Children, and the Physical Reunion of the Family in Heaven

As comfort books helped to define a specific class of child as mournable, they also solidified the figure of this child as definitive of childhood. The memorializing of the dead child shifted from the mourning of an individual child to a celebration of the figure which that child represented, which, in turn, became as valuable to parents as the lost child herself. As English poet and essayist Leigh Hunt explains in his “The Death of Little Children,” the child who dies in infancy (like Hunt’s own daughter) “is rendered an immortal child. Death has arrested it with his kindly harshness, and blessed it into an eternal image of youth and innocence” (3). This notion of death as a creator of “immortal children” is key to the way in which comfort book authors understand their own children’s death, and is perhaps why Hunt’s essay, first published in the short-lived *Indicator* in 1820, did not become popular until its republication in 1846.^{xii} While I can’t find any reference to Hunt’s essay in British newspapers before 1846, it was reprinted and excerpted in numerous Victorian newspapers after its republication,^{xiii} and (more importantly for the purposes of this chapter) became a popular addition to anthology-style comfort books such as Helen Kendrick’s *Tear for the Little Ones* (1878), in which the essay is reprinted under the title “Immortal Childhood.”^{xiv} That it was the first essay included in a collection of Hunt’s work published in 1891, despite not being chronologically first, indicates the essay’s lasting popularity.^{xv} *The Queen*, a “Lady’s Newspaper,” borrows the term “immortal child” to refer to Dickens’s Little Nell in 1888,^{xvi} suggesting that, by the late Victorian Era, the link between premature death and immortal childhood was widely accepted (I also found Hunt’s essay excerpted in obituaries for three US infants who died in the twenty-first century, suggesting that this is a link that still holds fast).

Part of the reason that the dead child became such a powerful figure in the Victorian era was due to a shift in religious belief. While the Victorians were certainly not a secular society, neither were they as dogmatically Christian as their Puritan or Catholic forbearers. Many of the influential thinkers and writers of the time had beliefs about death and the afterlife that could best be defined as spiritual, but not strictly based in church doctrine. Charles Dickens, who wrote many of the most famous child deaths of the nineteenth century, was notoriously skeptical about organized religion and those who practiced it, as was Charles Kingsley, whose *Water Babies* champions both evolution and the immortality of the human soul. The writings of Charles Darwin were widely influential in this period, and the natural sciences increasingly took precedence over superstitious religious beliefs about sickness, the natural world, and death. Spiritualism was also popular in the Victorian era, marking an interest in the afterlife that was more personal than religious. Death, then, was not entirely secularized, but neither was it seen as only a religious experience, and depictions of death, while (sometimes excessively) sentimental, became less overtly religious. A focus on science alongside religious belief meant that focus shifted from the soul to the body, and the Victorian idea of heaven was of a place where families would be reunited after death. If belief in evolution helped to erode religious belief, it also picked up on some of the more racist ideologies surrounding Darwinism, as eugenicist thought was suddenly important not just to bodies, but to souls.

Comfort book authors' notions of the preservation of childhood through death was, at times, very literal, and stemmed in part from changing ideas about spiritual life after death. By the middle of the nineteenth century in Great Britain and America, belief in original sin had all but vanished, and most Christian parents had no worries concerning their dead children's salvation. In 1858, American minister A. C. Thompson was confident enough in the fact of infant salvation to

inform his readers of precisely how many infants had ascended to heaven at the time he was writing. Describing the size of “The Infant Host in Heaven,” Thompson explained that “It is estimated that, of all born into this world, one half leave it in infancy. If such be the case, then, according to a computation which makes the whole race thus far to number twenty-eight thousand millions, there would be at this moment fourteen thousand millions in heaven who were infants when they went there” (115-116).

While Thompson doesn’t specify whether or not those who died when they were infants remained infants in heaven, many nineteenth-century Christians believed that they did, and that they would be reunited with their family members, in the same physical forms that they had held in life, in death. Pat Jalland describes the Victorian notion of heaven as “anthropocentric,” replacing a “theocentric” model of heaven that focused on an eternity of worship of, and communion with, God. For many Victorians, she says, “the family in the home became the basis for heavenly life, as Christians moved from one loving home to another, to meet departed loved ones in the next world” (266-267). In this formulation, eternal “life” in heaven carries on much like life on earth. This mode of imagining heaven is typical in comfort books: the author of *Our Children’s Rest* ends her text by describing heaven as a place where “*Each and every member of many dear families will be there, all safely gathered, ‘not a hoof left behind,’ unbroken by a MISSING LINK – all, all, HOME TOGETHER*” (79, emphasis in original). In a book written for his own children, Charles Dickens similarly described heaven as a place “where we hope to go, and all to meet each other after we are dead, and there be happy always together” (quoted in Walder 72).

Because of this commonly held view of heaven, even ostensibly religious comfort books focus on a bodily reunion with the deceased child, rather than on the spiritual implications of her

death. American minister Samuel Irenæus Prime writes, in an essay about the death of his own young son (included in Walter Aimwell's 1870 collection *Our Little Ones in Heaven*), that although "We have grown old since we saw him. . . . He has not grown old. . . . They do not grow old in heaven. They grow in knowledge and holiness and happiness. But there is no succession of time in eternity" ("Seven Years . . ." 54). The child's spiritual and mental growth is contrasted with an earthly aging process defined by physical growth (which, ultimately, leads to decay). Later, Prime stresses again that his son "must be far advanced in holiness" now, and would find his family dull if he were to return to them. He speaks of the son walking, talking, learning, and teaching in heaven, "sit[ting] . . . and speak[ing]" with his grandfather in "heavenly places" (57). "Growing old," then, is only physical—this heavenly child is clearly no longer a child in anything but his imaged physical form. The child's mind and soul may develop—what is important is that his body does not.

In this formulation, the physical charms of the child's immature body, as opposed to the hidden content of its soul, became its most important quality. While comfort books often reference Christian texts and beliefs, deceased children are repeatedly described in terms that are bodily, rather than spiritual. In fact, the child is at times defined solely by its bodily form—as upper-class, early twentieth-century British mother Lady Selborne explains, "I never think the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is the same comfort with regard to a baby that it is with regard to older people—at least from a mother's standpoint—because it is the body that she loves at that age . . . She does not know what the soul is like yet, so she can only love that vaguely" (quoted in Jalland 124). The notion that the child's soul would be something like its body (even somehow embodied) was comforting in this regard. To Selborne, and to many nineteenth-century comfort book authors, the child *is* the body, in a way that, at a time when most belief was still widely dualistic in terms

of the mind/body divide, no adult could be imagined to be. That the infant's soul is imagined as its body makes sense in this regard. The infant described by Selborne is cute, loveable, but personality-less, nothing beyond a desiring and desired body.

For nineteenth-century American poet, Fanny Fales, the heavenly child's physical form is of utmost importance. Fales' "Yes, as a Child" is a response to Longfellow's "Resignation," in which he writes of his dead daughter that "not as a child shall we again behold her." Fales' poem explains that her own daughter must remain a child in heaven; otherwise she won't be able to recognize her when she herself dies. Beyond this rather odd logic, though, the poem underscores the bodily desire of the mother for her child. "Yes, as a child, serene and noble poet," Fales writes, directly addressing Longfellow, "I hope to clasp my bud as when I wore it;/ A dimpled baby fair./ Though years have flown, toward my blue-eyed daughter/ My heart yearns ofttimes with a mother's love . . . E'en as a *babe*, my little blue-eyed daughter,/Nestle and coo upon my heart again/ Wait for thy mother by the river-water, –/ It shall not be in vain!" (Fales 88, emphasis in original). The daughters' physical qualities (her blue eyes and her dimples) and her infinite cuddliness are what the mother remembers about her—like Lady Selborne, Fales only knows her daughter as a body, not as an individual with a distinct personality.

This focus on the physical embodiment of the child's soul is not just about preserving childhood, of course, but reflects 19th century British and American ideas about bodies, and what made them human. Phrenology, which was popular at the time, suggests that one can tell much about the soul from the body, and eugenic discourses were eager to point out the physical reasons for supposedly "inferior" races' (or genders') inferiority. That Fales mentions her daughter's blue eyes twice is typical of this type of discourse, and works both to establish the daughter's physical beauty and her innocence by establishing her whiteness.^{xvii} The likeness of the child's soul to its

body, then, also makes sense in a eugenicist context. American psychologist G. Stanley Hall's seminal work on adolescence, which appeared at the turn of the century, worked to scientifically legitimize this linkage of psychological, mental, and spiritual development with the development of the body, while also bringing to the forefront the racist motivations barely concealed beyond the sentimental discourse of comfort books. The overt racism of Hall's theories of development in *Adolescence* (1904) may seem unrelated to the notion that one's body stay the same in heaven, but, in fact, they are drawing from the same nineteenth-century discourses of development that stress the importance of the body. While some abolitionist texts suggest that black people's souls can become white in heaven (or, less disturbingly, that all souls are the same), the notion of the embodied soul insists that racialization will continue, even in heaven.^{xviii}

1.3 Possession of the Dead Child—and of its Beautiful Corpse

In some texts, this obsession with the dead child's body, and parents' possession of that body, becomes literal. Boston father Nehemiah Adams' comfort book, *Agnes and the Little Key* (1869), recounts the story of his struggle over the decision of what to do with the key to his young daughter's coffin. For Adams, possession in heaven is replaced by possession in this world, of the child's corpse. In *Agnes and the Little Key*, Adams argues with his wife about the probability that their daughter will remain a child forever in heaven—while his wife believes, with many of her contemporaries, that the family will be reunited, as it was on earth, in heaven, Adams thinks that this is an “earthly idea” (57) and an example of “woman's theology” (59). Adams' notion of heaven still includes embodied souls and reunited families (and, interestingly, actually seems more bound to the laws of earth than that of his wife): he doesn't believe that he won't meet an embodied

version of his daughter in heaven; he just thinks that she'll age normally, even after death, and so be an adult when he sees her again. Refusing to believe in his daughter's eternal childhood in heaven, Adams focuses instead on his eternal possession of her childish corpse. For Adams, the key to his daughter's coffin is "a token of possession" (65), and he obsesses over this key in a two-hundred-page book. Despite his many suggestions of what he might do with the key, Adams (perhaps inevitably) doesn't actually do anything with it—it's still in his possession at the book's end, ultimately too precious to give up.

Like many comfort book authors (and nineteenth-century novelists), Adams relates the preservation of childhood directly to the beautiful corpse of the child. After describing his (living) daughter's body in some detail, he writes that, after her death, she "seemed to me the sweetest little thing that ever died; that, as she lay in her last sleep, no sight could be quite so beautiful and touching" (12). The unnamed author of "The Dead Child" puts it more bluntly: "Few things appear so beautiful as a young child in its shroud" (Aimwell 107). Poet Caroline Bowles Southey likewise compares the beauty of a dead child positively with that of a living one: "I've seen thee in thy beauty,/A thing all health and glee;/ But never then wert thou/ So beautiful as now . . . And is this death? – dread thing,/ If such thy visiting,/ How beautiful thou art!/ O, I could gaze forever/ Upon thy waxen face;/ So passionless, so pure!" (Johnson 78-81). The "passionless," "pure," and "meek" dead child embodies, more perfectly than any living child, the Victorian ideal of childhood that emphasizes these traits. The beauty of the dead child in its shroud is linked explicitly to purity and to powerlessness. When the beautiful and clearly destined to die "Babie Bell" of the euphonious poem finally dies, Thomas Bailey Aldrich links her beauty to her "meek" submission to death: "And what did dainty Babie Bell?/ She only crossed her little hands,/ She only looked more meek and fair!/ We parted back her silken hair;/ We laid some buds upon her brow" (142). The unnamed

author of the paragraph-long essay “Why Children Die” similarly suggests that, just as we often pick our most beautiful flowers when they first begin to bloom, so too does “God sometimes gather into heaven young and innocent children for the same reason—lest some rude hand may despoil them of their beauty” (Aimwell 92).^{xix} When James Kincaid wonders, in *Erotic Innocence*, whether “we feel that a defiled child is of no use to us and might as well be dead” he means to be provocative (17), but this nineteenth-century author answers Kincaid’s question in the affirmative, very bluntly and literally. It is better for a child to be dead than to be “despoiled.” Death acts, not as a destroyer, but as a preserver, freezing children at the height of their perceived beauty and innocence.

The dead child remains eternally the same, but, perhaps more importantly, eternally its parents’. Both Samuel Irenæus Prime and Helen Kendrick Johnson include the same unattributed quote in their comfort books: “They only who have lost a child in infancy are sure of a babe forever” (*Thoughts on the Deaths of Little Children* 54, Johnson 170). The unnamed author of “The Same for Evermore” calls their dead child a “bright, unwithering flower—our spirit’s hoarded store,” which “We keep through every chance and change, the same for evermore” (Aimwell 121). These are children who cannot grow up to disappoint their parents in any major way, or even in the many small ways that all children must. More importantly, though, they can also never grow out of “needing” their parents: their most important emotional attachments will always be to their mother and father. Molly Malone, in her essay “The Child who Could Never Grow up,” suggests that the dead child becomes “dear[er]” than living children for this very reason. As a mother experiences the stresses and sorrows of having children grow up, Malone explains, she finds that her dead child is the only one who remains “hers, unchanged, amid all change” (151). The mother’s living children, as they grow, teach her “how the heart may bleed under the thorn-

pricks of childish carelessness and unkind words, and all the thoughtless ingratitude of youth” (150), and, as adults, cause her constant worry for their “spiritual safety” (151). In contrast to her other children, who are now individuals with personalities and desires that may clash with her own, the image of the dead child remains, associated with a drawer of its treasured toys that the mother keeps locked away. Upon his death, the mother “laid away the dead child’s toys and all his childish possessions in a drawer at the bottom of her bureau, locked it up carefully, and went back to her daily duties; nor did she ever touch those little treasures for some time” (150). It is only once “years [have] passed, bringing to the mother many sorrows” (due to her other children continuing to live), that the mother looks into the drawer again (150). As she looks at the toys, the mother “felt once more the little curly head nestling in her arms, and heard once more the loving, childish voice whisper in her ear. Once again his baby kisses fell upon her cheek” (151). The return to the toys of the dead child is a direct response to the mother’s lack of control over her living children (now adults). The toys in their locked drawer mirror the child’s position—small, doll-like, and infinitely available to be either cuddled or locked away, as the possessor of the key to the drawer (which mirrors the key to Adams’s daughter’s coffin) sees fit. As Malone’s story shows, a child can continue to do much of the same emotional, political, and social work once dead—sometimes more effectively than when they were living. In these comfort books, the “comfort” is found not in one’s remaining living children, but in having a dead child, who will *always* be able to do the emotional work of a child in the way that living children cannot. For a child to die, in some ways, is less of a loss than to watch it grow up and lose its “innocence,” and, more crucially one’s own position in (and power over) its life.

In his introduction to *Our Little Ones in Heaven*, Walter Aimwell stresses this ability of the dead child to carry on the emotional labor required of one’s offspring as well as, or better than,

living children. While Aimwell acknowledges that part of the sorrow of losing a child may come from an investment standpoint—parents are losing someone whom they expected to care for them in “weakness and decay” (III)—he quickly goes on to explain how dead children can still care for their parents in old age, perhaps better than their living siblings can. Aimwell continues:

And yet it must be added that there are also many peculiar courses of consolation opened to those who are weeping over empty cradles and tenantless little beds. These little missed ones – O, *how* they are missed! – are, we believe, chosen lambs, gathered into the fold of the Good Shepherd; beauteous buds, and sweet, half-opened blossoms, transplanted from our chilling atmosphere into “those everlasting gardens,/Where angels walk, and seraphs are the wardens;” precious family jewels, rescued from a mean casket and an unsafe custody; glimmering germs of unschooled intelligence, expanded in a day by a heavenly magic into angel profundity, and perchance transformed into ministering spirits, to watch over the weary steps of their earthly guides, and to teach those who were once their teachers: - “How changed, dear friend, are they part and thy child’s!/He bends over *thy* cradle now, or holds/His warning finger out to be thy guide;/Thou art the nursling now.” (III-IV)

The final quote in this excerpt is especially strange—Aimwell doesn’t cite its source, and my initial instinct was to read it as a misappropriation, on his part, of a poem about adult “children” caring for their aging parents. However, the quote is actually from American poet James Russell Lowe’s “On the Death of a Friend’s Child” (1857), which does, indeed, describe the comfort of having a dead child to care for you in old age. The poem addresses what Aimwell earlier acknowledges as one of the key tragedies of child death, playing on the common trope of the reversal of roles between parents and children as both age, while removing the material concerns that the relationship usually implies.^{xx} If part of the reason for having children is the expectation

that they will be there to care for you in old age, Aimwell and Lowe suggest that even a child who has died can fulfill this duty—if not materially, then spiritually. Dead children are extra precious, then, both because they do not have to grow up in order to care for their parents, and because they offer a different type of support in old age. Throughout this long sentence (which is a somewhat extreme, but not atypical, example of comfort book style), Aimwell employs many of the metaphors that are typical of comfort books: dead children are referred to in turn as flowers, jewels, and little humanoid spirits who are learning in heaven. He also suggests, along with many comfort book authors (and nineteenth-century novelists, including Dickens, Stowe, and Alcott), that children who die do so because they are “chosen lambs,” simply too pure for this world—a move that both establishes death as the most desirable fate for a child, and that delegitimizes the deaths of children (abused children, working children, child sex workers) who don’t fit neatly into this category.

1.4 “God’s early blossoms” Children who “like to die”

Most children who die in comfort books, as in nineteenth-century fiction, tend to be perfect angels, and this angelic nature is apparently part of why they die. Many of these texts suggest that some children are not only destined to die, but are glad to die. According to Matthew Russell, who composed *Little Angels: A Book of Comfort for Mourning Mothers* after the death of his niece, children who die early are “happy, and they have never been sad” (2) (a fairly bizarre claim, considering that most Victorian children died of painful diseases, and/or in deep poverty, and were probably often very sad). Theologian Frederick Faber explains this in religious terms in *Ethel’s Book: or, Tales of Angels* (1858), saying that “Some children belong to God and to their mothers.

But some seem to belong to God only. These die soon, and they like to die. Yet they love their mothers better than other children do. Those are happy mothers who have such children. We call them God's Early Blossoms. Most mothers have one such" (Faber 145).^{xxi} The type of child who "likes to die" is an ideal child, its love of death linked to a resistance to growing up. This is dramatized in *Peter Pan*, in which Wendy, who is "one of the kind that likes to grow up," can never truly be a real child (Barrie 178). The desire to be a child forever aligns with a desire for death in fictional characters such as *Little Women's* persistently child-like Beth March, *The Old Curiosity Shop's* physically growth-stunted Nell, and the ghostly Peter Pan of Barrie's play and *The Little White Bird*, but, also, authors of comfort books insist, in their own actual, dead children.

The unnamed author of *Our Children's Rest*, who has lost three children, focuses her comfort book around the death of her daughter, who "possessed a peculiar tenderness of conscience rarely marked in children of her age" (17). This "tenderness of conscious," of course, is what marks the child for death. Described as, "a girl of exquisite beauty," the daughter is a Little Eva/Little Nell like figure who spends all of her days praying and worrying about those around her, until she "drop[s] like the lovely unfolding blossom of some exotic suddenly subjected to exposure" when she is five (18). Notably, the girl is neither the first nor the most recent of the author's children to die, but had brothers who died before and after her, in whom their mother doesn't seem to have been particularly interested—she mentions their deaths early in the text, and then focuses almost exclusively on her daughter. While it is possible that the mother was just more attached to her daughter, and thus more affected by her death, her focus on her daughter's death, rather than that of her sons, also plays to audience expectations of what an ideal dead child should look like (why this ideal, joyfully mourned child is so often a girl, and what that says about Victorian notions of femininity and childhood, is a question that I take up in the second and third

chapters of this dissertation). The daughter's piousness and frail beauty frame her as a child who "likes to die," and for whom death is the only imaginable fate, simultaneously imparting extra pathos to her death and robbing it of any real sense of tragedy.

1.5 Comfort Books and the Exclusive Club of Mourners

The ability to take pleasure in a child's death does not mean that a parent is not sad that the child is dead—as Faber repeatedly claims throughout his text, "Sorrow is not unhappiness" (108). Like Faber's Weeping Angel, who "was happiest when he wept the most bitterly," authors of comfort books find not only solace, but pleasure, in sorrow, and in its expression.^{xxii} *Our Children's Rest* is framed as if its writing is, as Helen Johnson writes in her introduction to *Tears for the Little Ones*, "almost instinctive, and also a sadly pleasant task" that helped her to mourn her own child's death (iii). For bereaved parents such as Johnson and the author of *Our Children's Rest*, the creation of comfort books becomes itself both a form of comfort, and a way of partaking in the "sublime privilege" of sorrow (Johnson iv). The author of *Our Children's Rest* insists that she will not "indulge [her]self" by including too many of the "[p]recious, dearly treasured memories" of her daughter that "come welling up as [she] write[s]," (17-18), but this claim is immediately preceded by memories of the girl's piousness, and followed by memories of her beauty. Writing about the dead child is a pleasurable indulgence—the language and syntax with which the author of this text describes her grief are melodramatic and sensual. When she explains that the "consolation" of belief does not stop parents from "ha[ving] to bear the deep deep anguish of the *separation* – the sorrow of *bereavement*; to miss the music of her voice, the beaming light of her eye, the sound of her footfall on our floor; to see her EMPTY PLACE, to mourn as

KEENLY, though not as HOPELESSLY, as nature could” (19), the capitalized and italicized words are almost tactile. The comfort book becomes a way of prolonging and preserving the “luxury of weeping,” the “grief most sacred” that, according to the author of *Our Children’s Rest* “the veriest trifle [is] considered a sufficient excuse for intruding on” in the real world (39-40).

For the author of *The Cradle and the Grave: Thoughts on the Death of Little Children* (who identifies herself only as “a mother”), this grief becomes itself a possession to be treasured and nurtured throughout the bereaved parent’s life. “Reverently would I approach your grief,” she writes, “I know it is not the less deep that it is *yours alone*. The passing away of that little life left no blank on the outer world. The stream of life rushed on, unmindful of the drop that had been lifted on a morning sunbeam. The loss is *yours alone*, but it is a loss that will stretch through all your future; you feel that down to your grave you must carry the trace of that wound” (14, emphasis added). At first the author’s insistence that a child’s death affects the outer world less than the death of an adult seems odd—it’s possible that a child’s life has less impact on the world than an adult’s, but children were certainly mourned publicly and widely at the time—but it becomes apparent that a large part of the pleasure of mourning is this privacy. The repetition of the phrase “yours alone” is key here—that the grief at the child’s death is apparently experienced alone makes it more powerful, more important, than something experienced with others, but the phrase also frames the grief as a valued possession, something that replaces the dead child, is, in fact, more valuable than the child, because, unlike the child, it will always be yours, alone.

The apparent privateness of the mourning of a child is both called into question by the practice of writing comfort books for publication, and gives these books a voyeuristic appeal. A key aspect of the pleasure of writing about one’s child’s death, however, appears to have been the opportunity afforded to boast about membership in an exclusive club of mourners. The author of

Our Children's Rest reminds her readers that not everyone is "qualified to sympathize with our peculiar sorrow" (13), and feels compelled to state what she explicitly refers to as her "credentials" early on: she has "known the agonising heart-yearnings of the bereaved mother," as she has had three children die (14). Having a child die, she suggests, enables a new depth of feeling, which is framed as a valuable ability, rather than as a curse: "We never expect a blind man to delight us with glowing pictures of the beautiful scenery by which he is constantly surrounded," she says, so why do we expect our friends "*to understand our anguish of heart* – rarely considering *none* can know the bitterness of the waters of affliction, till they have tasted of the dark stream" (13-14). The multiple italics, again, give a sense of luxuriating over the child's death, of an anguish that is also pleasurable. The parallel between delightful scenery and anguish marks this new sense as a not unpleasant one—part of what friends cannot understand, it seems, is the beauty in the anguish of losing a child. That the unbereaved parent is compared to someone who is blind or deaf suggests that it is they who are lacking, disabled by their inexperience with grief. Barry Cornwall also compares having a child die to awakening a new sense: "The single man knows no more of what we endure for the child we love than the deaf or blind knows of sound or color: his idea is a guess altogether unfounded, or remote from reality" (1) (despite his apparently deep love for her, Cornwall refers to his dead daughter exclusively as "it," suggesting that this love is more for an idea or object than a living human).^{xxiii} For American Nathaniel R. Stimpson, losing a child is similarly a gateway to new depths of feeling. "The loss of a sweet and beloved child," he tells his readers, "is a sorrow of which none but those who have suffered can have the least realizing sense; it is unlike that of any other relation . . . It is the opening of all the feeling, and pouring sorrow in at every pore" (221).

For these authors, the death of a child is an experience that enables parents to gain both newly heightened senses and a permanent infant as a family member. Karen Sánchez-Eppler suggests that dead children were crucial members of the nineteenth-century family—indeed, that a family was hardly complete without one. For Sánchez-Eppler, sentimental texts such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* set out “to make of the corpse a love-affirming tableau,” in the same way that post-mortem photography literally creates such a tableau (107). Writing of a scene in which a mother opens a drawer full of her dead child’s clothing, she says that

Stowe's image of a bureau drawer, “the opening of which has been to you like the opening again of a little grave,” imagines that all homes are built, like Stowe's novel, around a child's grave. This image does not denote a rupture in the domestic . . . but rather that this capacity of drawers to become like graves, of homes and hearts to harbor loss, is precisely what constitutes the ideal sentimental reader and the ideal nineteenth-century American family. . . . The grave locked within the home serves to produce and focus the family tableau. (107)

This formulation may help to explain the appeal of comfort books, and the notion that the death of a child can be a blessing. Rather than being lost, the dead child is cemented as a permanent and celebrated member of the family, which is now more, not less, complete than it had been when the child was alive. The drawer of the child’s objects or the postmortem photograph serves as a literal focus of the family, sublimating and giving body to the memory of the dead child.

1.6 Tearful Pleasures, Dear Treasures: Objects of/as Dead Children

Like the left behind toys that Molly Malone describes a mother treasuring, or the coffin key that Nehemiah Adams obsesses over, left behind objects often began to stand in for the child

herself. W. C. Bennett describes a mother who saved her dead child's shoes "With a tearful pleasure,/That dear little treasure,/and over them thought and wept!" (Bennett 6). This notion of "tearful pleasure" is key to the appeal of comfort books, and the tears that the mother sheds when she sees the shoes are "fond tears" (7)—not just tears of fondness, but tears of which she is fond, tears that are associated with pleasure, and with both the object and the child. Like other comfort book authors, the author of *Our Children's Rest* takes comfort not only in writing, but in the possession of her child's eternally beautiful corpse. As is apparently (and implausibly) typical of children in comfort books who died after horrible illnesses, her daughter remains beautiful in death: "Death tarried not till disease had wasted thee: thy chubby hands retain their dimples; the tint of health has not departed from thy cheeks; peacefully thou sleepest now, my beautiful, my own!" (43). Other objects quickly come to stand in for this corpse, though—the author includes an exhaustive, four-page long catalog of things that parents might save as memorials of their dead children, including not just dolls, toys, and books, but also ponies, pianos, and chairs at the dinner table (24-27). "Many a park," she assures us, "has its little unshod, unused pony, too early pensioned off for life" (24). An object as simple as an empty chair, in this formulation, can call forth tears, and allow the mourner to luxuriate in grief for their lost child. The author goes on to describe a father (presumably her husband) who treasures his daughter's chair after she dies. "Why does he look at the old chair? Why does he turn from it and wipe his eyes so frequently? Shall we move it, or get rid of it? No, no; a thousand times no; rather would that father part with half his hard-earned furniture than that old chair" (31). These objects were precious, the author explains, because when one saw them "The *past* was instantly *present*—the *far-off* so *very near*!" (23). The objects themselves do the same work of melodrama that the comfort books do, evoking emotion, memories, and tears. These relics of dead children return their possessors, not just to their time

with their deceased children, but to the moment of the child's death, allowing the scene of grief to be replayed again and again.

Like the toys, flowers, and other objects that often stood in for dead children, comfort books themselves could also work as physical embodiments of the dead child. These books are more interactive than the previously mentioned objects, both on the part of their creators and of their audience, but the interaction is still one-sided—author and reader can interact with the book (or even with versions of each other, through the book), but it cannot act on them. The physical comfort book itself could thus become a means of preserving and controlling the child, whether that child was your own or not. This is literalized in the work of W. C. Bennett (who wrote poems about both his living and dead children), who imagines his daughter literally becoming a comfort book. In his preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary republication of his poem “Baby May” in a book of collected works, Bennett writes of “Baby May:”

The time has come for celebrating her twenty-fifth birthday. She owns to reappearing in the holiday dress of the toned paper and ample margins of a Library edition, with a not unnatural glow of female satisfaction. Yet she is anxious not to separate herself from the many, her oldest friends. She retains for every-day wear her old apparel of a Shilling People's Edition. . . . Years since it was said she had had the curious fortune to be seen in almost every newspaper published in the English language. She has not only been quoted, she has been remembered” (*vii*).

While Bennett imagines his daughter as an adult, rather than an eternal infant, he transforms her imagined adult self into personified text, which, unlike a real adult daughter, is malleable, and remains under his control. “Baby May” has literally become text, has been allowed to grow up only as a bizarrely gendered and personified book, animated by her author-father. While the last sentence quoted above hints at one purpose of comfort books—to memorialize the dead—

it is clear that the book/woman described has little to do with any real “Baby May” Bennett. The book, instead, becomes a metaphor for the author’s continued possession of and power over his daughter. This possessiveness isn’t selfish. Bennet offers his version of May to the world, stressing her availability to both rich and poor—while those seeing this introduction are reading the poem in the new, finely-bound library edition, they are assured that it is still available to the masses as a “People’s Edition” (a cheaply printed book sold for a shilling or two). Baby May is everyone’s possession but her own.

Like Baby May, who has become a book, children in comfort books are pictured, to varying degrees, as objects, angels, and text—never as characters or people. Comfort books figure their child subjects as things that can be possessed, manipulated, and idolized, but can never have agency of their own. These figurations of children, and the texts and objects that represented them, continue to shape contemporary notions of children as pure and helpless, and of childhood as a separate—and, somehow, better—part of life. When contemporary parents wish that their children would never grow up, they are drawing, if unconsciously, on these narratives of parents whose most beloved children didn’t grow up, and instead remained treasured objects, forever.

2.0 “Young, Beautiful, and Good:” Dead “Girls” in Victorian Literature and Popular Media

The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street, in London, is staged to give Dickens’s fans the feeling that they are walking in the footsteps of the man himself, sharing the spaces in which he wrote the books that they love so much. This is despite the fact that Dickens actually only lived in the house for a little over two years, from 1837-1839, during much of which time he was traveling (something that those at the museum are strangely reticent about; the museum’s website tells visitors when the Dickenses moved in, but not when they left, and the general impression at the museum is that this place was Dickens’s home for far longer than it was). Although it is true that Dickens lived there when he became famous, and when he wrote (or finished) three of his most celebrated works (*Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *Nicholas Nickleby*), the thing that truly seems to mark his tenure in this specific house as an important time in Charles Dickens’s personal and professional life is that his seventeen-year-old sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, died there. Dickens’s great-great-grandson stresses the importance of this event in a blog post on the museum’s website, explaining that over the house hung “one very dark cloud—the sudden and unexpected death of the perfect and innocent Mary Hogarth—which totally devastated Charles, affecting him and his writing for the rest of his life.”^{xxiv} Mary Hogarth only lived in the house for two months before she died. Despite the fact that her tenure at 48 Doughty Street was that of a long vacation, Hogarth’s room is not only one of those that has been restored into a living space (rather than being used to hold artifacts or exhibits), but is framed as on par with Dickens’s study as a major reason to visit the house, and as a space of creation for the male author. Laid out on the feminine, pink-canopied bed is a long white nightgown, its emptiness inescapably

evoking Mary's missing body, but this absence is really the only trace of her presence there (the nightgown on the bed also brings to mind the famous illustration of the dead Little Nell lying in bed wearing a similar gown in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*). The walls are decorated with framed quotes about death from Dickens's novels and personal writings, and his will, which leaves the bulk of his estate to Ellen Ternan (Dickens's mistress), who would not even be born until two years after Mary's death, is displayed in this room—in short, the room has little to do with Mary, and is instead themed around Dickens's experiences with death.

Dickens's reaction to his sister-in-law's death mirrored, in some ways, the reactions of parents and family members to children's deaths discussed in the previous chapter. He mourned her excessively, and instantly canonized her in memory, writing to his old friend Thomas Beard that, since "the first burst of my grief has passed, and I can think and speak of her now, calmly and dispassionately." His calm and dispassionate assessment of his young sister-in-law? "I solemnly believe that so perfect a creature never breathed. I knew her inmost heart, and her real worth and value. She had no fault." (*Selected Letters* 34) .xxv He also memorialized Mary in fiction, basing "Little Nell" Trent, who would perhaps become the most famous dead Victorian child of all, on his memories of her. Dickens's imagined Mary, like the fictional Nell, embodied perfect girlhood, an angelic figure who died so pure as to be totally without fault—an impossible example, of course, for real, living (or dead) girls to live up to. Dickens echoed the advice of comfort book authors when he wrote to publisher William Bradbury, on the death of Bradbury's daughter in 1839, urging him to console himself with "the happiness of being always able to think of her as a young and promising girl, and not as one whome years and long sorrow and suffering had changed" (51). Dickens, who had, at the time, not yet lost a child of his own, assured Bradbury that he understood

his pain, since he, too, had once lost “ a young and lovely creature . . . in whom I had the fondest father's pride” (51).

Dickens's claim that he felt a “father's pride” in Mary Hogarth is somewhat troubled, however, by the fact that she was only seven years younger than him (and less than four years younger than his wife), and that, for most of their acquaintance, she had been considered enough of an adult to attend social events with, and later live with and help keep house for, the Dickenses. Rather than being completely unfatherly, though, Dickens's grief for Mary Hogarth troubles the ostensible “innocence” of the excessive mourning of parents for their dead children depicted in the previous chapter. If we take seriously Dickens's insistence that he's mourning the seventeen-year-old who lived with him for a year as his childish sister, or his daughter, what are we to make of the ways in which it often seems that he's mourning a lover? Dickens's relationship with Mary Hogarth lays bare something at the heart of the excessive mourning in comfort books that makes us uncomfortable—that the eternal possession celebrated by the parent-authors of those texts is not, really, that far removed from sexual possession. After all, it wouldn't have only been years of “sorrow and suffering” that had changed Bradbury's daughter (whom Dickens never names) or his beloved Mary Hogarth, had they lived, but years of pleasure—equally, if not more damaging, to the girl's potentials the eyes of the men who wanted them to stay forever their own. Perhaps Mary and Miss Bradbury would have suffered, but they also would have almost certainly gotten married, had sex, had children of their own, and each of these events would have removed them further from the father (or father-figure) who was (in Dickens case, probably only in his mind) once central to their affections.

Dickens's immediate reaction to Mary's death was to frame himself as her chief mourner. In his letter to Beard, he wrote that, “Thank God,” Mary “died in my arms, and the very last words

she whispered were of me” (33). Dickens would wear a ring that he took from Mary’s dead body for the rest of his life (Cockshut 135). He even contemplated stealing her body from the Hogarth family plot. Years after Mary’s death, Dickens wrote his friend (and later biographer) John Forster that, upon learning that Mary’s brother was soon to be buried beside her, he “thought of moving her to the catacombs, and saying nothing about it,” but then decided against it. “The desire to be buried next to her is as strong upon me now, as it was five years ago;” he says “and I *know* (for I don’t think there ever was love like that I bear her) that it will never diminish. I fear I can do nothing. Do you think I can? They would move her on Wednesday, if I resolved to have it done.” The fact that Dickens had gone so far as to discuss moving Mary’s body with someone who was willing to move it, and even arranged a date that it could be moved, shows that stealing his sister-in-law’s corpse was something that he was seriously considering as a viable option. As he told Forster, “I cannot bear the thought of being excluded from her dust” (*Selected Letters* 89). In short, Dickens seemed intent on making Mary his wife, after she was dead (we can only wonder what her sister Catherine, Dickens’s real, living wife, thought of all of this). His epitaph for Mary—“Young, beautiful, and good”—establishes her innocence as her main charm, and her death meant that he never had to act on his attraction to her, or see her grow up or old. Dickens borrowed this epitaph for Nell—“so young, so beautiful, so good”—cementing the fictional girl’s link with his sister-in-law (*The Old Curiosity Shop* 532).

When Dickens recreates Mary as Nell, who is barely pubescent, and who seems totally immune to sexuality, he freezes the girl in a state in which, he seems to insist, his feelings towards her *must* be innocent. As Kimberly Reynolds points out, however, the assumption that Nell’s youth renders all feelings towards her non-sexual ignores both the pedophilic implications of redirecting erotic energies from women towards children, and, to some degree, Nell’s actual age.^{xxvi} Nell is

thirteen at the beginning of the novel—it's neither shocking nor unreasonable when her brother plots to marry her off in a couple of years (in 1840, when the book was published, she's old enough that she's been able to legally consent to sex for at least a year).^{xxvii} The repeated insistence that Nell is a "child" (which is how she is referred to, almost exclusively, by both the narrator and almost everyone she meets throughout the novel) demands that the reader read her in a certain way, insisting on her innocence while she savvily navigates the dangerous streets, and men, of London.

This chapter takes up the question of who gets to be a "child" in death, and in life, and what that designation might mean—particularly when it is given to a female subject by a male author. What cultural constructions made it seem not only possible, but natural, that Dickens's feelings towards his sister-in-law could be, at the same time, those of a father, brother, and husband, and how did the insistence that the nearly eighteen-year-old Mary was a "child" play into how these feelings were read? Dickens's female "children" (including the adult, married Dora Copperfield) act here as indexes against which real Victorian women and girls could be judged, and found lacking, or models into which they could be awkwardly shoved, as suited the purpose of the male authors or reporters discussing them. In Dickens, the label of "child" enables a sort of violent possession that ends in death, keeping the female character both "pure," and in the author's power. In nonfictional Victorian reporting, similar tropes of childhood versus power and agency are deployed as shorthand, used by male reporters to slot female subjects into predetermined narratives. Contrasting Henry Mayhew and William Stead's depictions of young London sex workers, I think through the work done by the naming of these individuals as "children" or as "women," and the potential violence done by each. These narratives, I argue, influence "anti-sex-trafficking" discourses to this day. I end by turning to the story of "Sweet Fanny Adams," an actual

murdered child, whose death and life were not as neatly classifiable in these terms of pure, bourgeois girlhood as those of the fictional dead girls who define the Victorian era's ideal girlhood. The ghosts of Dickens's fictional dead girls haunt these depictions of actual women and girls (living and dead). If a fictional girl who is rendered eternally beautiful, young, and good through death represents ideal Victorian femininity, then it follows that all women are better beautiful, young, pure, and dead than aged and "impure."

Throughout this chapter, I trace different ways in which girls could be made into objects—through death, through writing, through apparently being bought and sold—and how childhood aided in that transformation. Mary and Nell's status as beautiful, possessable corpses mirrors that of children in comfort books like *Agnes Adams*, whose father gloats over the chastity-belt-like key to her coffin. While not all of the girls in this chapter are dead, they are all required to be corpse-like if they are to fit properly into a narrative that defines them as "children." The child can be a corpse to be celebrated and mourned, it can be an object to be literally bought and sold, but, as we see in the writings of Henry Mayhew and William Stead, what it absolutely cannot be is an actor, a person who can shape—or tell—their own story. To make women and teenaged girls into children, writers like Stead rely on an image of the feminine child as an object without interiority or agency. Unlike the psychoanalytical child-as-individual-history model that places supreme value on the child's interiority, the ideal Victorian girl was valuable only as an exterior, defined by the emptiness that James Kincaid locates at the heart of the modern constructions of both childhood and womanhood (*Erotic Innocence* 16). The beautiful corpse that Dickens fantasized about being buried with has the same amount of agency, in Stead's narrative, as the powerless virgins who are apparently being bought and sold in London every day without their consent. If

these girls will not do the decent thing and die, this narrative suggests, the author can still make them into ideal subjects by rendering them corpse-like, silent, and powerless.

2.1 “An age of beautiful deaths:” Death and the Ideal Victorian Woman

In *The Hour of Our Death*, historian Phillipe Ariès takes the title of a chapter on the nineteenth century shift in attitudes towards death from the journal of Coraly de Gaïx who, in 1825, wrote that “we live in an age of beautiful deaths” (409). For Ariès, the nineteenth-century association between death and beauty was the natural culmination of nearly 500 years over the course of which death became “beautiful and edifying” (307). While this “beautiful and edifying” death was at first reserved for saints and holy people, the beauty of death slowly became less spiritual, and more literal. By the late eighteenth century, according to Ariès, death began to be depicted as a healer and beautifier, rather than a ravager, and descriptions of death (already often infused with eroticism), become almost blatantly sexualized. “The dead body becomes in its turn an object of desire,” Ariès writes. “From now on, the first signs of death will no longer inspire horror and flight, but love and desire” (373-374). In the Victorian Era, this love and desire was particularly concentrated on the dead bodies of women and children. Their corpses, like those depicted in comfort books, were suddenly, instead of being uncanny and horrifying, apparently the most beautiful of objects—to repeat a quote from the previous chapter, “Few things appear so beautiful as a young child in its shroud” (Aimwell 107).

In the Victorian Era, the attraction to the beautiful corpse carried over into an attraction to death-like beauty in the living. These ideals were only for women—and only, really, applied to a certain class of women, who were expected to lead leisurely lives, and to be mainly useful for

ornamentation. In a culture in which women's main value was based on their purity, loyalty, and passivity, the beautiful corpse as ideal woman is logical. In fact, the symptoms of consumption (tuberculosis), a common and deadly disease in early nineteenth century Europe and America, both mirrored and helped develop an ideal of feminine beauty that has lingered for centuries: consumptive women were thin and pale, and often had flushed cheeks and bright eyes from the chronic, low fever that was symptomatic of the disease.^{xxviii} According to Bram Dijkstra, ill-health was not only supremely attractive in a woman, but "A healthy woman, it was often thought, was likely to be an 'unnatural' woman" (i.e., too masculine).^{xxix} These standards of beauty were so popular that Victorian etiquette manual author Sarah Stickney Ellis included advice to young girls about how to stay healthy in a section warning them *against* putting too much regard in beauty. Ellis literally feels the need to encourage her readers to "consider the advantages of health," rather than encouraging illness, as is apparently fashionable (187).^{xxx}

Ariès links this eroticization of death and illness to literal necrophilia, citing multiple novels, plays, journalistic accounts, texts warning about premature burial, and even doctors' writings from the eighteenth through early nineteenth centuries in which rejected lovers visit their beloved's tomb, either simply to sit by her corpse and cry, to kiss the corpse, or to rape it (369-380). I use the word "rape" here, which might not seem appropriate when applied to a dead body, because the theme of these stories is one of possession without need for consent. These men's actions are driven, not by necrophilia, but by a desire to possess (either sexually or emotionally) women who refused them in life. In these stories, men are able to gain access to the bodies of the women who refused their advances (because the woman is dead and can no longer say no), often by paying off or enlisting the sympathies of a male religious official or gravedigger. Echoing the ideas of death as preservation seen in comfort books, the woman is inevitably preserved in her

beauty (somehow), and is now able to be possessed more surely than the man could ever have possessed her in life. This possession is both physical and emotional, since some of the men come to the graves regularly to mourn and elicit pity from others, as they might have had the woman been their spouse. This trope even occurs in *Wuthering Heights*, when Heathcliff convinces the sexton who is digging Cathy's husband's grave to uncover her coffin, as well, so that he can see her one last time (despite Cathy's having been dead for eighteen years, her face remains the same).^{.xxxix} He then bribes the sexton to remove one side of her coffin, and to bury him beside her when he dies, with his coffin similarly altered, so that they can "dissolve" together (249). Heathcliff's desire to be buried with Cathy is also about possession, specifically his possessing her in eternity instead of her husband, Edgar Linton—he is delighted by the prospect that "by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which!" (248).^{.xxxix} While Ariès's accounts of men digging up women to "dissolve" with them are mostly earlier than the Victorian era (and many of them may be fictionalized), it would be wrong to consider this sort of violent, nonconsensual melding of bodies after death to be something entirely out of melodrama or horror, or even something entirely relegated to the past—Hugh Hefner, in 2017, was buried next to Marilyn Monroe, a woman whom he had never met, and with whom his relationship in life consisted entirely of publishing nude photographs of her that she did not want to be public, without her consent, and without paying her. After buying the crypt beside Monroe's in 1992, Hefner explained that "spending eternity next to Marilyn is too sweet to pass up."^{.xxxix} We know, too, that the fictional Heathcliff was not the only Victorian gentleman who, at least, gave serious thought to being buried beside a woman with whom he was obsessed without her consent—Charles Dickens's wish to "not be excluded from [Mary's Hogarth's] dust" is almost identical to Heathcliff's desire to "dissolve" with his foster sister, Cathy.

The beauty and desirability of dead bodies (especially female bodies) is apparent in the comfort books discussed in the previous chapter, in which parents repeatedly describe their dead children in terms of their apparently beautiful, peaceful bodies. It's also apparent in Victorian fiction and art—many Victorian paintings (perhaps most notably Millais's *Ophelia*) depict beautiful, dead or dying women and girls. As Dijkstra points out, many Victorian paintings that ostensibly depict sleeping women also look remarkably like paintings of dead women.^{xxxiv} Dead women and girls can also be transformed into art—sometimes literally, as evidenced by the extreme popularity of postmortem photographs during the era, sometimes more figuratively, as with the comfort books discussed in the last chapter, or when child poet Marjory Fleming's mother wrote of her daughter's corpse that she had never “[beheld] so beautiful an object. It resembled the finest waxwork.”^{xxxv} This literal objectification also appears in Victorian literature. Robert Browning takes this notion of possession through death to its horrific conclusion in his poems “My Last Duchess” (1842), in which a Duke finally masters his beautiful wife by killing her (but keeping a portrait of her beauty that he can display as he likes), and “Porphyria's Lover” (1836) in which a man murders his married (or otherwise entangled) lover to preserve “That moment she was mine, mine, fair/Perfectly pure and good,” and then embraces her beautiful corpse, apparently just as beautiful as—and certainly far more appealingly passive and possessable than—the living Porphyria ever was.

As seen in the previous chapter, writing was perhaps the most effective way to possess and control a dead person eternally. Individuals' lives and deaths could be given new meaning, without their input or consent, and the dead person could be frozen forever in this new form, through writing. Young women were particularly appealing subjects for this type of possession, because their passive, beautiful corpses cemented ideals of childhood and femininity as without agency,

unable to give either meaningful consent or refusal. Indeed, it seems the logical conclusion that both children and women, in their most ideal forms, should be corpses. The dead body literalizes objectification, becomes only an object. The ways in which the childhood of adult or older teenaged characters who die is often insisted upon plays into this dual ideal—a dead woman is much less romantic than a dead girl.

2.2 Charles Dickens, Mary Hogarth, and Possession Through Death (and Writing)

Like the parents whose dead children remained theirs forever through written comfort books, Dickens bound his sister-in-law's life up in his after her death, ensuring that she continue to exist only through her apparent importance to him and his art. Like Nell Trent, whose complicated and interesting life story becomes “the story of good Miss Nell who died” when her old friend Kit tells it to his children (544), Mary Hogarth's life, historically, seems to stop and end with her death, a “beautiful, good,” virginal girl who existed only so that she could die, suddenly, in Charles Dickens's arms on May 7, 1837. The most that has been written about Mary herself is a ten-page “Interlude” on “The Girls Hogarth” in Lillian Nayder's excellent biography of Catherine Hogarth Dickens. Drawing on primary sources including Catherine's own letters, Nayder's biography seeks to decenter Charles Dickens from the story of his wife's life, and to challenge the prevailing narrative (created by Dickens, who wanted to justify his decision to leave her for a woman their daughter's age) of Catherine as a “helpmate gone bad” (Nayder 1).^{xxxvi} For Nayder, Catherine's “relationship to Dickens need not be what scholars have claimed it is: the rationale for any consideration of her experiences,” and the popular critical assumption “that Catherine's life has meaning only insofar as it illuminates that of Dickens” is flawed, both factually

and morally (1). No such biographical project is possible for Mary Hogarth, who left behind few surviving letters. The portrait which Nayder paints of Mary, however, relying on the few letters by and about her that weren't written by Dickens, shows a vivacious, intelligent, attractive young woman, whose "glances" one admirer compared to those of a falcon (82), and who was "often irreverent or arch in her dealings with men" (85)—the most perfect creature that ever breathed, maybe, but certainly not the sexless, too-good-for-this-world angel who she becomes in Dickens's letters and novels. More importantly, perhaps, Nayder also shows that, rather than being the perfect foil to Catherine that Dickens pictured her as after her death, his co-conspirator who agreed with him about her sister's apparently innumerable flaws, Mary was actually quite close with her sister, and, while fond of Dickens, seemed to view him only in relation to Catherine. If, for Dickens, Mary lived with and existed for him, serving as his muse, reader, and wife in all but one capacity, Mary apparently saw things quite differently. According to Nayder, while Dickens wrote that Mary "was keeping house for *him*" when she stayed with the Dickenses after the birth of their first child, Mary's own letters to her cousin show that she understood herself to be staying with her sister, to help her out (84). Mary wasn't there to take care of Dickens, but to help ease Catherine's burdens—of which taking care of Dickens was one. Mary lived with the Dickenses for only about a year, and Dickens seems to have exaggerated the importance and intimacy of their relationship (perhaps in his own mind) after her death, certainly from Mary's side. Although Dickens wrote to friends and his wife about his constant dreams of Mary (who at one point literally appears as the Madonna),^{xxxvii} Mary "esteemed her brother-in-law," as Nayder bitingly remarks, but "she neither dreamed of nor worshipped him" (83).

The ultimate cruelty in all of this, of course, is that Dickens's obsessive mourning over Mary's death reclaimed it as *his* tragedy, ignoring the feelings of Catherine, a woman who had just

lost her life-long best friend and confidante, and who would, for years afterwards, be compared to and haunted by her husband's fictionalized memories of this woman, whom she had known much better than he had. Dickens's cooption of Mary Hogarth's memory not only amounted to a sort of posthumous assault on a woman with whom he was not romantically attached in life, but was also a form of emotional abuse towards that woman's sister, his wife. Nevertheless, Dickens was a prolific, famous, and well-respected author, and his versions of Mary Hogarth are the ones that persist today. In death, Dickens managed to possess Mary in a way that he never could have in the real world, not only coopting her personal history and making it his own, but reimagining and reclaiming her as characters in his fictional texts.

Dickens's reimaginings of Mary took two forms. The first, and most well-known, is that of ideal dead child Little Nell, which I have touched on briefly, and will discuss in more detail shortly. The presence of Mary (and of her surviving younger sister Georgina, with whom Dickens lived for nearly thirty years, even after his separation from his wife, her sister) can also be detected in Dickens's positive depictions of quasi-incestuous relationships, specifically marriage to sister-figures, or engagements to two actual sisters. Dickens's obsession with stealing Catherine Hogarth's sisters from her took place at a time when they were also, legally, considered his sisters—after leaving Catherine, Dickens lived with the unmarried Georgina as his housekeeper, but part of why this was possible was because she was not legally considered a potential sexual partner for him. Even if Catherine were dead, Dickens would not have been able to marry any of her sisters, because marriage to one's sister-in-law was considered incest.^{xxxviii} Nevertheless, Dickens often imagines a world in which such prohibitions are subtly subverted. In *David Copperfield* (1850), marriages between people who were raised to think of each other as brother and sister are not just unproblematic, but are the best sort of marriage. In fact, most of the

relationships between men and women in *David Copperfield* at least *feel* incestuous—“Lil Em’ly’s” cousin Ham, who grew up with and helped raised her, is in love with her, and her uncle/adoptive father’s feelings towards her seem hardly less pure. The much-admired Dr. Strong watched his wife Annie grow up, from the time she was six months old, and even helped to raise her (199), and she refers to him at one point “my husband and father” (538).^{xxxix} Then there’s Agnes and her father, to whom she acts as both wife and mother, but never daughter, and, of course, David and Agnes, whom David repeatedly insists is like a sister to him—even after deciding that he is in love with her, David refers to Agnes as his sister (691). Every mother and son relationship—David and his mother, Uriah and Mrs. Heep, and, especially, Steerforth and his mother—also seems almost pathologically intimate. However, this sort of incestuous marriage is depicted as not just normal, but positive—one could avoid it by, like Em’ly and Steerforth, partnering with someone outside of their “station,” or, like David and Dora, by marrying someone that they did not know well, but neither is depicted as a wise choice. That these marriages are not just between “siblings,” but between older men and girls that they raised from infants, emphasizes the blurring of familial bonds and age categories suggested by Dickens’s imagining of Mary as at the same time his sister, his daughter, and his wife.

In Dickens’s “Christmas Book” *The Battle of Life: A Love Story* (1846), he makes the marriage to sisters aspect more apparent, telling the story of two sisters, Marion and Grace, who are in love with the same man, Alfred. The younger, Marion, to whom he is engaged, feels so guilty about keeping him from her sister that she disappears for six years, giving her sister and her fiancé time to marry and have a child. The couple’s marriage revolves around the absent Marion—they marry on her birthday, name their daughter after her, and talk about her constantly. While Marion had initially pretended that she ran away to marry another man, she makes it clear, upon

her return, that she did not. In a strangely blunt speech, Marion assures her sister (and, perhaps more importantly, her sister's husband) that she is still a virgin: "But as I left here, so I have returned. My heart has known no other love, my hand has never been bestowed apart from it, I am still your maiden sister: unmarried, unbetrothed: your own old loving Marion, in whose affection you exist alone, and have no partner, Grace!" (166).^{xl} Alfred thus gets to possess both sisters—Grace, who, the text has always implied, will be a better wife, anyway, since she had to be like a mother to Marion as a child, and the best wife is a mother, and the still-virginal Marion, who announces her intention to live with them. While Dickens does suggest, in an odd postscript which suddenly shifts to what appears to be Dickens's own first-person perspective, that a personified "Time" told him that Marion went on to marry the man who everyone thought she married in the first place, he also acknowledges that "Time confuses facts occasionally," and he "hardly know[s] what weight to give to his authority" (175).^{xli} Thus, how the story ends is really dependent on which fantasy the reader prefers—that of both sisters being happily married, or of both sisters living together with the same man, with whom they are both in love, and who loves both of them.^{xlii}

According to some rumors, when Georgina Hogarth decided to continue to live with Charles Dickens after he kicked her sister out, there was enough talk about her and Dickens having an affair that she decided to obtain a certificate of virginity to prove that the rumors were false (Nayder 203). This probably isn't true, but the rumor that Dickens and his sister-in-law were having an affair also may have missed the point—for Dickens, who referred to Hogarth as "the Virgin" (203), having this sort of virginal, pseudo-wife, plus his actual wife (with whom he had ten children), appears to have been essential. One sister (first Mary, and then Georgina), to him, became the Madonna, the other the whore. He appears to have considered Mary (or her ghost, since he only lived with Mary the person for a year), more of a life-partner than his wife, but,

crucially, she was a wife-like figure who remained an untouchable virgin even while they lived together, first, ostensibly, protected by her relationship with his wife, which rendered any sexual union between them legally incestuous, and, finally (and perhaps mercifully quickly, for Dickens) more securely protected by her death. She remained, like Dora Copperfield, his “child-wife,” but one who was all the more precious because she had never disappointed him, either by, like Dora, being a bad housekeeper, or by ceasing to be a virgin. In contrast, Catherine Dickens’ sexual experience was written on her body by the births of ten children (and at least two miscarriages).

This freezing of the woman/child who is on the cusp of sexual maturity, but not yet a mother, is crucial. For Dickens’s Dora Copperfield, a woman who asks her husband to refer to her as his “child-wife” (527-528), death confirms her eternal childhood, cementing her, *forever*, as David’s child-wife (which he calls her, almost exclusively, through the rest of the novel), despite the fact that she is an adult who is married and has been pregnant, and despite the fact that David now has a new, more approximately adult (but much less charming) wife. Conveniently, Dora dies after a miscarriage, and David never has to deal with the threat that “a baby-smile upon her breast might change my child-wife to a woman” (572). Dora herself apparently agrees that she is better dead, since otherwise she may begin to bore David: “as years went on,” she says, David “would have wearied of his child-wife” (628-629). “It is better as it is” (629). As in *The Battle of Life*, Dora even blesses David’s second marriage, leaving Agnes with “a last charge” to marry David after she is dead (709), and David apparently sees her spirit shining from Agnes’s eyes: “O, Agnes, even out of thy true eyes, in that same time, the spirit of my child-wife looked upon me, saying it was well; and winning me, through thee, to tenderest recollections of the Blossom that had withered in its bloom!” (707).

Claudia Nelson argues that, while childish men in Victorian literature are often depicted as at least, socially deviant (Captain Hook, Dorian Grey), at worst, literal monsters (Frankenstein, Mr. Hyde, and, for Nelson, Dracula) childish women like “Dora and her literary sisters not infrequently represent an ideal type” (72).^{xliii} For Nelson, girl-like women and woman-like girls are permissible, and even appealing, because girls are never able to be either adults or children in the way that men are. Insisting on these women’s childishness, then, does not deny, but rather increases, their desirability. While in Dora’s case this is complicated—Dora is extremely desirable, but she is also a bad wife—Dora’s childishness is depicted as regrettable, rather than pathological. Although her childishness makes Dora a bad choice for a life-partner, that doesn’t mean that it’s bad that David married her, just that it’s good that she had the decency to die so that he could remarry. Nelson cites an 1878 abridged American version of *David Copperfield*, which focuses on Dora, and is called *The Child-Wife*: “The character of Dora in this little volume, although so lovable in its simplicity and childishness, teaches the great truth that a character so unformed, fails to satisfy the companion who has higher views of the duties and trials of life” (Nelson 72). Despite her ultimate failure as a wife—to properly grow up himself, David must leave her behind—Dora is nevertheless the focus of this adaptation, not David, or David’s second wife, the more appropriately “adult” Agnes, implying that Dora holds an appeal that those characters do not. Dora certainly appealed to Dickens himself, who considered her one of the best characters he ever wrote, and named his daughter—who, appropriately, died as an infant—after her. Like the two sisters in *The Battle of Life*, Dora’s death enables David (Dickens’s most autobiographical character) to have two wives: one who will take care of him and his household, bear him children, and, presumably, grow old with him, and another who remains young, beautiful, and childless forever.

2.3 “The story of good miss Nell who died”

If Dora Copperfield’s death freezes her in the first bloom of sexuality, Nell Trent seems to have never once thought of sexuality or romance in all of her fourteen-plus years.^{xliv} She never shows any interest in romance or marriage, or any fear of sexual danger. She appears to be totally oblivious to Kit’s obvious romantic feelings for her, and never shows any sign of feeling in danger from the many men whom she meets on the streets (including the narrator of the first chapter, whom she approaches in a back-alley and asks to take her home). When Daniel Quilp (jokingly?) suggests that she marry him, she “seemed to not understand him,” a lack of understanding that implies that Nell is particularly dense when it comes to such matters, since Quilp’s question isn’t vague—he asks her how she’d like to be “Mrs. Quilp” (44). Yet the idea that either Nell’s youth or her apparent sexual innocence actually prevent her from being an erotic object is questionable, especially considering that youth, innocence, and even the appearance of deathly illness were considered highly desirable qualities in Victorian culture. In fact, the very qualities that make Nell so attractive are bound up inextricably in both her youth, and the fact that she is destined to die. When Quilp (the only character who openly acknowledges her as a possible sexual object) compliments Nell by saying that she has “such blue veins and such a transparent skin” (73), he’s establishing his villainy by his refusal to see Nell as non-sexual, but not by his attraction to corpse-like beauty, which only serves to establish his sexual preferences of those of a typical Victorian gentleman. Dicken’s insistence that the teenaged Nell is a “child” (his narrator refers to her, almost exclusively, as “the child”) is in some ways a slight of hand, covering both her sexual vulnerability and his own compliancy (and apparent pleasure) in putting this girl whom he’s created into threatening situations. His insistence that Nell is a “child” also works, not just as an insistence of her purity, but of Dickens’ own—if she is a child, then his feelings towards her (or the young

woman on which she was partially based) must be pure. At the same time, Dickens, tellingly, did not create an ideal girl child who was eight, ten, or twelve—Nell is older than Paul Dombey, Tiny Tim, or Oliver Twist. At fourteen, Nell's age means that her childishness has to be read as at least partially socially imposed, since she's physically and legally sexually mature. Nell's status as a female "child" on the brink of adulthood establishes her as the most endangered and desirable type of child, and cements the desirability of her death, before, any moment now, her dubious "childhood" becomes impossible to claim.

Nell's death confirms her total purity—Nell's own knowledge of the fact that she is not going to live to adulthood, and her apparent desire for death, means that she has no need of or interest in the type of romantic entanglements that another girl her age might have. Instead, Nell seems erotically invested in death. She spends most of the last two hundred pages of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (after she has apparently recovered from her illness) thinking and talking about death with anyone who will listen to her and wandering around a graveyard (Robert Pattison remarks that "she can no more pass a graveyard than an alcoholic can a bar").^{xlv} Her obsession with death borders on the morbid—when a friendly schoolteacher offers her a home in a church building, remarking that it is a "peaceful place to live in," Nell responds, enthusiastically: "Oh yes . . . and learn to die in!" (380). Nell's death is similar to those of her American counterparts, Eva St. Claire (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* 1852) and Beth March (*Little Women* 1869), who get sick, apparently recover somewhat, talk (cheerfully and repeatedly) about how they are going to die, and then die. The fact that death appears to be the only thing that Nell desires both removes her from the realm of normative sexuality and paradoxically bolsters her attractiveness.

While it's impossible to know what Victorian readers were reading Dicken's novels for (and, certainly, different Victorian readers were reading for different things), Nell's centrality to

the text, and to the Victorian cult of the child, is undeniable. Nell is one of Dickens's most memorable characters not just because she is beautiful or innocent or good, but because she dies, preserving all of those qualities at their height. This is even the case within the diegesis of the story: when, in the novel's final chapter, Nell's former admirer Kit tells her story to his children, Dickens tells us that the children would "often gather round him of a night and beg him to tell again that story of good Miss Nell who died" (544). Nell's greatest achievement, in Kit's story (and maybe in Dickens's), is dying. Readers' interest in Nell certainly seem to have centered around her death—at the time of the novel's publication in serial form American readers allegedly gathered on docks in New York to call out to British passengers and ask them, not how the plot was advancing or how the fictional Nell was faring, but simply "Is Nell dead?" (Preston *xiii*).^{xlvi} The question reveals both anxiety and excitement at the thought of the dead Nell. Dickens's narrator seems to luxuriate over the fact that Nell is dead, making sure to point it out no less than four times over the course of two pages, always in the same stark phrase: "She was dead" (528-529). There is something pleasurable in the phrase's simplicity, which is offset by the descriptions of Nell's body that mirror those of other objects of the "beautiful death" in this time period—death has cured all of her pain, and she is more beautiful than ever before, looking completely at peace and full of "perfect happiness" (529). The illustration that goes along with this death scene recalls an earlier image of Nell sleeping, except that the corpse looks more peaceful, and, that, in death, unlike in life, Nell has a smile on her face. Nell's corpse is also noticeably more mature than her sleeping body is in the earlier illustration, showing a sexual maturation that the text insists on eliding.

When contemporary reader Fitzjames Stephen suggested that Nell's death scene was distasteful, it was because of the embodied, erotic quality of Nell's death. Dickens, Stephen wrote,

“gloats over the girl’s death as if it delighted him; he looks at it . . . touches, tastes, smells, and handles it as if it was some savoury dainty which could not be too fully appreciated” (quoted in Preston *xiv*). This idea that reading/writing Nell’s death scene is in some way equivalent to handling her body suggests both one reason for the appeal of such scenes, and a challenge to Dickens’ insistence that Nell is, to him, only a “child”—or that the child’s youth renders her totally sexless.

Dickens’s own letters to friends describing the experience of writing *The Old Curiosity Shop* seem to confirm Stephen’s suspicions about the author’s feelings regarding the fictional Nell’s death. Certainly, writing about Nell’s death consumed much of Dickens’s time and thought, and, according to his letters, was basically as painful to him as if Nell were a real person—yet Dickens’s repeated insistence of the painfulness of the topic suggests that it was also pleasurable, and that he wanted his friends to share in his pain/pleasure. So obsessed was he with this fictional death, in fact, that biographer Claire Tomalin suggests that Dickens was annoyed when a friend’s sorrow over the death of his own daughter “upstaged” Dickens’s whining about Little Nell (115).^{xlvii} Dickens may, like comfort book authors, have gained some sort of catharsis in rewriting Mary Hogarth’s death, but he also seems, as Stephen suggests, to “gloat over” it, to be “delighted” by his role in the creation of this exquisitely painful moment. Dickens wrote to Forster he wouldn’t “recover for a long time” from Nell’s death, and that it “is such a very painful thing to me, that I really cannot express my sorrow” (*Selected Letters* 74). To actor William Macready, he wrote “I am slowly murdering that poor child, and grow wretched over it. It wrings my heart. Yet it must be.” To his illustrator, he wrote that he was “breaking my heart over this story, and cannot bear to finish it,” but finish it he did.^{xlviii} These statements are odd, of course, considering that Dickens *didn’t* have to “murder” Nell. Narratively, her death makes the most sense, but the narrative was

completely in Dickens's control. Dickens's letters both claim and deny responsibility for the fictional death that is apparently causing him so much grief—he seems to boast about murdering Nell, then say that “it must be.” Dickens's “murder” of Nell becomes less of a crime because it cannot be helped—she is destined to die.

Tomalin sums up Nell's appeal (perhaps unfairly, perhaps not) by saying that “Nell herself has no character beyond sweetness, goodness, and innocence, which endeared her to male readers” (113). If her lack of character, purity, and desire for death are what make Nell such an appealing figure, they also make her a very dangerous one. The fact that Nell expresses a repeated desire to die removes the horror that would otherwise be present in the tale of a young girl who loses her home because of her grandfather's gambling, is forced to live on the streets amongst people who abuse her in various ways (although people are also, more often than not, unrealistically kind to her), and finally becomes so weak and ill that even a new, comfortable home life cannot save her from death. Rather than a call to help girls like Nell, the implication is that Nell would have died whether someone helped her or not—that she was simply one of the special breed of children identified by Fredrick Faber who “like to die.”^{xlix} Nell's inclusion in this group also makes her seem younger than she is, since most of the children written about by comfort book authors like Faber are half Nell's age, or younger.

The complete erasure of sexuality from the teenaged Nell's story not only infantilizes her, but also assists in the erasure of the “childishness” of real girls like Nell, who, once forced onto the streets, often made their livings as sex workers. The ways in which this definition of childhood affected actual young people are evident in how Victorian journalists classified “women” and “children” based on class and perceived sexual availability and agency, especially in accounts of young women who engaged in sex work. If the perfect woman/girl/child is both pure and dead,

then a sinister logic begins to emerge: better for young women to die than to be in situations which may threaten their “purity.”

2.4 Young, Beautiful, and Bad: Henry Mayhew’s Women who “Will Not Work”

Ten years after the publication of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, in 1851, Henry Mayhew published the first volume of his seminal journalistic work *London Labour and the London Poor*, a series of books that claimed to present “a photograph of life as actually spent by the lower classes of the Metropolis.”ⁱ Like Dickens, Mayhew is perhaps most famous for his creation of a little girl, based on a real girl whose story has been lost to history, except through Mayhew’s telling.ⁱⁱ Both known for using their apparently “realistic” descriptions of street life as calls for reform, Mayhew and Dickens sought to gain their readers’ sympathies for the impoverished children of London. Dickens’s most sympathetic “street children” though, come from genteel backgrounds (even homeless orphan Oliver Twist is revealed to be the child of a wealthy gentleman), and are only temporarily impoverished. Mayhew’s unnamed “little watercress girl” is more clearly an actual “street child” than the always genteel Little Nell, and Mayhew is not quite sure how to fit her into an ideal narrative of childhood that, really, only applies to the middle and upper classes. He opens his description of the girl by saying that she, “although only eight years of age, had entirely lost all childish ways, and was, indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman,” even going so far as to claim that the girl’s unnatural womanliness is written on her body: “her little face,” according to Mayhew, “was wrinkled where the dimples ought to have been” (151). Nevertheless, he attempts to fit her, by force, if necessary, into the figure of the Victorian little girl, throughout a conversation that must have, at times, been ridiculous—Mayhew’s notions of what childhood *should* be are so

clearly at odds with those of his interview subject that it's often hard to imagine their conversation, as he insists on asking the girl questions about toys, games, and sweets, treating her apparent pride at saving her money to buy clothes instead of wasting it on candy as tragic, rather than taking it at face value. The girl herself is ambivalent about childhood, explaining to Mayhew that "I aint a child, and I shan't be a woman till I'm twenty, but I'm past eight, I am" (152). Acknowledging the ways in which she does not fit into an exclusive narrative of childhood defined by access to play, candy, and freedom from responsibility, the watercress girl recognizes herself as being in an odd liminal space—she can't be a woman for many years, but she has never really been a "child," either. While this is a tragedy for Mayhew and his readers (with whom the girl's story was immensely popular), the girl herself resists Mayhew's attempts to force her into a narrative of melodrama. The trappings of bourgeois childhood are faintly ridiculous to her—she doesn't *like* sweets, and doesn't see why she would waste her hard-earned money on them.

If Mayhew was intent on painting the "little watercress girl" as a tragically ill-used child, he was unwilling to extend the same dubious privilege to the girls of whom he wrote in the fourth volume of *London Labour and the London Poor* (1862). Published a decade after the Watercress Girl's story was first heard, Mayhew's treatise on *Those That Will Not Work* focuses largely on prostitution, which he defines as "putting a woman's charms to vile uses" (36). According to Mayhew, "Literally every woman who yields to her passions and loses her virtue is a prostitute" (215). Mayhew's views of prostitution are extreme and misogynistic (probably even for his time—while it's true that "fallen" women were seen as "ruined" in polite society, it's also true that they often went on to work as servants and to marry, and that the people who they worked for or married probably did not literally consider them prostitutes). However, Mayhew's recognition that woman may *choose* sex work as a way to make a living acknowledges an agency which stories of women

being raped, seduced and abandoned, and otherwise tricked into prostitution deny. Mayhew's recognition of his subjects' agency, however, also prevents him from seeing young sex workers as "children," in the same way that their overt sexuality does.

I use the anachronistic term "sex work" throughout this chapter because it seems to me to better capture the attitude that many of the young women interviewed by Mayhew and Stead took towards this type of work—it was something that they could do for money when they needed to, but was not, for most of them, an identity in the way that the derogatory "prostitute" might suggest.^{lii} Sex work activist Carol Leigh, who coined the term in the late 1970s, explains that "sex work" "acknowledges the work we do rather than defines us by our status," and avoids the implication of shame in euphemistic terms such as "prostitute" (230).^{liii} "Sex work" also does important work to place those engaged in it in the same conversation as those engaged in other forms of labor, such as domestic work, factory work, or farm work, that may have been available to these women.

The agency that Mayhew assigns to the sex workers whom he interviews is obviously complicated—many of them may not have actually had a choice about their line of work. Despite the fact that the first interview that Mayhew cites is with a girl named Ellen who describes being groomed for years by a man who would visit her at her home in the country, and who, finally, once she was thirteen (and legal), brought her to London, where she was drugged, raped, and forced into prostitution, he does not spend much time thinking through forced prostitution, or causes for prostitution that may amount to coercion. Mayhew finds the story "revolting," but suggests (probably rightly) that "it may be a rare occurrence," gives it only about a page of space, and does not seem particularly interested in the girl's age. Repeatedly, when sex workers suggest that they were kidnapped, raped, or otherwise tricked into sex work, Mayhew suggests that they are lying.

“Loose women generally throw a veil over their early life,” according to Mayhew, “and you seldom, if ever, meet with a woman who is not either a seduced governess or a clergyman’s daughter – not that there is a word of truth in such an allegation – but there is a peculiar whim to say so” (217). Perhaps one reason that Mayhew isn’t troubled by the youth of many of the sex workers whom he interviews is because their profession is so at odds with childhood to him that he doesn’t, actually, believe that they are particularly young: in one odd moment, he describes a young woman as “not more than twenty-three; she told us her age was twenty, but statements of a similar nature, when made by this class, are never to be relied upon” (220). Like Dickens, Mayhew uses age here to denote innocence—or lack thereof. If Nell *must* be innocent because she is fourteen, rather than seventeen, Mayhew’s sureness that this girl is *not* innocent means that she also must be older than she claims.

While Mayhew is skeptical of the idea that anyone can work in the sex industry and be happy, he does allow sex workers who are content in their chosen profession to speak. One twenty-three-year-old woman tells him that she is “not tired of what I am doing. . . . I rather like it,” and when he asks her what she “think[s] will become of [her],” she laughs at him, calling it “an absurd question”—“I could marry to-morrow if I liked” (217). Another young woman backs this up, telling him that, although they “may now and then die of consumption,” sex workers “often do marry, and well, too; why shouldn’t we, we are pretty, we dress well, and we can talk and insinuate ourselves into the hearts of men by appealing to their passions and their senses” (219). Mayhew assumes that these women are sinners, but not that they are powerless—a distinction that both recognizes their agency and makes it impossible for him to view any of them as children.

Tellingly, Mayhew gives the names of all of the sex workers who he interviews—apparently their real names, since Ellen specifies in her story that she “has no other” name,

apparently in response to Mayhew's questioning. This is in stark contrast to his treatment of the nameless "little watercress girl." If names being changed or left out to protect the innocent applies here, then this makes sense in line with Mayhew's politics. The watercress girl's namelessness also allows her act as a cypher for *all* street children, though, to fit more neatly into the category of the Child that, as her narrative makes clear, neither she nor Mayhew is actually quite comfortable with her membership in.

Mayhew refers to sex workers interchangeably as "women" and "girls," regardless of age, and the appellation of "girl," here, appears to have more to do with their social status than their youth. He very rarely remarks upon the youth of his subjects, even when the ages that they give him are quite young, and even though they, like Ellen, often describe themselves as having been "children" when they were first "seduced."^{iv} He refers to one girl as a "child," in the past tense, while condescendingly relating a story of how her stupidity led to her entering sex work (221), and he suggests that we can imagine nothing "more dreadful than kidnapping a confiding unsuspecting girl, in some cases we may say child, without exaggeration, for a girl of fifteen is not so far removed from" being legally protected as a child (271). This girl of fifteen is hypothetical, though—while Mayhew acknowledges that kidnapping an unsuspecting girl *would* be dreadful, he doesn't acknowledge that this is something that has happened to any of the girls whom he interviews. No actual child prostitutes exist in Mayhew's work, because they couldn't—regardless of age, both the sexuality and the apparent agency of the women whom he interviews remove them from Mayhew's conception of childhood.

Mayhew does refer to one young sex worker as "childish" (though not as a child). Anille, a French girl who was apparently tricked into coming to England "at a very juvenile age" (again, not "as a child"), was fourteen when she became a sex worker, and apparently died "some years"

after that. The description of her death is not from Mayhew's own memory—the story was related to him by Anille's surgeon—but we can assume that Mayhew embellished or altered it as he saw fit to suit his themes. When Anille “at last [fell] a victim to a contagious disorder,” Mayhew tells us, “She bore her illness with childish impatience” There is a moment when it seems like Anille will have the sort of romantic death that might redeem her by fitting her into a traditional narrative of childhood death. Nell-like, she tells her doctor that “I am cheerful to-day. May I not recover; I suffer no pain.” According to the doctor/Mayhew, however, “her looks belied her words; her features were frightfully haggard and worn; her eyes, dry and bloodshot, had almost disappeared into their sockets” (214) Rather than the beautiful dead body that signifies the pure, dead child, Anille is aged, visibly sick, and frightening to behold. The girl cries out, “an expression of intense suffering contracted her emaciated features,” and then “her soul glided impalpably away, and she was a corpse” (215). That the dead girl *is* the corpse, rather than the soul that glided away, suggests that the young sex worker's body is ultimately unable to unite the spiritual and the bodily in the way that Little Nell can—she's just a corpse. Nell is, still, her beautiful, smiling body, but she is certainly never a corpse. “She was a corpse” reads like a shocking corruption of Dickens's repeated “she was dead”—while Nell's death is beautiful and romantic, both transcendent and bodily, the death of this real girl cannot fit into such a narrative. Ultimately, Anille is never a child. At fourteen, she is a “girl,” after that, she is a “prostitute,” and, “some years later,” after her soul has abandoned her, she is a corpse.

2.5 Childhood and Ignorance: W. T. Stead and “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”

Mayhew’s understanding of childhood and sex work as incompatible is in line with the eternally pure childhood depicted by Dickens and in comfort books. Two decades later, however, William Stead employed the same narratives of childhood in his writing about London sex workers, but to opposite ends. Stead expands the narrative of the pure, lost street child embodied by Dickens’s Little Nell to include child prostitutes, insisting that sex workers were not “bad,” but helpless. Stead focuses on young sex workers, claiming that a large part of the sex trade in London is in teenaged “virgins”^{iv} who are apparently “too young in fact to understand the nature of the crime of which they are unwilling victims”^{lvi} (a claim that is debunked by Judith Walkowitz in more detail in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*).^{lvii} In direct contrast to Mayhew, Stead refers to his subjects exclusively as “children,” even though some of them are in their twenties. Stead’s five-part article, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” was written to aid in the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which, in addition to raising the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen, granted lawmakers and police further control over women and girl’s sexuality and, most famously, outlawed all sexual acts between consenting men.^{lviii} Stead worked to reframe all sex work as trafficking by reframing all sex workers as children, incapable of consenting to sex or to work (a dangerous discourse that still dominates anti-trafficking rhetoric today). Stead frames sex work as always nonconsensual, and those who work in it as better off dead, sinisterly relying on the image of the pure, dead child as a role model whose example his child “prostitutes” would have done well to follow. Stead’s focus on the apparently undeniable value of a young, female, “virgin’s” body frames these women and girls as only bodies, objectified and possessable in similar ways to the child corpses in chapter one. While insisting that girl’s virginal bodies are valuable, saleable assets, Stead’s goal is to remove this asset from the hands of

the girls to whom it ostensibly belongs, and instead place it in the hands of the state, imaging the ideal female child-subject as one who is devoid of both the interiority necessary to make her own decisions and the physical autonomy required to control her own body. This focus on the value of child's overtly erotic body as a valuable (and potentially purchasable) object draws attention to the eroticism present in the descriptions of child corpses in the comfort books and discussed in the previous chapter, bringing to light the ways in which the possession of the child's corpse in a locked coffin and the possession of (or control over) a living child's body may not actually be that distinct.

Stead begins the first installment of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" by declaring that: "London's lust annually uses up many thousands of women, who are literally killed and made away with—living sacrifices slain in the service of vice" ("Maiden Tribute I" 2). It is very unclear here whether Stead is using "literally" here for emphasis (in a way that prefigures the usage added to the *OED* in 2011), if he is implying that many thousands of women are *literally* murdered in service of lust (or die from sexually transmitted diseases, perhaps) each year in London, or if he is saying that a woman's value is so tied up in her virginity that to lose it literally kills at least some part of her. He does certainly suggest that it would be better for the girls about whom he writes to be dead than to be prostitutes. Stead describes one young sex worker as "a lovely child between fourteen and fifteen, tall for her age, but singularly attractive in her childish innocence," saying that "It seemed a profanation to touch her, she was so young and so baby-like." When Stead remarks to the "keeper" of the house that the girl is "too good for her trade," and the woman tells him that she is new, and will become bolder after "a couple months," Stead's response is to hope "to God that she died before then!" Stead's reaction to this girl both stresses the fact that he knows that her youth and apparent innocence are precisely the things that make her "singularly attractive,"

and, paradoxically, claims that they also make it “a profanation to touch her.” Yet the girl herself does not appear to feel profaned by her profession—indeed, she tells Stead that, although “sometimes it was rather bad,” all in all, “she liked the life” (“Maiden Tribute III” 2). Stead’s insistence on the innocence of this girl relies on his completely ignoring her stated experience and agency in entering the sex trade, insisting that she is merely a “baby” (he refers to her as a baby or as baby-like three times). While she thinks she has made the right choices in her life, according to Stead, she is actually not only a victim, but would be better off dead—and, he hopes, will be dead soon.

This notion that girls are “better dead” than “unpure” is the basis upon which to understand the arguments that Stead makes in “The Maiden Tribute,” and the lengths to which he feels justified in going to prove these arguments. For Stead, kidnapping and endangering a thirteen-year-old is appropriate, even righteous, because otherwise she would be in danger of falling into sex work. This outlook was not uncommon among anti-sex work activists of Stead’s era. Feminist reformer (and Stead co-conspirator) Josephine Butler wrote of the gynecological exams that registered prostitutes were legally required to undergo in the late nineteenth century that she “had much rather die than endure it” (*Prostitution* 130), and Mary Hume-Rothery, a member of Butler’s LNA, ^{lix} declared in an open letter that she—and “all who love their country”—“must look yearningly forward” to a future “when women shall dare poverty, loneliness, contempt, starvation itself, rather than sell themselves, whether to wealthy husbands, or less eligible purchasers.”^{lx} Since Butler and Hume-Rothery were both upper-class, the choice between starvation and sex work was not one that they would have actually been faced with. The appeal of starvation for virtue’s sake was based on romantic notions of a beautiful death, not on the actual horrors of poverty and hunger.

The centerpiece of Stead's five-part article is a section titled "A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5," which details Stead's undercover attempt to prove that it is possible to "buy" a young "virgin," and take her to "the continent" for sex work ("Maiden Tribute I" 6). Stead paid a midwife to perform a "virginity exam" on the girl without her consent (he felt that this was necessary to "prove" her virginity, despite the fact that he admits later in the series that "virginity exams" are inconclusive, at best), then took her to a brothel, had her drugged, and finally kidnapped her to France. The girl, whom Stead refers to as "Lily" in the article (a pseudonym denoting whiteness, purity, and, perhaps, a short lifespan), was actually named Eliza Armstrong, and, upon seeing Stead's article, Eliza's mother recognized her daughter's story, and went to the police. Eliza was returned to her family, and Stead and his conspirators were arrested on charges of abduction and indecent assault (despite which, or perhaps because of which, Stead became something of a hero throughout the nation). Mrs. Armstrong, it transpired, had never actually sold her daughter to Stead's procuress. Instead, she seems to have either genuinely believed that she was sending her daughter into service, as she claimed she had been led to believe, or she (likely with her daughter's consent) believed herself to be selling her daughter's *virginity*, but not selling her daughter, a distinction that no one else involved in the case seemed to realize was possible—both Eliza and her mother expected to see each other again, not for Eliza to be kidnapped to France. The fact that the question of the case was around whether Eliza's mother sold *her*, and that it was so easy for Stead, the court, and the public, to believe this, relied on the idea of the child as an object, a possession that belongs to its parents (part of the reason Stead was charged with kidnapping at all was that Eliza's father hadn't been informed before she left—if he had had her father's consent, he could, presumably, have done what he liked with her). While Elizabeth Armstrong wasn't actually legally allowed to sell her children, nor was it socially acceptable for her to do so, it was

understood that she could, because they belonged to her, were her property. It was in the realm of possibility for a child to be sold, not because she was enslaved, but because she was already an object, a possession, a body. That Eliza herself could be for sale was not something that was up for debate in the court case or in public opinion, but was taken for granted. If Eliza's value lay in her body, though, so did Stead's defense—it must be clear to anyone watching the trial that Eliza was pure, was a child, and, at the same time, that sex with her was so obviously desirable that a law needs to be passed to prevent it. Like Dickens with Nell, Stead's insistence on Eliza's status as a child also works as an alibi. While everyone else may view Eliza as a sexual object, Stead insists, *he*, correctly and decently, only sees her as a child—a distinction that is especially important, since Stead claims to have “purchased” Eliza for sex.

In “Maiden Tribute,” Stead describes “Lily” as “an industrious, warm-hearted little thing . . . Her education was slight. She spelled write “right,” for instance, and her grammar was very shaky. But she was a loving, affectionate child, whose kindly feeling for the drunken mother who sold her into nameless infamy was very touching to behold” (6). Stead focuses on Lily's apparent extreme childishness: she is simple, loving, and completely unaware that she has been “sold” by her mother into sex work. For Stead, Lily's lack of formal education stands in for a general innocence and lack of knowledge, ignoring both the actual Eliza's clear competence and knowledge in other areas, and the impossibility of this type of “innocence” for girls. In fact, Stead's familiar narrative of innocence through ignorance was mostly a fiction that male writers and political actors could impose on women to fit their own ends. Victorian women and girls were expected to be knowledgeable in order to protect their innocence (Eliza, for example, knows that she should fight off the midwife who Stead paid to perform the “virginity exam”). Sarah Stickey Ellis explains to her young readers that “Woman, happily for her, is gifted by nature with a

quickness of perception, by which she is able to detect the earliest approach of anything which might tend to destroy that high-toned purity of character . . . and when this natural gift is added to good taste,” the woman literally has “a kind of second-sight” that tells her when anything is about to go wrong, and allows her to read others’ intentions, emotions, and, basically, minds (148-149). Innocence, then, for girls, can only exist with knowledge—knowledge so extensive that it seems supernatural. While a part of why Peter Pan is able to remain an eternal child is that he is constantly shocked by unfairness,^{lxi} girls’ childhoods, in Ellis’s formation, depends on their not being shocked by anything (a difference that is explored further in the next chapter).

On the stand, Eliza performs purity, but not naïveté, in a way that challenges Stead’s narrative, but also situates her within the model of bourgeois Victorian girlhood established by writers like Ellis and Dickens, even if she herself is working class. Eliza and her mother stress Eliza’s “goodness” and youth (Eliza refers to herself as a “little girl” at one point), but also her capability and agency. Both women make it clear that it was Eliza’s decision to go with Rebecca Jarrett, not her mother’s. In her testimony, Eliza says that she believed that she was entering service, and that “I was anxious to go out to work—our family, six or seven, lived in one room—my sister [who was in service] was not able to spare anything . . . [Rebecca Jarrett] told me when I went to see her that she wanted me to go to service with her—I went back and told my mother, who came across . . . I heard my mother say she would not let me go that day—I was annoyed at that, and kept talking to my mother next day, saying I wanted to go” (*Proceedings of the Central Criminal Court* 144).^{lxii} While both Eliza and her mother insist that Rebecca Jarrett told them that the reason she was in town looking specifically to hire a thirteen-year-old girl was that she wanted a maid, Jarrett insists, with equal vehemence, that she made it clear to Mrs. Armstrong that she was seeking a young, “pure” girl “for a gentleman” (215, 217). In fact, Eliza’s own recounting of

Jarrett's remarks shows how fine the distinction between sex work and house work were—according to Eliza, Jarrett told her that she was going into service, and bought her new clothes because “her husband was a particular man,” and wanted the girl to look a certain way, hinting at the fact that Eliza's purpose, whether at a “bad” house or good one, would likely not be dissimilar. When Stead describes “Lily” as “a little cockney child, one of those who by the thousand annually develop into the servants of the poorer middle-class” (“Maiden Tribute I” 6), he ignores the widely-held view of what Walkowitz describes as “the lower-class of domestic servants” as promiscuous and sexually available—not only were these women often sexually exploited, but they sometimes supplemented their meager incomes with occasional sex work (*Prostitution* 178). It is difficult to believe that Stead wasn't at least somewhat aware of this, and so the arbitrariness of the distinction that he makes between sex work and other forms of work is evident even in his own descriptions of Eliza.

What is never suggested during the trial (although it is hinted at through odd denials) is that Elizabeth Armstrong and her daughter may have both agreed that sex work was the most lucrative career path for Eliza, or have seen Eliza's “virginity” as a saleable asset for which £5 was a good price. Contemporary scholars writing about the trial have also failed to acknowledge this, because they fail to acknowledge childhood's status as a flexible construction. Judith Walkowitz, whose work on Victorian sex work generally acknowledges sex workers' agency and mobility, provides a comprehensive account of the Stead case and “The Maiden Tribute” in *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992). While Walkowitz recognizes that most of the sex workers whom Stead interviews seem to be in this line of work through their own volition, she takes Eliza's status as an “innocent” child for granted—Eliza could not have decided to enter sex work of her own accord, because of her age. Walkowitz largely takes Stead's word that the people whom he interviewed

were “children,” without interrogating the work that childhood is doing for Stead, or what it might mean across gender, class, and temporal categories. As Mrs. Armstrong herself points out, a thirteen-year-old who has been helping to raise the younger children in her family for years is not as innocent as Stead suggests. “A girl of 13 would know whether she was sold or not,” she tells the Salvation Army men who aided in Eliza’s kidnapping (*Proceedings of the Central Criminal Court* 149). The retort is meant to prove that she never tried to sell her daughter, but, of course, it works both ways – Eliza, far from being the ignorant child that Stead imagines her to be, is old enough to know if she was being sold, to know what that would entail, and perhaps to make her own decisions about it.

This distinction is what the case rests upon, and the jury ultimately decides that it is Jarrett, and not the Armstrongs, who are lying (this is largely, as the judge suggests during the sentencing, because they believe that Jarrett is dishonest due to her past as a procuress and prostitute).^{lxiii} Stead was convicted of kidnapping and indecent assault and sentenced to jail for three months (which he apparently enjoyed immensely)^{lxiv} on the basis that the child he had kidnapped had not, actually, been in need of kidnapping, not on the basis of kidnapping a child. In the environment of the Stead trial, which rested so heavily on the value of the pure child’s body, it would have been impossible for Eliza and Elizabeth Armstrong to have sought to sell Eliza’s virginity, and still appear to have been wronged by Stead.

For Stead, the issue at the heart of “The Maiden Tribute” is that it’s legal to have sex with girls whom he arbitrarily deems too young to consent, not the economic system that gives these girls good reason to consent to trade sex for money. In both “The Maiden Tribute” and at his trial, Stead consistently and willfully ignores the fact that, while the title “A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5” is clearly intended to shock middle- and upper-class readers with the tiny amount of money

for which he apparently “bought” the child, £5 was actually a huge sum for Eliza and her family. Eliza’s mother states in her testimony that she anticipated that Eliza would probably make around two shillings a week at the “situation” to which she apparently believed she was going—in other words, the £5 which she would have gotten in exchange for her virginity was equivalent to a year’s salary as a maid for Eliza.

According to “a well-known member of Parliament” with whom Stead speaks in “Maiden Tribute,” most of the “virgins” available for sex in London are not victims of kidnapping and rape, but girls from poor families, who see that “their virginity is a realizable asset,” and “take a strictly businesslike view of the saleable value of their maidenhead” (“Maiden Tribute I” 3). According to this member of Parliament, this “asset” might be worth up to £25. Stead claims that the going rate of virginity actually varies widely, between £5-£20, but this is still a huge sum of money for a girl who otherwise might expect to make £5 a year as a maid. While it’s true that we should probably be skeptical of a member of Parliament’s knowledge of sex workers’ motives, a “motherly old” procuress with whom Stead speaks corroborates this point of view. Pointing out that “virginity” only exists to be lost, she tells Stead that “If a girl is to be seduced it is better she should be seduced by a gentleman, and get something for it than let herself be seduced by a boy or a young fellow who gives her nothing for it” (“Maiden Tribute II” 3). While Stead claims that this statement, and the woman’s belief “that she was quite a benefactor to her sex” are “naïve,” it is Stead who refuses to comprehend either the pressures of poverty or the fact that some girls may choose, willingly, to sell the only “asset” that they possess in exchange for what is, to them, a large sum of money. As historian and journalist Kathryn Hughes puts it, sex work in Victorian England “was hardly a one-way ticket to ruin. Working-class women turned to selling sex because the usual ways in which they got income from their bodies—by working as a milliner or a domestic or a factory hand—

had come up short.” Far from being the death sentence that Stead imagines, sex work could be a way to get a start in life or get out of a bad situation, and a girl like Eliza could have easily sold her “virginity,” gone home to her parents, gone into another line of work, or married (235).^{lxv} According to Walkowitz, sex workers were much more integrated into low-income communities than Stead suggests, and most women’s forays into sex work were short, occurred during their twenties, and ended with marriage or “respectable” employment (*Prostitution* 17-18). Most sex workers made more money, had more freedom, and were even healthier than their contemporaries who did poorly paid housework, worked in factories, or were married—their “standard of living . . . was perceptively higher than that of other poor workingwomen” (195). It is telling that Stead quickly turns from this procuress and does not return to her, since her narrative of young women who savvily see their virginity as a salable asset contradicts the narrative of sacrificial children that he wishes to tell.

When faced with the willingness of some of the girls whom he interviews to engage in sex work, Stead repeatedly insists that they are actually ignorant, not willing. When, in the second installment of the series, Stead “Order[s] Five Virgins,” all of the girls whom he hires appear to be perfectly willing to exchange sex for money, and sign contracts saying as much (5). They seem more hurt than happy when he announces that he is not, actually, going to “seduce” them. Again, Stead ignores both agency and poverty, insisting to one sixteen-year-old girl who tells him that she makes five shillings a week working for a milliner that the £2 she will receive for selling her “virginity” is not a lot of money, despite the fact that £2 is two months’ salary for her. According to Stead,

“Nevertheless, to my astonishment, the child persisted that she was ready to be seduced. "We are very poor," she said. "Mother does not know anything of this: she will think a lady friend of Miss Z.'s has given me the money; but she does need it so much." "But," I said, "it is only £2."

Now," said I, "if you are seduced you will get £2 for yourself; but you will lose your maidenhood; you will do wrong, your character will be gone, and you may have a baby which it will cost all your wages to keep. Now I will give you £1 if you will not be seduced; which will you have?" "Please sir," she said, "I will be seduced." "And face the pain, and the wrong-doing, and the shame, and the possible ruin and ending your days on the streets, all for the difference of one pound?" "Yes, sir," and she burst into tears, "we are so poor." Could any proof be more conclusive as to the absolute inability of this girl of sixteen to form an estimate of the value of the only commodity with which the law considers her amply able to deal the day after she is thirteen? ("Maiden Tribute II" 6).

However, far from proving Stead's point that the girl is too young to "form an estimate of the value of the only commodity" that it's in her power to sell, this conversation does precisely the opposite, showing that the girl knows, very well, that she only possesses one thing of monetary value, and that the most practical thing to do, since her family is in poverty, is to sell it. While this account shows someone coerced by economic distress into making choices that they might not otherwise, it does not depict the ignorant victim that Stead claims it does (Stead's bullying, rather than just her conscious, probably also contributes to the girl's crying). The girl's account also complicates Stead's insistence that he "bought" Eliza Armstrong, and that girls who sell their virginites always stay in sex work afterwards, since this girl evidentially plans to return to her family with her £2.

The fact that £2 is so little, and this girl still needs it so badly, also points not to her ignorance about the value of her “virtue,” but to the depth of her poverty. Stead’s insistence that these girls should not sell their virginity is not ignorance on his part, either—it’s a literalization of his earlier statement that they would be better dead than unpure. Like Hume-Rothery, Stead suggests that starvation would be the preferable and honorable decision in this girl’s situation. It seems generous to suggest that Stead is simply unaware that this girl and her family may need £2 to survive when he has already stated, apparently seriously, that it is better for a girl to die than to do sex work. Stead’s actions after his “research” support this—rather than attempting to do something to rectify the gross economic inequalities that drove some women to sex work (and left almost all women incapable of making a living on their own any other way), Stead used his findings to support legally raising the age of consent in an attempt to decrease the number of teenagers engaging in sex work, thus removing young women’s ability to earn money to escape a bad situation, start a life on their own, support their families, or, sometimes, survive.

According to Stead, “The moment a child is thirteen she is a woman in the eye of the law, with absolute right to dispose of her person to any one who by force or fraud can bully or cajole her into parting with her virtue. It is the one thing in the whole world which, if once lost, can never be recovered, it is the most precious thing a woman ever has, but while the law forbids her absolutely to dispose of any other valuables until she is sixteen, it insists upon investing her with unfettered freedom to sell her person at thirteen” (“Maiden Tribute II” 1). Instead of suggesting that something be done to keep teenaged girls out of economic situations that might force them into sex work, Stead suggests that the only “valuable” that they have be given over to the state for conservation. Stead’s entire argument rests on the notion that virginity is “the most precious thing a woman ever has,” and that men are very willing to pay for it, yet he ignores the ramifications of

preventing girls from selling it. In this paragraph, Stead discusses preventing rape and underage sex work as a matter of controlling women, not rapists or those who seek out child sex workers—of taking away a woman’s “right to dispose of her person” as she sees fit and her “freedom to sell her person.” He not only conflates virginity so much with personhood that “ruined” women would be better off dead, but engages in a discourse of protection that is blatantly invested, not in changing the circumstances of these women, but in taking away rights and freedoms that enable them to better their circumstances. As with most discourses of protection, Stead’s work is actually about gaining further control over a marginalized group, not about helping that group in any meaningful sense. If a thirteen-year-old was an adult (in at least some senses) before a law was passed, passing the law can only rob her of her rights. Suddenly redefining a portion of the population as “children” only works to disempower the group who suddenly find themselves unable, legally, to make decisions for themselves. As Corrine Field points out, claiming “equal adulthood” was an important political move for women and black men in the US whose disenfranchisement had been justified by discourses of infantilization—infantilizing thirteen-through sixteen-year-old girls did not make them less sexually desirable (or sexually desiring), it just robbed them of their right to use that sexuality as they saw fit.^{lxvi} Under the guise of protection, the Criminal Law Amendment further solidified the notion of the girl’s body as a possessable, saleable object, in need of protection not just from the outside world, but from the girl’s own choices. Denying the girl’s ability to make meaningful choices helped to fix her as just a body, similar to the possessable corpses discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

2.6 “Girls for Sale:” Stead and Modern-Day Narratives of “Sex-Trafficking”

Laura María Agustín (2007) and Judith Walkowitz (1980) have suggested that the category of the “prostitute” was one that, like the child (Aries 1960) and the homosexual (Foucault 1976), appeared as a category of identity only in the nineteenth century, created by the new Contagious Disease Acts and the reform efforts of feminists like Josephine Butler towards “fallen women.” William Stead’s “Maiden Tribute” was also crucial to establishing the current discourse surrounding “trafficking.” When twenty-first-century anti-sex work activists insist that no woman could possibly consent to sex work, they are participating in the infantilizing discourse established by Stead. Such a discourse is possible only if we assume that it is already a given that many sex workers are children, that all sex workers are child-like, and that children are unable to consent to any sort of sex or work. The accepted truth in many modern circles that being “trafficked” for sex work is distinct from, and worse than, being “trafficked” for other kinds of labor relies on the category of “prostitute” as a victim with a total lack of agency, engaged in work which was so shameful and miserable that she would be better off dead, that emerged in the nineteenth century. This discourse also relies on the uniquely “trafficable” nature of the child, especially the female child, which explains why it made sense to Stead and his contemporaries that Elizabeth Armstrong would be able to “sell” her child, in a way that would not have made sense if she and a thirty-year-old daughter had entered into a similar deal with Rebecca Jarret.

As scholars such as Agustín and Elizabeth Bernstein (2018) have discussed, modern “anti-trafficking” campaigns revolve around the same stories that nineteenth century narratives like Stead’s did. Bernstein reprints a speech by an anti-trafficking activist at a conference on violence against women: “I’d like to tell you the story of Christina, who . . . was a victim of human trafficking. She came here as a 19 or 20 year old woman in response to an ad for what she thought

was a babysitting job, and when she arrived at JFK airport . . . she was told that the babysitting job wasn't available anymore . . . Of course . . . she was forced to work in a brothel." "She is infertile," the speaker concludes. "She can never have children" (57-58. Ellipses in original).^{lxvii} This story could, almost word-for-word, appear in Stead's article (in fact, it's suspiciously similar to the narrative that Mayhew apparently repeatedly encountered, and treated so skeptically: "you seldom, if ever, meet with a woman who is not either a seduced governess or a clergyman's daughter" (217)). Bernstein points out that "Christina's" story, while possible, is extremely unlikely statistically, although it was the only type of story presented at the conference—and, she says, her search of the US Department of Justice's records turned up no such case. That the deceived and "seduced" "governess" is still the main paradigm for understanding how someone might travel to enter sex work suggests just how much our current discourses around the topic owe to nineteenth century "reformers" like Stead.

In 2004, journalist Nicholas Kristof recreated Stead's "Maiden Tribute" in a series of columns for the *New York Times*. Kristof's four-part narrative, published, like Stead's, in a popular national newspaper, borrows both its structure and content from Stead's text. While Kristof did not kidnap and sexually assault the girls with whom he was working, he did set off, like Stead, to "buy" a young girl (or two, in Kristof's case). Despite the fact that he at first announces his intention to "buy freedom for" the girls ("Girls for Sale"), Kristof calls his first article "Girls for Sale," and quickly switches to writing about his decision "to buy the two teenaged prostitutes" ("Bargaining for Freedom"), referring to the girls as "the two teenage prostitutes I had just purchased" ("Going Home"). Like Stead, Kristof isn't, actually, buying anyone—although both reporters insist that there are "girls for sale" in the apparently horrible places that they are willing to go undercover to tell us about, neither Eliza Armstrong nor the two Cambodian women

whom Kristof claims to have “purchased” were ever “for sale.” Kristof’s “buying the girls’ freedom” is arranged when he pays off their debts to the brothels in which they work and live, thus ending their indentures. Like Stead, Kristof insists that, because of their youth, these girls can’t have chosen or consented to their work, and like Stead, he infantilizes them. In an inverse of Mayhew, he refuses to believe that one teenaged sex worker is as old as she says she is: “she claimed to be 18,” he writes, “but looked much younger” (“Girls for Sale”).

As Bernstein points out, anti-trafficking activists also borrow from the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century discourse around “white slavery,” framing sex work as literal slavery in a way that evokes racist narratives about racial, ethnic, and sexual purity. Kristof begins his modern “Girls for Sale,” thus:

“One thinks of slavery as an evil confined to musty sepia photographs. But there are 21st-century versions of slaves as well, girls like Srey Neth.

I met Srey Neth, a lovely, giggly wisp of a teenager, here in the wild smuggling town of Poipet in northwestern Cambodia. Girls here are bought and sold, but there is an important difference compared with the 19th century: many of these modern slaves will be dead of AIDS by their 20's.”

For Kristof, the “important difference” between nineteenth-century chattel slavery and modern “sex slavery” is that the latter is more dangerous—“modern slaves” (apparently unlike African slaves), are likely to be dead by their twenties (most estimates show that people enslaved on sugar cane plantations were, also, likely to be dead by their 20s). It seems, at best, irresponsible to compare the transatlantic slave trade and modern day “trafficking” at all; to suggest that the latter is somehow worse is reprehensible, but not uncommon in anti-sex-work rhetoric—Gary Haugen, founder of the International Justice mission, claims that there are “more slaves in our

world today than we extracted from Africa during four hundred year of the transatlantic slave trade” (Bernstein 69), and activists often identify themselves as “modern-day abolitionists” (70). This rhetoric can also be traced to the nineteenth century, as Butler recruited many of the members of her LRA from the abolitionist groups that she had belonged to, and many of these women viewed “rescuing” women from sex work as “another abolitionist struggle” (*Prostitution* 164). Part of what Kristof’s claim is doing, though, is attempting to make sex work literally equal death. If sex work will almost certainly cause one to die at the age of 20, then the question of whether death or sex work is preferable is moot—sex work is death.

Interestingly, Kristof’s belief that trafficked sex workers are literally enslaved does not extend to other kinds of work that may involve trafficking across borders and/or extreme constraints imposed on one’s body and time. In multiple columns (unrelated to his columns on sex work), Kristoff unironically “defend[s] sweatshops” as often the best option for people in impoverished countries (“When Sweatshops are a Dream”). To argue that sweatshops, factories that are notorious for low pay, long hours, and human rights violations, are preferable to sex work requires employing the same logic that Stead used over a century earlier. It relies on the belief that selling sex is the worst imaginable thing that can happen to a woman. Interestingly, for Kristof, workers in factories are “women,” while sex workers of the same age are “girls:” although she is the same age as the “girls” whom he “bought” in Cambodia, Kristof refers to “a 19-year-old woman” who tells him of her desire to work in what he calls a “sweatshop” (the woman herself calls it a “factory,” and it’s not clear whether she understands the conditions that she would be working in there). According to Kristof, “sweatshops are only a symptom of poverty, not a cause, and banning them closes off one route out of poverty.” The irony of his reluctance to “close off” this specific “route out of poverty,” while decisively calling for an end to another, is apparently

lost on Kristof. Sweatshops, he believes, are places where people like this “woman” may reasonably make responsible, adult decisions to work—a logic that he finds it impossible to apply to sex work.^{lxviii}

According to Bernstein, “the ‘sex-trafficking victim’ has become an iconic figure of our era, capacious enough to serve as the emblem for quite disparate imaginations of social suffering” (6). If the dead child was the iconic figure of the Victorian era, then perhaps the “sex-trafficking victim” has taken her place in our modern lexicon, but the two are, actually, not very different at all. The trafficking victim often *is* the dead child—she’s always a child (even when she’s a woman); she’s always about to die, or already socially or spiritually dead. Her body, like the corpse, belongs to everyone but herself, available to be discussed and gazed at with impunity. Like the dead child, the trafficking victim provides those who seek to “help” her with an icon of the perfect, helpless victim. Kathryn Bond Stockton has suggested that increasing conflict between the imagined figure of the innocent, unproductive child and the reality of children as consumers and producers in the age of late capitalism and new media has led us to “import” childhood from “third world” countries (“The Queer Child Now . . .” 505), focusing our fetishizing attention on children who, we think, actually need our help. It is no coincidence that most of the “trafficking victims” shown in the media are young girls—girls whose youth is supposed to shock us (and who are often left unidentified and are often not, actually, sex workers)—but actual age does not really matter in this equation.

Stead’s work begins to make this shift by making the connection between “dead child” and “trafficked woman.” By beginning with a description of the “thousands of women” who are “literally killed” annually in London, Stead promises that this is the story that we are going to get, and instead gives us, repeatedly, the story of a living “child” who has apparently been, or is on the

verge of being, kidnapped and forced into the sex trade. If these girls are the same people who are introduced as the series' topic in the first paragraph, then the implication is either that sex work will surely kill them soon, or that, for all intents and purposes, it already has. The introduction to Kristof's "Girls for Sale" series echoes this, framing sex work as a path to certain, almost immediate, death. In fact, Stead purposefully set out to frame sex work in sentimental terms, as the story of a dead child—in a letter to Butler, he wrote that "prostitution" "wanted its *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (City 96). While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* features many enslaved characters, its emotional heart is a little, white girl, who is beautiful and good and who dies—as Robin Bernstein has argued, we are more concerned with the effect of slavery on this white child than on the actual enslaved characters. Stead's reference to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a model for "Maiden Tribute" anticipates his use of the threatened, white girl-child—"Lily"—destined for a fate worse than death, to be followed soon, if God is merciful, with actual death. The pure, white, girl is the apparently universally appealing lure to draw readers into these stories about the plights of subjects with whom the author assumes they might otherwise be reluctant to identify. She is required as a sacrifice to elicit a strong emotional reaction from the audience, without challenging them to actually feel anything for the subjects that they are ostensibly being asked to help. This narrative insidiously implies that the only reason to care about its subjects is for the sake of this little white girl—not just that it may be difficult for audiences to sympathize with its actual subjects, but that these subjects, whether enslaved people or sex workers, are understood by the author to be unworthy of sympathy.

2.7 “It is supposed that he violated her person:” “Sweet Fanny Adams” and Literal and Symbolic Violations of Personhood

In August 1867, the United Kingdom was shocked by a particularly horrific child-murder that draws attention to both the complicated ways in which subjects were understood to be worthy of sympathy, and to the appeal of the spectacle of the dead, white girl-child. Papers across the country reported on the murder, the child’s funeral, and updates on the case, reprinted transcripts of the trial in detail, and christened the victim, eight-year-old Fanny Adams, “Sweet Fanny Adams.” *The London Evening Standard* sets the story up with a list of notorious murderers (their names all in bold) promising that “bad as were all these, greatly as the enormity of their offences degraded them below the common level of vulgar murders, the worst of them is a long way better than the wretch at whose hands FANNY ADAMS met her death on the 24th of August last.”^{lxix} *The Portsmouth Times* described the murder more simply, as “almost unparalleled in the annals of crime,” and the crime was indeed horrific— Fanny Adams was lured into a field by James Baker, a man whom she did not know, who murdered her and methodically dismembered her body, then placed her head on a post and scattered her other body parts around the area, either hiding her eyes, part of her chest, and her genitals in such a way that they were never found, despite extensive searching, or taking them with him.^{lxx} Beyond the clear horror of the crime, it captured the public imagination for two reasons. One was that the victim was someone that everyone could comfortably agree was a “little girl” (unlike the numerous teenaged girls who the same newspapers describe being murdered by “sweethearts” around the same time), and the other was the way in which it encouraged readers to focus on the child’s body—specifically on individual, sexualized parts of that body—while still insisting on her purity. The papers describe Adams’s dismembered body in detail, lingering over where various limbs were found, and how they were mutilated, and,

especially, on her missing sexual organs. While they all agree that she was a “little girl,” everyone was apparently too busy figuring out the exact placement of her body parts to bother to ask Adams’s age, which is variously reported as nine (*The London Evening Standard*), “seven years and six months” (*The Portsmouth Times*), and “between 7-8” (*The Oxford Journal*) (according to her tombstone, she was actually eight years and four months old, something that some of the papers might have been able to find out fairly easily, since they reported on the turnout for her funeral). While eager to report on the “Horrible Mutilation of a Child in Hampshire,” *The Nottinghamshire Guard* doesn’t even bother to get her name right, consistently referring to her as “Annie.”^{lxxi} Ultimately, Adams’s age and name didn’t actually matter—what mattered was the work that she was able to do in the symbolic. Perhaps the vaguer the details about her the better, in fact, so that each reader may imagine his own ideal girl-child, brutally chopped up and murdered.

One reason that the case aroused the national interest so much, of course, is that everyone assumed that Adams had been raped, but no one could quite be sure, since Baker had removed her genitals. Adams was thus able to remain pure until proven otherwise, while newspapers and readers were also free to speculate, in lurid detail, about how she probably wasn’t. Newspapers repeatedly raised the specter of Adams’s having been sexual assaulted—not in terms of the prosecution’s case, which partially rested on the idea that Baker had mutilated her body to hide evidence of sexual assault, but in salacious asides about how it was to be hoped that she had not been. As *The London Evening Standard* put it, “For the sake of her relatives we would fain hope that the theory of the prosecution is unfounded”—as if the dead child’s worth as a treasured memory would be somehow lessened if it were discovered that she had been sexually assaulted, as well as dismembered. Papers insisted on referring to Adams as “a pretty little child,” although none of the reporters had ever seen her, and no photographs of her exist. Her apparent prettiness

worked both to establish her innocence (the perfect dead child had to be beautiful, young, and good), and to provide a motive for Baker that was meant to be immediately recognizable.^{lxxii}

The *Western Times* provides perhaps the most graphic account of Adams's murder. The paper says that Adams was "a tall, comely, and intelligent girl," who "bore the appearance of being several years older than her age," and then goes on to describes the mutilation of her body in great detail. The article is peppered with phrases such as "Horrible to relate, the eyes had been gouged out with almost scientific skill" that make it clear that, actually, quite a bit of morbid pleasure is being taken in relating this fact. "In consequence of the disjointed and mutilated condition of the whole of the body," the author goes on to state, "it is impossible for the medical gentlemen who have examined the remains to determine whether the poor child had been violated."^{lxxiii} This seemingly nonsensical statement occurs repeatedly in articles reporting on Adams's death and Baker's trial: "It is supposed that he violated her person,"^{lxxiv} "it is to be feared" that she was "violated."^{lxxv} The euphemism takes on an incredibly sinister tone here—if it's "impossible to determine" if Adams has been "violated," then killing her, chopping her body up, are not violations. Death, even dismemberment, is not considered a "violation of one's person." In fact, Adam's death and dismemberment acted to preserve her symbolic integrity, even as her bodily integrity was literally destroyed. Adams's death and dismemberment allowed her to become "Sweet Fanny Adams," rather than a living person who looked "several years older than her age," and who a man might, understandably, mistake for someone of legal age to "seduce." Adams remained "the child," but only through the complete dissolution of her person.^{lxxvi}

Fanny Adams wasn't just literally dismembered, though. She was also destroyed in the realm of the symbolic. Shortly after Adams's death, some British sailors made the dark joke that the tinned meat that they were served was made of pieces of Fanny Adams's body. The joke spread,

and, as Kathryn Hughes explains the phrases etymology, “‘ So Fanny Adams’ became navy slang for disgusting mutton or stew, and then, by extension, for anything worthless. Even today, 150 years later, ‘Sweet FA’ means ‘nothing at all’—or, if you are in a particularly bad mood, ‘Fuck All’” (365).^{lxxvii} Fanny Adams exists in the collection conscious as, literally, nothing.

A 1983 article in the *Belfast Telegraph* refers to her as “the little girl whose name has been immortalized in English slang.”^{lxxviii} In fact, most newspaper articles on “Fanny Adams” from the years after her death are on the slang term, not the murdered child. Most of the academic writing about “Sweet Fanny Adams” is, similarly, contained in articles about British slang, not about gender, childhood, or violence. The real Adams, and the violence surrounding her death, are absent from these accounts. An explanation of the origin of the term in 1950 referred to Fanny Adams as “a young woman who was murdered in 1810” (nearly fifty years before Adams, eight years old at the time of her death, was even born).^{lxxix} In the 1930s, several newspaper articles show that a greyhound named Sweet Fanny Adams had some success at the racetrack. In 1906, a headline appeared in the *Hampshire Telegraph* declaring “‘Fanny Adams’ in Disrepute.”^{lxxx} The headline reads like a poignant scrape from an alternate timeline, in which Fanny Adams survived, grew up, and, as a woman in her late forties, had attained enough fame to be able to fall publicly into disrepute. Instead, it refers to a scandal around contaminated canned meat. In 2001 a negative (and vaguely misogynistic) review of a London staging of *The Vagina Monologues* was titled, “Sweet Fanny Adams,” referencing Adam’s first name’s other British slang usage in a pun that the author clearly found quite clever.^{lxxxi}

That Fanny Adams, an actual child who was brutally murdered, is remembered as “nothing,” that her name is literally a joke, while fictional children who are happy to die are remembered as ideals, skews the ways in which we imagine girlhood, and the forms that it can

take, in life and in death. A beautiful, good, pure, thirteen-year-old child who dies based on a seventeen-year-old young woman who dies is not only a problematic fantasy, but contributes to the erasure of the lives and deaths of girls like Fanny Adams, Eliza Armstrong, and Anille, who don't fit as neatly into a model of girlhood defined by innocence, purity, and helplessness. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, we will see how this model also contributed to the actual deaths of some girls, whose deaths by suicide were viewed as the socially correct choice, a final capitulation to the narrative of girlhood defined in this chapter.

3.0 “The Romance of the Nursery”^{lxxxiii}: Lost Boys, Deadly Femininity, and Queer Fantasies of Escape

All children, except one, grow up,”^{lxxxiii} J. M. Barrie informs us at the beginning of *Peter and Wendy*, but, as this dissertation shows, this is far from true. This chapter shifts the focus from girls to turn-of-the-century tales of little boys who don’t grow up written by queer,^{lxxxiv} male authors: J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1904),^{lxxxv} Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Author of Beltraffio* (1884), and Howard Sturgis’s *Tim: A Story of School Life* (1891). James’s and Sturgis’s texts depict boys who, like Peter Pan, “don’t grow up,” whose boyhood is captured and preserved through an escape from the land of the living. If Peter Pan remains an eternal child through an escape to Neverland, many of his contemporaries, like the boys in these texts, avoided adulthood in a far more conventional manner. The death of Victorian child characters suspends them, like Peter Pan, in an eternal childhood, giving them a certain immortality. If growing up necessitates the end of the child that was, and the replacement with an adult who conforms to expected standards of Victorian adulthood, then avoiding literal death brings about another sort of death: the metaphorical death of the child. Growing up means growing into a set of adult desires and responsibilities that may bear little relation to the unsocialized desires of children, and are often inescapably linked to “adult” (i.e. reproductive) sexuality. In these texts, death acts as both a metaphor for adulthood and an escape from its restrictive rules, a Neverland granting eternal childhood. To die, as Peter Pan knows, may be a great adventure—to grow up, in the proper, socially accepted way, is the end of all adventure.

As in the comfort books and stories of beautiful, dead girls discussed previously in this dissertation, the promise of escape through death for “lost boys” is, at best, ambivalent. Peter Pan’s

status as one of the ultimate icons of childhood is not in spite of his ghostly qualities (detailed later in this chapter), but because of them, and Barrie's effort to preserve childhood through this fictional character was, like Dickens's, at least partially inspired by an obsessive wish to possess and preserve real young people (in Barrie's case, his foster sons, the Llewelyn Davies boys) forever. Sturgis's *Tim*, I argue, presents death as a queer triumph, but also frames its young hero in sentimental terms, as, like Dickens's Little Nell, a child who is destined to—and happy to—die. James's novellas *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Author of Beltraffio* (1884), in contrast, critique this sentimental narrative, taking the comfort book mode to its logical conclusion and positing women as murderous protectors of the "virtue" of the children in their care. I begin by comparing *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan*, thinking through the ways that the two texts frame queer boyhood as an ideal that is threatened, not by the queer men who appear as the texts' ostensible villains, but by the intrusion of female sexuality into the relationship between queer boy and man. With queer ghosts and murderous women, both texts offer a fantasy of escape through death that is at turns horrific and liberatory. James's realistic *The Author of Beltraffio* figures as an important precedent to *The Turn of the Screw*, making explicit the themes couched in terms of haunting in the later novella. I then turn to Sturgis's *Tim: A Story of School Life*, a realistic (if extremely sentimental) text whose eponymous character's queerness makes him one of the kind who "like to die,"^{lxxxvi} thinking through the ways in which schools like Eton served as real-life Neverlands for upper-class boys, and the ways in which Tim's ambiguous gendering shapes his death. While all of these texts complicate the comfort book ideal by explicitly marking children who die young as somehow queered, they still rely on familiar motifs of death as preservation of childhood and purity—although these concepts are defined somewhat differently for male child characters. In these texts, the eroticism displaced by insistences on female characters' "innocence"

is closer to the surface. In James and Barrie's texts, in particular, the death of the erotic, untouchable child is posited as the ultimate consummation of an adult/child relationship, possession without desecration of the desired child. These texts help us to further interrogate the eternal possession celebrated in comfort books, and points towards the logical outcome of the desire for the dead child.

While boyhood is imagined differently in these texts than girlhood is in the texts in the last chapter—as a time of freedom and play, rather than a time of perfect purity—the childhoods depicted here are just as much fantasies as those of Little Nell or the child who is happy to die of scarlet fever. For most Victorian and Edwardian boys, childhood was not a special, distinct time of play and freedom, but rather a time in which they worked, hard, to prepare for a life in which they would continue to work hard. When authors like Charles Dickens, Horatio Alger, and Arthur Conan Doyle imagine street boys as free and mischievous in a way that characters like Little Nell are not, these characters are just as unrealistic as their perfectly restrained sisters. The boyhood discussed in this chapter, defined by play, public school, and a sharp distinction from adulthood, was a decidedly upper-class fantasy, and one that was not available to the large majority of Victorian or Edwardian boys.

3.1 “no one is going to catch me and make me a man:” Eternal Youth, Boyhood, and Girlhood

That Peter Pan can imagine death as an “awfully big adventure” (*Peter Pan* 55) points to a difference between this ideal, fantastical boy-child and the literally objectified girls discussed in the previous chapter. While *Peter Pan* is, ultimately, still about the eternal possession of the child

through death, the child-as-object looks slightly different in these texts. Catherine Robson has suggested that, between the Victorian Era and the Edwardian Era, the gender of the ideal child shifted from female to male. For Robson, William Stead and “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” had a hand in this—once girls were openly defined as sexual objects, she says, they ceased to be ideal children. This causality, however, doesn’t really fit with the basis of Stead’s argument, which rested on two points: first, that the girls whom he interviewed *were* completely innocent and child-like, and second, that everyone already knew that young girls were extremely sexually desirable. The impact of Stead’s articles relied on a pre-existing, widely-held assumption that girls could be both children and sexually desirable. Robson’s argument ignores the fact that the appeal of girlhood, as discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, already rested so clearly on a combination of “innocence” and sexual desirability. It’s true that the texts discussed here focus on boys, and that they were published later than Dickens’ texts about little girls, but it’s also true that Dickens wrote plenty of stories of ideal little boys, too—Tiny Tim and Paul Dombey are ideal children in the same vein as Little Nell (although, tellingly, they are younger than her), while *Oliver Twist* may be an ideal something between that of Nell and Peter Pan; Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies* (1863) is about a cherubic little boy who drowns and becomes a “water baby.” Part of what seems to define the “ideal child” in this formulation is the child’s erotic desirability, and so the fact that the most famous fictional children (or, at least, child, since Peter Pan is Robson’s main example) of the turn of the century were male seems to me to have more to do with the authors’ notions about childhood, gender, and desirability than a massive cultural shift. The boys depicted in these texts work as objects of desire in different ways than the girls discussed in the previous chapter, and the desire for eternal childhood here is, perhaps, a more complicated mixture of nostalgia and desire for eternal possession, but ultimately the dead child still works as

an object of erotic desire in these texts. In *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan*, however, that desire is triangulated through the introduction of a threatening female character, while the author's desires are partially masked. These texts are also complicated by a nostalgia for boyhood as a time of freedom that did not exist for nineteenth and early twentieth century girls. Neverland acts as a surrogate for a real space that did exist for upper-class Victorian and Edwardian boys, at prestigious public schools like Eton, of which Captain Hook and Howard Sturgis were both alumni.

In the texts discussed in this chapter, "innocence" is defined differently than it is in the previous chapters. While, as discussed in the previous chapter, being "innocent," for girls, meant performing ignorance in a way that, paradoxically, required a great deal of knowledge, innocence, for the boys described in this chapter, largely means ignorance—of rules, of responsibilities, and of consequences. When Barrie closes *Peter and Wendy* by declaring that "children are gay and innocent and heartless" (185), innocence and heartlessness are not contradictions, but go hand in hand, in a way that is antithetical to the depictions of angelic, thoughtful girls in the previous chapters. In James's *Turn of the Screw* the Governess and Mrs. Gross agree that boyhood contains at least a little heartlessness—"You like them with the spirit to be naughty?" the Governess asks Mrs. Gross. "So do I!" (12). The "them" that they're referring to, though, is only boys—Flora's potential "naughtiness" holds much less charm than Miles's does. For Barrie, too, "children" really means boys. Neverland contains no "lost girls," and Wendy's only role in the Lost Boys' lives is that of a mother, playing the part of an adult even though she is presumably close in age to her Lost Boy brothers. In all of the texts discussed in this chapter, the intrusion of a woman into a homosocial Neverland singles a dangerous approach of adulthood, and, with it, death.

While girls in American texts from the nineteenth and early twentieth century were often imagined to have freedom similar to their brothers until they reached puberty—what Anne Scott MacLeod termed “the Caddie Woodlawn Syndrome”—British texts from the same period depict much more restrictive girlhoods. Caddie’s wildness is linked to the “wildness” of the newly colonized territory in which she and her family live—her freedom is depicted as only possible in the wide-open spaces of the expanding United States, and her inevitable “taming” parallels the project of “civilizing” the new US territory in which her family has settled. In fact, some of the American women whom MacLeod cites contrast the remembered freedom of their own childhoods with the girlhoods depicted in the British children’s books that they read. According to one American woman, she and her siblings had “a vague idea that this freedom of ours was the natural inheritance of republican children only” (MacLeod 11). The claim that American girls enjoyed this childhood freedom, then, is a political one, and the depiction of American girls as temporarily free and British girls as always already little women probably depicts a difference in values, rather than an actual difference in lived experience. If American children’s literature was interested in showing some girls as (mildly) rebellious and wild, this seems to be part of an ideological project to paint the still fairly young nation as the home of freedom and rebellious thought that it has always (somewhat dubiously, perhaps) claimed to be. Most girls depicted in British literature are, as discussed in the previous chapter, upper- and middle-class, or at least genteelly poor, and represent a model of femininity that is not based on rebellion or freedom, even in childhood. Certainly, some actual British girls did have more freedom than Barrie’s Wendy or Dicken’s Agnes or Nell—Fanny Adams was murdered while she was playing with her friends, without adult supervision, in a nearby field, something that the newspaper articles discussing her murder stress was normal for children from her neighborhood in a way that often seems more judgmental than

normalizing. In the majority of Victorian literature, girls are afforded none of the freedom that has come to define the romantic notion of childhood, and that is central to the boyhood celebrated (or mourned) in *Peter Pan*. Women, in the texts discussed in this chapter, represent the antithesis of this experience of childhood, not just because they represent adult reproductive sexuality (as I explore in more depth over the course of the chapter), but because it is a childhood that they are barred from experiencing first hand.

While the fantasy of Victorian boyhood was marked as a time of socially sanctioned mischief, freedom, and rebellion, girlhood was seen as a time of enforced purity, good behavior, and preparation for a child's later role as a homemaker. This difference is evidenced in the gendered play of Wendy and the Lost Boys. In contrast to the boys' battles with pirates, "native" islanders, and ferocious beasts, Wendy's play replicates her home life—in fact, it's hard to call what Wendy does in Neverland "play" at all, since it mostly involves doing chores such as cooking and cleaning for the boys. Wendy arrives in Neverland, not with her brothers' childish (boyish?) glee at the promise of adventures, but rather delighted at the prospect of "civilizing," educating, and mothering the Lost Boys. Wendy appears to be roughly the same age as the boys—in the novel, she tells her mother that Peter is "just my size" (*Peter and Wendy* 12), and Peter, although his age is indeterminant, certainly appears quite young—he still has all of his baby teeth (16). Despite Wendy's age, the role of mother is, as Peter repeatedly reminds her, the only one available to her. Wendy's role as surrogate mother in many ways mirrors that of the turn of the century governess, engaged to care for children who were often not much younger than herself, and whose main qualifications were being female and moderately "well-bred." Considered sexual and marriageable adults from their early teens (so long as their parents consented to those marriages), girls like Wendy and James's young Governess did not have the luxury of the playful childhoods

embraced by Peter and his Lost Boys. Captain Hook's love of his alma matter, Eton, reflects the real-world Neverlands in which select upper-class boys, like Sturgis's Tim (and Sturgis himself), often spent their formative years. While schoolboys were encouraged to participate in sports and clubs, and, less overtly, provided with opportunities for sexual exploration with other boys, upper-class girls remained in the home, under the watchful eyes of parents and governess, preparing for their role as virginal brides, and, later, mothers. Girls' education differed from boys', then, not only in official content, but in experiential education received by interaction with peers outside of the confines of the nursery. The Governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is, after all, at first engaged only to care for Flora. It is only once Miles is expelled that he is placed in her stifling care, which he despises—yet this is the only education that has ever been in store for Flora.

As Claudia Nelson has pointed out in her work on age inversion (and as I discuss in detail in the previous chapter), both womanly girls and girlish women were often (although not exclusively) praised in Victorian texts, while men who clung to boyhood were almost universally considered, at least, odd and tragic, at most, a threat to society and the cultural norms upon which it was built. Villainous men who refused to grow up properly are common in Victorian literature (especially, as Nelson notes, the work of Dickens), and both *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan* present such men as their ostensible villains. This suggests a blurring of the line between girl and woman that cannot exist between boy and mature man in a patriarchal society. While the adult man is supposed to behave quite differently than his boyish self, and risks shunning if he does not, the perfect girl is already part woman, while the perfect woman, who can never achieve the full privileges of "adulthood" that are reserved for the man, retains some of her "girlish" appeal.

In the texts discussed in this chapter, queerness is closely linked to childhood, whereas femininity is tied to conventionality, adulthood, and death. These texts are tales of the battle for

possession of boys, the battle between forces that would have them grow up in a normative way, and those that would have them remain “little boys” in homosocial Neverlands forever. The women in these texts are, as Barrie describes Wendy, “of the kind that likes to grow up” (*Peter and Wendy* 178), while the boys would prefer to stay boys, and in the company of other boys, forever. Barrie’s description of Wendy is a direct inverse of Fredrick Faber’s comfort book imagining of ideal children as those who “like to die,” and *Tim* and *Peter Pan*’s Lost Boys both borrow from (and twist) comfort book convention to posit the desire for death as a potential protest against heteronormative adulthood.

Growing up, for the boys of *Peter Pan*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *Tim* (and, indeed, for many boys both at the turn of the century and today), entails not becoming an adult, but becoming a *man*, with all of the heterosexual and capitalist implications of Anglo-American manhood. Repeatedly, it is this assumption of manhood that the boys in Barrie’s play express fear of, rather than simply growing up. Indeed, the instigating event of *Peter Pan* is when Mr. Darling orders his son Michael to “be a man,” and Michael replies simply, “Won’t,” and flies out the window to Neverland (*Peter Pan* 17). Likewise, Peter tells Wendy that he ran away the day he was born because he overheard his parents talking about what he “was to be when he became a man,” and he “[doesn’t] want ever to be a man” (28). “Keep back, lady,” Peter warns Mrs. Darling, later: “no one is going to catch me and make me a man” (174). Femininity is implicated in Peter’s fear of becoming a man—borrowing from popular tropes of romance and marriage, adult manhood is imagined as something that begins, against the man’s will, once a lady has “caught” him. “You know, my dear, that for a fellow to be with a lady *always* – !” (54) James’s Miles exclaims, trailing off before fully expressing a sentiment that is certainly not a positive one. “I want to see more life,” he attempts to explain. “I want my own sort!”(55).

To grow up is to grow into a role as head of the heterosexual household that is deadly to the polymorphously perverse child: Lost Boys become men not through an evolution of character, but through an end of one character and assumption of another. “All the boys were grown up and done for by this time; so it is scarcely worth while saying anything more about them. . . . You see that judge in a wig coming out at the iron door? That used to be Tootles” (*Peter and Wendy* 179). The adult Judge does not contain the child Tootles, indeed, is not even the same person—instead, he represents the negation of Tootles, the automaton that took the place of the child which it and society killed. Growing up is the death of the individual: Barrie tells us that “*In the city where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, [Mr. Darling] is so like the others on their stools that you recognize him not by his face but by his stool, but at home the way to gratify him is to say that he has a distinct personality*” (*Peter Pan* 10). Likewise, the “virtuous” woman and “gentleman” of *The Turn of the Screw* become only their vaguely authoritarian titles, while the “villains” are allowed to keep their identities – “the Master” and “the Governess,” versus Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. Mr. Darling’s attempt to regain his individuality leads him to ridiculous lengths at the end of the play, when he spends much of the final scene living in a dog cage (and boasting about the celebrity that this has gained him).

The model of British masculinity that Mr. Darling tries so hard to follow is clearly depicted as empty and ridiculous—unlike the Lost Boys, or even Hook and his pirates, Mr. Darling is cowardly and foolish. Upon returning home, the children ridicule Mr. Darling’s performance of masculinity—Wendy recognizes him “by the bald patch,” and Michael, “disappointed, remarks that “He is not as big as the pirate I killed” (89). It is no wonder that Peter and the Lost Boys want to avoid such an unappealing version of manhood themselves. Nevertheless, growing older requires that they boys follow one of two paths, though—that of the appearance-obsessed,

ridiculous “gentleman” Mr. Darling, or that of the decidedly *not* gentlemanly, “definitely bad” “creature” (*The Turn of the Screw* 26), Quint or Hook. The path of the heterosexual family man is societally sanctioned, if deeply unappealing, while the unattached Quint and Hook are viewed as villains. To maintain, as an adult, the homosocial lifestyle that the “motherless” Lost Boys and their flamboyant leader value, one has to not only take up piracy, but swear “Down with the King” (*Peter and Wendy* 145). Being a Lost Boy is one thing, being a Lost Man is dangerously anti-social. If growing up means that one no longer has fun and adventures, but is instead consumed by “a passion for being exactly like his neighbors” (4), it is understandable that children shrink from such an adulthood. A life wherein one’s greatest desire is to be “normal” certainly seems like a tragedy—yet adults who refuse this normative narrative, who continue seeking adventure and fun rather than conventionality and stability, are branded by society as villains, and often, as in the cases of Quint and Hook, doomed to an honorless death.

Men who grow up outside of this normative narrative fall, in *Peter Pan* and the inside narrative of *The Turn of the Screw*, into two categories: the Pirate and the Pervert. The two are by no means mutually exclusive—the sexually adventurous Quint seems to be a rogue in all aspects of his life, and “*there is a touch of the feminine in Hook, as in all the greatest pirates.*” (*Peter Pan* 51) Both men are sexually ambiguous, dangerous, and attractive. Hook, “*that not wholly unheroic figure,*” is good-looking, cultured (he plays the flute and graduated from Eton), and slightly feminine. When we first see him, he is “*reclin[ing] among cushions*” on the pirates’ raft. “*Cruelest jewel in that dark setting,*” Hook’s hair is “*dressed in long curls which look like black candles about to melt, his eyes blue as forget-me-not*” . . . “*in dress he apes the dandiactal associated with Charles II*” (*Peter Pan* 34). Hook’s physical description is more romantic than imposing; his dress hints at a libertine sexuality reminiscent of the mores of the court that it calls

to mind. Quint is “remarkably” handsome, and looks “like an actor,” (*The Turn of the Screw* 23) a charge that, at the time, would have carried with it the implication of sexual licentiousness. Quint’s crimes are only hinted at—we are told only that “there had been matters in his life—strange passages and perils, secret disorders, vices more than suspected” (27). While one is given free reign to “suspect” what one wishes, it seems safe to assume that most suspicions tend toward “vices” of a sexual nature.

Sexually nebulous and vaguely menacing, the threat of both Hook and Quint seems, regardless of hooks, swords, or fists, to lie more in the moral than the physical. Both men are frightening precisely because of the allure that they and their lifestyles hold. John and Michael Darling are both at the point of joining Hook, before they learn that this would mean no longer being loyal subjects of the King (*Peter Pan* 75-76), and Peter himself briefly transforms into Hook.^{lxxxvii} Similarly, the thing that frightens the Governess about Quint is not that he might harm Miles, but that Miles might not mind such “harm.” The Governess’s fear is not that Miles will be physically injured, but that he will be corrupted. If she were truly convinced of the impossibility of Miles being a willing participant in Quint’s ghostly seduction, he would be immune to corruption, and she would have no cause for fear. The Lost Man offers the boy an alternative future, one in which he can, possibly, grow to physical adulthood and still remain delightfully “lost”—at a price. The supposed villainy of these characters lies in precisely the same place as their appeal—in their refusal to give up childhood pleasures as adults.

3.2 “only a sort of dead baby:” Peter Pan, Possession, and Death

If *Peter Pan* appears, at first glance, to offer a fantastical escape from heteronormative, capitalistic manhood that doesn't require the child's death, it's important to realize that it's just that—a fantasy. As Jaqueline Rose points out, it's not a child's fantasy. “Suppose,” Rose suggests, “that Peter Pan is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he doesn't want to, but because someone else prefers that he shouldn't. Supposed, therefore that what is at stake in *Peter Pan* is the adult's desire for the child” (3). After all, in reality, most children, not just Wendy and her ilk, are eager to grow up—nostalgia for childhood is a distinctly adult phenomenon. Barrie's texts, like the comfort books discussed in the first chapter, are best understood as stories about “the adult's desire for the child,” rather than any actual liberation for the child. In fact, like the authors of comfort books and like Charles Dickens, Barrie wrote *Peter Pan* largely to declare and cement his possession of a beloved child (or children). Barrie addresses “To The Five,” his (at times uncomfortably bitter) dedication of the published play, to the Llewelyn Davies boys, his foster sons, two of whom, by this point were dead (George died in WWI; Barrie's favorite child, Michael, drowned at the age of 21, and is assumed by many, including his brothers Peter and Nico and Barrie himself, to have died by suicide).^{lxxxviii} Barrie describes the process of Peter's creation in terms that are both violent and sexual—“I suppose I always knew that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together . . . That is all he is, the spark I got from you” (13). “The play of Peter is streaky with you still, though none may see this save ourselves” (13), Barrie writes, unmistakably evoking the image of bodily fluids smearing the text—although whether the fluids in question are sweat, semen, or blood (or some combination of the three) remains unclear.

Barrie's dedication often reads as an attempt to reassert his claim over the adult “boys” by reminding them of times when, he suggests, they were all boys together, while also hinting at the

fact that he knows that these men may not be entirely pleased to be followed throughout their lives by *Peter Pan* (or perhaps, its author). “I hope, my dear sirs, that in memory of what we have been to one another you will accept this dedication with your friend’s love” (13), Barrie writes. He goes on at length about their adventures, as depicted in his book of photos *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island* (1901), of which there only even existed two copies, Barrie’s and the Llewelyn Davies’s, which their father immediately (Andrew Birkin suggests, purposefully) lost. He tries to include the boys in secrets and inside jokes, as in the parenthetical “Hullo, Peter rescued, and not rescuing others? I know what that means and so do you, but we are not going to give away all our secrets” (22). Mostly, though, the dedication feels dark and sad because we know that two of the men to whom Barrie is addressing it are dead, and, in fact, it often feels as though *all* of them are dead to him, simply by virtue of being men. “There is Peter still,” Barrie asserts darkly at one point, “but to me he lies sunk in the gay Black Lake” (15). Barrie’s image of the drowned Peter Pan evokes the real Michael Llewelyn Davies, but it also suggests that the other boys, in their adulthood, are useless to him as images of the ideal, eternal child. The only way to imagine Peter, once the boys who inspired him are grown, is to imagine his youthful corpse, and, for Barrie, that corpse retains a darkness and rot that the preserved, blemish-less corpses depicted in comfort books and accounts of digging up dead women do not.

In fact, death and *Peter Pan* had always been closely linked. Barrie’s inspiration for the boy who refused to grow up came partially from a real boy who never grew up: his brother David, who died on the eve of his fourteenth birthday. “When I became a man,” Barrie wrote, “he was still a boy of thirteen.” Barrie was particularly affected by his brother’s death because of the effect that it had on his own relationship with his mother, who mourned her dead son obsessively, and, the young Barrie felt, preferred him over her living child (which, as comfort book authors’

idealized memories of their own dead children show, doesn't appear to have been unusual). As his grief-stricken mother ignored him, six-year-old James attempted to gain her affection and lift her spirits by becoming "so like [David] that even my mother would not see the difference" (Birkin 5) "You see—" he wrote, in an inscription of an autographed copy of his "afterthought" to Peter Pan, "I think now—that Peter is only a sort of dead baby—he is the baby of all the people who never had one" (Rose 38). Barrie's haltingness, indicted by the use of multiple dashes, is clearly performative (the dashes appear to indicate pauses in speech, as if he were pausing to collect his thoughts, but of course the easiest way to stop and collect one's thoughts while writing is to just stop writing for a moment), and it feels as though the reader was meant to take this as some sort of profound and personal confession. It is the use of the word "dead" that stands out here, though. Barrie's conflation of dead and desired is interesting—"dead" is, of course, not typically synonymous with "never born."

Peter Pan makes his first appearance in Barrie's *The Little White Bird* (1902), a novella for adults that embraces both the "dead baby" and "desired baby" aspects of the immortal fairy-child. The novel, like *The Turn of the Screw* and, to a lesser degree, Barrie's later *Peter Pan*, explores the conflict over a child (David, named after Barrie's own dead brother) between a socially sanctioned mother-figure (in this case, the boy's actual mother), and the unrelated, unmarried man who intends to "take him utterly from her and make him mine" (*Little White Bird* 46). Barrie's (at least semi-autobiographical) narrator attempts this theft by, to quote Kenneth Kidd, trying to "seduce the boy with stories" (88).^{lxxxix} The character of Peter Pan comes into being in one of these seductive stories. When we first meet him, Peter is an immortal week-old baby, and living not in Neverland, but in Kensington Gardens, on the island from which babies (birds, until they are born) come. Peter starts his life as both a dealer in desired children and their undertaker—Barrie tells us

that, “you may write what you want (boy or girl, dark or fair) on a piece of paper, and then twist it into the shape of a boat and slip it into the water, and it reaches Peter Pan’s island after dark” (*Little White Bird* 54). Sexuality is completely removed from the creation of the dream child—in a story with echoes of the popular legend of the stork, the child is created through the magical transformation of one of the island’s birds. Peter does more than provide dream-children, though. If guardians are careless and allow these children to wander too long in the Gardens after lock-out, it is also his job to bury the lost children’s corpses. “I do hope Peter is not too ready with his spade,” Barrie remarks, callously. “It is all rather sad” (126). The narrative takes on a threatening tone when we recall that the narrator is telling this tale to David in Kensington Gardens (where Barrie perhaps, also, told it to the Llewelyn Davies boys), where he can point out the many “gravestones,” marked with dead children’s initials. These “gravestones,” which are really parish boundary markers, can still be found in Kensington Gardens today. One of them is marked “P. P.,” which Barrie’s narrator tells David stands for “Phoebe Phelps,” and Google tells me stands for Paddington Parish, but which also, of course, happen to be the initials of the eternally youthful hero of Barrie’s story. Peter’s earlier occupation also casts a darker light on the Lost Boys who, in Barrie’s later versions of the story, fly away to join him in eternal childhood in Neverland. These Lost Boys, Peter tells Wendy, are boys who fell out of their prams in places such as Kensington Gardens, when their mothers or nurses weren’t looking, and were left behind—the very same boys whom his earlier incarnation buried (*Peter Pan* 24).

While later versions of Peter Pan, even in Barrie’s own novelization, are humanized, Peter’s ghostly quality is emphasized in the original play. The main alteration that Barrie makes to *Peter Pan* between the 1904 play and 1911 novel is the decision to suddenly allow his little

dream-child to be touchable. While Wendy can apparently both kiss and grope Peter in Barrie's novel,^{xc} the "thimble" scene in the play transpires much differently:

([Wendy] leaps out of bed to put her arms round [Peter], but he draws back; he does not know why, but he knows he must draw back.)

PETER: You mustn't touch me.

WENDY: Why?

PETER: No one must ever touch me.

WENDY: Why?

PETER: I don't know.

(He is never touched by any one in the play.) (21).

What, then, compels Barrie to disobey his own edict in a way that causes James Kincaid to declare the novel "unauthentic" (*Child-Loving* 286)? After all, according to Rose, it "is because Peter Pan can never be touched that he remains forever disembodied . . . , because he surrounds himself with an aura of impenetrability that he remains eternal child" (xv). When Barrie makes his eternal child kissable he makes him somehow less of a child—but also less ghostly. We are assured that, if ageless, Peter is also a living, breathing, touchable boy, immortal rather than undead. The Peter Pan of Barrie's play is not only untouchable, but appears to be entirely incorporeal: Wendy is told by the Lost Boys, "*as a deadly secret that one of the queer things about [Peter] is that he has no weight at all. But it is a forbidden subject*" (*Peter Pan* 55). Likewise, we learn that, before Wendy's arrival, Peter subsisted solely on pretend meals, indeed, he "*knew of no other kind, and [Wendy] is not absolutely certain even now that he does eat the other kind, though no one appears to do it more heartily*" (58) (while pretend meals are partaken of sometimes in the novel, there's also real food, and Barrie makes a point of telling us that Peter "could eat, really eat, if it was part

of a game”) (*Peter and Wendy* 69). Even Peter’s possession of a beating heart is called into question: when Peter prepares to meet the “awfully big adventure” of death, Barrie tells us that he does so “*With a drum beating in his breast as if he were a real boy at last*” (*Peter Pan* 55).

Peter Pan might not have a corporeal, touchable body (in Barrie’s play, anyway), but whatever body he does have is certainly a key part of his appeal. In the play, we are told that, “*In so far as [Peter] is dressed at all, it is in autumn leaves and cobwebs*” (*Peter Pan* 27), and in Barrie’s novel, Peter is dressed in “skeleton leaves, and the juices that ooze out of trees” (*Peter and Wendy* 16). Peter’s attire in both texts simultaneously suggests decay and eroticism—he is nearly nude, and covered in cobwebs, or in oozing juices that call to mind both decomposition and sexual fluids. Peter evokes our desire for the untouchable, erotic, eternal (dead) child. The fact that touching Peter is forbidden (or impossible) makes him more ghostly; it also makes him more appealing. Just because no one *can* touch Peter doesn’t mean that everyone doesn’t want to—the entire play is made up of Wendy trying to kiss him and Captain Hook trying to kill him, and both are framed explicitly in bodily terms. When Hook fantasizes about killing Peter, declaring to Smee “Oh, I’ll tear him!” the stage directions tell us that he is “luxuriating” in the fantasy (*Peter Pan* 35). Much is made of Peter’s possession of all of his baby teeth, which are coded as erotically appealing and feral—when preparing to fight, “Peter gnashes his pretty teeth with joy” (53). When Hook finally plans to surprise Peter by poisoning him as he sleeps, the teeth are mentioned again. Barrie describes Hook watching the sleeping child, posing him erotically: “*One of his arms droops over the edge of the bed, a leg is arched, and the mouth is not so tightly closed that we cannot see the little pearls.*” (70). That this is also one of the few moments in the play when Peter appears as a conventionally helpless child who may actually be in danger seems crucial to its eroticism. As Hook’s obsession with Peter is based largely in the fact that he knows he can never beat him, so is

Peter's attractiveness based largely on the fact that he cannot actually be touched. Peter dramatizes the appeal of the erotic dead child—always just out of reach, he is a safe vessel for adult affections.

3.3 Neverland, the Queer Temporality of Eternal Childhood, and the Threat of Heterosexuality

When Peter is removed from Kensington Gardens to Neverland, he is removed from the real world, to a world of play, a world designated “never”—both outside of time and, simply “not.”^{xci} If he exists in his own temporal plane, Peter's refusal to age can be seen as a product of where he lives, not of what he is. Describing Peter in his first incarnation, the narrator of *The Little White Bird* tells David that “His age is a week, and though he was born so long ago he has never had a birthday, nor is there the slightest chance of his having one. The reason is that he escaped being a human when he was seven days old.” It seems impossible to avoid the euphemistic sound of this statement—Peter, he goes on to explain, “escaped by the window, and flew back to the Kensington Gardens” (55)—but this is not the usual method of escape, and, if that knowledge is lost on David, it is not lost on the narrator or the reader. “All children,” Barrie continues, “having been birds before they were human,” have this natural desire to escape—and, by the time of *Peter Pan*, Peter is there to help them escape. The unique temporality of Neverland allows a convenient “escape” in an unconventional way.

Neverland exists in its own temporality, an island upon which reproductive time is out of joint, or ceases to exist at all. Not only do the child citizens of this world never reach sexual maturity, the implication of sexuality is erased from their origins. While some of the Lost Boys claim to have vague memories of their mothers, they mostly seem to have simply sprung into

being, like the babies on Peter's island in *The Little White Bird*. The adults who inhabit Neverland are as out of step with reproductive time as the islands' ghostly children. The pirates live in the same adventurous, all-male society as Peter and his Lost Boys. Even among the "Indians," the only society on the island that could conceivably have "traditional" family structures, the "belle of the tribe," Tiger Lily, "wards off the altar with a hatchet." Rather than marrying one of the many braves who would "have her to wife" (*Peter and Wendy* 56), the indeterminately-aged Tiger Lily focuses her attentions on a prepubescent boy who she knows will never grow up to return them.

By refusing to "grow up," in the sense that the word generally means, by refusing, not only to grow older, but to follow the course of life that "growing up" would entail, the citizens of Neverland halt reproductive time, step out of the timeline which "responsible adults" like the Darlings will follow. In the words of Kathryn Bond Stockton, Lost Boys resist the "vertical movement upward (hence, 'growing up') toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness" (4), instead becoming rather literalized versions of her "ghostly gay children," with an identity that "*is* a deferral (sometimes powerfully and happily so) and an act of growing sideways" (11). Peter Pan, who is to be found "in the faces of many women who have no children" (*Peter and Wendy* 16), represents a disruption of heterosexual reproductive time that points to both the queer and the ghostly.

Perhaps it is precisely this stepping out of reproductive time that puts a halt to time altogether in Neverland. It is useful here to think of Jack Halberstam's ideas of queer time and space. According to Halberstam, "Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction."^{xcii} "Queer subcultures," he continues, "produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life

experience—namely birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2). By stepping out of a timeline the ultimate goal of which is reproduction, *Lost Boys* also step outside of the perpetual cycle of birth and death. A culture that is obsessed with procreation is, after all, implicitly obsessed with death—inherent in the purpose of reproduction is that not only one’s genetics, but one’s culture, live on. In *Peter Pan*, then, Wendy, a white, non-working-class girl from the “real world,” is representative of reproductive time in a way that the women native to the queer temporalities of Neverland are not. Tiger Lily and Tinkerbell, who are, respectively, non-white and working class^{xciii} (and, in Tinkerbell’s case, non-human), pose little danger to Peter Pan’s childishness, because they can never really invoke the deadly cultural implications of marriage and family that Wendy, as a middle-class, white, British girl, can. Encounters with possible romantic partners of the opposite sex, it is hinted, are what lead to “growing up”, and ultimately, death.

Wendy, a woman in the homosocial Neverland, is the ultimate threat. As “one of the kind that likes to grow up” (*Peter and Wendy* 178), she seems intent on taking everyone else with her by force – and, with the exception of Peter, she succeeds. Peter, like Miles, is closest to death when he is closest to the woman who would possess him. The one time when we (and Peter) really fear for his life, when he realizes what a big adventure death will be, is when he and Wendy are stranded on Marooner’s Rock:

Two small figures were beating against the rock; the girl had fainted and lay on the boy’s arm. With a last effort Peter pulled her up the rock and then lay down beside her. Even as he fainted he saw that the water was rising. He knew that they would soon be drowned, but he could do no more. As they lay side by side a mermaid caught Wendy by the feet, and began pulling her softly into the water. . . .(97-98)

The same corporeal reality that allows Peter and Wendy to touch and kiss in the novel puts them in a very real danger. The weightless, only-pretend-wounded Peter of the play cannot, we suspect, actually be drowned—Peter in the novel is weak, wounded, and, tellingly, embracing a girl. The one time that Peter and Wendy lie down side-by-side is also the one time that they actually come in dire danger of death. Tellingly, when we last see Wendy in the play *Peter Pan*, she is leaving Neverland for the final time astride a broomstick, a witch rather than a fairy (*Peter Pan* 94).

Hook, the one physically adult man who seems to belong in Neverland, also meets his end in the hands (or mouth) of a female. Hook's greatest fear and ultimate killer is not Peter, but the crocodile that has hunted him since she developed a taste for his flesh after eating his right hand. This symbolic (and hungry) crocodile also ate a clock, and so Hook is safe from her only until the clock winds down and stops ticking, at which point she will again be able to sneak up on him. Interestingly, Barrie makes a point of referring to the Crocodile as "she," rather than the "it" that might befit this symbolic animal (and Hook uses), or the standard neuter "he" of the time (which Hook's first mate, Smee, uses).^{xciv} The gendering of the Crocodile seems deliberate, and is certainly significant—the ticking Crocodile stands out as one of the few female characters in the boy's world of Neverland. Time, the ultimate destructive force, is marked as feminine. Like Wendy and her mother, who urge Peter and the Lost Boys to grow up, the female Crocodile forcibly reminds the Lost Boys and Men of Neverland that death is the only actual way to escape time.

3.4 *The Turn of the Screw* and the Feminine Threat of “Protection”

For Henry James, the darkness lurking in the background of Barrie’s fairy tale is brought to the forefront in both his psychological ghost story *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and the less read, but perhaps more horrific, realistic novella *The Author of Beltraffio* (1884). If *Peter Pan*’s Wendy is dangerous because she wants Peter to grow up and rejoin normative time, the women in *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Author of Beltraffio* are outright murderous. While I’m not particularly interested in “recuperating” any of these texts by doing feminist readings of them (which, especially in the case of *Peter Pan*, seem like they would have to be, at best, a stretch), James’s novellas differ from Barrie’s *Peter Pan* texts in that they indict not just feminine sexuality, but the discourses of protection that, at their logical ends, insist that a dead child is better than a “corrupted” (or queer) child. When paired with James’s *The Pupil* (1891), these texts form what I think of as James’s “dead erotic child trilogy,” in which the death of the erotic child acts as consummation of the adult/child relationship.

The Turn of the Screw, the most well-known of these novellas, shares many common themes with *Peter Pan*.^{xcv} The novella begins with a young woman’s intrusion into a world of children and domestic servants, and ends with her (probably) killing one of those children, in order to protect him from the ghosts that she believes are haunting them (although, since no one else ever sees these ghosts, it’s unclear whether they actually exist, or are just hallucinations).^{xcvi} I read these ghosts as representative of the unnamed Governess’s panic around Miles’s presumed sexual knowledge—she sees him as haunted by the specter of queerness, which may or may not relate to his relationship with Peter Quint, the dead valet whom the Governess sees haunting Miles.

Bly, like Neverland, exists in a temporality that is out of step with reproductive time. Flora and Miles are not only orphans, but are devoid of the residual parents who would usually

accompany orphanhood—like the Lost Boys, they appear to have neither grief, memories, or even a last name that would connect them to the man and woman who must have produced them. Bly’s chief living inhabitants consist of a sexually repressed virgin who is (supposedly) in love with an absent and unattainable man, and a presumably childless, single or widowed woman past her reproductive prime.^{xcvii} The one couple of childbearing age at Bly is present only in the form of ghosts, rendering any sexuality attached to them sterile. Additionally, while the living Peter Quint and Miss Jessel may have been lovers, their sexuality, rife with hints of child-loving, violence, and queer attractions, seems more at home on an enchanted island than in the reproductive timeline of the mainland.

There is a fatality inherent in heterosexuality for both the citizens of Neverland and Bly. If the official villains of *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan* are Lost Men Quint and Hook, it does not take a particularly deep reading of either text for it to become apparent that the real villains are the supposed heroines—both the first white, non-working class female characters to appear in Neverlands previously inhabited by men, boys, “natives,” and servants. While the Governess identifies Quint as “the white face of damnation” (*The Turn of the Screw* 86), Miles’s last words tell a different story. “Whom do you mean by ‘he’?” the Governess demands, sure that if she can only get the boy to “surrender” the name, the demon will be vanquished. “Peter Quint—you devil!” Miles cries. It is not Quint whom the boy fears, but the Governess. The devil at Bly, the person who ultimately destroys its children, is not Quint, but the woman appointed to protect them. Whatever may occur between Miles and Quint and Peter and Hook, neither boy ever appears to be in any real danger at the hand of the older man. Death comes to Neverland and Bly only with the arrival of women who wish to place the enchanted queer islands back into their own conventional temporality.

To be possessed by a woman, for the boys of Neverland and Bly, is fatal. Miles, ostensibly being shielded from the queer specter the Governess sees beckoning him, ends up literally smothered by a woman's embrace, on a night that is, significantly, likened to a wedding night. Describing her final dinner with Miles, the Governess compares their silence to that of "some young couple who, on their wedding journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter." Dismissing her transgressive association as "whimsical," the Governess attempts to finally discuss the matter that has obsessed her, his dismissal from school, with an "admirable, but not comfortable," Miles. After she admits that she stays on at Bly only for the pleasure of his company, her voice trembling, Miles becomes "more and more visibly nervous" (80), although the Governess attributes this nervousness to something other than being left alone with a woman who has apparently driven his sister mad, and seems intent, now, on possessing him.

While the Governess appears to believe that she is battling to save Miles's soul, the possession in question is less demonic, and more literal, physical. When she learns that Quint was "much too free" with Miles, the Governess feels "a sudden sickness of disgust," but her response, "Too free with *my* boy?" (26, emphasis in original), seems to indicate that the problem is less that someone was "too free" with Miles, than that someone else may have considered him *his* boy. "There is not their equal on earth, and they are ours, ours!" Mr. Darling cries, in a moment of dramatic irony, before his children fly out the window and away (*Peter Pan* 11). Like Mr. Darling, or the comfort book authors in the first chapter, the Governess takes pride in the children, not as charges, but as possessions. "We were cut off, really, together; we were united in our danger. They had nothing but me, and I—well, I had *them*. It was in short a magnificent chance" (*The Turn of the Screw* 27, emphasis in original). And this dual possession delights the Governess. The invasion of "ghosts," at first, helps her to solidify her possession of the children as something invaluable to

their protection. It is only when she sees that they may not *want* this protection that she becomes frantic. As Ellis Hanson points out, the ghosts, if real, are not inherently menacing, and the children, far from seeming “evil” or even “corrupt,” are in fact well-behaved, pleasant, and happy, until frightened out of that happiness not by their former, but by their current governess.

The Governess’s eagerness to view the ghosts as not just competitors for the children’s affection, but agents of sexual corruption, hints at the erotic impulses that appear under the surface of some comfort book authors’ delight in the eternal possession of their dead children. The titular key in Nehemiah Adam’s *Agnes and the Little Key* resembles not just a jailor’s key, but the key to chastity belt, and Agnes’ death, like Nell’s, Mary Hogarth’s, or Miles’s, is satisfying largely because it preserves her chastity and dubious innocence. When the Governess announces to a bewildered Mrs. Grose that the vague, nearly meaningless letter from Miles’s school, which says only that “should be impossible to keep him,” “ can have only one meaning” (10) she is participating in the same discourse as Adams, one that assumes that there is only one sort of harm that can come to a child: “corruption.” In the Governess’s declaration that Miles must be “an injury to the others!” injury only has one possible meaning, which has nothing to do with physical harm or emotional cruelty (11). To injure, to James’s Governess, means simply: “To corrupt” (12)—a term which, according to Eric Savoy, would, in Victorian England, have had an implication even more decidedly sexual than it does today.^{xcviii} Our understanding of Miles’s expulsion from school never gains any more clarity than these vague notions of “corruption” and forbidden knowledge. What, exactly, *did* Miles “say” at school? We are left only with his final interrogation by the Governess, with purposefully vague statements made under physical duress. After being shaken and ordered to provide an answer to the question of “What did you do?” Miles, in “vague pain,” admits the crime that got him expelled from school:

“Well – I said things.”

“Only that?”

“They thought it was enough!”

“To turn you out for?” . . .

“Well, I suppose I oughtn’t.”

“But to whom did you say them” . . . “Was it to everyone?” . . .

“No; it was only to – . . . I don’t remember their names.”

“Were they then so many?”

“No – only a few. Those I liked.” . . .

“And did they repeat what you said?” . . .

“Oh yes, . . . they must’ve repeated them. To those *they* liked.”^{xcix}

Miles’s explanation only further confuses the Governess. “Those he liked?” she wonders. “I seemed to float not into clearness, but into a darker obscure” (84). After wondering for a moment, in horror, whether or not she may have imagined the boy’s guilt in the first place, the Governess demands again that he tell her what, precisely, “*were* these things?” (86). His answer is stayed, however, by the Governess herself as, “with a single bound and an irrepressible cry,” she “spring[s] straight upon him” (86). The queer specter of Quint has appeared to her, both to stop the boy from answering and as answer to her question. If the revelation that Miles was expelled for “saying things” to “those he liked” sends the Governess further into darkness, it seems to us to be only because she lacks the narrative that would make sense of it. Or perhaps her confusion is deliberate, founded in the same attitude that she takes towards the ghosts, steeling herself for her final confrontation with Miles by willing herself to “shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, *against nature*” (79, emphasis added).

According to D. A. Miller, texts that show homosexuality merely by implication will be “haunted by the phantasm of the thing itself.”^c In *The Turn of the Screw*, that haunting is made literal. Peter Quint becomes the personified specter of homosexuality that the governess sees haunting Miles, beckoning him to join. Quint and Miss Jessel have returned from the dead, according to the Governess, in order to possess Miles and Flora, respectively. She by this point intends the word in both its physical and supernatural meanings, declaring that the ghosts want the children “for the love of all the evil that, in those dreadful days, the pair put into them . . . to ply them with that evil still.” In response to Mrs. Grose’s question as to what two dead people could possibly do to the living, the Governess responds that Quint and Jessel can “destroy” the children. Seen only across distances, on towers, at the further edge of the lake, outside a window from inside, she says, the ghosts beckon to the children—“and the success of the tempters is only a question of time. They’ve only to keep to their suggestions of danger,” she says, for the children to yield, to come to them – “and perish in the attempt!” (48). These queer specters gaze at the children, summon them over “the long reach of [their] desire” (70)—but there is no indication that this desire frightens anyone other than the Governess.

3.5 *The Author of Beltraffio* and the Avenging “Angel of Propriety”

The Turn of the Screw may have been, in some ways, James’s attempt to retell a story that he had already told in such a way that its ambiguities might make it more palatable. That story was *The Author of Beltraffio*, a novella published four years before *The Turn of the Screw*, in which the murderous, protective mother is literalized in a way that she is not in the later text. If the murderous desire of *Peter Pan* and *The Turn of the Screw*’s mother-figures is somewhat

ambiguous, *The Author of Beltraffio*'s is not—nor is this murderous impulse displaced onto a surrogate mother. The novella revolves around an unnamed narrator's visit to a novelist, Mark Ambient, with whom he is infatuated. Ambient has an “extraordinarily beautiful” son, “not more than seven years old” (15), who is only ever referred by the nickname “Dolcino” (which both marks him as a sweet treat available for adult consumption, and foreshadows his eventual martyrdom to the cult of “propriety”). Ambient's wife, Beatrice, makes it clear that she does not approve of her husband's writing, or his philosophy of life, and is worried that he will “corrupt” their son. To prevent this, when the child gets sick with a minor, curable illness, she withholds his medicine, bars the doctor and his father from his room, and allows the child to die.

James's writes in his *Notebooks* that the story is based on Edmund Gosse's observations of the relationship between John Addington Symonds and his wife and child (57). Symonds is most well-known today as an early author of gay history and memoir, and, whether or not James had read it, his *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1873) had first been privately printed and circulated over a decade before James published *The Author of Beltraffio*. Mark Ambient, the titular author of *Beltraffio* (an aesthetic novel, the content of which is never detailed), seems to reference the text when he remarks that his wife “thinks [him] . . . no better than an ancient Greek” (48). While Mark continues by saying that “She thinks me immoral—that's the long and short of it,” his mention of ancient Greece suggests a particular type of “immorality” (49). Mrs. Ambient's fear is partially that her son will read her husband's writing, and be, like Miles, “corrupted” by knowledge, but the lengths she goes to keep her husband and son separate also hint at a fear of not just influence, but sexual abuse. Mark's sister, Gwendolyn, explains to the narrator that Mrs. Ambient “has a dread of my brother's influence on the child on the formation of his character, his ‘ideals’ . . . It's as if it were a subtle poison or a contagion—something that would rub off on his

tender sensibility when his father kisses him or holds him on his knee. If she could she'd prevent Mark from even so much as touching him" (41). Mark later tells his son, "with a grimace," "Oh yes; I know how mamma holds you when I come near!" (59). Mrs. Ambient's too-tight holding of her son amounts to actual abuse—both in that her immense commitment to "protecting" her son is preventing him from doing what he wishes (mainly spending time with his father), and physically. James describes Mrs. Ambient's maternal embrace in terms that sound painful: the first time we meet him, "Dolcino struggled in the maternal embrace; but, too tightly held, he after two or three fruitless efforts jerked about and buried his head deep in his mother's lap" (14), and, eventually, like Miles, Dolcino dies in the embrace of a woman who is trying to shield him from the specter of queerness.

After Dolcino becomes (like so many Victorian literary children) suddenly and vaguely ill, Mrs. Ambient, after reading the proofs for her husband's book, decides to take both the Victorian cult of the dead child and the cult of protection at face value and let the child die to "save" him. Gwendolyn Ambient describes her sister-in-law's actions as a "sacrifice," saying that Dolcino's mother "sacrificed him; she determined to do nothing to make him live. Why else did she lock herself in, why else did she turn away the Doctor? The book gave her a horror; she determined to rescue him—to prevent him from ever being touched" (73). The narrator asks whether Gwendolyn thinks that Beatrice "has no pity, that she's cruel and insane," but, Gwendolyn suggests, Beatrice's actions are neither cruel nor illogical to her, as she sees death as the only way to preserve her child's all-important innocence. "She held him in her arms," she says, "she pressed him to her breast, not to see him; but she gave him no remedies; she did nothing the Doctor ordered. Everything's there untouched. She has had the honesty not even to throw the drugs away!" (73).

Beatrice allowing her son to die is not an uncharacteristic burst of madness, but a logical extension of her character, which is depicted mostly as that of a proper Victorian lady. Her husband describes her, perhaps a bit condescendingly, but apparently quite sincerely, as “a very nice woman, extraordinarily well-behaved, upright and clever and with a tremendous lot of good sense about a good many matters” (50). Gwendolyn, who, later, doesn’t appear particularly shocked that Beatrice has, for all intents and purposes, murdered her son, says that “Beatrice is perfect as a mother” (34). Murdering one’s child, then, appears as one course of action that’s available in the repertoire of “perfect mother.” The narrator describes Mrs. Ambient as “the very angel of the pink of propriety,” adding rather ominously that “Mark Ambient, apparently, ten years before, had simply and quite inevitably taken her for an angel, without asking himself of what” (51). Again, none of this appears to be ironic. Beatrice’s actions are, after all, just an extreme literalization of the stated emotions of mothers who wrote comfort books, who felt that they could treasure their children better if they were dead, preserved forever in their most perfect state, and eternally protected from corruption, or anyone else’s touch.

3.6 “So I never laid a longing hand on Dolcino:” Denied Gratification and the Erotic Child

Mrs. Ambient, like *The Turn of the Screw*’s Governess, functions as a sort of murderous gatekeeper of childhood “norms” and “purity.” The violence that this ascribes to femininity is problematized, however, by the ambivalence of the male narrator to Dolcino’s death. As in *The Turn of the Screw*, James’s narrator in *The Author of Beltraffio* is unnamed and unreliable, and his stated horror at Dolcino’s death is complicated by his own complicity in the circumstances surrounding the child’s death, and by his descriptions of the child. As Kevin Ohi points out, citing

Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence*, the ways in which Dolcino's silence and perceived "blankness" allow the narrator to write his own desires there, culminating in the "ventriloquism" through which the narrator justifies his intervention into the Ambient's affairs by saying that the boy "pleaded" with him to intervene with his eyes (Ohi 754).^{ci} The narrator is, in fact, a key player in Dolcino's death, since it appears to be his insistence that Mrs. Ambient read her husband's latest work (a choice that is woefully naïve, at the very least) that cements Mrs. Ambient's decision to allow her son to die, rather than be corrupted.

The narrator's descriptions of Dolcino echo comfort book descriptions of objectified, angelic children whose eroticism is barely veiled. The fact that the narrator has only known this child for a few days, however, makes it impossible to avoid the fact that his affections for Dolcino are almost entirely based on the child's appearance, and draws attention to the convergences between wanting to touch a child, and wanting that child to die. When he first meets Dolcino, the narrator says that

I lost no time in observing that the child, not more than seven years old, was extraordinarily beautiful. He had the face of an angel—the eyes, the hair, the smile of innocence, the more than mortal bloom. There was something that deeply touched, that almost alarmed, in his beauty, composed, one would have said, of elements too fine and pure for the breath of this world. . . . Afterwards indeed I knew a trifle better; I grasped the truth of his being too fair to live, wondering at the same time that his parents shouldn't have guessed it and have been in proportionate grief and despair. For myself I had no doubt of his evanescence, having already more than once caught in the fact the particular infant charm that's as good as a death-warrant" (15-16).

Since this is narrated after the fact—the narrator knows, when he's writing (or telling us) this story, what will become of Dolcino—the notion that Dolcino is "too pure for this world," or

that his “charm” is his “death-warrant” is particularly disturbing. Dolcino does not die because God decided that he was “too pure for this world,” as comfort books often suggest, but because his mother decided that he was, and that he should remain that way. The narrator’s framing of Dolcino’s murder as his unavoidable fate lays bare the sinister undertones of the implication that children might die because they are just *too* good, too pure, too beautiful—that a child’s death might be a mark of their perfection. Like the children in comfort books, of course, death doesn’t mar Dolcino’s beauty—he “was more exquisitely beautiful in death than he had been in life” (75).

Dolcino’s death not only allows his mother to preserve his purity by protecting him from queer knowledge, but helps to preserve his fascination for the narrator, since, as he says multiple times, Dolcino’s death prevented him from being able to touch the boy, despite his deep desire to do so. In fact, the narrator frames this, not the boy’s death, as his greatest regret about the whole event. “[I]t has remained a constant regret for me,” he says, “that on that strange Sunday afternoon I didn’t even for a moment hold Dolcino in my arms” (58). Later, after his offer to carry Dolcino to bed is denied, he says, apparently by way of resigned explanation, “So I never laid a longing hand on Dolcino” (62). Dolcino’s untouchability is linked to his desirability in the same way that the ghostly Peter Pan’s is, and, like Peter Pan, the boy appears in *The Author of Beltraffio* as always already ghostly, always destined not to grow up, not to be touched. The way in which Dolcino’s death preserves him as a desirable figure in the narrator’s mind precisely because this desire never was, and now never can be, acted on also recalls Dickens’s writings about his dead, teenaged sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, and prefigure James’s *The Pupil* (1891).

The Pupil, in which the teenaged Morgan dies of a heart attack as soon as his neglectful parents finally give him permission to go live with his beloved tutor, Pemberton, makes explicit the motif of death as consummation—or, the desirability of death right before consummation can

occur. Morgan and Pemberton share a long, romantic friendship, with the tutor caring for the boy as both an employee and friend (Morgan and Pemberton, even more so than the Governess and Miles, appear to be fairly close in age). When Morgan suddenly drops dead at the moment that he and Pemberton's relationship is legitimized, as in the *The Author of Beltraffio*, the real tragedy is not that the child is dead, but that the child dies before the narrator can touch or possess him—except, is that really a tragedy? As we've seen repeatedly throughout this dissertation, the best relationship with the child is the one left unconsummated, any corrupting touch prevented, mercifully, by death (the "mercy" here is all for the adult admirer, of course; unlike those who believe that sexual abuse or knowledge is the worst thing that can happen to a child, I hardly find death to be a mercy).

As *The Pupil* and *The Author of Beltraffio* suggest, the men in these tales are as complicit in their beloved children's deaths as any murderous mother. While Pemberton loves Morgan, he is also ambivalent about his future—he expects, to the point, it sometimes seems, of hoping, that the boy will die young because of his heart ailment, and even jokingly threatens to poison him if he doesn't die soon enough (63). James's texts, then, complicate the notion that it is only gatekeeping mother figures who harbor murderous impulses for queer boys—male admirers may secretly wish for their deaths for reasons similar to those of the men who desire dead girls in the previous chapter. If Wendy wants Peter to grow up and die, Barrie's impulse to keep him a child forever is actually more immediately deadly. Death allows for both a preservation of and a denial of the child's erotic appeal, now infinitely delayed.

3.7 *Tim: A Story of School Life* and Queer(ed) Sentimental Fiction

While, in James's texts, the preservation of childhood through death is exposed as a violent act, James's friend, Howard Sturgis, posits death as a potentially liberatory decision in the face of otherwise compulsory heterosexual adulthood in his *Tim: A Story of School Life* (1891). *Tim*'s framing of Eton as a homosocial Neverland reflects real-life possibilities for some upper-class queer Victorian boys, and, while his death is, in some ways, a reaction to the invasion of a woman into his queer paradise, it is ultimately framed as his decision, not as an act of violence. Tim is, in fact, coded as similar to Little Nell and the other ideal children who are destined to die, decide to die, and then do. In Sturgis's framing, however, this reads less like an adult desire that is imposed onto Tim, and more like a genuine desire on Tim's part to decline to take part in the adult world. While Peter Pan's fantastical nature complicates his refusal of adulthood—it's never quite clear if he's *really* "sort of a dead baby" by his own choice or not—Tim's desire for death is grounded in the real-world options available to him.

Unlike *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan*, *Tim: A Story of School Life* has been canonized only in that it sometimes appears on lists of gay/queer novels, and its author, Howard Sturgis, is more typically remembered for his relationships to other, more famous authors (including Henry James, with whom he had an intense, and possibly romantic, relationship) than by his literary works. In both his writing and his life, Sturgis was more openly queer than James or Barrie. It is difficult to read *Tim* as anything other than a queer romance. If Peter Pan's queerness lies in his resistance to heterosexuality, and Miles's is shrouded in the mystery of what he might have "said" to boys he "liked," Tim's queerness is explicit: it lies in his atypical gender performance, and in his romantic attachment to another boy. Like *Peter Pan*, *Tim* is a sort of anti-bildungsroman, but Sturgis borrows more explicitly from the format of the typical school story—

Tim grows older, goes to school, progresses well in school, and . . . *does not* grow up. Tim resists the queer, dead character's typical place in the bildungsroman—as Eric Tribunella has discussed in detail, school stories often rely on “narrative[s] of melancholic maturation” in which, in order for the protagonist to achieve “successful manhood,” “same-sex love or queerness . . . must be sacrificed” (1). This often occurs through a literal sacrifice of the “intimate friend” of the protagonist through death.^{cii} The basic plot of *Tim* does follow this format—one boy dies, the other, it is implied, can now grow up and marry a woman. Instead of being relegated to the sidelines, though, an obstacle on the way to heterosexuality that the protagonist must overcome in order to grow up “properly,” into heterosexual manhood, the queer “sacrifice” is the protagonist of this novel. We learn very little about Carol, the apparent British masculine ideal, except that Tim loves him intensely. Instead, the focus is on Tim, his feelings for Carol (his neighbor when at home, and “fag-master” when at Eton), his decision to “sacrifice” his relationship with Carol to allow the other boy's engagement to a woman (who has called off their engagement because she is jealous of Carol's friendship with Tim),^{ciii} and, finally, his death.

Unlike in James's work, in which the death of the queer boy is framed as horrific, or in *Peter Pan*, in which it's cloaked in the language of fairy tales, *Tim* gives us a queer child protagonist whose death appears to fit neatly into the sentimental narrative established by texts such as *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. That *Tim* was published half a century after these novels, once sentimental fiction was largely out of fashion, suggests that Sturgis was trying to play with the sentimental narrative, rather than play into it. Certainly, Tim's attitude towards death echoes that of death-obsessed characters like Dicken's Little Nell—Tim's father is disturbed by his son's frequent questions about/discussion of how young various relatives were when they died, which he views as “morbid and unhealthy” (240). When Tim's doctor finally tells

his father, vaguely, of “his belief that the lad would die,” he explains that nothing is really wrong with Tim. He thinks Tim going to die, but “How soon he could not say; he might even be wrong, and Tim might take a turn and begin to gain strength; but he was afraid to hope it. The little stock of life in him seemed to be ebbing away. He might go on for a year, or it might be much sooner; it was impossible to say” (293). When Tim’s father responds, logically, by asking the doctor what’s wrong with his son, and how it can be treated, the doctor explains that “There is no organic disease; he is dying of sheer weakness” (293). Although “weakness” is in line with Tim’s doctor and father’s view of his feminized gender performance, Tim actually appears to be dying not of “sheer weakness,” but of sheer will. After reminding his father, again, that many people in their family have died young, Tim announces that “I think *I* shall die this summer” (297). This feels more like a declaration than a confidence—Tim appears to be announcing his exciting decision to join in the family tradition, not telling his father that he’s concerned about his health. Tim tells his father not to worry, since, for his own part, “I think I am rather glad” (297).

The reason that Tim is glad to die is not, like Little Nell or the angelic children of comfort books, because he’s excited to go home to God. The prospect of an afterlife is never mentioned in *Tim*, which makes the text completely unique from the sentimental tales that it draws from. In fact, the only mentions of religion in the text are in relation to Carol’s resemblance to an angel in a stained glass window in the church that Tim attended as a child, and the Biblical story of David and Jonathan (read by many, at least since the Renaissance, as a queer romance), which provides both the epigraph for the novel and the epitaph for Tim’s tombstone: “Thy love for me was wonderful, passing the love of women.”^{civ} Death, then, offers not a release from a flawed world for which Tim is “too pure,” but a specific respite from the world of adult heterosexuality. The text’s queering of religious motifs posits a different sort of afterlife for Tim: not a literal heaven,

but a symbolic eternal life in which he gets to remain queer (and, shockingly, even to have that queerness marked on his tombstone). When Tim and Carol are reunited on the Tim's deathbed, Tim explains the appeal of death by saying that "If I had lived I could not have had you with me now" (310). The "now" here is ambiguous—since Carol is by all appearances happy to spend time with Tim, it suggests that Tim's death allows him to be with Carol without affecting his relationship with his fiancée, but also, perhaps, that the "now" in question means "at Tim's death," not "at the present moment." "Now," for Tim, is the time to die, because otherwise his and Carol's relationship will necessarily not be as close when he does. Tim spends his last hour with Carol telling him "all the long story of his constant love," and, the narrator tells us, this hour was "was just the happiest of Tim's whole life" (313). After embracing and kissing Carol, and asking him to make sure that his desired epitaph is carved on his tombstone, Tim sends him away, and calls in his father, and "a satisfied smile lit up [Tim's] face" (318). This is how the novel ends—with Tim dying, but satisfied, in possession of the love of both Carol and his father, a situation that seemed impossible during his life.

In dying, Tim not only resists growing up into heterosexuality (something that he has clearly never had any interest in), but is able to, in some ways, regenders himself along the lines of the Victorian female ideal described in the previous chapter. If Carol is, as we are constantly told, a masculine ideal, then Tim is also framed as a feminine ideal—weak, imaginative, and happy to die. For Tim, the delicate health that characterizes his ideal sisters works as a coded reference to his sexuality, but also troubles the strict binary of gender performance expected in the Victorian Era. Tim's sickness marks him as not normatively masculine, and, in fact, the very descriptions that make his father so disappointed in him could be applied to a girl in a novel from the same time period to let us know that she was a desirable, pure child. We are told multiple times how pale and

thin Tim is (he gets repeatedly “whiter and thinner” as the novel progresses) (111, 294), and a sixteen-year-old Tim is described as having a “slight, graceful figure,” and “small,” “delicate slender hands with long fingers” (242). A sensitive child, Tim spends much of his time reading and daydreaming, and the idea of hunting animals makes him sad. Tim’s father is constantly disappointed with his son’s untraditional masculinity, but Tim himself doesn’t necessarily seem to be, except in that it disappoints his father. When Tim’s father tells him that he wonders why he “can . . . never be like other boys about anything,” the narrator tells us that “Tim wondered that too” (218), but Tim doesn’t seem particularly disturbed by the wondering. Mostly, Tim’s father’s concern seems to stem from the fact that he sees his son’s non-normative gender performance and apparent romantic attraction to another boy as linked (which most late-Victorians probably would have, since “inversion” was the popular model for homosexuality at the time). He accuses his son of “hanging about [Carol’s] house and grounds like a sentimental girl when he’s away” (216), wonders why he can’t be “less like a silly schoolgirl in his friendship and more like a man,” and repeatedly refers to his distaste for the apparently feminine, “sentimental letters” that Tim writes Carol (252).

Tim’s inexplicable sickness is itself presented as a deviation from normative gender performance: when he is a child, his doctor tells Tim’s nurse that she “must take care of this little man,” since “he is by temperament an excitable child. So slight a scratch as he got would have had no effect on most boys, but the shock has evidentially told on him” (39-40). “The boy must have an odd constitution,” he concludes” (40). Years later, as the sixteen-year-old Tim enters his final illness, the doctor again warns that Tim “wants great care and attention; there is no use denying it. . . . I don’t say he is ill. God grant he may not be, for he hasn’t the strength to throw things off as

some boys do” (237). Tim’s illness, then, is framed as a specifically gendered oddity—“most boys” wouldn’t be affected by whatever is wrong with Tim.

Crucially, the text never seems to be mocking Tim’s “feminine” behavior. In fact, this aspect of Tim’s story appears to be autobiographical, since Sturgis apparently took no pains to hide the feminine and queer side of his own nature—he took great delight in entertaining, spent most of his time, with a basket of “work” (knitting and embroidery) by his side, and lived openly with his male companion.^{cv} Sturgis’s cousin, philosopher George Santayana, described Howard as a child as “save for the accident of sex, which was not yet a serious encumbrance, a perfect young lady of the Victorian type” (306), and suggests that Sturgis was sent to Eton to “cure” him of his “girliness,” but it didn’t work—“Young Howard calmly defied all of those schoolboys with his feminine habits and arts, which he never dreamt of disguising” (308).^{cvi} While an all-boys school may reasonably have been expected to “cure” Howard of his love of knitting, however, Santayana’s framing of Eton as a place of gender-normative development misses the ways in which it could, also, act as a sort of homosocial Neverland of queer exploration, and as crucial part of life for queer boys who *didn’t* view that exploration as only a stepping stone into adult heterosexuality.

3.8 “A Story of School Life:” Eton as “queer nursery”

Sturgis’s subtitle for *Tim: A Story of School Life* frames is as a part of the genre of school stories (which, as Tribunella points out, often have queer subtexts). However, very little of the narrative of *Tim* takes places at or revolves around Eton—almost a third of the book has passed before Tim even goes to Eton. In fact, the narrator states, repeatedly and explicitly, that *Tim* is not

a story of school life at all. “It is not my intention to trace in detail Tim’s career at school, which, after all, presents few points of interest” (140), Sturgis tells us, shortly after Tim goes to Eton. Later, he reminds us that “Tim’s career at Eton, after it became more prosperous, offers nothing of much interest to the general public, his relations with the various good people who befriended him having nothing to do with this story, which is the history of his friendship for Carol, and for no one else” (209). If the story is the history of Tim’s friendship with Carol, though, its subtitle seems to make even less sense, since Tim and Carol, who are four years apart in age, appear to barely interact at school. What we see of Tim and Carol’s relationship takes place almost entirely when they’re at home—before they go to school, after Carol finishes school, and on school holidays. We know that Tim is Carol’s “fag” (a younger boy who acted as a servant to an older boy at a British public school) while they’re at Eton, but this is not a position that implies friendship (although it did, sometimes, imply a sexual relationship, either consensual or coerced), because of the two boys’ different statuses in the school. Thus, the framing of the story of Tim and Carol’s friendship as “a story of school life” is doing something other than literally describing what the story is about. Rather, the title works to signal to a specific type of reader that the novel is about a specific type of friendship—a passionate, erotically charged romance between two boys that would, for most turn-of-the-century men, have only been acceptable within the confines of public school life. When the narrator of *Tim* says that they “doubt if at any later date a healthy popular boy is likely to taste such pure joys as during the last few years of public-school life” (162), it’s possible to read this statement two ways—it’s not necessarily that the “healthy, popular boy” is experiencing greater joys than the other boys, but that he *won’t experience them again*. Leaving school, for boys like Carol, meant, for the most part, leaving behind queer relationship and pleasures.

Eton is not only a “queer nursery” (210),^{cvii} though, it works as a sort of Neverland, eternally preserving the youth of the boys who matriculate there. Eton graduates are referred to as “old boys,” despite their age—physically adult men who, even in their old age, are eternally boys. These men exist forever in relation to boyhood, which is supposed to have been the happiest time of their life—a rather ominous notion, since it’s such a small portion of life. J. M. Barrie, too, testified to the temporality-altering powers of Eton, in a speech that he gave there about notable alum James Hook’s time as a student. Hook returns and sits on the wall reserved for “Pops,” or members of the elite Eton Society—“Once a Pop, always a Pop,” Barrie tells us.^{cviii} *Peter Pan*, in dramatizing the potential joys of eternal boyhood, also dramatizes the tragedy of the real-life men who have to give it up. Captain Hook’s obsession with Peter Pan is equaled only by his obsession with Eton—his last words are “Floreat Etona,” and, Barrie tells us in his speech, he left everything to the school in his will (although they turned it down). Four of Barrie’s five adopted sons went to Eton (although Barrie himself did not), and his speech detailing Hook’s love and respect for his alma mater is deeply sympathetic (he loves it so much, it turns out, that he destroys all record of his attendance in order to save it from disgraceful association with a pirate). Unable to stay in Eton in real life, unable to join the Lost Boys in Neverland, Hook’s desire for childish pleasures brands him a villain—perhaps, like Tim or Peter Pan, he would have been better off becoming Lost before he grew up, and it was too late.

3.9 The Llewelyn Davies Boys and the Limits of Death as Escape

Whatever the liberatory potential offered through death for queer characters, it is important to remember that *Tim* is, ultimately, no less a fantasy than *Peter Pan*. If the authors of the texts

discussed in this chapter may have been able to identify more with their dead child creations than the authors discussed in the last chapter could, and so to show them more sympathy, these children are still fantastical creations of adults who wish to preserve and possess them—which, as James’s novellas suggest, can never not be an act of violence. *Tim* certainly seems to have been partially based on Sturgis’s own experience, but Sturgis, unlike Tim, did not have to die—he grew up, retained the “feminine” parts of his personality, lived with his male partner, and had many close friends. Most queer turn-of-the-century boys were not so lucky. If Michael Llewelyn Davies died by suicide at the age of twenty at least partially because he was conflicted about his sexuality, as his brother Nico believed, then he did not decide to die as some sort of liberatory act that rendered him eternally young and queer, but because he lived in a society in which his sexuality was both socially frowned upon and illegal, and he lived on as an immortal boy only in the writings of his foster father. When Peter Llewelyn Davies died, nearly forty years later, newspapers announced his death with headlines that read “The Boy Who Never Grew Up is Dead,” “Peter Pan Stood Alone to Die,” and, most provocatively, “Peter Pan Commits Suicide” (Birkin 1). Peter, who had been plagued by his association with Barrie’s play, which he referred to as “that terrible masterpiece” (Birkin 196), his entire life, was not able to escape it even in death, when he appeared to be literally indistinguishable from the fictional boy who was named after him. Unlike the comfort books that came to surrogate the bodies of already-dead children, *Peter Pan* worked to freeze real, living children in an eternal childhood possible only through death, and it worked so well that it probably contributed to two of them, finally, not wanting to live anymore. Barrie could, perhaps, be a character out of one of James’s horror stories, wishing so badly to preserve his children’s childishness that he’s willing to kill them for it.

The next chapter of this dissertation takes up the question of child suicide, first by focusing on a fictional account, and then real, newspaper accounts. That this is, in some ways, the obvious conclusion of the logic of comfort books and of texts like *Peter Pan*, which insist that childhood is the best time of one's life, and that it's best to die young, suggests that such logic can only ever be damaging.

4.0 “It was in his nature to do it:” Victorian Accounts of Child Suicide

Most of the texts discussed in this dissertation are about children who apparently wanted to die. Many of these children are fictional, and even those who are apparently based on real people have been absorbed into sentimental narratives that have little to do with these children’s actual desires, fears, or deaths. Nevertheless, many of the children who appear in this dissertation are presented as having died because they desired to die. Comfort book authors frame their own children as of an ideal type that “like to die” (Faber 145), and texts like *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) present an obsession with death as a part of the charm of an angelic young girl. These children’s deaths are often framed as blessings, as the correct response to a cruel world that would rob the child of their innocence and purity, or, in the case of texts about boys like *Peter Pan* (1904) and *Tim* (1891) of their freedom or queerness. This is never examined as a reflection on that cruel world, though, but instead on the child—a child’s wish to die proves that they are the perfect child, and it is typically a positive, rather than tragic, impulse. The deaths depicted in the comfort books and novels discussed throughout this dissertation are peaceful, beautiful, and well-managed, not violent or messy (either emotionally or literally). Little Nell wants to die because she is a saint, not because she is homeless, alone, and terrified of the violent world around her—an idea that seems odd when you consider that, really, she is (or perhaps should be) all of those things.

This chapter takes the previous chapters’ romanticized notion of children who “like to die” literally, dealing with stories of children and young people who died by suicide. Why, in the real world, might children in Victorian England have wanted to die? These children, like Little Nell, were threatened by poverty and abuse, and their choice to die was rooted in desperation, not saintliness. What might a culture in which the desire for an early death seems to have been an

acknowledged and appealing aspect of childhood have done with the notion of children who took their lives—and deaths—into their own hands? Did this culture, perhaps, work to encourage some of these deaths? And were children, or child characters, ever able to gain any sort of agency by deciding when to die? Could these deaths ever comment on the social system that caused them? The answer to these last two questions, of course, is not really—Victorian children and young people who died by suicide were not often allowed into the discourse of ideal childhood occupied by literary children who apparently wished to die but did not take action to cause their own deaths, and the contributing societal factors for their deaths are often elided in newspaper reports covering them.

I begin with a fictional case of a child who is portrayed as gaining a dubious agency through suicide, “Little Father Time” from Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895). While Little Father Time is often read only as a symbolic figure, I take his story more literally here, reading Hardy’s narrative of suicide as a potential political action against the depoliticized narratives of child suicide published in Victorian newspapers. I then turn to two case studies that show how childhood was defined for, and defined, young people who died by suicide in nineteenth-century Great Britain. The different ways in which these two cases, both of girls who died by suicide, were reported by different newspapers draws attention to the flexibility of the category of “child,” and to what a designation as a “child” might grant, or take from, the dead person.

This chapter focuses on the public discourses surrounding children and young people who died by suicide, and I attempt to avoid making assumptions about the mental health or states of the people discussed herein. It’s not only impossible to access these subjects’ interiority, but any attempt to claim such access encourages a fetishization of children’s imagined interiority at the expense of the actual, archival knowledge that is available. These children likely did not keep

diaries (and, if they did, they were not published or preserved). I am interested in understanding the discourse that emerged around child suicide—how was it that a child’s death by suicide was both shocking and a completely accepted cause of death, and how the denial of society’s culpability for these dead children fit into narratives of the child who “likes to die.” This chapter is more interested in circumstances than in states of mind, and most interested in how these circumstances were interpreted and shaped by public accounts to produce violent “child” deaths that could be consumed as spectacles, with no need for critical thinking about the circumstances that led to the child’s death.

4.1 Little Father Time and the Logical End of the Child who “likes to die”^{cix}

The most famous child to die by suicide of the Victorian era is, like most famous Victorian children, a fictional one. Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, published in 1895, took the figure of the death-obsessed, death-desiring, “old-fashioned” child to its logical and horrific conclusion in the character of “Little Father Time,” Jude’s nine-year-old son who murders his half-siblings, then kills himself. It’s hard to resist reading Little Father Time metaphorically—after all, this is a child to whom anyone who wants to write about or discuss him must refer, repeatedly, as “Little Father Time,” the only name that he apparently knows when he comes to live with Jude and Sue. Bizarrely, Sue doesn’t even ask her partner’s son his name until the day after Little Father Time moves in with them. The child’s name is so unimportant that his mother never mentions it in her letter to Jude, and Jude and Sue do not initially think to ask him (244). Jude and Sue officially name the boy Jude, but typically call him “Little Time,” and the narrator often refers to him simply as “the boy” (the reason that he doesn’t have a name, incidentally, is both in anticipation of his

death and in protest against the Victorian cult of mourning—his mother never had him christened, since if he “died in damnation, it would save the expense of a Christian funeral”) (244). Susan Zeiger compares the weirdly aged Father Time to Paul Dombey, another “old-fashioned,” or prematurely aged, child, and offers him up as an example of Jack Halberstam’s “queer time.”^{cx} Franco Ferrucci sees Little Father Time as an answer to all of the rest of the texts that appear in this dissertation, imaging him taking literary vengeance for all of his fictional brothers and sisters who were “murdered” by authors over the past century in service of the Victorian cult of childhood. “Who are the ‘too menny?’” Ferrucci wonders. “Perhaps the sacrificed children?” (129).^{cxii} I’m inclined to agree with both of these readings, but I also want to take Little Father Time and his incredibly violent actions literally. Father Time is a plot device, certainly, but he’s a device that reacts to real-world political and economic constraints.

Sally Shuttleworth writes that *Jude the Obscure*’s murder/suicide “scene acts as a direct assault on the reader, a deliberate attack on our novel-reading sensibilities, where children customarily represent hope for the future, a promise of continuity and development” (335).^{cxiii} While Shuttleworth is correct that the scene is clearly meant to assault the reader’s senses, late nineteenth-century audiences were not used to looking at children as symbols of futurity in precisely the same way that early twenty-first-century audiences are. While Little Father Time’s suicide and murder of his siblings was certainly shocking to contemporary readers, his death probably wasn’t. Little Father Time is coded, in the same ways that Dickens’s Little Nell and Paul Dombey are, as an “old fashioned” child who is going to die. Hardy doesn’t invent a new type of child, he takes a very familiar Victorian figure of the child to its logical conclusion, making that child’s agency in his own death explicit. Father Time’s stepmother, Sue, remarks after his death that “It was not unreasonable for him to die; it was part of his sad nature” (301), linking Father

Time to other well-known child characters who “like to die.” Little Father Time may have a somewhat darker personality than Little Nell, but his desire for death and his precociousness are actually very similar to hers. Father Time, though, has not yet learned to love death, as Nell does, but merely to find life pointless and depressing. While Nell spends her time in a chapel full of tombs, thinking about how lovely and peaceful it would be to be dead there (*Old Curiosity Shop* 392-393), Father Time can’t quite move beyond his own over-the-top morbidity to find the beauty and joy that his contemporaries do in death—“I should like the flowers very very much,” he explains to his parents “if I didn’t keep on thinking that they’d be withered in a few days” (Hardy 262). Hardy’s note of “sympathy” to a friend who had lost a child, in which he admitted that “to be candid, I think the death of a child is never really to be regretted, when one considers what he has escaped” (Shuttleworth 347), also feels like a darker echo of Dickens’ and comfort book authors’ admonishments that one should be glad of having an eternal (dead) child. The “reasonable” and expected conclusion to Father Time’s story is that he would die—it is his agency in this death, and his insistence that his siblings join him in death, that is so shocking.

Certainly, some contemporary reviewers were disturbed by *Jude the Obscure* in ways that they were not by more conventional tales of children enduring poverty and wanting to die. The staff of the *Glasgow Evening Post*, in particular, seem to have been deeply offended by the book: an early review suggested that fans of Hardy’s earlier work should buy the book—to burn it. (November 7, 1895). Later, another review declared that it had “been . . . universally condemned” (November 21, 1895), and, still later, a third review was published to remind readers that *Jude* was “a titanicly bad book” (December 14, 1885). The *Post*’s claim that the book had been “universally condemned” was dubious, at best—most other contemporary reviews of *Jude the Obscure* were mixed. The reviewer of *The Graphic* found the book disturbing, but moving, and

The Manchester Courier was impressed by the “force and art of the story,” even if they found its content “repugnant” at times (November 11, 1895). Many critics, however, apparently found the brutal murder/suicide depicted in *Jude* as laughable as Oscar Wilde found Little Nell’s death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. *The Morning Post* reviewer found the book “pretentious,” and ridiculous in its overwhelming melancholy (November 7, 1895). The review published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (of “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” fame) describes the plot satirically—“And so in due course an unblessed family appears; and soon early and later infants are attracting momentary attention by hanging each other with box-cord on little pegs all round the room”—before “turn[ing] from laughter to tears” at the very end to beg “Mr. Hardy” not to “disappoint us again.” The title of the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s review is “Jude the Obscene,” but the obscenity in question has more to do with the book’s depiction of sexuality outside of marriage than with the murder and suicide of the children, which the reviewer treats as a joke.^{cxiii} That these reviewers apparently found the book both laughable and obscene, though, hints at a discomfort behind the laughter—*Jude the Obscure* is, at times, undeniably ridiculous in its pathos, but the scene in which Jude and Sue find their three children dead by murder/suicide is also genuinely surprising and disturbing. Why, then, would the appropriate response to the murder/suicide of several children be laughter? What might this laughter be covering over?

4.2 The Limits of Suicide as Resistance: Eugenics and the Power to “Let Die”

Little Father Time’s actions bring us forcefully back to the reality that, for most Victorian children, childhood was not a space of freedom from adult worries, but actually contained the same fears, concerns, and knowledge as adult life. Working class Victorian children like Father Time

did not have the luxury of “innocence” of sexuality, capital, work, or the unromantic realities of death. Father Time’s death is a direct response to his family’s deepening poverty, not a romantic refusal of life on a plane of existence that is beneath him. For Father Time, death works as both an escape from a life in which he is miserable and as an indictment of his parents. In a common trope of parenting, Jude sees his long-lost son’s arrival at his doorstep as an opportunity to right the wrongs of his own youth. “We’ll educate him and train him with a view to the University,” he tells his wife, excitedly. “What I couldn’t accomplish in my own person perhaps I can carry out through him” (243). Father Time’s suicide and murder of his father’s other children puts an abrupt end to Jude’s idea that he can live vicariously through his offspring. While Father Time’s ostensible motive for the murder/suicide is “because we are too menny” (298), it also marks both a refusal to live in a cycle of deepening poverty and a complete rejection of futurity through the methodical execution of his parents’ other children. It is crucial that Little Father Time doesn’t merely kill Jude and Sue’s children, he executes them, hanging them. Hanging is not only a strange and probably difficult style of murder for a nine-year-old—it is a mockery of state power and clear display to his parents of his own mastery over the ultimate power: death.

Little Father Time’s escape from the cycle of reproductive futurity that he sees as directly responsible for his family’s poverty is also a strong condemnation of his parents’ commitment to this cycle. The murder/suicide is a direct reaction to Father Time’s stepmother, Sue, telling him that she is pregnant again, for which he tells her that he “won’t forgive [her], ever, ever” (296)—and, evidently, he never does. Little Father Time’s actions at first bring to mind arguments by queer theorists such as Lee Edelman, which question the desirability of the futurity that has for so long been linked to the figure of the child. Father Time, in his embrace of the death drive and rejection of childhood and childishness, seems ready to make good on Edelman’s call to “Fuck the

social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized" (29), and provides a nihilistic, queer counterpoint to the symbolic Child Edelman denounces.^{cxiv}

Edelman's positioning of the Child and the death drive as antithetical forces doesn't quite hold, though—as we've seen throughout this dissertation, many of the most famous Victorian child characters are strongly associated with the death drive. Even Edelman's prime Victorian example of "the Child," Tiny Tim, is notable in that he "did NOT die," a punctuation choice that has always read to me like a joke by Dickens, writing two years after the final installment of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, about the fact that readers probably expect him to. Everything about Tiny Tim marks him as "one of the kind that likes to die;" that he does NOT die is a pleasant twist because of its incongruity. Thus, while Father Time's actions involve a violent assault on reproductive futurity, rather than his gracefully declining to participate in it, as Nell, Beth March, or Paul Dombey might be said to, his embrace of death and queer time does not really differentiate him from his less threatening contemporaries. In fact, Little Father Time's refusal to participate in futurity, and his insistence that his siblings join him in this refusal, is eerily similar to Barrie's early versions of Peter Pan. Both a seductive and threatening force in Barrie's play and novel, in *The Little White Bird* (1902), Peter doesn't bring "Lost Boys" to a magical Neverland, but buries their bodies around his home in Kensington Gardens. The narrator's "hope [that] Peter is not too ready with his spade" (126) suggests that Barrie's ideal eternal child may be just as willing as Hardy's monstrous child to gain companions in his (un?)death through force.

What sets Father Time apart from his contemporaries is not just the violence of his actions or his agency, but his implication of society and the state, which make his death appear to be an act of rebellion. For Foucault, the rise of interest in suicide as a subject of sociological and psychological study (and public panics) in the nineteenth century can be attributed to its unique

space within a biopolitical regime—suicide goes from being “a crime, since it was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone, whether the one here below or the Lord above, had the right to exercise” to being a weird aberration in a society governed by biopolitics. Suicide “testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die, strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations, and consequently so difficult to explain as being due to particular circumstances or individual accidents, was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.” (*History of Sexuality* 138–139). Foucault later suggested that “Even though the relation of power may be completely unbalanced ... a power can only be exercised over another to the extent that the latter still has the possibility of committing suicide, of jumping out of the window or of killing the other.” For Foucault, here, suicide can act as a form of “violent resistance” to power, a reversal of power that he puts in the same vein as murdering one’s captor (“The Ethic of Care . . .” 12).^{cxv} Suicide as a form of resistance to power only really works, though, when one’s continuing to live is important to the regime or person in power. While Father Time’s death marks his own refusal to live under the current social regime, it matters little to those in power that he is dead. As a pre-reformed Ebenezer Scrooge might say, in fact, if Father Time wants to die he “had better do it, and decrease the surplus population” (*A Christmas Carol* 10).^{cxvi}

In fact, whether he realizes it or not, Little Father Time is basically taking the role of the eugenicist state upon himself by killing himself and his siblings. His suicide note echoes Scrooge’s words—both characters agree that there are “too menny” impoverished people, and that the correct solution to this problem is for some of these people to die. If Jude’s three children had died of an infectious disease, or even of starvation, their deaths would not have been remarkable, but a part

of the passively eugenicist system that would see such deaths as a necessary means of population control. As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Victorian judges and juries often saw suicide as a similar form of popular control—an acceptable way for people who did not fit properly in to society to remove themselves from it. Father Time may take on the role of the pre-biopolitical sovereign when he executes his siblings, but his actions also incorporate the sort of eugenicist population management typical of the biopolitical state in which he lives.

According to Foucault, *all* life or death political conflicts in the nineteenth-century had to be understood through “evolutionism,” in biological terms of survival of the fittest, survival of the race. Not only the “phenomena of madness and mental illness,” but class differences are understood biologically, racially (*Society Must be Defended* 256-257). Victorians were eager to see class difference as racial—children who worked and lived on the street were referred to as “street arabs,” and talent and success were widely seen as inherited hereditarily, not socially. In the first volume of *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), Henry Mayhew describes the titular “London Poor” as literally racially different than the upper-classes, as “a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth—the government population returns not even numbering them among the inhabitants of the kingdom” (iii). Framing the poor not just as not part of “the public,” but as literally not part of the kingdom, Mayhew marks his subjects as the ultimate other, and his voyage into their realms (the city in which he himself lives) as one of great daring. Mayhew’s racialization of his subjects anticipates eugenic rhetoric with its reliance on the pre-Darwinian discourse of phrenology. For Mayhew, “there are . . . but two distinct and broadly marked races:” “the wandering and the civilized tribes” (1). Mayhew asserts that “to each of these tribes a different form of head is peculiar, the wandering races being remarkable for the development of the bones of the face, as the jaws, cheek-bones,

&c., and the civilized for the development of those of the head” (1). Mayhew declares the London poor to be a part of this later “tribe,” totally racially other from their “civilized” neighbors, even to the point of having heads that are “remarkable” in their difference from the heads of the London upper class.

Mayhew’s notions of the London underclasses as racially inferior insidiously suggests that helping them may be more difficult, and less successful, than just allowing them to die out. It prefigures Francis Galton’s conception of eugenics, in which the early death of the impoverished and unwell can only be a benefit to the Anglo-Saxon race as a whole.^{cxvii} For Galton, taking aid from the poor and giving it to the “Fit” is a major strategy of race improvement. In *Memories of my Life* (1908), he explains: “It is known that a considerable part of the huge stream of British charity furthers by indirect and unsuspected ways the production of the Unfit; it is most desirable that money and other attention bestowed on harmful forms of charity should be diverted to the production and well-being of the Fit. . . . It would clearly be advantageous to the country if social and moral support as well as timely material help were extended to the desirables, and not monopolised as it is now apt to be by the undesirables” (322). Galton frames this, more palatably, if less logically, in terms of birth control—people with less aid will have fewer children—but, as Jude’s family shows, poverty is far from effective as a means of birth control. The actual effects of policies like those that Galton proposes are not to keep children from being born, but to allow them to die. Galton puts it more bluntly in *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883), saying that “Overpopulation and its attendant miseries” are likely to become much worse, “owing to improved sanitation [*sic*] and consequent diminution of the mortality of children” (317-318). Rather than working as a protest against the state’s neglect of his family, then, Father Time’s death actually supports the regime of race purity championed by eugenicists. It calls attention to the violence of

this regime, equating old methods of sovereign power over death with new biopolitical methods of “letting die,” but ultimately the outcome is the same—Father Time and his “unfit” siblings are dead; the British race is slightly purer.

When Foucault suggests that death is “the term, the limit, or the end of power, too. . . . Death is beyond the reach of power” (*Society Must be Defended* 248), this may work for the individual, biological organism, but it does not account for the ways in which systems of power continue to shape the meanings of individual lives and deaths long after they have occurred. Father Time’s agency is also challenged, in the text, by the fact that he fails to successfully shape the meaning of his own and his siblings’ deaths. Sue refuses the political implications of her children’s death, reading it as a judgement from God on her and Jude’s adulterous relationship, rather than a judgement from their child on their excessive procreation, suggesting that even suicide ultimately fails as a protest against futurity, since its interpretation is out of the child’s hands. For Sue, Father Time, as a product of Jude’s first marriage, is rightfully acting as a vengeful angel, murdering the children of their later union. Instead of seeing Father Time’s actions as a rebellion on his part, she sees them as the workings of the ultimate Power, with a capital P, declaring that “All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us . . . and we must submit” (303). For Sue, the children “were sacrificed to teach me how to live!—their death was the first stage of my purification! That’s why they have not died in vain!” (321). Like the parents of children in comfort books, like Dickens and Mary Hogarth, Sue views her children’s murder as something that happened to and is about her, not them. The children’s death, to Sue, become meaningful only if they can be incorporated into a theological narrative of her own improvement.

Father’s Times actions also work, narratively, as the final tragedy in a long list of tragedies that happen to Jude. Not even a person, Little Father Time is instead the embodiment of “all the

inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he has groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died” (298). Neither his death nor that of his siblings is tragic in and of itself, because none of them are characters—we learn, at their death (never before that), that Jude and Sue’s children are a boy and a girl, but we never learn their names, and their births are not even mentioned in the story. Even when they are in their coffins, these two children have no identities, to the point that they are buried in one coffin—Jude watches as “the two little boxes, one containing little Jude, and the other the two smallest” are buried (301-302). The child with whom Sue is pregnant at the time of her other children’s deaths is never even given a gender—all we know about it is that it is “prematurely born, and that it, like the others, was a corpse” (303).

4.3 Suicide, Class, and Childhood in British Newspapers

Jude the Obscure is, certainly, different in many ways from *The Old Curiosity Shop* or a comfort book. It tells a horrific story about poverty, mental illness, and (as was often pointed out in contemporary reviews) the institution of marriage, and it is not a story that has any sort of happy ending, even one facilitated through a child’s death. *Little Father Time*, though, is still much better off than most of the children and young people who died by suicide in Victorian Great Britain. These children, whose deaths were reported, often fairly matter-of-factly, in local and national newspapers, further complicate any romanticized notion of suicide as a form of rebellion against or reclamation of power, since, in fact, their deaths were often caused by power—the decision to

die does not exist outside of power, and, in these cases, was often a sort of response to eugenicist attempts to culture a particular kind of life.

Accounts of children murdering other children in Victorian newspapers are extremely rare, but are reported similarly, as horrific actions by individuals, rather than reactions to the constraints on these individuals. Most of the children who were responsible for the deaths of other children in Victorian England were not making some sort of grand political statement, but were raising their siblings, or were employed as nannies to children slightly younger than themselves. It was not a dramatic statement against futurity, but a moment of exhausted rage, or a five-year-old's ignorance at how to care for an infant, that caused children to kill their siblings. The reporting of these rare cases is often tinged with sexism and classism—the author of “A Child's Confession of Murder,” for example, suggests that the reason that a thirteen-year-old “child” killed her six-month-old cousin, for whom she was caring, was “jealousy” of the younger (six-month-old) girl.^{cxviii} Another article describes a case from the US in which a six-year-old apparently confessed to killing her nineteenth-month-old sister “in order to be rid of the trouble of taking care of it.” Rather than drawing attention to the circumstances that must have led to a six-year-old having to care for another child, or to the difficulty such a young child might have had caring for an infant, the reporter proclaims the girl “a juvenile criminal of the most pronounced type.”^{cxix} “A Juvenile Murderer” describes a five-year-old boy who allegedly killed his fourteen-month-old brother by putting him in the fire, after his mother left him in charge of the child while she went to work. Quick to assume that children responsible for their siblings' deaths were monsters and murders, reporters give little thought to the “murderous” children's circumstances or abilities (how difficult would it be for a five-year-old to place a fourteen-month-old in a fire? How culpable would the child be if he did do this, or if the other child crawled into the fire by accident?).^{cxx}

While accounts of children murdering children remained rare, newspaper accounts of children dying by suicide increased in the later part of the nineteenth century. This was probably not because there was any actual increase in the numbers of children who died by suicide, but because “suicide of children under 15” became a statistical category of crime in 1861. Prior to this date, although the death of a child by suicide had likely been conceivable, it may not have been as widely speakable, and there had been no statistics available to back up anyone’s ominous feeling that such a method of death was on the rise. Records showed an increase in children who died by suicide in the 1880s, and the early reports of these numbers led to a general panic over the perceived epidemic of children who attempted suicide. From 1861-1888, 261 children were recorded as dying by suicide (as I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, these records may be misleading, since it’s often difficult to distinguish between children and young people who died by suicide, died by accident, or were murdered) (Shuttleworth 341). While this number was apparently large enough to cause alarm, the deaths of roughly fifteen children per year certainly placed suicide low on the list of causes of children’s deaths.

Although the perceived rise in child suicides was likely due to the fact that they were suddenly being taken notice of, public thinkers were quick to lay the blame on anything from too much schooling, reading too many novels, genetics, or the pressures of newly industrialized life. Hardy toys with all of these in *Jude the Obscure*—Jude’s own educational aspirations certainly depress him, and Father’s Time’s depressed demeanor seems to be at least partly hereditary, merely a more extreme version of Jude’s. As Shuttleworth points out, this emphasis on schooling as a cause of suicide was decidedly classist—no one thought that the upper-class boys who had always been highly educated were more likely to die by suicide than others, just that education might suddenly give working class people aspirations beyond their “station” that might make their lives

unbearable—a notion that *Jude the Obscure* seems, at least somewhat, to support, since a large part of Jude’s misery is due to his over-education.

British newspaper accounts of child suicides peaked, alongside this panic, in the 1870s and 1880s.^{cxxi} Newspaper reports of children’s deaths by suicide range from curt, two-sentence blurbs to long, graphic accounts of mutilated child bodies. Most of these children are not treated in the sentimental tradition, although a few are. One article, printed in the *Aberdeen Press* under the headline “A Touching Story,” tells of an eleven-year-old girl who drowned herself after her mother died, telling her friend that “I wish I was with my mother.”^{cxxii} A similar story, imported from France, told of an eight-year-old boy who hung himself in order to join his dead sister, after apparently uttering the very sentimental-fiction-esque last words, “We shall meet again soon, dear sister.”^{cxxiii}

While most accounts of children who died by suicide are not romanticized in this way, the work being done both to guarantee that the subjects of the articles are recognizable as “children,” and that their deaths appear to be a personal, rather than social, issue is similar to the work done in sentimental novels and comfort books. The reasons that these young people may have had for wanting to die are consistently glossed over and elided—everything from not wanting to go to school to too much novel reading is given as a possible motive for suicide. Teenaged girls are repeatedly reported to have become suicidal because of a “scolding.” Both reporters and judges were often unwilling to place blame on the parents of children who died by suicide, even in cases when the child was very young, the circumstances very suspicious, or the child’s suicidal impulses clearly the result of a long pattern of abuse. As long as parents avoided openly murdering their children, they were apparently free to do pretty much what they wanted with them. Most of the cases reported in these newspapers are from court inquests into the child’s cause of death, or, in

the case of attempted suicide, into the child's guiltiness (since suicide was still technically a crime in Victorian England). Rarely do the judges hearing the cases seem concerned with the children's welfare. One twelve-year-old boy who attempted suicide told a police constable that "My mother is very cruel to me, and I want to die." After his mother admitted to the court that she "beat him more severely than she intended," the judge "censured" her, "and told her to take him home and behave better and more kindly to him for the future."^{cxxiv} In another case, after fifteen-year-old Delia Wolland brought charges against her former employer for "criminal assault," Wolland's mother told her that "she wished she could see her coffin come home for bringing this trouble upon [their] family." After Wolland attempted suicide, apparently according to her mother's wishes, her mother appeared in court promising to "behave well to the girl if she were allowed to go home." When Wolland refused to go with her mother, the judge sent Wolland to jail for a week. It's unclear what became of Wolland after that, and seems likely that she would have been forced (by circumstances, if not by the court) to live with the mother who had said that she wished she was dead.^{cxxv} If there was concern over the apparent "epidemic" of child suicides, there did not seem to be any real impulse to take children out of situations that might motivate them to attempt suicide.

For all of their insistence on the shock of each suicide that they report, members of the Victorian press also seemed to have had an easy time believing that children were capable of suicide. There are multiple accounts of very young children "throwing themselves" from windows to their deaths, which are presented without question or suspicion, despite the fact that it is almost certainly easier for a six-year-old to be thrown from a window than to throw himself.^{cxxvi} An especially strange case, coming from the US, captured the attention of many British papers in 1890. Clement Flint, the eleven-year-old "son of a well-known lawyer in San Francisco," ran away from home, and, when he saw his father pursuing him, fled "at his full speed." His father

(according, of course, to his father) chased after him, apparently shouting that he “should be forgiven.” “The father gained upon the runaway, who, seeing that he would be inevitably captured, darted into a doorway, drew a revolver, and shot himself in the head. The horrified father reached his son just in time to take him in his arms and see him die. The strangest part of the sad affair is that the lad was always an affectionate and obedient son, had a happy home and indulgent parents.”^{cxxvii} This story is certainly framed as being out of the ordinary, but, for the reporter, the “strangest part” is that the child apparently came from a “happy” (read: respectable, wealthy) home, not the circumstances surrounding his death. No one questions why the son was so terrified of his father, or how the two ended up alone in a doorway with a revolver. While this case lays bare some of the classist sentiment at work in most reports of children who died by suicide, it also shows how willing nineteenth-century reporters and public apparently were, on both sides of the Atlantic, to take parents’ words for how their children died without any corroborating evidence. No possible reason is given for this boy’s apparent suicide, yet there’s also no suggestion, not just that his death could have been anything other than that, but that a reason should be searched for. His father is presented only as the victim of a tragedy, not as a suspect in his son’s very suspicious death, or even as a potential abuser. The willingness to believe that children were not only capable of suicide, but perhaps inclined to it, covered over a wider societal ambivalence about both the deaths of children and violence against children. Cases like this rely on the notion that children are not, really, people with rights of their own, but basically still the property of their parents, at whose mercy they exist. The same framework of children as possessable objects that made it easy to accept the possibility that Elizabeth Armstrong could “sell” her daughter also leads to a logic in which Mr. Flint’s son has no rights of his own, but is simply his father’s property. Flint’s son isn’t his to dispose of as he wishes, exactly—if he had been seen executing his child in a doorway, he

would have gone to jail—but the framing of this story takes it for granted that we should accept Flint’s version of the story without question, because the loss is his loss, since the child matters only in that it was his. This is the dark conclusion to the comfort book notion that the grief over one’s child’s death is “yours alone”^{cxxviii}—if the child’s death matters only to the parent, then not only is the child’s personhood erased, but it becomes possible to imagine that the parent may have a right to decide whether the child lives or dies.

When the adult who had witnessed a child’s death was not their parent, but their employer, the reasons to believe that the young person had died by suicide often become even more tied up in issues of class. There are numerous accounts of teenaged girls dying by suicide, only to have flimsy motives provided by their employers. The only witness to Drucilla Berry’s death was the woman for whom she worked as a servant, who “heard an unusual noise like something falling on the floor. Witness immediately went upstairs and found the deceased lying on the floor in a pool of blood. No one was in the house at the time, with the exception of witness and her husband. Witness had suspected the girl was pregnant.”^{cxxix} Eighteen-year-old Drucilla, tellingly, is not described as a “child,” but as a “domestic servant and a single woman.” Her possible pregnancy provides a motive for her death, but it is only confirmed in court by her employer’s suspicions and the word of another employee of the house. That Drucilla apparently managed to slit her own throat in such a way that she died immediately is possible, but would have been difficult, and her male employer never appears to testify, although he was, according to his wife’s testimony, also home when she died. Most of these cases, though, appear to be more interested in covering up abuse than possible murder. Fourteen-year-old Emma Hogg’s death appeared to the coroner who testifies at the inquest to be entirely incomprehensible—he declared at the end of the inquest that “he could not make out how children got such things into their heads, unless it was from reading

miserable penny trash.” Hogg’s employer, Mrs. Carr, gave a guilty conscience as the girl’s motive for suicide: Hogg had stolen money from her, and, though Carr had benevolently forgiven her and promised not to tell her mother, the theft must have weighed on her conscience. Hogg’s note to her mother, however, laid the blame for her death on her employer. “Dear Mother,” the note read, “Mrs. Carr has driven me to do this.— Your miserable daughter, Emma Hogg.” The jury ignored this note, since, “Evidence showed, however, that the child had always been kindly treated by her mistress.”^{cxxx} Another fifteen-year-old girl’s death by suicide is, similarly, explained by her “mistress” as due to the fact that she “suspected” the girl of “purloining” a pair of gloves.^{cxxxi}

Both of the girls in these later articles are described as “children”—the headlines of both articles mark them as “child suicides.” Both girls are, also, employed outside of the home. Another article, titled “Attempted Suicide by a Child,” describes its subject as a “servant, a little girl, fourteen years of age,” and says that the rumored reason that the “little girl” attempted suicide was that she had been fired for “breaking some culinary article” (although this reporter, at least, acknowledges that the given reason “scarcely seems possible”).^{cxxxii} One thirteen-year-old girl, Emma Angell, who has been working as a “nursemaid” for nearly a year to her cousins (the oldest of whom is only two years younger than her), is reported to have died by suicide after she slapped one of the younger children, and the oldest slapped her back.^{cxxxiii} There is an obvious incongruity here in the ways in which the subjects of these articles are described as “children” and “little girls,” and are also not just employed, but defined largely by their jobs. Although the work of a maid or nanny was often extremely labor intensive, these girls are not protected by the same laws that would keep them from working in factories. Angell was twelve when she started working as a nanny to several children, one of whom was ten, and, in some ways, this age clearly defines her as a child—the article refers to her as a child. Her childishness is subsumed by class, though. There

is never any suggestion that these girls were overworked, that their work was inappropriate for their age, or that their employers may, in some way, have been at fault in their deaths, even when Hogg's suicide note clearly states that she, at least, blamed Mrs. Carr for her state of mind. Another article reports a "little girl" who attempted suicide after being "shockingly neglected by her mother" being sent to a workhouse—the neglect on the mother's part was "shocking," certainly, but the girl's new position at the workhouse suggests that, although she may be a "little girl," she is not assumed to need the parental care or protection that would go along with that role for an upper-class child.^{cxxxiv}

It's entirely possible, since all of these girls are teenagers, that the reasons given by their employers for their deaths were not quite correct—as we will see, newspaper stories and judges at inquests often went to great lengths to avoid mentioning sexual assault or pregnancy as possible motives for girls under eighteen who died by suicide (although they tended to assume that every woman over eighteen who died by suicide was pregnant). However, it's also possible to take seriously the fact that these girls needed these jobs badly enough that losing them could have led them to feel that they had few other options. Without good references, a new job as a maid or housekeeper might be difficult to find, and this was the only option that these girls had for making money. As they had been told repeatedly, the alternative line of work that was available to them was worse than death. Death, sometimes, may have seemed like a viable choice.

4.4 "if they did not go and commit suicide, they were driven upon the town, to do something even worse:" Suicide as an Act of Propriety

Certainly, death seemed like a viable and rational choice to girls and young women who were sexually assaulted and/or were pregnant, and to the judges who presided over the inquests surrounding their deaths. When no apparent motive could be found for the suicide of a young woman over the age of seventeen or eighteen, judges typically assumed that she was pregnant, and moved on. Far from being an act of rebellion against social powers, as Little Father Time's death at first appears to be, these girls' deaths were often portrayed as the socially correct action on their parts, a final act of propriety in deference to social mores. When the body of nineteen-year-old Mary Lowe, whom the reporter describes, crassly, as "a fine-looking, plump woman, with some pretensions to personal beauty," was found in a canal, the fact that she was pregnant meant that she was automatically assumed to have died by suicide. The jury found no need for an autopsy, despite the fact that, according to her sister's testimony, Lowe's married lover had said that "he would take her life if she spoke to another man." While the judge "severely reprimanded" her lover, telling him that "his behavior in connection with the enquiry had been thoroughly unmanly and un-English," the fact that Lowe's death was a suicide was taken for granted. In fact, to the judge, it had been the correct decision, and confirmed Lowe's moral character, since, when women found themselves pregnant outside of wedlock, "if they did not go and commit suicide, they were driven upon the town, to do something even worse."^{cxxxv} In the opinion of the court, very plainly and literally, it was better to end one's life than to engage in sex work.

As in the novels and comfort books discussed earlier in this dissertation, most of the child suicides that received the most attention were those completed or attempted by girls. Here, though, the meaning behind the gender discrepancy seems glaringly obvious, even if newspapers refuse to

name it when writing about younger girls. The notion that, perhaps, there's some concealed sexual motivation in the lurid stories of these "children's" deaths also seems to be part of their appeal. For example, one paper writes about a girl who "became tired of life at the extremely young age of thirteen." The paper says that "The inquest failed to discover the motive of the unhappy child," and then proceeds to include a long lecture by the coroner about why carbolic acid should be made more difficult to procure.^{cxxxvi} What the article does not say, though, is that all of the carbolic acid related deaths that the coroner has seen may not have been from people ingesting the chemical, which was used as a douche to induce (sometimes deadly) abortions. ^{cxxxvii} Thus, it seems possible that "the unhappy child" did not actually die by suicide, but because she was mistaken as to how to use carbolic acid to end a pregnancy.

Many of the articles on girls who died of suicide focus on the girls' bodies in ways that mirror the coverage of Fanny Adams's murder. The ways in which these girls are framed as "children," or not, influences the level of lurid interest or investigation in their personal lives and habits, but not, once they are dead, the availability of their bodies as a public spectacle. The same person might be depicted as a "child" in one article, and a "girl" (which could connote a female child, but, if used without the word child, typically denotes a young woman or teenager who is, for whatever reason, determined not to be a child) in another, and the decision on what her age and position meant vastly changed what type of coverage this person's death got, and whether she appeared as a victim or a criminal agent. I turn, now, to two case studies, to examine how the framing of a young, female person as a "child" or not impacts how her death was received, and how her availability to be fit into the narrative of ideal, passive child influenced whether or not this designation was available to her, or what needed to be omitted to make it available.

4.5 “a young girl in a naked condition”:^{cxxxviii} Child Suicides that Attracted National Attention

While child suicide was rare in Victorian England, it was not rare enough that most cases attracted national attention. Most of the cases discussed in this chapter circulated locally, and were reprinted in a one or two papers, if at all. Kate Hughes died after being struck by a train in Worcester, England, but the story of her death spread, in graphic detail, across England, to Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and even to San Francisco, where an article arbitrarily declared her death “The Youngest Suicide on Record” (Hughes was twelve; there were records of children as young as five or six allegedly dying by suicide at the time).^{cxxxix} The case is remarkable because it involves a strange coincidence—the police officer called to the scene of Hughes’s death was her uncle and guardian—but mostly because it is remarkably gruesome, and because Hughes’s was mostly undressed at the time of her death, which gave reporters and readers an excuse to linger over imagined images of her nude, mutilated body.

Another key aspect of the case’s appeal was that it was possible to claim that Hughes had no motive: the home in which she lived was apparently happy, and comfortably middle class (although the fact that it was the home of a police constable almost certainly means that there was some bias towards his and his wife’s account of things); she had been caned by her teacher at school, but was changing schools because of it; although her parents had not been married, “She was never taunted with being illegitimate;” her aunt “had never heard of insanity on either side” or her family.^{cxl} In short, although many reasons are suggested as to why Hughes may have had suicidal thoughts, they are all quickly dismissed. The story was appealing because it was almost possible to fit Hughes into the romanticized narrative of the dead child who dies for no reason—unlike other cases of children who died by suicide, it did not call attention, explicitly, to economic

disparities or parental abuse. Tellingly, no one involved in the case or reporting on it seemed particularly interested in finding a motive for Hughes's actions, perhaps because any reason for her death could have only cast blame on her guardians, society as a whole—or, of course, herself.

Most important, though, was Hughes's body. The *Birmingham Daily Post*, which describes the case in graphic detail, describes the twelve-year-old's attire when a train conductor saw her walking onto the track: "She had a red shawl or petticoat round her shoulders . . . With that exception she was perfectly naked."^{cxli} The train track was beside a river, and Hughes's clothing was found further along the riverbank, but why she wasn't wearing it was unclear—nor was it a question that anyone seemed particularly interested in answering. Despite the fact that no one suggested it was relevant to the case, in the 100+ accounts of Hughes's death that I read, only one failed to mention that she was nude.^{cxlii} While reporters appeared to disagree (or to not have bothered taking the time to learn) whether Hughes was twelve or thirteen, every article, whether it took up multiple columns or was two sentences long, made sure that the reader knew that she wasn't wearing clothes—the "little girl's" (as many articles referred to her) naked body was clearly an important part of the story's draw.^{cxliii}

Instead of a mystery worth solving, Hughes's death was treated as a sensation to gawk at: The *Worcestershire Chronicle*, the paper of record where the event took place, described Hughes's death as a "Sensational Occurrence on the Railway near Worcester."^{cxliv} The *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* describes the scene of Hughes's death by announcing that "Her head was Severed right from the Neck. It was smashed, and part of it laid on the rails and part on the other side."^{cxlv} "Severed right from the neck" is not only in large, all-caps print, but is offset to occupy an entire line in the article, drawing the reader's attention immediately to the mutilated child's body.

The reporting of Fanny Adams's death (discussed in the second chapter) was similar to this, and shows that Hughes's body would have probably been written about in the same salacious detail regardless of how she died. The thing-ness of Hughes's body here points to both her method of death and her status as a child, already more thing than person. Unlike the women, just a few years older than her, who were understood to have had suicidal impulses because of their interior lives, because of their own "guilt" or fear, Hughes is understood only through the testimony of her caregivers, who insist that she was a "good-tempered" child, who "did not suffer from depression of spirits."^{cxlv}

As with Adams, the constant references to Hughes's nudity seem to both evoke the specter of a possible motive for suicide—had she been sexually assaulted?—and to ask the audience to participate in that assault. The papers not only insist that their readers visualize the body of a dead, headless, pubescent child, nude except for a red cloak, in a way that seems, if not explicitly erotic, at least designed to titillate, but also insist that they imagine why Hughes was nude, and why she wanted to die. While the reporters' refusal to speculate on these topics could be read as restraint, their universal insistence on including information about Hughes's state of undress merely ensures that the reader will be the one doing the speculation. The fact that this article was reprinted so widely suggests that readers took at least some amount of pleasure in imagining these things, and in discussing their imaginings of them. Hughes's status as a child renders these discussions possible and pleasurable, since her body can appear, like a perverse version of Schrödinger's cat, at the same time pure and defiled, child and thing, her death shocking and inexplicable, and yet completely explicable.

4.6 “Child,” “Actress,” “Prostitute:” What Defines a “Child” in Death?

The status of some young, female people who died by suicide with regard to childhood was more complicated than that of Hughes. When fourteen-year-old actress Mabel Watson attempted suicide, some newspapers mocked her. The *South Wales Echo* headlined Watson’s story as “An Actress’s Attempt at Self-Destruction: Her Life was Miserable,” the subheading being a quote from Watson that appears to be being deployed sarcastically (July 16, 1889). The *Western Daily Press* published the story under the title “Mabel Love Again” (“Love” was Watson’s stage name), since apparently Watson had been in the papers previously for running away from home (July 17). Tellingly, these papers refer to Watson as “an actress,” and “a young girl,” but not as a child, and both round her age up, to fifteen. The *Luton Reporter* and *ShIPLEY Time and Express*, in similar articles entitled “Attempted Suicide of a Child Actress,” are more sympathetic to Watson. Tellingly, both give her age (correctly) as fourteen, and they quote from a conversation from the inquest that the other articles do not: the judge asks Watson “How old are you, child?” and she replies “Fifteen next birthday” (July 20, 1889). The phrasing of the judge’s question stresses Watson’s youth, but whether or not reporters read Watson’s answer (she would be fifteen, at some point in the next year) to mean that she was fifteen or fourteen depended on their previous inclination to view her as a child or as an “actress,” a profession that might imply adulthood, or sexual licentiousness. Even a numerical age, stated under oath, was not only not enough to clarify whether Watson was a “child,” but whether she was fourteen or fifteen years old.

A better example of what headlines like “Suicide of a Child” can cover over is the case of Elizabeth Collins, a fifteen-year-old girl who died in Newcastle. The *Bristol Mercury*’s report of Collins’s death is titled “Suicide of a Child,” and in an inverse of the Mabel Watson story, ages Collins down, giving her age (incorrectly) as fourteen. The *Mercury* describes Collins’s death as

“A tragedy of a very painful nature.” The rest of the article is vague—Elizabeth and her two sisters, it says, were living above a hospital, from which Elizabeth stole strychnine, which she drank after “some dispute with one of her sisters.” “She afterwards told her sisters what she had done, and then took a piece of paper, upon which she wrote a letter to a young man.” Oddly, and rather defensively, the article ends by announcing that “The caretaker of the institution has been unable to attend to her duties owing to illness.”^{cxlvii} The letter to the young man and the fact that Elizabeth and her sisters don’t live at home, coupled with the unprompted defense of the caretaker’s name, make it clear that more is happening here than is being printed, and it seem probable that preserving Elizabeth’s status as “child” is the reason for the omission (although it’s unclear why the *Mercury* is invested in this status).

The *Bristol Mercury* was not, actually, the only—or the first—paper to report Elizabeth Collins’ death. The *Aberdeen Evening Inquirer* had, a few days before, published the same story, but with a much different title: “Startling Revelations in Newcastle. Suicide of a Girl of Fifteen. Horrible Depravity.” In this article, Elizabeth is a “girl,” but never a “child,” and the “horrible depravity” of the title is not her death, but her life, which, apparently, was “immoral.” There is, it says, a warrant out for the arrest of Miss Keenleyside, the hospital’s deputy caretaker, who allowed the sisters to stay there. In conclusion, the article declares, boldly, that “A more horrible and infamous state of things, perhaps, never existed in connection with a public institution.”^{cxlviii} The *Carlisle Patriot* also gives Elizabeth’s age as fifteen, and provides more information about the sisters’ situation, taken from the eldest sister’s (who was nineteen) testimony at the inquest. The sisters had moved to a temperance hotel “in consequence of a quarrel at home,” with only thirteen shillings, and then “commenced to lead an immoral lifestyle to earn a livelihood.” Miss Keenleyside, who was the niece of the aging caretaker of the hospital, let the girls live and work

there in exchange for a cut of their profits, and “it was alleged, had induced the girls to lead a life of prostitution” (an odd argument, since by their own admission the sisters were engaged in sex work before they met Keenleyside). This article claims that the sisters “had a good deal of drink” the night of Elizabeth’s death, and gives the contents of her suicide note: “George,--I’ve done this all for your sake, If I had not seen you it would not have been this, because I love you. George, good-bye, darling.” Again, in this article, Elizabeth and her sisters are referred to as “girls,” but never as “children.” The *Newcastle Courant* published the story as “Suicide of a Girl in Newcastle: A Hospital a House of Ill-Repute,” and details what Elizabeth had to drink that night, adding that “For some time past deceased had taken drink to excess.” The reasons that this fifteen-year-old girl—someone identified as a “child” in other papers—had been habitually “taking drink to excess,” or the fact that her drinking, like her death, might be a symptom of depression, desperation, and abuse, are not addressed—drinking, like sex work, is reported by the press as a sign of sensual abandon, rather than something brought about by bad circumstances. The sisters, who were nineteen, seventeen, and fifteen, respectively, are treated as drunken, fallen women here.^{cxlix} Elizabeth’s death, which was tragic to the *Bristol Mercury* when she was a child, now matters only because of her scandalous connection with the hospital. Her state as a young person without a home quickly ceases to matter once her “immoral life” is revealed. The societal issues implicated in the Collins sisters’ homelessness, poverty, and inability to find work are subsumed into a personal scandal based on their and the hospital caretaker’s actions.

4.7 Fatalistic Genetics, Fatal Narratives, and the Danger of Suggesting that any Child is Destined for Death

Girls like Elizabeth Collins were real-life versions of Dickens's Little Nell—girls who were driven from their homes, relied on strangers to help them find work, and did not want to live (Elizabeth and Nell are also about the same age). The reasons for these girls' desire for death, though, was not romantic or comfortable. What is most surprising in these accounts is how willing newspapers are to accept that children are capable of suicide and murder. Suicide was regularly explained as something that could be understood as a childish impulse, or, at least, an impulse that existed comfortably within established norms of childhood—a child might kill herself because she was scolded, because she read too many novels, because he didn't want to go to school. All of these motives understand the desire to die to be a foolish, naïve impulse. These children do not get to shape their own stories, and their deaths do not call any attention to the hopelessness of their situations, or cause anyone to take action to prevent similar deaths.

In many of the reported cases of “child suicide,” the dominant narrative tells a story in its gaps. We know that many of the “children” who died by suicide were young teenaged girls, often young teenaged girls who worked as servants or nannies. We know that young women in these positions were often sexually abused, that their abusers were unlikely to be prosecuted,^{cl} and that single motherhood was not just frowned upon, but could be deadly to both mother and child. We know that abortions were illegal and dangerous, and that a botched home chemical abortion could, sometimes, look like suicide. Here, then, are real-life ramifications of a culture that lifts up girls who love to die as ideals, that suggests that sex workers are literally better off dead—it can make people think that they have no choice but to die, that dying is their best choice. In the last chapter, I suggested that Michael and Peter Llewellyn Davies may have died, partly, because of stories—

stories about who they were, who they could be, stories that took over their lives. In this chapter, I don't think there is a "may have." Some of the children who died by suicide in Victorian London did so because of abuse, because of poverty that was glamourized even in the works that meant to condemn it. Some of them, though, died because of stories, and only because of stories—stories that told them that their worth lay only in their purity, that told employers not to hire them, jurors not to believe them, the London Foundling Hospital not to accept their children. In death, they got a chance to be eternal children. In life, they would have been women who no one cared about. Arguments that interpret a fictional suicide as an act of rebellion against power can be compelling, but they also tend to be ahistorical, ignoring the social realities in which such an action would have taken place. Most real suicides in the Victorian Era (and probably most eras) were capitulations to power, they were caused by eugenic cultural forces that deemed it desirable for some people to die.

The ways in which these children's deaths became public spectacles also lays bare the desire at the heart of texts that purport to mourn dead children, a desire to gawk at child corpses with no real care about the people that they were—no recognition, perhaps, that children ever were people. The panic around the apparent rise in child suicide offered a convenient excuse to talk about dead children, and to speculate about more soon-to-be-dead children, but it never became a panic over the conditions that led so many children to become suicidal. Early studies linking childhood suicide to depression, such as James Crichton Browne's "Psychical Diseases of Early Life" (1860), posited it as a fatalistic destiny, a medical version of the religious destinies of the children mourned so lavishly in comfort books. Hardy (who was a friend of Browne's) has the doctor who attends the dead Fawley children echo these views—Jude explains to Sue that the

doctor said there would have been no stopping Little Father Time's suicide: "It was in his nature to do it" (129).

This type of fatalism elides the actionable social causes for the deaths of the children and young people who died by suicide in Victorian England. There is also a eugenicist aspect to this line of thinking. As discussed earlier, child suicides were sometimes seen as beneficiary to society as a whole, as they got rid of unwanted elements (unwed mothers and illegitimate children), or, like that of Little Father Time, "decreased the surplus population." Browne's article presents child suicides, specifically, as an evolutionary benefit, since he sees basically every issue that could arise in someone's life as being genetically predetermined—children who die young won't survive to pass on their "melancholy." The child's depression, for Browne, is also a reflection, not on their circumstances, but on their parents' conduct during and prior to their conception, making genetic inheritance seem like something akin to divine retribution. Browne claims that the children of those who have "violated natural laws" by masturbating, giving in to lust, gambling, or drinking, "may expect that punishment, proportional to their offense, will inevitably be visited upon them and their descendants," typically in the form of "psychical disorders" (289-290).^{cli}

Browne treats children who are mentally ill or depressed as defective, a species that is destined to die. The "old-fashioned-ness" of the child who is destined to die young here becomes a medical, rather than spiritual symptom, as Browne declares that "Precocity may generally be looked upon as expressive of disease, and thus, those manifesting it almost invariably die young" (299). Browne does not specifically associate suicide with precocity, but does insist that children who die of suicide do so only because they are in some way defective, not because of outside circumstances. "Even in infancy and childhood," he says, "when cares and sorrows are comparatively unknown, and when sensations and feelings, pleasurable or painful, are transient

and evanescent, we frequently meet with deliberate acts of self-destruction. In Berlin, between the years of 1812 and 1821, no less than thirty-one children, of twelve years of age and under, committed suicide, either because they were tired of existence, or had suffered some trifling chastisement” (316) (Browne relies on statistics for child suicides from Germany and France, since none would exist for England until the next year). The Romantic idea of childhood that Browne subscribes to, though—one that is free from pain, sorrows, or the cares of the “adult” world—excludes most of the children who died by suicide in Victorian England (and, one can assume, in Germany and France). While a “trifling chastisement” is often given as the reason for a child’s suicidal impulses, these children are also usually working outside the home, suffering from abuse and/or extreme poverty, or, often, all of these things. When Browne suggests that melancholia “and a tendency to suicide, is not unfrequently observed in girls about the age of puberty” (317), he fails to suggest any explanations for this, either social or medical. By insisting that suicidal ideation is only caused by mental illness, and, in turn, that mental illness is only caused by defects in a parent’s genetics and lifestyle, Browne suggests that the child who die by suicide are a special class of children who were destined to die, and whose deaths could not be prevented. This formulation is a dark spin on the tales of angelic children in comfort books and popular fiction who “like to die”—they were destined to die, both suggest, so there is nothing that we could have done, and it is no real tragedy.

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i According to Victorian doctor and statistician William Farr, between the years of 1861-1870, 263,182 children out of 1,000,000 live births died before their fifth birthdays. These numbers increased in cities (most notably to 46% in Liverpool), but still hover around 18% in what Farr refers to as “healthy districts” (204). Farr points out that these numbers were likely on the conservative side—since stillbirths were not registered as births in Victorian England, “a certain amount of infants that breathe for a short time” were likely treated as stillbirths, to save burial costs (Farr 188). Likewise, there would certainly have been infanticides that were successfully hidden, or children born in rural areas or in extreme poverty who died and were buried without ever seeing a doctor or having their births registered. Patricia Jalland confirms these statistics in her *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996).

ii Phillipe Ariès’s *Centuries of Childhood* (1960) famously explains the growth in attachment to children as stemming partially from a decline in infant mortality rates, a notion that has been

challenged in recent years (and that is, in fact, somewhat disputed by the information in Ariès's own *The Hour of Our Death*, published in 1977). As Vivian Zelizer points out in *Pricing the Priceless Child* (1994), this correlation seemed especially odd when we shift our gaze in the US, where there was no significant decrease in child mortality until the late nineteenth century.

iii Because births and deaths were often recorded by parish in eighteenth-century England, reliable national statistics from this period are difficult to find. Farr states that, between 1730-1749, over 74% of children born in London died before their fifth birthdays, but, as in the nineteenth century, it should be assumed that this percentage was higher for children born in cities than for children born in "healthy districts" (Farr 195).

iv "The Deaths of Little Children" was first published in 1820, but rose to popularity in the mid-nineteenth century—this rise in popularity, especially as a part of anthology-style comfort books, is discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. Hunt, Leigh. "The Deaths of Little Children." *The Indicator*, No. XXVI, April 5, 1820. 1-4. Quotes are taken from a digitized collection of *The Indicator* at Hathi Trust Digital Library.

v Haraway, Donna. "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936." Durham: Duke University Press. *Social Text*, No. 11 (Winter, 1984-1985), pp. 20-64.

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viii As Sanchez-Eppler points out, both the long exposures and high cost of early photography made young children less than ideal subjects. Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. 115

ix The term "comfort books" was coined by Judith Plotz in her 1991 article "A Victorian Comfort Book: Juliana Horatia Ewing's *The Story of a Short Life*." Comfort books were distinct from the religious tracts that were also popular during the period (particularly in the US), in that, although they often had some religious content, their main purpose was comfort, not conversion. In comfort books, the child's salvation is seen as assured, not hard-earned, and the child's life and death are presented for the pleasure of adults, rather than for the instruction of other children (both tracts' content and their typically small size mark them for children's consumption). My archive for this chapter is larger than Plotz's, but its focus is more specific—I am interested mainly in the autobiographical works that seem to me to be crucial to understanding how this type of literature was deployed. These texts take the form of short essays, longer, book-length accounts of the child's life, death, and its aftermath, and collections of poems and short essays collected by the grieving parent (and often written by other grieving parents). Some of these texts are available online, via The American Antiquarian Society, the Hathi Trust, the Internet Archive, and the British Library. Others were found in the special collections of The British Library and of the University of Pittsburgh's Hillman Library.

x One of these headlines describes a "Shocking Child Murder in Derbyshire" (*Kendall Mercury*, July 27, 1867), another "Shocking Case of Child Murder" (*Maidstone Telegraph*, September 17, 1864), the "Extraordinary Attempt of a Mother to Murder her Child" (*Wiltshire Independent*, May 9, 1862), and an "Insane Attempt to Murder a Child" (*Dundee Evening Telegraph*, April 24, 1880). These, and many more articles about child murder can be found in the British Library's digital Newspaper Archive.

- xi *The Cradle and the Grave: Thoughts on the Death of Little Children, by a Mother*. Edinburgh: Andrew Eliot, 1872.
- xii Hunt first published the essay in 1820 in the *Indicator*, a literary periodical that he edited from 1819-1821. The essay was republished in Vol. 1, Iss. 16 of the *Monthly Mirror*, to which Hunt was a frequent contributor, in April, 1846, and gained popularity after this.
- xiii “Lines for the Thoughtful.” *Lady’s Own Paper*. October 5, 1867.; “Miscellaneous.” *Coleraine Chronicle* February 16 1850. (unattributed); “The Death of Little Children.” *Forres Elgin and Nairn Gazette, Northern Review and Advertiser*. May 23, 1894.; “On the Death of Little Children.” *Dunfermline*. February 7, 1863.; “The Death of Little Children.” *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*. February 20, 1864.; “Varieties.” *Elgin Courant, and Morayshire Advertiser*. March 13, 1857.; “Literary Extracts.” *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, February 17, 1863.; “The Death of Little Children.” *Southern Reporter*. January 21, 1864.; *Londonderry Standard*. March 14, 1850. (unattributed); “The Deaths of Little Children.” *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*. September 10, 1847.
- xiv The essay is reprinted in full or excerpted from in *Tears for the Little Ones* (1878), *Over the River, Or, Pleasant walks into the valley of shadows, and beyond* (1871), *Light for the House of Mourning: A Book for the Bereaved* (1850), and several other comfort books, sometimes without attribution.
- xv Hunt, Lee. *Essays of Lee Hunt*. Ed. Reginald Brimley Johnson. London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1891.
- xvi *The Queen*. March 24, 1888.
- xvii It’s true that white infants are often born with blue eyes that darken as they age, and so the image in part stresses Fales’s daughter’s infancy. However, there are many markers of infancy that are less racialized than blue eyes, and the repeated mention of both blue eyes and blond hair in Victorian novels, poems, and memoirs about girls who died supports the notion that the focus on the dead infant’s eye color was about racial purity, not age.
- xviii Robin Bernstein discusses the discomfort amongst abolitionists about whether black souls could go to heaven or not in *Racial Innocence*, focusing in particular on Lynd Palmer’s “Poor Black Violet,” an 1862 antislavery text in which a white, slave-owning girl explains to an enslaved girl that, if black people can go to heaven, their souls *must* be able to become white: once “our bodies are covered up in the ground,” she says “our souls go to heaven, and they must all be white” (Bernstein 59). The poem “‘Topsy,’ or The Slave Girl’s Appeal,” similarly suggests that, at least metaphorically, souls must be white to get into heaven. In the poem, Topsy, the enslaved child from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “Hopes to have her sins forgiven,/Black girl’s soul made white as snow.” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* itself takes a somewhat less troubling stance, with both Eva and Tom suggesting that a person’s race does not matter when they die. Although Eva’s promise that Topsy can “be an angel forever, just as much as if you were white” is certainly racialized, it is not clear that, in Eva’s formulation, Topsy’s soul would actually need to change, or to not resemble her body, for her to go to heaven (Stowe 95).
- xix The metaphor of flowers, plucked in their prime, is a popular one among comfort book authors (somehow, no one ever considers the inevitable decay of either the plucked flower or the child corpse). Alaric A. Watts refers to dead children as “Gathered Bud[s]” (Aimwell 46); John J. Morris calls his daughter “the lily, type of purity” (Aimwell 6), and American composer William Bradbury explains that “the loveliest flowers are often soonest plucked” (Aimwell 164). These are just a few of innumerable examples of the flower metaphor (several of which also appear

throughout this paper), which seems to frame dead children, like hothouse flowers, as beautiful, but always destined to die.

^{xx}Dickens is full of instances of mature children caring for parents or grandparents made “child-life” by age (Nell Trent and her grandfather, Agnes Wickfield and her father, Jenny Wren and her drunken “bad child”); this trope was also dramatically illustrated, as recently as the spring of 2018, on a billboard near the University of Pittsburgh that showed a mother reading to her daughter on one panel, and, on the next, the grown daughter reading to her ailing mother, implying that it was the daughter’s duty to care for her mother in age, as she had been cared for in her youth.

^{xxi} *Ethel’s Book* differs from most of the comfort books in my archive, as it was written by a childless man for a living child (the titular Ethel was eight years old when Faber dedicated the book to her), presumably to aid in her religious instruction. Rather than teaching the child how to die properly, though (as contemporary and earlier tracts do), its focus is on correctly mourning dead siblings or other children. Its descriptions of child death, particularly its focus on mothers, and on children who are happy to die, are typical of comfort book language.

^{xxii} Certainly more threatening than the sci-fi monsters who borrowed his name, Faber’s Weeping Angel spends his days weeping on a mountaintop, and his nights weeping while having disturbing and secretive conversations with a little boy whom he hopes to convince to join him in his constant weeping. At first merely exhausted by the angel’s constant nighttime visits, the boy eventually falls ill. The angel then explains to him that “When the world is very wicked, and God’s glory withers and is yellow and dry, He refreshes it by the souls of little children, whom He takes to Himself to increase his glory,” and asks him if he would “like to be one of those children whom God is so impatient to have with Him in heaven” (138). When the boy says that he would, the angel sheds a tear on him, and he dies (but only after a protracted death scene with his family – the angel tears apparently kill in a way that fits neatly into the sentimental narrative).

^{xxiii} “We had one child born to us, a girl. It was the only one we ever had, and we loved it in proportion” (1).

^{xxiv} Dickens, Mark. “48 Doughty Street: a Dickens family perspective by Mark Dickens.” Feb 6, 2017. <https://dickensmuseum.com/blogs/charles-dickens-museum/48-doughty-street-a-dickens-family-perspective>

^{xxv} Dickens, Charles. *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*. Ed. Jenny Hartley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. All references to Dickens’s letters are taken from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

^{xxvi} Reynolds, Kimberly. “Fatal Fantasies: the Death of Children in Victorian and Edwardian Fantasy Writing.” *Representations of Childhood Death*. Eds. Gillian Avery and Kimberly Reynolds. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000. 169-188.

^{xxvii} The age of consent for girls in England was twelve until 1875, when it was raised to thirteen; in 1885 it was raised to sixteen by the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. However, younger girls could still marry with their parents’ consent. The rationale behind the age of consent being raised had little to do with concerns about underaged girls marrying or being sexually exploited by older men, but was instead largely inspired by an attempt to prevent the perceived trafficking of teenaged girls for the sex trade, something that is discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

^{xxviii} Day, Carolyn. *Consumptive Chic: A History of Beauty, Fashion, and Disease*. London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.

^{xxix} Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

^{xxx} Women should try to stay healthy, according to Ellis, not because it's attractive, but despite constant reminders that health is *not* attractive. "We hear of the beauty of extreme delicacy, of the beauty of a slight hectic, and sometimes of the beauty of constitutional debility and languor," she says, and "On the other hand, we hear of vulgar health, of an unlady-like bloom, and of too much strength, giving an air of independence unbecoming to the female character" (186). Despite her insistence that girls should not try to make themselves ill to be attractive, "Mrs. Ellis," as she styles herself, is apparently not immune to the charm of illness. She moves on quickly from basic advice on how to stay healthy (eat regular meals, take a walk every day, go to bed at a reasonable hour, and "dress according to the season") to discuss "The loss of health"—"a theme of far deeper interest" (194). When one is "labouring under bodily affliction," according to Ellis, "there is a strength and a beauty in her character . . . of which the heroism of fiction affords but a feeble imitation" (194) "Yes," she admits, "there are many enjoyments in the chamber of sickness" (195). Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Daughters of England: Their Position In Society, Character & Responsibilities*. London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842.

^{xxxii} As Troy Boone pointed out to me, in the case of *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy's preservation isn't, actually, fantastical—she is buried in peat, which is known for its ability to preserve bodies (peat is what preserves "bog bodies," humans who have been buried in bogs for years and naturally mummified). Cathy's preservation still fits within this motif of women and children who appear beautiful and natural even long after death, though, and highlights the uncanny power of the landscape in *Wuthering Heights*.

^{xxxiii} Susan Meyer argues that "Brontë's image of the two bodies uniting in dissolution, the barrier lifted between the white woman and the dark colonial outsider, has a dramatically defiant power" (122). Despite the racial politics of the two bodies becoming the same dirt, though, the politics of consent and gender remain the same as in other accounts of men's claims to dead women's bodies and space. Meyer, Susan. *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

^{xxxiiii} Izadi, Elahe. "Marilyn Monroe helped launch Hugh Hefner's career. But they never even met." *The Washington Post*. September 28, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/09/28/marilyn-monroe-helped-launch-hugh-hefners-career-but-they-never-even-met/?utm_term=.e0e94d90f05c

^{xxxiv} Dijkstra discusses what he calls "The Cult of Invalidism" in detail on pgs. 25-63.

^{xxxv} Brown, John. *Marjorie Fleming: A Sketch*. 1863. 51.

^{xxxvi} Nayder, Lillian. *The Other Dickens: A Life of Catherine Hogarth*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012.

^{xxxvii} Dickens writes to John Forster, in September 1844: "Let me tell you of a curious dream I had . . . I was visited by a Spirit. I could not make out the face, not do I recollect that I desired to do so. It wore a blue drapery, as the Madonna might in a picture by Raphael; and bore no resemblance to any one I have known except in stature. I think (but I am not sure) that I recognized the voice. Anyway, I knew it was poor Mary's spirit. I was not at all afraid, but in a great delight, so that I wept very much, and stretching out my arms to it called it 'Dear.' At this, I thought it recoiled; and I felt immediately, that not being of my gross nature, I ought not to have addressed it so familiarly." Dickens sobs and begs for the spirit's forgiveness – and for "some token that you have really visited me – and it instructs him to "Form a wish." Knowing that he shouldn't make a selfish wish, he wishes for his mother-in-law to be "extricated" from her "great distress," and then asks the spirit which religion is best (she tells him that "For *you*," it's Roman Catholicism). He then wakes up

and calls his wife in to tell her about this dream, weeping, and apparently thinking it makes perfect sense that he is the one to whom Mary would choose to appear in a dream (*Selected Letters* 144).
xxxviii Between 1835-1907, it was illegal to marry one's wife's sister in Great Britain, even if that wife was dead. This law caused a fair amount of controversy (and was probably broken fairly often), partially because, in families that were less well-off than the Dickenses, marriage to a wife's sister was often the easiest way for a family to maintain its current living and childcare situation. The law relied on definitions of family in which a sister through marriage was the same as a biological sister—legally, marrying one's sister-in-law was considered incest. That the act that legalized this type of marriage was called “The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act” is telling—widows attempting to marry their brothers-in-law was clearly not as much of a concern. Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. “The Puzzling Case of the Deceased Wife's Sister: Nineteenth-Century England Deals with a Second-Chance Plot.” *Representations*. No. 31, Special Issue: The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England (Summer, 1990), pp. 142-166.

xxxix Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. 1850. Mineola, New York: Dover. 2004.

xl Dickens, Charles. *The Battle of Life: A Love Story*. London: Bradbury and Evans, Whitefriars. 1846.

xli The narrative until this point is told from a third-person omniscient perspective, and the sudden switch to first person in the final paragraph is marked by the narrator's introduction of “Time,” with whom, he says, he has had “the pleasure of a personal acquaintance of some five and thirty years' duration” (175). The purpose of this somewhat bizarre aside, in which Dickens states his own age (or, more precisely, the age that he will be very soon after the story's publication at Christmas 1846), appears to be to insist on Dickens's personal presence as a narrator, to the point that he becomes a character in his own story.

xlii There's an alternate way of reading the story, too, of course—that the sisters don't actually care that much about the man, at all, but primarily love and want to live with each other. Daniel Maclise's illustration for the frontispiece supports this reading—the illustration shows the two sisters dancing together, clasped in a tight embrace, with what, at first glance, appear to be bare breasts pressed together. One sister looks away, but the other faces the viewer, her hair tumbling down, eyes closed, expression ecstatic. The sister's love for each other is, quite clearly, their prime motivation in the text, however, because Dickens is intent in triangulating that love via the basically characterless Alfred, the story is ultimately only about their relationship to and through him, which makes a feminist reading rather difficult—it doesn't even pass the Bechtel test.

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

xliiv Nell is “nearly fourteen” at the beginning of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (55), and, while it's not quite clear how much time passes over the course of the novel, it's certainly at least enough time for her to have attained that age.

xlv Pattison, Robert. *The Child Figure in English Literature*. 1978. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008. 80

xlvi In the words of James Kincaid, “The extent of this public mourning [over Nell's death] has doubtless been exaggerated, but it makes a good story, which is all one ought to ask of history” (*Child-Loving* 238).

xlvii Tomalin, Claire. *Charles Dickens: A Life*. New York: Penguin, 2011.

xlviii Quoted in Tomalin 115.

^{xlix} Faber and children who “like to die” are discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. Faber, Frederick William. *Ethel’s Book; or, Tales of the Angels*. London: Richardson and Son, 1858.

ⁱ This advertisement is reprinted in the front of the fourth volume of the series, and if, of course, probably not wholly accurate. Even if we take Mayhew’s reporting at face value, he brought his own racist, sexist, and essentialist views to every interview that he conducted, meaning that both the interviews, and his interpretations of them, should be read extremely critically. Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor, Vol. IV: Those That Will Not Work*. London: Griffin, Bohn, and Company, 1862.

ⁱⁱ People have tried to recover this girl’s story—Carolyn Steedman ends *Strange Dislocations* by relating the story of her “compulsive search for a child who did once actually exist,” Mayhew’s “little Watercress Girl” (171). Ultimately, however, the search is fruitless, leaving the figure of the child created by Mayhew, Dickens, et al must stand for and replace the real girl—and, even if Steedman had been able to recover the girl’s name and future occupation, spouse, and death date from the censuses she searched, it’s unclear that they would have given us much more than a few facts on which to base a new narrative just as incomplete as Mayhew’s was.

ⁱⁱⁱ Judith Walkowitz, in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, suggests that many of the women marked by the C. D. acts as “common prostitutes” did not identify themselves as “prostitutes” at all (203).

ⁱⁱⁱⁱⁱ Leigh coined the term “sex work” at a conference “in 1979 or 1980,” in response to a panel titled “Sex Use Industry,” which she felt regulated sex workers to objects, “described only as something used, obscuring my role as an actor and agent in this transaction” (229). Sex work avoids the all-encompassing identity of “prostitute,” or the objectification of “sex use,” instead describing a career choice like any other career choice, what these women do for money, not their identities. It also avoids the shame implicit in euphemistic terms, including “prostitute,” which, Leigh points out literally means “to offer publicly” (229) (thus the term “public women,” popular in the Victorian era, which contracts the sex worker with her “respectable” sisters ensconced in private homes). Leigh, Carol. “Inventing Sex Work.” *Whores and Other Feminists*. Ed. Jill Nagle. New York: Routledge, 1997. 225-230.

^{liii} Any use of “seduced” in the nineteenth century is best enclosed in scare quotes. While it can (and often does) have the same meaning that it does today, in the nineteenth century, “being seduced” really just meant a woman having her first sexual experience outside of marriage. Thus, seduction covered a huge breath of experiences, and could mean anything from enthusiastically consensual sex, to sex brought about through coercion or deception, to violent rape. In the admissions files for the London Foundling Hospital, for example, unwed mothers usually specify what “seduction” means in their case – “he seduced me against my will,” or “he seduced me with my consent.”

^{liiii} “Virginity” is obviously a construction based on heterosexist, misogynistic norms that insist that heterosexual, penetrative sex is the only act that counts as “sex,” and that women and girls’ values are inherently linked to their “purity.” However, it’s a construction that is very important to understanding how sex and girlhood were imagined in Victorian London (and, indeed, today), and so, while I enclose “virginity” in scare quotes as much as possible, it’s a concept that’s necessary to understanding Stead, Dickens, and other Victorian authors’, actors’, and parents’ beliefs and actions.

^{lvi} Stead, W.T. “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I: the Report of our Secret Commission.” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, July 6 1885. 3. All quotes from “Maiden Tribute” are taken from the digitized versions in the British Library Newspaper Archive, which is available by subscription.

^{lvii} Walkowitz’s research shows that almost none of the sex workers who were arrested, admitted to “lock hospitals,” or taken in by the Rescue Society of London were under the age of 16 (the percentage of sex workers younger than sixteen in the care of the Rescue Society, which specialized in young girls who were new to “the life,” and so probably had a higher percentage of the youngest sex workers, was lower than 3% in 1865) (17). In fact, most of them were in their 20s, suggesting that most women’s forays into sex work were only temporary, and that women were able to reintegrate themselves into “respectable” society through other types of employment or marriage fairly easily (18). Walkowitz, Judith R. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. 1980.

^{lviii} In addition to raising the age of consent for girls to sixteen, the law outlaws “any act of gross indecency” between males (6). This “class of newly created offenses” applied to any sexual acts between men besides sodomy, which had already been illegal (33). The Act is most famous for being the basis of Oscar Wilde’s prosecution in 1895. In this context, it’s important to remember that the law that Stead was seeking to pass was not, actually, about protecting children, but about controlling sexuality. *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885: with introduction, commentary, and forms of indictments by R. W. Burnie of the Middle Temple, Barrister-at-law*. London: Waterlow & Sons Limited, 1885.

^{lix} Butler’s Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA) was founded in 1869, in protest to the Contagious Disease Acts, which required “registered prostitutes” to submit to routine gynecological exams with a speculum (which Butler and other reformers referred to as “instrumental rape” and allowed sex workers to be detained in “lock hospitals” if they were found (or assumed) to be suffering from a sexually transmitted infection. Judith Walkowitz discusses the CD Acts, and the campaign for the repeal, in detail in *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980).

^{lx} Hume-Rothery, Mary. “A Letter Addressed to The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.” London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1870. 18

^{lxi} “No one ever gets over their first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it. I suppose that was the real difference between him and all the rest” (*Peter and Wendy* 97)

^{lxii} *Proceedings of the Central Criminal Court*, 19th October, 1885. All quotes are taken from a digitized version at oldbaileyonline.org.

^{lxiii} Mr. Justice Henry Charles Lopes’ Sentence. The Old Bailey, November 10 1885. <https://attackingthediabol.co.uk/pmg/tribute/armstrong/bailey/sentence.php> Stead and Rebecca Jarrett were convicted of abduction and indecent assault, and Jacques and Mourez were convicted of indecent assault. Although convicted of a lesser offence than Stead (who was sentenced to three months without labor, and served less), Mourez was sentenced to hard labor for six months, during which time she died. “The Death of Madame Mourey.” *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*. Monday, January 25, 1886. The British Newspaper Archive. There isn’t much information about Louise Mourez (whose name is misspelled in the announcement of her death)—she apparently spoke little English, and did not testify at Stead’s trial. The “Untold lives blog” of the British Library features a brief entry by a woman whose grandmother was delivered by, and named after, Mourez. While the post doesn’t provide much additional information about Mourez, it does suggest that “at least

one mother she attended was grateful enough to name her child after her,” and that she was an abortionist at a time when providing such services was dangerous. Certainly, the suspicion that she was an abortionist played a large part in her receiving a harsher sentence than anyone else involved with Eliza Armstrong’s kidnapping and assault. Makepeace, Margaret. “May Louise and the Marylebone midwife.” *Untold lives blog*. May 1, 2014. <https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2014/05/may-louise-and-the-marylebone-midwife.html>

^{lxiv} Stead wrote that, after being transferred out of the local jail, he very much enjoyed his time in prison, which, he said “afforded the rare luxury of journalistic leisure.” “From the governor, Colonel Milman, to the poor fellow who scrubbed out my room,” according to Stead, “every one was as kind as kind could be. . . . I had my own little kettle and made my own tea: fresh eggs were sent me by some unknown benefactor in Dunville in Ireland, and anything in the shape of food was ordered outside. . . . I was allowed my own hearthrug and easy chairs, as well as a writing desk and a cosy little tea table.” In fact, he said, apparently unironically, he did “not think that I have ever been in better spirits in my life or enjoyed existence more intensely than in these two months.” (Stead, William T. “My First Imprisonment.” London: E. Marlborough & Co., 1886. <https://attackingthediabol.co.uk/steadworks/imprisonment.php>). Stead’s career and fortune were unaffected by his time in jail—in fact, most people viewed him a hero for exposing London’s shameful trade in virgins. He went on to die as a first-class passenger on the Titanic.

^{lxv} Hughes, Kathryn. *Victorians Undone: Tales of the Flesh in the Age of Decorum*. London: 4th Estate, 2017.

^{lxvi} Field, Corrine. *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2014.

^{lxvii} Bernstein, Elizabeth. *Brokered Subjects: Sex, Trafficking, and the Politics of Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

^{lxviii} Kristof’s beliefs are in line with the colonizing impulses of much anti-trafficking “humanitarian work” explored by Bernstein in *Brokered Subjects* (2018). During her ethnographic work, Bernstein found that both religious and secular groups often attempt to “help” women whom they believe to have been trafficked by installing them in new, low-paying jobs, “framing the problem of human trafficking as a humanitarian issue that global capitalists can help combat” (87). These jobs are part of what author Teju Cole termed the “white savior industrial complex” (Bernstein 90), in which sex workers are ostensibly “freed” from sex work, in order to be contained in a West-based, capitalist marketplace. Boreth Sun, one anti-trafficking activist interviewed by Bernstein, suggests that the best way to prevent trafficking is to help women start their own businesses—by helping make sure they are able to get credit and go into debt to start those businesses (93). Sun apparently doesn’t see the irony in this suggestion, considering that a major point that anti-trafficking activists (beginning with Stead) often use to define sex work as “slavery” is that many women are in debt to the brothels where they work, or (if cross-border “trafficking” was actually involved) to the people who helped them immigrate..

^{lxix} “It is seldom the duty of a journalist to record a crime so shocking . . .” *London Evening Standard*. Monday, December 9, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

^{lxx} “Horrible Murder of a Little Girl at Alton. Shocking Mutilation of the Body.” *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*. Saturday, August 31, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

^{lxxi} “Horrible Mutilation of a Child in Hampshire.” *Nottinghamshire Guard*. Friday, August 30, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

^{lxxii} “Atrocious Murder in Hampshire.” *Westmorland Gazette*. Saturday, August 31, 1867. The

British Newspaper Archive. The *Cardiff Times*, in an article titled “A Child Hacked to Pieces,” called her “pretty and intelligent,” and the *Coventry Standard* calls her a “pretty child,” before saying that there is “little doubt” that she was “indecently assaulted” before being “hewn to pieces.” (“Horrible Murder.” *Coventry Standard*. Saturday, August 31, 1867.)

lxxiii “Horrible Murder and Mutilation.” *Western Times*. Friday, August 30, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

lxxiv “Atrocious Murder in Hampshire.” *Croydon Chronicle and East Surrey Advertiser*. Saturday, August 31, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

lxxv “Revolted Murder of a Child.” *Hampshire Telegraph*. Wednesday, August 28, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

lxxvi In the *Birmingham Journal*’s account, due to odd punctuation, Fanny Adams literally becomes “the child,” the figure that represents all children everywhere: “The trial of the young man Frederick Baker, for the murder of the child, Fanny Adams, under circumstances of almost unprecedented barbarity.” “The Alton Murder” Saturday, December 7, 1867. The British Newspaper Archive.

lxxvii Kathryn Hughes examines Fanny’s Adams’s story, and Baker’s trial, in more detail in a chapter of *Victorians Undone*.

lxxviii *Belfast Telegraph*. Friday December 23, 1983. pg. 11

lxxix *Western Daily Press*, Monday 27 February 1950. The British Newspaper Archive.

lxxx “‘Fanny Adams’ in Disrepute.” *Hampshire Telegraph*. Saturday, June 9, 1906. The British Newspaper Archive.

lxxxi Myerson, Jonathan. “Theatre: Sweet Fanny Adams” *The Independent*. Saturday, May 12, 2001. Pg. 8

lxxxii James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw*. 1898. New York: Dover Publications, 1991. Print. 18. All references to *The Turn of the Screw* taken from this edition.

lxxxiii Barrie, J. M. *Peter and Wendy*. 1911. New York: Penguin Books, 1995. 1.

lxxxiv Howard Sturgis was openly gay (an anachronistic term that I use begrudgingly), and lived with his male partner for the final 32 years of his life. J. M. Barrie, whose fifteen-year marriage allegedly remained unconsummated, has typically been either assumed to have been asexual or to have been sexually attracted to boys; certainly his writing and photographs display an erotic investment in boys. While there has been much speculation about James’s sexuality, with biographer Leon Edel, in a series of biographies published between 1957-1972, setting the tone for years of scholarship by suggesting that James was probably attracted to other men, but never acted on these attractions, recent scholars (most notably Sheldon Novick) have questioned the assumption of James’s celibacy. James had many openly queer friends, and his letters to male friends (including Sturgis), while not explicitly sexual, often feel intimate and erotic in the way that letters to a lover might. To quote Novick, “In the absence of contrary evidence, it has seemed most reasonable to assume that when [James] seemed to be having a love affair, he was; that when he seemed to be expressing an idea, he was consciously doing so” (xiii). The assumption that James was a life-long celibate seems, to me, more in line with the habit of referring to someone euphemistically as a “confirmed bachelor” than based on any real evidence from James’s life or writings. Ultimately, futile attempts to determine what feelings James and Barrie may have had, and how they may have acted on them, are less important than the distinctly queer motifs that run through their work, and attempts to pin their sexualities down may miss the point. To borrow one of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s definitions of “queer,” the term, in this dissertation, encapsulates

“the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (*Tendencies* 8).

^{lxxxv} While the text of the play was not published until 1911, as part of a collection of Barrie’s plays, it was first performed seven years earlier, in 1904. The edition which is cited in this dissertation was published in 1956, by Samuel French. Barrie, James. *Peter Pan: A Fantasy in Five Acts*. 1911. London: Samuel French, Inc, 1956. Print.

^{lxxxvi} This quote is taken from *Ethel’s Book* (1858), a comfort book by Fredrick Faber. Faber and children who “like to die” are discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation.

^{lxxxvii} Barrie writes, in an odd stage direction, a final scene aboard the boat which he warns must not be shown: after Hook throws himself into the crocodile’s mouth, the curtain briefly rises “to show PETER a very Napoleon on his ship. It must not rise again lest we see him on the poop in HOOK’s hat and cigars, and with a small iron claw” (*Peter Pan* 85).

^{lxxxviii} Michael died, according to a witness, in the embrace of his close friend and probable lover, Rupert Buxton, and theories vary as to whether the two men had a suicide pact, or Buxton drowned trying to save Michael. Michael’s brother Nico suggested that his brother’s death occurred because “he was going through something of a homosexual phase and maybe let this get a bigger hold on his thinking than it need” (293). Birkin, Andrew and Goode, Sharon. *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys: The Real Story Behind Peter Pan*. 1979. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

^{lxxxix} Kidd, Kenneth. *Freud in Oz: At the Intersection of Psychoanalysis and Children’s Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

^{xc} In Barrie’s novel, Wendy explains to Peter that a “thimble” is “like this,” kissing him, to which he responds, “Funny!” before returning the kiss and incurring Tink’s wrath (*Peter and Wendy* 32); at another point we are told that she “felt him, solicitously, lower down than his chest” (116).

^{xc} Merriam Webster defines “never” as either “not at all, or “at no time in the past or future.”

^{xcii} Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place* provides a thoughtful and useful exploration of queer vs. reproductive time, although Halberstam is more interested in the queer time embodied by transgender bodies than in queer childhood. Halberstam, J. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005. Print. 1

^{xciii} Peter tells Wendy that Tink is “quite a common girl,” and that she is called “Tinkerbell” because of her occupation as a tinker (24).

^{xciv} As the crocodile makes her first appearance in the novel, Barrie tells us that “We shall see for whom she is looking presently.” (*Peter and Wendy* 56). Hook and Smee later discuss the crocodile, referring to her as “it” and “he,” respectively (60).

^{xcv} I discuss this in more detail in an article published in ChLAQ. Gryctko, Mary. “The Romance of the Nursery:” Lost Boys and Deadly Femininity in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Peter Pan*. *The Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, Johns Hopkins University Press, issue 41.2. Summer 2016.

^{xcvi} In his seminal essay “The Ambiguity of Henry James,” Edmund Wilson was the first to advance (or at least to publish) the psychological interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw* that fundamentally changed future criticism of James’s novella, and sparked a debate that still rages today. Wilson’s basic argument is that that the “ghosts” are merely products of the sexually repressed governess’s imagination. While I for the most part subscribe to this interpretation, I feel, with Shoshana Felman, that it over-simplifies both Freudian sexuality and the text, ignoring the very “ambiguity” that the essay purports to celebrate. To me, the moment when Mrs. Grose fails to see the ghost of

Miss Jessel has always seemed to be the “reveal” of the story, however, at the heart of the tale is the fact that we can never be sure, for certain, exactly how objectively “real” the ghosts are, and to express any certainty as to the “truth” of the text is to risk falling into James’s carefully constructed trap. For the purposes of this chapter, I have considered the ghosts as symbolic figures of desires and fears which the Governess cannot admit as coming from herself – but I have attempted to avoid allowing myself to be trapped into committing definitely to one or another explanation of them.

^{xcvii} The title “Mrs.” typically denotes marriage, but was also sometimes used as a courtesy title for female servants above a certain age and status, so it’s unclear whether Mrs. Grose has been married or not. I assume that she is not currently married because she neither lives with, visits, or mentions her husband in the text. I likewise assume that, because the text never mentions them, she has no children, which is admittedly a bit more of a leap—certainly if she does have children, they are grown.

^{xcviii} Savoy, Eric. “Theory *a Tergo* in *The Turn of the Screw*.” Bruhm, Steven, and Natasha Hurley, eds. *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. 245 – 275. 263

^{xcix} I’ve included only the dialogue from the scene – the Governess’s interpretation of it, her prose, is omitted and indicated by ellipses to show only the conversation between herself and Miles (*The Turn of the Screw* 84).

^c Miller, D. A. “Anal Rope.” *Representations*, No. 32 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 114-133. University of California Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928797>. 123

^{ci} Ohi, Kevin. “The Author of ‘Beltraffio’: The Exquisite Boy and Henry James’s Equivocal Aestheticism.” *ELH*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Fall, 2005), pp. 747-767.

^{cii} Tribunella’s examples include nineteenth-century school stories *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858) and *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857), and mid-twentieth century texts *A Separate Peace* (1959) and *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977). Tribunella’s formulation is actually complicated by these nineteenth-century examples somewhat, since *Tom Brown’s* Arthur doesn’t actually die, and Eric doesn’t actually achieve “successful manhood,” but instead becomes a pirate, only repenting on his own death bed. Many canonical nineteenth-century texts do fit this formulation, however, especially when we look outside of school stories. I would add Steerforth in *David Copperfield* (1850) to Tribunella’s list, as well as expanding it to include girls—Beth March in *Little Women* (1869), and Helen in *Jane Eyre* (1847), to name a few. Tribunella, Eric. *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children’s Literature*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009.

^{ciii} Carol’s fiancée, Violet, is depicted as somewhat spoiled and jealous, but her concerns about Tim and Carol’s passionate friendship are not totally unfounded. When Violet declares to her mother that “If [Carol] wants me to play second fiddle to that ridiculous boy, he’s just mistaken; I’ll never marry a man with an intimate friend. Never” (267), she seems to be suggesting that there’s something more than friendship in the two boys’ relationship that makes her unsure about marrying Carol. Her mother’s response, tellingly, isn’t to tell her that she’s wrong, or overreacting, but to tell her not to “talk so loud” (267), in case someone might hear her.

^{civ} Many nineteenth-century writers including Jeremy Bentham, Lord Byron, Oscar Wilde, and John Addington Symonds viewed David and Jonathan as a biblical touchpoint for erotic relationships between men. In fact, at least since the renaissance, the story has worked as a code,

to delineate a text as clearly “queer,” while also apparently retaining the upmost respectability—Sturgis epigraph can’t be objectional, since it’s from the Bible! The story of David and Jonathan follows a similar trajectory to the school stories described by Tribunella, since Jonathan must die in order for David to move into heterosexual, patriarchal manhood. Tim first hears this passage in chapel at Eton, and thinks about it often after that. He asks Carol, on his deathbed, to make sure that it is inscribed on his tombstone—something that he feels certain that his father will agree to, despite his past disapproval of Tim’s relationship with Carol (318).

cv Wharton, Edith. *A Backward Glance: An Autobiography*. 1933. New York: Touchstone, 1998. 225

cvi Santayana, George. *Selected Critical Writings of George Santayana, Vol. I*. Ed. Norman Henfrey. London: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

cvi Sturgis is almost certainly using “queer” here in its more traditional sense of “out of the ordinary,” but the very framing of Eton as out of the ordinary (which, of course, it was and is—most boys can’t afford to go there) suggest opportunities for exploration and play that were not open to children who did not attend private school.

cvi Barrie, J. M. “Captain Hook at Eton.” Speech delivered at Eton College, July 8, 1927. <https://classic-literature.co.uk/j-m-barrie-captain-hook-at-eton-speech/>

cix This type of child who “likes to die” is identified by Fredrick Faber in his comfort book *Ethel’s Book*, which is discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. Faber, Frederick William. *Ethel’s Book; or, Tales of the Angels*. London: Richardson and Son, 1858.

cx Zieger, Susan. Susan Zieger. “Dickens’s Queer Children.” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 20:1-2, 2009. 141-157

cx Ferrucci, Franco. “The Dead Child: A Romantic Myth.” *MLN*, Vol. 104, No. 1, Italian Issue (Jan., 1989), pp. 117-134. The Johns Hopkins University Press

cxii Shuttleworth, Sally. “*Jude the Obscure* and Child Suicide.” *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

cxiii “Jude the Obscene.” *The Pall Mall Gazette*. November 12, 1895.

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

cxv Foucault, Michel. “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984.” James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds). *The Final Foucault*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1988. 1–20.

cxvi Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. 1843. New York: Fall River Press, 2013. 10

cxvii Galton, who is also discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, coined the term “eugenics” in 1883, although his first book detailing his new “science” was published in 1869..

cxviii “A Child’s Confession of Murder.” *The Star*. February 4, 1897.

cxix “A Child Accused of Murder.” *Northern Daily Telegraph*. June 4, 1892.

cx “A Juvenile Murderer.” *Cirencester Times and Cotswold Advertiser*. Monday, November 22, 1869

cxxi All accounts of child suicides, unless otherwise stated, were found in the British Library’s online newspaper archive, available by subscription at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

cxii “A Touching Story.” *The Aberdeen Press*. Dec. 11, 1903. It is worth noting that this is later than most of the accounts of child suicide found in the archive, suggesting that distance from the

panic surrounding the “rise” in child suicide in the 1880s had perhaps made it easier to romanticize such deaths.

cxxiii “Suicide of a Child.” *Torquay Times, and South Devon Advertiser*. April 15, 1887.

cxxiv “Attempted Suicide of a Child.” *Eastern Daily Press*. October 21, 1883.

cxxv “Attempted Suicide by a Child.” *Gloucester Citizen*. Friday, August 5, 1892. Woolland’s case is interesting because it sheds a positive light on the age of consent laws passed with the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, and discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. It was extremely difficult for Victorian women to prosecute their employers for sexual assault, but court records show that Woolland’s employer, George Henry Upson, was convicted of “carnally knowing a girl under the age of sixteen,” and sentenced to six weeks’ hard labor. This, then, is a case in which the age of consent laws championed by William Stead worked the way they were supposed to—it would have been almost impossible for Woolland to prove to a judge or jury that Upson had raped her, but her age made his actions a crime, regardless. Old Bailey Proceedings, September 12, 1892. 1172. <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?name=18920912>

cxxvi “Suicide by a Child.” *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*. August 12, 1892.

“Suicide of a Child of Six.” *Aberdeen Press and Journal*. Thursday, July 26, 1906.

cxxvii “Strange Child Suicide.” *Bradford Daily Telegraph*. Friday, January 10, 1890. This article was reprinted in numerous papers across Great Britain.

cxxviii The notion of a child’s death as an entirely private tragedy that granted a parent membership in an exclusive club is discussed in detail in chapter I of this dissertation. This quote is taken from *The Cradle and the Grave: Thoughts on the Death of Little Children*. 14.

cxxix “Distressing Case of Suicide at Culworth.” *Northampton Mercury*. Friday, July 11, 1890.

xxx “Child Suicide.” *South Wales Daily*. Thursday, June 26, 1902

cxix “Supposed Suicide of a Child.” *Hackey and Kingsland Gazette*. Friday, September 28, 1883.

cxixii “Attempted Suicide by a Child.” *Cheltenham Chronicle*. Tuesday, June 7, 1870.

cxixiii “A Child Suicide.” *North Devon Gazette*. Thursday, June 23, 1887.

cxixxiv “Attempted Suicide by a Child.” *Nottingham Evening Post*. May 27, 1882.

cxixxv “Distressing Suicide of a Young Woman, Extraordinary Censure of her Sweetheart” *Rochdale Observer*. Dec. 1, 1866. Pg. 5.

cxixxvi “Child Suicide.” *Cheshire Observer*. Saturday, August 8, 1896.

cxixxvii McLaren, Angus. “Illegal Operations: Women, Doctors, and Abortion, 1886-1939.” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer, 1993), pp. 797-816. Oxford University Press.

cxixxviii Many of the accounts of Hughes’s death describe her as “a young girl in a naked condition,” or, sometimes, “in a nude condition” (they all refer to her nudity in some way). It’s impossible to know who originated this specific turn of phrase, since it appeared in multiple papers reporting on Hughes’s death the day after she died. On Saturday, May 23, 1891. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, *South Wales Daily*, *Lancashire Evening Post*, *Portsmouth Daily News*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Exeter Flying Post*, *South Wales Daily News*, *Shields Daily Gazette*, *St. James Gazette*, *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, *Western Morning News*, *South Wales Echo*, *Carlisle Express and Examiner*, *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, *Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle*, and *Dundee Courier* all referred to Hughes as “a young girl in a naked condition;” *The Manchester Evening News*, *Nottingham Evening Post*, *London Daily Telegraph & Courier*, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* described her as “a young girl in a nude condition.” This type of copy-and-paste reporting was very common in Victorian England—some of these papers probably had reciprocal relationships in which they

shared reporters and news, although, with no real concept of “plagiarism,” papers borrowed freely from each other with or without such relationships.

cxxxix “The Youngest Suicide on Record.” *San Francisco Call*, Vol. 70, No. 8. June 8, 1891. California Digital Newspaper Collection.

cxli “The Shocking Suicide of a Child. An Inexplicable Act.” *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*. Tuesday, May 26, 1891.

cxlii “The Suicide of a Child near Worcester.” *Birmingham Daily Post*. Tuesday, May 26, 1891.

cxliii “Suicide of a Girl,” in *The Wellington Journal* (May 30, 1891), is really more part of a list of small-print news items than an article, but its author’s restraint is still commendable, I think.

cxliiii The reporter for the *Lancaster Gazette*, for example, opens his article by calling Hughes “A little girl.” The second sentence describes her state of undress, rather than anything else about her life or death. “Shocking Suicide of a Child.” *Lancaster Gazette*. May 27, 1891.

cxliv “Sensational Occurrence on the Railway near Worcester.” *Worcestershire Chronicle*. Saturday, May 30, 1891.

cxlv “The Shocking Suicide of a Child. An Inexplicable Act.” *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*. Tuesday, May 26, 1891.

cxlvi *ibid*

cxlvii “Suicide of a Child.” *Bristol Mercury*. Saturday, May 25, 1889.

cxlviii “Startling Revelations in Newcastle. Suicide of a Girl of Fifteen. Horrible Depravity.” *Aberdeen Evening Inquirer*. Wednesday, May 22, 1889.

cxlix *Newcastle Courant*. Saturday, May 25, 1889. “Suicide of a Girl in Newcastle: A Hospital a House of Ill-Repute.”

cl Carolyn Conley discusses the outcomes of rape and sexual assault trials in Kent in Victorian England in detail. Only about 20% of sexual assault cases that were brought to court ever made it to trial, and men of higher stations were extremely unlikely to even go before a jury, let alone face a conviction. Cases of rape that were tried were also routinely dropped to basic assault, for which men would typically be charged a fine and set free. Conley, Carolyn A. “Rape and Justice in Victorian England. *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Summer, 1986), pp. 519-536

cli Browne, J. Crichton. “Psychical Diseases of Early Life.” *Journal of Mental Science*, vol. 6, no. 33, 1860, pp. 284–320.