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Child-Loving: the Erotic Child and Victorian Culture. By James Kincaid. New York: Routledge, 1992. Pp. 413. \$35.00. 0-415-90595-8.

Professor Kincaid once wrote: "My parents made me very, very happy as a child. It was the worst form of abuse." Funny, disturbing, reminiscent of Oscar Wilde, and partly true — this irony finds extended play upon a serious register in his *Child-Loving*. While the subtitle specifies Victorian culture, the book robustly interrogates twentieth-century American culture in its construction of an ideal child around whom it can build a temple of devotion while at the same time barring its worshippers entrance.

Drawing upon Philippe Ariès, Lawrence Stone, and Michel Foucault while using a jargon-free "home-version of deconstruction" (3), the first third of the book decenters current beliefs about the Victorian child. We are offered the child as a playful thing, as a stubborn bundle of nerves, as something to be cured, as a savage, and as an innocent thing. Even the approximate number of years that define childhood escapes us: "Is a child something from 7-14 or something from 0-21?" (70). Quotations from Richard von Krafft-Ebing, William Acton, and Havelock Ellis — with comparisons to Kinsey — remind us that the child is an actor who fills specific roles allotted to it by its societies.

Kincaid believes the goal isn't so much to understand the Victorians as to understand ourselves better by discovering ways in which certain Victorians "did *not* read as we do" (4). And yet Kincaid trusts his readings sufficiently to credit the Victorians with two cultural types, the Gentle Child and the Naughty Child. Their space, however, is soon intruded upon by discourses such as *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* whose Wonder Child challenges both Victorian and contemporary figures. Indifferent to the cogitations of the adult world, this Wonder Child is resistant to our desires, is not easily appropriated by adults, and is most clearly created by writers who have undergone in various forms society's rejection of the pedophile.

To Kincaid, the actual dynamic of pedophilia does not necessitate either sexual practices or destructive effects. It begins with "this child, the image formulated in response to desire," who

functions as "a moving conveyor belt, propelling the adult dreamer into the child's world, a world that immediately becomes the sole property of the dreamer" (195). Nostalgically, the pedophile sees his or her own past in the child, longs for an idealization of that past, and, in efforts to be close to that world, displaces the child. "The pedophile, in short, plays the part of the child in order to play with the desire for the child-who-ought-to-be."

However, desire is as slippery as the discourses which attempt to define it. Through three readings, Kincaid offers a declension of desire from its ideal state to its most depraved. In *David Copperfield* David's childhood "is the land of cuddles" (306). In *Catcher in the Rye*, the reader/voyeur is constantly drawn in and forced away by the narrative of Holden Caulfield, who's "a regular Hallmark card" of desirability (313). Finally, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the ostensible villain, Alec, is merely a selfish human next to the white-washed, yet diabolical Angel, who is forever substituting figurations of Tess in place of the genuine girl-woman, with the result that he remains protected from her true self and powerful over her false self. "Here is play in its most irresponsible form, play conducted with hatchets and machine-guns, play that should be saved from itself, play most in need of the decentering into love" (321).

In the third, final section of *Child-Loving*, Kincaid argues that we, the average people, have located the evil *out there*, in strangers whom we call Pedophiles: "if only a few freaks conspire to sexualize children, then nothing is the matter that a little censorship or some entrapment or a few electrocutions won't cure" (376). We have created an object of desire and at the same time we condemn anyone who appreciates that object. We are fascinated by both the desirability of the child and the criminality of the pedophile. Our society's propensity for attempting to project our latent guilt on someone else, preferably someone we can really believe is despicable, is as great as the trial of alleged child abuser, Raymond Buckley, was long.

Kincaid grants that some people perpetrate horrendous deeds against children, that it is indisputable that "children are sometimes murdered, sometimes kidnapped, sometimes raped and forced to submit in various ways to the needs of others without

regard to their own" (360). But he also believes that most of us "ladle massive doses of pain into our children, partly in obedience to purblind cultural prescriptions and partly for our own pleasures, some of which are more subtle but no less terrible than the sexual." Thus, Kincaid implicates mainstream society in the abuse of children and of pedophiles by pointing to the disparity between where the abuse really occurs and where we tell our kids it will occur. According to the favored narrative, the pedophiles lurk "out there," while in the untold narrative, parents, aunts, uncles and family friends engage in a spectrum of violent actions against children, spanning subtly pleasurable spanking to more clearly incestuous or otherwise oppressive sexual behavior.

Discursive abuse most interests Kincaid and best lends itself to his method of linguistic play. Telling children inaccurate cautionary tales strikes him as most discordant with the alleged love we have for children. Germane to Kincaid's deconstructionist approach is the requirement for a metaphorical discourse upon which to perform his analyses. Thus verbal representations — such as those that surround pedophiles — are useful, while stark, verbally garbled or otherwise muted recollections of events offer little to work with. Perhaps this book tends to privilege pedophiles as the main victims and to understate the fact that more than a few children really do suffer long-term effects from behavior that might be attributed, probably inaccurately, to pedophiles. Thus, the topics engaged in this book invite a sustained study of the child-as-victim that would be a startling "other" to Kincaid's witty, well researched, thoughtfully organized, carefully indexed, and courageously uncompromising book.

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Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory. By Wendell V. Harris. Reference Sources for the Social Sciences and Humanities 12. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992. Pp. 456. \$75.00. 0-313-25932-1

Wendell V. Harris's *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory* is an excellent guide to the ideas informing contem-