



Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture

James Kincaid

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The question "What is a child?" is at the heart of the world the Victorians made. Throughout the 19th century, there developed an image of the child as a symbol of purity, innocence and asexuality. Yet at the same time, the child could be a figure of fantasy, obsession, and suppressed desires, as in the case of Lewis Carroll's Alice or James Barrie's Peter Pan. This image of the child, as both pure and strangely erotic, is part of the mythology of Victorian culture. Built on a decade of research into literary, medical, cultural, and legal materials, "Child-Loving" traces the growth of Victorian - and modern - concepts of the body, the child, sexuality, and the stories we tell about them. The Victorians, Kincaid argues, viewed children in ways that seem to us now both complex and bizarre. But do we fare better today? While our culture recoils from the horror of child molestation, we offer children's bodies as spectacles in the media, giving children an erotic attention we wish to deny. "Child-Loving" writes a additional chapter in the history of the Victorian era.

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