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THE INVENTION OF CHILDHOOD IN VICTORIAN
AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

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LUANN WALTHER

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THE INVENTION OF CHILDHOOD IN VICTORIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE INVENTION OF CHILDHOOD IN VICTORIAN
AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

This study began with an initial interest in Ruskin's Praeterita, grew into an examination of autobiography as a form, and eventually found its focus in the theme of "the invention of childhood" as found in three major and several minor Victorian autobiographies. The combination of literary autobiography with the history of childhood has an inherent fascination. We live today in a post-Freudian era which takes for granted the importance of childhood experiences in influencing adult behavior. We believe, without question, that the first years of life are crucially formative. We also live in a culture which is highly "me"-oriented: the tyranny of the individual ego, the immense rise of the autobiographical "I," the high authority granted to subjectivity in literature and in life, are standard features in the contemporary cultural landscape. It was not always so. How, we may ask, did the first subjective literary explorations of childhood take place? When people began to examine their childhoods through the form of sustained autobiographical narrative (something which did not happen to any extent in English literature until the nineteenth century), what did they find? How did autobiographers approach the subjects which to us are such familiar territory, and so loaded with meaning: early events, mothers, fathers, siblings? How did they cope with the burden of the authorial "I" in relating this material? Previous to the Victorian period,

an autobiographer was likely to "cover" his childhood in a sentence or two, perhaps in a paragraph; sometimes he didn't mention it at all. But Victorian autobiographies are full of childhood. Does the introduction of this new source of literary material affect the development of the form? Many scholars have written about aspects of the "self" in modern autobiography; can we discover the nature of the "self-as-child"? These were some of the questions I had in mind when I began to work.

Deciding where to start was a problem. There is no general book on Victorian autobiography. For the seventeenth century we have Paul Delaney's British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century, as well as some good thematic books like Joan Webber's The Eloquent I and Margaret Bottrall's Every Man a Phoenix. For the eighteenth century, Patricia Meyer Spacks has covered a good deal of ground in Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England. But for the nineteenth century there has been no attempt at an overview. Books like John N. Morris's Versions of the Self or James Olney's Metaphors of Self contain useful discussions of nineteenth-century figures, but they treat the autobiographies primarily as expressions of specific themes; neither author tries to provide a "survey." Unlike the history of biography, which has been excellently rendered by such critics as Richard Altick, A.O.J. Cockshut, and Edgar Johnson, the history of autobiography has yet to be written.

Only recently, in fact, has autobiography begun to be seen as a form separate from biography. The Oxford History of English Literature is typical of the older view in listing autobiography and biography under one heading. Many books on biography treat autobiography as a kind of minor subgroup. In the past few years, though, Victorian scholars have begun to appreciate autobiography as a form with its own distinct significance. If Jerome Hamilton Buckley were ever to revise his influential The Victorian Temper, he says, he would now want to lay more stress on the importance of autobiography and the subjective impulse, even among those who upheld the idea of objectivity and shrank from self-revelation.* There is no comprehensive work on Victorian autobiography, but in another ten years there probably will be.

There is also no history of English childhood. Because historians have become more and more interested in childhood and the family in recent years, a great deal of scattered material can be found. But the broadest work in the history of childhood, Philippe Ariès's pioneering Centuries of Childhood, deals mainly with French culture, and is therefore of limited use. The same is true of David Hunt's Parents and Children in History. Lawrence Stone's The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800 stops exactly where we would like to begin. Peter Coveney's The Image of Childhood

*New Literary History I (1969) 73.

is concerned only with fictional images of children in the nineteenth century, so although useful, it did not provide the information which I was looking for as I sought to understand what it was really like to be a child in Victorian England. The essays in Lloyd deMause's "psychohistory"-oriented collection, The History of Childhood, were provocative and often helpful; but they erred, I thought, in a number of ways. For one thing, they often blindly accepted autobiographical first-person narratives as factual, historical "evidence," when it is clear that memory is nothing if not deceptive. In my research on childhood, then, as in my research on autobiography, I cannot say that I trusted in any one basic text or theory.

Most helpful in suggesting an "approach" was the work of a Dutch psychologist, J.H. van den Berg. In The Changing Nature of Man he argues against the notion that "human nature" remains constant throughout history; thus relationships, such as those between parents and children, change in essential ways from age to age. Childhood is a different experience in each period; moreover, Western childhood before the seventeenth century is very unchildlike, according to our modern views of childhood and the maturation process. Along with the lengthening and deepening of maturation in post-Renaissance men and women, there is a gradually increasing tendency toward individual inwardness and self-scrutiny: autobiography, we know, makes its first sustained

appearance as a literary form in the seventeenth century. To put things as briefly as possible, van den Berg helped me to see that childhood and autobiography were discovered, or rather, "invented," at the same time; that this alliance was a meaningful one; and that it would indeed be useful to look at the treatment of childhood in autobiography as a subject relevant to some of the deeper concerns of a society as a whole.

In researching the subject I found useful information in the literature of the Victorian home, in the excellent scholarship on British children's literature, in Freud's essay on screen memories, and in Eric Erikson's Childhood and Society. Wendell S. Johnson's Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry was helpful in showing how to derive cultural generalizations from the literature of the period. The large number of critical works on autobiography, including recent structuralist approaches and earlier work on "sincerity and authenticity," "la litterature intime," and so on, were of less value to this study, but often provided excellent bibliographical material.

By far the most important book to anyone studying Victorian autobiography is William Matthews' British Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written Before 1951. Here are hundreds of autobiographies, more autobiographies than one could read

in a lifetime. (Not that anyone would want to: for every interesting book there are dozens of unbearable ones.) Looking through Matthews' list, one sees immediately that autobiography grew to enormous heights of popularity in the nineteenth century. The obscure and the famous alike wrote their life stories. Religious converts, aristocrats, soldiers, authors, philanthropists, civil servants, and working men wrote. (In America, a reformed prostitute wrote her autobiography, suitably entitling it Out of the Depths: The Story of a Woman's Life; but this is a trifle fraudulent, since it was actually written by a man.) Using the Matthews bibliography as a guide, I read as many autobiographies as possible. Not surprisingly, I found more interesting and lengthier childhood sections in the latter part of the century. I also found that "literary" people--in addition to writing better books--were more likely to dwell upon the events of childhood than were statesmen, missionaries, theatrical personalities, and soon. Hence my view of Victorian autobiography is based mainly--though not exclusively--on the works of men of letters of the later Victorian era.

There are a number of interesting women of letters whose autobiographies would ideally have been included here. I particularly regret the exclusion of Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Mrs. M.O.W. Oliphant, Harriet Martineau, Annie Besant, and Charlotte Mary Yonge. In addition to including more women,

I would have liked to explore the subject of why certain authors refused to write autobiographies; George Eliot made a point of doing this, for example. There was also a great temptation to devote chapters to figures like George Moore, who wrote not one but six autobiographies, plus an unfinished fragment; Edmund Gosse, whom I mention in Chapter II, but on whom I would like to have spent more time; Anthony Trollope; Herbert Spencer; William Hale White; Robert Louis Stevenson. The only easy exclusion was Cardinal Newman, for the simple reason that his Apologia Pro Vita Sua does not concern itself with childhood at all and is therefore not relevant to this study.

A limit had to be set somewhere. It seemed essential to work on Ruskin, Mill and Carlyle: three major authors who wrote memorable autobiographical works in which they attempted to rethink their own childhoods in light of their later growth. Interestingly, each of these men remained childless throughout life; of each one it was said that he was "childish" as an adult. These peculiar facts would seem to link the three in a curious way. Could one make anything of it? Did these three men represent typical Victorian attitudes toward childhood, or did they go against the grain? Were they part of that slowing-up of the maturation process which van den Berg discusses, and if so, did this turn them inward, incline them to self-scrutiny? How much did they

reveal of their early lives? How important were their childhood impressions to them? Did they falsify the past, and if so, how? These were among the questions I asked as I proceeded. The results of my inquiries are the essays which constitute Chapters III, IV, and V.

Because very little work had been done on the "minor" Victorian autobiographers, and because I felt that my main subjects demanded some introductory frame of reference, I tried, in Chapter II, to provide a general background against which the autobiographies of Ruskin, Mill, and Carlyle could be read. This, as it happens, is the part of the dissertation which is most gratifying. Not only does it introduce many formerly neglected figures into the discussion of Victorian autobiography, but it also suggests some general patterns which seem to occur again and again throughout the genre. Finally, to round out the discussion, and give it a proper academic context, Chapter I surveys the critical terrain, justifies my particular approach to the texts, and explains what I mean by the phrase "the invention of childhood."

I cannot claim that all the parts fit neatly together to make up the whole. It was sometimes difficult to keep the essays on the three major figures running along a parallel course. Each man wrote in his own way, for his own reasons; I became increasingly aware that it was the individuality of each "major" autobiography, not its likeness to others,

which deserved most attention. Nor can I pretend to have the psychological or historical expertise which the truly ideal writer on this subject would possess. Often, where I have felt ill-equipped, I have had to put my faith in the reliability of common sense. I hope, however, that I have broken some ground in an area which may be of continuing interest to scholars and readers in the years to come.

L.A.W.

CHAPTER I :
APPROACHES TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiography is a strangely indefinable literary genre. For some critics, it cannot even be called a "genre"; for them, the word "autobiography" simply indicates certain expectations on the part of the reader, or certain intentions on the part of the author. The term itself does not appear in English until 1809 in a Quarterly Review article by Robert Southey, and it was not firmly established in the language until the 1860's. Frequently, a Victorian author will use the words "autobiography" and "biography" interchangeably. In contemporary criticism of autobiography, many forms--including novels, plays, poems, and various works of nonfiction--have been seen as "autobiographies." One critic has even gone so far as to suggest that his own book about autobiography may be an "auto-¹biography on autobiography." Such fundamental confusion as to what constitutes the self-written story of one's life makes it difficult to interpret specific works themselves. Yet, in the past few years, there has emerged an interesting and diverse body of criticism on this subject. Before explaining my own approach to Victorian autobiography, I think it sensible to outline the approaches of some other writers on autobiography, and to give a sense of how Victorian autobiography fits into the vast and tantalizing literature of the self which has now preoccupied several generations

of critics.

Formal or Generic Approaches

There are innumerable approaches to autobiography, but for the sake of clarity one may discern three major areas of speculation. The oldest and most earthbound might be called a "formal" or "generic" approach. Here the question of definition is squarely confronted; the length, scope, style, content, and other conventions of the form are discussed, and the growth and direction of autobiography are interpreted. Wayne Shumaker's English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form is a standard work of this type. Shumaker defines autobiography simply as "the professedly 'truthful' record of an individual, written by himself, and composed as a single work." Modern autobiography, however, is more than this, and Shumaker proceeds to show why. The autobiographical fragments found in medieval and classical literature are qualitatively different from post-Renaissance writings, he says, because they are for the most part the objective records of deeds done, the res gestae of heroic leaders. The modern autobiographical convention, on the other hand, reveals the tendency in Western consciousness toward greater subjectivity and increased emphasis on the worth of the individual; that is to say, modern autobiography is increasingly introspective and deals more and more with ordinary people. For Shumaker the "seed-time" of modern autobiography is the seventeenth century, and its "time of

full and luxuriant flowering" the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though in the matter of definition each critic of autobiography is likely to come up with something which suits his own specific needs, most of the critics agree with Shumaker's basic lines of development; English Autobiography is considered to be one of the indispensable works in the field.

Shumaker's main argument is that modern autobiography tends to move gradually from expository to narrative form. He illustrates this by examining the "modes" of three successive nineteenth-century works: the "expository mode" of J. S. Mill's Autobiography, the "mixed mode" of Anthony Trollope's Autobiography, and the "narrative mode" of George Moore's Hail and Farewell. Shumaker and his co-thinkers thus see a consistent pattern in the rise of autobiography: the form moves gradually and inevitably toward full-length nonfiction narrative which is increasingly concerned with psychological or other self-exploratory insights. The conventions of the form are thought to be derived mainly from eighteenth-century works; the original impulses toward self-revelation are seen in some late sixteenth- and in many seventeenth-century writings. For generic critics like Shumaker, the historical conditions which bring about autobiography as we know it are of secondary interest; their primary concern is with the development of a literary convention.

While other kinds of critics have pondered the sources and ramifications of the introspective impulse, caring little for literary definitions and categories, the generic critics have concentrated on refining their definitions. Illustrating this is a second very influential generic approach to autobiography, Roy Pascal's Design and Truth in Autobiography.³ Pascal attempts to sort out "true" autobiographies from other writings which merely have autobiographical qualities, such as diaries, letters, memoirs, and philosophical reflections. For Pascal an autobiography must be a systematic reconstruction of a life in its actual circumstances; it must shape the past from a consistent, coherent point of view; and it must show a vision of consistency between the outer world and the inner life. Its degree of intimacy is a decisive factor in judging "true" autobiography, but the writer cannot be too engrossed with the inner life alone, or he will miss the full "potentialities of the genre," which are expressed in the "interplay" between past and present, and between inner and outer, worlds.

Pascal's analyses are helpful in establishing an ideal for the genre. And certainly the weeding out of letters, diaries, and other "incomplete" autobiographical forms eliminates some of the confusion in this very unwieldy field of study. Yet the idea of "true" versus "false" autobiography is unnecessarily restrictive. According to Pascal's definition,⁴ Samuel Johnson's autobiographical fragment would not be

"true," but the use to which Donald Greene puts that small surviving fragment in his essay on "The Uses of Autobiography in the Eighteenth Century"⁵ proves Johnson to have been as good--as true--an autobiographer as one could hope to find; the fragment would belong in any list of important British autobiographies.

A similar objection might be made to the careful definition by Philippe Lejeune in his book l'Autobiographie en France. Though Lejeune treats only French works, his approach owes much to Shumaker and Pascal: "nous appelons autobiographie le récit rétrospectif en prose que quelqu'un fait de sa propre existence, quand il met l'accent principal sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité."⁶ Lejeune gives several reasons why "l'opposition fondamentale" between autobiography and memoirs, novels, poetry, and other forms of la littérature intime justifies the creation of the new word "l'autobiographie." Such distinction between genres can, however, be arbitrary rather than "fundamental." As Donald Greene points out,

Swift's Journal to Stella consists of memoranda jotted down by Swift at the end of each day, then collected and mailed to Stella at intervals of a week or so. While they remain in Swift's room, I suppose we should call them a diary; when they enter the post, they suddenly become a letter.

Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland

is, among other things, an autobiographical memoir of how he spent three interesting months in the year 1773; a great deal of it, however, is a revision of a series of letters he wrote to Mrs. Thrale en route; if he had not mailed these letters, but kept them in a memorandum book and handed the book to Mrs. Thrale on his return to London, I suppose⁷ we should call it a journal. And so on.

It would seem that no matter what criteria we settle on as the formal requirements of an autobiography--that the work be written in prose, and not in the disguise of poetry; that it be intended as the truth, so far as the writer can discern it; that it cover most or all of the writer's life rather than simply an aspect or an event of that life; that it mark the writer's inner growth rather than the "life and times" of the period; that it be, conversely, not simply philosophical contemplation but an account of the activities of the writer in the world; that it be a retrospective summation of a life rather than a daily recording of the life as it is happening; that the writer be the principal character and not the observer of other more important characters--still, no matter what we decide upon, there will be such glaring exceptions to the rule as to make our definition unserviceable. Many studies of nineteenth-century autobiography, for example, include Wordsworth's The Prelude and Carlyle's Sartor Resartus;

neither of these is an autobiography by any standard generic definition, but both are, nevertheless, major works in the British autobiographical tradition.

While the theorists of form and genre have helped to place autobiography within a certain literary frame, they have also categorized perhaps too much. It is admittedly very confusing to have to accept T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets as autobiography (as the poem is treated in James Olney's Metaphors of Self⁸), but it is equally confusing to have to eliminate The Prelude from one's considerations simply because it is not written in prose and therefore fails the test of the definition. Moreover, regarding the nineteenth century in England, when one begins to look beyond the more famous autobiographies (the usual list includes Wordsworth, Mill, Newman, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Gosse), one finds the great bulk of autobiographies to be combinations of genres-- a memoir plus letters, a series of reminiscences, an autobiographical fragment published with the author's later reflections, and so on. Finally, it seems useful to think of the formulations of Shumaker, Pascal, Lejeune, and the like, as helpful, but not binding, theories; they show general outlines, but cannot account for the many variations which exist within the larger categories.

There are critics whose purpose is not to define or categorize, but who are still essentially "formal" in their

approach in that they explore autobiography as narrative. One example is F. J. Plourde, Jr., who studies autobiography⁹ "as a narrative of duration." Using the word in its Bergsonian sense, Mr. Plourde attests that it is the quality of "duration" which makes certain works seem autobiographical. He argues a connection between a secular, "Kantian " sense of autobiography and a Christian, "Augustinian " one. Both the Kantian unfolding of the "immanent will" in the universe and the Christian consideration of the autobiographer's own past as a "teleological process" leading to the present reality, he thinks, display an inner structure which is more important than any other quality in defining the form. Because it is this teleological "feeling," or sense of immanence, which is "the main criterion on which most readers unconsciously base their judgement that any given work is autobiography," there can be little point in holding to the kinds of definitions of autobiography discussed earlier; this then allows Plourde to consider George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, Dickens' David Copperfield, and John Updike's "Pigeon Feathers"--all works of fiction--as autobiography. Plourde's approach is useful in its attempt to look beyond outer formal qualities to some of the inner structures of autobiography; yet it is also extremely loose and vague. Would there not have been an essential difference between the prose nonfiction account of her life which George Eliot chose not to write

and the fictional account of some aspects of her childhood in The Mill on the Floss? It would even be possible to say that David Copperfield is more autobiographical, in Plourde's sense, than the short nonfiction account of his blacking house days which Dickens wrote for his biographer John Forster. Plourde shows that when a critic bypasses the standard theories, he eliminates certain problems; but then, others appear.

It is refreshing to turn to Alfred Kazin's discussion of "Autobiography as Narrative" because, though his concerns are formal, Kazin posits no theory or definition of autobiography. Instead he simply proclaims that "autobiography, like many other forms, is what a gifted author makes of it," and then proceeds to discuss the particular kind which interests him: "autobiography as fiction--that is, as narrative which has no purpose other than to tell a story, to create the effect of a story, which above all asks...to be read for its value as narrative."¹⁰ Naturally the best autobiographies of this sort will be written by practiced fiction writers, since "autobiography as narrative obviously seeks the effect of fiction, and cannot use the basic resources of fiction, like dialogue, without becoming fiction."¹¹ Kazin writes mainly about modern autobiographers like Hemingway, Nabokov, Dahlberg, Colette. His observations about the interplay of fact and fiction in autobiography, about an

author's creative longing which, when fiction cannot fulfill it, is satisfied by autobiography, about autobiography as artistic strategy for discovering new imaginative spaces, are notions which apply most directly to modern writers living in modern society. Autobiography-as-narrative is especially useful in our time, Kazin concludes, because it can establish that "the individual is real even when the culture around him is not."¹² In other words, autobiography can be a way of establishing personal authenticity in a surrounding world of irrationality and doubt. Thus a formal concern with narrative has led at least one critic to see a causal relation between the kind of world an autobiographer lives in, and the form which his autobiography takes.

Not so with another influential generic critic: Barrett John Mandel, responding to Kazin and others, argues for the consideration of autobiography not as cultural history, nor as psychology, nor as the reflection of these, but simply "as art."¹³ Like Shumaker and Pascal, Mandel wishes to establish the aesthetic criteria of autobiography. He points out, however, that to concentrate on narrative is to eliminate a huge portion of the genre. Wishing to be more systematic and inclusive than all of the aforementioned critics, Mandel first argues against the common mistake (committed, he says, by both Kazin and Pascal) of judging autobiography by the standard of fiction. Novels have different ends and different properties from autobiographies, and although many autobiographies are written in prose, with "characters" and

"settings" which are reminiscent of fictional ones, autobiography is bound to be disappointing when read as if it were fiction. One needs to discover the elements which make autobiographies different from all other genres; then perhaps one may begin to understand the principles of their artistic excellence. Mandel's definition is much like Shumaker's: "Autobiography is a retrospective account of a man's whole life (or a significant part of a life) written as avowed truth and for a specific purpose by the man who lived the life."¹⁴ But his emphasis is upon the three specific "generic restrictions" which shape and control the form. The first regards content: autobiography, unlike other forms, must by definition convey information about the author's life. The manner of treatment may vary, but the content is limited to a particular body of information. Second, the author is limited to retrospection. His glance must be cast back over history. Third, he must profess to speak the truth. "The world of autobiography is dependent on the real world of the author, and the writer who creates a totally self-sufficient and self-contained world and cuts off the rhetorical signals which reveal that the book is an imitation of a real life in the matter-of-fact world has crossed the thin line and created fiction: just over the border is the world of Proust, Melville, and Joyce."¹⁵

Mandel's insistence upon such standard formal concerns

as keeping fiction and autobiography separate, upon differentiating autobiography from all related genres such as the diary or the personal essay, and so on, is confusing in light of his main point, which is that "the autobiographer has no limitations whatsoever as to the techniques he may employ in bringing his self-view to the printed page....The point is that a writer may choose to write pure autobiography and yet limit himself to no fixed style or manner of representation."¹⁶ Thus Mandel (despite his own definition) accepts as autobiography long or short prose narrative, "one kind of poetry or another, from the long blank verse poem to the lyric," and even dramatic presentation, such as Fellini's film 8½. This, if we are keeping score, makes The Prelude and Samuel Johnson acceptable, but excludes The Mill on the Floss, David Copperfield, and Sartor Resartus. One cannot help but feel a certain exasperation with the formalist enterprise, finally; seeking to be more comprehensive and more precise than all the other critics, Mandel ultimately adds to the confusion.

It must have been in response to such confusion that Louis Renza developed his anti-generic theory of autobiography as a "veto of the imagination." Generic signals or truthful intentions are not autobiography's essential components after all: "We find that the term, autobiography, is essentially non-restrictive; it can be applied validly to aspects of

any given literary work, regardless of the work's apparent
¹⁷genre." What then distinguishes autobiography from other

modes of utterance? It is the "abstention from or veto of
 the particular, imaginative options (including the writer's
 consciousness of imaginative activity as such) with which
 his language presents him in regard to representing a life

¹⁸story." Rather than developing his definition from literary
 history, from literary conventions, or from generic signals,
 Renza goes straight into the authorial mind for the secret
 of what constitutes autobiography. Though the idea of
 "imaginative veto" is not terribly far removed from Mandel's
 idea of imposed restrictions, Renza's contribution to the
 criticism of autobiography is different in focusing upon the
 writer, rather than the finished product or the "tradition."
 His approach is **phenomenological**, his range ample: he
 discusses The Life of St. Theresa, The Prelude, Leaves of
Grass, Rousseau's Confessions, and some examples of first
 person writing by Augustine, Beckett, Hesse, and Max Frisch.
 Despite the alluring breadth of this approach, one asks
 oneself warily whether something so generally recognized,
 so established, as autobiography, can exist only as an
 authorial condition or imaginative state. To define a type
 of literature exclusively by negative authorial activity--
 "imaginative veto"--seems false to some of the best auto-
 biographical texts. Could Carlyle have been exercising such

a veto in Sartor? Could any author abstain from any tempting imaginative option? It seems unlikely.

Possibly the most reasonable of all the generic critics is Francis R. Hart, who, in his "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography," chides those critics who have been caught up with what is in many ways only a "pseudo-problem," namely, the relation of fiction and history, Dichtung und Wahrheit, in autobiography. Their continual preoccupation with the three major questions of truth, form, and intention in autobiography, he thinks, has led to rigidity, exclusion of many texts, and a premature prescriptiveness in the development of their theories. Like Renza, Hart sees significance in the limitation of imaginative freedom for the autobiographer, and he goes on to carry this into the realm of the reader as well: "...When we look only for fiction our imaginations are liberated to carry on our own 'profitable invention.' There is--or should be--no such freedom, no such total imaginative access or response, for either writer or reader, in the historiographical transaction¹⁹ that is autobiography." But Hart's recognition of this does not lead him, as it did Renza, to phenomenology. In fact it leads him away from theory altogether. Rhetorical critics mistakenly seek forms that are "unified," that have "integrity," that are consciously shaped according to an "organizing principle," he says; yet it is the nature of autobiography

to be "experimental, dynamic." Formal principles fluctuate as autobiographical intentions shift; intentions (confessional, apologetic, memoiristic) overlap; "the total emergent reciprocity of situation and activity and pattern is what is formal or distinctive" about any particular autobiography. Refusing to settle upon any rhetorical definition or philosophical theory of autobiography, Hart discusses some forty autobiographical works in the hope that his observations will be the kind "one needs to make and test before historical²⁰ generalization and critical judgment are possible." And indeed, when the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Benjamin Franklin, Edward Gibbon, William Wordsworth, Edward Dahlberg, Eldridge Cleaver, Henry Adams, Stephen Spender, Richard Wright, James Boswell, and many others are brought together, it is obvious that static classifications and definitions simply do not work in the interpretation of autobiography. The shiftings and fluctuations of form and intention, the ambiguities of truth and fiction, and the extremely various interplay of all these elements in different autobiographies show that more study of individual works is needed before any valid overall theories may be formed. "When such recognitions of individual autobiographies have accumulated and undergone sorting and testing, then and only then will it be possible to make real and meaningful descriptive generalizations about the historical development of modern²¹ autobiography." After some twenty years of critical

activity this is the least prescriptive, and yet the best, of generic approaches. It is a modest harvest.

Cultural/Philosophical Approaches

The second major group of writers on autobiography is more exciting; it consists of persons whose interest is what we might clumsily call "interdisciplinary." These are the people who look for historical, cultural, and philosophical clues to the sources of introspection, who ponder the development of the modern "I," and who wrestle with large concepts such as "sincerity," "the self," and "authenticity." Lionel Trilling is unquestionably the most influential of this group. Also important are critics who have been influenced by the French structuralists Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida: their approaches blend ontological, psychological, and anthropological interests with metaphysical and linguistic concepts. There are also a few very good scholars of seventeenth-century autobiography who seem to belong here because their concerns are primarily with the emergence of "the self" in literature of the period. And finally, a critic like James Olney belongs in this discussion as well, because, as he says, his Metaphors of Self is intended to explore "the philosophy and psychology
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of autobiography."

What is notable about these critics is that they regard autobiography not simply as a literary form but as a cultural and psychological phenomenon. Since the rise of

autobiography in literature is aligned with the "rise of the individual" in Western culture, there is generally thought to be significance in the development of first-person autobiographical writing as the expression of a newly-acquired "self-consciousness" in Renaissance men of letters, just as the increase in self-portraiture of that period is thought to be a sign of the same self-consciousness in visual artists. As Trilling has described it, "something like a mutation in human nature took place" in European culture of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; "at a certain point in history men became individuals."

Autobiography, then, is tied in with the fact that in post-feudal times human beings began to live more privately than they had before. Their homes were more comfortable; they sat on chairs, not benches; they lived in separate rooms; they looked at themselves in newly-invented mirrors. They became introspective; they thought of society as something separate from themselves; they began to keep journals and
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 spiritual diaries.

Rather than seeing these and other cultural events of the period as simply the conditions under which modern autobiography came into being, the interdisciplinary critics develop their approaches with the theme of "the self" at the very center, and they never lose sight of the notion that autobiography not only originates in, but inevitably expresses, that difference between public and private which separates

each "self" from his society and his outward being. The result is an emphasis on writings which are confessional, intimate, soul-searching, meditative. Unlike the generic critics, whose gaze seems most often directed toward the twentieth century, these experts on the literature of the self often tend to linger with earlier writers: Rousseau, Montaigne, Donne, Bunyan, the Romantic poets.

Henri Peyre's book Literature and Sincerity suggests the breadth of this subject while Trilling's Sincerity and Authenticity reveals its depth. Both critics (unlike too many of the formalists) recognize the immense importance of Rousseau in any discussion of autobiographical literature. "To Rousseau," says Peyre, "must be traced back the worship²⁴ by many moderns of sincerity...." In his effort to tell the truth about himself Rousseau may not have escaped the lies and subterfuges he accused society of imposing upon most men, but he did advance the limits of introspection farther than any thinker of his time (as in his Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire) and he did establish, in his Confessions, the value of autobiography as an expression of individual worth: "I am unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no²⁵ better, but at least I am different." Tracing the introspective impulse through Western (mainly French) culture, Peyre looks with some disapproval at Rousseau's heritage,

the "romantic exhibitionism" of the nineteenth century and its twentieth-century corollary, the "obsession with literary sincerity." In what is admittedly a superficial tour across vast areas of literature and art, Peyre does manage to establish a pattern of increasing self-scrutiny and, often, the sense of an artist's self-analysis as burdensome, perilous, a kind of disease. Though he does not go so far as P.M. Jones, who has found introspection and ill health to be almost synonymous,²⁶ Peyre spends much of his argument pointing out the dubious relation of "sincerity" to artistic merit, bemoaning the tendency of writers such as Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold to insist upon sincerity as a "hallmark of greatness," when it is in fact quite irrelevant to the quality of any work of art.

Trilling's greater attention to the philosophical depth of the subject makes his work on sincerity and authenticity more valuable than Peyre's. With both a higher regard for Rousseau and a more troubled sense of the modern crisis of inauthenticity which Rousseau heralded, Trilling discusses the problem of selfhood as it permeates politics and philosophy as well as art; the dangers, he implies, are not simply those excesses of literary egotism toward which Peyre is so easily contemptuous, but also many widely accepted doctrines of modern liberalism. For our purposes it suffices to note that for a critic like Trilling the meaning of autobiography

has altogether to do with the discontent felt by individuals in their societies, with the sense of the inauthenticity of everyday life, and with the fairly desperate search for the "honest soul" in a world of masks and roles.

Drawing on the work of Trilling, adding to it the theories of Lacan, and quoting as a kind of motto Freud's remark that "We are all ill," Peter Glassman goes so far as to describe autobiography as "prosthesis."²⁷ Autobiography is a substitute, that is, for the authenticity which is experientially denied to our modern diseased selves. Lacan's idea about infantile mirror experience--that a child is drawn to his image in the mirror precisely because it is not himself, but rather a projected, separate, realized form of its own--becomes part of a disturbing psychological theory: "The first effect of the Imago which appears in human beings is an effect of alienation in the subject. It is in the other that the subject identifies and even senses himself at first."²⁸ If psychic identification is indeed a process of distortion and separation, autobiography is a similarly alienated enterprise: the autobiographer writes, says Glassman, "primarily to establish and to secure a serviceable imitation of that legitimizing integration of character which the fabricated heroes of narrative literature undertake to create."²⁹ Autobiography is a sophisticated kind of imaginative consolation for an inevitable experiential defeat.

The autobiographer characteristically consoles himself for his devitalizing inability historically to activate his intimate-authentic consciousness by representing himself as being coherently coordinated in the modes of his social performance and impersonation. The autobiographer solaces himself for his continuing falsity as an expressed being by linking the disparate purposes and passions of his factitious, ceremonial character into one labyrinthine but at least unmistakably consistent, ³⁰ unmistakably actual form.

Glassman's essay represents an interesting (if exhausting) fusion of Trilling and the French structuralists; moreover, it illuminates one of the common themes of these different forms of interdisciplinary criticism, namely, that the urge to write autobiography emerges from a writer's sense of the hopeless inadequacy of his own culture. According to the structuralists, this culture in turn makes autobiography impossible to write. As Jeffrey Mehlman argues in his study of Proust, Leiris, Sartre, and Lévi-Strauss, it is nothing less than language itself which prevents a writer from truly representing himself; thus the autobiographical project is ³¹ doomed from the start.

A completely different conclusion is reached, however, by other writers whose concerns are also with the development of the literary "I" as a response to the "problem" of self-

consciousness. Joan Webber, for example, has studied eight seventeenth-century prose writers and has shown how the "styles of selfhood" of these writers helped to define their ideologies and to affirm their senses of place in society.³² Margaret Bottrall, remarking upon the growth of autobiography in that century as it is aligned with the stirrings of democratic and egalitarian sentiment during the period, emphasizes that there were many autobiographers who were more concerned with the outer, rather than the inner, life; their existence testifies not to a crisis in self-consciousness but to a new and politically significant assertion of the ordinary man as an important and interesting being in the worldly pageant of events.³³

Going much further in this direction is James Olney, who describes a person's autobiography as a "magnifying lens" which reveals him even more intensely than his works. It is "the symptomatic key to all else that he did and, naturally, to all that he was."³⁴ In utter contrast with Glassman's idea that autobiography is an artificial replacement for that "intimate-authentic consciousness" which is denied expression in the changed, alienated industrial world, Olney's view is that autobiography is the symbolic completion of its subject. Autobiography, like poetry, says Olney, becomes more than history or description of experience; it becomes an embodiment of experience. Jung's myth of individuation in his autobiography Memories, Dreams, Reflections is a particularly good example, Olney thinks, of such a

"metaphor of self." His extreme reverence for Jung's work is excelled only by his extraordinary--nay, outrageous--claims for autobiography in the abstract:

All dogma and proof, i.e. formulations and facts of religious belief, are founded deep in autobiography; ...all philosophy, indeed, and all knowledge is real only in autobiography. Cosmology, one might also say, is no more than (but as much as) psychology writ large; history is autobiography enacted on a grand scale; and the poetic-autobiographic metaphor, being both imitation and creation of the self, is sufficient expression for psychology, history,
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philosophy, and cosmology.

We see that, as is often the case, the criticism of autobiography reveals in great part the methodological assumptions of the critics. And not only that. Once we have sorted out all these seemingly contrary critical distinctions, we must conclude that, in reality, each "theory" can be true. Upon reflection, most are self-evident. No doubt one of the ways an autobiographer completes his sense of self is through "artificial replacement." But this is not arbitrary or uncontrolled; it must have some relation, binding and disciplined, to the factuality of things. It would seem that most of the contradictions we have encountered thus far in reviewing the approaches of several major critics are really false options, representing only parts of the

problem; in the interest of creating "distinctive" critical arguments, the critics have exaggerated their differences. This brief survey ought to remind us, too, that the conclusions of any study of autobiography will be greatly affected by the particular works chosen as examples. Jung and Montaigne will call forth the cosmic enthusiasm of an Olney, while the major Victorian autobiographies will seem "testaments of surrender" to a Glassman, while the works of Leiris will demonstrate Lacanian self-betrays of consciousness to a Mehlman. Moreover, the concerns of the time will dominate the interpretations of critics who concentrate on one period.

For a critic like myself, whose area of research is the nineteenth century in England and whose interest is cultural and historical, certain assumptions may be predicted in advance. First of all, because I shall be dealing with "minor" as well as "major" Victorian autobiographies, I shall have to be flexible in determining what constitutes autobiography. If I were to hold to the definitions set out by the generic critics I should have to eliminate interesting fragmentary autobiographies such as those of Sara Coleridge and Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant. Moreover, a work like Sartor Resartus cannot possibly be excluded from consideration, even if it is in many ways a "fiction"; it contains too many of the elements of Victorian autobiography and illuminates too clearly the roots of the Victorian autobiographical impulse to be neglected. The fact is that

I shall, like others before me, refuse to define autobiography at all; the distinction between "pure" or "true" autobiography and any other kind seems to be an impossible one. Nor shall I concentrate on formal classifications or strictly aesthetic patterns in the works considered.

Furthermore I shall not tackle the subject of selfhood as a philosophical or psychological phenomenon in the manner of the second group of critics. Not only has this approach been widely experimented with, as the previous remarks ought to have indicated, but the diversity of the autobiographies I have chosen to study forbids much generalization of that sort. Naturally it is useful to see John Mill and Thomas Carlyle responding to similar agonies of self-consciousness as part of their age's battle with new philosophies and old religions; but when we look at, say, Augustus J. C. Hare's six-volume autobiography, we are caught up in a smaller world and with less weighty concerns. It is not necessarily a less interesting world, and it is no less representative of the age; in many ways Hare is a more typical autobiographer than any of the great Victorian writers. But he does not obviously suffer the "disease" of selfhood; he does not write in order to provide a substitute for the inauthenticity of his life; he does not write a poetic "completion" of his imaginative existence.

He writes, as do most if not all of the autobiographers

in my study, a history. The introduction of the word brings us to the third and final group of critics on autobiography, the group in which this study would belong.

Historical Approaches

It is possible to see autobiography as comprehensible through its author's relation to time and history. The Victorians, who were avid historians, wrote autobiographies which reflected their concern with time. For several Victorians, writing about their earlier selves gave them an opportunity to escape from what they felt to be the intense (and unpleasant) pressure of time; for others, it was a way of situating themselves within a securely fixed historical frame.

A number of critics have begun to discuss the notion of autobiography-as-history. Jean Starobinski speaks of autobiography as "discourse-history" and shows how Rousseau's Confessions became "a replica of his philosophy of history."³⁶ Karl J. Weintraub argues successfully that "the autobiographical genre took on its full dimension and richness when Western man acquired a thoroughly historical understanding of his existence."³⁷ Both Marie Thérèse Squericiati and John N. Morris see nineteenth-century autobiographical writing as a secularized version of the traditional religious confession;³⁸ as such it is in part the product of a specific, historically locatable dilemma, namely, the loss of faith resulting from the new discoveries in biology and geology of the period.

It would be foolish, of course, to clasp the idea of autobiography-as-history to one's bosom as if it were the only way to view the form; but there is a flexibility and a convenience to it which is greatly appealing. (Here I might add that it would be possible, and very interesting, to write solely about the relation of Victorian autobiography and Victorian history, in the same way that Professor Spacks has written about autobiography and the novel in the eighteenth century. But that would be another subject entirely.)

In an age which scrutinized the meanings of "past and present" so thoroughly, it is not surprising that the subject was often translated into personal terms. Edmund Gosse was able to weave the story of the Plymouth Brethren into the story of his own life, and in so doing, to write a persuasive history of the decline of evangelical values in terms of his own personal "unconversion" from the faith. Mill's "mental history" was similarly an account of the ideological transformations of his age, made vivid by his own strenuous personal experiences of change. Self and history were aligned as self and society were not. Though the literary prototype for Victorian autobiographers was the religious confession, the impulse was now changed. One wrote one's confessions no longer for God, but for posterity; the turning points in one's life were no longer conversions, but evidence of the transitions of the age.

The modes of nineteenth-century autobiographies vary, but they are based on an assumption shared by the period's poets, novelists, and historians--that life was comprehensible in relation to time, to the "ever-rolling stream" which carried or buffeted its passengers but which forcibly, inevitably, moved them along. Life was, for better or worse, a "progress," the movement of a vessel from shore to shore, the difficult crossing of deep and often dangerous waters. The water metaphor is frequent and telling. In choosing the following epigraph from Bacon for one of his books, Augustus Hare suggests much about the period's memorial impulse:

Out of monuments, names, wordes, proverbs, traditions,
private recordes and evidences, fragments of stories,
passages of books, and the like, we doe save and
recover somewhat from the deluge of Time.³⁹

The lens through which I wish to look at autobiography-as-history is one which is unique in the criticism of autobiography, one which emphasizes something so obvious about autobiography that it has been neglected entirely: I wish, namely, to approach autobiography through the history of childhood. In most Victorian autobiographies the childhood section is long, nostalgic, and unusually detailed. Roy Pascal says that "most autobiographers succeed better with
their childhood than their later life, even their youth."⁴⁰

I would go further. It was at least partly through the contemplation and description of childhood, I believe, that many Victorian autobiographers were able to defend themselves against the deluge. Often, it was through the fashioning of a personal past that they were able to establish a relation to history.

Childhood in Autobiography

We know that childhood is a relatively recent subject for scholarly study and that the historians of childhood tend to disagree with one another about changing conditions of childhood throughout Western history. It is generally agreed that Philippe Ariès is correct in saying that childhood as a separate and distinct period of life is something that had to be "discovered" by Western man, though when and where this event took place is a matter of debate. (Ariès⁴¹ says the seventeenth century, which seems accurate.) It is also fairly obvious that J. H. van den Berg is right to attribute the lengthening and deepening of "maturation"--the Bildung of all those increasingly numerous Bildungsromane--to a great change in the very nature of man, "a change in⁴² the way man saw himself in relation to his own past." Changes in the organization of the family, in class structures, in economics, in medicine, in life expectancy, all contributed to the creation of a post-feudal child whose dress, education, and behavior were different from before and,

most importantly, whose position as a child identified him as a separate creature. It is a commonly repeated myth of our century that children of the past, particularly Victorian children, were treated like "miniature adults." This is not at all so; from at least the seventeenth century on, children in Britain and Europe wore special clothing, played special games, ate special food. None of these was necessarily more pleasant than the adult version (the diet in the Victorian nursery being a notorious example), but it was different. Different, but never static: the rules underwent continual transformation.

By the time the Victorians wrote about their childhoods they could already see significant changes between their own experiences and those of the current generation, so that to write down their memories was among other things an act of simple historical preservation. Alice Meynell exemplifies one aspect of the Victorian reverence for childhood in her book Children of the Old Masters:

We are inclined, and with justice, to accuse our fathers...of considering childhood too hurriedly, too inconsiderately, as a passage. Had they known, we aver, of the law of unresting change, of the passage through which everything living, and even the inorganic creature, journeys alike; had they known that the very crystals have to grow old, they

would not have been urgent, impatient, and in haste with childhood...they would not have seen the character of transitoriness, which is everywhere, exclusively in human childhood, and would not have reproached the innocent child with what⁴³ is the universal lot.

Reacting to the lack of absolutes in her post-Darwinian world--a world in which "the very crystals have to grow old--Mrs. Meynell values childhood in a way which her forbears, she says, could not: childhood mirrors the transitoriness of all life and is therefore worthy of attention. Other Victorians would react to the same feeling of transitoriness by seeing childhood completely differently: to people like Ruskin and Froude childhood was a refuge of eternality and timelessness in a world otherwise viciously ruled by the clock. In either case childhood was related to adult values, yet was signally different from the adult world.

"It is human to have a long childhood; it is civilized to have an even longer childhood. Long childhood makes a technical and mental virtuoso out of man, but it also leaves⁴⁴ a lifelong residue of emotional immaturity in him." Eric Erikson's remark may illuminate some of the difficulties which Victorians were to have with their increasingly long childhoods, difficulties which they themselves often perceived. The theme of the great man who was "at heart a

child" was frequent in Victorian biographies. It was Trevelyan's view of Macaulay, Froude's of Carlyle. Though Mill's objection to Bentham's philosophy was based on his opinion that Bentham had remained inexperienced and child-like throughout his life, many modern commentators have volleyed the same criticism at Mill himself. No doubt an entire army of psychologists could be kept busy explaining the arrested development of many a great Victorian (and many a lesser one, too); being blessedly free of any knowledge of "psychohistory," the Victorian autobiographers simply narrated what they knew, thereby providing readers to come with plenty of incriminating evidence in the continuing sagas of their family romances.

For the autobiographers themselves, however, the narration of childhood experiences was not necessarily an opportunity for deep and searching psychological self-examination, for plunging into the dark and mysterious depths of the personality. Autobiography in turn was not the weighty and self-conscious exploration we now tend to expect from the literature of sincerity. It was much more likely to be Gibbon, rather than Rousseau, who set the tone for the Victorian autobiographer. The historian, not the philosopher, provided the model.

In the chapters to come we shall see how the writer's autobiographical impulse was aligned with his sense of history,

and how, through the contemplation of his own childhood, the autobiographer sought to define his position in a world of disillusionment and change. In preparation for the essays on individual autobiographers, Chapter II will attempt to generalize about the inter-relations between the history of childhood and the development of the autobiographical child-figure.

Before moving on to these matters, it might be well here briefly to discuss what I mean by my title phrase, "the invention of childhood." Childhood is an invention in several senses. First, there is Ariès' sense of historical discovery. The child of the seventeenth century comes to be considered a separate unit of the family; his separation, once completed by the establishment of the school, effectively removes him from his earlier place in the flow of adult society and transforms him into a being with privileges and hardships that are distinctly different from those of adults. His function in society has changed, and his role must be created anew. Second, childhood is an invention of the adult imagination. As a period of life it can only be understood in retrospect. Most children are not conscious of their childishness; if they are, they have begun to be adults. The autobiography of fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Barrett, "Glimpses into my own Life and Literary Character," conveys a wonderfully childish charm--but only because it is written

in what she thinks is a deadly serious, "adult" style:

At four I first mounted Pegasus...At six I thought myself privileged to show off feats of horsemanship ...At ten my poetry was entirely formed by the style of written authors...At twelve I enjoyed a literary life in all its pleasures...I am now fourteen and since those days of my tenderest infancy my character has not changed...I feel within me an almost proud consciousness of independance [sic] which prompts me to defend my opinions and to yield them only to conviction!!!!!!

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The absence of adult self-consciousness, the trust and the arrogance, the absolute belief in the "I"--these are qualities which can be seen and appreciated only by those who have lost them. The child is invented by the adult to represent those values which he no longer can find within himself. Third, childhood is a literary invention. The spiritualized infants of Vaughan and Traherne, the eighteenth-century models for occasional poems, Blake's innocents, Wordsworth's heaven-remembering babes, Fanny Trollope's defenseless orphans, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, Maisie Farange, Alice in Wonderland--all these are literary creations, inventions of literary minds designed to serve literary purposes. Because autobiography is by nature a mixture of fact and fiction, autobiographical children share some of

the attributes of fictional children--though, as we shall see, the portrait of the Victorian child in autobiography is quite different from the Victorian novelists' image of childhood. The typical autobiographer, however "truthful" he wishes to be, participates in the task of the novelist as he recreates characters and scenes from the past; his child-self emerges out of the creative cauldron of his memory, and, if he is an experienced writer, out of the careful planning of his selective literary mind. Once invented, of course, the literary child may harden into stereotype; as more and more children crop up in literature, many begin to resemble one another, to influence one another, so that, for example, once David Copperfield is established as a model, we have many Copperfield-like characters appearing in other books, including autobiographies.

The image of the Victorian child ranges from the purity and sweetness of Little Nell to the mischievous, uncombed little girls of Julia Margaret Cameron's strange, slightly faisandé photographs. The autobiographical childhood, I hope, may provide still another angle from which to view Victorian society, while giving us a new perspective on its fascinating literature of the self.

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"The Introspective is not a hero or a man of action; he is not a 'genius,' except perhaps posthumously, and he is never a success. He scarcely qualifies for the popular compliment 'manly'; he looks like a malingerer, he is probably maladive, if not a little morbid. [He is]... in danger not so much of appearing abnormal as of being thought subnormal--less than average in application and adaptation, feeble with men, incompetent with women, a bungler at 'life.'" (p. 101)
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CHAPTER II:
THE INVENTION OF CHILDHOOD
IN VICTORIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Yeats, in his autobiography, said that he could remember little of childhood but its pain; Gide, in his, that he could remember nothing in his childhood soul that was not "ugly, dark, and deceitful."¹ Neither man had been subjected to any extraordinary unpleasantness, nor to the rigors of that famous Victorian method of upbringing, the "breaking of the will"; Ruskin, on the other hand, to whom denial and deprivation were central in his early life, who was whipped summarily for crying or tumbling on the stairs, thought that childhood was a blessed time, the happiest time of life.² Augustus J. C. Hare's adoptive mother approved of and often aided her pious sister-in-law in treating Augustus in a way which can only be described as abominable--in order to teach him to "give up my way and pleasure to others," for example, she made him sacrifice his adored cat Selma to the formidable Aunt Esther, who promptly had it hanged--yet in later life Hare wrote of his relationship with this strange mother with a sincere overflow of love and affection, with,³ it is not unfair to say, a sadly maudlin nostalgia.

Clearly not only the conditions of but the attitudes toward childhood change considerably from age to age. Childhood, the invention of adults, reflects adult needs and adult fears quite as much as it signifies the absence of adulthood. In the course of history children have been

glorified, patronized, ignored, or held in contempt, depending upon the cultural assumptions of adults. The autobiographical evaluation of one's early life has in turn reflected these assumptions. In an age like the seventeenth century when babies were wrapped tightly in swaddling bands in order that they might grow not only physically but morally straight, and might not, moreover, crawl on all fours like distasteful little animals,⁴ we should hardly expect an autobiographer to dwell at length upon the particular details of his early life; infancy, except in the abstract, was a kind of larval stage to be passed through as quickly as possible.⁵ Modern autobiographers, in contrast, often examine the events of their first years for insights into their adult selves: Gide's account of having bitten the beautiful white neck of a cousin whom he was supposed to kiss, or his description of having acquired "bad habits" with the concierge's son as early as he could remember, are meant to serve as signals of the pleasures and perversities he was to find in his later life. Victorians, for whom the realities of early life were sometimes brutal or at least unpleasant, nevertheless participated in a culture which regarded childhood so ambivalently that many autobiographers praised parents whom they might have blamed, and recalled comfort and happiness when they had reason to remember otherwise.

If childhood is in one sense a historical invention, the Victorian autobiographical childhood is in another sense

a literary one, since never before this period had so many English writers been interested in recalling their early lives at length within the form of sustained prose autobiography. In this chapter I would like to look at Victorian autobiography as having developed within a culture in which to be a child was both a privilege and a hardship. In so doing I hope to illustrate certain inter-relations between the history of childhood and the development of the autobiographical child figure, and to demonstrate the literary uses to which this relatively new creature was put. Autobiography is neither fiction nor history, yet it is often read as if it were fiction and cited as if it were history. Among other things the discussion will show that, as historical evidence, autobiography is unreliable; no autobiographer can be free of the fictionalizing impulse, and, even if he were, his memory itself is creative. At the same time I wish to note the very real effects which Victorian cultural attitudes had upon the development of a literary genre and its conventions. Finally I would like to ask what one can generalize about the role of the "self as child" in the Victorian adult imagination, if one can generalize at all.

Family is the first, the permanent, the elemental sphere of social life, of morality; and consequently, it is the source of religion.... Here and there a few single

men and women with intellectual aspirations,
and here and there a few childless and unencumbered
adults, may nurse the idea that they are living
for themselves alone: but their condition is so
abnormal, so unnatural, and their mental and moral
constitution is so morbid, that their opinion is
not worth considering, and their demands should
excite nothing but pity.

These remarks were delivered by Frederic Harrison in 1893
in a lecture entitled "Family Life." Though he speaks with
the passion of a man who knows that he is supporting a losing
cause, Harrison represents attitudes toward the home and the
family which were by no means uncommon throughout much of
the Victorian period. Without the family unit, it was feared,
society would be endangered, religion would crumble, individuals
would fall into unrestrained and base activity: in short,
anarchy would result. The childless adult was unnatural,
"morbid," a threat to the order of society. At the same
time, however, he was admittedly "unencumbered," and, at least
potentially, intellectual. That Harrison did not see a conflict
here is typical of the way in which many Victorians were able
to maintain, simultaneously, two contradictory notions of
"home," and, more specifically, of the place of the child in
it. On the one hand the child was a source of hope, of
virtue, of emotion: along with the angelic wife, he was

the repository of family values which seemed otherwise to be disappearing from an increasingly secular and brutal world. "Household happiness, gracious children, debtless competence, golden mean"⁷ : these were ideals. But at the same time, and of course much less obviously, the child was a hardship, an obstacle to adult pleasure, and a reminder of one's baser self.⁸ He might be innocent, untainted by sexual knowledge, uncorrupted by the world of business, free from the agony of religious doubt; yet he was also potentially wicked and needed constant guidance and discipline. These contradictions are apparent throughout the children's literature of the period: while there is much sentimentality about the natural goodness of children and their clear, unspoiled view of things ("Sweetheart Travellers," "Little Lord Fauntleroy"), there is also a strong element of admonition against following natural desires because they are likely to be selfish or sinful ("Rosamund and the Purple Jar," "The Fairchild Family").

In this context it is not surprising that children were much favored while they were much denied. It was during Victoria's reign that the Christmas tree was introduced to England, that penny and halfpenny and farthing toys became popularly available, that the children's book trade reached previously unparalleled heights in volume and quality. It was also the age in which the early isolation of children

from their parents--through the growth of the nursery and Nanny traditions--became established and acceptable in middle class homes;⁹ and the child for whom new games and amusements were being created was also painfully familiar with the cane, the strap, and the riding whip as disciplinary methods. As children became the focus of more attention due to the increased emphasis on "family life," the large injustices they had suffered for centuries were attacked by many legal and philanthropical reforms (such as Lord Shaftesbury's Factory Acts or his "Ragged Schools" for the poor), yet the more disguised kinds of abuse seem to have increased. Godfrey's Cordial and other opiates were used to keep babies quiet. Horrifying punishments were administered "for the child's own good." (In "The Fairchild Family," for example, the children are taken to the gibbet to see the hanged criminals in order to teach them respect for the law; real-life Nannies sometimes did this too, and seem very often to have used bedtime horror stories as preventive discipline.)¹⁰ Small children were burdened with overbearing moral expectations and religious demands. Illustrating the disparities of freedom for the Victorian child, A. O. J. Cockshut has noted that "the child was free to find God for himself, but not to leave the prunes upon his plate, to criticise his father, or to choose his own books."¹¹

Thus, while one social historian can say that for the nineteenth century the "privileged age" is childhood (as is "adolescence" for the twentieth and "youth" for the seventeenth),¹² another can dwell grimly upon the difficulties through which children had to pass (floggings, malnutrition, and the like), and both can be right. There was indeed a strong tendency to idealize childhood--to see in the child such qualities as an enviable imagination, a naive spontaneity,¹⁴ an unspoiled sense of beauty. There was great popular sentiment for the child's innocent vulnerability--poor little Nell!--and great praise for his innocent goodness--perfect little Fauntleroy! "I love thee... with my childhood's faith," says the speaker in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous sonnet, thus granting superiority to the child's pure ability to believe over that of the polluted adult. The simplification and dilution of Romantic child-images to their sentimental extremes became a staple of the popular novel.¹⁵ And melodrama was not the only literary product of this concentration on childhood perception: Lewis Carroll's Alice, in addition to being a nice and mannerly middle class girl, was allowed to become a complex spokesman for her time.

But despite the wave of interest and solicitude toward children which can be found in the literature and the social movements of the period, one can understand why Peter Pan's "I'll never grow up" was not heard until after 1901: the fun

was too often complemented by discomfort and fear. Icy cold baths, distasteful medicines, long sermons, and teachers who flogged their students are typical memories in accounts of the period, and all took place in the name of healthy upbringing. Popular Victorian attitudes toward the amusement of children were similar to the attitudes toward sex described by Steven Marcus in The Other Victorians: the vital supply was limited, therefore one must be economical, one mustn't have too much. Alice Meynell advises her readers that

...the evil to be feared is not that of making the child too happy; it is that of using up the capital estate of pleasure. If a child is to continue happy, to continue amused and gay, he must be entertained upon the usufruct and not upon the capital of pleasures. ...The child over-amused is in peril of losing amusement
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itself within his own heart.

If the child was in some ways superior to the man and in other ways his pet or his slave, if he was sometimes God's
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spokesman (as in certain Evangelical story books) and sometimes the object of cruel yet "necessary" punishments (as in the fairy tales of Knatchbull-Hugesson and Christina Rossetti), if, in short, he was both an ideal innocent and a selfish fallen creature, how did this cultural double standard effect the writing of the autobiographical childhood? Without wishing to draw any simple lines between large cultural

motifs and the writing of specific books of literature, I would yet like to suggest two impulses which these attitudes may have encouraged in autobiographers. First is the need to emphasize childhood adversity, to portray oneself as not having been spoiled by overindulgence, even, in some cases, to have deserved hardship. Second, and in conflict with this, is the desire to present childhood as an edenic, blissful state, a time of past blessedness, a world completely different from the grating present.

The first tendency has in some ways created a false view of the period, and since the interpretation of history through the "history of childhood" has in recent years become more and more popular, this is an important area for examination. The second tendency had a special function. It provided the autobiographer with a workable approach to the past and it allowed him to create, in the richness of memory, a place of repose from the harsh, indifferent "fast-hurrying stream of Time" which threatened him. In his vacillation between the need to have suffered and the need to have been blissfully innocent, the Victorian autobiographer reflected the cultural ambivalence of his age regarding children, yet at the same time discovered facets of himself which were emotionally restorative and which ultimately had their own literary power.

Though English autobiographers are generally more reticent

about personal matters than, for example, their French counterparts, they do exhibit a willingness to discuss their early sufferings in print. When the military man William Butler wrote his autobiography he spent little time on his childhood; after all, it had nothing to do with the battles past and battles to come, the politics, and the impersonal events of history which were his primary concern, his "life." This is predictable in autobiographies of men of state. Butler did, however, manage to pause long enough to express admiration for his hard-working parents, and to describe certain of the early hardships of their family.¹⁸ Anthony Trollope, writing for entirely different reasons yet with a similar desire for objectivity, also felt that the miseries endured by his family could and must be told: the poverty of his father, the hopeless depression of his schooldays, the unceasing efforts of his mother to save the family from the creditors. "Ah! how well I remember all the agonies of my young heart," he confesses.¹⁹ Thomas Carlyle chose to portray his strict father as a hero in Reminiscences (he was "perhaps among Scottish peasant what Samuel Johnson was among English authors," his "noble head" was like Goethe's his "natural faculty" like Burns'); yet a different view of this stern man emerges out of the loose fictional disguises of Sartor Resartus, as Carlyle allows himself to reveal his own childhood unhappiness. Teufelsdröckh "wept often; indeed

to such a degree that he was nicknamed Der Weinende (the Tearful)"; the same was true of Carlyle. And in the first person: "I was forbid much: wishes in any measure bold I had to renounce; everywhere a straight bond of Obedience inflexibly held me down...my tears flowed...." ²⁰ Sara Coleridge, the daughter of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, began her autobiographical recollections with the intention of pointing out whatever "chief moral or reflexion" the various stages of her life might illustrate, but she only got so far as describing such things as the displeasure Coleridge showed when she preferred her mother to him, the "nervous sensitiveness and morbid imaginativeness" she developed early in life, the nightmares she had, at Grasmere, of terrible lions, of the ghost of Hamlet, of Death at Hell's Gate. ²¹

The ability to remember and describe the painfulness of family struggle and childhood isolation was perhaps best seen at the end of the century in Edmund Gosse's Father and Son, in which the melancholy details of his mother's death, and the seemingly interminable dullness of his father's narrow religious life afterward, are painstakingly told.

What is striking in many of these accounts is the autobiographer's willingness to accept the blame for his own unhappiness or to see his suffering as having been, in retrospect, "good for him." Trollope said that his misfortunes were caused not only by his gentleman father's

poverty but also by "an utter want on my own part of that juvenile manhood which enables some boys to hold up their heads even among the distresses which such a position is sure to produce." Though his father "knew not what he did" in passion, and in that state "knocked me down with the great folio Bible which he always used," Trollope insists that this form of punishment was simply the result of ignorance: "no father was ever more anxious for the education of his children, though I think none ever knew less how to go
²² about the work."

Samuel Smiles, the writer of self-help books, revealed his old schoolteacher Hardie to have been a tyrant and an indefatigable flogger, but then praised him
²³ for his "fairness." Similarly, Leigh Hunt described the humiliating methods of "Old Boyer," the famous teacher at Christ Hospital school. Though Boyer knocked Hunt's tooth out with the back of a Homer, and ridiculed his essays by "contemptuously crumpling them up in his hand, and calling out, 'Here, children, there is something to amuse you,'" Hunt saw him in retrospect as a "conscientious" and "laborious"
²⁴ man, and Christ Hospital school remained a dear memory.

Evidently a child was expected to be stoical when misfortune befell him. In Victorian popular novels there are many pathetic orphans, dying children, and neglected waifs;
²⁵ these young martyrs were attractive for various reasons, not least of which was a horror of that worst and most dreaded

alternative, the "spoilt" child. It would seem that any child who was poor and abused was superior to one overly coddled. When the illustrator Dorothy Tennant Stanley decided to reject, for her "ragged life" drawings, the very widespread and popular images of "pale, whining children with sunken eyes, holding up bunches of violets to heedless passer-by; dying match girls, sorrowful watercress girls, emaciated mothers clasping weeping babes," in favor of more robust and happy urchins and "street Arabs," she too was operating under the assumption that the most interesting children in London were those whose "ingenuity" and "charm" were born of extreme adversity, in this case poverty.²⁶

The feeling against spoilt children was so common that even so unlikely (and confessedly spoilt) a person as Lord Alfred Douglas echoed the general disapproval: "I would rather see a child badly treated than spoilt," he said;²⁷ "suffering is good for the soul."

This may account in part for the lack of autobiographical reticence regarding childhood troubles. Victorians did not wish to think of themselves as having been "over-amused" as children. They were moreover quite ready to feel guilty for not having been strong of "manly" enough in times of distress. Childhood suffering was bracing; it was good for you. Learning obedience at the point of the rod was cause for tears, perhaps, but, as Teufelsdröckh says, "it was

beyond measure safer to err by excess than by defect. Obedience is our universal duty and destiny; wherein whoso will not bend must break: too early and too thoroughly we cannot be trained to know that Would, in this world of ours, is as mere zero to Should, and for the most part
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 as the smallest of fractions even to Shall."

Hence the harshness of parents and other authorities was forgiven and justified. Though Ruskin portrayed himself as a lonely, suppressed child, often whipped, who was denied all toys, sweets, and even companions, he rationalized each of these denials by praising its beneficial result. The "utter prohibition" of wine and sweets, he said, had left him with "an extreme perfection in palate and in all other bodily senses." The whipping had given him "serene and secure methods of life and motion." The lack of toys and other distractions had given him a "formed habit of serenity," an ability to concentrate contentedly upon the patterns in the carpet or the wallpaper and thereby to learn "the main practical faculty" of his life, "the habit of fixed attention with both eyes and mind" through which his future in art was
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 established. Gosse too felt that parental severity had had its value. Even though the zoological illustrations which his father helped him paint had been "wrung" from him, "touch by touch, pigment by pigment, under the orders of a taskmaster," the mental discipline gained by working according to the strict requirements of his father had finally been worth the agony: "It taught me to concentrate

my attention, to define the nature of distinctions, to see³⁰ accurately, and to name what I saw."

Neither man protested, as a modern autobiographer might, that his talent had been damaged or his creativity stifled by such restrictions. Ruskin in fact wondered whether his childhood had not been too luxurious; perhaps, he thought, his mother had been right in suggesting that he had been "too much indulged." Mill also thought that he might have had too much too soon in his boyhood, and that easy success had spoiled his appetite for living: "I had had (as I relected) some gratification of vanity at too early an age... little as it was which I had attained, yet having been attained too early, like all pleasures enjoyed too soon, it had made me blasé and indifferent to the pursuit." Like Meynell's "child over-amused," he felt that he had lost the very capacity for enjoyment: "...neither selfish nor³¹ unselfish pleasures were pleasures to me."

In a reaction against overindulgence some autobiographers not only did not judge their parents as harshly as they might have done, but tended to select details which suggested more hardship than may necessarily have been the case. Ruskin, for example, gives his readers some slightly exaggerated impressions of how much he was denied. He was, no doubt, called upon to crack nuts slavishly for the guests at dinner without being allowed to eat any himself; he did, probably, still remember after sixty or more years the first three

raisins he was given to eat, so rare a treat were they; he must certainly have had to grow up without elaborate toys and, as he relates, to give up the beautiful Punch and Judy dolls which his aunt had given him because it was "not right" that he should own such things. Yet occasionally a glimmer of luxury peeps through all this grey suppression, and causes one to wonder. The dolls were forbidden, but we soon learn of the rather splendid gift of a silver-mounted postilion's whip from the young traveller's increasingly well-off father. Food being so important to children, we marvel at the poor boy's misfortune to have had no sweets, nuts, "nor anything else of dainty kind" to eat, but we then read of the "ethereal flavor" of cherry pies which were cooked from the cherries he himself had chosen--in the very garden of which he had said earlier that "all the fruit was forbidden."³² It is not that Ruskin deliberately wishes to mislead but that like many others he selectively remembers the difficulties of his "poor little life" with a kind of unconscious pride; he creates of himself a character worthy to stand beside the rest of the unspoilt, brave, heroic children of collective Victorian fantasy.

If there was, as I am suggesting, a certain cultural encouragement to feel that one had suffered (here I am by no means attempting the impossible task of challenging the truth of reported hardships; I am more concerned with their

importance in the adult writer's imagination), then there is some question as to how to read a book like Augustus J. C. Hare's The Story of My Life. This six-volume autobiography is a mine for anyone looking for incriminating testimony against Victorian authority figures and the "breaking of the will" school of upbringing. It begins with the story of how Augustus, an unwelcome birth, was shipped off by his parents to his widowed aunt Maria when she offered to raise him as her own. ("My dear Maria, how very kind of you! Yes, certainly, the baby shall be sent as soon as it is weaned; and, if anyone else would like one, would you kindly recollect that we have others," Mrs. Hare wrote.)³³ Then starts the long and pitiful account of Maria's sincere but clumsy campaign to teach him obedience and unselfishness. There was the lesson of the puddings:

The most delicious puddings were talked of--dilated on--until I became, not greedy, but exceedingly curious about them. At length 'le grand moment' arrived.

They were put on the table before me, and then, just as I was going to eat some of them, they were snatched away, and I was told to get up and carry them off to some poor person in the village.³⁴

There was the hanging of Selma. There was, alas, the all-too-frequent presence of Selma's murderess, Aunt Esther. This woman made Augustus sleep in an austere, freezing cold

back room because he had chilblains and gave him sauerkraut to eat because it made him sick. (Esther said of another aunt's children when they were ill with measles: "I am very glad they are so ill: it is a well-deserved punishment because their mother would not let them go to church for fear they should catch it there." "She had the inflexible
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cruelty of a Dominican," Hare wrote.)

The horrors go on and on. Augustus was made to wear a miserable back brace--"a terrible iron frame"--when he went to Harrow. Christmas at home meant "having to sit for hours and hours pretending to be deeply interested in the six huge volumes of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs,'" and "being compelled--usually with agonizing chilblains--to walk twice to church, eight miles through the snow or piercing marsh winds, and sit for hours in mute anguish of congelation, with one of Uncle Julius's interminable sermons in the
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afternoon...." In the midst of all this anguish burns an undying flame of affection for Maria, "my darling mother." Hare justifies all her complicity with his more-than-Murdstonian aunts by referring to Maria's high religious principles: when persecuted, she believed, one must turn the other cheek. It grieved her that Augustus had to suffer, but as a good Christian he too must follow Christ's meek example. And so Aunt Esther's tyranny prevailed, year after miserable year.

Multitudes of questions arise from a reading of Hare's book, but the one which concerns us here is how to read it

in light of the autobiographer's impulse to entertain, at some level, the vision of himself as a child of adversity. With Hare, one senses a definite authorial relish in the description of family eccentricities and calamities. There are some very humorous passages, and there are moments when a character may be perfectly captured in a laughably grotesque image: at one point Esther is seen, spade in hand, marching off to the churchyard to bury two grinning skulls which have interested Augustus during his imprisonment in the church vestry. Dickens might have written it better, but the image itself cannot be improved upon for its delightfully apt placing of Esther in her proper setting. When social historians use Hare's book as factual evidence of the kind of discipline which Victorian parents were capable of inflicting, are they not misunderstanding the workings of a literary imagination? The young Hare, one is bound to notice, often bears an uncanny resemblance to David Copperfield. One can also find echoes of Praeterita in the book. Hare was an experienced travel writer and loved to repeat quaint stories and eerie legends to enhance his factual material. I do not mean here to claim that autobiography and fiction are one, or that Hare was a marvelous liar, but simply to suggest that in the case of an autobiography like this one, it ought to be read as existing within literary and cultural traditions which encouraged the selection of

certain memories over others. In addition to noting Hare's habit of storytelling and his eye for the macabre and the unusual, we have to remember the increasing ease with which his culture allowed him to discuss the severity of former generations. Just as the claim that "I was the chief of sinners" became a kind of convention in Puritan autobiography,³⁷ so the retelling of childhood woe became, if not conventional, at least common enough to be seen as part of a pattern. A man whose will had truly been broken, of course, would not have written the book at all.

The willingness to have suffered may perhaps be more clearly seen when viewed in contrast with its equally strong opposite: the desire to have inhabited an edenic "other world" as a child. The ideological struggle in nineteenth-century children's literature between the didactic tale and the fairy tale parallels this division. A fairy tale need not have any relation to the world of Would, Should and Shall; its eventual triumph over the moralistic stories of writers like Mrs. Sherwood and Charlotte Mary Yonge is an indication of the adult writers' recognition that the realm of childhood fantasy could be as real and necessary as the world of adult rules and restrictions. Alongside the child as martyr, the Victorian mind was able to see the child as a free spirit, sporting idyllically on Echoing Greens, drinking in perceptions with a power which would later be lost. Ruskin

praised the "large eyes of children," equating the child with the man of genius in having "infinite ignorance, and yet infinite power; a fountain of eternal admiration, delight, and creative force within him, meeting the ocean of visible and governable things around him."³⁸ Froude thought that the child's simple ability to believe was worth all the world's knowledge. He would gladly give away all he was, he said, "but for one week of my old child's faith, to go back to calm and peace again, and then to die in hope."³⁹

In this spirit, then, though somewhat less dramatically, autobiographers called forth memories of early happiness. Frances Power Cobbe describes a pleasant nursery, a mother who often cuddled up close to her on the sofa, a house full of relatives at Christmas with all the children playing "romping games" through the halls and corridors. In her childhood drawing room "the happiest hours of my life were passed."⁴⁰ Lord Alfred Douglas also passed his "happiest days" in a family country house and remarked that "when you go to heaven you can be what you like, and I intend to be a child." Douglas, like Hare, idealized his mother as she had appeared to him in the early days, remembering that she had had an "angel's beauty"; she was so beautiful, he said, that when she and her sister went driving in the Park,⁴¹ "people stood on chairs to see them."

Angelic mothers, paradise in the form of a childhood garden--these are images which appear to have been very important to the formation of one's concept of early childhood. Frances Hodgson Burnett remembered an "enchanted garden which, out of a whole world, has remained, throughout a lifetime, the Garden of Eden."⁴² Her biographer could not place this garden, since the most likely spot contained only a small garden, not the "imposing mansion ensconced in trees" described by her son and first biographer, but the image was nevertheless real enough to Mrs. Hodgson Burnett, who transformed it into The Secret Garden, her best children's book. Ruskin of course began and ended Praeterita with⁴³ images of "Eden-land" and "the rivers of Paradise." William Michael Rossetti grew up in the dinginess of Charlotte Street, Portland Place, but found that his earliest recollections were of his grandfather's country cottage in Buckinghamshire: though he was there only about three times after his infancy, he still clearly remembered as an adult the pigs, dogs, spiders, earwigs, and slugs of those early rural visits.⁴⁴

Sometimes it is not the content of the memory which is important in the establishment of an idyllic feeling. The very act of remembering can also be a source of unusual pleasure. As "the past grows holier the farther we leave it,"⁴⁵ so the recapturing of lost time through memory may seem to carry an almost mystical significance. Leigh Hunt found that the accidental appearance in a music stall of songs he

had sung as a boy caused him to remember the intensity, the reality of the past; this moment of childhood clarity made all his adult life seem stale and unreal:

What a difference between the little smooth-faced boy at his mother's knee, encouraged to lift up his voice to the pianoforte, and the battered grey-headed senior, looking again, for the first time, at what he had sung at the distance of more than half a century! Life often seems a dream; but there are occasions when the sudden reappearance of early objects, by the intensity of their presence, not only renders the interval less present to the consciousness than a very dream, but makes the portion of life which preceded it seem to have been the most
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real of all things, and our only undreaming time.

This perhaps describes the kind of pleasure which Dickens felt while writing David Copperfield, and which made him so regretful finally to put his pen down when the book was finished. The memorialization of the past, through objects (Hunt's songbooks) or through narration (Dickens' story), creates not only a pleasant sense of nostalgia, but can also confer the energy and the purity of the former time to the present. The following passage on David's reaction to his mother's death is interesting because it seems to describe the process by which the autobiographer is able to revive

those images which seem most pure and eternal:

From the time of knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour.... In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled
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all the rest.

The ability to write David Copperfield must have begun with a similar cancellation, imaginatively, of Dickens' grown-up life; this then opened the door to the past, that fascinating other world, in all its seeming innocence and clarity.

Though the psychologist Emma Plank found that, of all the autobiographies she studied, only those written by "men of letters" revealed "genuine recollections" of very early memories (as opposed to "screen memories," or to repetitions of what an author had heard from other people about himself
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as a child), one should also note that men of letters can recollect things that may never have happened at all. Memory is not only creative in that it may "screen" or "conceal," in the Freudian sense, the significant event; a writer's memory, especially, may easily blend the real and the written event. Thus when Matilda Betham-Edwards describes her

"first recollection" as a baby in her nurse's arms, she may simply be inadvertently revealing her admiration for the work of Thomas Hardy:

The scarlet coat so strikingly contrasted with the blue sky and green hedges, the ingratiating smiles of the wearer, who, whilst making love to the maid, warily ministered to the good humor of her charge, the animation of the pair, all these things make
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up a clear, ineffaceable whole.

For Betham-Edwards, this pleasant scene is clear and ineffaceable; but the fact that it is so like the famous appearance of Sergeant Troy in Far From the Madding Crowd, which she has recently read, suggests the effect other writers may have on autobiographers. The "other world" of childhood may also be a literary world.

Whether the autobiographer chooses to describe his former happiness in metaphors of enchanted gardens or visions of mother, whether his memories are "genuine" or screened or second-hand, the important point is that the tendency toward the idyllic is as common in descriptions of childhood as the previously discussed portrayal of adversity. Both are in part the result of cultural attitudes, though of course it would be much too limiting to see them only in this light. Both tendencies may exist side by side in the same writer, as when Hare portrays himself as a persecuted child

raised by an angelic mother. The inclination is to swing from one to another, but never to reverse them; so far as I know, there are no spoilt children nor ugly mothers in Victorian autobiography. ⁵⁰ Each form of selection has its function for the writer. He is able, through the recounting of troubled times, to relieve his own sense of guilt, to reassure himself of his worth, and to implicate, without actually accusing, those who may have persecuted him or failed to help him. More importantly, the journey back to the imagination's "fair Life-garden" of childhood, where "every-
⁵¹ where is dewy fragrance, and the budding of Hope" allows the writer to escape his grown-up world of anxiety and limitation and to participate in an ideal which nevertheless seems "the most real of all things, and our only undreaming time." In the furthest reaches of memory he finds a measure of repose:

...as yet Time is no fast-hurrying stream, but a sportful sunlit ocean, years to the child are as ages: ah! the secret of Vicissitude, of that slower or quicker decay and ceaseless down-rushing of the universal World-fabric, from the granite mountain to the man or day-moth, is yet unknown; and in a motionless Universe, we taste, what afterwards in this quick-whirling Universe, is forever denied us,
⁵² the balm of Rest.

NOTES

1. William Butler Yeats, Autobiography (New York, 1965), p. 5; Andre Gide, If It Die (New York, 1935), p. 4.
2. John Ruskin, Works, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-12), vol. 11, p. 66.
 "/All men/ look back to the days of childhood as of greatest happiness, because those were the days of greatest wonder, greatest simplicity, and most vigorous imagination...."
3. Augustus J.C. Hare, The Story of My Life (London, 1896-1900), 6 vols. All subsequent notes refer to Volume 1.
4. See David Hunt, Parents and Children in History: The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France (New York, 1970), p. 130 and passim.
5. What Traherne and Vaughan describe in poems like "Childehood" and "Wonder" is a religious or metaphysical idea: "I cannot reach it; and my striving eye/ Dazles at it, as at eternity." ("Childehood")
6. Frederic Harrison, On Society (London, 1918), pp. 33 and 40.
7. Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Vastness."
8. Thomas Hardy illustrates the extremities of this darker view through several characters whose illegitimate babies become their curse. Tess Durbeyfield loves her child and hates him: "When the infant had taken its fill the

young mother sat it upright in her lap, and looking into the far distance dandled it with a gloomy indifference that was almost dislike; then all of a sudden she fell to violently kissing it some dozens of times, as if she could never leave off, the child crying at the vehemence of an onset which strangely combined passionateness with contempt." (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, New York, 1951, pp. 113-14.)

9. See Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny (London, 1972).
10. See Gathorne-Hardy pp. 282-88 and Lloyd deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood," The History of Childhood, ed. Lloyd deMause (New York, 1974), pp. 11-13.
11. A. O. J. Cockshut, Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1974), p. 67.
12. Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, tr. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962), p. 32.
13. deMause, op. cit., passim.
14. See George Boas, The Cult of Childhood (London, 1966).
15. See Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood (Baltimore, Md., 1967).
16. Alice Meynell, Childhood (New York, 1913), pp. 61-2.
17. See Gillian Avery, Nineteenth Century Children (London, 1965), pp. 81-104.

18. William Butler, Autobiography (London, 1911).
19. Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography (London, 1946), p. 28.
20. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (New York, 1937), pp. 98 and 104.
21. Sara Coleridge, Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge, ed. by her daughter (London, 1873).
22. Trollope, pp. 21-22, 32.
23. Samuel Smiles, Autobiography, ed. Thomas Mackay (New York, 1905).
24. Leigh Hunt, Autobiography, ed. J. E. Morpurgo (London, 1949), p. 78.
25. See Coveney, pp. 179-93.
26. Dorothy Tennant Stanley, London Street Arabs (London, 1890), p. 5.
27. Lord Alfred Douglas, Autobiography (London, 1929), p. 16.
28. Carlyle, op. cit., pp. 98-99.
29. Ruskin, Praeterita, Works, XXXV, 44, 21, 22.
30. Edmund Gosse, Father and Son (Baltimore, Md., 1970), pp. 120-21.
31. John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston, 1969), p. 84.
32. Ruskin, Praeterita, Works, XXXV, 26, 50, 36.
33. Hare, p. 51.
34. Ibid., p. 112.
35. Ibid., pp. 202-3.

36. Ibid., pp. 239-40.
37. L. D. Lerner, "Puritanism and the Spiritual Auto-biography," The Hibbert Journal LV (1956057), 373-86.
38. Ruskin, Works, II, 66.
39. James Anthony Froude, The Nemesis of Faith (1904), pp. 30-31. Quoted in Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, 1957), p. 86.
40. Frances Power Cobbe, Life, 2 vols. (London, 1894), vol. 1, p. 10.
41. Douglas, pp. 9-10.
42. Ann Thwaite, Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett (New York, 1974), p. 8.
43. Ruskin, Praeterita, Works, XXXV, 561, 20.
44. William Michael Rossetti, Some Reminiscences (New York, 1906).
45. Carlyle, "James Carlyle," Selected Works, Reminiscences, and Letters, ed. Julian Symons (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 517.
46. Hunt, p. 45.
47. Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (Boston, 1958), p. 109.
48. Emma N. Plank, "Memories of Early Childhood in Auto-biographies," The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child (New York, 1945-54), Vol. 8, pp. 381-93.
49. Matilda Betham-Edwards, Reminiscences (London, 1898), p. 2.
50. Lord Alfred Douglas said that he had been "spoilt," but then portrayed himself as being naturally generous and

self-sacrificing. This he attributed to his aristocratic instinct.

51. Carlyle, Sartor, p. 91.

52. Sartor, p. 90.

CHAPTER III:
RUSKIN, CHILDHOOD, AND PRAETERITA

At the end of Volume I of Praeterita, John Ruskin comments upon the early deaths of three young women of his acquaintance and marks this period of his life-- around 1839--as the time when "the untried faith of childhood" began, for him, to be modified. It is striking that he felt his childhood to have lasted so long; by this date he was already twenty years old. Earlier in the same chapter, the author of sixty-seven, writing about his youth, claims that after almost fifty years he hasn't really changed:

"Some of me is dead, more of me stronger. I have learned a few things, forgotten many; in the total of me, I am but the same youth, disappointed and rheumatic." To project an autobiography in three equal parts, of which the first deals exclusively with childhood and youth, and then to suggest that the two parts which follow will reveal, finally, "the same youth," is to place a great deal of emphasis upon the childhood years and the childhood consciousness. Ruskin is a particularly interesting figure to include in a study of childhood in autobiography, because, in addition to writing a great deal about himself as a child, he also wrote extensively for, and about, children. Unlike Mill or Carlyle, he cultivated their friendship. For him, childhood was more than an event or an experience; it was an idea and an ideal. His view of childhood repeats, elaborates, and refines that of the age in which he lived, yet it is peculiarly his own.

It is a fascinating combination of personal nostalgia, arrant sentimentality, and passionate lyric idealism.

Considering Ruskin's Evangelical background, it would seem possible that he might have held to a bleak Calvinistic image of the child as sinful, guilty, and in need of divine grace. So firm a moralist in other areas might here too have been severe. But in fact Ruskin appears not to have seen guilt or ugliness in anything but adult activity. In all my reading of Ruskin, I have found only one example in which he writes negatively about the behavior of children, and this is when the children--Italian boys and girls whom he saw on his tour of 1845--have been ruined by adults: "The little wretches gamble and fight and swear, and steal, and cringe, and beg, and abuse, but I never saw them play--nor smile, except with the vicious smile of mockery, the baldhead² smile." This is the one exception. On the whole Ruskin spends a good deal of time watching children, thinking about them, and being terribly pleased by their innocent ways. In him the "contradictory consciousness" described by Steven Marcus ("On the one hand, children are spoken of as pure and innocent and sexually quiescent; on the other, they are described as constantly threatened by horrid temptations, open to stimulation and corruption, and in danger of becoming little³ monsters of appetite"), is not evident--not, at least, on the surface of his thought or behavior. Rather, Ruskin

grants to childhood a specialness, an almost magical quality; it becomes an ideal which he almost never defiles with plainer or more sin-oriented considerations. This is not to say that Ruskin conformed to the simple and often morbid kind of idealization committed by the popular authors, nor that he championed Rousseau, but that in his unique vision of things he conceived of childhood as a region in which such values as the perception of beauty and the power of imagination could exist unobstructed.

He noticed and remarked upon these and other qualities of children throughout his work. During the 1845 trip he wrote to his father about the French children at Beauvais who were happy and smiling, "hopping, and skipping and scampering, and shouting," and said of the Parisians, "I am more delighted than ever with the people, and the children, the latter especially--sweet studies some of them are."⁴ This sense of delight in children, both the delight which they can generate in others and the kind in which they ought best to be raised, was an idea that Ruskin elaborated upon in the lecture "Of Queens' Gardens" in Sesame and Lilies, in Ethics of the Dust, and elsewhere. His interest in the education of the young was not merely theoretical. Had he been able to complete his autobiography he would have written a chapter or chapters on his friendship with Margaret Bell and his numerous visits, between 1859 and 1868, to her

school for girls in Winnington Hall at Northwich, Cheshire, a place which became for him a kind of oasis during the time he was making lecture tours in the north. At Winnington Ruskin taught geology and drawing to the girls, whom he called "my birds" and to whom he wrote frequent and doting letters. Many of the Winnington materials are as yet unpublished, but The Winnington Letters (1969) indicate how important to him was his relationship to this "fairy ring" of children: their "gentle voices and faithful eyes" were "like the oil and wine of the Samaritan to me."⁵

Ruskin is one of the few major writers of his time who composed a fairy tale for children. It was as children that he first saw Adèle Domecq, Effie Gray, and Rose LaTouche, the three main romantic interests in his life, and it was their child-like qualities he admired most. Thus as spectator, educational theorist, teacher, friend, and lover, Ruskin was involved with children and with a particular notion of what childhood meant. Ultimately, as autobiographer, he attempted to analyze his own childhood and to give it meaning. His observation and his experience come together in the creation of an ideal which is both shimmeringly beautiful and sadly incomplete.

Ruskin's view of himself as a child is most fully developed in the opening chapters of Praeterita. One of the more striking images in the chapter called "Herne Hill

Almond Blossoms" comes from his description of the nightly routine during the winter at Herne Hill. Ruskin's father used to read aloud while his mother knitted and Ruskin sat "in a little recess, with a table in front of it, wholly sacred to me"; in this position he "remained in the evenings as an Idol in a niche..."(39). This final phrase is often quoted when critics wish to suggest the majesterial but lonely solitude in which Ruskin spent his childhood. As the only child of extremely attentive parents he was indeed idolized, and because these parents were also demanding, ambitious, and severe, he withdrew rather quickly into a private, self-absorbed, unpeopled world of his own; yet the image of noble passivity is not quite the key to his early character. Nor is the rigidity and harshness suggested by another often-quoted passage: "...Being always summarily whipped if I cried, did not do as I was bid, or tumbled on the stairs, I soon attained serene and secure methods of life and motion..."(21).

Ruskin was quiet but not passive, disciplined but not harshly treated. He was not allowed to cry, nor, his mother being a strict Evangelical woman, to have toys. This may seem like wretchedness to a twentieth-century reader, but we recall that these were fairly common methods of upbringing at the time. We read that Ruskin was not allowed near the parlour while his father ate dinner; few middle-class children

were allowed this privilege. We react to Ruskin's revelation that he still, after sixty or more years, remembered the first three raisins he was given to eat, so rare was it that he got fruit; and we feel badly that the first real dessert he ate was a bit of his father's leftover custard. Yet the diet of most children was kept plain; nursery meals were almost always monotonous.⁶ We read further that Ruskin had no "companionable beasts" in the Herne Hill garden, but in truth his days were not so lonely; his cousin Mary joined the family when Ruskin was ten. Ruskin may have been whipped often but he was also paid close attention to and given daily lessons by his careful mother. Many children of his class were shunted off to the nursery and expected not to be seen or heard by the parents except for occasional visits, and their nurses and teachers, if they existed, were underpaid and often unqualified. Ruskin at least knew that he was loved and cared about and that the discipline he received was well-meant.

Thus it is not surprising that he often describes his childhood not as horrible or even constrained but instead as perfect, "too much indulged." In the garden at Croydon he saw glimpses of the "rivers of Paradise" (20) and at Herne Hill he was also in a little Eden. "The differences of primal importance which I observed between the nature of this garden, and that of Eden, as I had imagined it, were,

that, in this one, all the fruit was forbidden; and there were no companionable beasts: in other respects the little domain answered every purpose of Paradise to me..."(36). We have already noted the slight inaccuracy concerning the beasts. Later he qualifies further by noting that the fruit was forbidden only until it was ripe for harvest, at which time "the peach which my mother gathered for me when she was sure it was ripe, and the cherry pie for which I had chosen the cherries red and round, were, I suppose, of more ethereal flavour to me than they could have been to children allowed to pluck and eat at their will..."(50). So he did get to pick the fruit after all, and he did eventually get to eat cherry pies. And although he was denied a Punch and Judy set of dolls his aunt had given him, he did not go without gifts, such as a silver-mounted postilion's whip presented to him by his father (32). From earliest youth he remembers pleasant trips taken with his parents, the comfort and excitement of the old carriage, the moments of visual enjoyment afforded by various scenes and places.

Ruskin's regrets, then, about his upbringing are not concerned with what he lacked but with the possibly excessive luxuriousness of his condition. He considers the "treatment, or accidental conditions, of my childhood, entirely right, for a child of my temperament"(23), and justifies each denial with its beneficial result. The prohibition of wine

and sweets had left him with "an extreme perfection in palate and in all other bodily senses" (44). The whipping had given him "serene and secure methods of life and motion" (21). There had been a hidden good in the "apparent severity" of the denial to pick fruit because the reward was all the more enjoyed for having been anticipated (50). And most important, the lack of toys and distractions had given him a "formed habit of serenity" (22), an ability to concentrate contentedly upon the patterns in the carpet or the wallpaper and thereby to learn "the main practical faculty" of his life, the "habit of fixed attention with both eyes and mind" through which he made so many discoveries in art and nature.

It was, in fact, the very security, protection and easiness of the life his parents created for him that made him recall his mother's condemnatory remark that he had been "too much indulged" (46). So peaceful, stable, and child-centered a home had been established that he felt in retrospect that he had been allowed to grow up without emotional struggle ("I had nothing to love"), without knowledge of danger, pain, or fear ("I had nothing to endure"), and without social discipline ("I was taught no precision or etiquette or manners") (44-45). These three "calamities" can only be negative in retrospect, of course, because they impose adult requirements upon the child's growing nature. The child himself could not have felt the need of etiquette or endurance or companions he had never known. For him the

world was close to Paradise; his parents were the sun and moon. Only the adult could regret that he had been unprepared for the worlds of passion, pain, or, less dramatically, the world of polite conversation. Oddly enough, Ruskin's childhood was imperfect, he thought, because it was so untroubled.*

This is another way of saying that it is rather a shame one has to grow up. In this Ruskin expressed a feeling not uncongenial to the late Victorian mind: one thinks most readily of Lewis Carroll, of the popularity of Mark Twain in England, of James M. Barrie. (Peter Pan was written in its first form in 1902, just two years after Ruskin's death.) But Ruskin's loss of childhood meant for him not only the unwelcome intrusion of the troubled adult world; more importantly, it meant the loss of perceptions and powers which could never be equalled in later life. Here we feel a similarity not to Barrie's child-hero or to Huck Finn or to Alice, but to the child of vision as Wordsworth describes him in the "Intimations" ode: the boy who "by a vision splendid/ Is on his way attended," until "at length the Man perceives it die away, And fade into the light of common day."

Surely it is a Wordsworthian kind of loss which Ruskin felt during his trip to Italy in 1845:

I find that while my mind has become so far
developed and manly, that I can now judge of the

* For an examination of another aspect of this attitude, see Chapter II.

greatest things, and desire them, and have pleasure in nothing that is fictitious or second rate, yet for this I have sacrificed the energy and joyousness of the childish time. I do not wake in the morning with the feeling of delight in everything that I used to have, nor can I amuse myself as I used to do, with the pebbles on the sea beach or lake shore for hours together.⁷

This feeling was important enough to him to repeat, in a letter to Swiss artist J. L. R. Durheim, more strongly:

[Il y a] une chose qui me trouble beaucoup-- c'est de trouver que j'ai perdue [sic] presque tout à fait la simplicité si précieuse de l'enfance-- et que je ne puis plus m'amuser pour des heures entières à regarder une fontaine qui fait danser des sables, ou les cailloux qui font briller ses eaux--et voila pour moi un grand malheur.⁸

This "great unhappiness" had been preceded the year before by his realization that Cyamonix no longer inspired him to sing or climb a hill or sketch among the rocks ("...I do not feel as I ought to feel. For the first time in my life, I begin to miss the exhilaration of spirit which these scenes awakened in my childhood"), and by an attempt to replace the spontaneity with nostalgia ("...In the afternoon a meditative walk to the Source de l'Arveiron. All my old

associations with the valley centre about that place; how
 dear such become to me, as I lose the fresh childish feeling!").¹⁰
 For Ruskin the loss of spontaneity and freshness does not bring
 the kind of "abundant recompense" Wordsworth wrote about in
 "Tintern Abbey," however. In that poem the boy has lost
 his "glad animal movements," his "aching joys," his "dizzy
 raptures," his instinctive, thoughtless love of nature, but
 the man has found compensation in a soberer and more elevated
 perception of the motion and the spirit that "rolls through
 all things." Wordsworth will not "mourn nor murmur"; compen-
 satory gifts have followed the initial loss. To Ruskin, this
 conclusion is arrived at "idly" (218). Ruskin does mourn.
 He does murmur. With his typical attention to the calendar,
 in fact, he even gives the exact date and place of his loss.
 It was in Yorkshire, he says, in 1837, that he felt "for the
 last time" that "pure childish love of nature"; "there the
 feeling came back to me--as it could never return more"
 (218-19). Then in 1844, "I think much of the blessed imagin-
 ative power of childhood is gone from me--and nothing can
 pay for it."¹¹

It has been suggested that Ruskin often describes
 himself in Praeterita in metaphors which reflect a distaste,
 even a "real dislike," for his younger self and its "amor-
 phousness."¹² He calls himself a "floppy and soppy tadpole"
 (279), a "squash before 'tis a peascod," a "codling or

cocoon" (261); socially he is a "just-fledged owlet, or just open-eyed puppy," a "Skate in an aquarium trying to get up the glass" (180). It is true that these images are used in a self-deprecating way, but yet it is not quite accurate to apply them as representative examples of Ruskin's view of himself as a child and youth. Actually they refer to two occasions in his life which he is in retrospect sorry to have bungled: his awkward meeting with the four Domecq girls in 1836, and his failure to make the most of his years at Oxford in 1837-40. Both of these are examples of lost opportunities and send Ruskin moodily into the "if only" attitude which sometimes makes Praeterita uncomfortable reading. In turning back and meeting himself face to face, he says in the chapter "Cumae," he has not found himself amiable, as other readers have done. But as always with Ruskin we must balance such a statement with those written in less depressed moods. The man who regretted the loss of his fresh childish feeling is more representative of Ruskin as a whole than the man who saw himself as a clumsy youth wandering stupidly through Oxford like the "Duckling Astray" (199).

Usually it is the unspoiled potential of childhood which interests him, not its awkwardness or formlessness; one might even say that the malleability of the child, his simplicity, and his ability to absorb are completely positive

for Ruskin until they are taken out of the garden and placed vulnerably in the world of social pressures. Ruskin's early efforts at writing are perfectly charming--until the Domecq girls laugh at them (180); his powers of elocution, demonstrated in his precocious ability to sermonize are the cause of much pride--until the gentleman-commoners demean them (196). Once again, the trouble with childish qualities lies not in themselves but in the fact that they become weaknesses, signs of naïveté, in the harsh adult world. So we must not take Ruskin's moments of self-denigration as the final judgment. When he says that he has not changed in fifty years but is the "same youth, disappointed and rheumatic," we must remember that he also takes pride in having retained his youthful powers of observing things which are "clearly visible and present" (104), and that the disappointment and illness were late additions to a childhood otherwise described as blissful and serene.

The image which seems best to describe Ruskin's childish nature is not that of shapeless tadpole, nor lonely idol, nor punished victim, but rather that which Henry James uses to describe himself in his autobiography: the image of the "gaping" child. Ruskin as a boy had superior vision; he saw what others didn't see. Contemplating the plain of Croydon one day "I frightened my mother out of her wits by saying 'the eyes were coming out of my head.'" She thought

it was an attack of coup-de-soleil" (48). Asked by the painter Northcote what he wanted in the background of his portrait, the three-and-a-half-year-old boy thought about his aunt's garden of gooseberry bushes in Scotland and its vista of distant hills. "[That] I should have said 'blue hills' instead of 'gooseberry bushes,' appears to me--and I think without any morbid tendency to think over-much of myself--a fact sufficiently curious, and not without promise, in a child of that age" (22). The man who denigrates himself in some parts of Praeterita is the same man who cannot resist, at the risk of thinking "over-much" of himself, repeating this anecdote of the boy with precocious vision who is already opinionated about art. He is the same man who says, in The Stones of Venice, that "[all men] look back to the days of childhood as of greatest happiness, because those were the days of greatest wonder, greatest simplicity, and most vigorous imagination..." (11, 66).

Ruskin's view of children in general tended to be more idealizing than his view of himself. Idealization, after all, cannot take place without distance, and while Ruskin was proud of his ability to stand back in order to see things, this could only partially be done in the case of his own life. No doubt the lyrical quality of Praeterita has to do with its unusually close and personal attitude, the result of Ruskin's

meeting himself by "turning back, face to face," as he described it. Regarding other children, however, the process of objectification was easy and natural to him. Seeing them at a distance, he made them the repositories of values which he feared were being lost in the fast-changing world around him. His distance made possible some new perceptions, but it also led him into error. One may examine both the perceptions and the errors from three basic points of view.

Wonder, imagination, and simplicity were the qualities which made childhood, Ruskin said, the time of "greatest happiness." One finds that to explore these concepts is to gain a fairly good idea of Ruskin's attitude toward the child and his ideal function. "Wonder" can be a sort of key to the right appreciation of God and the natural world; through wonder we begin to understand faith. For the sake of a scheme, imagination may be seen to work in the same way with regard to art and beauty, and simplicity may be aligned with moral behavior. Together they describe the potent and unrealizable image which Ruskin created from the children he saw and knew, the ideal which allowed him to be so appreciative and yet so pathetically blinded at the same time about the nature of the young.

The connection of childlike intuition or trust with religious faith, as emphasized in the New Testament gospels, was a common Victorian theme. Walter Houghton has shown how the nostalgia for lost faith often led to the idealization

of home and childhood, as when Froude said that he would gladly give away all that he was, "but for one week of my old child's faith, to go back to calm and peace again, and then to die in hope."¹³ Charles Kingsley advised his wife to cure herself of "morbid fear" by imitating a child's approach to the world, that of thinking little but sensing much.¹⁴ "Except ye...become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Indeed, one had often to deny his adult intellect in order to retain his faith; conversely, if one lost his faith he was likely to think overly fondly of those lost days of childhood belief and comfort.

Here again Ruskin lingers near a familiar attitude but transforms it through his own particular vision. Ruskin too believes in the child's senses, in his intuition. Yet instead of regretting the mere intuitive security of childhood belief, Ruskin thinks that the truly religious act is to recapture the child's intuitive capacity for delight, for wonder. In this way one may again gain access to "redemption." "You have to repent into childhood, to repent into delight, and delightsomeness....Slide back into the cradle, if going on is into the grave..." (18, 428). True religion is childlike in nature (10, 127), and the nature of the child is to live in perpetual wonder. In this he and the man of genius are one.

The man of genius remains in great part a child,

seeing with the large eyes of children, in perpetual wonder, not conscious of much knowledge,--conscious, rather, of infinite ignorance, and yet infinite power; a fountain of eternal admiration, delight, and creative force within him, meeting the ocean of visible and governable things around him. (11, 66)

What, one may ask, makes a reverent response to the phenomenal world a religious response? Pamela Ball gives a partial answer in her discussion of Ruskin's view of facts and their revelatory power. "Respect for the pure fact is a theological virtue: the inability to face it denotes a man-orientated universe, in which the facts are not only distorted but debased." ¹⁵ To meet the "ocean of visible and governable things" outside one with eternal admiration is simply to grant God his due. This the child does naturally.

Unlike the Evangelical believer, however, Ruskin does not allow the child to become authoritative in his virtue. When Matthew said that "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (21:16), he hardly meant that children should be preachers, says Ruskin; rather that "...children, remaining children, and uttering, out of their own hearts, such things as their Maker puts there, are pure in sight, and perfect in praise" (28, 326). Nor will Ruskin allow heaven to lie about us in our infancy. Wordsworth's famous doctrine "is wholly untrue in the implied limitation; if life be lived under heaven's law, the sense

of heaven's nearness only deepens with advancing years, and is assured in death." But he will agree with Wordsworth "thus far, that in the dawn of virtuous life every enthusiasm and every perception may be trusted as of divine appointment; and the maxima reverentia is due not only to the innocence of children, but to their inspiration" (29, 457). We may say that regarding the child and religion Ruskin does not go so far as many of his contemporaries in simple-mindedly granting spiritual perfection to the child or to childlikeness, but he does attribute to children qualities such as purity, innocence, inspiration, and above all, the capacity for wonder, all of which he advises men to recapture in some form if they wish to perceive God and nature rightly. In The Crown of Wild Olives he says again that the "character of the child" is necessary for redemption, though here the qualities which constitute that character are slightly different: modesty, faithfulness, generosity, and cheerfulness. These last four have less to do with spiritual salvation, one would think, than with pleasant behavior, or what I will discuss later under the heading of "simplicity." But for the moment we need only note that Ruskin often uses the child-image to illustrate correct spiritual approaches to the world.

The second of the child's great qualities, a vigorous imagination, may be seen to be related to the larger worlds

of art and beauty. We have already noted how important his own imagination was to Ruskin from his earliest years, and how he regretted the loss of "the blessed imaginative power of childhood." This power was not recoverable. But there were other kinds of childhood perception which one could, with effort, gain back.

There is a singular sense in which the child may peculiarly be said to be father to the man. In many arts and attainments, the first and last stages of progress, the infancy and the consummation, have many features in common; while the intermediate stages are wholly unlike either, and are farthest from the right. Thus it is in the progress of a painter's handling....So it is in many matters of opinion....Childhood often holds a truth with its feeble fingers, which the grasp of manhood cannot retain, which it is the pride of utmost age to recover.

(3, 31)

In addition to these kinds of imaginative power there was the more fanciful sort. It was for the sake of promoting and stimulating this that Ruskin wrote The King of the Golden River and defended the non-moralizing fairy tale. Unlike many contemporaries Ruskin did not fear that children who listened to fairy tales would grow up not knowing the difference between fantasy and reality.

In all these matters Ruskin's ideas are advanced or at least sensible. It was as objects for imaginative contemplation that children became for Ruskin the source of a misguided enthusiasm. Seeing them as art, he failed to comprehend their imperfections, their purely human qualities, until it was too late to spare himself disappointment. Here we must perhaps qualify the meaning of "child." Increasingly, the word meant to Ruskin "young girl"; ultimately it meant Rose LaTouche. Without becoming entangled in the complexities of Ruskin's sexual and emotional difficulties we must nevertheless keep this in mind. Strong and charged as the image of Rose becomes, however, it grows out of habits of mind which Ruskin developed long before he met her, and these we may see as fitting into the context of his total attitude toward children.

In 1845 Ruskin was writing to his father that Parisian children were "sweet studies" and to his mother that the children depicted in the paintings of Mino da Fiesole were "such sweet, laughing, holy creatures that I am afraid you will wish they were yours instead of me."¹⁶ What is striking here is that there is a kind of easy interchangeability between the real and the painted children; the real ones are studies and the painted ones are his potential rivals in real life. But the real children are not altogether real. The children whom Ruskin almost never talks about are those

"little wretches" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter who gamble, fight, swear, steal, and beg. Rather, he prefers to contemplate children in their artfulness, their beauty. Thus we see him years later, in 1859, at Winnington Hall, writing to his father that the dark dresses of the girls around the table at dinner reminded him of the light and shade in the better Venetian paintings, or to his mother that the sight of the girls in blue gathering hawthorne in the sunny grass before breakfast was a scene "worth going far to see."¹⁷ Ruskin enjoyed the aesthetic quality of these girls as they were seated in neat groups around him during a lesson or as their white-frocked bodies formed a quadrille in the gallery. Seen from a distance, unreal, sculptured, they were utterly beautiful, utterly ideal. Up close, seen in all their reality, as Effie Gray had discovered, Ruskin found girls less pleasing. The distance which allowed Ruskin to see the child not only as imaginatively autonomous but also as an artful object finally caused great pain in his own life when Rose LaTouche met his admiring gaze with her own form of pitiless detachment.¹⁸

But it is in Ruskin's influence as a lecturer and critic of society that one really ought to measure the significance of these attitudes. The third quality which made childhood the time of greatest happiness, he said, was simplicity. We may examine this quality most fruitfully with reference to Ruskin's views on moral behavior. Here

we find some of the worst effects of Ruskin's idealization of children. He is, on the one hand, doting and sentimental, and on the other, didactic in a wholly unrealistic way. When Ruskin sermonizes on the education and behavior of girls he seems to come close to possessing that "contradictory consciousness" discussed earlier. Such an unrealistic belief in the girls' inherent innocence and sweetness almost necessarily implies its opposite.

When Ruskin is cloying, he is unbearably so. "My dearest Birdies," he writes the Winnington girls, "you know I wrote to you long ago about the pieces of the Psalms which might be considered as chickweed and groundsel, and otherwise nice for birdies; and the other pieces which were not good for them at all, nor ever meant for them." ¹⁹ Alas, the same tone can be found in his serious advice. "A girl's proper confidant is her father....What she is not inclined to tell her father, should be told to no one; and, in nine cases out of ten, not thought of by herself" (29, 428). This is the voice of a man who is out of touch with his subject. The ability to project such sweetness and lack of corruption into the girls is one of the informing ideas of his view of women in the lecture "Of Queens' Gardens," which calls for the woman to tend to the morals of her people by being "incorruptibly good, infallibly wise," "the center of order, the balm of distress, the mirror of beauty"--all, of course,

while remaining properly subjected in a wifely way, not engaged in invention or creation, but in "sweet ordering, arrangement or decision" (18, 122). The connection of the childish with the womanly ideal is made explicit when he says in the same lecture that a woman's countenance should consist in a "majestic peace" and a "yet more majestic childishness" (18, 125). Girls and women are not only innocent; they are innocent in a high and noble way. Such nobility and majesty are inextricably connected with an implied inferiority of the deepest kind; at moments like these, one longs to close one's Ruskin and open one's Mill. Simplicity begins to stand for simple-mindedness rather than naturalness or honesty or clarity.

Ruskin liked it when Rose called him "St. Crumpet" in her letters. He said, quite rightly, that "child's play in many cases is the truest wisdom" (34, 487), and no doubt he was capable of being just as charming with his girls as Charles Dodgson was with the famous Liddell sisters. But even to mention Dodgson here is to be reminded of how much further back Ruskin stood from the young objects of his attention, how humorless and frightened he was by comparison, how incapable he was of channeling his idealizing impulses into acceptable or comfortable responses instead of making artificial and condescending moral pronouncements or doting, foolish remarks. "She grows as a flower does,--she will wither

without sun; she will decay in her sheath, as a narcissus will, if you do not give her air enough; she may fall, and defile her head in dust, if you leave her without help at some moments of her life..." (18, 131). The man whose mother accompanied him to Oxford--and stayed--was perhaps destined to project his own emotional immaturity into the objects he perceived. Yet one cannot help reacting with some distaste.

Interestingly, Ruskin was bitterly attacked by the Futurist F. T. Marinetti in 1912 for the childishness of his entire ideology and the naïveté of his notion of "simplicity":

When, then, will you disencumber yourselves of the lymphatic ideology of your deplorable Ruskin....
 With his sick dream of a primitive pastoral life;
 with his nostalgia for Homeric cheeses and legendary spinning wheels; with his hatred of the machine, of steam and electricity, this maniac for antique simplicity resembles a man who in full maturity wants to sleep in his cot again and drink at the
 20
 breasts of a nurse who has now grown old....

A tendentious tirade, perhaps--but there is a measure of truth in it.

To return to Praeterita, however, is to realize the finer and nobler aspects of Ruskin's aesthetic use of

childhood. Though in his Preface he says that the book is not simply "an old man's recreation in gathering visionary flowers in the fields of youth" but rather a "dutiful offering at the grave of parents who trained my childhood to all the good it could attain," it is the visionary flowers which constitute Ruskin's best, most imaginative achievement. Praeterita not only links and orders the events of the past in an artful way, but also becomes a poetic work in its blending of extraordinarily clear memories with creative transcendent longings. The book begins with childhood recollections of a "spring of crystal water" which became, for him, "the rivers of Paradise." And it ends with this famous passage:

I draw back to my own home, twenty years ago,...
 and the Elysian walks with Joanie, and Paradisiacal
 with Rosie, under the peach-blossom branches by
 the little glittering stream which I had paved with
 crystal for them. I had built behind the highest
 cluster of laurels a reservoir, from which, on sunny
 afternoons, I could let a quite rippling film of water
 run for a couple of hours down behind the hayfield,
 where the grass in spring still grew fresh and deep.
 There used to be always a cornrake or two in it.
 Twilight after twilight I have hunted that bird, and
 never once got glimpse of it: the voice was always

at the other side of the field, or in the inscrutable air or earth. And the little stream had its falls, and pools, and imaginary lakes. Here and there it laid for itself lines of graceful sand; there and here it lost itself under beads of chalcedony....I have been sorrowful enough for myself, since ever I lost sight of that peach-blossom avenue. "Eden-land" Rosie calls it sometimes in her letters. Whether its tiny river were of the waters of Abana, or Euphrates, or Thamesis, I know not, but they were sweeter to my thirst than the fountains of Trevi or Branda.

It is this visionary power--with its linking of past and present, of real fountains and imaginary pools, of wonders seen and unseen, of childhood, youth, and age, "here and there...there and here"--that transforms the limited, remote, and unsatisfying elements of Ruskin's view into something remarkable: not the embarrassing errors of a hazy idealist but the perfected accomplishments of a careful artist. Seeking enclaves of possibility outside the ugly contours of modern society as he perceived it, Ruskin mistakenly granted to childhood an aura, a numinousness, which could not be borne out in real life; but in literature, the magic of the past and the beauty of that childhood vision could, and did, become an authentic form of transcendence.

NOTES

1. The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-12), vol. 35, p. 220. All further references to Ruskin's works will be given in the text by volume and page number. In the case of Praeterita, which is volume 35 of the Works, page number alone will be given.
2. Ruskin in Italy: Letters to his Parents 1845, ed. Harold I. Shapiro (Oxford, 1972), p. 242.
3. Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians (New York, 1964), p. 15.
4. Ruskin in Italy, p. 5.
5. The Winnington Letters: John Ruskin's Correspondence with Margaret Alexis Bell and the Children at Winnington Hall, ed. Van Akin Burd (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 112.
6. Early Victorian England 1830-1865, ed. G. M. Young (London, 1934), p. 109.
7. Ruskin in Italy, pp. 148-9.
8. Ibid., p. 136
9. The Diaries of John Ruskin, ed. Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse (Oxford, 1958), p. 277.
10. Ibid., pp. 290-91.
11. Ibid., p. 277.

12. Elizabeth K. Helsinger, "Ulysses to Penelope. Alterations in Autobiography: Ruskin and the Poets," Approaches to Autobiography, ed. George P. Landow (Athens, Ohio, to be published 1978).
13. Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, 1957), p. 86. Houghton is quoting Froude's The Nemesis of Faith (1904), pp. 30-1.
14. Ibid., pp. 128-9.
15. Patricia M. Ball, The Science of Aspects (London, 1971), p. 79.
16. Ruskin in Italy, p. 187.
17. The Winnington Letters, pp. 104-5.
18. Ibid., p. 502.
19. Ibid., p. 314.
20. Quoted in R. Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, 2nd ed. (New York, 1967), p. 12.

CHAPTER IV:
THE ROLE OF "LITTLE MILL" IN
JOHN STUART MILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A recent book on John Stuart Mill suggests, surprisingly, that this accomplished man of letters never really grew up. This is a curious idea when weighed against the evidence of Mill's intellectual maturity as it is presented in his Autobiography. There one reads of a boy who began his Greek at the age of three, who had read Herodotus, Xenophon, and other prose authors by the time he began Latin at the age of eight, whose "strong predilection" for history caused him to be conversant with Hume, Gibbon, Watson, Robertson, and Hooke at an age when other children were barely able to spell, and who, miraculously enough, seems not only to have mastered the domains of ancient literature, mathematics, science, and logic at a startlingly fast pace, but simultaneously to have taken full responsibility for the education of his younger brothers and sisters as well. Understandably, the reaction of Mill's contemporaries to this grueling education was to wonder not whether Mill had grown up, but whether he had ever been a child at all.

Modern interpretation entertains both possibilities. The mentally precocious but overworked, overly serious boy described in the Autobiography is sometimes considered to have been simply a miniature adult whose overwhelming accomplishments made him arrogant and unnatural: this is the "Little Mill" of whom a contemporary complained that his observations were always "in slow measured tones, and deliver'd

with the air of a person who is conscious of his superiority."¹
 In this view, the crisis of his twenties was a "nervous breakdown," a predictable result of the pressure of having learned too much too soon. Consequently James Mill, who personally devised his son's energetic course of study, is seen as a harsh and uncompromising taskmaster and a foe of childhood for his unflagging tutelary efforts. At the same time, however, Mill's adult relationship with his friend and eventual wife, Harriet Taylor, is thought to have been very childish. His dependency on her, his willingness to sacrifice friends and family for her, his overestimation of her unproven talents to the point of absurdity, are taken as proof that John Mill was, emotionally at least, remarkably immature.

Mill himself is responsible for these reactions. Though he had been guarded and even reclusive during much of his adult life, in his Autobiography he exposed many of his feelings about his father, his upbringing, and his wife. Some of these were rather unexpected. Though the purpose of the autobiography was not to confess, but rather to explain and justify, its underlying theme was the quest for an emotional base; at least half the book is the record of an exceptional young man's struggle to balance his overly analytic intellect with an ability to feel something. The well-known "mental crisis" of chapter five centers, finally, on the relief Mill felt when he responded sentimentally,

rather than analytically, to the father's death scene in Marmontel's Memoirs: "...I was moved to tears. From this moment my burden grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or stone." The chapters preceding the crisis are shot through with reminders that, while an education in logic had been eminently useful to him, it had failed to provide the "poetry," the "culture of the feelings," without which life was barren of meaning. The chapters which follow it include the famous (to some, infamous) passages of unqualified praise describing how greatly Harriet Taylor's "strong feelings" and "poetic nature" benefitted him as he became, as he put it in an early draft, "a sort of prose interpreter of her poetry."

In passages which Mill eventually deleted from the final version he more forcefully described the lack of love in his family, the coldness of his father, the ineffectuality of his mother, the "thoroughly ineffective and bungling manner" of himself as he was growing up; contrasted to this was the utter "perfection" of Harriet Taylor in comparison to all other human beings. As a result of these revelations in the Autobiography and in Mill's Early Draft (published by Jack Stillinger in 1961), there are now historians such as Bruce Mazlish who see significance in the image of Mill as an unhappy, emotionally stunted, paradoxical creature who "never was a child, and yet in large part remained one,

although in a twisted fashion, all his life."⁴

But even if Mill himself invites us to see him as a strained, awkward, bookish boy, able to read Plato's Dialogues in Greek at seven but unable for years to tie a knot, even if he seems to emerge between the lines as a worried child who grew up so starved of emotion and companionship that he was willing to spend the rest of his emotional life in pure adulation of an idealized woman, we ought not to fall into any such simple psychohistorical traps. Mill was, after all, writing with a purpose. And he was writing within a particular literary form. Like all autobiographers, John Stuart Mill was engaged in writing a myth of explanation. As a philosopher and a historian, he was particularly interested in finding causes and effects. The result was a patterned autobiography in which Mill's own life came to represent the intellectual transition of his from Enlightenment to post-Romantic thought. To dramatize the way he felt about the meaning of his life, Mill had to emphasize, to heighten, even to distort, certain aspects of his childhood. Seeking to explain, Mill had to select; seeking to clarify certain events, he had to neglect others.

Mill's habits of mind caused him to see himself as a figure not unlike Walter Pater's later fictional hero Marius the Epicurean, whose growth depended upon his exposure to extremes, and whose gradual synthesis of conflicting elements

became his self-definition. Mill's autobiography reflects his views of time and history as surely as Pater's novel, which was influenced by Hegel, does his; and if in the presentation of the stages of growth the emotions seems to be sacrificed to the intellect (as in the early education), or if the intellect seems to be blinded by the emotions (as in the encomiums about Harriet), these may simply indicate the parts from which the whole is to be perceived. The linear narrative requires a pattern, a focus, which ordinary experience never achieves. To confuse this pattern with the life itself is to misunderstand the meaning of the autobiography.

It is generally agreed that in the chapter describing his "mental crisis," Mill distorted the original experience for the sake of the meaning he intended to give it. Rather than dealing separately with a series of depressed states which apparently came over him in greater and lesser degrees from the autumn of 1826 until at least the end of 1828 (perhaps longer), he concentrated on the first great period of dejection (autumn 1826-spring 1827), the gloom of which was broken, he said, by his reading of Marmontel's Memoirs and the tears he was able to shed in sympathy with the hero. In mentioning the other crises he was much more vague, calling them "relapses" and treating them as minor extensions of the same general malady, though in his earlier draft he

had been more specific about them. Robert D. Cumming has noticed discrepancies in the dates he does give, and has remarked upon the difficulty of accepting Mill's chronology of the stages of the crisis at all, since the period of Coleridgean "dejection" inconveniently overlaps with the two years of active enthusiasm described earlier in the chapter on "Youthful Propagandism."⁵ But Mill's selectivity and his narrowing of focus, though they may have obfuscated many of the factual aspects of that period, ultimately clarified the meaning of these several crises for Mill and allowed him to see them as one crisis: the breakdown of his strict adherence to Utilitarianism and the beginning of a more balanced view of life in which "the cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed" (86).

Obviously autobiography calls for such condensation and selection; accuracy of detail must often yield to the exigencies of the larger pattern. Yet while the "mental crisis" chapter is generally seen to be a mixture of real experience and literary creation, other parts of the Autobiography are too often taken as simple fact. The evenness and "objectivity" of Mill's style confer credibility to the material; the masterful attack against the Utilitarian philosophy of Bentham and James Mill, as expressed by John Mill's reaction to the education they gave him, compels

assent. Only when Mill later explains what Harriet Taylor Mill might have been (a rival to Shelley, a great orator, an eminent statesman), and gives her credit for what he thinks she was (more than a partner in all his intellectual endeavors, "joint author" of his most important works, an unexcelled humanitarian, a thoroughly unselfish and generous human being), only then do the critics balk. But just as the older Mill may not have been so liberated a creature in his post-Benthamic period as the book's conversion structure suggests, so the young Mill was not so ungainly and overly-rational a child as he has made himself out to be.

The "early education," the stringency of which has alternately horrified and inspired many generations, should be seen as part of the polemic of the book. It is in some ways another version of Mill's critical essay on Bentham, just as the theme of "poetic cultivation" may be seen to be an extension of his complementary essay on Coleridge. Mill remarked about these:

In the essay on Coleridge I attempted to characterize the European reaction against the negative philosophy of the eighteenth century: and here, if the effect only of this one paper were to be considered, I might be thought to have erred by giving undue prominence to the favourable side, as I had done in the case of Bentham to the unfavourable. In both cases, the

impetus with which I had detached myself from what was untenable in the doctrines of Bentham and of the eighteenth century, may have carried me, though in appearance rather than in reality, too far on the contrary side. (130-31)

Similarly, the impetus to write an autobiographical character whose stages of growth were distinct from one another seems to have carried Mill into some overemphasis of his childhood defects and of his father's stern, "unpoetic," eighteenth-century character. The barrenness of this earlier experience is meant to be seen in contrast with the fullness and warmth of the later partnership with Mrs. Taylor. If we can question Mill's pronouncements on the latter relation (as most have), we should also have reservations concerning the first.

Mill's description of the years spent under his father's tutelage is hardly an overt denunciation of James Mill or his methods, of course. One of the purposes of the autobiography, in fact, was to leave, Mill said, a record of "how much more than is commonly supposed may be taught, and well taught" (3) in the early years of a person's life, and Mill went on to show how many advantages he derived from being asked to do more than was usual for a boy his age. ("A pupil from whom nothing is ever demanded which he cannot do, never does all he can" [20-21].) But throughout

the chapters in which due credit is given to his father for the quality and value of his education ("...In the main his method was right, and he succeeded" [19]), Mill scatters remarks which indicate the day-to-day unpleasantness of his labors, the painful cost in spontaneity of every advance in thinking, the overwhelming dominance of his critical and exacting father.

"I was continually incurring his displeasure by my inability to solve difficult problems for which he did not see that I had not the necessary previous knowledge" (9). Being compelled to write verses "was one of the most disagreeable of my tasks" (10). Teaching the younger brothers and sisters Latin was part of the day's work "which I greatly disliked" (8). His father's particular attention to elocution made the reading aloud of Plato and Demosthenes "a most painful task. Of all things which he required me to do, there was none which I did so constantly ill, or in which he so perpetually lost his temper with me" (15). "He was often, and beyond much reason, provoked by my failures in cases where success could not have been expected..." (19). Though James Mill always insisted that John find things out for himself, "I acquitted myself very lamely in this department; my recollection of such matters is almost wholly of failures, hardly ever of success" (20). "The education which my father gave me, was in itself much more fitted for training

me to know than to do. Not that he was unaware of my deficiencies; both as a boy and as a youth I was incessantly smarting under his severe admonitions on the subject" (23).

In passages which were deleted from the final text Mill was even more specific about the "very considerable drawbacks" of his father's method. In tutoring the mind so carefully, James Mill had neglected physical coordination and common sense. In matters of dexterity or practicality John Mill exhibited "extraordinary inaptness and even incapacity": "I was far longer than children generally are before I could put on my clothes. I know not how many years passed before I could tie a knot. My articulation was long imperfect; one letter, r, I could not pronounce until I was nearly sixteen" (E.D. 178-79). His father noticed these problems, but was only made angry by them.

I was continually acquiring odd or disagreeable tricks which I very slowly and imperfectly got rid of. I was, as my father continually told me, like a person who had not the organs of sense: my eyes and ears seemed of no use to me, so little did I see or hear what was before me, and so little, even of what I did see or hear, did I observe and remember....

[My father] could not endure stupidity, nor feeble and lax habits, in whatever manner displayed, and I was perpetually exciting his anger by manifestations

of them. From the earliest time I can remember he used to reproach me, and most truly, with a general habit of inattention; owing to which, he said, I was constantly acquiring bad habits, and never breaking myself of them; was constantly forgetting what I ought to remember, and judging and acting like a person devoid of common sense; and which would make me, he said, grow up a mere oddity, looked down upon by everybody, and unfit for all the common purposes of life. (E.D. 179-80)

These passages do not merely display the simple tyranny of an insensitive authoritarian over his weaker victim; more importantly, they portray a complex battle of opposite sensibilities. What Mill is describing here is the confrontation between a thoroughgoing man of reason and a child who is determinedly holding on to his subjectivity. The father is practical, energetic, objective; the son inattentive, "odd," a daydreamer. The father is empirical, outward; his reality is perceived through the eyes and ears; he believes in the "common purposes of life." The son is different from other people, eccentric; he is incapable of being ordinary; he doesn't see what others see. While the one is interested in perfect elocution, the other is listening to inward voices. It is the familiar contrast between the mirror and the lamp. Through the retelling of his childhood, in short, Mill describes the collision of eighteenth-century empirical

philosophy with Romantic poetic sensibility.

Because the differences between father and son came to signify so much beyond the merely personal for Mill, the implied indictment of his father and the frequent denigration of himself as a child seem less embarrassing, less ungrateful, than they otherwise might. For there can be no question that after all his father's hard work Mill was deeply unsatisfied with his education. When he did not see himself as a bungler he saw a "manufactured" personality, a mind "irretrievably analytic," that famous steam-engine utilitarian mentality which Carlyle mocked. His character, he lamented, was "close and reserved from habit and want of impulse, not from will" (E.D. 184). Because his father based his authority on fear rather than love, he said, he grew up morally "stunted," by which he meant emotionally uncommunicative: "The one person I was in communication with, to whom I looked up, I had too much fear of, to make the communication to him of any act or feeling ever a matter of frank impulse or spontaneous inclination" (E.D. 184).

In contrast to his father were people like John Sterling, to whom Mill was drawn after his crisis period. Sterling was a disciple of Coleridge and a champion of Byron and Wordsworth, and Mill's description of him reflects his view of the difference between a Romantic, as opposed to an eighteenth-century, personality. Sterling's character was

"frank, cordial, affectionate, and expansive"; his "generous and ardent nature threw itself with impetuosity into the opinions it adopted." He had an "open mind and heart" which found no difficulty in "joining hands with me across the gulf which as yet divided our opinions" (93). Mill's father, on the other hand,

thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and unsatisfied curiosity had gone by.... He would sometimes say, that if life were made what it might be, by good government and good education, it would be worth having: but he never spoke with anything like enthusiasm even of that possibility.... For passionate emotions of all sorts, and for everything which has been said or written in exaltation of them, he professed the greatest contempt. He regarded them as a form of madness. (30-31)

To have been educated by this man, Mill seems to have felt, was to have started life with certain major deprivations. Mill once confessed to Carlyle that he thought of himself as "a schoolboy... who had never conversed with a reality."⁶ From his own experience he gave his readers the warning that an education of fear, while it might successfully enforce "habits of application," might also be attended by a larger evil: it could "seal up the fountains of frank and spontaneous

communicativeness in the child's nature" (34).

By the time of his mental crisis Mill felt an intolerable sense of spiritual drought. "The fountains of vanity and ambition seemed to have dried up within me, as well as those of benevolence" (84). The "sealing up" of childish qualities had led to the "drying up" of adult ones. The metaphor of the sealed fountain thus becomes the central expression of Mill's dissatisfaction with his childhood. We add to it the apparent joylessness of the intellectual endeavors, the suggested loneliness of life without friends of his own age (his father feared the "contagion of vulgar modes of thought and feeling" they might bring, Mill said [22]), the "backwardness" of his personality in terms of initiative, energy, and decision-making (23; E.D. 185), the strain of the daily hard work, and the lack of one single game of cricket to relieve all his pent-up emotion (this was Leslie Stephen's suggested remedy for Mill's problems),⁷ and we have a very bleak picture. It is the picture Mill needed to create, as a fitting background to the major event in his story: the emergence from an old-fashioned, naive self-consciousness to adulthood, anti-self-consciousness, and the new historical age.

When Victorian autobiographers looked back at their childhoods, their memories tended to search out images of idyllic innocence or of valiantly-borne hardships, or some-

times of both. This was a reflection of the contemporary concept of the child, which seesawed ambivalently between Rousseauvian original innocence and Evangelical original sin. Secular as he was from birth onward, Mill was less susceptible to the demands of his culture in this regard than were, for example, Ruskin and Carlyle, but even in his cool distance from many Victorian prejudices Mill did worry about whether he had been "spoiled" or not (this was a common Evangelically-based source of concern, though in Mill's case the questioned factor was not "too little discipline" but "too much knowledge"), and he did emphasize the struggles of youth when he might have spent more time on its pleasures.

Compared with the imaginative riches which writers like George Eliot or Thomas Carlyle were able to find in their rustic childhood memories (Eliot referred to her childhood as her "primal passionate store," as indeed it was), John Mill's early years may seem barren, sterile, lacking in texture. As James Olney says, "Particularized scenes and anecdotes, drawing the reader to participation in Mill's self-portrait and -progress, are almost deafening by their absence.... As reluctant with fictions as Swift is said to have been with metaphors in Gulliver's Travels, 'the rogue never hazards an anecdote.'" ⁸ Yet Mill does give us material which suggests a fuller emotional and "poetic" dimension in

the boy than the whole pattern of the autobiography might suggest. Because he wrote the book, on one level at least, with the strong intention of illuminating and justifying his irregular relation with Mrs. Taylor (some critics feel that this was his primary impetus, in fact), he stacked the deck against James Mill and Bentham, giving a darkened portrait of his early education in their hands; but he also, to his credit, left plentiful amounts of evidence to the contrary.

The style of the autobiography yields one example of this. The dichotomy Mill emphasizes between his early mechanical self and his later, emotionally fuller self has caused some readers to see, or rather to invent, corresponding differences in style and metaphor in the book. "His boyhood and youth are narrated in careful expository statement with no figurative embellishment, but as his crisis comes over him, he breaks into metaphor," says Keith Rinehart.⁹ "The essence and product of James Mill's exclusively intellectual educational program," says James Olney, "finds expression most often in a machine metaphor.... But the other, the heretofore neglected half of the education for life, is always expressed by a submerged organic metaphor.... After the crisis it is not a question of shaping or forming, of acquiring something external or finished, but of 'cultivating,' of 'nourishing' with an emotional 'fount' that had

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been 'sealed up' in youth...." If either of these suggestions is true, it is difficult to know what to make of Mill's generous metaphorical treatment of Bentham as he describes his reaction, at fifteen, to Dumont's Traité de Legislation, a French version of Bentham's principal work:

...When I found scientific classification applied to the great and complex subject of Punishable Acts, ... I felt taken up to an eminence from which I could survey a vast mental domain, and see stretching out into the distance intellectual results beyond all computation. As I proceeded further, there seemed to be added to this intellectual clearness, the most inspiring prospects of practical improvement in human affairs. (42)

Bentham's "vista of improvement" was "sufficiently large and brilliant to light up my life," he said. "When I laid down the last volume of the Traité I had become a different being" (43, 42). These metaphors may indeed hark back to the eighteenth-century sublime more than they anticipate Romantic organicism, but they certainly do belie the notion of "careful expository statement with no figurative embellishment," or of external and mechanical, as opposed to personal and imaginative, formation. Furthermore, the "submerged organic metaphor" is applied to both "halves" of the education. Mill says that James Mill's insights regarding the art of the

Greek orators, especially Demosthenes, were advanced for a child, but "left seed behind, which germinated in due season" (14). The elder Mill's public spiritedness "warmed into life and activity every germ of similar virtue that existed in the minds he came in contact with" (62). He "nourished" his son in Plato's mode of investigation (15). His opinions "fell singly scattered from him in many directions, but they flowed from him in a continued stream principally in three channels" (63). In short, James Mill and Bentham were indeed associated with fertile inner growth, just as the benefits of Harriet Taylor's presence were often measured in a dispassionate debit-and-credit fashion. (Characteristically, the balance sheet consists mainly of debts. He speaks confidently of what he "owes" her, what he has "derived" from her, what he has "received" from her, but only timidly of what she has perhaps "drawn" from the friendship [113].) Further textual investigation would affirm that the style of the book really does not change significantly, either in tone or in metaphor, from chapter to chapter.

A similar situation exists regarding the issue of Mill and poetry. Though he said he was "indifferent" to poetry before the mental crisis and the subsequent introduction to Wordsworth in 1828, and wished to emphasize how liberating Wordsworth's miscellaneous poems had been for him because "they seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I

was in quest of" (89), it would be false to characterize his education as one which was without poetry or "poetic cultivation." Mill's biographer rightly rebukes Mill for criticizing his education in poetry "from the standard not of necessity but of perfection."

Never satisfied that with the right upbringing he would not have been a poet, he reproached his father for being unpoetic--while admitting in passing that by him he was introduced to Milton, Goldsmith, Burns, Grey, Cowper, Beattie, Spenser, Scott, Dryden, Campbell, and Pope--a not inconsiderable list. And if his father, being old-fashioned, had little regard for Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, those contemporary poets surely were rightly left for the voracious appetite of youth to discover for itself.¹¹

Not only was Mill "introduced to" a great deal of poetry through his father; he "delighted" in it. When he was eight and was reading the Iliad in Greek, his father gave him Pope's translation. "It was the first English verse I had cared to read, and it became one of the books in which for many years I most delighted: I think I must have read it from twenty to thirty times through" (8). At his father's commendation he read the metrical romances of Walter Scott and was "intensely delighted" with them (11). Dryden's "Alexander's Feast," along with many of the songs in Walter

Scott, he used to "sing internally, to a music of my own" (12). He still remembered, as an adult, airs which he had composed to Scott's songs.

So despite the fact that much of the poetry his father recommended meant little to him (and one is not surprised that Milton was less than gripping to a ten-year-old), it cannot be strictly true that, as he said in the "crisis" chapter, "the only one of the imaginative arts in which I had from childhood taken great pleasure, was music" (87), or that the "undervaluing of feeling" (67) in his father's ideas "naturally resulted among other things in an undervaluing of poetry" (68). What is true is that in retrospect Mill tended to expect more from poetry as an active cultural and personal force than had his father. And in doing so he himself undervalued the kind of poetry which had been meaningful to him as a child, not recognizing that his internal melodies had themselves been a form of "poetic" expression. The later Mill required both inspiration and education from poetry; this is why he was able to say, oddly enough, that he had received "poetic culture" not from poetry but from biographies. Condorcet's Life of Turgot, Plato's pictures of Socrates--books such as these had given him a sense of "reverential admiration for the lives and characters of heroic persons," and this had been "poetic culture of a most valuable kind" (69). Here also we gain insight into why he

thought Harriet Taylor so poetically fine, even though her actual output was minimal. For Mill, "poetry" was not poems, but was instead a forceful idea or set of ideas involving personal feelings and values. A good poet might therefore not have "poetic cultivation" of the sort Mill was in quest of, and a man or a culture might be considered "unpoetic" for reading Pope but ignoring Coleridge.

If the young Mill was not exactly starved of poetry, neither was he forbidden, as were many children, the pleasures of "children's literature." He owned Robinson Crusoe. His father borrowed for him the Arabian Nights, Cazotte's Arabian Tales, Don Quixote, Miss Edgeworth's Popular Tales, "and a book of some reputation in its day, Henry Brooke's Fool of Quality" (8). The latter book is interesting because it tells the story of a young man who, though he is a son of the Earl of Moreland, is left in the country with foster parents because he is thought to be a fool. He subsequently adopts an old man for a parent: "I'll have you for a father if you please, sir."¹² Later on there is a great deal of fun made of an authoritarian schoolmaster named Mr. Vindex, whose chair has been rigged up by his students with a needle so that he is frequently impaled when he sits down. Fool of Quality is a reminder of the throttling and the pranks which were conventional in the "education" of young men at the time, and of the generally rebellious feelings which

these young men were expected to have toward their elders, both parents and teachers. To think of Mill reading this book is to recognize that his education was neither humorless nor intellectually rigid. It was not beyond James Mill to allow popular or indecorous literature to come John's way; nor were there any strictures against imaginative or fanciful stories, as in many early Victorian homes. For the period, the number of children's books which came into Mill's hands is quite respectable.

Mill complained that his education had been much more fitted for training him "to know than to do," but this is somewhat puzzling, for he was quite obviously capable of taking action on his thoughts. The young man who, at nineteen, had single-handedly educated his brothers and sisters, edited Bentham, contributed articles to the Westminster Review, worked for two years as a clerk at the India House, gone to France on his own, developed a side interest in botany, and personally sought out the company of "instructed men" such as George Grote and John Austin for conversations on "political, moral, and philosophical subjects" (46), was not a retiring Casaubon with large plans and little application. Perhaps he was referring to physical activity; in this regard we have no other evidence besides Mill's few self-deprecating remarks. The assumption is made by Packe that Mill's fencing and dancing lessons in France were "hated"

by him, but this has no particular basis in fact, and has been challenged, as could many of the little legends which have grown up about Mill's life.¹³ Possibly he meant simple practical tasks; critics have expressed amazement at Mill's "fantastic dependence upon Harriet's judgment and approval in practical matters" after their marriage. "Trivialities" such as what to do about rats in the garden, how to deal with the servants' possible dishonesties, how much to pay for taxes and potatoes, even what underclothes to wear, dominate letters which these critics would have expected to contain grand thoughts: "It is notable...how seldom ideas are touched on," Stillinger complains of the Mill-Taylor letters (E.D. 25-6). But since most Victorian men didn't take any interest in domestic matters, what is notable here is not that Mill consulted Harriet in certain detailed aspects of house management but that he attempted, during her long absence from Blackheath, to keep house at all. (When Carlyle was bothered by the noise of the neighbor's roosters, he made a great fuss but expected Jane to solve the problem; when Mill was faced with rats in the garden wall, he at least made an effort to take care of it himself. The trouble was that, knowing so little, he had to ask Harriet about virtually everything.) It is even possible that Mill's negative remarks about his lack of physical dexterity and practical acumen stem partly from the unusual recognition that his all-too-

common gentlemanly ignorancies, so obvious when the house-keeping responsibilities fell to him, were really rather shameful. In one of the deleted passages of the Autobiography Mill spoke scornfully of his mother who "only knew how to pass her life in drudging" for her children (E.D. 184); the distaste he felt for women who were mere drudges may have been equalled by a certain discomfort for ever having had to be the helpless object of their labors. Part of Mill's resentment about his "inaptness" came from the belief that ordinary contact with other schoolboys would have taught him things that books couldn't, but part of it may also have been regret for having never learned what any illiterate housemaid was expected to know.

When readers of the Autobiography accept as a kind of label Mill's description of himself as a "mere reasoning machine" (66), pitying this manufactured product of what Emery Neff called James Mill's "sublime and ruthless confidence" in offering "his own flesh and blood for an experimentum in corpore vile to test Helvetius' theory of the omnipotence of education,"¹⁴ they are mistaken. What Mill said was that the Benthamite description might have been "not altogether untrue" of him "during two or three years" of his life (66); it ought not to be asserted therefore that, as one critic put it,¹⁵ "the completely rational man was formed." Though Mill's case against Utilitarianism caused him to emphasize

the negative effects of what Carlyle punningly named the "Logic-mills" of empirical thinking, he also made frequent reference to the positive aspects of what he called his emotional "susceptibilities." In fact, Mill seems to have laid the groundwork for his eventual "conversion" to Wordsworthian concepts of nature and imagination by recalling the importance of the many natural "associations" (to use Hartley's term) which had developed throughout his childhood.

Wordsworth's immediate appeal in 1828, Mill said, was that his poems "addressed themselves powerfully to one of the strongest of my pleasurable susceptibilities, the love of rural objects and natural scenery" (88). In this he was responding to tastes which, he shows throughout the early chapters, had been acquired as an integral part of his education. From 1810 to 1813, when the Mills were living in the "almost rustic" neighborhood of Newington Green, Mill and his father would walk together every morning. Voluntarily, Mill remembered, he would discuss his favorite subject, history: "...With my earliest recollections of green fields and wild flowers, is mingled that of the account I gave him daily of what I had read the day before" (6). In 1813 he was chosen to accompany James Mill and Bentham on a long excursion during which he "acquired [his] first taste for natural scenery, in the elementary form of fondness for a 'view.'" Later at Bentham's country place, Ford Abbey,

he gained "a sort of poetic cultivation" from the spaciousness of the house and the Abbey grounds which were "riant and secluded, umbrageous, and full of the sound of falling waters" (35-6). His first sight of French mountain scenery "made the deepest impression on me" (37). Sentiment about nature, grandeur, "a view," was common enough to the eighteenth-century mind, but Mill mentions these "impressions" and "susceptibilities," it seems, as preparation for his later attraction to Wordsworth. In a sense he is suggesting that the movement toward Romanticism was a latent possibility in all his Benthamite training, as, historically, it may similarly be argued that the Romantic period was a natural outcome of the Enlightenment. What was wrong with himself, he thought, was not that he had become "completely rational" (if such a thing were possible) but that the stirrings of non-rational elements in himself had not been brought to the surface or given any definite meaning.

What made Wordsworth's poems truly important to Mill, he said, was not the "mere outward beauty" they expressed, but the "states of feeling" they contained, from which Mill drew "a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings" (89). Unless one has shared Mill's polemical antipathy to Benthamism right along, the difference Mill saw in Wordsworth as opposed to other poets or philosophers is not immediately

clear. Byron, we can understand, could never bring a disillusioned radical back into sympathy with humanity; as Mill said, "his was the lament of a man who had worn out all pleasures, and who seemed to think that life, to all who possess the good things of it, must necessarily be the vapid uninteresting thing which I found it" (88). But what, exactly, was the appeal of Wordsworth? The famous passages of the *Intimations Ode*, Mill thought, contained "grand imagery but bad philosophy" (90), and Mill all-too-readily stated that there were better poets than Wordsworth. Yet in the *Ode* Mill found the cure for his habitual depression: "I found that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he had also felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it" (90), that is, in "tranquil contemplation" which included a "greatly increased interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings" (89).

Not only did Wordsworth thus introduce the idea of Imagination as an infinitely restorative power for individuals (as opposed to the Benthamite formulas for the calculable improvement of mankind), he also proposed that experiential loss was imaginative gain. The assumption that the experiences of early life are of immense value, requiring compen-

sation in later life, is important here. If the fountains of spontaneity, vanity, and ambition had been totally sealed up in John Mill by James Mill's denial of the boy's "freshness and youthful enjoyment of life"; if "Little Mill" had been forced to spend all his time plodding singlemindedly through Voltaire while Wordsworth, at that age, was more fruitfully engaged in activities such as nocturnal bird-snaring or boat-stealing; if nature, Wordsworth's great teacher, hadn't had her chance to teach the child what "society" would try to make him forget; then there would have been little solace for Mill in Wordsworth's idea of compensation. Why mourn the loss of something one has never had? But of course Mill had been a "Wordsworthian" child, had glimpsed possibilities of inner permanencies and "poetical" values, had allowed nature, as well as the classic orators, to be his teacher. The great difference in what Mill chose to consider his cured condition was that his emotional "susceptibilities," always strong throughout childhood and only temporarily in question during the crisis, now were given their due importance and a name which befitted this importance: they were "states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty," as Mill paraphrased Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

In granting so much importance to Wordsworth and to that

primary text of Romantic poetic theory, Mill described as a pivotal event in life what was essentially a redefinition of terms. Mill was not, as the book often seems to suggest, "reborn" into a life of genuine emotion after having lived for more than twenty years without emotion, but he was, with the help of Wordsworthian and Coleridgean poetic theory, able to clarify, and more importantly to name, those emotions not accounted for in his father's Hartleyan psychology. "Thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty" was the material of poetic cultivation which Mill had been looking for.

The "great revolution" in his thinking upon which he structured the autobiography was not so much a revolution, then, as a broadening of possibilities. With something like the "antiselfconsciousness theory" of Carlyle ("Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so" [86]), he was able to redirect his goals toward "some end external to" happiness; by ceasing to scrutinize the pleasures of life he was able to enjoy them en passant. Happiness was still the goal, but only indirectly. This is an important reformulation, but it does not negate Mill's earlier point of view. Moreover, despite his adoption of a theory of life which refused to expose happiness to the "fatal questioning" of the analytic mind, Mill seems to have continued worrying about happiness long past the resolution of the crisis;

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the Mill-Taylor letters published by Hayek are full of discussions and analyses of happiness.

Mill was proud of his ability to synthesize conflicting ideas. In the essay on Bentham he stressed the importance of comprehending antagonistic modes of thought. On the first page of his autobiography he described his own mind as one which was "always pressing forward, equally ready to learn and to unlearn either from its own thoughts or those of others" (3). Part of what he retained from his study of the St. Simonian philosophy of history was a sense of successive "organic" and "critical" periods of history, and of the transitions from one age to another. It is natural, then, that he should see his life in the structure of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis, even if, as I have tried to show, the demarcations between stages are ultimately blurred. Thus the transition from eighteenth- to nineteenth-century modes of thought are illustrated through an account of his own experience; his life was descriptive of the times not because it was eventful, he said, but because it was the record of a gradual and inevitable change in perception. As a boy he had been deficient, incomplete; like Bentham's philosophy, he suffered from lack of "experience"--or at least this was the image which had to dominate his autobiographical presentation of himself. As a man he was a Radical, then a reformer; his maturity in life was meant to be a reflection of the growth

of the age from a too-simple view of humanity to one which could incorporate, at least partially, the natural supernaturalism of a Coleridge, a Wordsworth, or a Carlyle.

The idea of boyishness, so simple and glorious to many later Victorian writers, was shaded with ambiguity for Mill. One of his remarks about Bentham was that he was "a boy to the last." This was not a compliment; it was an explanation of Bentham's incapacity to prescribe a philosophy for the rest of the world. At the same time, however, he regretted the educational precept of his father that "Life must be a struggle throughout; so let children, when children, learn to struggle manfully and overcome difficulties." 17 From this excessive sense of maturity could come the closing off of imagination, the stunting and limiting of life.

There are, perhaps, two Little Mills represented in the Autobiography. The first is the disappointed recipient of the education, the passive vessel through which Utilitarian ideas were to be carried into effect, the person who was less a person than an idea--a faulty, outdated idea. The second is the receptive, inventive child who exists on the edges of this portrait, the susceptible young traveller, the avid amateur botanist, the child who enjoyed himself. Among his numerous revisions to the Autobiography Mill removed one of the more damning passages about his father ("Mine was not an education of love but of fear" [E.D. 66]), and replaced it

with the following: "I hesitate to pronounce whether I was more a loser or gainer by his severity. It was not such as to prevent me from having a happy childhood" (33-34). Probably some readers would prefer to take the original condemnatory remarks as the "real truth," but I think that the revision is more likely correct. The happier moments of Mill's childhood are perhaps unrecorded, but so, in fact, are those spent with Harriet; Mill simply wasn't able to describe pleasure in any but abstract terms.

A happy childhood was one thing, childhood as a lost paradise another. Unlike many Victorians, Mill did not see anything idyllic in childhood. This is consistent with his view of history. The early history of the individual, like the early history of the race, was primitive and constrained; real freedom, for individuals as well as for mankind in general, was the result of improved knowledge and rationality. Reasoned maturity was in every case preferable to childish instinct. For the ideas of Rousseau Mill had no use at all. This is not to say, however, that in his own autobiographical rendering of childhood he could make the portrait conform to these or any other ideas. Despite the selectivity demanded by Mill's central three-part argument--the unpoetical youth, the crisis of emotional recognition, and the years of satisfaction with Harriet Taylor Mill--the figure of Little Mill is one of some complexity and even contra-

diction: not quite full-blooded, he is nevertheless a living presence in autobiographical literature.

That Mill emphasized the role of his father in his mental history, never even mentioning his mother in the final draft, has, finally, less psychological than literary significance; the book is only secondarily about Victorian Oedipal struggles. Primarily it is about a transition in the thought of the age; and as such it is a complete success. It has been noted that there is a great difference between writing about oneself in a diary as opposed to writing fictional or nonfictional autobiography: in the diary, the end is unknown, the rhythm is necessarily that of waking and sleeping, and no detail is irrelevant; whereas in the latter forms the author must be concerned with shaping a consistent whole which usually includes a beginning, a middle, and an end, and details must be selected with the end in mind. ¹⁸ Mill's autobiography is an excellent example of the force of this distinction, for, with his impersonal, polemical object always in view, Mill finds himself sacrificing many facets of his personal past in order to develop an effective argument. If, in the end, Little Mill is not fully satisfying in his role, he at least provides the basis for an argument which is still as strong and brilliant an explanation of the central intellectual problems of the nineteenth century as we have.

NOTES

1. Anne Romilly, Romilly-Edgeworth Letters, 1813-1818, ed. Samuel Henry Romilly (London, 1936), p. 178.
2. John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston, 1969), p. 85. Further references to the Autobiography are taken from this edition and are indicated in parentheses in the text itself.
3. John Stuart Mill, The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, ed. Jack Stillinger (Urbana, Illinois, 1961). Further page references to this draft will be made within parentheses in the text, marked "E.D." for Early Draft.
4. Bruce Mazlish, James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1975), p. 170.
5. Robert D. Cumming, "Mill's History of His Ideas," Journal of the History of Ideas XXV (1964) 235-56.
6. John Stuart Mill, The Letters of John Stuart Mill, ed. Hugh S. R. Elliot (London, 1910), vol. I, p. 88.
7. Leslie Stephen, The English Utilitarians (New York, 1968), vol. 3, p. 9.
8. James Olney, Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography (Princeton, N.J., 1972), pp. 243-44. (I have reversed the order of the quotations.)

9. Keith Rinehart, "John Stuart Mill's Autobiography: Its Art and Appeal," The University of Kansas City Review XIX (1953) 266.
10. Olney, p. 248.
11. Michael St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill (London, 1954), p. 25.
12. Henry Brooke, The Fool of Quality, or The History of Henry Earl of Moreland (New York, 1887), p. 57.
13. Anna Jean Mill, ed., John Mill's Boyhood Visit to France (Toronto, 1960), xvi.
14. Emery Neff, Carlyle and Mill: An Introduction to Victorian Thought (New York, 1924), p. 176.
15. John Durham, "The Influence of John Stuart Mill's Mental Crisis on His Thoughts," American Imago XX (1963) 371.
16. F. A. Hayek, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Correspondence and Subsequent Marriage (London, 1951).
17. Caroline Fox, The Journals of Caroline Fox 1835-71, ed. Wendy Monk (London, 1972), p. 83.
18. Frank Brady, "A New Edition of Pepys," The Yale Review LX (1971) 270.

CHAPTER V:
THOMAS CARLYLE'S PRIMAL PASSIONATE STORE

1

"Happy season of childhood!"¹ So begins Diogenes Teufelsdröckh's narrative of his early years in Entepfuhl, and so indeed did Thomas Carlyle wish to remember his rustic beginnings in the small market town of Ecclefechan in Dumfriesshire. As Teufelsdröckh continues his description of the blessed condition of childhood, he enumerates some familiar Carlylean ideals:

Kind Nature, that art to all a bountiful mother;
that visitest the poor man's hut with auroral
radiance; and for thy nurseling hast provided a
soft swathing of Love and infinite Hope, wherein
he waxes and slumbers, danced round (umgaukelt) by
sweetest Dreams! If the paternal cottage still
shuts us in, its roof still screens us; with a
Father we have as yet a prophet, priest and king,
and an Obedience that makes us free. (90)

In this short passage from Sartor Resartus are several elements which indicate the extent to which Carlyle had adopted a romantic conception of childhood. First we note the greatly revered setting: the humble dwelling of the poor man, in all its goodness and simplicity. Into this enters Kind Nature as an all-encompassing, maternal, godlike presence and source of infinite hope. Accompanying her is a protective father figure who is great, heroic in the Carlylean sense ("prophet, priest and king"), and benevolent. It is

the father who enforces the law of Obedience, a rule which is paradoxically a source of freedom rather than a form of constraint. In Carlyle's vision of childhood bliss, the infant is "swathed" in motherly love, "screened" by the paternal roof: he is made secure, though in different ways, by the bountiful mother and the powerful father.

But the child's most important source of serenity comes from elsewhere. Teufelsdröckh continues:

The young spirit has awakened out of Eternity, and knows not what we mean by Time; as yet Time is no fast-hurrying stream, but a sportful sunlit ocean, years to the child are as ages: ah! the secret of Vicissitude, of that slower or quicker decay and ceaseless down-rushing of the universal World-fabric, from the granite mountain to the man or day-moth, is yet unknown; and in a motionless Universe, we taste, what afterwards in this quick-whirling Universe, is forever denied to us, the balm of Rest. Sleep on, thou fair Child, for thy long rough journey is at hand! (90)

Here are themes, images, and stylistic devices which appear again and again in Carlyle's writings on self and history: the use of the water metaphor to describe Time; the reference to historical change as an organic process ("that slower or quicker decay"); the contrasting view of history as a wild,

uncontrollable force (a "ceaseless down-rushing" of elements, a "fast-hurrying," "quick-whirling" movement); the energetic and unusual use of broken syntax and exclamation to convey the forcefulness and speed of a universe in which the granite mountain is no more permanent than the fragile day-moth. For the moment, however, what stands out is the child's privileged position in this awesome world of flux. Impervious to it all, he sleeps. Existing in a "motionless Universe," not yet conscious of time, he is granted what Carlyle, as an adult, constantly sought-- "the balm of Rest."

While other autobiographers see beauty, grace, purity, and other aesthetic ideals in childhood, or value that time primarily for its innocence and faith, Carlyle finds that the greatest blessing of the child is his relation to time. More than any other Victorian autobiographer, Carlyle was obsessed by time. His writing reflects the conventional autobiographical task of "making sense" of a life, of ordering it into a pattern, yet it is equally motivated by a desire to break down the boundaries of chronology which slot human lives into a confined, inevitable historical process. Repeatedly, Carlyle delves into his own past for a glimpse of those "memorative" moments which might in some way remove him from his time-bound, adult self. In the child's world, he says, "sleep and waking are one: the fair Life-

garden rustles infinite around, and everywhere is dewy fragrance, and the budding of Hope" (91). "One has yet no consciousness of self; one is a thought, an action, not a thinker or an actor."² Childhood is a release from the world of the clock, a paradise of unselfconsciousness.

Though Carlyle's vision is in several respects like Wordsworth's (in, for example, the Immortality Ode or in the "Childhood and School-time" section of The Prelude), there is an important difference between Wordsworth's thoroughly Romantic child and Carlyle's more demanding Victorian one. Both are born remembering the glorious, timeless world they have just left. ("The young spirit has awakened out of Eternity," says Carlyle; "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," says Wordsworth.) Both sadly but inevitably lose their special knowledge of eternity by growing up. Wordsworth's child, however, finds compensation; Carlyle's does not. As Wordsworth says in Book Second of The Prelude, "the soul, /Remembering how she felt, but what she felt /Remembering not, retains an obscure sense /Of possible sublimity, whereto /With growing faculties she doth aspire." Wordsworth's child is able to "augment" and "sustain" his "infant sensibility" --and does so by continually strengthening his bond with nature, eventually being rewarded with the transcendent "spots of time." By watching and loving nature's "transitory qualities," he simultaneously learns of her "permanent

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relations, else unknown."

Little Gneschen in Entepfuhl does have a few revelatory moments that rival the young Wordsworth's: he speaks of the illumination--"a Hebrew speech for me," he says--of the gold and azure sunsets enjoyed while he is eating his porridge out of doors; he is touched by the vision of the Swineherd's daily procession; he takes wise counsel from the Old Men under the Linden-tree. But the increasing spiritual strengths of Wordsworth's autobiographical child are not matched by Carlyle's. Teufelsdröckh must balance his wonder with his bitterness.

I had, once for all, come down from Heaven into the Earth. Among the rainbow colors that glowed on my horizon, lay even in childhood a dark ring of Care... always it reappeared, nay ever waxing broader and broader; till in after-years it almost overshadowed my whole canopy, and threatened to engulf me in final night. It was the ring of Necessity whereby we are all begirt.... (97)

This ring of Necessity introduces the note of ambivalence which is ever present in Carlyle's perception of his own past. His most nostalgic memories are tinged with a hint of the anxiety, even the despair, he would experience in later life. The "permanent relations" which Wordsworth consistently discovered in the transitory world were seen less easily by Carlyle--even in his greatest periods of confidence, even

in his triumphant statement of the doctrine of Natural Supernaturalism. Sartor Resartus is meant to "exhibit the Wonder of daily life and common things" (267) to men; yet its grand assertion of life is significantly reduced by Teufelsdröckh's admission that most men unfortunately cannot perceive wonder in the real world. To do so, most men would need that Carlylean variation on Fortunatus's wishing cap, the "Time-annihilating Hat; and man, poor fool that he is, can seldom and scantily help himself without one" (263). No sooner does Carlyle renounce Time's hold on men, than he qualifies this triumph almost out of existence.

There are further imperfections in the childhood paradise. We notice that even in the auroral radiance of the poor man's hut, the paternal cottage "shuts us in"; as, even in Carlyle's rosiest memories of Ecclefechan, there was much that was restrictive, frustrating, painful. It is interesting that Carlyle's most glowing references to his early life also contain some notion of its inadequacies. Its poverty could never quite be romanticized, though Carlyle frequently made the effort to do so. Reminiscing about boyhood days spent with Edward Irving in the Ecclefechan meeting house, he said:

I must bid adieu to that poor temple of my childhood, to me more sacred at this moment than perhaps the biggest cathedral then extant could have been; rude, rustic, bare--no temple in the world was more so--

but there were sacred lambencies, tongues of
 authentic flame from heaven which kindled what was
 best in one, what has not yet gone out.⁴

The contrast here between the "poor" temple and the
 "authentic" spiritual life within it--a common Protestant
 idea--is made particularly Carlylean because so much attention
 is drawn to the rudeness and the poverty of the place. Can
 it be that "no temple in the world" was more rude? Probably
 not; but Carlyle chose to think so. When a character in
Wotton Reinfred exclaims "What wealth is in childhood, how
 that morning sun makes a very desert beautiful!", we again⁵
 see the richness of childhood in contrast with an utterly
 unpromising environment, a desert. Discussing his early
 travels with Irving, Carlyle said, "I remember the squalor
 of our bedroom in the dim rainy night, and how little we
 cared for it in the opulence of youth"⁶--another example of
 the perception of experiential wealth through the memory
 of material inadequacy, "squalor," the dim, rainy night.

Just as the dark ring of Necessity encircles the
 paradisaical bliss of Teufelsdröckh's childhood, so the
 threat that "the Night cometh" hangs over Carlyle in his
 most eloquent efforts to be free of that selfconsciousness
 which binds him to the grating present. And so indeed is
 each memory given two faces. Some memories are seen as
 beautiful "despite" their grim circumstances; others are

regarded with more obvious ambivalence. In the end one feels that while Carlyle worked harder than most autobiographers to resurrect the energies and beauties of his personal past, his moments of illumination were particularly brief and unsatisfying.

In a fascinating article, Burton Pike has said that a major impulse in the writing of autobiography is to enable "the ordering mind to escape temporarily from its own ⁷ bondage to the time of successive moments." In other words, the autobiographer writes about his past in order to recreate, in the present moment of writing, the timelessness which the unconscious, pre-ego-dominated mind has once known. This explains the autobiographer's strong interest in childhood, when the time sense has been most free and undifferentiated. Though he does not discuss Carlyle, Professor Pike might well have done so, for Carlyle shares with the writers in Pike's study an obsession with time; he needs, like them, to return again and again to autobiography to confront his obsession and thereby, ultimately, to affirm his identity. However, unlike these writers (they include Dickens, Hugo, and Nietzsche), Carlyle is unable to sustain his "luminous" moments long enough to enjoy them. To borrow Pike's language, Carlyle's clock-oriented ego will not allow him to stray very far into his unconscious mind; it all too quickly insists on re-establishing in his consciousness the dominance

of chronological time. Or, to return to the Victorian metaphor, a dark ring of Necessity encompasses a universe which might otherwise be seen--even briefly--to be boundless, infinite, and free.

We have seen, in earlier chapters, the deep ambivalence which existed in Victorian culture toward real children. They were angels, yet they were monsters; they represented goodness and innocence, yet they required extreme discipline to hold down their natural sinfulness and depravity. We have also seen how this ambivalence found its way into many autobiographers' images of themselves as children, and how writers frequently distorted the past according to the myths of childhood which their culture offered as models. In the case of Carlyle, he certainly shares with many autobiographers the view that childhood is simultaneously Edenic and full of hardship. Sometimes he sees his parents as nearly godlike; just as frequently, he sees himself as a homeless orphan cast out into a harsh world. He can hardly praise the heartiness of his rough rural background enough; yet he also complains that he has never in his life been taught "to do⁸ the simplest useful thing." Because childhood represents a release from the "quick-whirling cataracts" of time--those uncontrolled waters which might plunge him into the abyss--he looks toward it for a reassuring glimpse of the safe place he has once known; his consistent quest for eternity in

the transitory world motivates him to elevate and sanctify the past when he can. But his equally strong skepticism causes him to undercut his own efforts, to mock and belittle the gains that he has made, to vacillate from one extreme to another.

Thus even in the lyrical paradise of the "Idyllic" chapter, the child's happy universe is a "motionless"--one could even say deathlike--sleep; it would not have been lost on Carlyle that a consciousness in which "sleep and waking are one" approaches a state of simple nonbeing. There is also a great deal of ironic undercutting on the part of the Editor of Sartor Resartus whenever it looks as if Teufelsdröckh may find too much significance in the memories of his early life.

Then we have long details of the Weinlesen (Vintage), the Harvest-Home, Christmas, and so forth; with a whole cycle of the Entepfuhl children's games Concerning all which, we shall here, for obvious reasons, say nothing. What cares the world for our as yet miniature Philosopher's achievements under that 'brave old Linden'? (92)

Mocking Teufelsdröckh's Wordsworthian excursions into a world of "deeper sympathy with animated Nature," the Editor tartly remarks that "With 'the little one's friendship for cattle and poultry' we shall not much intermeddle" (93). Teufelsdröckh

then justifies his indulgence in so many small biographical details by explaining the autobiographer's historical obligation:

Of a truth, it is the duty of all men, especially of all philosophers, to note-down with accuracy the characteristic circumstances of their Education; what furthered, what hindered, what in any way modified it: to which duty, nowadays so pressing for many a German Autobiographer, I also zealously address myself. (94)

To which the Editor replies:

Thou rogue! Is it by short-clothes of yellow serge, and swineherd horns, that an infant of genius is educated? And yet, as usual, it ever remains doubtful whether he is laughing in his sleeve at these Autobiographical times of ours, or writing from the abundance of his own fond ineptitude. (94)

In such a way Carlyle reminds us again and again that the autobiographical enterprise is potentially ridiculous, that the autobiographer may well be laughing in his sleeve at the attempt to find answers to important questions about a man in the day-to-day details of his early experiences. Through such skepticism he defends against his equally strong desire to discover, through autobiographical exploration, that lost self, that potentially beautiful past, which, he senses, might bring an exquisite and sustaining pleasure to the present.

Carlyle recognized that there was for him a mixed emotional quality in the memory of lost time. Along with the loveliness of the past there was always a sense of pain and regret. In his journal in 1835 he mused about his Scottish background and about the blend of sadness and beauty which accompanied such thoughts:

Vernal weather of all kinds, soft and hard, moist western and clear north-eastern, to me most memorative. Old days at Mainhill, Hoddam Hill, and earlier, come vividly back full of sad beauty which, while passing, they had not. Why is the past so beautiful? The element of fear is withdrawn from it for one thing. That is all safe, while the present and future are
⁹
 all so dangerous.

Later he expressed similar feelings:

How solemn is this Hall of the Past, beautiful and mournful; the miraculous river of existence rolling its grand course here, as elsewhere in the most prophetic places, now even as of old; godlike, though
¹⁰
 dark with death.

This feeling of a powerful, awesome sadness in the contemplation of irrecoverable moments--the strange pleasure in seeing them as beautiful and mournful--was also a motive for writing "Reminiscences" of his friends Lord Jeffrey and Edward Irving: "There is something of value in reawakening

the sleep of the past. . . . A certain solemn tenderness . . .
 dwells in it for me"¹¹

That reawakening the sleep of the past should prove so pleasurablely unhappy, that the events recalled should take on such an agreeably funereal sadness, is absolutely true to the spirit of Carlyle's autobiographical researches. The quest for that place where things are "all safe" leads him to treasure the unmatched beauty of the remote, the irrecoverable, the unchangeable--just as it fills him with bleak solemnity and wistful regret.

It may be that some of this wistfulness, this excess of reverence for what has been lost, is one of Carlyle's most cleverly subtle forms of defense against truly confronting his memories. Like George Eliot, Carlyle knew that childhood was a "primal passionate store," providing, in a few short years, enough material for the literary endeavors of a lifetime. But unlike her, he failed to tap that unlimited source of self-knowledge; he shrank from becoming the interpreter of his own history. This is unfortunate, because, contrary to Carlyle's diary entry, the past is not "all safe" until one has made sense of it; it is not secure until it has been interpreted. History, Carlyle frequently pointed out, is chaos until the historian has understood it. Autobiography, the history of the self, might have proven as useful to Carlyle's private self-knowledge as his historical

writing had been to his development of a public world view; yet he dared not.

One speaks of "daring" here because what I have called the "confrontation" of memory does require a certain courage. No autobiographer needs to narrate his worst memories in order to be an "authentic" explorer of the self. (In this regard, Ruskin was perfectly right to announce that in his autobiography he would simply omit those events which would be too painful to write about.) Yet the autobiographer does need to make an effort to be honest, even if, later on, he decides to sift out materials which might embarrass him or represent him unfairly. We have little sense of the events of Carlyle's childhood, and correspondingly, an overwhelming sense of his ambivalence about it, because he never evaluated his past (particularly his parents' role in it) with his defenses down.

This is perhaps most apparent in "James Carlyle," the long, nostalgic essay written immediately after the death of Carlyle's father. In addition to writing about his father in a suitably eulogistic way, Carlyle engages here in two important autobiographical tasks: first, he tries to trace his own memories as far back as he can, and second, he attempts to give a structure to the father-son relationship. In the first matter he is as curious, and probably as successful, as most autobiographers. He recalls the

sensation of being carried across a stream by his father at about age five; he clearly remembers his first new half-pence, acquired at the age of four; he thinks he cannot have been more than about two years old when he threw his little brown stool at his brother, feeling, (significantly, we might add), "perhaps for the first time, the united pangs¹² of loss and remorse." Beyond this event he cannot go: "Backwards beyond all, dim ruddy images of deeper and deeper¹³ brown shade into the dark beginnings of being."

While in the initial exploration of memory Carlyle is careful and thorough, in the delineation of his relationship to his father he is confusing and evasive. For, though he attempts to elevate James Carlyle to a position of moral, intellectual and spiritual eminence, he simultaneously gives us a portrait of a rude and stubborn man whose children could not bear his company. Though he claims to have been¹⁴ content as a child--"I have been a happy son," he announces straightforwardly--he also shows how painfully insensitive the father was to the things which mattered most to the son. There is a strain throughout the essay between the grand claims of paternal greatness and the occasional details which suggest quite the opposite.

We are told that James Carlyle was a "noble inspiring example," a "real Man," a "natural man," "the last of the¹⁵ true men which Scotland on the old system produced." He was

"perhaps among Scottish peasants what Samuel Johnson was among English authors"; he was the equal of Burns in "natural faculties"; he was comparable in his way to Goethe. He spoke in a "bold glowing style, full of metaphors," was "singularly free of affectation," had a "habit of intellect¹⁶ that was thoroughly free, and even incredulous."

Despite all his fine "natural" qualities, however, he was incapable of loving his children, and they of loving him.

We all had to complain that we dared not love our father. His heart seemed as if walled in It seemed as if an atmosphere of fear repelled us from him, me especially. . . . Long may we remember his 'I don't believe thee'; his tongue-paralyzing¹⁷ cold indifferent "Hah.'"

This is a strong statement even for a Victorian. For despite the assumption that fathers were meant to be awesome and feared, they were also meant to be loved, at least from a distance. And Carlyle goes on:

My father's education was altogether of the worst and most limited. . . . Poetry, fiction in general, he had universally seen treated as not only idle, but false and criminal. . . . Without religion he would have been nothing He was in Annandale, and it was above fifty years ago, and a Gospel was still preached there to the heart of a man in the

tones of a man. Religion was the polestar of my
 father. Rude and uncultivated as he otherwise was,
 it made him and kept him "in all points a man."¹⁸

If we recall how important education, poetry and fiction were to Thomas Carlyle, and if we note that by the time of this essay (1832) Carlyle had moved very far indeed from the old Annandale religion, then these statements are in one sense startlingly negative. (They are, moreover, a bit confusing in light of the claim that James Carlyle's mind was "free and even incredulous.") If this "rock of granite," as Carlyle refers to him, is humanized only by his religion--if in fact he is "nothing" without it--and if this same religion is provincial and out of date, what remains of James Carlyle is a stony, stubborn, crude man, a threat to a young man's creative talent.

Rather than enforcing an "Obedience that makes us free," James Carlyle seems to have represented to his children simply "an inflexible element of authority." Like so many other nineteenth-century autobiographers, Carlyle decided that it had been "a useful thing" for the rest of the family to know that "our own wishes had often nothing to say in the matter,"¹⁹ but his argument in defense of James Carlyle's thoroughgoing Presbyterian repression is unconvincing. (From a modern standpoint it is almost irresistible to speculate on the reasons Carlyle wished to defend his father. We

recall that he was afraid his schoolfellows at Annon Academy would laugh at his father when he came to visit; we see, in this and many other small ways, the seeds of his predictable guilt at being the one elected to rise out of poverty to a position of fame and power. "Was he not a sacrifice to me? Had I stood in his place, could he not have stood in mine, and more?")²⁰

It is only through the disguise of fiction, that is, through Teufelsdröckh, that we gain what seems to be a more honest appraisal:

My Active Power (Thatkraft) was unfavorably hemmed in; of which misfortune how many traces yet abide with me! . . . I was forbid much; wishes in any measure bold I had to renounce; everywhere a straight bond of Obedience inflexibly held me down. Thus already Freewill often came into painful collision with Necessity; so that my tears flowed, and at seasons the Child itself might taste that root of bitterness, wherewith the whole fruitage of our life is mingled and tempered. (98)

Though it is accompanied by that stoical acceptance of pain so common in the childhoods of the period, here at least is a hint that parental inflexibility might have done damage, that the shutting-in of desire might have been a "misfortune." It is a relief to find an expression of at least one negative judgment among so many expressions of effusive praise.

One longs for more evaluation of this sort, but it will not come from Carlyle. He is the son who spent a lifetime searching for fathers, who thought that the entire historical enterprise was a struggle "piously, passionately, to behold, if but in glimpses, the faces of our vanished Fathers,"²¹ yet who would still not give up the notion that his own parents had been well-nigh perfect. He is the son who left Dumfriesshire to establish himself and to marry, yet who returned home constantly--and who never quite allowed his marriage to succeed, so attached was he still to his mother. He is the iconoclastic writer who shocked the English-speaking world with his views, yet who told his conventional Calvinist mother near the end of her life that "essentially" everything he had done had been attributable to her husband and herself. (" . . . It was your voice essentially that was speaking through me; essentially what you and my brave father meant and taught me to mean, this was the purport of all I spoke and wrote.")²² Finally, Nietzsche's conclusion about Carlyle must be our own: "A constant passionate dishonesty against himself--²³ that is his proprium."

There cannot, then, be anything but ambivalence in Carlyle's view of the childhood self. Very often, the image of childhood is an image of clear vision: he admires Boswell's "childlike open-mindedness" about Johnson, for example,

because it enables Boswell to see more of the man than any
²⁴other person could. To see the world with childlike
wonder is one of the goals of the doctrine of Natural
Supernaturalism. As often, though, the image of childhood
is one of weakness, dependency, and inadequacy. When he
was feeling restless or despairing, Carlyle often referred
to himself as a "sick child," a "poor infant," "a child
²⁵wishing Mammy back." His biographer and friend, J.A. Froude,
also used the image pejoratively, scolding him for acting
like a "wayward child--a child in wilfulness, a child in
the intensity of remorse," "a child, and...a very naughty
²⁶one."

We recall that Teufelsdröckh, a "Son of Time, unhappier
than some others," was in danger of being devoured by his
father Chronos. "O Time-Spirit," he cried, "how hast thou
environed and imprisoned us, and sunk us so deep in thy
troublous dim Time-Element, that only in lucid moments can
so much as glimpses of our upper Azure Home be revealed to
us!" (127) Later on, after his fire baptism, when his hands
have been "ungyved," or unfettered, we are no doubt meant to
remember this passage in which poor Teufelsdröckh is being
eaten by Time, eaten "quite prematurely; for, strive as I
might, there was no good Running, so obstructed was the path,
so gyved were the feet" (128). The freedom of the Everlasting
Yea is, we discover, not freedom from Time, but merely a
chance to "run" with it--which means to spend one's life

working (" . . . only by incessant Running, by incessant Working, may you . . . escape" [127]). Those "lucid moments" in which our "Azure Home" is revealed to us are not the reward of so much running, but are only the occasional (perhaps even accidental) glimpses of eternity which are revealed through the symbols of the visible world.

For Carlyle, the kind of autobiographical quest which can be successfully accomplished by a Wordsworth or a Ruskin--that is, the quest for "memorative" moments which are lasting, pure, and indicative of the eternity that has come before, and will come after, the life of the person remembering them--must remain unfulfilled. To compare the results of Carlyle's backward glances with Ruskin's Praeterita is to realize how little transcendence of time Carlyle was able to feel, how little of the lyrical mode is there as he approaches--but does not quite tap--the farthest points of memory, the curious regions of childhood consciousness. In the last chapter of Praeterita, Ruskin has a marvelous vision of his childhood garden as "Eden-land," a place where past, present, and future all merge together. Despite Carlyle's constant contemplation of Time and Eternity, at no point in his autobiographical writing is such a vision achieved.

Carlyle's "primal passionate store" remains forever unexplored, his worried, censoring adult mind always playing

the Editor to his unfettered Teufelsdröckhian urges for an undifferentiated, amoral, childlike perception. Naturally one wishes that he had been willing fully to investigate the true conflicts of his past, the mighty influences of his lowly upbringing. What Carlyle called for in historical narrative--"not Redbook Lists, and Court Calendars, and Parliamentary Registers, but the LIFE OF MAN in England: what men did, thought, suffered, enjoyed. . ." --this is what we would have liked to find in his own autobiographical writing.

Why did he not plunge more deeply into the past? There are many reasons, but perhaps the most compelling is the one which he himself gives us. It is in his remarks about Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the essay "The Hero As Man of Letters," that the explanation for autobiographical self-censorship appears. Carlyle had read and admired Rousseau's candid and irreverent Confessions as a young man. Later, however, he found it necessary to revise his opinion of the great philosopher, ultimately regarding him as a brilliant but woefully misguided thinker, a man ruined by "Egoism." Egoism, he maintains in this essay, had among other things turned Rousseau into an object of public ridicule, a "dying gladiator" whose "perversions and contortions" had become light anecdotes for the whole world: "the crowded amphitheatre looks on with entertainment; but the gladiator is in agonies

28

and dying." What Carlyle does not see is that it is precisely the agonies, perversions, and contortions which authenticate Rousseau's work and grant him an honest base from which to evaluate his life. Had Carlyle not feared that such honesty led to ridicule and exposure, his own autobiographical work might have been less skeptical, less ironic--and probably more satisfying to him and to us.

In the "internecine warfare with the Time-Spirit" (195) which was life itself to him, Carlyle battled energetically, meeting the dangerous world of present and future with the charged anxiety of an Old Testament prophet. Around him was a world of immense changes, of never-ending fluctuations. In Carlyle's perception of things, if a man were not careful he could be plunged into the abyss; one could "shoot Niagara" in a personal as well as a political sense. In the large and hurried scheme of history, the "ceaseless down-rushing of the universal World-fabric, from the granite mountain to the man or day-moth," there is no particular concession given to man: man, mountain and day-moth are all equally powerless in their transitoriness. The giant sweep of Vicissitude races through everything; Time-Chronos devours his children. Striving to find a suitable "religion" in which to rest his fears of mortality, Carlyle passed by one of the most consolatory of modern notions, an idea well-used by such writers as Wordsworth, Ruskin, and Proust,

that is, the existence of a timeless time which can be reached through the imagination's recollection of childhood. "By wise memory and by wise oblivion: it all lies there!" Carlyle said; "without oblivion, there is no
29 remembrance possible." But for himself, there was too much self-imposed oblivion to allow for the extraordinary rewards of remembrance.

NOTES

1. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (Indianapolis and New York, 1937), p. 90
All further references to Sartor Resartus will be taken from this edition and will henceforth be given in parentheses in the text.
2. Thomas Carlyle, "Wotton Reinfred: A Romance," The Last Words of Thomas Carlyle (New York, 1892), p. 189.
3. William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book Second, ll. 315-19 and passim.
4. Thomas Carlyle, "Edward Irving," Reminiscences, ed. James Anthony Froude (New York, 1881), p. 69.
5. "Wotton Reinfred," p. 189.
6. "Edward Irving," p. 98.
7. Burton Pike, "Time in Autobiography," Comparative Literature XXVIII (Fall 1976) 339.
8. James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of His Life in London, 1834-1881 (London, 1897), vol. II, p. 285.
9. Ibid., vol. I, p. 20.
10. Ibid., pp. 347-8.
11. Ibid., vol. II, p. 358.
12. "James Carlyle," Reminiscences, p. 45.
13. Ibid., p. 46.
14. Ibid., p. 47.

15. Ibid., pp. 5, 12, 7.
16. Ibid., pp. 13, 15, 22, 7, 19.
17. James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835 (New York, 1882), p. 15.
18. "James Carlyle," p. 16.
19. Ibid., p. 44.
20. Ibid., p. 17.
21. Thomas Carlyle, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Thomas Carlyle, ed. H. D. Traill, 30 vols. (London, 1896-1899), vol. 6, p. 3.
22. Froude, His Life in London, vol. II, p. 151.
23. Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Gods, quoted in A. J. LaValley, Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern (New Haven, 1968), p. 236.
24. Carlyle, Works, vol. 28, p. 76.
25. Froude, His Life in London, vol. I, p. 211; vol. II, pp. 142, 268.
26. Ibid., vol. II, p. 230; vol. I, p. 352.
27. Carlyle, Works, vol. 28, p. 81.
28. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 186.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Childhood is looked upon as the happiest time of life. Is that always true? No, only a few have a happy childhood. The idealization of childhood originated in the old literature of the privileged. A secure, affluent, and unclouded childhood, spent in a home of inherited wealth and culture, a childhood of affection and play, brings back to one memories of a sunny meadow at the beginning of the road of life. The grandees of literature, or the plebeians who glorify the grandees, have canonized this purely aristocratic view of childhood. But the majority of people, if it looks back at all, sees, on the contrary, a childhood of darkness, hunger and dependence.

Life strikes the weak--and who is weaker than a child?*

This passage from Trotsky's My Life is marvelous--but mistaken. If there is one great conclusion to be drawn from the study of the Victorian autobiographical childhood, it is that no such simplification is possible.

Each autobiographer transforms childhood into something he as an adult author needs. In many cases, it is the "grandees" who remember darkness and dependence, and the ordinary men and women who recall sunny meadows. Trying to generalize, we might say that as a reaction to the over-

* (New York, 1973), p. 1.

whelming threat of a new, godless world and an increasingly ugly and unpredictable society, some writers, like Ruskin, embraced the "cult of the child" as a kind of temporary refuge from the world's bleakness. Others, like Mill, saw their personal pasts in relation to a larger, more meaningful pattern of history. Still others, like Carlyle, tried both, accomplished neither, and thus represented most appropriately the characteristic ambivalence of the age. Or we might say that it is Ruskin's basically idealistic vision which describes childhood the way Victorians wished it to be, Mill's practical and often negative view which describes the way it was, and Carlyle's fitful evasiveness which characterizes the difficulties involved in any such evaluation. But these formulations would only be partly true, if even that, and they would not begin to represent the great variety of approaches taken by Victorian autobiographers. The most that can be said by way of generalization, perhaps, is that misremembering and distortion are definitely part of the autobiographical act; that for many authors, cultural determinants can affect their views of the past in certain predictable ways; and that for the best artists, their heightened intellects and broader sensitivities cause them to deviate sufficiently from the average so that no general statements can do them justice.

To a study such as this one, there can be no real

"conclusion," no answer or deduction which has not already been found in the individual essays. But there are a number of remarks which can be made, remarks which are perhaps more in the nature of afterthoughts than of solutions. These have mainly to do with what Victorian autobiography is not: the ways in which this subject eludes our modern expectations. For example, though one might have expected to find confessional outpourings, Rousseauvian exposures, glimmerings of modern psychological insights, or Proustian searches for the elusive and beautiful forms of the past in these books, such qualities are not greatly in evidence. A twentieth-century philosopher like Norman O. Brown can say in Life Against Death that the function of art is to help us find our way back to the sources of pleasure which our education has denied us, that is, to help us regain the "lost laughter" of infancy; but for a nineteenth-century writer, it seems often true that the belief in pure, uncluttered early perceptions and feelings is challenged by an equally powerful fear of the formlessness and selfishness of the amoral infant sensibility. The possible sanctity of early memory is not as strong a theme in most Victorian autobiographies as one might have thought; and the pursuit of the "I," simply for the sake of exploration, is unlikely to be the typical autobiographer's conscious aim.

One might also have thought to find the conversion

theme as a common denominator among the different autobiographies, since religious confession is the literary tradition from which autobiography springs. But while all three major authors do describe crucial moments of change (Ruskin's "unconversion" at Turin, Mill's "crisis," and Carlyle's dramatic walk down the rue de l'Enfer), the majority of writings does not bear out the notion that nineteenth-century autobiography is a direct descendent of earlier spiritual autobiographies in theme, style, or structure. Though some autobiographies are written as justifications of spiritual beliefs, most are more clearly related to the subject's perception of himself as a historically-definable being. Thus the period of childhood and youth tends not to be the fallen, pre-conversion state of the spiritual autobiographer, but rather the personal equivalent of the early chapters of a history: not "this is how mistaken I was before I saw the light," but "this is the basis of what I later became." There is a real distinction here. Even Mill, who seems so energetically to reject his early self, carefully builds the positive foundation of his later views into his generally negative descriptions of his childhood training.

Another theme which is largely missing from these works is that of frank personal revelation, specifically, the disclosure of intimate facts which would illuminate

the relationships autobiographers had with their mothers, fathers, and siblings--and later, with their lovers, wives, and husbands. Ruskin never "explains" the unusually strong presence of his mother in his life and thoughts, and he gives a limited and rather bloodless view of his father. Mill never mentions his mother in his final draft, and though we are told that he was responsible for educating his sisters and brothers, we learn little else about them or their effect on his early life. Carlyle does speak of his sister who died, but not of his other siblings; we have noticed his self-censorship in the comments he was able to make about his father; he never wrote objectively or at length about his mother, despite her immense influence throughout his education and career. As for passions which extended outside the family, almost every writer is silent; romances, rivalries, and jealousies are simply not there.

Certainly we need not go so far as George Orwell, who said in a review of Salvador Dali's autobiography that "autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful,"^{*} but we may wish to know why, if an autobiographer is telling his life story, he can so easily exclude persons or events which must have affected him--including those which may have affected him in negative

* George Orwell, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. III (New York, 1968), p. 156.

ways. A partial answer to this is that English autobiographers did not accept the model of Rousseau when they wrote. Though Rousseau felt that in order to show "a man as he was within" the writer had to include thoughts and deeds of which he might not wish to speak, no Victorian autobiographer felt a similar call to reveal all. "I had always," said Rousseau,

been amused at Montaigne's false ingenuousness, and at his pretence of confessing his faults while taking good care only to admit to likeable ones; whereas I, who believe, and always have believed, that I am on the whole the best of men, felt that there is no human heart, however pure, that does not conceal
*
some odious vice.

Here Rousseau anticipates modern psychology in a way that no Victorian autobiographer could. In this regard we may regret that someone like Carlyle seems to have suffered from his psychological naïveté; but at the same time we may feel blessedly relieved of those grosser manifestations of Rousseauvian confession which often vulgarize the autobiographies of our own time. In a pre-Freudian world people did not articulate their passions in the ways we have come

* Confessions, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1954), pp. 478-9.

to take for granted, and thus were blinded to many truths which seem obvious to us. Yet, in this condition, they were spared the corresponding dangers of "sincerity," the inherent corruptions resulting from too eager a desire to confess the dark secrets of the inner personal life.

As for the theme of ambivalence toward childhood--a premise upon which much of this thesis rests--we can say that it has been a very useful and convenient way of thinking about Victorian cultural attitudes; but we should also note that in individual cases the matter necessarily becomes more complex, allowing for those many variations and exceptions which close scrutiny of a general pattern always produces. Certainly there is a vast range of images, differing, as has been noted, in fiction and nonfiction; were we to examine the visual arts we would find still more. Yet again and again the "contradictory" view--of children's innocence existing alongside their depravity--is revealed. (Here it may be mentioned that the photographs collected by Graham Ovenden and Robert Melville in their volume entitled Victorian Children (New York, 1972) illustrate this split better than any words can: we have the predictable portraits of sweet girls' faces in ringlets, little children playing on the beach, and so on, accompanied by a most shocking series of pornographic photos--including one very

disturbing picture of a pathetic, pregnant 10-year-old prostitute, whose nudity is meant to be erotic, and whose obvious acceptance of her exploitation is utterly heart-rending.) On the whole, as with so many aspects of Victorian culture, we find large contradictions peacefully coexisting: testament, no doubt, to the enormous moral and spiritual confusions of the age.

There is one more point which surfaces in several of the essays but which should be restated here. The fact that people began to write in earnest about their own childhoods during the nineteenth century is due to many social and historical factors. But it was also, I believe, greatly encouraged by their reading of William Wordsworth. We have seen that Ruskin, Mill, Carlyle, and most of the other authors responded in some way to Wordsworth: either to his suggestions regarding the child's special knowledge of eternity or to his ideas about the development of the mind through its earliest relations with nature. Roundly rejecting Rousseau, many Victorians warmly embraced a Wordsworthian model when they sought to evaluate the meaning of their own lives. By this I do not mean that there are simple, direct "influence" charts to be plotted; I mean to say that to any perceptive reader the presence of Wordsworth hovers lightly, but surely, over the Victorian autobiographical terrain.

Though most of the autobiographers in this study had

little direct contact with children (Ruskin is the exception, and even he eliminated boys from his attentions), all had a great deal to say about their own experiences as children and most felt obliged to make evaluative comments on the success of their upbringing. Despite what we would consider the psychological naïveté of the age, there is a definite movement toward greater and greater scrutiny of the early years as the formative ones; the great difference between then and now is that Victorian writers were usually unwilling to accuse their parents of making mistakes, even when they were treated cruelly or unfairly.

I have argued that the fascination with childhood was aligned with certain historical impulses, but--here is a typical Victorian paradox--it had also to do with escaping history, reaching back to a timeless time when life was lived at its simplest, least selfconscious, least rational level. While Victorian biographers insisted on documentation, writing nothing about the childhoods of their subjects which could not be supported by facts, autobiographers were able to establish personal historical truths on the basis of memory alone. Relying on subjective material, becoming historians of the self, they were released from the uncontrollable pressures of their world, from the apparent aimlessness of time. In the process they discovered the power of memory to grant meaningful harmony to past and present,

and verified the power of the individual to unify experience while the world outside became increasingly dislocated and chaotic. This was a valuable, and a heartening, accomplishment.

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