THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY

FRENCH POETRY

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Romance Languages in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama

UNIVERSITY, ALABAMA

1973
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to Dr. Robert T. Cargo for his interest and invaluable guidance in the writing of this study. I have also greatly appreciated the thoughtful attention and beneficial suggestions of Dr. C. Beaumont Wicks. In addition, the assistance of Dr. Emmett Parker as well as that of the other members of the Romance Languages faculty has been of great value. Most especially I would like to express my deep gratitude to my family and friends for their constant assistance, encouragement, and concern.
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INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Procedure

There are many who would say with Justin O'Brien that "the child entered French literature during the Romantic period." While this is not entirely true, as will be shown by our brief survey of children in French poetry before the nineteenth century, it is certainly valid to say that the nineteenth century saw more children in the works of more poets than any previous century had ever witnessed. Indeed, Georges Renard remarks, "One could well call it [the nineteenth century] 'the century of the child,' so great a place has the child held in its preoccupations and its existence. [. . .] I know of none, indeed, which has been more merciful, and more severe towards him; never before was he so brooded over, so cherished, so spoiled; never before was he so exploited, so mistreated, so martyred."  

It has been our desire to explore how this description of the place of the child in nineteenth-century literature in general applies to French poetry in particular. A certain amount of investigation has already been done in this area: investigation of a general nature in Jean Calvet's L'Enfant dans la littérature française and investigation of a specific nature in Joseph
Petrus Christian de Boer's *Victor Hugo et l'enfant* and Joan Evans' "The Theme of Childhood in Baudelaire." None of these investigations, however, has answered questions which we consider significant: What are the major themes in nineteenth-century French poetry about children? How is the child employed by the poets to illustrate these themes? Can any pattern of change or development be detected in this poetry as it evolves from the beginning to the latter part of the century?

It has been the purpose of this study to find answers to these questions, i.e., to discover the major themes in nineteenth-century French verse and prose poetry dealing with children, to compare and contrast the various treatments of a particular theme, to investigate the role of the child in the poems, and to determine whether a pattern of change or development in this poetry does exist. It should be emphasized that it is not the purpose of this study to reveal any findings about children themselves; rather, we will examine how children have been viewed by the poets, as well as how they have been viewed in specific situations and under specific conditions.

Such an examination must be preceded by a definition of the term *child* as it appears in this study. It should be stressed that we have not allowed definition to include description, since an entire chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the nature of the child as described by various poets. We have therefore confined our definition of the child to the establishment of an age limit.

To decide exactly what age limits to place on childhood is
they do not agree upon an exact age for the onset of puberty. Some, like Elizabeth Hurlock, would place puberty in the thirteenth year for girls and the fourteenth year for boys. Others, among whom are those influenced by the teachings of Freud, would favor twelve as the age "when the energy of the sexual instinct is greatly augmented by physiological changes in the reproductive system." In light of these various influences, we will consider in this study that the child is any individual between the fetal stage and puberty, and we will establish puberty as beginning with the thirteenth year.

With such definite limits being assigned to childhood for the purpose of this investigation, it should be noted here that it has not always been possible to determine the exact age of a child in a particular poem. Sometimes a specific age is mentioned in the poetry; more often, it is not. In such cases, we have necessarily made a subjective judgment about the pertinence of the poem to this study, based upon whether we consider the "child" in the poem to fall within the age limits established in the above definition.

Although the stated or assumed age of the child has been the primary criterion for the selection of the poems to be included in this study, it should be emphasized that further selectivity has of necessity been exercised in deciding which of the poems that deal with children are pertinent to this investigation. Poems in which the child plays an important role but which fail to reflect the major themes that will form our chapters, have been eliminated; while interesting and perhaps even revealing as to the poet, they did not seem to contribute significantly to the overall findings of the
Moreover, many poems which mention children or childhood but do not deal with them significantly, have not been utilized, since this investigation does not intend to be a mere listing of the many mentions of these words in nineteenth-century French poetry. When the child is not a major figure in a poem, quotations have been used only when they have been deemed to be a meaningful contribution to this study.

It should be further stated that the poems selected are not primarily for children but about children. Moreover, many of the poems—indeed most—are not written from the child's point of view but from that of the poet and observer. This investigation, therefore, intends to reveal not so much the thoughts of children (although a few notable poems such as several by Rimbaud do so), but observations on children or childhood that have been made by nineteenth-century French poets.

Perhaps what is meant by "nineteenth-century French poets" should be clarified. Obviously the work of every writer of poetry in nineteenth-century France has not been consulted; in this sense, the present study is not comprehensive. For reasons of time and space, a certain amount of selectivity has been necessary from the beginning of the investigation. We have attempted to include all the major poets, all the important minor poets, and some of the less important minor poets. Another problem has been deciding which poets fell within the limits of the nineteenth century. André Chénier has been chosen as the earliest poet whose works will be here considered. Although actually he lived and wrote in
the late eighteenth century, he is not only the single major poet at that time but also the only poet to write significant poems about children and he has, therefore, been chosen as a transition from Rousseau, whom critics consider the sire of all the children in nineteenth-century French literature. As for those writers who composed poetry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in general their works were included only when they were written before the turn of the century. Of course, such a selection of poets must necessarily be as subjective as has been the selection of poems in many cases.

Let us now turn our attention to the treatment and organization of the poems selected. The poems discussed will not receive equal attention. Some poems, because of their complexities, seem to require more explanation and interpretation than others and will be therefore treated at greater length. The organization of the poems selected has been a major task in the presentation of this study. The poems are not arranged chronologically by poets, nor even by poetic schools, for such an organization has not been found to be meaningful in this investigation. The writers in a particular school of poetry did not always confine themselves to a particular subject or manner of viewing the child (although this did happen occasionally and will be mentioned in the conclusion). Moreover, the poems are not arranged chronologically according to the ages of the children treated. Indeed, this would have been an impossible task since, as previously stated, many poems deal with children who have been assigned no specific age or even age range.
Instead of any chronological arrangement, then, the method of organization to be employed will be the grouping of the poems under various categories according to the themes of the poems to be considered. These categories will form the chapters of the present work. The poems included within the chapters will be organized into sub-categories when appropriate.

This particular method of organization has seemed to us a logical one, for while reading the poems, we found it increasingly clear that they could be arranged into several groups according to subject matter. For example, we discovered a number of poems written about a child's death or about that of a child's loved one, about a child's experience with an aspect of religion, about a child's effect upon an adult. When it was seen that these groups were rather limited in number, we decided that this was a significant enough discovery to merit being the basis for the organization of our study. Occasionally a poem has more than one theme and is therefore placed under more than one category. Moreover, sometimes the assignment of a poem to a particular category has been somewhat arbitrary, as in the case of the inclusion of Mallarmé's "A La Nue accablante tu" in the category Death. Poems, like children, are by nature elusive; therefore, categorizing them can be a frequently problematic, always subjective task.

The first category to be discussed will be the one in which the child is described by the poets: the nature of childhood. These poems present various characteristics of children and qualities of childhood itself which have been observed by nineteenth-century
French poets. This chapter will be followed by a consideration of those poems which deal with the child in the presence of two irrevocable phenomena—birth and death. In a study stressing chronology, these phenomena would not be grouped together. Birth would logically be placed at the beginning while death would be located at the end of the work. Here, however, because the death of the child under discussion may occur in infancy or in the twelfth year and because the poems cannot be arranged according to the age of the child, it seems advisable to group these two subjects together. It should be mentioned that not every poem concerning death deals with the death of the child involved; sometimes it treats the death of someone he loves and the resulting impact on the child.

The third category is that of the child and his environment. Under this heading will be discussed the poems treating education, religion, nature, poverty, and toys, games, and activities. It must be emphasized that these particular categories were selected not because they are comprehensive ones, but because they are the major ones dealt with in nineteenth-century French poetry treating the child.

The next chapter will examine the child and his sexual awareness. Although Rimbaud contributed more than any other poet to this chapter, he is by no means the only nineteenth-century French writer to note in poetry that sexual awareness is a significant factor in the development of a child. As far as actual number of poems, this chapter represents the smallest. In our opinion,
however, some of these poems are among the most fascinating and com-
plex of those to be considered in this work, and will therefore re-
ceive a somewhat more lengthy treatment than most of the other poems
examined.

Following the chapter treating poems about a child's sexual
awareness, this study will consider the child and the adult world.
There are three sub-categories to be treated. First of all, it
happens that several poets wrote poems on the inclinations of a
child toward a particular vocation. Then there were those who wrote
about the ways in which the child may affect an adult or adults.
Finally, there were many poets who wrote nostalgically of their own
childhood.

It has seemed advisable to begin with the poems treating
the general nature of childhood, and then to move to those treating
the specific subjects. The first of these subjects would seem to
be, logically, that of birth coupled in this particular study, as
discussed above, with that of death. Next, the poems treating the
child and his environment are discussed, for almost immediately
after birth the child begins to interact with what surrounds him.
Of course, the environment discussed includes only those elements
recurrent in the works of nineteenth-century French poets. As the
child grows older, he gains in sexual awareness, so those poems re-
lating to this awareness follow the poems relating to the child's
environment. Finally, we will consider the child and his relation-
ship to the adult world. First will be those poems on the subject
of the vocation toward which the child shows inclinations, for we
are still considering only an individual under thirteen. Next,
however, we will look at those poems treating the child's effect on an adult or adults. These poems will mark a transition in emphasis from the child alone to both the child and the adult. Finally will appear in the poems the adult who is looking back nostalgically to the time of his childhood. Thus there has been a logical progression in categories if not in the ages of specific children treated.

The chapters examining categories will be preceded by a brief survey of the treatment of children in French poetry before the nineteenth century in order to provide some sense of continuity with the past, and yet to show that it is indeed true that the nineteenth century was "the century of the child." In addition, after the chapters examining categories, we will present the conclusions we have drawn from this investigation.

At this time, we would like to express our particular appreciation to four writers whose works have been especially helpful in the preparation of this study: Jean Calvet, L'Enfant dans la littérature française; Joan Evans, "The Theme of Childhood in Baudelaire"; James Tedder, "The French Novel of Palingenesis: The Child's Point of View as a Novelistic Technique"; and Joseph de Boer, Victor Hugo et l'enfant.
A Brief Survey of Children in French Poetry
Prior to the Nineteenth Century

In the first part of this Introduction, we mentioned Justin O'Brien's statement that "the child entered French literature during the Romantic period." Maurice Souriau has made a similar observation in his *Histoire du romantisme en France*: "Nul avant Hugo n'avait chanté le tout petit," and "jusqu'à lui nos poètes semblent tous de vieux célibataires." There have not been numerous studies made which would indicate the contrary. One particular investigation, however, that by Jean Calvet in *L'Enfant dans la littérature française*, has seemed to us important enough to merit being considered as conclusive evidence that O'Brien's statement and those of Souriau need considerable qualification. We shall rely heavily on Calvet's work in attempting to present a survey of children in poetry before the nineteenth century in order to disprove the statements of O'Brien and Souriau. In addition, we have also been greatly aided by James Tedder's study of children in the modern novel and by U. T. Holmes's *History of Old French Literature*. It should be stated at the outset that in this survey we cannot hope to be comprehensive, for no doubt any period in French literature could be examined in detail for children in its poetry and the results might form an entire book. Neither do we intend to make critical judgments about the poems presented in this survey, for limited readings of early texts would make this task impossible. We have, therefore,
presented only a brief summary of the pertinent poetry since we merely wish to demonstrate, by pointing out representative poems treating children before the nineteenth century, the truth of Tedder's statement that the vast number of children in modern literature have not sprung "Athena-like from the intellects of Hugo and his fellow members of the Génacle."\(^{13}\)

Indeed, the origins of an interest in the child are far removed from the time of Hugo. Calvet remarks: "L'enfant n'a vraiment compté parmi les hommes que depuis que le Fils de Dieu a pris la forme d'un petit enfant comme les autres et est né d'une femme, à minuit, dans une étable, entre le bœuf et l'âne. A partir de ce jour, l'enfant est devenu un petit être sacré."\(^{14}\) According to Calvet, then, an interest in the child as "un petit être sacré" has its roots in the Christian religion. Moreover, Calvet concludes: "Essentiellement, l'art qui glorifie l'enfant est un art chrétien."\(^{15}\) Certainly this statement applies to two extremely important literary works at the very beginning of French literature. The first piece is the "Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie," probably written around 882. This séquence, the earliest extant literary work in the vernacular, was intended to be sung in mass on December 10, the feast day of Saint Eulalia. The piece tells the story of the "buona pulcella," Eulalia, who dies as a martyr at the age of twelve. Interestingly enough, there is a nineteenth-century poem based on this medieval incident, "Sainte Eulalie de Méride" by Vielé-Griffin, which we will discuss in Chapter II.

The second important early French literary text dealing
with a child is the \textit{Vie de Saint Alexis}, composed about 1040. While we are not told in detail of this holy man's childhood, we do know that he was born to a previously childless couple, Eufemien and his wife, in answer to their prayers and that he was well educated:

\begin{verbatim}
Fud baptizet, si out num Alexis.
Ki lui portat, suef le fist murrir;
Puis ad escole li bons pedre le mist:
Tant aprist letres que bien en fut guarnit.
Puis vait li emfes l'emperethur servir.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{verbatim}

We can assume his childhood to be saintly in that it must have been a logical link with his more saintly manhood. Here, then, we may have an example of Calvet's affirmation that medieval literature is not generally interested in the puerile nature of the child, for these writers believe that "l'enfant est un avenir et la seule chose qui compte en lui, c'est l'avenir qui essaye de s'affirmer."\textsuperscript{17}

If we accept Calvet's idea, we can see that the reason some of the composers of epics wanted to treat their heroes' childhood was in order to present the origins of these heroes' noble and courageous adult lives. It is important to realize, however, that this was done only in retrospect; the epic \textit{Enfances} all postdate the epics treating adult heroes.

The interest in the childhood of epic heroes can be seen in all cycles of the epic. In the \textit{Geste du Roi}, for example, the life of the young Charlemagne is examined. Because a servant girl impersonates for a time Charlemagne's mother, Berthe "aus grans pies," the former's illegitimate children humiliate the boy Charles at every opportunity and force him to serve them. One day, however, showing the nobility which will one day make him emperor, Charles brings to
his stepbrothers a roasted peacock, but instead of serving their plates, he throws the meat in the face of one of his tormentors, whom he then wounds with his skewer. After this episode Charles escapes and, ironically, enters into the service of the Sarracins.  

Examples of the interest in the childhood of heroes can also be found in the *Geste de Garin de Monglame*. For example, in the *Enfances Guillaume*, Aimeri and his wife have seven male children of whom the four oldest have been invited to stay six years in the court of Charlemagne in order to become knights. The youngest of the four, the twelve-year-old Guillaume, refuses to serve even the great emperor and declares his intention to set out on his own and not to return until he has made enough conquests to be followed by three thousand men.  

This epic and others prove that the child is indeed father of the man and this very fact seems to be the sole reason for interest in the childhood of an epic hero.

In addition, there are children in the *Geste de Doon de Mayence*, or the rebellious vassal cycle as it is often called. Here is found the story of the children of the Count de Mayence, who has vanished. The traitor Master Saloman, in hopes of gaining control of the inheritance, takes the three boys out on a boat with the intention of killing them. He throws the four year old into the sea and ties a rock around the neck of the second boy, but before the traitor can cause further harm, he is stabbed by the eight-year-old Doon de Mayence. Finally this brave boy alone survives and is washed by a storm onto a shore.

Besides the three major cycles of the *chansons de geste*,

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there are also some miscellaneous epic poems to be found in early French literature. Among these, in the Geste de Bloye, is Amis et Amiles. In this poem one of two friends is stricken with leprosy for having committed a sin and he can be cured only by bathing in the blood of his friend's children. After the leper is healed in this manner, God restores the children to life.21

Another poem in a miscellaneous chanson de geste is Aiol et Mirabel, belonging to the Geste de Saint Gilles. Here we are told of the child, Aiol, the sole consolation of his parents, Elie and Avisse, who are in disgrace and are living in the depths of the woods. The poem relates the boy's education: Elie teaches him about chivalrous exploits; Avisse teaches him to be good and pious; a hermit teaches him Latin and astronomy. The child then prepares to leave the forest in search of adventure.22

Among the epics found in the twelfth century are the Crusade epics, from one of which is the Naissance du Chevalier au cygne. In this poem, Elioxe, wife of a king of Hungary, gives birth to six sons and a daughter at one time, and she dies. The evil grandmother of the children orders them killed by her servant, but the latter leaves the children instead with a hermit in the woods. Many years later, the grandmother recognizes the children by the gold chains around their necks. She orders the chains removed from the boys and the boys are then forced to assume the form of swans. Only later is the situation somewhat resolved when the father learns of the grandmother's treachery and forces her to give up all the chains except one which she has already used in the repair of a gold basin. All but one of the boys then reassume their human forms.23
In addition to these discussed, Tedder cites other works which present the youthful exploits of well-known heroes: the Enfances Roland in the Geste du Roi cycle; the Enfances Vivien in the Geste de Garin de Monglane cycle; the Enfances Godefray in the Chevalier au cygne cycle; the Enfances Hector, a continuation of the Roman d'Hector in the Matièrè de Rome; the thirteenth-century Enfances Ogier, a continuation of Ogier le Danois.  

Besides the epics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, children can also be found in the Matièrè de Bretagne. Marie de France, for example, treats them in three of her lais, Yonec, Fresne, and Milon. In Yonec, a jealously guarded lady is often visited by her lover who is able to assume the form of a bird. A trap is set for the lover by the lady's husband and the lover is slain. The lady has been left with child, however, and she gives birth to a boy who later becomes a noble knight and avenges his father. In Fresne, a lady accuses her neighbor of adultery because the latter has twin sons. Shortly thereafter the accuser is herself delivered of twin daughters. Fearing dishonor, she allows a maiden in her household to take away one of the infant girls and to leave her in an ash tree outside of an abbey. The baby is found and raised by the abbess as her own niece. In Milon, a maiden sends her illegitimate child to be raised by her wealthy sister. Tedder makes an interesting observation about the children in the lais of Marie de France: "It is notable that the child is not so important in itself as in what it is to become: an avenger, a bride, an opponent, etc."
A second poet included in the Matière de Bretagne is Chrétien de Troyes. Tedder points out that in Chrétien's Philomena, a medieval version of a Greek legend, is found the story of a child who is slaughtered, cooked, and served to his father at the table. 

Another work generally ascribed to Chrétien is the Guillaume d'Angleterre. In this adventure romance, the Queen of England, Graciene, who is with child, flees with her husband, King William, after a voice from heaven bids them to do so. On the way, she gives birth to twin boys who later are separated from their father and brought up first by a tanner, then by the King of Quatenasse.

More significant than the child in Philomena and the children in Guillaume d'Angleterre, however, is the child in Chrétien's Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal. Let us consider in detail Chrétien's treatment of this child in order to demonstrate what we have found to be generally true of medieval literature: the child speaks and behaves as if he were an adult. Indeed, Lamar Janney states:

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature that distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society, this awareness was lacking.

Medieval literature, therefore, seems incapable of presenting children as children. They appear universally as tiny adults. This is true not only of their physical appearance but more startlingly of their intelligences and emotions, as we shall see in Perceval. In one episode of this work we see the two daughters of Tiebaut at a tournament. The older girl, who is selfish and quarrelsome, has
caused the tournament, for she wants her fiancé, Melians de Lis, to prove himself worthy of her. In the tower from which the two view the action of the tournament, the younger girl, "qui n'estoit folle ne malvaise," observing Gauvin, says that there is one man present who is even "plus bel" than Melians de Lis. These words anger the older sister to such an extent that she soon slaps the child forcefully:

Lors le fiert si que toz ses dois
Li a ens el vis seelez.30

Later the child appeals to Gauvin to defend her honor:

Au partir vit de l'autre part
Sa petite fille venant,
Qui par le jambe main tenant
Monseignor Gavain enbracha
Et dist: "Biax sire, entendez cha,
Qu'a vos clamer me sui venue
De ma seror qui m'a batue,
Si m'en faites droit, s'il vos plaist."

Et la demoiselle le tire
Et dist: "A vos di je, biax sire,
Qu'a vos de ma seror me claim,
Que je n'ai chiere ne ne l'aim,
Car por vous m'a hui fait grant honte."

In this passage, if it were not for the fact that she embraces Gauvin by the leg, we would not suspect that this girl is indeed a child. Her reaction to the affront by her sister is that of a peer and rival, not that of a child, for the former would certainly ask a knight to defend her honor, while the latter might well run to her father to seek protection and satisfaction. This maiden seems, moreover, so sophisticated for her age that Gauvin is impressed by her speech and insists on coming to her aid:

Et mesire Gavains li {au père de l'enfant} dist:
"Sire, se Damedieux m'ait,
Ains a trop bone enfance dite
Come pucele si petite,
Ne ja ne l'en refuserai,
Mais quant li plaist, demain serai
Une piece ses chevaliers."

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The little girl again acts like a lady when she presents Gauvin with her sleeve for him to wear as a token. As would be customary for ladies in such a situation, she tells him to wear it "por la moie amor":

Contre monseignor Gavain saut  
La pucelle et dist: "Diez vos salt  
Et doinst honor hui en cest jor.  
Mais portés por la moie amor  
Ceste mance que je tien chi."

We are able to see, therefore, that this girl, like most children in medieval literature and art as well, speaks and behaves as a miniature adult.

The thirteenth century, like the twelfth, mentions children in its poetry. Three examples will testify to this. First let us consider Li Romans de Dolopathos, translated into French in 1210. In this work a king's son has been warned not to speak even to defend himself until his tutor Vergil appears to save him. When a series of cruel circumstances causes him to be condemned to death, seven sages in turn appear on seven consecutive days. Each tells a story, on the condition that the boy's life be spared for that day. Finally Vergil appears, the boy's innocence is proved, and he is freed. A similar version of this story may be found in the Estoire des sept sages at the end of the twelfth century.31

Two other thirteenth century works should be mentioned. In the first, Le Dit l'empereur Constant, an emperor commands that the boy, Constant, be slain, for the child has been predicted to be the emperor's successor. The child is not slain but is abandoned to die. Having been spared, the boy is raised by a physician and
Finally, there is the poem *Octavian*. In this piece, the twin sons of the Emperor of Rome are separated; one is stolen by an ape, the other by a lion. The first child is rescued and grows up as a butcher's son in Paris, while the second, Octavian, is raised by the lion.

In the fifteenth century there appears one of the many references to that famous French child, Jeanne d'Arc. In this case, the mention is made in poetry by Christine de Pisan in her *Dité en l'honneur de Jeanne d'Arc*. A little later appears François Villon, who in his *Grand Testament* expresses nostalgia for his "jeunesse folle" as well as regret for having wasted so much of it by being "le mauvais enfant" who constantly played hookey from school.

Such nostalgia for childhood will be seen frequently in nineteenth-century French poetry, though the bitter remorse of Villon is generally lacking. Villon also wrote "Epître à Marie D'Orléans," a poem commemorating the birth in 1457 of the daughter of the Duc d'Orléans.

As for the sixteenth century, the young giants in Rabelais' *Pantagruel* and the young Montaigne as he depicts himself in his *Essais* are familiar prose references to children, but in the poetry there is only an occasional mention of children. Sometimes this mention will be made in a *pièce de circonstances*, as in the case of "Chant sur la naissance de Jan, second fils de l'auteur" by Charles Fontaine. Here the poet welcomes his son into the world:

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Enfant petit, petit et bel enfant,
Masle bien fait, chef d'oeuvre de ton père,
Enfant petit en beauté triomphant,
La grande liesse et joye de ta mère.
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Pierre de Ronsard also wrote a poem commemorating a child's birth. In "Sur La Naissance du Duc de Beaumont, fils aîné du Duc de Vendosme et Roy de Navarre," he wishes for the infant honor and happiness:

\begin{verbatim}
Ce jour nasquit l'héritier de mon maître:
    File-luy, Parque, un beau filet d'honneur,
Puis aille au Ciel de Nectar se repaistre.37
\end{verbatim}

In addition to mentioning a historical child, Ronsard also wrote of the mythological child Hercules. He does so in "Audit S. Duc de Beaumont" ("Jeune Herculin, qui dês le ventre saint / Fus destine pour le commun service"28) and in "A Luy-mesme" ("Le jeune Hercule au berceau combatit / Les deux serpens qui le vouloient occire"39).

Ronsard was not alone in portraying a mythological child, for Philippe Desportes did so as well. In the first sonnet of Les Amours d'Hippolyte he praises the courage of Icarus, "le jeune audacieux / Qui pour voler au Ciel eut assez de courage":

\begin{verbatim}
Icy tomba son corps degarni de plumage
Laissant tous braves coeurs de sa cheutte envieux.

Il mourut poursuivant une haute aventure,
    Le Ciel fut son désir, la Mer sa sepulture:
Est-il plus beau dessein, ou plus riche tombeau?40
\end{verbatim}

Desportes also mentions in the second sonnet from the same volume the son of Venus, Cupid, whom the poet characterizes as "dangereux" like his mother:

\begin{verbatim}
Le fils est dangereux, dangereuse est la mère.41
\end{verbatim}

The depiction of the child in Renaissance poetry is quite often found in the form of an image. This can be seen more than once in the work of Agrippa D'Aubigné. Let us consider as an example the poet's "Miseres" from Les Tragiques in which he uses twin children
fighting at their mother's breast as a metaphor for the struggles in France between the Catholics (whom Esau represents in the poem) and the Protestants (whom Jacob represents):

Je veux peindre la France une mere affligee,
Qui est entre ses bras de deux enfans chargee.
Le plus fort, orgueilleux, empoigne les deux bouts
Des tetins nourriciers; puis, a force de coups
D'ongles, de poings, de pieds, il brise le partage
Dont nature donoit a son besson l'usage;
Ce volleur acharne, cet Esau malheureux
Fait degast du doux laict qui doit nourrir les deux,
Si que, pour arracher a son frere la vie,
Il mesprise la sienne et n'en a plus d'envie.
Mais son Jacob, pressé d'avoir jeunesse meshui,
Ayant dompte longtemps en son cœu son ennui,
A la fin se defend, et sa juste colere
Rend a l'autre un combat dont le champ est la mere. 42

François de Malherbe, who bridges the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, also mentions children in his work. In "Les Larmes de Sainct-Pierre" the principal figure envies "la troupe innocente" (the children whom Herod ordered massacred at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ) because, unlike himself, they died unblemished by sin:

Que je porte d'envie à la troupe innocente
De ceux qui, massacrez d'une main violente,
Veirent des le matin leur beau jour accourcy!
Le fer qui les tua leur donna ceste grace,
Que si de faire bien ils n'eurent pas l'espace,
Ils n'eurent pas le temps de faire mal aussi. 43

It is also Malherbe who wrote perhaps the most famous poetical reference of its time to a child, "Consolation à Monsieur Du Perier":

Ta douleur, Du Perier, sera donc eternelle,
Et les tristes discours
Que te met en l'esprit l'amitié paternelle
L'augmenteront toujours!

Le malheur de ta fille au tombeau descendu
Par un commun trespas,
Est-ce quelque dedale où ta raison perdue
Ne se retrouve pas?

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Although the child is rarely mentioned in seventeenth-century French poetry, there are several instances in which he is treated in the fables of Jean de La Fontaine. In "L'Enfant et le maître d'école," a child, who falls into the Seine, is rescued by a schoolmaster who first lectures the boy for "sa sottise." The poet, disapproving of such pedantry, observes:

He! mon ami, tire-moi de danger:
Tu feras après ta harangue.  

The three sons, who learn the lesson of strength being in union, in "Le Vieillard et ses enfants" may well be older than twelve. We can be fairly certain, however, that the child in "La Fortune et le jeune enfant" is not yet an adolescent, for he is characterized as "un enfant alors dans ses classes" and "un écolier." In this fable, the boy, dozing on the edge of a well, is saved from falling into it by "la Fortune." She reminds him that, while Fortune is always blamed for the bad occurrences of life, she is often responsible for providential occurrences as well. Finally, in "L'Ecolier, le pédant, et le maître d'un jardin," La Fontaine again attacks pedantry. He pictures a scholar lecturing a boy for stealing fruit. The pedant, citing Virgil and Cicero, becomes so enamoured with his own ceaseless eloquence, that he does not notice that the boy and his cohorts are pillaging "en cent lieux le jardin."
Poetry of the eighteenth century is even more barren of references to children than is that of the seventeenth century.

In fact, only after the time of Rousseau does the situation change. Indeed, as Calvet so aptly paraphrases, "Enfin J.-J. Rousseau vint et tout changea de face." Although not a poet himself, this influential French writer has made such an impact on the subject of children in literature that he deserves our attention. For Rousseau, the governing principle, the hinge of his whole system, is the child; for since nature is good and since the child is fresh from the hands of nature and as yet untainted by contact with a corrupt humanity, the child is also entirely good. Rousseau, who created Emile, perhaps the most famous child in French literature, made the French public realize for the first time that "the child is important in himself and not as a diminutive adult." There are many spiritual affinities between literary descendants of Rousseau and the Middle Ages, not the least of which is the presence of children in each age. There is this great difference, however, that after Rousseau we are interested not only in what the child will become, but also and especially in what he is.

Thanks to Rousseau, we are now aware that

l'enfant n'est pas un homme en herbe, c'est un être complet en lui-même et différent de nous. Il ne perçoit pas, il ne sent pas, il ne juge pas comme nous; au vocabulaire que nous lui imposons, il donne un sens qui correspond à sa constitution spéciale, non à notre dictionnaire.

That is to say, we know now that childhood has a very special and exclusive nature all its own.
NOTES


4 Calvet, L'Enfant dans la littérature française, I, II. It should be stated that while Calvet's study was most interesting and helpful, its scope was limited, for it strongly emphasized such poets as Aicard and Laprade while totally omitting poets of much greater importance, such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud.


7 Tedder, p. viii.


10These poems represent only a negligible percentage of all the poems considered.


12This study will consider the term poetry rather broadly, including, for example, medieval epics, the lais of Marie de France, and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, but will not apply the term to such poetical drama as that of Racine.


14Calvet, I, ix.

15Ibid.


17Calvet, I, 13.

18Ibid., p. 22.

19Ibid., pp. 24-26.

20Ibid., pp. 20-21.


22Calvet, I, 19-20.

23Ibid., p. 125.

24Tedder, p. 11.

25Holmes, p. 265, points out that such a belief that multiple births indicate adultery can also be seen in Elioxe and in Octavian.
26. Tedder, p. 5.

27. Ibid.


29. Lamar Janney, Childhood in English Non-Dramatic Literature from 1557 to 1798 (Greitswald: Abel, 1925), p. 128.


32. Ibid., p. 227.

33. Ibid.


35. Ibid., pp. 144-45.


38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., p. 316.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 412.

43. Ibid., p. 518.

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16. Ibid., pp. 108-09.

17. Ibid., p. 124.

18. Ibid., pp. 221-22.


20. Ibid.


22. Calvet, II, 204.
CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF CHILDHOOD

L'Enfant n'est pas, comme on le croit souvent, un homme en miniature. Sa mentalité n'est pas seulement quantitativement différente de la nôtre, mais aussi qualitativement: elle n'est pas seulement moindre, elle est autre.

—Aimé Dupuy

Many if not most nineteenth-century French poets were concerned at one time or another with observing children and with recording their observations in verse of varying degrees of quality. The majority of the poems found throughout this study discuss a particular child or children in relation to a particular situation, phenomenon, or moment, such as birth and death, the environment, a growing sexual awareness, or the adult world. These situations, phenomena, or moments will form the unifying factor for such poems and will serve in our study as the basis for their classification. Unlike the later chapters, however, the present chapter will examine the poems which illustrate various characteristics that the poets involved have judged to be common to all children. While these poems may also at times treat a particular child rather than children in general, it seems obvious from the poems that the poets
intend the characteristics to be considered almost universally applicable to children.

Many nineteenth-century French poets wrote more often about positive qualities in children than negative ones. Yet of no writer, including Victor Hugo as we shall demonstrate, can it be said without qualification as de Boer says of Hugo, "l'enfant n'apparaît au poète que comme l'opposé de tout ce qu'il y a de laid, de triste et de méchant dans les hommes; il n'a voulu voir que l'aspect-ange et non pas les imperfections et les défauts qui, sans rien ôter aux charmes de l'enfance, la font rentrer dans la vie réelle."¹ In fact, quite a few writers recognize in verse that negative qualities in children do exist; moreover, it might be added that we have found some of these poems, especially those by Baudelaire, to be more interesting than many of the poems emphasizing the more commendable qualities of children. It will be the purpose of this chapter to discuss both types of qualities observed by our poets—the positive and the negative.
The Positive Nature of Childhood

Surely Baudelaire's line "Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants" from "Correspondances" is one of the most evocative lines ever written on the subject of children, for it arouses not only the mind but the very senses as well. It elicits in the reader a myriad of recollections which call forth freshness, elusiveness, purity, to name only a few. Like all good poetry, the line suggests much more than it states.

Nevertheless, we will attempt to state precisely and in detail, the various qualities which, in the minds and verses of nineteenth-century French poets, make children the charming creatures they are. We will first consider the qualities of innocence and purity, which are the characteristics noted by the poets more often than any others.

Rousseau's famous words "Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme" made an immense impression on his literary descendants, the Romantic writers. They understood from Rousseau's statement that what is closest to nature and least "civilized" is most nearly perfect and most nearly divine. They turned their thoughts, therefore, not only to nature herself, but to those whom they believed to be living in a natural, i.e., innocent, state. Such beings, for the Romantics, include medieval man, the humble country peasant, the noble savage, and the child.

Nowhere is Rousseau's idea of the child as the purest and
most divine being on earth better illustrated than in the poetry of the chief of the Romantics, Victor Hugo. For Hugo the child is more than pure and innocent—he is Purity, he is Innocence. Calvet explains that for Hugo "il [l'enfant] représente l'innocence, en qui se complaît le regard de Dieu, et qui reflète la lumière de Dieu. [ . . ] Cette innocence donne des leçons à la méchanceté civilisée [ . . . ] ils sont la part du divin qui traîne à travers notre univers de boue." In order to portray the child's nearness to God, Hugo writes of his own child in "Le Portrait d'une enfant":

On devine à ses yeux, pleins d'une pure flamme,
Qu'au paradis, d'où vient son âme,
Elle a dit un récent adieu.5

This close relationship with heaven implies that the child is pure.

Because of this purity, Hugo sees the child's age as "ce tendre âge d'or" which forms a striking contrast to the "siècles de fer" of civilized and thus corrupted man:

Il est le regard vierge, il est la bouche rose;
On ne sait avec quel ange invisible il cause.
N'avoir pas fait de mal, ô mystère profond!
Tout ce que les meilleurs font sur terre, ou défont,
Ne vaut pas le sourire ignorant et suprême
De l'enfant qui regarde et s'étonne et nous aime.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
L'âge d'or, l'heureux temps de Saturne et de Rhée,
Existe, c'est l'enfance; il est sur terre encor;
Et nos siècles de fer sur ce tendre âge d'or
N'en font pas moins leur bruit de glaives et de haines,
Et l'on entend partout le traînement des chaînes.6

In a later poem, Hugo employs the same effective metaphor of metals when contrasting the child with man:

Tous les hommes sont cuivre et plomb, l'enfance est or.7

Hugo seems to be contrasting here a utilitarian dullness which he equates with man, with an aesthetic lustre which he equates with the child.
The innocence of the child, because he is newly arrived from heaven, is further illustrated in part II of La Pitié suprême:

C'est le nouveau venu de la céleste rive;
On dirait un petit archange éblouissant;
Son pas tremble, et son front ploie ainsi qu'un roseau;
Mais il n'en est pas moins l'innocent du berceau,
Et dans ses beaux yeux clairs où l'amour semble éclore
Il a du paradis toute l'immense aurore.8

There are times in Hugo's poetry when the sheer beauty of the innocent child is emphasized as in "Les Innocents":

Les enfants ont des coeurs faits comme le matin;
Ils ont une innocence étonnée et joyeuse.9

Particularly notable among these times are those in which the poet views a sleeping child. He seems especially touched at such moments by the child's beauty and innocence. A typical expression evoked by such a scene is the following line from "Jeanne endormie":

O suprême beauté de l'enfant innocent!10

Similar feelings are expressed in two other poems by Hugo on the subject of the sleeping child, "XX"11 from Les Feuilles d'automne and a second poem entitled "Jeanne endormie"12 from L'Art d'être grand-père.

These poems comprise only a small portion of Hugo's poems about childhood but they provide an auspicious beginning, for as de Boer remarks, "l'enfance lui doit [à Hugo] les plus beaux chants qu'elle ait jamais inspirés à aucun homme."13 Perhaps Hugo's poems are not the most interesting of all the poems examined on childhood, or the most complex, but their beauty on the whole remains uncontesteable.
Victor Hugo, however, was by no means the only poet, nor even the only Romantic poet, to write of the innocence of the child. Alphonse de Lamartine also discusses this characteristic, notably in his "Hymne de l'enfant à son réveil." When compared with Hugo's seemingly spontaneous and sincere expression, the words of Lamartine in this poem appear to us more stilted and artificial. Perhaps this feeling is due to the fact that the situation is a contrived one: the words are supposed to be those of a child addressing God. The thought, however, is one that we have seen above: the child, because of his innocence, is closer to God; or conversely, because he is closer to God, he is more innocent than man, who has grown away from his original state of purity:

Que faut-il? Prononcer ton nom!
O Dieu! ma bouche balbutie
Ce nom des anges redouté,
Un enfant même est écouté
Dans le choeur qui te glorifie!

On dit qu'il aime à recevoir
Les vœux présentés par l'enfance,
À cause de cette innocence
Que nous avons sans le savoir.\(^\text{14}\)

In a commentary on this poem, Lamartine writes, "On pourrait dans ce genre en faire de bien diverses et de bien meilleures. La poésie de l'enfance n'est pas trouvée.\(^\text{15}\) Celui qui ferait le livre de cantiques des enfants aurait fait un bon et beau livre.\(^\text{15}\) C'est un livre qu'une femme génie devrait tenter; nous y échouerions.\(^\text{15}\)

Almost as in answer to this need, there appeared such a gifted poetess, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, a contemporary of
While her poems lack the sophistication of those of some of the other nineteenth-century French poets, they are the sincere and poignant expressions of a sensitive woman and a loving mother. Like Hugo and Lamartine, she too observes and celebrates in verse the innocence of childhood in several of her poems, including "Un Ruisseau de la Scarpe," and two with the title "Ma Fille." Not infrequently Mme Desbordes-Valmore's poetry is tinged with the sadness that so often accompanies the loss of the innocence she glorifies:

Innocence! innocence! éternité rêvée,
Au bout des temps de pleurs serez-vous retrouvée?  

and

C'est beau ton âge
D'ange et d'enfant.
Voile, ou nuage
Qui te défend
Des folles âmes
Qui font souffrir,
Des tristes flammes,
Qui font Mourir.  

In contrast to the lyrical effusions of Mme Desbordes-Valmore on the subject of children's innocence are the philosophical observations of another poet of the Romantic school, Alfred de Vigny. This poet in his consideration of the idea of innocence utilizes the child, as have many other writers, as a symbol of any being who is unjustly punished for an uncommitted crime. Two examples may illustrate this, the first from the long poem "Hélène" and the second from "Le Mont des Oliviers":

O nous pourrions déjà les entendre crier!
Ces filles, ces enfants, innocentes victimes.
Vos ennemis riant les foualent sous leur pas,
Et leur dernier soupir s'étonne de ses crimes
Que leur âge ne savait pas.
François Coppée, although less intellectual than Vigny, also took into consideration the contrast between the innocence of the child and the evil of the world about him. In his poem "Innocence" he portrays a five-year-old girl, a jailor's daughter, who fills the jail with "éclats de rire et de rayons":

Si chétive, une haleine, une âme,
L'orpheline du porte-clés
Promenait dans la cour infâme;
L'innocence en cheveux bouclés.  

Of course, such a touching vignette drawn by the "poète des humbles" has little in common with the frequently bitter invectives of the aristocratic stoic. There is this bond between Vigny and Coppée, however, that each in his own way recognizes, at least in these two poems, that in a corrupt world the child remains the embodiment of purity.

That the child is indeed the embodiment of purity is a thought echoed in the fluid verse of Paul Verlaine. Consider, for example, the following lines from "Sanctus XIII":

Saint est l'homme au sortir du Bapteme.
Petit enfant humble et ne tétant pas même,
Et si pur alors qu'il est la pureté suprême.  

Yet it is not only at the moment of baptism that the child is pure, for purity is one of the inherent qualities of childhood, or at least of early childhood, as Verlaine remarks in a Christmas prayer entitled "Noel III":

Accordez-nous d'alors renaitre
En pur bébés, nus, sans repaire
This idea that purity is a natural accompaniment of childhood is also seen in "A Mademoiselle Eveline":

Votre âge gai ne connaît
Que l'innocence divine ...
Riez, petite Eveline! 

This "divine innocence" has been emphasized by many of our poets. It is a beautiful quality, and a transient one. One poet who comments on the ephemeral nature of a child's purity is the Romantic Amédée Pommier in his delicate poem, "Ne Touchez Pas A L'Enfant":

La fin, la loyauté, la pudeur, l'innocence,
Sont dans le coeur humain comme une exquise essence;
Que par le moindre choc le flacon soit fêlé,
Le précieux parfum est bien vite enivlé!
Ol laissions à l'enfant sa candeur jeune et fraîche,
.
Qu'on ne saurait frôler sans que tout soit détruit.

Innocence, therefore, like many of the positive qualities which make up the nature of childhood, is fleeting. Another such quality and perhaps an extension of innocence is the charming naïveté with which the child is frequently endowed.

Lamartine wrote two poems which, when taken together, illustrate well the naïveté and guilelessness of a child. In the first poem, "L'Etoile," the poet is inspired by a portrait of his young daughter to write verses extolling her beauty and her childish charms. The second poem, "Réponse," is ostensibly written by the young girl in answer to the praise she has received from her father. She replies that she has been told of the "harmonious" (a perceptive
adjective for Lamartine to have applied to his own poetry) verse in which her father has lauded her, and she continues:

Mais on dit aussi que tes vers
Sont un piège pour mon enfance,
Qu'il faut prolonger l'ignorance
Dont nos premiers ans sont couverts
Et s'embellir sans qu'on y pense.26

Like "Hymne de l'enfant à son réveil," the poem by Lamartine which we have earlier considered, the situation here is also a contrived one: clearly, no young child, not even the daughter of a major poet, could have composed such verse. But this poem seems fresher, more sincere. Perhaps the reason is that in the latter instance, the poet was inspired by his own daughter who obviously delighted him greatly, rather than by an abstract idea of a model child in prayer.

Another poem which treats in a completely different way the naïveté of the child is one by the mid-century poetess, Mme de Pressensé. In "Le Tout Petit Frère," a small girl is proud and happy to have a new baby brother. She watches him with wonder and admiration until without warning he bursts into furious screams. At this point she has second thoughts and utters spontaneously a response which is typical of a child's simplistic view of the world:

On aurait dû faire
Ce tout petit frère
Un peu plus gentil!27

Quite often the quality of naïveté is accompanied by that of credulity. Lamartine, once again, has observed and noted a characteristic of childhood in "Le Dernier Chant du pèlerinage d'Harold":

Ce monde en grandissant a détroné ses dieux,
Comme l'homme qui touche à son adolescence
Brise les vains hochets de sa crédule enfance.28
Fernand Gregh, many decades later, takes note of this same childlike trait in a beautiful poem called "Le Regret," which will be treated at greater length in Chapter V. Here we will point out only the concluding line which expresses the haunting lament of a disillusioned adult:

Qui l'eût cru, qu'on trompait le doux enfant crédule?²⁹

The qualities we have discussed to this point, innocence and its corollaries, naïveté and credulity, produce a common result in the child: they cause him to be unaware of many of life's problems—problems which he will come to know more and more as he gains sophistication and experience. Meanwhile, as several nineteenth-century French poets have recorded, he resides in the proverbial state of bliss. This was seen very early in the century by the author of light popular verse, Pierre-Jean de Béranger. If one were to judge by the majority of his chansons, one would believe him a joyful, carefree man; yet even he views childhood as the only age free from "the storm," the only age when "en vain la foudre gronde." It is an age, therefore, when life should be enjoyed and he advises just that in his poem "L'Orage":

Chers enfants, dansez, dansez!
Votre âge
Echappe à l'orage:
Par l'espoir gaiment bercés,
Dansez, chantez, dansez!³⁰

Soon after Béranger's verse became popular, a Romantic poetess, Mme Amable Tastu, was writing the same thoughts on the unawareness of childhood, but she envisioned Béranger's "storm" as a particular phenomenon: death. In her poem "La Mort," she
mentions various periods of life and she warns that death is always present. It is her opinion that only in childhood is one free from the disturbing knowledge of ubiquitous death:

Sans redouter cette ombre fugitive
Qu'aperçoit seule une mère craintive,
Il rit, bercé d'ignorance et d'espoir;
Son beau matin ne prèvoit point de soir. 31

That the child is blissfully unaware of death is a thought set into verse by Victor Hugo as well. Hugo, however, at the time he composed "A Jeanne" had a personal sentence which was almost as bitter to him as the universal one of death: he was in exile. Like death, exile is also a state of which a child is unaware:

Jeanne, tu ne sais pas ce que c'est que la tombe,
Jeanne, tu ne sais pas ce que c'est que l'exil.

Puisque tu n'as qu'un an, je peux bien tout te dire,
Tu comprends seulement la douceur de ma voix.32

It was a phrase from Hugo, "la jeune fille rieuse," that inspired Théophile Gautier to comment on the joyful unawareness of childhood. Like Hugo, Gautier had a specific and personal situation in mind: he relates the loss of ignorance to the onset of the vicissitudes of love. He tells the girl to whom he writes in "Stances" that she is too young to know of "les molles rêveries," "cet inquiet désir," and "l'insomnie" that accompany love. On the contrary, he says that she knows nothing, "rien que folle gaieté," and he continues:

Votre existence pure et limpide s'écoule
Heureuse d'un bonheur calme et silencieux.33

Evidently, this phenomenon of gaining malaise as one gains awareness
is applicable not only to the poet himself but to others as well, as can be seen in "Les Deux Ages." Once again, Gautier has taken inspiration from a Hugolian phrase, "La petite fille est devenue jeune fille," and this thought reflects the theme of the poem. Here Gautier is contrasting the "bonheur et naïve gaiété" that used to be seen in the girl's eyes with the present state in which her eyes seem to have lost the ability to express these qualities. 34

In his long poem, "Le 28 juillet 1840," Gautier takes the idea which he has expressed in the two preceding poems and gives it a wider application. In this poem he is indicating that when one realizes and accepts responsibility, he abjures the "pur bonheur de l'âge tendre":

L'homme n'est qu'un enfant encore,
Bouche rose, blanche de lait;
Il dort, et sourit sans effroi;
Ne pouvant pas encore comprendre,
Oh! pur bonheur de l'âge tendre,
Qu'il est marqué pour être roi! 35

By the time Gautier wrote this poem in 1850, he had rejected his Romantic tendencies and was turning toward an impersonal, pictorial poetry. No one better exemplifies such a style of poetry than the Parnassian poet José-Maria de Heredia. Like almost all the important poets of the nineteenth century, Heredia was inspired to treat the subject of childhood. In "Nessus" Heredia speaks through the voice of a centaur who feels a great contrast between the time of his childhood when he was "ignorant d'un sort meilleur ou pire," when he was "beau, libre, heureux sous le soleil" and the present time when he feels cursed by physical desire and no longer free and innocent. 36
Thus all of the poets to this point who have written on the subject of the child's unawareness have stressed the idea that with such unawareness goes bliss. Yet there is one French poet in the nineteenth century who does not agree that ignorance always brings bliss. As Francis Jammes sees it, it is possible for ignorance to produce not ecstasy but anguish. To illustrate this belief, he cites the moving story of a little girl who, after having fought with two girls at school, is invited by the latters' father to dine with them. During the meal, the father mentions that there must be some watercress growing by the stream near the little girl's house and that he would appreciate her bringing him some. She avoids him after that until she meets him two weeks later by accident, and in her embarrassment and confusion she promises to bring him the watercress the following day. But the poem ends by stating that she does not know what watercress is.37 Because of the child's humiliation, unawareness, then, is not always completely desirable, but it is most often a significant characteristic of the child.

The humiliation and anguish described above by Jammes are short-lived in the world of childhood. More characteristic of the child as viewed by our poets is laughter and gaiety. This quality is noted not only by Hugo through his close observation of children, but by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Fort as well. Hugo characterizes the age as carefree and happy by saying:

Age enchanteur où l'âme, étrangère à l'envie,
Se prépare en riant aux douleurs de la vie,
Prend son penchant pour guide, et simple en ses transports,
Fait le bien sans orgueil et le mal sans remords!38
Paul Fort in "Le Dit aux enfants" also speaks of children as "gais enfants" and Mallarmé, whose poems are frequently quite complex, uses in "Feuillet d'album" comparatively simple terms to describe the "très naturel et clair rire d'enfant qui charme l'air." It would seem that even the skillful and studied high priest of Symbolism can be moved to express apparently spontaneous feelings when in the presence of childish laughter.

The fact that a child laughs freely does not imply that he cannot feel deeply, for a further quality noted by nineteenth-century French poets is that of sensitivity. Contrary to Mallarmé's poem, "Feuillet d'album," mentioned above, the poem which illustrates his observation that children are extremely sensitive beings is a difficult one. This poem, "Prose pour des Esseintes," speaks of the poet's younger sister Marie who died when Mallarmé was only fifteen. He refers to Marie in the poem as "cette soeur sensée et tendre" and suggests her openness to nature and to life. He is evidently expressing a lament over the loss of sensitivity and of a sense of ecstasy which is seen in the child but not generally in the adult.

Almost the same words applied by Mallarmé to his sister were used more than three-quarters of a century earlier by André Chénier. In his poem "L'Amérique" this poet says:

Je le connais. C'est l'amé d'un enfant.

Un coeur sensible et tendre et jusqu'à la faiblesse.
Mais un esprit de fer [\ldots]

Un coeur tendre et facile, une tête indomptable.

Rather than using such words as "sensible" or "tendre" to indicate sensitivity, Fernand Gregh gives a clearer understanding
of this quality in "Nous Étions Deux Enfants" by telling us how children can be sensitive. The following lines demonstrate a child's appreciation of certain aspects of nature by characterizing his response as "éblouie et comme ivre":

Un nuage, une fleur nous jetaient dans l'extase;  
Notre âme se sentait éblouie et comme ivre,  
Nous devinions qu'il est un mystère de vivre.

Sensitivity does not only mean an openness and an appreciation of clouds and flowers, but also a feeling for the needs of others. Several poets recognized this attribute of charity in the child, and interestingly enough, they all wrote during the Romantic period. We have already mentioned Lamartine's "Hymne de l'enfant à son réveil" in which a child is supposed to be praying. The poem, as we have said, emphasizes the innocence of the child and his ability to be heard by God. This poem also testifies to the charitable nature of a child:

Je veux lui demander sans cesse  
Ce dont les autres ont besoin.

Donne au malade la santé,  
Au mendiant le pain qu'il pleure,  
A l'orphelin une demeure,  
Au prisonnier la liberté.

Yet more than reflecting a charitable side to the child's nature, Lamartine was here attempting to impose upon the child such a quality by giving him a model to follow.

This same situation of a child in prayer is handled very differently by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore in "L'Oreiller d'une petite fille." In her poem, the child is less an abstract model and more a real being. This is accomplished by giving the child
appropriate feelings, such as the fear of wolves and the assurance of security provided by her pillow. This child's prayer is not sophisticated; she is not concerned, like Lamartine's child, with according liberty to prisoners or even food to beggars, but with those children who, because they are poor and orphaned, have no pillow to comfort them:

... j'ai prié Dieu pour tous ces petits anges
Qui n'ont point d'oreiller [• • •]
... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Mets sous l'enfant perdu que la mère abandonne
Un petit oreiller qui la fera dormir.46

Another poetess, writing at approximately the same time, Mme Emile de Girardin also assigns to a child the characteristic of charity in her poem, "La Folle des Champs-Elysées." Here the quality seems again plausible, for the child's feelings result from an incident which could well arouse pity and generosity even in a child. Moreover, the scene portrayed demonstrates not only a child's charity but also his naïveté, which we have established earlier as a recognized quality of childhood. Perhaps it is the addition of this latter quality which contributes to the verisimilitude of Mme de Girardin's poem. In the poem, the poetess is walking in a public garden with her young nephew, waiting for "Alfred." A very sad, poor, and seemingly mad woman approaches the poetess whom Alfred loves. "La folle" has been loved and betrayed by Alfred, and the grief of it has broken her heart and mind. The boy, not comprehending that the sufferings of her mind far surpass those of her body, offers her alms:

Pensant que la misère est le plus grand des maux,
L'enfant qui me suivait, à cette infortunée,
Vint pour donner l'aumône au pauvre destinée.
Car le joyeux enfant, qui veut sécher des pleurs,
Croit qu'un même secours sert à tous les malheurs.47
Victor Hugo also treats the charitable side of a child's nature, and his portrayal is a very credible one. Indeed, the incident he describes in "Jeanne était au pain sec" no doubt actually occurred. The poet relates that his granddaughter Jeanne is being punished "pour un crime quelconque" by being given only dry bread. Her loving grandfather, taking pity on her plight, slips her some jam for the bread. When this is discovered, the family is angry at the poet for having undermined its discipline, and announces that he too deserves to be "au pain sec." At this point Jeanne wishes to return the kindness earlier shown to her:

... Jeanne alors, dans son coin noir,
M'a dit tout bas, levant ses yeux si beaux à voir,
Pleins de l'autorité des douces créatures:
--Eh bien, moi, je t'irai porter des confitures.

A child can be, then, innocent, unaware, joyful, sensitive, and generous. He possesses, moreover, still another attribute due this time to his zest and effervescence: his appetite for life. This characteristic is especially noted, as are so many of the so-called "positive" qualities, by the Romantics. Mme Desbordes-Valmore mentions this idea in her poem, "Un Ruisseau de la Scarpe" when she says:

Oh! quel enfant des blés, le long des chemins verts,
N'a dans ses jeux errants possédé l'univers?

Lamartine, as well, suggests in "A Un Enfant, fille du poète" that the child, being open to life, is more alive than an adult. He says this upon looking at his own daughter and feeling life emanating from this small being:

Géleste fille du poète,
La vie est un hymne à deux voix.
Son front sur le tien se reflète,
Sa lyre chante sous tes doigts.
As always, Hugo is perceptive enough about children to discern in them an appetite for life and to admire them for this quality. In a poem entitled "La Lune," Hugo says of children, "leur rêve c'est le grand" and uses Jeanne's desire for the moon as a symbol of a child's longing for all that which life has to offer. He continues this poem through several divisions, and in the last part speaks again, and even more specifically, of a child's appetite for life:

Ahi l'âme des enfants a de forts appétits,
Certe, et je suis pensif devant cette gourmande
Qui voit un univers dans l'ombre, et le demande.51

The Romantics, however, are not the only poets to observe that the child possesses an almost insatiable appetite for life. This is also recognized by the man whom many would term the greatest of nineteenth-century French poets, Charles Baudelaire. Although it is true that Baudelaire more often views the child as "le petit monstre" than as "le petit ange,"52 it is also true that he is not unaware of children's exuberance and wonder at all of life. Twice in his poetry he praises a child for these attributes. The first time occurs in "Les Petites Vieilles" where he states an interest in and an admiration for old women, whose eyes are like those of young girls:

... les yeux divins de la petite fille
Qui s'étonne et qui rit à tout ce qui reluit.53

Here, as in "Correspondances," the poet has managed to capture in a few words one of the beautiful and wondrous qualities of the child. He does this again in "Le Voyage," which opens with what Martin Turnell calls "one of Baudelaire's finest and most characteristic images"54:

...
Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit,
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit! 

In this superb and provocative poem, which discusses "the tragic disproportion between aspiration and reality," the child's appetite for life is presented as keen and pure, for it has not yet been dulled by the disillusionment and despair which Baudelaire has found to be companions of adulthood.

This very appetite for life may cause the child to become impatient with the restrictions of his age and eager to begin "the voyage" into adulthood and freedom. Such an impatience is exemplified in the life of Rimbaud and such a voyage will be illustrated in the poet's magnificent work, "Le Bateau ivre," which will be discussed in a later chapter. Three other nineteenth-century French poets note this possibility of impatience with childhood, and all three treat it in the same manner. Each presents a more mature figure advising the child not to long for the termination of childhood. Pierre-Jean de Béranger, in "La Jeune Muse," is writing a response to a twelve year old who has addressed to him some couplets she has written. The poet advises her to leave aside such work and enjoy the pleasures of her age, without trying to rush headlong into the future. The same advice is given to a young girl by her guardian angel in Mme Tastu's poem, "L'Ange gardien." Here the child expresses her impatience for the future:

Dans cette vie obscure, à mes regards voilée
Quel destin m'est promis? à quoi suis-je appelée?
Avide d'un espoir qu'à peine j'entrevois,
Mon cœur voudrait franchir plus de jours à la fois! 

The third writer to suggest the child's impatience for adulthood
is Victor Hugo. In his poem, "A Une Jeune Fille," he tells the
girl that she must not be in a hurry to terminate childhood, when
her azure eyes are the "miroir de paix et d'innocence."59

Hugo knew, as do we all, that the age of insouciance is
all too fleeting and that this transience is the most incontestable
quality of childhood. This is the quality of which he writes in his
exquisite poem, "Mes Deux Filles." Here the poet, in a Symbolistic
manner extremely rare in his Romantic poetry, views his two daugh-
ters seated in a garden. Although the girls are momentarily still, the scene is anything but fixed:

Voyez, la grande soeur et la petite soeur
Sont assises au seuil du jardin, et sur elles
Un bouquet d'œilllets blancs aux longues tiges frêles,
Dans une urne de marbre agité par le vent,
Se penche, et les regarde, immobile et vivant,
Et frisonne dans l'ombre, et semble, au bord du vase,
Un vol de papillons arrêté dans l'extase.60

The bouquet of carnations here described may be considered a symbol
of the girls' childhood: graceful, beautiful, and, for a magical
instant, immobile, but ever with the potential for change. The poet has captured a perfect moment, but alas! an ephemeral one.

Nineteenth-century French poets observed, therefore, that
there are many qualities which make up the positive nature of child-
hood. These include innocence, naïveté, credulity, unawareness,
gaiety, sensitivity, charity, an appetite for life, and impatience.
In addition, there is that characteristic which may seem a blessing
to the child and a curse to the adult, the transience of childhood.
In the beginning of the first part of this chapter we presented Joseph de Boer's pronouncement on Victor Hugo. A portion of this quotation stated "il n'a voulu voir que l'enfant-ange et non pas les imperfections et les defauts qui [ . . ] font [l'enfance] rentrer dans la vie reelle." De Boer's opinion notwithstanding, the child is rarely if ever viewed by nineteenth-century French poets, not even Hugo, as merely "un enfant-ange." Indeed, he is frequently depicted as possessing qualities we have termed negative. Some of these qualities may be judged mere "imperfections," as in the case of fear and jealousy, while others, such as cruelty and a propensity for violence, must be considered "faults," with more serious implications.

Let us first examine the "imperfections"—those qualities which are more human than monstrous, but which nonetheless mar the perfection of the child. A child, being human, has fears. Very often these fears are caused by what is to him strange or unknown and what, if he is fortunate, will become known and less frightening as he grows older. Baudelaire's prose poem, "Le Désespoir de la vieille," presents a lonely old woman, whose toothless, balding head resembles that of the infant whom she longs to caress. But the fearful child filling "la maison de ses glapissements" forces her to retire "dans sa solitude éternelle," for she realizes that she causes horror "même aux innocents." The baby evidently does not sense her longing to please, only her strangeness.
Sometimes the unknown which a child fears becomes a very specific phenomenon: darkness. Two nineteenth-century French poets, Musset and Fort, have noted such a fear. Alfred de Musset, himself called the "enfant terrible" of Romanticism, tells in "A Madame B. .." of a child who is afraid at night:

Ainsi, lorsque à l'enfant la vieille salle obscure
Fait peur, il va tout nu décrocher quelque armure;
Il s'enferme, il revient, tout palpitant d'effroi,
Dans sa chambre bien noire et dans son lit bien froid.
Et puis, lorsque au matin le jour vient à paraître,
Il trouve son fantôme aux plis de sa fenêtre,
Voit son arme inutile, il rit et, triomphant,
S'écrie: "Oh! que j'ai peur! Oh! que je suis enfant!"

While perhaps not quite so universal today as the situation presented by Musset, the one related by Paul Fort at the end of the century is an even more credible one. In his series of prose poems entitled "Les Premiers Pas" he goes much further than Musset, for he writes in such a way that the reader not only observes the child's fear but feels it with him. In this particular poem, "Le Puits,"
the child is taking a carafe to the well at night. As he crosses the garden, he fears that he will see Belisaire, the Byzantine general, "ce guerrier sans yeux, à la barbe noire tachée de sang bleu, sur la couverture du cahier aux chiffres." When he at last reaches the well, his lamp goes out and in his fright he breaks the carafe:

Le pauvre petit gars fiévreux, halluciné, tremble de tous ces membres ... il croit entendre une voix! ...
une voix au fond du puits, une ombre qui sanglotte au fond du puits avec une voix.

Un éclair! deux éclairs! deux yeux de sang sous les lilacs; le tonnerre! le tonnerre! un choc d'armure sous les lilacs,—le pauvre petit gars fiévreux, halluciné, voit osciller dans l'herbe l'ombre de Belisaire.63
Badly frightened, the boy races home where he is comforted by his mother, who shows to him and to his brothers and sisters the picture of "ce bon Bélisaire" which makes them all laugh.\textsuperscript{64}

In addition to the darkness the child also fears other aspects of nature. Mme Emile de Girardin observes in "L'Orage" that a child senses and reflects her mother's fear of the storm, but is easily consoled by sleeping in her mother's lap while "l'orage ébranle la maison."\textsuperscript{65} While Mme Girardin notes here that a child may have very real fears, she also suggests that a child can often be easily reassured. Sully-Prudhomme as well sees that nature can frighten the child when he writes in "La Grande Allée":

\begin{quote}
C'est une grande allée, à deux rangs de tilleuls.
Les enfants, en plein jour, n'osent y marcher seuls,
Tant elle est haute, large et sombre.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

To this point we have discussed fears that can occur in almost any child. The Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn, however, presents in "Nuit d'Ukraine" a child's fear under unusual circumstances:

\begin{quote}
Il se traîne, menu, babillard et déloge
d'une branche brandie, un vol d'oiseaux de nuit.
Il regarde le feu se foncer sur le pal,
il entend s'apaiser le cantique de Baal
puis, pris de peur, chancelle et sanglote et s'enfuit.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Fortunately, most children never have to contend with the sight of a human sacrifice on the altar of Baal, but without exception all children experience fear for one reason or another.

In addition, most children also suffer from feelings of jealousy from time to time. It is interesting, however, that of our poets only two discuss this trait, and both of these have chosen the same situation in which to present the child's feeling of jealousy:
both treat a young girl's jealousy of her older sister. The first
of these two poets is André Chénier who writes in "Epigrommes V":

Ah! ce n'est point à moi qu'on s'occupe de plaire
Ma soeur plus tôt que moi dut le jour à ma mère.
Si quelques beaux bergers apportent une fleur
Je vois qu'en me l'offrant ils regardent ma soeur.

Ah! pourquoi n'ai-je encore vu que douze moissons?68

Casimir Delavigne is the second poet to speak of a young girl's
jealousy of her older sister who has admirers, but this poet adds
a saucy warning in the refrain of his poem, "La Ballerine":

Engagez qui vous plaira
Pour danser la tarentelle!
Je suis un enfant, dit-elle;
Mais cet enfant grandira.69

In addition to fear and jealousy, the child has another
imperfection noticed by José-Maria de Heredia: his penchant for
mischief. While never relaxing his skill for the impeccably
chiseled verses on which rests his fame, in "Hortorum Deus"
Heredia seems to be in a somewhat whimsical mood, which is rather
unusual in his precise sonnets. In this poem, a farmer, the "god
of the garden," apprehends some children clandestinely picking
his grapes:

Holà, maudits enfants! Gare au piège, à la trappe,
Au chien! Je ne veux plus, moi qui garde ce lieu,
Qu'on vienne, sous couleur d'y querir un caieu
D'ail, piller mes fruitiers et grappiller ma grappe.70

The farmer advises the boy to depart immediately, for he intends
to beat them if he catches them. But the farmer continues, perhaps
with a droll smile, that the boys might take the path to the neighbor-
boring garden where there lives a negligent god ("un négligent
Priape").
Not only is a child sometimes mischievous, he has also been known to employ cunning to acquire what he wishes. Hugo has observed this quality in his own granddaughter Jeanne. He first writes of it when Jeanne is only three years old, yet already she is manifesting feminine wiles by her manner of dress and action, and has, of course, totally conquered her grandfather. 71 A little later in the same volume, L'Art d'être grand-père, Hugo again notes this characteristic in Jeanne. This time it is a question of two poems, "Le Pot cassé" and its sequel. In the first poem, the maid-servant Mariette has broken an exquisite vase. When Hugo arrives "furieux, terrible," Jeanne takes the blame for the frightened Mariette. 72 Of course this action would seem to indicate an altruistic side in Jeanne's nature. But soon enough, in the following poem, we see that here she has displayed less altruism than craft, for she says:

—Je savais bien
Qu'en répondant: c'est moi, papa ne dirait rien.
Je n'ai pas peur de lui puisqu'il est mon grand-père. 73

Sully-Prudhomme also takes note of this trait when he suggests in "Passion malheureuse" that a child can play-act to achieve an effect:

Le marmot prend alors sa voix flûtée et tendre
(Les enfants ont deux voix), et dit, sans la comprendre,
Sa fable, avec expression. 74

In addition to the cunning nature of the child, the greed of the child has also been noted in verse by Vigny and by Baudelaire. Baudelaire demonstrates this quality in "Le Gâteau" but, since this poet's depiction of the child's greed is more serious in nature in
that it leads to violence, it will be discussed a little later.
Vigny's poem, "La Sauvage," tells of an incident in which an Indian
woman with her two sons seeks asylum at the home of white settlers
after a massacre. The daughters of this English-American household
see the Indian first and ask:

As-tu de beaux colliers d'azaléa pour nous?  

Obviously the first thought of the children is a concern for what
the woman can give them rather than for what they may be able to
do for her. Yet it must be remembered that they may very well know
nothing of the massacre, nor even understand the word massacre.
Moreover, this type of egocentrism may perhaps be an extension
of the child's appetite for life, a quality which we have already
seen to be praised by the poets.

There have been many people to observe this quality of
egocentrism among the imperfections of the child. Not the least
of these observers is the renowned Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget.
For him, "the term 'egocentric' is used not in a pejorative sense,
but descriptively to refer to [the child's] inability to take
another person's point of view."  

It is precisely this idea, we
believe, that Baudelaire wishes to convey in his brief poem, "Je
N'ai Pas Oublié," and in his prose poem, "Les Veuves." The first
poem is an autobiographical evocation of the blissful year when he
was seven, during which his recently-widowed mother belonged solely
to him. In this poem Baudelaire describes the dinners which he
shared with his mother as being "longs et silencieux."  

The in-
formative word "silencieux" makes us realize that the mother was
able to verbalize to the boy neither the loneliness she may have felt early in the year when she had lost her first husband, nor the eagerness she felt later in the year in anticipation of her remarriage to Jacques Aupick. Not only is the boy's response to his mother's widowhood different from hers, but, being a child, he cannot be expected to comprehend her point of view. The second poem, "Les Veuves," more specifically states the child's inability to take another's point of view. Here Baudelaire asks the question:

Quelle est la veuve la plus triste et la plus attristante, celle qui traîne à sa main un bambin avec qui elle ne peut pas partager sa rêverie, ou celle qui est tout à fait seule?78

And later, in describing in detail such a tragic widow, he concludes:

Et elle sera rentrée à pied, mendiant et rêvant, seule, toujours seule; car l'enfant est turbulent, égoïste, sans douceur et sans patience; il ne peut même pas, comme le pur animal, comme le chien et le chat, servir de confident aux douleurs solitaires.79

Baudelaire has employed here very negative descriptions to characterize the child, but it is important to note that he has chosen the phrase "il ne peut même pas ... servir de confident": it is not within the young child's capacity to take another person's point of view. The child thus has moved from his position as "le petit ange" but is not yet totally "le petit monstre."

Earlier we have classified the negative qualities into two categories, imperfections and faults, indicating that the latter are more serious in nature. Let us now turn our attention to the poems in which these faults are discussed. In De L'Essence du rire, Baudelaire refers to children as "des Satans en herbe."

It is time, thus, to consider the child as Baudelaire sees him the
most often: "le petit monstre." Unlike Rousseau and Hugo, who see the child as an innocent and the antithesis of the corrupted adult, Baudelaire, a strong believer in original sin, believes that nature left to herself and untamed is monstrous, and that only through discipline and education can man ever learn to slough off his evil tendencies. The poet pictures the child's basically evil nature in the prose poem "Le Gâteau." Here the writer, feeling at peace with the world, is eating some bread beside a small tranquil lake. Suddenly a little boy appears, who begins to devour the bread with his eyes. The boy, in a low hoarse voice, sighs the word "gâteau." Amused by this term, the poet cuts off a slice of the bread and gives it to the urchin. Immediately, another boy appears, evidently a brother of the first, and a fight between the two boys ensues. The battle is violent, reflecting all the greed, rage, and aggression of which these young beings are capable. Ironically, however, as their fury to possess the coveted prize increases, the bread, which "voyageait de main en main et changeait de poches à chaque instant," is crumbled to the point of being utterly worthless. After this spectacle, the poet is greatly saddened and no longer feels, as he has almost felt earlier when he was momentarily seduced by his surroundings, "que l'homme est né bon." 

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The child, then, is capable of evil, of cruelty. This has been suggested above in a poem from Hugo's volume _Odes et ballades_ when, all the while praising the child for his gaiety and charity, the poet warns that the child "fait [que le mal sans remords." Thus the child can be cruel, and in spite of the teachings of
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, this cruelty is less learned than instinctive. It is especially interesting that this idea can be substantiated by lines from "Le Crapaud" by Victor Hugo, the very same man whom de Boer describes as seeing only "l'enfant-ange." In this poem, Hugo states:

--- J'étais enfant, j'étais petit, j'étais cruel;--
Tout homme sur la terre, où l'âme erre asservie,
Peut commencer ainsi le récit de sa vie.
On a le jeu, l'ivresse et l'aube dans les yeux,
On a sa mère, on est des écoliers joyeux,
De petits hommes gaïs, respirant l'atmosphère
A plein poumons, aimés, libres, contents; que faire
Sinon de torturer quelque être malheureux?

Clearly then, in Hugo's view, cruelty is not the trait of one child but of every child. In this particular poem the cruelty is quite ugly. It is manifested by the actions of four schoolboys who happen upon a toad:

les enfants l'aperçurent
Et crièrent: "Tuons ce vilain animal,
Et, puisqu'il est si laid, faisons-lui bien du mal!"
Et chacun d'eux riant;--l'enfant rit quand il tue,--
Le mit à le piquer d'une branche pointue.

This is one instance in which Hugo, like Baudelaire, sees children as "des Satans en herbe." Yet, contrary to Baudelaire, Hugo is not willing to end the story on such a note. In great detail he relates that a donkey advances pulling a cart while the boys wait expectantly for the tortured and dying toad to be crushed under the wheels of the cart. The donkey, himself oppressed, senses the tragic plight of the toad and leads the cart around the toad to avoid harming him. The boys then learn a lesson of kindness from the lowly donkey.

Vigny also takes note of a child's cruelty in his poem "Dolorida." This poet, like Hugo, observes particularly that a child's cruelty can be directed toward elements of nature. Here
the poet compares the love of a woman to a child:

Car l'amour d'une femme est semblable à l'enfant
Qui, las de ses jouets, les brise triomphant,
Foule d'un pied volage une rose immobile,
Et suit l'insect ailé qui fuit sa main débile. 87

This view of a child's cruelty presented in less detail lacks the impact of Hugo's poem. On the other hand, it is an interesting and honest appraisal, for Vigny does not feel the necessity to redeem the child.

The child can be cruel to creatures of nature, and he can also be cruel to human beings. He can direct this malice toward other children as well as toward adults. Like Hugo, Mme Desbordes-Valmore speaks of a child's cruelty, which in this case is directed toward another child; and like Hugo, she is careful to include the moral instruction of the child. In "Le Petit Rieur," young Paul is sent home from school early because he has laughed at another boy who is deformed. He confesses this to his mother who discusses at length the evil that Paul has done and the grief that he has caused. 88

Such a necessity for didacticism is evidently not felt by Paul Fort at the end of the century. He depicts two incidents of a child's cruelty, but moralizes in neither. Both poems treat a child's unkindness to another child. In the first poem, "Boules de neige," the poet says that "ils m'ont jeté des boules de neige parce qu'ils ne m'ont pas compris." 89 These children are reflecting a quality shared by too many adults: in the presence of that which is unknown, they are aggressive and cruel. Fort's second poem on the subject of cruelty is "Histoire de Petit Pierrot." Here young Pierrot, frightened in the woods by an approaching storm, wishes to
run back to the safety of the village. When he attempts to cross the bridge, however, an older boy refuses to let him pass. Thus young Pierrot leaves "sans comprendre." We have seen earlier that the child has been portrayed by poets as an innocent victim. Now we see him in a dual role, for he can be both tortured and torturer.

A child can be malicious not only to other children but to adults as well. Hugo indicates this in "Le Maître d'études" when he admonishes the child:

Ne le [le maître] tourmentez pas, il souffre. Il est celui sur qui jusqu'à ce jour pas un rayon n'a lui. Cruelty would be perhaps too harsh a word to apply to the child's attitude here; it may be only a question of disrespect or unkindness. But whatever the children's motives, the result is that an adult suffers.

A similar situation of children's unkindness to an adult is noticed twice by Baudelaire. The first instance occurs in "Les Petites Vieilles," which we have mentioned above. Here the old women are menaced by a child:

Sur vos talons gambade un enfant lâche et vil. And in "Châtiment de l'orgueil," Baudelaire says of an old scholar who, as punishment by heaven for his excessive pride, has fallen from the heights to the depths:

Il faisait des enfants la joie et la risée. Lautréamont has noted in his remarkable Les Chants de Maldoror an occurrence similar to that indicated by Baudelaire in "Les Petites Vieilles." In "Chant III, 2e strophe" he uses almost as a leitmotif
of the strophe a line which emphasizes the alienation and persecution of "la folle" in particular, and the cruelty of the child in general:

Les enfants la poursuivent à coups de pierre, comme si c'était un merle.

Children, then, "des Satans en herbe," can be cruel to those who are strange and weak. This latter combination of traits can result not only from age or size but also from an extreme sensitivity. "Une Mort héroïque," a prose poem by Baudelaire, deals with the destruction of such an individual: an intensely sensitive and excellent actor, Fancioulle. In this poem there has been a plot to kill the Prince, a man "plus cruel et plus despote que tous ses pareils," a full-blown rather than budding Satan. His old friend Fancioulle has been a part of the conspiracy, so Fancioulle and the other conspirators are condemned to death. The Prince, however, decides that Fancioulle must act for him once again, so the courtiers assume that the actor has been pardoned. The performance is superb, making the audience lose all thoughts of condemnation to death. Yet in the midst of the play, an action occurs which assures the reader that the Prince has not forgotten his anger and desire for vengeance:

A un certain moment, je vis son Altesse se pencher vers un petit page, placé derrière elle, et lui parler à l'oreille. La physionomie espiègle du joli enfant s'illumina d'un sourire; et puis il quitta vivement la loge princière, comme pour s'acquitter d'une commission urgente.

Quelques minutes plus tard un coup de sifflet aigu, prolongé, interrompit Fancioulle dans un de ses meilleurs moments, et déchira à la fois les oreilles et les cœurs. Et de l'endroit de la salle d'où avait jailli cette désapprobation inattendue, un enfant se précipitait dans un corridor, avec des rire étouffés.

This derision is too much for the sensitive Fancioulle who dies on the stage. The important point here is that the child not only carries out the cruel wishes of his master, but also seems to
delight in doing so. This is seen when the child's "physionomie espiègle" lights up with a smile, upon having been given the Prince's instructions. Of course the child, unlike the Prince, probably could not have foreseen the full consequences of the action. But it is nonetheless true that the child takes pleasure in an action which causes misfortune to another person.

Baudelaire's Prince desires vengeance for a wrong done to him. Yet the passion for vindication is not a characteristic limited to adults. Hugo indicates this in "L'Enfant," which focuses upon a Greek child left alone after a battle in which the Turks are victorious. The poet feels pity for the poor child with his bare feet on the sharp rocks. Wishing to console him, the writer asks the boy if he wants a flower, a bird, or some fruit. But the poet does not realize that the boy has much more serious matters in mind, for he wishes to destroy the oppressors who have conquered his land:

Que veux-tu? fleur, beau fruit, ou l'oiseau merveilleux?
—Ami, dit l'enfant grec, dit l'enfant aux yeux bleus,
Je veux de la poudre et des balles.96

We have seen that the nature of childhood can be negative as well as positive. French poets of the nineteenth century have noticed both imperfections and faults in the child. They have observed in him fear, jealousy, mischief, cunning, greediness, and egocentrism; moreover, they have discerned in the child violence, aggression, cruelty, and vengeance. If we judge quantitatively, we would conclude that the nature of the child as our poets have seen it is more often inclined toward goodness than evil, for there
are more poems in the preceding discussion of positive qualities than in this treatment of negative qualities. If we judge qualitatively, however, the decision would be much more difficult. While there are beautiful and moving poems among those treating the positive qualities of the child, there are at the same time astute and striking poems among those treating the child's negative qualities.

The Potential of the Child

It is obvious, then, that the child, like the adult, possesses a dual nature: he is both angel and monster. Possessing such a nature, he has the potential both for good and for evil. Two of our poets, Lamartine and Kahn, recognize this possibility in the child. In his long and on the whole rather dull poem, "La Chute d'un ange," Lamartine presents the wicked character Nemphed, who takes an eleven-year-old child to serve him. Through his malevolent influence, her once "noble" nature has been fashioned into one of vice and malice:

\[
\text{Des ses jours innocents pervertis à dessein,} \\
\text{Lui-même avait versé ses poisons dans son sein.}\quad 97
\]

Although the evil nature of the child is developed and molded by the satanic Nemphed, it is clear to us that the germs of the evil have been present in the child, if only in a dormant state.
Just as Lamartine recognizes the potential for evil in the child, he also takes note of the child's potential for greatness. The poem "Les Quatre Ages," in a section entitled "L'Enfance," speaks of the possible latent talents within a child:

Peut-être ici dans un oubli stérile
Dort un rival d'Homère ou de Virgile,
Qui n'a jamais fait rendre sous ses doigts
Que des sons durs, au chalumeau des bois.98

Gustave Kahn also observes the child's potential for greatness. He terms the child, as does Hugo, the "bel ange à l'aureole d'or."

Kahn, however, uses this idea in the specific instance of discussing the child's potential:

Mais pourtant ce soleil qui met une auréole,
au front de cet enfant, veut dire que l'aureole
de ce corps enfantin doit un jour éclater
en palais de puissance ou de sérénité!
Que sera-t-il? Force? beauté? magnificence?
Il est tout l'avenir, puisque c'est lui l'enfance!99

Perhaps Kahn has singled out here the most intriguing quality in the nature of childhood: the child, whatever else he may be, is "tout l'avenir."
NOTES


9. Ibid., p. 223.

10. Ibid., p. 555.


17 Ibid., p. 166.

18 See, for example, "L'Incroyant et les chrétiens" by Albert Camus.


20 Ibid., p. 105.


23 Ibid., p. 550.

24 Ibid., p. 434.


26 Lamartine, Oeuvres poétiques, p. 1757.


28 Lamartine, Oeuvres poétiques, p. 197.

29 Fernand Gregh, La Maison de l'enfance (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1897), p. 29.


31 Mme Amable Tastu, Poésies complètes (Paris: Didier, 1858), p. 94.

32 Hugo, Toute La Lyre, p. 59.

34. Ibid., II, 28.
35. Ibid., II, 193.
41. For an interesting discussion of a child’s laughter, see Baudelaire, p. 984.
42. Mallarmé, p. 55.
44. Gregh, p. 21.
45. Lamartine, Oeuvres poétiques, p. 83.
49. Desbordes-Valmore in Poètes d’aujourd’hui, p. 129.
50. Lamartine, Oeuvres poétiques, p. 1199.

53. Baudelaire, p. 35.


56. Turnell, p. 82.


58. Tastu, p. 54.


60. Hugo, Les Contemplations, p. 10.


63. Fort, pp. 319-21.

64. The well-known passage in Chateaubriand's Mémoires d'outre tombe also refers to a child's fears of the darkness:

A quatre heures du matin, la voix du maître du château, appelant le valet de chambre à l'entrée des voûtes séculaires, se faisait entendre comme la voix du dernier fantôme de la nuit. Cette voix remplaçait pour moi la douce harmonie au son de laquelle le père de Montaigne éveillait son fils.

L'entêtement du comte de Chateaubriand à faire coucher un enfant au haut d'une tour pouvait avoir quelque inconvenient; mais il tourna à mon avantage. Cette manière violente de me traiter me laissa le courage d'un homme, sans m'éter cette sensibilité d'imagination dont on voudrait aujourd'hui priver la jeunesse. Au lieu de chercher à me convaincre qu'il n'y avait point de revenants, on me força de les braver.


68. Chenier, p. 79.


70. Heredia, p. 65.


72. Ibid., p. 477.

73. Ibid., p. 478.


75. Vigny, p. 96.


77. Baudelaire, p. 95.

78. Ibid., p. 245.

79. Ibid., p. 246.

80. Ibid., p. 985.


82. Baudelaire, pp. 249-51.


84. Actually, de Boer does mention later in his study two poems by Hugo which deal with a child's cruelty, but he seems to understate their importance.


86. Ibid.
87Vigny, p. 61.
88Desbordes-Valmore in *Petite Anthologie*, p. 293.
89Fort, p. 83.
90Ibid., p. 184.
92Baudelaire, p. 87.
93Ibid., p. 20.
95Baudelaire, p. 272.
98Ibid., p. 1633.
99Kahn, p. 545.
CHAPTER II

THE CHILD IN THE PRESENCE OF BIRTH AND DEATH

The future of the child includes many experiences which can be classified as significant events of life but in which individuals participate to varying degrees, such as formal education, love, and work. In only two instances, however, can we say that these events are experienced by all individuals equally: the universal phenomena of birth and death. The writers of nineteenth-century French poetry treating children have been well aware of the importance of these two phenomena and have often written of them in verse. Let us consider this poetry, first those poems treating the child in the presence of birth, then those treating him in the presence of death.

Of the poems on birth, the first ones examined will mention the fetal stage. These will be followed by poems discussing unnamed and sometimes symbolic children and then by those discussing particular, named children. Finally, we will present several poems commemorating the baptism of the child.

As for the poems on death, we will first treat those in which the child is touched by death but only indirectly, in that these poems discuss the loss of someone the child loves and the resulting effect upon the child. Then will follow those poems
in which the child is touched directly by a threat of death but does survive. Next we will consider the poems which examine the actual death of a child: those treating the death in narrative form, those in which an adult is lamenting the death of a child, those in which the child's death is presented as the cruel and unjust destruction of an innocent victim, and finally those in which the child's death is presented as less tragic and, in some instances, even fortuitous.

The Child in the Presence of Birth

For unto us a child is born . . .
--Isaiah 9:6

Among the nineteenth-century French poems about birth there is a most unconventional and remarkable one by the influential and innovative Symbolist, Jules Laforgue. This unique poem, "Complainte du foetus de poete," presents the thoughts of a fetus within the womb and at the actual moment of birth. The fetus expresses its impatience to escape the sticky confines of the albumin cloister so that, emancipated, it might suckle the sun:
The poem continues by expressing, in this same unprecedented poetic language, the thoughts of the fetus at the very moment of birth. The fact that the fetus calls for courage and speaks of the cold ("Mais j'ai froid") indicates a feeling of apprehension because of the greater degree of independence before him. At the same time the words of the fetus evidence an eagerness at the prospect of this new and profound experience. The ambivalent feelings of the fetus in this specific instance represent man's twofold attitude toward life: the need for security and at the same time the Faustian urge to explore and discover:

Courage,
Là, là, je me dégage...

En avant!
Cogne, glas des nuits! filtre, soleil solide!
Adieu, forêts d'aquarium qui, me couvant,
Avez mis ce levain dans ma chrysalide!
Mais j'ai froid! En avant!
Ah! Maman...

Lacking the immediate impact of Laforgue's poem but possessing an ethereal beauty is Baudelaire's nebulous poem, "La Vie antérieure." We cannot know from the poem what this "former life" is, whether it is a memory or merely a dream of a life before birth. It may be descriptive of a pre-natal
cosmic life; or, although it is admittedly less possible, it may be a nostalgic evocation of the calm and secure life within the womb where all of one's needs are gratified. While this life, like Baudelaire's life after birth, is haunted by ennui, here only suggested ("Le secret douleurieux qui me faisait languir"), it is nonetheless a tranquil and lovely life, satisfying to the body if somewhat restrictive to the spirit:

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs.

Less memorable than those poems by Laforgue and Baudelaire but still interesting is "Le Signe" by Sully-Prudhomme. Like the two previous poems, this one too is written in the first person and concerns the period before birth. Here Sully-Prudhomme comments upon the belief that the longings of a pregnant mother will affect her unborn child:

On dit que les désirs des mères
Pendant qu'elles portent l'enfant,
Fussent-ils d'étranges chimères,
Le marquent d'un signe vivant.

The poet continues that in his own case his mother, at the moment of feeling her child stirring within her, must have yearned for "des ailes, des ailes" in order that she might flee to some "oasis surhumaine," for the child who is now the poet longs ceaselessly for "quelque paradis lointain." The desire for change and mobility is reminiscent of a similar observation expressed often by Baudelaire in such poems as "Anywhere out of the world" and "Le Voyage."

Tristan Corbière may also be compared to Baudelaire, especially in temperament, though Corbière's verses are "rouger and
This important Breton poet writes of the birth of a child in the third part of his poem "Les Pannoïdes ou Les Trois Mystères du Greffier Panneau." The poem, written in a humorous tone and using colloquial language, discusses the birth of "le greffillon," the son of a "greffier" or clerk:

Crac le v'là! qui? parbleu, l'enfant!  
Tout au bout du grand instrument.⁶

Corbière continues by pointing out the difference between the reaction of the proud parents and that of the sleepy doctor who has to get up in the middle of the night for this event:

Un greffillon c'est une fête  
Pour le greffier qui l'a commis!  
... ... ... ... ... ... ...  
Un greffillon ce n'est pas fête  
Pour un docteur surtout la nuit.⁷

Perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most complex of the poems treating the general theme of birth is "Après Le Déluge" by Arthur Rimbaud, who in our opinion is the master among the poets who write of childhood. This particular poem, which Fowlie calls a "brilliant parable of the birth trauma,"⁸ is the first poem of Les Illuminations in which "childhood is one of the worlds seen [ . . ] rather than evoked because there had been no time and no experience in Rimbaud's case for that world to have been forgotten. It is remarkably present in him."⁹ In "Après Le Déluge," Rimbaud does not mention the moment of birth, as does Corbière in his poem, but rather concerns himself with the immediate aftermath of birth, or as he calls it "the flood." The poet seems to be describing here the re-beginning of creation after the biblical flood, and to be comparing with this the flood of every child's
The first few lines of the poem describe the innocence and tranquility of the world after the deluge:

Aussitôt que l'idée du Déluge se fut rassise,
Un lièvre s'arrêta dans les sainfoins et les
clochettes mouvantes et dit sa prière à l'arc-en-ciel
à travers la toile de l'araignée.
Oh! les pierres précieuses qui se cachaient,—
les fleurs qui regardaient déjà.11

This peaceful scene is short-lived, however, for immediately are evoked images of blood, of slaughterhouses:

Le sang coula, chez Barbe-Bleue,—aux abattoirs
—dans les cirques, où le sceau de Dieu blêmit les
fenêtres. Le sang et le lait coulèrent.

The blood is soon coupled with violence:

—Sourds, étang,—Ecume, roule sur le pont et
par-dessus les bois;—draps noirs et orgues,—éclairs
et tonnerre,—montez et roulez;—Eaux et tristesses,
montez et relevez les Déluges.

And then the speaker, the child-poet, gives his reason for wanting the return of the floods—the same reason Baudelaire gives in "Le Voyage" for welcoming death. Indeed, Rimbaud may be expressing here a death wish, for he seems to be calling for "les Déluges" to engulf "[les] tristesses" and "[l']ennui" of life:

Car depuis qu'ils se sont dissipés,—oh les
pierres précieuses s'enfonçant, et les fleurs
ouvertes!—C'est un ennui!

This poem becomes less enigmatic when we consider that it is an excellent example of a fact we have established in the previous chapter: the child possesses a dual nature. As Wallace Fowlie says, the child "cherishes his memories of violence and blood on the one hand, and of tenderness on the other. His purest moments of contentment are followed by yearnings for the renewal of violence and destruction."12 And the reason for these
yearnings is simply to relieve his boredom, or as Baudelaire puts it, to render "les instants moins lourds."\textsuperscript{13}

Unlike Laforgue, Baudelaire, and Sully-Prudhomme, who are concerned with an existence prior to birth, and unlike Corbière and Rimbaud who are concerned with the birth itself and its immediate aftermath, most of the nineteenth-century French poets who write about birth concentrate more on the child and on welcoming him into the world. Usually this newborn baby is a specific, named child, although in a few instances he is used symbolically or merely as an element in a narrative. The latter case may be illustrated by Lamartine's poem "L'Ange" in which the guardian angel of Clovis is likened in a long simile to a mother watching over the bed of her newborn son who, after being frightened, is sleeping peacefully:

\begin{quote}
Telle une jeune mère, au milieu de la nuit,
De son lit nuptial sortant au moindre bruit,
Une lampe à la main, sur un pied suspendue,
Vole à son premier né, tremblant d'être entendue,
Et, pour calmer l'effroi qui la faisait frémir,
En silence longtemps le regarde dormir.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Mme Tastu also uses a newborn baby as an element in a narrative in "La Fille des fées," basing her tale on fantasy rather than history. She relates the blessing of an infant by fairies who endow the baby with various gifts.\textsuperscript{15} A similar but more philosophical poem is "Les Dons des fées" by Baudelaire. Here is described "[\textit{une}] grande assemblée des fées, pour procéder à la répartition des dons parmi tous les nouveau-nés, arrivés à la vie depuis vingt-quatre heures." When all the gifts have been distributed, "un pauvre petit commerçant" reminds the fairies that
his son has not yet received his gift. One of the fairies, remembering the regulation which allows the invention of a new gift in such cases, creates immediately "le Don de plaire." The father's reaction is one of bewilderment and disappointment, for he cannot appreciate a gift which he does not consider remunerative.Ironically, "le petit boutiquier" in his shortsightedness is unable to see either the ideal merits of this gift which the fairy terms "le meilleur des lots" or the practical merit, for such a gift could be quite profitable for the one who knew how to use it to his best advantage:

Donc la bonne Fée répondit, avec un aplomb digne de son rang: "Je donne à ton fils . . . Je lui donne . . . le Don de plaire!"
"Mais plaire comment? plaire . . . ? plaire pour-quoi?" demanda opiniâtrement le petit boutiquier, qui était sans doute un de ces raisonneurs si communs, incapables de s'élever jusqu'à la logique de l'Absurde.16

A final example of the use of a newborn child as an element in a narrative is "Le Revenant" by Hugo. This poem recounts the improbable tale of a mother whose baby now in heaven will be jealous and unhappy about her having a second child. Again she has a son, but she is still melancholy until this second child gladdens her heart by whispering that he is the first son who has returned:

Elle entendit, avec une voix bien connue,
Le nouveau-né parler dans l'ombre entre ses bras,
Et tout bas murmurer: C'est moi. Ne le dis pas.17

Let us now consider an example of a poem in which the birth of a child is used symbolically. It is not surprising to discover that such a poem was written by the leading Symbolist, Stéphane Mallarmé. In this difficult poem, "Don du poème," the
poet parallels the birth of a child to the birth of a poem. It was written in 1865, the year after the birth of Mallarmé's daughter Geneviève and the conception of his dramatic poem Hérodiade, which may help explain the combined imagery of the poem. The birth of the child and therefore of the poem is characterized as "horrible" but there is the suggestion that the creation may assume beauty when the reader, who becomes a nurse to the poem as the "berceuse" does to the child, "feeds it on his own secrets."\(^{18}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ la berceuse, avec ta fille et l'innocence} \\
\text{De vos pieds froids, accueille une horrible naissance} \\
\text{Et ta voix rappelant voile et clavecin,} \\
\text{Avec le doigt fané presseras-tu le sein} \\
\text{Par qui coule en blancheur sibylline la femme} \\
\text{Pour les lèvres que l'air du vierge azur affame?}^{19}
\end{align*}
\]

It must be noted, however, that the fate of the creation is precarious, hence the question asked of the nurse--will she stimulate her breasts that the milk may flow to give life to the infant, i.e., will the reader involve himself in the poem so that it may take on beauty and meaning? The poet has laboriously given birth to a poem which, as the title indicates, he offers as a gift to the reader, but unless the reader accepts the gift and nourishes it "on his own secrets," the gift, the creation so carefully conceived and brought into the world, will be stillborn. "Don du poème," therefore, represents in a beautifully concise form the idea that art is alive and evolves.\(^{20}\)

Such thoughts of birth as being horrible and of the possibility that the newborn child will not be welcomed into the world are extremely rare. On the contrary, as indicated above, most of the nineteenth-century French poems about birth have been written
in order to celebrate the happy occasion of the birth of a particular child. Typical of such poems are two by Alfred de Vigny, whom Paul Viallaneix characterizes as "toujours intéressé aux enfants et privé sa vie durant d'en avoir à son foyer." These two poems commemorate the birth of Marie de Clérembault, the daughter of the poet's cousin. Both were written twenty days after the infant's birth. In "Le Rêve," Vigny imagines a conversation between the angels and the baby who has just left paradise, and in "Le Berceau" he wishes for the little Marie a tranquil sleep in her new home.

These tender and sentimental poems are quite a contrast to the generally bitter and philosophical poetry of the aloof Vigny.

It is not at all unusual, however, to find a light-hearted verse among the writings of Pierre-Jean de Béranger. The first of his two poems about a newborn child is "Les Filles: Couplets à un ami que sa femme venait de rendre père d'une quatrième fille." In this jaunty poem, the poet says that he cannot comprehend why husbands groan when presented a daughter by their wives and he expresses his delight that his friend is the father of a fourth girl:

Mais pour quatre filles buvons
A toi mari, qui nous aimés.
Pour nos fils nous te le devons;
Que n'est-ce, hélas! pour nous-mêmes!
A vos filles, oui nous tenons;
Faites-en, faites-en de gentilles
Qu'elles soient anges ou démons,
Faites des filles
Nous les aimons.

Béranger's second poem about a newborn child is written in a somewhat more sedate tone. In this poem, "Le Commencement du voyage: chanson sur le berceau d'un enfant nouveau-né," the poet
expresses his hope that all will go well for the child and that the gods will look favorably on "cette barque légère" (a commonplace metaphor for the infant in its cradle) as it begins its voyage on the waves of life.  

Béranger and other poets before him have shown us in their poetry treating children that the theme of childhood in the verse of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore was not, as Calvet claims, "une véritable nouveauté." Her use of this theme, nevertheless, is quite remarkable and we will agree with Calvet that "voici la note juste, une simplicité sans puerilité, une tendresse sans fadeur." In "Un Nouveau-né" Mme Desbordes-Valmore lovingly welcomes her child into the world:

Bien venu, mon enfant, mon jeune, mon doux hôte!  
Depuis une heure au monde: oh! que j'attendais!  
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *  
Ne vas pas l'oublier: je t'ai parlé de Dieu;  
Je t'ai fait de prière, enfant! de tendres larmes.

Sainte-Beuve also commemorates in his poem "La Veillée" the birth of a child, the son of his one-time friend, Victor Hugo:

Mon ami, vous voilà père d'un nouveau-né;  
C'est un garçon encor: le ciel vous l'a donné  
Beau, frais, souriant d'aise à cette vie amère;  
A peine il a coûté quelque plainte à sa mère.

It is interesting to note that already in 1829 when this poem was written, Sainte-Beuve had a concern for Mme Hugo's welfare—a concern which would soon cause serious trouble in the marriage of Adèle and Victor Hugo.

Much later in the century than Mme Desbordes-Valmore and Sainte-Beuve is Louis le Cardonnel, a poet with Symbolist affinities. Like many other nineteenth-century French poets, he welcomes a
newborn baby into the world in his lovely and fluid "Ballade pour fêter Cécile Viel":

Enfant née au temps des moissons,
Au mois dont la brûlante haleine
Fait courir d'augustes frissons
Dans le silence de la pleine,
Devant la lumière sereine,
S'ouvrent tes yeux couleur de ciel;
Sur le seuil de la vie humaine,
Salut, chère Cécile Viel!30

After greeting the infant, the poet wishes her a happy existence "pleine de rires fous et de chansons," that she may never know hatred and that she may grow up "pour boire aux coupes d'or le miel de la jeunesse blonde et saine."

Several nineteenth-century French poets composed verse in commemoration of the birth of a historical figure. Such a poem is "Dithyrambe sur la naissance du Roi de Rome" by Casimir Delavigne, who often wrote of events of national importance. In this poem he welcomes Napoléon Bonaparte's son who, unknown to all at the time, would have a life so different from the one wished for him by Delavigne:

Salut, doux espoir de la France!
Gloire au guerrier fils du guerrier!

Enfant chéri du ciel, attendu de la terre,
Promis à la postérité
Puisses-tu, sous les yeux de ton auguste père,
Croître pour l'immortalité!31

Two of our poets, Lamartine and Hugo, wrote poems recognizing the birth of Henri V, Duc de Bordeaux and the posthumous son of the assassinated Duc de Berry. It is perhaps natural that there would be similarities between the two poems, for they were composed for a common reason: in order to express the personal
and national rejoicing at the "miraculous" birth of the son following so closely the tragic murder of the father. Both poets have chosen the same title: "La Naissance du Duc de Bordeaux."

The vocabulary of each poem is remarkably like that of its counterpart. For example, consider the following lines of Lamartine's poem:

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Il est né, l'enfant du miracle
Héritier du sang d'un martyr!

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Ainsi fleurit sur des ruines
Un lis que l'orage a planté.32
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Let us compare Lamartine's words with corresponding expressions in Hugo's poem:

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O joie! Ô triomphe! Ô mystère!
Il est né, l'enfant glorieux,
L'ange que promit à la terre
Un martyr partant pour les cieux!

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
O jeune lys qui viens d'éclore,
Tendre fleur qui sors d'un tombeau.33
```

Of course, as there are similarities there are also differences. Hugo's poem is more detailed and in it he speaks directly to the child, unlike Lamartine; in addition, Hugo speaks to the people of Bordeaux and then to the mother of the child. There is no doubt that the sympathetic Hugo, of whom C. S. Parker says "Children have never had a better friend than Victor Hugo," truly empathizes with this tiny "orphelin" whose cradle is draped "des couleurs du cercueil." Yet in one particular portion of Lamartine's poem, this poet seems even more sincere than Hugo in his expression of emotion, for he portrays the universal feeling of jubilation at the triumph of good over evil in terms typical of a Romantic
writer whose instincts are more powerful than his reason:

Et, comme ces rois de l'aurore,
Un instinct que mon âme ignore
Me fait adorer cet enfant.35

Musset also writes a poem on the occasion of the birth of a historical figure: the Comte de Paris, grandson of Louis-Philippe. Rather than addressing himself to the child as Delavigne has done in the previous poem, Musset speaks to France and expresses his desire that this event may coincide with peace and prosperity for the nation and that she, "vieille mère patrie," may welcome and nourish the newborn child.36

As Delavigne has written a poem celebrating the birth of the son of Napoléon I, so Gautier commemorates in verse the birth of the son of Napoléon III in his poem "Nativité," written in 1856. In this poem he compares the infant to Jesus:

C'est un Jésus à tête blonde
Qui porte en sa petite main,
Pour globe bleu la paix du monde,
Et le bonheur du genre humain.37

Gautier comments upon the "avenir magnifique" which "le Napoléon pacifique" has prepared for his son, the "futur César." This hope, like that of Delavigne for the future of Napoléon II, will not be fulfilled, for this boy will live only two years longer than Napoléon II and at the age of twenty-three will die, like the Roi de Rome, on foreign soil.

In addition to the poems about birth, three nineteenth-century French poets have written poems on the subject of an infant's baptism. One of these is Hugo who writes in "Le Bapteme du Duc de Bordeaux" of the same child whom we have discussed.
earlier. In this poem Hugo states that even though the times may be bad, God has sent this child, "notre joie," to be a savior, "un roi parmi les hommes."38

Béranger also writes of a baptism in "Couplets à ma filleule âgée de trois mois, le jour de son baptême." In his usual genial mood, the poet jests that his god-daughter's cries are brought about by the child's knowledge of the identity of her godfather, but he assures her that he bears no grudge and that he will make her laugh:

Ma filleule, où diable a-t-on pris
Le pauvre parrain qu'on vous donne?
Ce choix seul excite vos cris;
Du bon coeur je vous pardonne.

Mais mon enfant, ne pleurez pas,
Votre parrain vous fera rire.39

The third poet to celebrate in verse a child's baptism is the minor Romantic poet, Hégésippe Moreau. In his poem, "Le Bapteme," he speaks of the birth and baptism of a door-keeper's son, yet actually the child is only an excuse for the poet to protest the political and social conditions of the year 1837:

A l'hôpital, sur le champ de bataille,
Chair à scalpel, chair à canon, partout,
Tu souffriras, et, lorsque sur la paille
Tu dormiras, la Faim criera: Debout!
Tu seras peuple, enfin; mais bon courage!
Souffrir, gémir, c'est la commune loi.
Sur un palais j'entends gronder l'orage:
Dors, mon enfant, il glissera sur toi.40

We have seen in the nineteenth-century French poems on birth and baptism that in general these occasions are joyous ones. If there is any sadness whatsoever it is caused by contemporary events such as the assassination of the Duc de Berry or the
The Child in the Presence of Death

A simple child
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

--William Wordsworth

As Wordsworth's verses indicate, a child seems the antithesis of death, and yet, unfortunately, even children are not untouched by its icy tentacles. Mme Amable Tastu points out that no stage of life is free from a threat of death, not even childhood:

Quand, de la vie essayant le voyage,
L'enfant sourit à son naissant destin,
La Mort est là.41

From the moment of birth and even before, therefore, the child is menaced by death. It is not always directly, however, that he
experiences death, but sometimes indirectly through the loss of someone he loves. It is not unusual that a child's first awareness of death comes as a result of the death of a grandparent. Such an occurrence is examined in three of our poems. Two of these poems treating the effect upon a child of his grandparent's death have been written by Victor Hugo. In the first, "La Grand-mère," two children enter a room in which they find their grandmother who is dead but whom they believe to be sleeping. They try to rouse her, they beg her to tell them stories, to show them pictures, to let them warm her hands. At last they begin to realize that she will never again be able to respond to them. They are deeply distressed:

Leur gémissante voix longtemps se plaignit seule.  

And in the final scene we see them on their knees in prayer before their grandmother's Bible.

Hugo's second poem on this subject is "Petit Paul," in which the effect on the child of the loss of his grandfather is a fatal one. The poem relates the affective story of a boy who has spent the first three years of his life with his grandfather, since his mother has died in childbirth. During the three years the lives of the boy and his grandfather are blissful, until suddenly the loving grandfather dies. The boy is returned to his father who has remarried, and this prototypical stepmother despises and mistreats Paul, whose life is now miserable:

Après avoir été l'ange, être le lépreux.  

Finally the child, not able to understand or bear this abrupt change of fortune, leaves home one night and goes to the cemetery.
seeking closeness with the only love and security he has ever known. Unable to wake up his grandfather from his eternal sleep, the boy goes to sleep on the grave in order to be near his friend. Paul never awakens. Of course such poetry is sentimental and perhaps it is so to excess. It contains numerous melodramatic elements which are typical of Romanticism at its worst: the death of the mother at birth, the intense but brief affection between grandfather and grandson followed by a second death, the wicked stepmother, the rejection and consequent loneliness and anguish of the child, the boy's flight in the dark of night, and finally the death of grief on the very tomb of the lost loved one. Yet in spite of this, the story does not seem maudlin, but rather touching. Hugo is, after all, a master storyteller, so much so that the power of his story, be it in poetry or prose, usually compensates for the occasional weaknesses in its component parts.

The third poem relating the loss of a child's grandparent is "Le Grand-père" by André Theuriet, who is better known as a novelist than as a poet. In this poem Theuriet paints for us a portrait of his grandfather, a memorable old gentleman. The boy's depiction of the man forms the central portion of the poem, and the grandfather's death and funeral are described in limited detail. It appears that the life of the old man has made a much more forceful impression on the child than the man's death. Unlike the death of the grandfather in the preceding poem by Hugo, this death seems natural and is accepted by the child as such.

Instead of or in addition to the loss of grandparents, it
can happen that a child loses a brother or a sister. One nineteenth-century poet who has written of such an event is Sully-Prudhomme. In "La Malade," the scene we see is that of a room in which a sick child has just died. The exhausted mother, unaware of her child's death, is sleeping. The girl's brothers enter and find their sister dead. They are frightened and sad, but do not wish to disturb their mother's feverish sleep, so weeping they flee from the room.45

Another poem depicting a child's loss of a sister is François Coppée's poem "XXV" from Promenades et intérieurs. Here Coppée has captured and expressed in plausible words the pride of a five-year-old girl at being considered grown-up enough to hold her newborn brother:

Comme à cinq ans on est une grande personne,
On lui disait parfois:—Prends ton frère, mignonne,
Et, fière, elle portait dans ses bras le bébé.
Quels soins alors! L'enfant n'était jamais tombé.
Très grave, elle jouait à la petite mère.46

This tiny brother, however, is only "un ange éphémère," and his young sister must soon wear mourning clothes. We are left with an image of a saddened girl who no longer desires to play with her doll.

A child may experience death through the loss of a grandparent or a brother or sister. By no death of a loved one, however, is he so profoundly touched as when he loses a parent, and perhaps most especially a mother. Many of the poets who treat a child's loss of a parent do speak of the death of the child's mother, but there are three poets who have written of the child's father's death. The first of these is Lamartine in whose poem, "La Mort de
Socrate," the venerable philosopher is bidding farewell to his two children. Rather than being moved by such a potentially heart-breaking scene, we have found it somewhat stiff and formal, but it must be remembered that this event is not at all the focal point of the poem, but merely an insertion perhaps for the sake of historical accuracy:

Socrate, en recevant ses enfants dans ses bras,
Baisa sa joue humide [de sa femme] et lui parla tout bas:
Nous vîmes une larme et ce fut la dernière,
Sous ses cils abaissés rouler dans sa paupière.
Puis d'un bras défaillant offrant ses fils aux dieux;
"Je fus leur père ici, vous l'êtes dans les cieux." 

A second poet who discusses the loss of a child's father or in this case the loss of both his parents is Mallarmé in his prose poem, "Reminiscence." Here the poet treats the plight of an orphan boy who wanders about seeking a family. Finally at a fair he speaks with other children who are performers and who explain to the orphan the delight of having parents who are able to make people laugh. The young boy seeking solidarity is obviously a symbol of solitude and the suffering which frequently accompanies it. This child may well represent, consequently, the poet himself, for the poet's traditional estrangement from society certainly does not preclude a need for intimacy.

The third poem which we will classify as portraying the death of a child's father is the puzzling but hypnotic "On Est Venu Dire" by the Symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck. It must be admitted, however, that we cannot be certain of the relationship of the people in the poem, for their identities remain mysterious. We do know that it is addressed to a child, evidently the child
of the speaker. While no interpretation seems positive, it is quite possible that the parent, who is grammatically identified as feminine, is describing an encounter with death, perhaps that of her husband or father, and she is expressing her fear of it to her child in the repeated phrase "Mon enfant, j'ai peur." We never know the viewpoint of the child, for he assumes no active role in the poem, and yet his presence pervades the entire poem. It is as if the mother is attempting in her own time of need to take on some of the strength and courage of the child, who may be totally unaware of the crucial ordeal being undergone by the parent. Such an interpretation is supported by evidence from Maeterlinck's one-act play L'Intruse. The grandfather in the play perceives the approach of someone or something ominous; and using almost the same words in order to express his fear ("J'ai peur aussi, mes enfants") as does the speaker in the poem, the grandfather seems reassured by the presence of his grandchildren. As in the poem, in the play the light, at first bright, flickers and finally goes out, an occurrence which is soon followed by the wail of an infant who obviously senses the simultaneous death of its mother in another room. It is clear in the play that "the intruder" is Death herself. In the poem, however, the one who arrives is less easily identified, for we know merely that someone has come ("On est venu dire") to announce a departure of someone masculine ("Qu'il allait partir"), and that the speaker approaches with a lighted lamp. The speaker then arrives in turn at three doors and the resulting occurrences are described as follows:
A the previous poem, we do not see the child’s point of view, for it is the mother who is speaking. She knows that her death is near and she expresses her anguish at the fact that her daughter will have to know sorrow at such an early age and that the motherless child will have no one to dry her tears. Similarly sentimental are two poems by Lamartine, "À Une Jeune Fille qui pleurait sa mère" and "Aux Enfants de Mme Léontine de Genoude." In both of these the poet offers words of comfort to children who have just lost their mothers. Chateaubriand also offers sympathy to a child who has lost his mother. In part two of Mémoires d'outre-tombe he writes to his nephew:

Cher orphelin, image de ta mère,
Au ciel, pour toi, je demande ici bas
Les jours heureux retranchés à ton père
Et les enfants que ton oncle n'a pas.

A third Romantic poet who comments upon the death of a child’s mother is Alfred de Musset, who mentions briefly in "Lettre à M. de Lamartine" a laborer who is telling his children of the death of their mother.
Not only is the death of a child's loved one treated by Romantic poets but by later poets as well. An example of this can be found in Rimbaud's first published poem "Les Étrennes des orphelins." It is the story of two young children who are asleep in a dark and icy room on New Year's Day. Their mother is dead and their father is "bien loin." The children are in great distress until an "ange des berceaux" comes and causes them to have a happy and consoling dream. They dream that they arrive at their mother's bed and give her a beautiful gift.  

Hackett feels that this poem cannot be taken at its face value, for Rimbaud, he feels, was well aware in advance of the "mawkish feelings" of the readers of *La Revue pour tous* in which the poem was published and was in effect mocking bourgeois sentiments in the poem.  

We see little evidence to support such a strong statement. In the first place, Rimbaud had composed two years earlier at the Collège de Charleville a Latin exercise in which he tells a somewhat similar story: a child dies on New Year's Day and to comfort his weeping mother he returns to her as an angel and kisses her. This may indicate a genuine interest in such an idea over a period of several years. It is not difficult, moreover, for us to believe that such a sensitive adolescent as the barely fifteen-year-old Rimbaud could feel sincerely sympathetic toward these children who suffer because of a physical separation from their mother, especially since the young poet himself, as we shall see in later poems, suffered because of a spiritual alienation from his own mother. Being quite impressed
by the technical achievement in "Les Étrennes des orphelins," we are much more inclined to agree with Starkie than with Hackett, for the former judges the poem "a remarkable production for a boy of fifteen, even though it does not possess any permanent value." Both critics rightly note the influence of Coppée and of Hugo on the young poet's work. They mean by this that the poem is quite sentimental in tone. Perhaps it is a difficult task not to be sentimental in a poem treating the death of a young child's mother. Whether such an accomplishment should be achieved is dubious, but in any case Francis Jammes has not attempted it. He, not unlike his predecessors, has presented in "Finale de cantique de Lourdes," the tender account of a young child who, inconsolable after having lost his mother, goes with his father to Lourdes. The father urges the boy to drink the holy water, explaining that the water has its source in heaven where the mother now dwells. Having tasted the water, the child feels soothed as the water sings to him "C'est maman qui t'embrasse là-dedans." 

As we have seen, most of the children in nineteenth-century French poetry have been grievously affected by the death of their mothers. There is one notable exception, however, among the poems of Hugo—one occasion in accord with the goal stated above of treating the death of a child's mother with less sentiment and more realism. More specifically, it is not the mother's death which is here treated without emotion, but rather the effect that the death has upon the child, which is viewed objectively. In "L'Enfance,"
while the mother lies in agony on her deathbed, her five-year-old child is blissfully unaware of the imminent tragedy:

L'enfant chantant; la mère au lit, exténuée,
Agonisait [. . .]

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

L'enfant avait cinq ans, et près de la fenêtre
Ses rires et ses jeux faisaient un charmant bruit;
Et la mère, à côté de ce pauvre doux être
Qui chantait tout le jour, toussait toute la nuit. 62

In the closing lines of this poem, Hugo's words indicate that he would agree with Wordsworth that a child "who feels its life in every limb" should know nothing of death. Hugo suggests that a child's nature is or should be the incarnation of health and of buoyancy even in the presence of death.

Such an aspect of the child's nature is illustrated by several poets. The first of these is Charles-Hubert Millevoye, a precursor of Romanticism. In his fantastical poem, "L'Amour maternel," he relates the tale of a child who is seized by an escaped lion. The distraught mother falls on her knees before the lion and implores him to give her back the child. The lion, moved by this display of love and courage, relinquishes his captive. Of course the purpose of the poem is to testify to the all-conquering devotion of a mother, but at the same time, Millevoye manages to affirm the child's ability to survive, literally in the very jaws of death. 63

Writing slightly later than Millevoye and also loosely connected with the Romantic school of poetry is Casimir Delavigne. His approach to the theme of a child who survives death is unique, for in his poem, "Un Miracle," a child actually dies and is
subsequently told by Jesus in Limbo that it is not yet time for her death, and she is allowed to return to life.\textsuperscript{64}

At the end of the century, Paul Valéry describes an autobiographical encounter with death. Unlike the extraordinary rescue of the child in Millevoye's poem and the miraculous return to life of the child in Delavigne's poem, the rescue described by Valéry in "Enfance aux cygnes" not only happened but is vraisemblable as well, a combination not so frequent as might be thought. In this prose poem, a child falls into a pond among swans when his careless nursemaid leaves him in order to see her lover. The child is saved by a passer-by who takes him home and gives him a spoonful of rum. The poem ends with the effective and unexpected line:

\begin{center}
Mon grand-père voulait tuer la bonne.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{center}

In spite of its weighty subject matter, this poem is written with a smoothness and delicacy which complement its lyrical title.

Two additional poets wrote about a child close to death, but unlike Millevoye and Valéry, these poets, Hugo and Jammes, do not leave us with the certain knowledge that the threat of death has passed. In Hugo's poem, "A L'Enfant malade pendant le siège," the poet watches over a frail child and says that if the child dies he will believe that she has been sent from heaven to take him there too.\textsuperscript{66} Jammes's poem, in spite of its title "Prière Qu'un Enfant ne meure pas," is a bit more unorthodox than that of Hugo. The poem begins piously enough by asking God to spare and protect a child as He protects the grass in the wind; but at the conclusion of the poem, after pleading that the child be allowed to remain with his mother, Jammes takes the liberty of reminding the Lord that He,
after all, still lives near His Mother:

Puisque l'heure sonne,
rappelez-vous, mon Dieu, devant l'enfant qui meurt
que vous vivez toujours auprès de votre Mère.67

Even though God may spare the child in Jammes's poem, unfortunately children do not always escape death. Indeed the nineteenth-century French poems about the child in the presence of death much more often treat the actual death of the child than the death of someone he loves or a close encounter with death after which the child survives. A number of poets who have written of a child's death have done so in the form of a narrative. André Chénier, for example, tells the story in "Les Deux Enfants" of children whose parents have died and who get lost in a forest, lie down to rest and die there. Although not a Romantic writer, Chénier has not remained untouched by the eighteenth-century cult of sensibilité nor by the influence of Rousseau's Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse, for the poem relates the sensitivity of nature to the death of the children:

Le feuillage poussa des plaintes . . .
La lune se couvrit d'un voile de douleurs.
L'aurore pleura leur enfance . . .
D'une rosée amère elle inonda les fleurs.
Hélas! ils étaient morts.68

The narrative presentation of a child's death was evidently a type of poetic writing which also interested François Coppée, for he produced four such poems: "Angelus," "La Marchande de journaux," "La Nourrice," and "L'Enfant de la balle." All of these poems present the death of a delightful child and its effect on an adult who has loved the child deeply. As the first two of these will be
treated in the next chapter, we will here discuss only "La Nourrice" and "L'Enfant de la balle." In "La Nourrice" a girl, in order to support her child, goes to the city to work as a wet nurse to an infant who later dies. She then returns home to discover that her own child has died as well. This story appears to us the least moving of the four; perhaps we do not know the child who dies so well here as we know the children in the other three poems. In "L'Enfant de la balle," on the other hand, we follow closely the captivating child, Adèle, through the seven years of her life. Adèle is lovingly raised in a theater by her parents who work there and by the actors and actresses, all of whom adore her. At the age of seven she becomes a child-star in a play full of sentimentality but extremely popular. Suddenly she becomes quite sick but after a rather dangerous illness, her health improves considerably. She is to be allowed to return to the stage which she loves, but only after a week of rest in the country. Yet this fragile child is unaccustomed to the fresh air and sunshine and dies from exposure to them:

Car c'était une fleur à l'ombre habitée;
Elle a vu le soleil un jour; il l'a tuée.

There is a possibility of symbolism implied in the last two lines. Often darkness is associated with ignorance and illusion as opposed to light which is associated with knowledge and truth. The metaphor may be carried out in "L'Enfant de la balle" by the child's being brought up in a theater (darkness) and her participation in a play (illusion). The sudden exposure to the sun (reality) is too much for Adèle, who has been protected from such direct light all her
It cannot be denied that such an ending, whether symbolic or not, can be condemned as melodramatic; indeed this trait is not unusual in the work of Coppée. On the other hand, his works have been widely read and enjoyed by those who can identify with the subjects of many of his poems—he humble people whose lives are upset by emotional or physical traumas.

Not nearly so accessible as the poetry of Coppée is that of Rimbaud. We have spoken in the first part of this chapter of the latter's poem about birth from Les Illuminations. From this volume of prose poems comes also a poem about death. In this poem, "Enfance, II," the death of a little girl is stated and the resulting atmosphere is described in numerous images which flow unbridled from the mind and pen of the poet. For example, let us consider the first paragraph:

C'est elle, la petite morte, derrière les rosiers.
--La jeune maman trépassée descend le perron.--La calèche du cousin crie sur le sable--Le petit frère (il est aux Indes!) là, devant le coucher, sur le pré d'œillets.--Les vieux qu'on a enterrés tout droits dans le rempart aux girouettes. 71

It is our interpretation that Rimbaud is here describing the effect this little girl's death is having upon those close to her. Her mother has all but died herself having lost her child, and is descending the steps in a trance. The cousin has evidently hastened to the family's side in this time of tragedy. The young brother is oblivious to the sorrow around him and is daydreaming about India while watching the sunset. And the old people, perhaps grandparents, are not even considered as having any feelings, having been "buried upright in the wall," i.e., alienated because
of their age from the family. The rest of the poem appears to be describing life in the world beyond this house in mourning—a desolate life but apparently unchanged by the death of one small girl. And even the desolation is temporary, for movement begins to be perceived:

Des fleurs magiques bourdonnaient. [...] Des bêtes d'une élégance circulaient.

The final sentence seems to be saying that life and death are eternal—that nature continues forever as does the sorrow of man:

Les nuées s'amassaient sur la haute mer faite d'une éternité de chaudes larmes.

While the previous poem is a difficult one, Rimbaud's poetry is for the most part less obscure than that of Stéphane Mallarmé. This poet also wrote of the death of a child, or in this case a child-siren, in "A La Nue accablante tu." This puzzling but intriguing sonnet relates the aftermath of a shipwreck, resulting in the death of a young siren. Only the foam which is slobbering over the wreckage knows how such an event has occurred:

A la mue accablante tu
Basse de basalte et de laves
A même les échos esclaves
Par une trompe sans vertu

Quel sépulcral naufrage (tu
Le sais, écume, mais y baves)
Suprême une entre les épaves
Abolit le mât dévêtu

On cela que furibond faute
De quelque perdition haute
Toute l'abîme vain employé

Dans le si blanc cheveu qui traîne
Avarement aura noyé
Le flanc enfant d'une sirène.72
It is impossible to ascertain exactly what is being said here beyond the literal meaning. We propose that Mallarmé, perpetually haunted by a fear of poetic sterility, may be saying that his as yet unfledged inspiration (the child-siren) has been destroyed by some force or event (the storm, the shipwreck). Yet although this inspiration is truly lifeless, as is the young siren who can never stir men to do what she wills, its remains have not been totally obliterated, for one small memory (the white hair) trails behind to torment the poet with thoughts of what might have been accomplished.

In all the previous poems which have related a child's death or its after-effect, this death has been unplanned. In Baudelaire's prose poem "La Corde," however, a young boy, feeling rejected by everyone around him, hangs himself. The central issue in the poem is not so much the boy's death but his mother's callous and mercenary attitude toward the death of her son. This attitude is demonstrated when she requests the rope used by the boy, not in order to remember him by this "horrible et chère relique," but in order to sell it to her morbidly curious neighbors. Nevertheless the boy's desperate act is not an unimportant element in the story, and the suicide is perhaps even clarified by its consequences.

Baudelaire has described a child who has taken his own life. In a poem by Maeterlinck the cause of death has been a mysterious "they." As in "La Corde" the death is less important than its result. In the case of this cryptic poem, "Ils Ont Tué Trois Petites Filles," the result has been to discover what is in
the hearts of the three girls:

Ils ont tué trois petites filles
Pour voir ce qu'il y a dans leur cœur.

Le premier était plein de bonheur,
Et partout où coula son sang,
Trois serpents sifflèrent trois ans.

Le deuxième était plein de douceur,
Et partout où coula son sang,
Trois agneaux broutèrent trois ans.

Le troisième était plein de malheur,
Et partout où coula son sang,
Trois archanges veillèrent trois ans.\footnote{74}

It is predictable that the blood of the second little girl whose heart is full of gentleness would give rise to lambs grazing. It is equally foreseeable that the blood of the third little girl whose heart is full of misfortune would give rise to watchful archangels. What is baffling is the case of the first little girl. Perhaps Maeterlinck is saying that even in children, happiness is not necessarily synonymous with goodness; and as we have established in the preceding chapter children may be "des Satans en herbe." It is feasible, therefore, that hissing snakes might feed upon the blood of a happy but evil heart. There is much biblical symbolism in the poem, not only due to the recurrence of the number three but also due to the vocabulary itself: "serpents," "agneaux," "archanges." Yet this symbolism seems exterior, for we can find no substantial link to a biblical incident or allusion. In any case, there is in the poem, as in Maeterlinck's "On Est Venu Dire," a mysterious and alluring quality that supersedes the need to dissect and analyze every word.

Francis Vielé-Griffin, a contemporary of Maeterlinck,
wrote, like the Belgian poet, a Symbolistic poem about a young girl's death caused by an undefined "on." This poem, "Sainte Eulalie de Mérida," gives us a beautiful and haunting portrait of the twelve-year-old child as well as a tragic and disturbing account of her martyrdom. The poet begins by capturing with exquisite delicacy the precarious moment in history when "cette âme enfantine" hovers "au seuil de la mort":

Pour saisir sur la lèvre d'une rose
Le papillon posé,
La main tremble, trop lourde, et craint de le blesser;
Ainsi on n'ose
—Tant elle est frêle et fine—
De crainte de heurter son rêve qu'on devine,
Toucher le vol posé de cette âme enfantine
Palpitante au seuil de la mort.75

The description of Eulalie as "La sainte au doux babil, aux mots jolis" demonstrates Viélé-Griffin's sensitivity to the young martyr's dual nature, for she possesses at the same time the fragility of a child and the strength of a saint. The poet develops this duality in two scenes. First the child is seen sobbing in her sleep:

Elle rêve aux enfants que l'on veut tuer
—Le père l'a bien dit tout à l'heure—
Elle étreint son jouet. . .

Soon, however, we see the determined courage of the saint:

Désormais, devant elle,
La grande route est couleur de cendres . . .
Qu'importe! intrépide, elle passe
—La grâce brille en elle—
Vers la nuit noire.

The poet then proceeds to describe the child's cruel death on the stake in the month of December. Yet it is not this distressing scene which ends the poem but rather the depiction of the renewal
of life in the spring and the consequent budding of the crocuses and violets which the poet has mentioned throughout the poem and which seem to commemorate the brave young spirit of Sainte Eulalie.

Contrary to the poems of Maeterlinck and Vielé-Griffin in which we do not know the exact identity of the one or ones who cause the death of a child, in "Chant I, 11e strophe" from Les Chants de Maldoror by Lautréamont, we know exactly who is responsible for the child's death--Maldoror. In this unsettling strophe the evil and fascinating Maldoror takes on the specific characteristic of being "le 'mauvais génie' d'un enfant jalousement surveillé par ses parents."76

The poet depicts a happy family of three—a father, mother, and son—into whose lives comes destruction caused by Maldoror. The change from contentment to grief is initiated when the boy, a model son, begins to be disturbed by a voice in the distance:

J'entends dans le lointain des cris prolongés
de la douleur la plus poignante.77

The voice becomes more and more difficult to resist, for while attempting to lure the boy away from his parents it promises him an idyllic life of freedom and beauty in which his slightest caprice would be satisfied. The strophe, building up to its climax—the child's death and as its consequence, the mother's death—has assumed a symphonic form due to the alternation of three voices: that of Maldoror, enticing the child to follow him; that of the boy, trying desperately and vainly to defy this "evil genius"; and that of the father in prayer pleading that God avert "les malheurs qui peuvent fondre sur notre famille." The misfortune is not averted, however, and the boy is strangled. Whether his death is
a literal or figurative one is not really of supreme importance. What is important is that in one way or another a boy is irrevocably separated from his family due to the satanic power of his "mauvais génie," in this case, Maldoror.

Baudelaire has written of a child who causes his own death. Maeterlinck, Vielé-Griffin, and Lautréamont have told of children whose deaths are deliberately caused by someone else. In "La Fée et la péri," however, Hugo is not at all concerned with the cause of death but with the child's subsequent journey to heaven. He warns children that if they die they must take great care not to be turned away from heaven by evil spirits with angelic voices who will lead them to purgatory. As proof, he tells the story of a child who is enticed by an Eastern fairy, a "péri," and a Western fairy, but at last the child overcomes the temptation to follow them and he does reach heaven. This poem, while possessing a certain amount of narrative interest, might be deemed alarming in the mind of a child reader for whom it is apparently intended, because it may plant or increase in his mind a fear of death as well as delineating for him a danger lurking after death.

In addition to a poetic narrative of events surrounding a child's death, a number of nineteenth-century French poets wrote of an adult's lamentation as a result of a child's death. It is Hugo who is the most prolific writer of this type of poem, for he has written six such poems. He has written two poems about unnamed children, "Ecrit Sur Le Tombeau d'un petit enfant au bord de la mer" and "Epitaphes d'enfants." They are similar in that they both
mention nature watching over the tomb of a child while the mother weeps nearby. But while the first calls for silence that the child may sleep peacefully, the second states that the child is now safely in heaven. In "La Canadienne suspendant au palmier le corps de son enfant" (an unlikely geographical juxtaposition), a mother is telling her dead son to sleep in peace and she is lamenting that she will never be able to watch him growing up and becoming worthy of his father.\(^{81}\) It is Hugo himself who mourns in "Un Manque" the grandchild he has lost.\(^{82}\) He describes his two remaining grandchildren, Georges and Jeanne, who are happily playing. Their childlike antics make the poet joyful, but he states that he will never forget "le petit disparu."\(^{83}\) In addition, there are two poems in which Hugo has written about the death of a child of national and historical importance: "La Mort de Louis XVII"\(^{64}\) and "Au Roi Louis-Phillipe après l'arrêt de mort [du fils du roi] prononcé le 12 juillet 1839."\(^{85}\)

Another major Romantic, Alfred de Musset, has composed a poem in order to lament the death of a child. Like Hugo who has written "Au Roi Louis-Phillipe . . ." more out of respect for the father than out of grief for the child, Musset also does this in "A M. Régnier de la Comédie-Française après la mort de sa fille." In the poem Musset confesses that he does not really know Régnier ("pas l'esprit seulement"), but that he feels deeply disturbed that the man has lost his daughter.\(^{86}\)

In addition to the major Romantic poets, there are minor ones, generally writing before Hugo and Musset, who have depicted an adult's sorrow over the loss of a child. Millevoye, for example, composed two such poems: "Epitaphe d'un enfant," a four-line
epitaph in memory of a little girl, \(^{87}\) and "L'Orphelin," an imaginary epitaph on the tomb of Rousseau's son. \(^{88}\)

Another early Romantic, Jules de Rességuier, offers us an unusual and delicate sonnet, "Sur La Mort d'une jeune fille," the form and word choice of which are somewhat reminiscent of the opening and closing stanzas of Hugo's "Les Djinns." The form of this delightfully original poem, like that of "Les Djinns," complements its content, for the lovely and monosyllabic sonnet accentuates well the beauty of the child and the brevity of her life:

```
Fort
Belle,
Elle
Dort.
Sort
Frêle;
Quelle
Mort!
Rose
Close,
La
Brise
L'a
Prise.
```

Mme Amable Tastu, also writing in the early period of Romanticism, has given us two examples in "La Tombe d'une jeune fille"\(^{90}\) and "A L'Enfant qui n'est plus"\(^{91}\) of an adult's grief following the loss of a child. She is joined in this genre by Hégésippe Moreau who, in "Sur La Mort d'une cousine de sept ans," adds to the usual experience of sorrow a feeling of guilt that he may have made his cousin's school life more miserable than necessary by preaching at her and insisting that she prepare for
the future. The poem expresses in credible tones a genuine cry of distress:

Hélas! Si j'avais su lorsque ma voix qui prêche
T'ennuyait de leçons, que sur toi, rose et fraîche,
Le noir oiseau des morts planait inaperçu;

Hélas! si j'avais su!

Sainte-Beuve and Gautier also wrote in the style of the Romantics, although in both cases, only during the first part of their careers. Sainte-Beuve, in "A Mme P. sur la mort d'une jeune enfant," consoles the mother for her tragic loss. Gautier's viewpoint is different, however, in that he does not express sympathy but rather personal sorrow upon seeing the lonely toys, the doll, the music box, the small set of dishes—all the "héritage enfantin" that little Marie has left behind. The poet surely demonstrates in "Les Joujoux de la morte" a universal reaction to the discovery of a dead child's toys:

Le coeur se navre à ce mélange
Puerilement douloureux,
Joujoux d'enfant laissés par l'ange,
Berceau que la tombe a fait creux!

An adult's grief because of a child's death is depicted by one final Romantic poet, and a rather exaggerated one: the fascinating Petrus Borel, so-called "le lycanthrope." Often his poetry expresses the viewpoint of an embittered and jaded man, but this poem, "Larmes à mon frère Benoni," conveys a profound and tender emotion which must have pervaded the childhood of Borel. Enid Starkie goes so far as to affirm that this poem is "sentimental [...] in the vein of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore." The view of his dead brother, whom the poet describes as sleeping,
must have deeply affected the latter, for he relates in detail
the appearance of the deceased boy. We are able to ascertain from
the poem that Borel was no longer a child himself at the time of
his brother's death because of the poet's sophisticated relief
that the young Benoni whose life had been so melancholy might at
last know peace:

Il dort, mon Benoni! [. . .]
Laisse-le dans sa paix; [. . .]
Son âme avait brisé son corps par la pensée
Et sans être comprise aux cieux elle est passée. 96

As we have seen, it is most often the Romantic poets who
express an adult's lamentation for a deceased child. Two later
poets, however, have done so as well. In "Lettre du Mexique" by
the first of these, Tristan Corbière, we can see the Breton poet's
affinity with seafaring life. Here we are told of a sailor who
must write to a mother of her son's death. In the letter the
sailor is careful to assure the bereaved woman that "le petit
[. . .] a fait sa prière."97 The second poet is the Symbolist
Louis le Cardonnel. We have mentioned in the first part of this
chapter the fact that this poet has commemorated in verse the birth
of Cécile Viel. It is particularly regrettable then to note le
Cardonnel's poem only one year later, "A Mme Morice Viel--à Morice
Viel (après la mort de leur première enfant Cécile)"

Elle était née au temps des splendides moissons,
L'enfant trop tôt pleurée aux blondeurs séraphiques,
Et nous lui prédisons des destins magnifiques
En mêlant des refrains d'exultantes chansons.

Et maintenant voici que l'enfant chère dort
À l'heure où les avrils ramènent leurs féeries
Et, tirant des écrins leurs mille pierreries,
Viennent les enchâsser dans les floraisons d'or! 98
To this point the poems we have examined about a child's death have presented death as sad and perhaps incomprehensible, but a few poets have gone further and have presented the death of a child as cruel, and sometimes as the destruction of an innocent victim. We can see each of these attitudes in turn in "Pensées des morts" by Lamartine and in "Sur La Mort d'un enfant" by Chénier. In the former poem, the poet speaks of a deceased child as

L'enfant dont la mort cruelle  
Vient de vider le berceau,  
Qui tomba de la mamelle  
Au lit glacé du tombeau.99

A deceased child is called "l'innocente victime" in the poem by Chénier, whose collected poetry was published posthumously only a year before the appearance of Lamartine's literary landmark Méditations poétiques. In "Sur La Mort d'un enfant" Chénier shows himself to be if not a precursor of Romanticism at least spiritually akin to the movement by expressing with emotion—a refined emotion but nonetheless perceptible—the void which the child's death has caused. He makes mention, moreover, of nature on which the child will no longer make an imprint. He does not imply, however, as the Romantics will do later and even as he has done in the previously discussed "Les Deux Enfants," that this nature is capable of reacting sympathetically to the child's death. Finally, demonstrating himself to be breaking with previous centuries, Chénier suggests that he does not consider the child to be merely an adult in miniature but a being with a world and language all its own:

Tes regards, ton murmure, obscur et doux langage,  
N'inquiéteront plus nos soins officieux,  
Nous ne recevrons plus avec des cris joyeux  
Les efforts impuissants de ta bouche vermeille  
A bégayer les sons offerts à ton oreille.100
Other writers with Romantic tendencies thought of a child's death as the cruel destruction of an innocent victim. Mme Emile de Girardin, especially, has espoused this attitude in "La Jeune Fille enterrée aux Invalides" which relates a little girl's death caused by an assassin's bullet intended for the king. Not only does Mme de Girardin lament the child's death, but she protests it bitterly although she knows her protest will go unheeded since most of the populace has viewed the accident as providential:

Nous ne trouvons plus de symboles  
Dans ce jeune et chaste cercueil.  
Négateurs de la Providence,  
Nous n'apercevons point la loi  
Du Dieu qui veille sur la France  
Et la sauve encor par le Roi.101

Mme Tastu, another Romantic writer, has also protested a historical event resulting in a child's death. Rather than an accidental assassination of a child, as in the previous poem, Mme Tastu records in "Les Enfants de Clodomir" the deliberate murder of two of Clovis' grandsons by their jealous uncles and the resulting despair of Clothilde.102 Hugo, like Mme de Girardin and Mme Tastu, has objected bitterly to a historical event which brought about the death of a child. In "Souvenir de la nuit du 4" as elsewhere, he denounces the reign of Napoléon III; here, particularly, he protests the fact that his enemy permits conditions under which it is possible for an innocent child to be shot by reckless soldiers.103

Yet it is not only the Romantics who have recognized that innocent children may die as victims of malevolent forces around them. The Symbolist Jules Laforgue took from a legend and versified the morbid account of Ugolin104 who eats his own children on board
a ship when the provisions are depleted. Laforgue demonstrates a rather unusual technique of writing here, for he treats this grim subject with a very light touch, yet still manages to convey a feeling of concern or as James Lawler says, "his humor, with its apparent detachment yet real pathos, is constant throughout." 105

A few lines may serve as evidence of this:

Et donc, stoïque et légendaire,
Ugolin mangea ses enfants,
Afin d'leur conserver un père . . .
Oh! Quand j'y song', mon coeur se fend. 106

One final poet has viewed a child's death as unjust: Lautréamont, born like Laforgue in Montvideo of French parents. In "Chant V, 6e strophe" of his volume of prose poetry Les Chants de Maldoror, the poet speaks of seeing a ten-year-old boy's funeral procession including priests, parents, friends, and, not surprisingly present in this sinister but absorbing work, "les grillons et les crapauds."

In a typically lyrical passage, Lautréamont says that these crickets and frogs are discussing the former activities of the boy:

Ils s'entretiennent à voix basse dans leur pittoresque langage [, . . .] de celui qu'ils regardèrent plus d'une fois courir à travers les prairies verdoyantes, et plonger la sueur de ses membres dans les bleuâtres vagues des golfs arenacés. D'abord la vie parut lui sourire sans arrière-pensée, et, magnifiquement, le couronna de fleurs. 107

This image of security in which life is smiling upon the boy with no hidden motives has of course been deceptive, for it is no longer life but death which has crowned him with flowers. Even Maldoror evil though he may be, finds this death intolerable:

Dix ans. . . . C'est peu et c'est beaucoup. Dans le cas qui nous préoccupe, cependant, je m'appliquerai sur votre amour [du lecteur] envers la vérité pour que vous prononciez avec moi, sans tarder une seconde de plus, que c'est peu. 108
Finally in our treatment of poems about the child in the presence of death, we will consider those poems which, contrary to the others we have examined, look upon a child's death as not altogether tragic and in some cases even fortuitous. Typical of such poems is "Le Petit Frère" by Mme de Girardin. In this poem a child speaks from beyond the grave. The boy tells his sisters not to weep, because he is in heaven and is joyful now. Hugo also points out the calmative influence that a child can have after death upon his loved ones who are still living. In his poem "XV" from Les Rayons et les ombres Hugo says that a child who dies becomes a star to light his mother's way, which suggests that the memory of the child will always be an inspiration to the mother.

Most often the poets who consider the child's death as advantageous do so because they feel that the perfection of heaven is so greatly to be preferred over the imperfection of earth. This is stated by Mme de Girardin and suggested by Hugo. The idea is also advocated by Reboul, Nerval, and Laforgue. Jean Reboul, writing in the early Romantic period, speaks in "Elégie à une mère" of an angel telling a baby to come with him to paradise, for the earth is unworthy of the infant's purity. Gérard de Nerval writes in "La Sérénade" of a dying child who hears a choir of angels calling her to God. The poem is surprisingly clear, almost puerile when compared to Nerval's more famous works such as "El Desdichado" and "Artemis"; on the other hand, it is quite representative of this type of poem by other Romantic poets.

As for the non-Romantics, there is a poem, similar to
Nerval's import though very different in style, by the Symbolist Jules Laforgue. In this poem, "La Chanson du petit hypertrophique," a very sick little boy describes his earthly pain and longs for the heavenly sleep he will soon find, for his deceased mother is calling him to paradise. As he often does, Laforgue here uses conversational language, employing expressions suitable to a small boy:

C'est d'une maladie d'coeur
Qu'est mort', m'a dit l'docteur,
Tir-lan-laïre!
Ma pauvr' mère;
Et que j'irai là-bas,
Fair' dodo z'avec elle.
J'entend mon coeur qui bat,
C'est maman qui m'appelle. 113

Finally, as an example of a non-Romantic who writes of a child's death as fortuitous, there is the Parnassian Sully-Prudhomme. Unlike the preceding poets he does not mention in "Dernières Vacances" that heaven is a place of perfection, but he leaves no doubt that he considers earth a place of imperfection. His unusual thought is that a child who dies in his seventh year is fortunate, for he will never feel the suffering unavoidable after that age:

Heureux l'enfant qui meurt dans sa septième année,
Avant l'âge où le coeur doit saigner pour jouir,
Qui meurt de défaillance, en regardant bleuir
Sous les orangers d'or la Méditerranée! 114

We have seen many types of poems about a child's death. We have witnessed his indirect contact with death and its effect on him; we have observed his direct contact with death and its effect on those about him. We have read of the cruelty of a child's death and of its benefits. We have even been told once
that a child is blessed who dies in his seventh year, for he is spared the grief accompanying involvement with the world. Yet whether blessed or cursed, not all children die. Many, even most, complete full and active childhoods, participating all the while, as we shall see in Chapter III, in the world around them.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 95.


7 Ibid.


9 Ibid., p. 52.

10 Ibid., pp. 53-54.


16 Baudelaire, p. 258.


This poem may also represent in primitive form the modern idea of conceptual art, i.e., that art in which the observer participates actively in order to give full meaning to the work.


21 Ibid., p. 124.

22 Ibid., pp. 124-25.


24 Ibid., p. 56.


26 Ibid.


32 Lamartine, p. 42.

33 Hugo, Odes et ballades, pp. 72-73.


35 Lamartine, p. 43.

36 Alfred de Musset, Poésies, II (Paris: Lemerre, 1907), 170.


38 Hugo, Odes et ballades, pp. 77-82.

39 Béranger, p. 167.


41 Tastu, p. 94.

42 Hugo, Odes et ballades, p. 310.

43 Hugo, La Légende des siècles, p. 370.


45 Sully-Prudhomme, I, 55-56.

46 François Coppée, Oeuvres complètes, I (Paris: Lemerre, 1892), 330.
47 Lamartine, p. 103.

48 Fowlie, Mallarmé, p. 243.


51 Tastu, pp. 5-8.

52 Lamartine, p. 1093.

53 Lamartine, pp. 545-46.

54 It is interesting to note that in part V of Mémoires d'outre tombe Chateaubriand states, "Je n'ai jamais désiré me survivre; mais pourtant une fille, et qui porterait le nom de Lénore!"


60 Starkie, p. 40.


62 Hugo, Les Contemplations, p. 57.

64 Delavigne, Oeuvres, I (Paris: Didier, 1846), 166-201.


66 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 62.

67 Jammes, p. 132.


69 Coppée, I, 219-30.

70 Coppée, III, hl.

71 Rimbaud, pp. 176-77. All future references to this poem will also be from the Pléiade edition.

72 Mallarmé, pp. 154-55.

73 Baudelaire, pp. 278-81. This poem is based on actual events surrounding the death of Manet's helper and sometime model, Alexandre.

74 Maeterlinck, Poesies complètes, pp. 189-90.

75 Francis Viele-Griffin, Oeuvres, III (Paris: Mercure de France, 1924), 189. Future references to this poem will be taken from this same edition, pp. 189-91.


78 Hugo, Odes et ballades, pp. 365-72.

79 Hugo, Les Rayons et les ombres, p. 651.

80 Hugo, Toute La Lyre, p. 192.
81 Hugo, Odes et ballades, pp. 451-52.

82 Hugo's first grandson died at the age of one on April 14, 1868.


84 Hugo, Odes et ballades, pp. 421-25.

85 Hugo, Les Rayons et les ombres, p. 555.

86 Musset, p. 319.

87 Millevoye, p. 362.

88 Ibid., p. 383.


90 Tastu, p. 311.

91 Ibid., p. 296.


93 Sainte-Beuve, p. 440.


This is no doubt a reference to Canto XXXIII of Dante's Divine Comedy in which Count Ugolino tells the story of his imprisonment with his four sons and the subsequent death of the five by famine. Before the death of the sons, which preceded that of Ugolino, the children called upon the father to eat their bodies in order that his own life might be prolonged. It is our interpretation that this suggestion horrified Ugolino and that he could not follow it. Therefore his torture in hell (Canto XXXII) for having been a political traitor—he is condemned to gnaw eternally upon the head of another shade—seems all the more hideous.


Ibid., p. 119.


Ibid.

Mme de Girardin, pp. 364-67.

Hugo, Les Rayons et les ombres, p. 564.

Jean Reboul, "Elégie à une mère" in Les Poètes français, p. 221.

113 Laforgue, p. 15.

114 Sully-Prudhomme, II, 46.
CHAPTER III

THE CHILD AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

Nineteenth-century French poets have written more prolifically of the child in relation to his environment than they have of any other aspect of childhood. As we have indicated in the Introduction, their views of this environment are not comprehensive ones, for it was not their purpose to contribute to a treatise on child development. Rather, the poets have depicted the child in relation to those aspects of the environment which particularly interested them. These environmental aspects can be classified into five categories: education, religion, nature, poverty, and leisure activities. Selecting an order for the five categories has been a rather arbitrary task, since the child begins to be affected by most of these phenomena from the very moment of birth. We have chosen to discuss first the child in relation to education, for an infant begins to acquire knowledge of the world around him even in the earliest stages of life. The second category to be treated will be that of religion because in nineteenth-century France, this was an influence which often made itself felt extremely early in a child's life. Some of our poets have believed that religion may be experienced not only by means of traditionally
orthodox channels but also through communion with nature. A discussion of this and many other ways in which a child can relate to nature will form the third part of this chapter. Following the categories of education, religion, and nature will be that of a child's relation to poverty. This is a relatively recent theme in French literature about children, due to the humanitarian observations of Hugo, among other factors. Finally will be treated the category examining the toys, games, and activities of children, for these poems as a whole, more so than those of the other four categories, treat children who have passed the stage of infancy.

Education

Oh! l'éducation! quel bienfait,
on quel crime

--Victor Hugo

French poets of the nineteenth century have written about the education of the child more than about any other aspect of the child's environment to be included in this chapter. It should be clarified that we will consider very broadly the term education so that we may include here examples in poetry of the informal acquisition of knowledge as well as the more formal and limited one.
We will first present various illustrations of informal education. As stated above, the child begins acquiring knowledge almost from the moment of birth. One of the earliest and perhaps most informal factors contributing to a child's education is the lullaby, examples of which have been written by a number of our poets. In addition to this very early manner of instruction, the poets have observed that long before the child enters the classroom, he is taught by people and influences surrounding him and that this training may be accomplished by several means, among which are discipline and advice. After having considered the child's informal education as seen by nineteenth-century French poets, we shall examine those poems treating the formal education of the child. We will begin with the poems presenting the educational theories of some of the poets and we will then turn our attention to the poems which deal with the child himself in a school-related situation. We will conclude this section of the chapter with several poems on the subject of a child's distraction from his studies.

The infant surely derives much comfort from the soothing simplicity and repetition of a lullaby, one of the earliest ways in which he receives communication from those around him. While some of the nineteenth-century French poems in the form of lullabies are traditional and somewhat unimaginative, others are quite original and noteworthy, even though they have not been written by major poets. Examples of the more conventional lullaby-poems are "Ma Nourrice"¹ by Béranger, "Berceuse" by Chantavoine, and "Dormeuse"² and "Pour Endormir L'Enfant"³ by Mme Desbordes-Valmore.
The first two of these contain the phrase so often found in French lullabies: "Dodo, l'enfant do, / L'enfant dormira tantôt." We will cite the second of these, "Berceuse" by Chantavoine, as typical of this genre:

La paupière demi-close,
A l'ombre du blanc rideau,
Comme un oiseau qui se pose
L'enfant dort dans son berceau.

Le bon ange qui le veille
Le berce pour l'apaiser
Et tout bas, à son oreille,
Lui chante dans un baiser:
Do, do, l'enfant do,
L'enfant dormira bientôt.

Also rather conventional are "Berceuse" by Gabriel Vicaire and "Berceuse d'Armorique" by his contemporary, Le Braz. The former poem assures the baby that although he will know many hardships, life also has its good side. The latter, in which the words flow rhythmically like ocean waves, lulls the child while making it known to him that he is destined to become a sailor. Each of these two poems will be mentioned again in later categories. A bit more unusual is Delavigne's "Memmo" in which a mother rocks her child to sleep while telling him to be brave like his father. It is not the lullaby which distinguishes the work but occurrences previous to the lullaby in this long poem. The mother, Adda, after first rejecting her suitor Memmo when he would not avenge her father's death, finally marries him when he does satisfy her need for vengeance. Later, however, Memmo is shot as an outlaw just as was his father-in-law. Therefore, in the lullaby, the mother is inciting her child to a life of violence rather than wishing for him peace and contentment.
Much more unusual and worthy of consideration are two poems by Tristan Corbière and one by René Ghil. Corbière's "Rondel" is more delicate and subtle than the lullaby-poems previously discussed. In this intriguing work, the poet is evidently looking back upon himself as a child in a state resembling death. He seems to be imagining that he is being given a second chance at life and love. He assures himself, moreover, that this time no force will destroy his relationships with the young ladies ("Ils ne viendront pas, tes amis les ours, / Jeter leur pavé sur tes demoiselles"—a reference to La Fontaine's "L'Ours et l'amateur des jardins" in which a bear kills his friend the gardener by mistake):

Il fait noir, enfant, voleur d'étincelles;
Il n'est plus de nuits, il n'est plus de jours;
Dors... en attendant venir toutes celles
Qui disaient: Jamais! Qui disaient: Toujours!

Entends-tu leurs pas?... Ils ne sont pas lourds:
Oh! les pieds légers!—l'amour a des ailes...
Il fait noir, enfant, voleur d'étincelles!

Entends-tu leurs voix... Les caveaux sont sourds.
Dors: il pèse peu, ton faix d'immortelles;
Ils ne viendront pas, tes amis les ours,
Jeter leur pavé sur tes demoiselles...
Il fait noir, enfant, voleur d'étincelles.8

We have placed this lovely if esoteric poem here rather than with the poems on death for two reasons. Firstly, its form is to a certain extent analogous to that of the other lullaby-poems. Secondly, the dual identity of the child-poet makes the death itself, if indeed it is a death, less important than the resulting surrealistic limbo resembling the period of semi-oblivion preceding sleep in which the imagination is free from the restrictions of consciousness. The most outstanding line of the poem is the
repeated line "Il fait noir, enfant, voleur d'étincelles!" The juxtaposition of the darkness with the characterization of the child as a "voleur d'étincelles" is striking and evokes an image of the child as a creature of light amid a world of darkness. Corbière may also be suggesting a comparison with Prometheus, thus identifying the child not only as a giver of light but as semi-divine.

Another intriguing lullaby-poem by Corbière, "Do, L'Enfant do," is also concerned with light and darkness. The progression of time in the poem is made apparent by three phrases appearing respectively in the three verses of the poem: "Buona vespre [. . .] Buona sera [. . .] Buona notte [. . .]." Each of these phrases is followed by the words "Dors: Ton bout de cierge . . ." and we see that eventually the candle goes out, leaving the child alone, perhaps afraid, in the dark.9

A third unusual lullaby-poem is "La Mère en berçant" by the Symbolist René Ghil. Here too it is a question of a child in the darkness. Ghil adds the psychological dimension of a child's fearing sleep, for he equates it with "son exil aux ombres du néant." Having sung the baby a song, the mother in the poem comments:

Mon petit
ne veut dormir, et pleure, et tend à la lumière
qu'il sait trop! l'implorant geste de son exil
d'errer . . .10

A young child is instructed by many means other than by lullabies. One of the most obvious of these is the instruction he receives from his mother. Millevoye, for example, points out
in "L'Amour maternel" that it is the mother who teaches the child to talk:

Quand la raison précocè a devancé son âge,
Sa mère, la première, épure son langage;
De mots nouveaux pour lui, par de courtes leçons,
Dans sa jeune mémoire elle imprime les sons:
Soin précieux et tendre, aimable ministère,
Qu'interrompent souvent les baisers d'une mère.

Coppée also discusses a mother's educational influence on her children when he describes in "L'Education maternelle" a statue portraying a mother teaching the alphabet to her child. Yet by far the most fascinating treatment of a mother's influence on her child is Rimbaud's brilliant and rebellious work, "Les Poètes de sept ans." In this poem the poet verbalizes his previously mute revolt against the enemy of his childhood, his mother. He makes known in emotive verse the defiant feelings which have been smoldering silently inside him for so long:

Et la Mère, fermant le livre du devoir,
S'en allait satisfaite et très fière, sans voir,
Dans les yeux bleus et sous le front plein d'éminences
L'âme de son enfant livré aux répugnances.

Tout le jour il suait d'obéissance; très
Intelligent; pourtant des tics noirs, quelques traits
Semblaient prouver en lui d'âcres hypocrisies!
Dans l'ombre des couloirs aux tentures moisies,
En passant il tirait la langue, les deux poings
A l'aïne, et dans ses yeux fermés voyait des points.

Another aspect of Rimbaud's mother's influence which he greatly resented and comments upon in this poem is her rejection of lower-class playmates for her son and his brother Frédéric. In the following lines, we again see the hypocrisy of the boy who takes delight in lying to his mother whom he views as being, in her turn, also deceitful ("les tendresses, profondes, / De l'enfant
The poem also mentions the self-education of the boy, for it relates his penchant for creating

The fifth of Chénier's Elégies is the second example in his poetry
of a child's being informally educated by someone other than his mother. Here Venus brings her son to a shepherd so that the latter may educate her boy by "rustiques leçons." The tables are turned, however, for instead the child teaches the shepherd about love. The poem possesses the lightness and grace characteristic of Chénier's Eucoliques and Elégies.

A second poet who treats a child's being educated by someone other than his mother is François Coppée, who examines in "Angelus" the education of a child by his two adopted fathers, a priest and a former soldier. The poem relates the upbringing of Angelus by the two doting but unwise old men. Because they love the child so much they want him near them constantly. They encourage his inclination toward reading, not realizing that he is growing paler each day for lack of physical activity. Only after the boy's death do they realize that by not heeding nature's demand that the boy's body be cultivated as well as his mind, they unknowingly contributed to his destruction. Such an idea of a balanced education is of course not without numerous precedents, but it is here expressed by means of a sentimental example which no doubt has a certain amount of popular appeal.

Gustave Kahn also takes note of an unhealthy influence upon a child in "Les Bonnes Dames," whom Ireson identifies as "les vieilles filles cagottes qui comblent le vide de leur existence en édifiant de fausse moralité les enfants." Certainly almost every child has known such a person as Kahn describes so graphically:

Les Bonnes Dames sourient aux enfants
leur ôtant le gâteau d'une douce reprimande,
leur gâtent la caresse du moisi de leurs doigts moites,
les bordent, les enserrant de milles bandes d'ouates
leur enseignant la peur. . . .

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Among the poems about the child's education outside of the classroom we have found Jammes's "L'Enfant lit l'almanach" particularly appealing. It captures charmingly the ingenuousness of a young peasant girl contemplating in the almanac the signs of the heavens: "Chèvre, Taureau, Bélier, Poissons, et caetera." The poem indicates that the child believes there is in the skies a marketplace where these various animals are sold. When she sees the picture of the Scales, moreover, she imagines that in heaven are weighed "le café, le sel et les consciences":

C'est le marché du ciel sans doute qu'elle lit.
Et, quand la page tourne au signe des Balances,
elle se dit qu'au Ciel à l'épicerie
on pèse le café, le sel et les consciences. 19

Charles Guérin, not so well known as Jammes, shares with that poet a very loose association with the Symbolist school of poetry. Rather than discussing the influence upon a child of a person or of a book, this poet expresses in an untitled poem beginning "O faible enfant chez qui le rêve" his hope that the day, "ce jour grave," will instruct the boy in the ways of strength and manliness. 20 Ironically, this very poem which calls for strength is comparatively weak and undistinguished.

As we have stated earlier, we are including, as do the French, in the definition of the word education the discipline and advice the child receives from those around him. Four poets have spoken of the discipline of a child. Hugo, especially, shows an interest in this subject. It is, however, not so much the discipline which he illustrates but a lack of it. For example, he explains, in "La Vie aux champs," that children love him because he does not suppress their gaiety and exuberance:
Hugo, who feels that a grandfather's role is much freer and more joyous than that of the father who must constantly be directly concerned with the responsibility of the child's upbringing, admits to spoiling his grandchildren in "Les Enfants gâtés." He asks his grandchildren not to be afraid of him in "Le Syllabus," reminding them that he wishes to cause fear only "aux petits hommes, non aux petits enfants." In "A Des Oiseaux envois," Hugo records an incident in which he at first scolds the children for having burned some of his pages in order to watch the fire. Later, however, he feels that he has overreacted and hopes they will return bringing with them their sincere and fresh laughter.

Victor de Laprade, a contemporary of Hugo, has a reaction very similar to that of Hugo in "A Des Oiseaux envois," when Laprade expresses apprehension after having punished his child:

Je t'ai grondé trop fort peut-être.
Et je me sens tout soucieux
En voyant grossir dans tes yeux
Ces deux larmes que j'ai fait naître.

Laprade, whom Calvet praises as being "chaud, lumineux et d'un optimisme réconfortant" and whom he designates as "le poète qui ne considérait pas l'enfant comme un objet d'art mais comme l'honneur et la joie d'une famille française qui a longtemps duré et qui veut durer encore," has written a second poem on the subject of discipline. Like Hugo, he admits that he may have spoiled his children,
but he blames this on "mon ami Stahl [. . .] ce cher enjôleur de l'enfance." 28

Far from the Romantic verse of Hugo and Laprade is the poetic prose of Paul Fort's Ballades françaises. In the poem, "Le Paillasse de la théière," Fort explores a fascinating aspect of the psychology of a particular child, most probably the poet himself. In the poem, the child is irritated by the image of an enamel clown, "le paillasse," on his mother's teapot—an object which she prides highly as it is a creation of "le meilleur émailleur enfin de la cité." One day the boy breaks the teapot in anger, but immediately afterwards he himself experiences a feeling of being shattered. Perhaps such a reaction is an indication of maturity; perhaps without understanding why, the boy is undergoing remorse at having surrendered to his violent emotions. Or perhaps without realizing it the child has identified with the clown whose melancholy countenance, "sa gueule amère" which the boy finds so annoying, forms such a striking contrast to his clothes and surroundings. In any case, we are not given a reason for his action; we are informed only that it does occur and that a severe punishment follows the transgression:

A terre, j'ai cassé de colère la théière! A tout jamais Paillasse était décapité . . . Mais c'est bête, c'est bête, il m'a semblé, moi-même, avoir perdu la tête!

Or, les oreilles on m'a frotté longtemps et fort pour avoir cassé, du service à thé, une preuve de la si glorieuse habileté, si souvent vantée par ma mère et ma sœur à leurs invités, du meilleur émailleur enfin de la cité!—Et j'ai fort bien senti qu'on me brisait la tête. 29

Like Fort, Rimbaud also discusses in the first person the suffering of a child due to being disciplined by his mother.
We have pointed out above in the consideration of "Les Poètes de sept ans," the misguided attempts of Rimbaud's mother to educate her sensitive child. This idea appears again in the prose poem "Angoisse" which examines the effect of her rigid discipline upon the child. Rimbaud is treating in this poem the tortuous influence which his mother, "la Vampire," has had upon him. In her over-zealous demand that her children be "gentils" so as not to be "drôles," i.e., that they be mediocre rather than run the risk of being different, she has attempted to suck from them their life-blood:

Mais la Vampire qui nous rend gentils commande que nous nous amusions avec ce qu'elle nous laisse, ou qu'autrement nous soyons plus drôles.\(^{30}\)

Although several poets, as we have seen, have discussed the discipline of a child by an adult, others have recorded a milder form of influence which an adult may exert upon a child: advice. We have found the poems on this subject to be generally undistinguished and will therefore only mention them rather than examine them in detail. Sully-Prudhomme in "Conseil" advises the child to love purity, modesty, and simplicity.\(^{31}\) Laprade advises children in "Travaillons" not to be idle, but to work.\(^{32}\) Hugo has produced three poems in which he counsels children: "Au Fils d'un poète" which recommends to the poet's son that he enjoy the poetry all around him,\(^{33}\) "A Un Enfant" which admonishes the son of a widowed mother to love, respect, and cling to her,\(^{34}\) and "Ma Fille" which advises the child to be good and gentle and to love or to pity rather than to hate.\(^{35}\)

In "A Mlle Renée Zilchen," Verlaine writes not to his own child but to a friend's daughter whom he calls his "filleule
littéraire." In the poem he wishes for the young child that she may be "l'espoir et le bonheur" of her father and "l'honneur et la grâce" of her mother. Jean Aicard is much more specifically a writer of poetry about children than is his contemporary Verlaine. Indeed, Calvet has said of him: "Parmi ceux qui ont essayé de ce genre périlleux, il semble bien que Jean Aicard est celui qui s'est le plus approché de la note juste, et qu'il a crée une poésie enfantine qui est vraiment de la poésie et qui est vraiment enfantine." We feel, however, that Aicard has not struck "la note juste" in his poem "Aux Enfants de la France." Here, in our opinion, rather than the stirring and inspirational entreaty that is obviously intended, is only a stereotyped statement expressed too dramatically:

\[
\text{Humanité touchante, encor blanche et petite,} \\
\text{Monte! Deviens très grands, peuple des nouveaux-nés!} \\
\text{...} \\
\text{Sache tenir, s'il faut, un sabre de bataille,} \\
\text{Mais studieux le soir, actif dès le matin,} \\
\text{Sache bien qu'un enfant qui veille et qui travaille} \\
\text{Prépare au monde entier sa gloire et son destin!}
\]

"Prière pour un dernier désir" by Francis Jammes seems fresher and more original than the other poems in which an adult advises a child. Here, instead of all the banal advice the poet could have offered, he has chosen to remind children to give water to the blackbird, to let him go when he is ready to fly, and to write at New Year's "aux grand-mères tremblantes." Rather than encumbering the child with trite platitudes, Jammes simply suggests that the child not forget the small acts of kindness which make him a loving and considerate human being.

Nineteenth-century French poets have not only concerned
themselves with the informal education of a child but with his formal education as well. Delavigne and Hugo, for example, have written poems presenting their theories of education. Delavigne's work is entitled "Epitre à Messieurs de l'Académie française sur cette question: L'Étude fait-elle bonheur dans toutes les situations de la vie?" Here the poet examines both sides of the issue and concludes that study is a mixed blessing bringing both sorrow and joy to the "faible enfant" on whom it is forced. It is the sorrow that education may bring to a young child which Hugo emphasizes in the fifth section of "Colère de la bête" from L'Ane entitled "Conduite de l'homme vis-à-vis des enfants." In this work, a donkey criticizes vigorously the educational system which permits pedants to crush the originality of children in order to mold them into a standard pattern, thereby creating, according to Hugo, a nation of imbeciles:

Et l'âne s'écria:—Pauvres fous! Dieu vous livre
L'enfant, du paradis des anges encore ivre;
Vite, vous m'empoignez ce marmot radieux,
Ayant trop de clarté, trop d'oreilles, trop d'yeux,
Et vous le fourrez dans un ténébreux cloître;
On lui colle un gros livre au menton comme un goitre;
Et vingt noirs grimauds font dégringoler des cieux,
Ô douleur! ce charmant petit esprit joyeux;
On le tire, on le tord, on l'allonge, on le tanne,
Tantôt en uniforme, et tantôt en soutane; 41
Un beau jour Trissotin l'examine, un préfet
Le couronne; et c'est dit: un imbécile est fait. 42

Hugo has written a second poetical treatise on education in his "Discours sur les avantages de l'enseignement mutuel." Here too he criticizes harsh educational practices, giving in their place a projection of an ideal educational situation in which the children
are guided to teach each other, and laughter is not banished from the classroom. Yet we should also mention that Hugo was not completely opposed to formal education even as it existed in the nineteenth century, for he suggests more than once that it may be a deterrent to violence. Indeed he states in "Ecrit Après La Visite d'un bagne":

Chaque enfant qu'on enseigne est un homme qu'on gagne.

Rather than discussing theories, other poets have presented in verse incidents concerning an actual child or children in relation to an aspect of formal education. For example, Mme Tastu in "L'Enfant de Canaris" asks the son of Canaris, a famous and brave Greek sailor, why he has come to France for an education since there are no better examples of brave men than in Greece.

In addition to Mme Tastu's poem alluding to formal education in France, there have been several poems written about children in an actual classroom situation. Writing in the last quarter of the century is Frédéric Bataille, himself a former teacher, who pictures in "La Leçon" children who are listening in appreciation to their teacher's reading of Horace. A more sensitive and touching poem is one from Les Humbles by Coppée in which are described "deux petits en deuil": a mother leading her child to primary school. Having inspected the child's lunch basket, the mother pulls out a handkerchief and has the child blow his nose before entering the classroom:

Ecartant le vieux châle noir
Dont la petite s'emmitouffe,
L'aînée alors tire un mouchoir,
Lui prend le nez et lui dit:--Souffle.

Three other poems show children in a classroom: Lachambeaudie's
"La Rentrée des classes" and Hugo's "Les Enfants lisent, troupe blonde . . .", and "Souvenirs d'enfance."

We have mentioned above that Hugo has criticized the classroom in that he finds it often too restricting and dull to inspire true learning. The idea that nature is a preferable teacher to the short-sighted and pretentious scholars found frequently in schoolrooms is often repeated by Hugo. Indeed, the poet ends the section we have discussed from L'Ane with these words which he addresses to educators:

Votre système est vain, votre empirisme est faux.
.
.
.
Non, la nature au fond pourrait suffire seule;
Elle sait tout, elle est nourrice, étant aieule.

Hugo reiterates this idea by an illustration from his own life in "Ce Qui Se Passait Aux Feuillantines," in which he relates his mother's dilemma of whether to leave her son in a convent school where the life is harsh or to instruct him herself at home. She chooses the latter course and at home allows the boy the liberty of the garden. Hugo in this poem praises highly "la nature éducatrice."

Yet Hugo is not the only poet to express the sentiment that schools are often prisons for children, for we find similar thoughts in the poetry of Moreau, Baudelaire, and Sully-Prudhomme. In the previous chapter we have discussed Moreau's "Sur La Mort d'une cousine de sept ans." Here it is pertinent to mention from that poem one phrase:

Loin des bancs où palit l'enfance prisonnière.

We have also mentioned in the preceding chapter Sully-Prudhomme's
"Dernières Vacances." It, too, substantiates Hugo's idea that a child needs more freedom to develop than he is generally allowed in the classroom. A child is fortunate if he dies early, for he is no longer enslaved in school:

On ne tient plus son âme aux leçons enchaînées,
Et, libre de s'éteindre, il croit s'épanouir.55

Baudelaire also treats the idea that education, at least as practiced in nineteenth-century France, is a bitter and restricting experience for a child. In "A Sainte-Beuve," Baudelaire presents the idea even more graphically than Hugo, Moreau, or Sully-Prudhomme:

Tous imberbes alors, sur les vieux bancs de chêne,
Plus polis et luisants que des anneaux de chaîne,
Que jour à jour la peau des hommes a fourbi,
—Nous traînions tristement nos ennuis, accroupis
Et voûtés sous le ciel carré, des solitudes,
Où l'enfant boit, dix ans, l'âpre lait des études. 56

There can be no doubt that these poets have been greatly influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in their idea that education restricts children unnecessarily. In this remarkable philosopher's work *Emile*, he states in memorable language:

Que faut-il donc penser de cette éducation barbare, qui sacrifie le présent à un avenir incertain, qui charge un enfant de chaînes de toute espèce et commence par le rendre misérable pour lui préparer au loin je ne sais quel prétendu bonheur dont il est a croire qu'il ne jouira jamais?57

Later in the century than Hugo, Moreau, Baudelaire, and Sully-Prudhomme but also challenging the impositions education can make upon a young mind is Arthur Rimbaud. Indeed, the very first test we have by this outstanding poet is an essay which he wrote at the age of ten in order to protest the study of Latin and Greek, which he perceived as useless.58 Of course the angry outcry of a
ten-year-old boy cannot be compared in wisdom or quality of expression with the mature censure of his predecessors. Yet even in this early work are vividly present the probing and the rebellion which will permeate his later productions.

Rimbaud is one of several poets who write of the distraction a child seeks from the rigors of education. In a Latin exercise written at the age of fourteen, Rimbaud describes an exhilarating but brief reprieve from his studies:

Je saisit l'occasion; je gagnai les riante compagnes, oubliant tout . . . Loin de l'étude, et sans nul souci, de douces joies récréèrent mon esprit fatigué.

In "Dimanche" from Les Illuminations, moreover, the poet discusses a vision or daydream that a child has when he has put aside his homework:

Les calculs de côté, l'inévitable descente du ciel et la visite des souvenirs et la séance des rythmes occupent la demeure, la tête et le monde de l'esprit.


Reprions l'étude au bruit de l'oeuvre dévorante qui se rassemble et remonte dans les masses.

Of the four images evoked, the running horse, the wretched actress, the desperadoes longing for excitement, and the children stifling their curses along the rivers, the last is certainly the most forceful. It is so not only because of its controlled power but also because of its restatement with broader application of the previously discussed seven-year-old poet's repressed repugnance in Rimbaud's "Les Poètes de sept ans" (Et la Mère [. . .] / S'en allait
Less gripping and lacking the depth of Rimbaud's poem but also treating the distractions from his studies which a child may enjoy are "L'Ecolier"\(^61\) and "Jours d'été"\(^62\) by Mme Desbordes-Valmore and "Les Griffonnages de l'écolier"\(^63\) by Hugo. These poems relate various incidents in which a child is diverted from his studies, but both writers state that the boy is happier after the diversions and eager to continue his learning. Hugo, however, not wishing to pass up an opportunity to denounce what he sees as pseudo-education, tells of a nine-year-old boy who is forced to copy one thousand verses as punishment for having doodled upon his Latin book. While the boy is copying the verses tediously, Juvenal magically appears to him and approves heartily of the drawings. The poem ends with the jubilation of the young student.

We have shown that numerous French poets of the nineteenth century have observed in verse the influence, both favorable and unfavorable, that a child's education can have upon him. We have seen that the child is profoundly influenced by people and forces around him from the earliest hours of life. We have said, moreover, that this influence may be termed education, for the child learns from it how to relate to the world around him. Our poets have demonstrated that this learning process may take place both under free and informal circumstances and under more restricting and formal ones. Regardless of how the child receives the influence of education, it is undeniable that it forms an extremely important, even vital, aspect of his environment.
Religion

But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God Who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
—William Wordsworth

Although the influence of religion upon the child may not be so universal as that of education, it was still generally a keenly felt influence in nineteenth-century France. As in the case of education, the child is often affected by religion very early in his life, an idea supported by Lamartine in "La Foi":

Notre esprit la [la foi] reçoit à son premier réveil,
Comme les dons d'en haut, la vie et le soleil.

Elle a pénétré l'homme en sa tendre saison;
Son flambeau dans les coeurs précéda la raison.

To illustrate the early presence of religion in the life of a child, let us consider part IV of Sagesse in which Verlaine refers to Rimbaud's childhood religious training:

Malheureux! Tous les dons, la gloire du baptême,
Ton enfance chrétienne...

Of course in this particular case, Verlaine is bemoaning the fact that Rimbaud has turned away from his moral upbringing just as Verlaine himself had done before his conversion to Catholicism which inspired this work. Yet whatever the result, it is most probable that Rimbaud's traditional religious training is typical of that of a great many children in the nineteenth century.

Several poems were written for the purpose of instructing a child to remain close to his faith. Three of these are Romantic poems: "Ma Fille" and "Dormeuse" by Mme Desbordes-Valmore and...
which many believe to be his finest volume. An additional poet who advises a child or in this case a child and his mother to trust in God is Verlaine. His poem, "Un Veuf parle," contains biographical as well as poetic interest, for it is an obvious allusion to his estrangement from his wife and son and to the suffering caused by it. In the poem the poet, who refers to himself as "un veuf," sees on a sea ("Quelle mer? Celle de mes larmes") a woman and a young boy being tossed about by a tempest. They are told by the poet:

Espérez en Dieu, pauvre folle,
Crois en notre Père, petit.
La tempête qui vous désole,
Mon coeur de là-haut vous prédit.
Qu'elle va cesser, petit, folle!  

A number of nineteenth-century French poets who have written on the subject of a child's relation to religion have treated the aspect of prayer. Tristan Corbière, for example, has written in "Le Pardon de Sainte-Anne" a prayer to Sainte-Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, that this saint may have mercy and pity on children.  

Certainly no less sincere than the other poems which express a prayer for a child's welfare, this seemingly unorthodox work has a vibrancy which the others lack. This is no doubt due in great part to the poet's humanization of Sainte-Anne and to his seeing in her "l'âme [...] d'un franc-Breton" like himself. Pale beside Corbière's poem are "La Veille de Noël" by Mme Tastu and "La Prière d'une mère" by Mallarmé, both of which treat a mother's prayer that her son be blessed and protected.
While it is not startling to encounter an unnoteworthy poem among the writings of Mme Tastu, the adjective "pale" is a rather unusual one to apply to a poem by Mallarmé. Such a judgment, however, is more conceivable if one takes into consideration that "La Prière d'une mère" was written while the poet was still in his teens.

In addition to presenting the prayer of an adult on behalf of a child, nineteenth-century French poets have also written of a child in prayer. We have examined in Chapter I, in our discussion of the nature of childhood, such a poem by Lamartine: "Hymne de l'enfant à son réveil." A second poem on this subject is "Prière d'un enfant" by Mme Tastu. While there is nothing particularly unusual about this poem, it is nonetheless a good model prayer for children, for it is simple enough for them to understand yet meaningful enough to be worthy of repetition. Let us consider, for example, the third and final stanza:

Notre Père des cieux, bénissez ma jeunesse,
Pour mes parents, pour moi, je vous prie à genoux;
Afin qu'ils soient heureux, donnez-moi la sagesse;
Et puissent leurs enfants les contenter sans cesse,
Pour être aimées d'eux et de vous!

Although Hugo's "La Prière pour tous" treats this same subject of a child in prayer, it attracts the reader's attention in that it offers an insight into the poet's religious philosophy. Hugo expresses in this poem his idea that the child is an intercessor between man and God, i.e., Hugo has, as de Boer puts it, "une conception messianique du rôle de l'enfant." Because he sees the child as the incarnation of purity, he believes that the child is "the supreme solution to the problem of evil," who will
lead the poet to redemption. In Part II of the poem Hugo entreats his daughter:

Va prier pour ton père!

Efface mes péchés sous ton souffle candide,
Afin que mon cœur soit innocent et splendide
Comme un pave d'autel qu'on lave tous les soirs.

Besides depicting a child in prayer, our poets have examined the child's involvement in other religious activities, such as mass or first communion. They have also composed poems on the subject of the childhood of Jesus. Three poems of this latter type should be cited: "Cantate pour les enfants d'une maison de charité" and "Hymne au Christ" by Lamartine and "Noël" by Gautier. As for examples of poems treating the child in religious activities other than prayer, we have discovered three among the writings of nineteenth-century French poets. The first of these, Coppée's "XXX" from Promenades et intérieurs, pictures a twelve-year-old marquis going to mass.

The remaining two poems which portray a child in a religious activity are "Cantate pour la première communion" by Mallarmé and "Les Premières Communions" by Rimbaud, both of which, as their titles indicate, treat a child's first communion. Mallarmé's poem, like his "La Prière d'une mère" which we have previously discussed, seems innocent and pious, unlike many of his later poems. Like "La Prière d'une mère," "Cantate pour la première communion" was composed at an early age, in this case at the age of sixteen. And like most of the early poems, the work is relatively clear in meaning and syntax; already, however, we see because of the repeated phrase
"Ange à la robe d'azur" an interest in the word "azur" which will in the later poems become almost an obsession.

By no means do we consider an overstatement Edgell Rick-ward's judgment of Rimbaud's "Les Premières Communions" as being "after 'Le Bateau ivre' the most remarkable of his longer poems." The poem was written on the occasion of the first communion of Rimbaud's sister Isabelle, but there can be little doubt that the central figure in the poem, a young girl who is singled out by the priest as being particularly pious, is the poet himself at the time of his own first communion. By the time Rimbaud composed this poem at the age of seventeen, however, he had cast aside all inclinations toward piety and had become, as we will see from this absorbing poem, severely critical of the Church. This change in attitude is indubi-

tably proclaimed from the very first lines:

Vraiment, c'est bête, ces églises des villages
Où quinze laids marmots encrassant les piliers
Ecoutent, grasseyant les devins babillages,
Un noir grotesque dont fermentent les souliers.

In this work, Rimbaud juxtaposes pretensions to piety with realities of impiety. He sets the scene for such a contrast early in the poem:

Le premier habit noir, le plus beau jour de tartes,
Sous le Napoléon ou le petit Tambour
Quelque enluminure où les Josephs et les Marthes
Tirent la langue avec un excessif amour
Et que joindront, au jour de science, deux cartes,
Ces seuls doux souvenirs lui restent du grand Jour.

Les filles vont toujours à l'église, contentes
De s'entendre appeler garces par les garçons
Qui font du genre après messe ou vêpres chantantes.
Eux qui sont destinés au chic des garnisons
Ils marguent au café les maisons importantes,
Blousés neuf, et gueulant d'effroyables chansons.

Among the catechists, the priest singles out a young girl, "cette
petite fille inconnue, aux yeux tristes," as the most devout. On
the eve of the "grand Jour" the child actually makes herself ill
by working herself into a physical and emotional frenzy in order
to be deliberately consumed with religious fervor. Her thoughts
and feelings which begin as holy soon take on sexual overtones, an
aspect of the poem which will be explored in Chapter IV. Yet, how-
ever hard she tries, she is not able to prolong this feverish ec-
stasy:

Elle veut, elle veut, pourtant, l'âme en détresse,
Le front dans l'oreiller creusé par les cris sourds,
Prolonger les éclairs suprêmes de tendresse,
Et bave . . . --L'ombre emplit les maisons et les cours.

Et l'enfant ne peut plus.

Regaining full consciousness, then, and "se sentant bien chaste et
pleine de faiblesses," she goes out into the night, crosses the
courtyard and enters the latrine. The ludicrousness of this line
is forceful:

Elle passa sa nuit sainte dans des latrines.

At this point the voice of the poet is heard to ask the disturbing
question:

Qui dira ces langueurs et ces pitiés immondes,
Et ce qu'il lui viendra de haine, ô sales fous
Dont le travail divin déforme encor les mondes,
Quand la lèpre à la fin mangera ce corps doux?

Rimbaud could not have been more explicit: for him as for his con-
temporary Nietzsche, whose writings incidentally were not published
until long after the composition of this poem, religion amounts to
weakness ("se sentait bien chaste et pleine de faiblesses"), to
disease ("la lèpre à la fin mangera ce corps doux"). In order to
demonstrate this belief, Rimbaud again speaks from the point of view of the girl who has now become a woman. After her first experience of physical love with her husband or lover, she realizes that she can never fully surrender herself to him, for her full sexual release will always be checked by "sa conscience aux ignobles terreurs":

Car ma Communion première est bien passée.  
Tes baisers, je ne puis jamais les avoir sus;  
Et mon coeur et ma chair par ta chair embrassée  
Fournissent du baiser putride de Jésus!

In order to recapitulate this idea finally and indelibly, Rimbaud culminates the antithesis which he has employed throughout the poem with the salient epithet:

Christ! Ô Christ, éternal voleur des énergies.

Of all the nineteenth-century French poems concerning children which we have discovered, we consider "Les Premières Communions" unsurpassed in power of expression and emotion as well as in depth of psychology.

It is evident from examination of this poem that not all of the nineteenth-century French poets accepted unquestioningly the canonical point of view. Indeed, several poets expressed their religious doubts or even disbelief using the vehicle of poems about children. Rimbaud, for instance, did so not only in "Les Premières Communions" but also in "Les Poètes de sept ans" which we have examined earlier. Here the poet expresses memorably his childhood dread of dreary December Sundays and his disbelief in God:

Il craignait les blafards dimanches de décembre,  
Où, pommadé, sur un guéridon d'acajou,  
Il lisait une Bible à la tranche vert-chou;  
Des rêves l'oppressaient chaque nuit dans l'alcôve,  
Il n'aimait pas Dieu; mais les hommes, qu'au soir fauve  
Noirs, en blouse, il voyait rentrer dans le faubourg  
Où les crieurs, en trois roulements de tambour,  
Font autour des édits rire et gronder les foules.
It is not surprising to find that of the poets who, like Rimbaud, have written critically of established religion in their poems on childhood, only Hugo was writing before the middle of the century, for many of the Romantic poets were deeply impressed by the Christian faith, at least in its sensual and mystic aspects. Hugo, however, who has expressed religious doubts more than once in his poetry, writes sarcastically in "Encore L'Immaculée Conception" against the doctrine that children are stained with original sin:

La Chute est leur vrai nom.
Ces enfants que l'aube aime et que la fleur encense,
C'est la honte portant ce masque, l'innocence;
Dans ces yeux purs, Trublet l'affirme en son sermon,
Brille l'incognito sinistre du démon;
C'est le mal, c'est l'enfer, cela sort des abîmes!
Soit. Laissez-moi donner des gâteaux à ces crimes, 86

Later in the century, Coppée also criticizes a particular aspect of religion when in "Enfants trouvés" he censures the nuns who raise orphans for not making the lives of these children more joyful. He says, for example, that the strict discipline of the nuns allows for no playing or laughter and that forcing the children to wear black perpetually only emphasizes their solitude:

Que ployant sous les disciplines
Et mortes avant le cercueil
Vous vous sentiez bien orphelines
En voyant vos habits de deuil. 87

Although a contemporary of Coppée, the cynical Comte de Lautréamont is his polar opposite in philosophy and style. We are able to receive a clear statement of Lautréamont's rebellion against God in the "Chant deuxième" of Les Chants de Maldoror. In poetic
prose, Lautréamont describes an eight-year-old boy seated on a bench in the Tuileries Gardens. The boy is not laughing and playing with the other children but is simply sitting very still, looking with bold eyes at "quelque objet invisible, dans l'espace." Maldoror is attracted to this contemplative boy and, sitting down beside him, begins this conversation:

---A quoi pensais-tu, enfant?
---Je pensais au ciel.
---Il n'est pas nécessaire que tu penses au ciel; c'est déjà assez de penser à la terre. Es-tu fatigué de vivre, toi qui viens à peine de naître?
---Non, mais chacun préfère le ciel à la terre.
---En bien, pas moi. Car puisque le ciel a été fait par Dieu, ainsi que la terre, sois sûr que tu y rencontreras les mêmes maux qu'ici bas... Ce que tu as de mieux à faire, c'est de ne pas penser à Dieu, et de te faire justice toi-même, puisqu'on te la refuse. Si un de tes camarades t'offensait, est-ce que tu ne serais pas heureux de le tuer?
---Mais c'est défendu.
---Ce n'est pas si défendu que tu crois. Il s'agit seulement de ne pas se laisser attraper."

Maldoror continues this conversation, ever weaving his evil but enticing web through the young boy's thoughts. He tells the child that only by being the strongest, cleverest, and most ruthless can he be a conqueror:

Est-ce que tu ne voudrais pas un jour dominer tes semblables?
---Oui, oui.
---Sois donc le plus fort et le plus rusé.

Maldoror can see that the boy is being profoundly affected by his words. He discerns a strong physical reaction in the child; indeed "la fièvre a gagné ce corps délicat." At this point Maldoror realizes the precarious balance of the child between good and evil:

Lorsque dans l'âge mûr, il est si difficile de maîtriser les passions, balancé entre le bien et le mal, qu'est-ce dans un esprit encore plein d'inexpérience?
Maldoror ends the incident by wishing that the boy, of whom he seems genuinely fond, might not be tormented by hatred and horrifying visions as he himself has been:

L'enfant en sera quitte pour garder le lit trois jours. Plût au ciel que le contact maternel amène la paix dans cette fleur sensible, fragile enveloppe d'une belle âme.

Once again, as in Chapter I, we see an emphasis on the fragility and malleability of the child, and on his potential for nobility or for depravity.

Born about the time of Lautréamont's death, Francis Jammes also demonstrates, much less radically however, religious doubts in an adult as opposed to unquestioning belief in a child. In "Je Parle De Dieu" the poet astutely points out not only the fact that a child often accepts readily what he is told to accept but also, and especially, that a child's appreciation for religion is usually confined to the sensual level:

Je parle de Dieu--mais pourtant est-ce que j'y crois?--A cinq ans on me disait: tiens un croquant . . .

Va le manger avec Marie aux vêpres. Sois bien sage et prie le bon Dieu, la vierge Marie.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Je levais la tête pour voir le curé, le grand ostensoir qui luisait sur le reposoir.

Et on chantait: Ô bonne vierge! O lis sans tache! Fleur des berges!--Et l'on voyait briller des cierges.

Et l'on jetait encor des fleurs, et l'on chantait: prenez mon coeur, Notre Dame des sept douleurs!

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The last three lines suggest that religion has not elicited any deeper response in the life of the adult than the sensual one experienced in his childhood. Jammes, however, does not seem to lament this; on the contrary, he expresses appreciation in retrospect for the sights, smells, and sounds of the church which impressed him as a child.

The innovative Paul Fort, a contemporary of Jammes, has also demonstrated how religion affects a child's senses and imagination. Even more so than Jammes, he expresses his religious doubts in a much gentler manner than does the intense Comte de Lautréamont. In Fort's poem "Rêve d'enfant," the deviation from strict orthodoxy is seen in his portrayal of a child's confusing in a dream the figure of Jesus with that of a policeman and of the devil:

"Un diable vert aux cornes rouges . . . Il cueille toutes les fleurs de la terre . . . Mais le beau bleu qui vient là-bas c'est un gendarme . . . Il écrase tous les coquelicots avec ses bottes . . . Ah, il le tient, le gros mauvais diable . . . Non, c'est un petit Jésus, un tout petit Jésus en or, gros comme une souris . . ."

We are able to see from the poet's choice of vocabulary in the following passage that the child has been greatly impressed by the physical trappings of his religion: the colors he associates with the Church ("du blanc, du bleu [. . .] du rose, de l'or"); images of holy or satanic figures which he may have seen ("un ange d'or d'une aile blanche," "vers le soleil beau Jésus monte," "un diable
vert aux cornes rouge"); traditional religious means of punishment ("le feu! le feu!"). Fort effectively conveys the dreams of the child by recording the boy's impressions in the surrealistic manner of free association:

"Du blanc, du bleu, du beau blanc, du bleu, du blanc, du beau bleu, du rose, du rose, de l'or, de l'or, une petite langue de sable rose dort son image dans l'eau bleue, des algues d'or dorment en grâce au bord du sable vers l'eau bleue, au bord du sable aux algues d'or dort un petit Jésus en or, une petite lampe d'or vole, vole dans le ciel bleu, une petite lampe d'or avec deux grandes ailes blanches, avec un ange . . ."

This subconscious state of the child's mind is sustained until the end of the prose poem when the terrified boy, who has cried out in his sleep one time previously ("Maman, l'enfant Jésus est mort"), awakens in terror, wailing,

Maman! le diable qui me tire par les jambes!

We are jolted good naturedly back to reality when the boy, who insists that "le gros gendarme a mangé le petit Jésus," is warned by his father,

--Tu sais, toi, si tu le fais encoremourir une seule fois, celui-là, je te fiche une gifle!--hurle papa qui fait des chiffres.

While Rimbaud, Hugo, Coppée, Lautréamont, Jammes, and Fort have written poems expressing doubts about religion, several poets have written poems which do not question the validity of religion, but which express a desire for worshiping God as He is manifest in nature rather than within the confines of the Church. For example, in "Sonnet" Jammes expresses pleasure at seeing his daughter in a meadow communicating with God and with nature. Vielé-Griffin, too, in "Vision de juin," has seen a young girl
in a state of prayer; but, noticing her eyes closed, the poet tells
her that God loves her naturalness and openness to life and that He
wants her to receive the full impression of His glory by enjoying
nature:

Fille, lève-toi! et prends des roses:
La geste de la Fête est pour tes mains;
Le Dieu qui marche par le pré de juin
S'émerveille de toi et crie de loin
Que s'ouvrent vers sa gloire tes paupières closes! 92

Hugo goes a bit further than do Jammes and Vielé-Griffin in
calling for the worship of God through nature, for he suggests in
"Aux Champs" the Pantheistic idea that God is much more at home in
the fields than in the churches. In this poem he advises his grand-
children never to harm plants and animals, which are "loin du prêtre
et près de Jésus-Christ." 93

Finally, Mme Desbordes-Valmore in "La Fileuse et l'enfant"
gives through the voice of an old spinner-woman the advice to a child
that he should always be open to the voice of God who is everywhere
in nature. 94 For this reason and for others, the child is involved
with nature, and as we shall see in the next section, numerous
nineteenth-century French poets have recorded in verse this involve-
ment.
Nature

Abandonnant tout à coup mes jeunes compagnons, j'allais m'asseoir à l'écart pour contempler la mue fugitive, ou entendre la pluie tomber sur le feuillage.

— René de Chateaubriand

As we have indicated in the previous section, there are instances in nineteenth-century French poetry which demonstrate that the poets believe that God may speak to man through nature. This point is emphatically made by Hugo in "Dieu est toujours là." Here he states that God through nature may offer consolation to one who has lost a loved one. In this particular instance the bereaved is a child:

Alors, si l'orphelin s'éveille,
Sans tout, sans mère, et priant Dieu,
Une voix lui dit à l'oreille:
"Éh bien! viens sous mon dôme bleu!

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"C'est moi qui sur leur sépulture [de ton père et de ta mère] Ai mis l'herbe qui la défend.
Viens, je suis la grande nature!
Je suis l'aïeule, et toi l'enfant!"

In his poem "Ce Qui Se Passait Aux Feuillantines" Hugo once again expresses the idea that God speaks to man through nature. This may be seen in the concluding line of the moving passage in which the poet counsels children to love nature and to receive inspiration from her beauty:

Enfants! aimez les champs, les vallons, les fontaines,
Les chemins que le soir emplit de voix lointaines,
Et l'onde et le sillon, flanc jamais assoupi
Où germe la pensée à coté de l'épi.
Prenez-vous par la main et marchez dans les herbes;
Regardez ceux qui vont liant les blondes gerbes;
Epelez dans le ciel plein de lettres de feu,
Et, quand un oiseau chante, écoutez parler Dieu.
Hugo could give this advice to the children knowingly, for in his childhood he too experienced closeness with nature, a closeness which in poem "XXXVII" from *Les Rayons et les ombres* takes the specific form of a rapport with "les choses ailées":

J'eus toujours de l'amour pour les choses ailées,  
Lorsque j'étais enfant, j'allais sous les feuillées,  
J'y prenais dans les nids de tout petits oiseaux,  
D'abord je leur faisais des cages de roseaux  
Où je les élevais parmi des mousse verte,  
Plus tard je leur laissais les fenêtres ouvertes,  
Ils ne s'en volaient point; ou, s'ils fuyaient aux bois,  
Quand je les rappelais ils venaient à ma voix.  

Not only does Hugo point out a child's closeness to nature, but also the poet has twice compared the child to an element of nature. In the first poem, "La Rose de l'infante," the beauty of a child is compared to that of a rose. Each is found to be so lovely that one can hardly distinguish between the two when they are seen together:

Quand l'enfant, allongeant ses lèvres de carmin,  
Fronce, en la respirant, sa riante marine,  
La magnifique fleur, royale et purpurine,  
Cache plus qu'à demi ce visage charmant,  
Si bien que l'œil hésite, et qu'on ne sait comment  
Distinguer de la fleur ce bel enfant qui joue,  
Et si l'on voit la rose ou si l'on voit la joue.  

In his work "Le Poème du Jardin des Plantes" Hugo again notes a comparison between a child and an element of nature. In this poem the poet, after a visit to the zoo with his grandchildren, records in verse the differences and the similarities which he has observed between children and animals, particularly lions. He notes that neither the child nor the lion is able to communicate, yet both possess "en eux un mystère qui tâche / De dire ce qu'il sait."
Perhaps this "mystère" is a knowledge of or instinct for truth, common among creatures close to nature but rare or non-existent among civilized men. The child, however, will eventually be able to speak, "dénouer le nœud," while the "triste" animal will never be able to free "[la] langue [qui] est prise":

L'enfant regarde l'ombre où sont les lions roux,
La bête grince; à qui s'adresse ce courroux?
L'enfant jase; sait-on qui les enfants appellent?
Les deux voix, la tragique et la douce se mêlent;
L'enfant est l'espérance et la bête est la faim;
Et tous deux sont l'attente; il gazouille sans fin
Et chante, et l'animal écume sans relâche;
Ils ont chacun en eux un mystère qui tache
De dire ce qu'il sait et d'avoir ce qu'il veut;
Leur langue est prise et cherche à dénouer le nœud.
Se parlent-ils? Chacun fait son essai; l'un triste,
L'autre charmant; l'enfant joyeusement existe.99

Hugo shares the typically Romantic belief that "l'enfant joyeusement existe" because he lives in total harmony with nature; his simple life is not burdened with the concerns of the adult who sometimes unfortunately has lost the capacity he once had for wonder and delight in the presence of nature. In "Les Innocents," Hugo describes the child as

Ayant pour toute affaire et pour toute aventure
L'épanouissement de la grande nature.100

It is not surprising to find so many references to nature in Hugo's poems about childhood, for a sensitivity to nature is a fundamental tenet of most Romantic writers. For further examples of this let us look at poems by several other poets connected directly with the Romantic school of poetry. Lamartine, like Hugo, suggests a child's instinctive love for birds when in "Le Moulin de Milly" he mentions a child who has found a nightingale's eggs and who restrains his hand so as not to disturb them:
A third poet, Maurice de Guérin, notes a child's affinity to birds in his delicate poem, "Ma Soeur Eugénie." Here he describes a child's fascination for birds as they soar gracefully and free in the sky above him:

Sous la feuille morte
Le brun rossignol
Niche vers la porte,
Au niveau du sol;
L'enfant qui se penche
Voit dans le jasmin
Ses œufs sur la branche,
Et retient sa main.  

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En l'âge d'enfance
J'aimais à m'asseoir
Pour voir
Dans le ciel immense
L'oiseau voyager
Léger,
Quand le ciel couronne
Les horizons bleus
De feux,
Plus d'un soir d'automne
Au bois m'a surpris
Assis,
Ecoutant les ailes
Qui rasalent les toits
Des bois,
Bruissant entre elles
Comme les flots clairs
Des mers.  

Sainte-Beuve and Gautier, both affiliated at one time with the Romantics, also have written poems on the subject of a child's relationship with nature. Sainte-Beuve, taking inspiration from the passage from René which we have used as the epigraph for this section, questions in his poem, L'Enfant rêveur,

Chateaubriand's young dreamer:

Sous la feuille morte
Le brun rossignol
Niche vers la porte,
Au niveau du sol;
L'enfant qui se penche
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Chateaubriand's young dreamer:

Où vas-tu, bel enfant? Tous les jours je te vois,
Au matin, t'échapper par la porte du bois,
Et, déjà renonçant aux jeux du premier âge,
Chercher dans les taillis un solitaire ombrage.  

Où vas-tu, bel enfant? Tous les jours je te vois,
Au matin, t'échapper par la porte du bois,
Et, déjà renonçant aux jeux du premier âge,
Chercher dans les taillis un solitaire ombrage.
Gautier has written two poems which treat the theme of the child's rapport with nature. In the first of these, "Le trilla," the poet asks a child for what occasion she is dressed, and her answer that it is to celebrate the arrival of spring demonstrates the enviable childlike ability to regard a phenomenon of nature with fresh and appreciative eyes. There is quite a contrast between her exuberant answer and the sad comment of the poet who is not able to put aside his suffering in order to rejoice with the child:

—La neige fond sur la montagne;
L'oeil bleu du printemps nous sourit.
Je veux aller à la campagne
Savoir si le jasmin fleurit.—

Pour moi ni printemps ni compagne;
Pour moi pas de jasmin en fleur;
Car une peine m'accompagne,
Car un chagrin me tient au cœur. 104

In a second poem, "Le Pot de fleurs," Gautier writes of a child's reaction to an aspect of nature. In this poem, the poet relates an incident in which a child finds a seed and plants it in a porcelain pot "orné de dragons bleus et de bizarre fleurs." The child, forgetting the plant, returns quite a while later to find that the plant has grown so much that it has broken the pot. This child reacts differently toward nature from the children of previous poems who are in the presence of nature, for his immediate desire is to pull up the plant rather than simply to enjoy it as a living aspect of nature:

L'enfant revient; surpris, il voit la plante grasse
Sur les débris du pot brandir ses verts poignards;
Il la veut arracher, mais la tige est tenace;
Il s'obstine, et ses doigts s'ensanglent aux dards. 105

In addition to the Romantics, a Parnassian poet, Sully-Prudhomme,
has also noted in verse a child's relationship with nature. In his "Songe d'enfant" he pictures a boy dreaming after school under a willow tree. He feels blessed by nature and in harmony with her creatures around him:

Bientôt, je sentis, en rêvant,
Comme un baiser du ciel à mon âme d'enfant.
Les insectes des prés et les blondes abeilles
Vinrent sans doute alors bruire à mes oreilles;
Les libellules d'or dont l'aile est un éclair,
Les frêles papillons qui sont des fleurs de l'air,
Vinrent d'un lac peut-être ou d'un buisson de roses
Voltiger sur ma bouche et mes paupières closes;
Sans doute quelque oiseau pour bercer mon sommeil
Chanta la liberté, l'espace et le soleil,
Et des bois d'alentour une odeur d'églantines
Vint, errante et légère, effleurer mes narines.

This melodious poem, unlike most of the poems by Sully-Prudhomme from the same volume Le Prisme, does not exemplify the typical Parnassian impersonality and restraint, but rather a lyrical and synesthetic effusion.

Baudelaire is much more skillful than Sully-Prudhomme in varying his poetic style, for the capable Baudelaire inspired not only the Parnassians but the Symbolists as well. Like Sully-Prudhomme he writes of the pleasure a child may receive through his contact with nature. In "A Yvonne Pen-Moor," the poet expresses a nostalgic appeal to the senses by recalling the days when the lady as a child would run barefoot through the forests:

Te souvient-il, enfant, des jours de ta jeunesse
Et des grandes forêts où tu courais pieds nus,
Rêveuse et vagabonde, oubliant ta détresse
Et laissant le zéphir baiser tes bras charnus?

In the prose poem, "Les Bienfaits de la lune," Baudelaire speaks
of a second young girl's rapport with nature, but for another reason. In the former poem, the child receives enjoyment from nature because she seeks out particular pleasures; in the latter poem it is nature ("la lune") who seeks out and blesses the child. The poet relates that the moon, entering the infant's room through the window one night, is attracted by the loveliness of this delicate creature lying in her crib and therefore endows the baby with special qualities:

Cependant, dans l'expansion de sa joie, la lune remplissait toute la chambre, comme une atmosphère phosphorique, comme un poison lumineux; et toute cette lumière vivante pensait et disait: "Tu subiras éternellement l'influence de mon baiser. Tu seras belle à ma manière. Tu aimeras ce que j'aime et ce qui m'aime: l'eau, les nuages, le silence et la nuit; la mer immense et verte; l'eau informe et multiforme; le lieu où tu ne seras pas; l'amant que tu ne connaîtras pas; les fleurs monstrueuses; les parfums qui font délirer; les chats qui se pâment sur les pianos et qui gémissent comme les femmes d'une voix rauque et douce;108

This is a blessing to be sure, but at the same time it may be considered a curse, for it instills in the child a restlessness and a desire that she may never be able to satisfy. The girl, now a woman, is therefore characterized by Baudelaire as "maudite chère enfant gâtée," and the poet testifies to her beauty and her magnetism.

In "Bénéédiction," Baudelaire states one of his fundamental ideas: The poet, unlike the ordinary man, is able to communicate with nature and, as he says in "Correspondances," the poet is observed "avec des regards familiers" as he passes through nature's "forêts de symboles."109 In the former poem, Baudelaire tells of a mother who, realizing she has given birth to a poet, is "épouvantée
et pleine de blasphèmes." Clenching her fists toward God, she
curses "la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères" when this child was con-
ceived. The child-poet also suffers because he is different from
other children, and like the albatross in Baudelaire's poem of the
same name, he may be ridiculed for his awkwardness and his inability
to be comfortable in the alien world of average men. Yet there is
an environment which is clearly his element, a sympathetic world
which inspires him and which will allow him to attain his potential
--the world of nature. Having been "déséréité" by his mother, the
child in "Bénédiction" is fortunate enough to find again (as in
Baudelaire's "Vie antérieure") a paradise where his appetite is
appeased by "l'ambroisie et le nectar vermeil":

Pourtant, sous la tutelle invisible d'un Ange,
L'Enfant déséréité s'énivre de soleil,
Et dans tout ce qu'il boit et dans tout ce qu'il mange
Retrouve l'ambroisie et le nectar vermeil.

Il joue avec le vent, cause avec le nuage
Et s'énivre en chantant du chemin de la croix.

It is clear from this poem that Baudelaire views the poet as a
uniquely gifted being, able to communicate with the natural world
and to describe with sublime artistry the visions which his clair-
voyance has allowed him to perceive. Such a definition of the poet
could also apply to the voyant which Rimbaud sought so fervently
to be--"a 'see-er,' penetrating by his own insight and experience
into the true nature of things and self." Indeed, the seer
Rimbaud is the fulfillment of Baudelaire's idea of a true poet, a
genius who is able, like the child, to see everything "en nouveauté"
and who is always "ivre." This ivresse allows the voyant, like
the child, to receive "impressions [...] without rationalizing them with his logic [...] and to receive] the sensations with unquestioning wonder and amazement which is nearer to wisdom and truth than the meditation of his elders." Arthur Rimbaud, more than any other French poet, was able to do this, for his "unique achievement is that he expressed the experiences of childhood—the real and the visionary—while he was still a child, and in language that is beautifully articulate and of unusual lyric power." Rimbaud, then, is the supreme incarnation of Baudelaire's superb definition of genius: "le genie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté, l'enfance douée maintenant, pour s'exprimer, d'organes virils et de l'esprit analytique qui lui permet d'ordonner la somme de matériaux involontairement amassée." Such genius is clearly seen in Rimbaud's poems treating a child's relationship with nature. As early as his fourteenth year, Rimbaud informs us of his love for nature in a Latin exercise in which he says "dans ma poitrine s'insinuait l'amour de la chaude campagne." But the child Rimbaud not only loved nature but also yearned for an intimacy with her, a penetration into her mysteries. We see this in his prose poem "Aube" which Fowlie characterizes as "related to the whole mythology of quest, to the life of man [...] in his will to discover the world." In this poem it is "l'aube d'été" which the child is seeking and which he does manage, at least momentarily, to embrace. He describes awakening when all is still and walking out into a countryside beginning to stir. His ability to communicate with nature is demonstrated:
Then the child glimpses, at the silver top of a "wasserfall blond," "la déesse"--dawn. He takes off her veils and pursues her through the city, until at last he wraps her in her veils and for a moment feels "son immense corps." This moment in which the child merges with nature in what is at least symbolic copulation represents a victory for the child, indicated by the reference to "un bois de lauriers." The experience exhausts him, however, and he falls to the ground and sleeps until noon:

Alors je levaïs un à un les voiles. Dans l'allée, en agitant les bras. Par la plaine, où je l'ai dénoncée au coq. À la grand'ville elle fuyait parmi les clochers et les domes, et courant comme un mendiant sur les quais de marbre, je la chassais.

En haut de la route, près d'un bois de lauriers, je l'ai entourée avec ses voiles amassées, et j'ai senti un peu son immense corps. L'aube et l'enfant tombèrent au bas du bois.

Au réveil il était midi.

Although the child and the voyant may be the only beings privileged enough to embrace the dawn, even they are evidently not so superhuman that they are able to prolong the experience, and they are subsequently exhausted by the intensity of the experience, however brief it may have been.

Perceptive critics realize the significance of even the smallest childhood event in the works of any writer, but most especially a precocious one like Rimbaud. Joan Evans points out, for example, that Baudelaire was well "aware of the significance that childhood experiences have for creative writers" and that "the most trivial incidents often bloom into works of art."
Evidence in support of this statement is found in Baudelaire's "Un Mangeur d'opium" in which he states "Tel petit chagrin, telle petite jouissance de l'enfant, démesurément grossis par une exquise sensibilité, deviennent plus tard dans l'homme adulte, même à son insu, le principe d'une œuvre d'art." It is possible that such a "petite jouissance"—perhaps the sight of a sunray at dawn and the fleeting desire to possess it—may have inspired "L'Aube." It is probable that certain unrelated impressions which Rimbaud has stored in his mind from childhood form the basis for "Enfance au bois." Here we have a series of images with no apparent connection, seemingly expressed in the surrealistic manner of psychic automatism. After six images are listed, there is a pathetic seventh one which pictures the child as rejected, "désérîté":

Au bois il y a un oiseau, son chant vous arrête et vous fait rougir.
Il y a une horloge qui ne sonne pas.
Il y a une fondrière avec un nid de bêtes blanches.
Il y a une cathédrale qui descend et un lac qui monte.
Il y a une petite voiture abandonnée dans le taillis, ou qui descend le sentier en courant, enrubannée.
Il y a une troupe de petits comédiens en costumes, aperçus sur la route à travers la lisière du bois.
Il y a enfin, quand l'on a faim et soif, quelqu'un qui vous chasse.

A child then, like a "seer," has the ability to communicate with nature; he can hear a flower telling him its name, he can embrace the dawn, he can be made to blush by the song of a bird. But our poets have suggested, as Sully-Prudhomme actually states in "La Terre et l'enfant," that a child loses this ability as he grows older. The poet indicates that the very same person who used to have "de graves tête-à-tête avec le chien de la maison," who was
able to hear "l'herbe qui pousse," i.e., who experienced a close communion with nature, has lost forever this precious gift when he reaches adulthood:

Enfant sur la terre on se traîne,
Les yeux et l'âme émerveillés,
Mais, plus tard, on regarde à peine
Cette terre qu'on foule aux pieds.123

The child, regrettably, loses his rapport with nature as he ages. As for the seer, it is difficult to know. The supreme seer, Arthur Rimbaud, chose not to speak on the subject after his twenty-first year.

Poverty

The child was diseased at birth, stricken with a hereditary ill that only the most vital men are able to shake off. I mean poverty—the most deadly and prevalent of all diseases.

—Eugene O'Neill

Poets in the nineteenth century, more than in any previous century, began to express a concern for the lower classes and their problems, of which the greatest, as O'Neill points out, is poverty. A few, like Clovis Hughes who wrote in the last quarter of the century, became crusaders in verse for the cause of social progress.
An example can be seen in Hughes's sentimental poem, "Le Noël des enfants." Here he reminds the fortunate children not to forget that there are often children who are not so blessed and who receive no cakes at Christmas:

Ils sont beaux, souriants et doux comme vous l'êtes;
Ils ont le même droit que vous à vos galettes,
A nos transports d'enfants heureux
Ils aiment comme vous Noël faisant sa ronde;
Mais ils sont les petits des pauvres, et le monde
N'a pas de galettes pour eux.

En bien! soyez un peu les frères, les bon frères
De ces pauvrets en proie à toutes les misères!
Enfants, pitié pour eux! Pitié
Pour les autres enfants qui n'auront pas d'étrennes!
Portez-leur, portez-leur vos gâteaux à mains pleines
Et donnez-leur-en la moitié.124

It is Victor Hugo, however, who remains the century's incontestable champion writer of verse for the cause of social progress. In "Sur Le Bal de l'Hôtel de Ville," for example, upon seeing the Hôtel de Ville illuminated for a ball, he remarks bitterly that it is not a ball that is needed, but social concern, such as a thought for poor starving children:

Et ce n'est pas un bal qu'il faut, en vérité,
A ce tas de douleurs qu'on nomme la cité!

Puissants! nous ferions mieux de penser quelque plaie
De songer aux enfants qui sont sans pain dans l'ombre.125

This same plea is reiterated in Hugo's "A M. Le D. D'O" when he asks of this "jeune homme au coeur royal" that he be the guardian of society's misérables, including poverty-stricken children:

Soyez l'abri, le toit, le port, l'appui, l'asile!
Faites aux prisonnier qu'on frappe et qu'on exile,
Aux enfants grelottants qui n'ont ni pain ni mère,
Yet for Hugo, versifying concern for poor children was not merely an intellectual exercise but the result of a profound emotion. This can be seen in "Rencontre" in which Hugo describes four poor orphaned children. Hugo begins the poem by saying:

Après avoir donné son aumône au plus jeune,
Pensif, il s’arrêta pour les voir.  

Such a statement is quite revealing as to the character of this poet. Another less sympathetic man, if he contributed at all to the children, might, having fulfilled his obligation to society, hurry off, never really seeing these wretched human beings who are "tout seuls [. . .] dans la foule des hommes." But Hugo does not avert his eyes from them, and indeed, their suffering elicits his own. In "Question Sociale" we again see Hugo's compassion aroused because of an impoverished child. The poet describes in moving tones the state of a pitiful five-year-old girl:

L'enfant souffre. Elle était en haillons, pâle, affreuse, Jolie, et destinée aux sinistres attraits; Elle allait au milieu de nous, passant distraits, Toute petite avec un grand regard farouche. Le pli d'angoisse était aux deux coins de sa bouche; Tout son être exprimait Rien, l'absence d'appui, La faim, la soif, l'horreur, l'ombre, et l'immense ennui. Quoi! l'éternel malheur pèse sur l'éphémère. 

Hugo then explains that the misery of "ce pauvre enfant tragique" is accentuated by the fact that her mother is a prostitute with no concern whatsoever for her child. The child's future, moreover, will probably be no different from her mother's, for as Hugo remarks:

Il arrive parfois, vers le soir, à la brune,
Que la mère et l'enfant se rencontraient, et l'une Regardait son passé, l'autre son avenir.
Hughes and Hugo were by no means the only nineteenth-century French poets to express in verse an awareness of the omnipresence of indigent children. Coppée, in "La Grève des forgerons," mentions a grandfather who is only too conscious of the hunger that awaits his grandchildren in the future:

Je regardai, pensif, ces deux petites bouches Qui bientôt connaîtraient la faim.130

A parent in Vicaire's "Berceuse," which we have discussed in the previous chapter, sees a similar future for his child as has the grandfather in Coppée's poem:

Dors, tu seras gueux, gueux jusqu'à la tombe. Qu'on soit parpille, juif ou bon chrétien, Comme grèle aux champs, la misère tombe Sur les pauvres gens qui n'y peuvent rien.131

Yet, unlike most of those who write of poverty-stricken children, Vicaire inserts an optimistic note:

Mais le soleil rit après la froidure. Paysan, la vie a son bon côté.132

Sainte-Beuve also has indicated that occasionally an impoverished child may find happiness. In "Monsieur Jean" he tells of an infant who has been left at a foundling home and who is adopted by a substitute mother who learns to love him as her own.133 But such fortuitous occurrences are rare in the poetry about poverty-stricken children. More often the poets, as does Sainte-Beuve in "Sonnet," emphasize the tragedy of such an environment:

Quand la Pauvreté seule, au sortir du berceau, M'a pour toujours marqué de son terrible sceau, Qu'elle a brisé mes vœux, enchaîné ma jeunesse, Pourquoi ne pas mourir? 134
Indeed, several poets have recorded illness and death as the consequences of poverty in the life of a child. Comparatively mild among these consequences is the illness that is described in Banville's poem "Le Petit." Here a poor little boy, probably an orphan "qui vit de l'air du temps, de rien," coughs constantly while wandering aimlessly through suburban streets:

Le petit, lorsque vient le soir,
Et qu'il pleut sur la feuille rousse,
Flâne sur le boulevard noir,
Et puis il touche, touche, touche. 135

Unfortunately illness is not the only adverse consequence of poverty. Three nineteenth-century French poets--Coppée, Richepin, and Jammes--report an even more serious one: death. In Coppée's poem, "La Marchande de journaux,"136 which we mentioned in the previous chapter, it is not actually stated that the grandchild of the woman selling newspapers dies due to poverty, but it is strongly implied. Moreover, the poet adds a vraisemblable but ironic touch when he pictures the grandmother rejoicing when there occurs an important or even tragic event, for that means she will be able to sell enough newspapers to buy flowers for the boy's grave. Jean Richepin, writing during the last quarter of the century, also recognizes that poverty is, as O'Neill puts it, "the most deadly [ . . . ] of all diseases." In "Il Etait Une Fois," he speaks of three orphaned children who die of starvation:

Ils sont morts de soif et de faim,
Les trois petits sans père ni mère.137

In addition to Coppée and Richepin, Francis Jammes notes that death can result from indigence. We have found Jammes's poem
even more tragic than the previous two, for he emphasizes not only the children's poverty, but their desperation which results from it. It is interesting that Jammes does not judge the event, but only reports it. And yet, there is one brief subjective note—he has chosen to italicize the word métal in the phrase "le beau pont de métal." Perhaps he is subtly bemoaning the fact that our "progressive" civilization has sufficient metal to put into a bridge, but not enough to put into one sou in order to save the lives of two destitute children:

On m'a dit qu'on avait construit je ne sais où un pont où pour passer chacun payait un sou. C'est sur la gave, j'crois. Une petite fille et son tout petit frère, tous deux en guenilles, conduisaient un char et ils n'avaient pas le sou. Alors ils ont voulu tâcher passer dessous. Ils se sont noyés sous le beau pont de métal. On a raconté la chose dans le journal.138

Baudelaire and Rimbaud have also suggested children's suffering as a result of poverty but their portrayals of these children seem less altruistic in purpose and more personal. In "Les Yeux des pauvres," Baudelaire writes that he was sitting in a café with a woman he loved, perhaps Jeanne Duval, when they noticed a poor man and his two children gazing through the window of the splendidly-decorated room:

Les yeux du père disaient: "Que c'est beau! que c'est beau! on dirait que tout l'or du pauvre monde est venu se porter sur ces murs."—Les yeux du petit garçon: "Que c'est beau! que c'est beau! mais c'est une maison où peuvent seuls entrer les gens qui ne sont pas comme nous."—Quant aux yeux du plus petit, ils étaient trop fascinés pour exprimer autre chose qu'une joie stupide et profonde.139

Yet however unsettling the effect of this sight upon the poet, the
main purpose of the prose poem is not to issue a humanitarian appeal on behalf of the poor, but to point out the difference between his own reaction of compassion for these people and the lady's annoyed one and to conclude that even among those in love it is not possible for two people to think as one.

Rimbaud, in "Les Effarés," also writes of children looking through a window at something unattainable, in this case, "le lourd pain blond" being baked. In this poem, called by Hackett "un chef-d'oeuvre de simplicité," the poet gives us a sensitive portrayal of poor and hungry children but does not seem to suggest social reform as have most of the other poets who treat this subject. Indeed, it seems to us such a delicate yet pregnant poem that it would have been weakened if the poet had chosen to moralize:

Noirs dans la neige et dans la brume,
Au grand soupirail qui s'allume,
   Leurs culs en rond

A genoux, cinq petits--misère!--
Regardent le boulanger faire
   Le lourd pain blond . . .

Ils voient le fort bras blanc qui tourne
La pâte grise et qui l'enfourne
   Dans un trou clair.

Ils écoutent le bon pain cuire.
Le boulanger au gras sourire
   Chante un vieil air.

Ils sont blottis, pas un ne bouge,
Au souffle du soupirail rouge,
   Chaud comme un sein.

Et quand, pendant que minuit sonne,
Façonné, pétillant et jaune,
   On sort le pain,

Quand ce trou chaud souffle la vie
Ils ont leur âme si râvée
   Sous leurs haillons,
The wretchedness of these street urchins is accentuated by the implication that they have had to substitute for a mother's breast the "soupirail rouge / Chaud comme un sein," "ce trou chaud [qui] souffle la vie." Unfortunately, although "ils se ressentent si bien vivre" upon inhaling the scent of the baking bread, the feeling of well-being is as ephemeral as the aroma itself, for the children are, perhaps eternally, separated from the source of nourishment.

We have seen that some poets, like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, picture the longings of impoverished children while others specify illness or death as possible consequences of poverty. An additional aspect of a child's poverty is the phenomenon of child labor, a rather widespread practice in the nineteenth century. We are not surprised to find Hugo once again championing the rights of the child. In "Melancholia" he gives us an idea of the dismal life of a working child:

Où vont tous ces enfants dont pas un seul ne rit?
Ces doux êtres pensifs que la fièvre maigrit?
Ces filles de huit ans qu'on voit cheminer seules?
Ils s'en vont travailler quinze heures sous des meules;
Ils vont, de l'aube au soir, faire éternellement
Dans la même prison le même mouvement.
Accroupis sous les dents d'une machine sombre,
Monstre hideux qui mâche on ne sait quoi dans l'ombre,
Innocents dans un bagné, anges dans un enfer,
Ils travaillent.\textsuperscript{1142}

Hugo, in the same poem shows himself to be bitterly opposed to such a practice:

\begin{quote}
Travail mauvais qui prend l'âge tendre en sa serre,
Qui produit la richesse en créant la misère,
Qui se sert d'un enfant ainsi que d'un outil!
Progrès dont on demande: Où va-t-il? que veut-il?
Qui brise la jeunesse en fleuri qui donne, en somme,
Une âme à la machine et la retire à l'homme!
Que ce travail, hai des mères, soit maudit!\textsuperscript{1143}
\end{quote}

Several poets, in addition to Hugo, have written verse illustrating child labor. Sully-Prudhomme points out in "Sonnet" that the rosy-cheeked little girls in rags, of which the villages are full, will not be allowed to enjoy their childhood for long because they will soon have to work in order to eat:

\begin{quote}
Mais elles vont bientôt se courber et s'asseoir
Serves du champ pénible et des vives aiguilles;
Les vierges ne sont pas, dans les pauvres familles,
Des colombes qu'un grain nourrit de l'aube au soir.\textsuperscript{1144}
\end{quote}

Two poets, Banville and Coppée, illustrate the same circumstance about which Sully-Prudhomme was speaking—the working of a young girl. In "La Bouquetière," Banville has chosen a sentimental subject—a poor, suffering child—but like the Parnassians and their prose counterparts, the Realists, he has pictured objectively and scientifically the child's physical condition:

\begin{quote}
Elle est à jeun. Le sang pourpré
A déserte sa levre, pâle
Comme un linge blanc sur le pré,
Et sa pauvre poitrine râle.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}
Coppée's poem on the same subject, "XII" from *Intimités*, is to us a more touching one, for in it is seen a contrast between the poor little girl selling violets, "une enfant presque nue et livide tenant des fleurettes en main," and the happy and elegant couple who stop to buy some flowers from her. Coppée condemns this situation as "monstreux":

Et c'était monstreux, cette enfant de sept ans
Qui mourait de l'hiver en offrant le printemps.146

Another poet who has written of a young girl's having to work is the minor Parnassian, Albert Merat. This poet states in "L'Apprentie" that the girl's desires or her scholastic potential is of no consequence, for

Belle ou laide, distraite ou sage,
On lui fait quitter, vers douze ans,
L'école pour l'apprentissage.147

Our poets have written not only of young girls having to work but of working young boys as well. Mallarmé mentions such a boy in his brief poem "Le Crieur d'imprimés" from "Chansons bas."

His approach, however, is quite different from that of the previous poets, for he in no way indicates that the boy suffers from working. On the contrary, the young newspaper seller is characterized as "gai":

Toujours, n'importe le titre,
Sans même s'enrhumer au
Dégel, ce gai siffle-litre
Crie un premier numéro.148

Much more typical than this portrayal of a working child as joyous and carefree is Alexandre Guiraud's "Le Petit Savoyard," considered by the poet's contemporaries to be his best work.
Guiraud, writing in the Romantic period, tells the story of a little boy who must leave his sick mother to travel and find work in order to eat. One night the nine-year-old boy is found starving and freezing in the snow by nuns, who care for him. At last, having earned some money by singing, the boy is able to return home to his mother.\(^{149}\)

Two poets, Mallarmé and Gautier, have warned that poverty may lead a child to commit a crime. Mallarmé's poem "Pauvre Enfant pâle" treats, as has done Guiraud's poem, the theme of a boy who must sing in order to earn his living,\(^{150}\) but there is a vast difference between the two poems. We find Giraud's poem characterized by a rather easily forgotten sentimentality whereas the later poem possesses a haunting power. In Mallarmé's prose poem the poet expresses a fear that the boy's difficult and impoverished life may lead him to commit a crime for which he will be guillotined:

Petit homme, qui sait si elle \([\text{ta tête}]\) ne s'en ira pas un jour, quand, après avoir crié longtemps dans les villes, tu auras fait un crime? Un crime, n'est pas bien difficile à faire, il suffit d'avoir du courage après le désir, et tels qui ... \([\text{sic}]\) Ta petite figure est énergique.

Pas un sou ne descend dans le panier d'osier que tient ta longue main pendue sans espoir sur ton pantalon: on te rendra mauvais et un jour tu commettras un crime.

Ta tête se dresse toujours et veut te quitter, comme si d'avance elle savait, pendant que tu chantes d'un air qui devient menaçant.

Elle te dira adieu quand tu paieras pour moi, pour ceux qui valent moins que moi. Tu vins probablement au monde vers cela et tu jeunes dès maintenant, nous te verrons dans les journaux.

Oh! pauvre petite tête!\(^{151}\)
While Mallarmé suggests a probability that a poor boy will commit a crime, Gautier records an accomplished fact. In his poem "A L'Impératrice" he praises the Empress Eugénie for visiting prisons in which are found "de petits bandits de douze ans." It is not stated but certainly implied that poverty has been a major factor in the lives of many of these "pauvres enfants détenus."#152

Two poets, Coppée and Baudelaire, have written of the contrast between rich and poor children; both have emphasized, in these poems, that the latter can be just as happy as the former. Coppée sets his poem "Aux Bains de mer" on a beach. Here are found both rich children, "sains et superbes sous leurs habits étoffés," and poor children, equally barefoot ("pieds nus comme ceux-ci") though not so elegantly dressed. Yet the poet indicates that the indigent ones are not envious of the wealthy ones, for the poorest children, "les derniers des pauvres," are able to enjoy the sea just as can the rich children:

Car ils savent combien maternelle est la mer,
Et que pour eux aussi souffle le vent amer
Qui rend robuste et belle, en lui baisant la joue,
L'enfance qui travaille et l'enfance qui joue.153

Baudelaire, in his prose poem "Le Joujou du pauvre," also treats this subject but in a more vivid and memorable manner. Here he pictures two children—a rich boy with "un joujou splendide, aussi frais que son maître, verni, doré, vêtu d'une robe pourpre, et couvert de plumets et de verroteries" and a poor boy "sale, chétif, fulingineux" with his own toy "dans une boîte grillée [. . .] un rat vivant!" The rich lad puts aside his own toy and regards with
fascination the "toy" which the poor boy shows him.\textsuperscript{154} In the final line of the poem, Baudelaire makes his point that exterior trappings do not determine interior worth:

Et les deux enfants se riaient l'un à l'autre fraternellement, avec des dents d'une égale blancheur.\textsuperscript{155}

Goppée and Baudelaire have thus established for us that whatever the social and financial status of a child, he may still enjoy one of a child's fundamental rights: to delight in such activities as frolicking on the beach, to possess toys however meager or grand. We will examine this aspect of childhood in the following section.

Toys, Games, and Activities

\textemdash\textemdash l'utilité du jeu ne réside pas dans le profit direct de l’activité déployé en jouant, mais dans le bénéfice lointain que procure la dépense même de cette activité en exerçant les organes et en développant les facultés.

—Marcel Braunschvig

Just as nineteenth-century French poets have viewed the child at school and at church they have also viewed him at home and at play. This section will deal with those poems describing the two latter situations. We shall first examine those poems
which treat the toys and games of children of the previous century; then we shall consider the poems which treat children's leisure activities in and around the home.

Two poets have written of toys that children do not possess but desire. Banville does this in "Jour de l'an," a poem which emphasizes the child's self-centered nature, for it is merely a list in twelve stanzas of toys the children wish to receive. While we have found no deep aesthetic value to the poem, it is nonetheless informative as to the type of toys prevalent in the nineteenth century. The last verse cited suggests the educational value of the play experience ("Nous voulons par les jeux nouveaux / Réjouir nos cervelles":

Et les bébés à l'air mutin
Qui disent deux paroles,
Et la cuisine du festin
Avec ses casseroles;

Nous voulons bien les vrais fusils
Qu'on charge avec des balles,
Et les paillasses cramoisis
Qui choquent leurs cymbales;

Pour nous promener dans les bourgs
Avec des escopettes,
Nous voulons bien de vrai tambours
Et de grandes trompettes;

Nous voulons par les jeux nouveaux
Réjouir nos cervelles;
Nous voulons bien les grands chevaux
Avec leurs manivelles.

Another example of children in poetry who long for toys they do not possess is found in "Joujoux" by Edmond Rostand, better known as a dramatist than as a poet. In this poem, Rostand evokes the familiar scene of children on the way home from school stopping "pendant des heures" to peer yearningly into a toy window:
Other poets who write of a child’s toys speak of those actually in the child’s possession. Coppée, for example, in "Joujoux d’Allemagne" speaks of watching "la petite Marie" play with a toy farm, "ce jouet d'Allemagne appelé bergerie." The poet continues that he derives even more delight from the intriguing toy than does Marie. A second writer who notes a toy possessed by a child is Adélaïde de Montgolfier, who began writing verse in the Romantic period. Mme Montgolfier speaks of the toy that is most typically associated with a French child—a boat.

In her simple and unsophisticated poem "Mon Bateau" she expresses a child’s longing for freedom, a feeling that will be given depth and power in Rimbaud’s "Le Bateau ivre" which we will discuss in our final chapter:

Quand mon bateau
S’en va sur l’eau
Poussé gaiement
Par le bon vent
Je voudrais tant
Etre dedans!160

Albert Samain, a poet with Symbolist affinities, also notes a toy which is a typical instrument of childhood—the bubble-blower. In the case of the poem "La Bulle," the toy is no more complicated than a straw blown into a basin of foamy water. Here Samain gives us a beautiful evocation of the conception and growth of the lovely and delicate bubble, and of its sudden disappearance:
Such an exquisite poem is not only meaningful in itself, but in its symbolic portrayal of the brilliant but ephemeral nature of childhood, for once this exhilarating but brief period has passed, we, like the child Bathylle, seek "en vain sa gloire évanouie."

Two additional poets, Mme Desbordes-Valmore and Paul Fort, have written of children's toys and both have specified toy-weapons. In Mme Desbordes-Valmore's poem, "Le Coucher d'un petit garçon," the poetess speaks of a little boy who does not want to go to sleep because he will have to stop playing with "sa belle épée." Fort, in his exciting poem "Le Petit Marquis," tells of an elegantly-dressed child who cuts up a prayer book and scatters pictures of saints "comme des fleurs sur les fleurs du tapis." He then folds "la page déchirée ou scintille, au cœur d'un Jésus doré, la pointe en rubis d'une lance d'argent." From this paper he fashions a paper arrow with which he threatens the animals on the tapestry. The seeming irreverence and violence of the child are perhaps inspired by the pictures of Jesus and the saints in which he may see acts of
brutality against these holy figures. On the other hand, the irreverence may be a conscious rebellious gesture against a strictly enforced religious education:

Soudain! gloire à son geste de bel enfant cambré, s'éclaire son rire, frisonne sa chevalure, son rire de nacre ourlé d'écarlate et tout l'or frivole de sa chevalure,—le petit marquis menace de sa flèche les singes, les licornes, et les lions des tentures.\(^{163}\)

One poet, Francis Jammes, mentions in "Il Y A Par Là"\(^{164}\) and in "Voici Le Grand Azur"\(^{165}\) specific games which children play.\(^{166}\) In the former poem he mentions children playing hide-and-seek ("puis les enfants allaient jouer à cache-cache"), while in the latter poem he pictures children playing hopscotch ("voici les doux enfants jouant à la marelle"). Both poems emphasize not only the games of childhood but also the innocence, beauty, and exuberance of that age.

In addition to writing of children's toys and games, many poets have pictured children in activities in and around the home. Of these, Fernand Gregh, writing late in the century, depicts in "Un Soir" a tranquil family grouped around a fire. He describes the activity of each person, the sewing of the mother, the reading of the father, etc. As for the boy, he is happily dreaming:

Et je rêve, parmi le grand silence,—heureux.\(^{167}\)

In contrast to this warm and contented family scene is one portrayed by the Symbolist Charles Cros which emphasizes the monotony and meaninglessness of an only too typical family existence. The style and approach to the subject matter of "Intérieur" have a freshness which forms an effective contrast to the staleness of the existence here delineated:
Unlike Cros, Coppée pictures a happy family, but, ironically, its happiness is based on the grief of others. In "La Famille de Menuisier," he tells of a father who is a "marchand de cercueils" and a mother who therefore thinks hopefully of a cholera epidemic.

As for the children, they view with joy a funeral procession and bless the deceased person "qui fait vendre des planches." 169

Three nineteenth-century poets have written of instances in which the child is being read to or is reading to himself. Richepin, for example, in his poem "Les Contes de grand'mère," describes children listening eagerly to their grandmother who tells them such stories as

C'est le Chaperon rouge, ou le Petit Poucet,
La Belle au bois dormant, le Chat botté, Peau d'Ane,
Cendrillon, les Souhaits, Barbe-Bleue et Soeur Anne,
Et Riquet à la houppe et bien d'autres encor.170

August de Chatillon, a painter, sculptor, and minor poet of the Romantic period, also says that a grandmother may frequently tell stories to her grandchildren. Indeed, in his poem "Les Petits
Loups," he actually relates the story that his grandmother used to tell about the little wolves.

Unlike Richepin and Chatillon, Paul Fort examines a child reading to himself. As usual, Fort's method is a psychological one, for he is not content in "Le Grimoire" to portray merely the physical activity of reading the magician's book, but rather he probes into the child's mind to record the following credible thoughts swirling through the child's brain:

--Oh, les nuits noires avec ce grimoire ancien qui me mettait l'âme en plein soufre!
L'Homme noir aux yeux d'ocre, et son poignard de fer!
L'Homme noir aux yeux bleus, et son poignard de bronze!
L'Homme noir aux yeux blancs, et son poignard d'argent!
L'Homme noir aux yeux noirs, et son grand poignard d'or!

Oh! les aurores avec encore l'ancien grimoire qui me faisait croire aux belles princesses d'ivoire, aux yeux adamantins, aux cheveux de matin. . . .

In addition to the poems about children and stories, several poets have viewed the child involved in other activities around the home. Hugo, for example, in his poem "XLVII" from Toute La Lyre, relates an incident in which his granddaughter was hoping for rain so that one particular bean would grow in her garden, and the poet, giving her a watering can, teaches her to rely on action rather than vain wishes. In "L'Enfant voyant l'aïeule," Hugo notes a second instance of a child's activity around the home. This time a mildly mischievous child, reminiscent of Jason, sneaks behind his dozing grandmother to snatch a bit of the wool which she is spinning. Hugo captures in verse the child's joy at his accomplishment:

Puis s'enfuit triomphante, emportant avec joie
La belle laine d'or que le safran jaunit,
Autant qu'en pourrait prendre un oiseau pour son nid.174
Sainte-Beuve was inspired to write "A David" upon seeing the statue of a three-year-old boy picking a cluster of ripe grapes. The poem is a well-written one, for the reader is able to visualize perfectly the young boy in the act of picking "le raisin superbe":

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Il a couru! ses dix doigts} \\
&\text{A la fois,} \\
&\text{Comme autour d'une corbeille,} \\
&\text{Tirent la grappe qui rit.} \\
&\text{Dans son fruit} \\
&\text{Buvez, buvez, jeune abeille!}^{175}
\end{align*}
\]

In "Les Confitures"\textsuperscript{176} by André Theuriet, a minor Parnassian poet, we also have a portrayal of children picking fruit, but this time for another purpose—in order to make jelly, "exquises confitures."

Albert Samain also shows a child in the process of helping around the home when in "Le Repas préparé"\textsuperscript{177} he describes in detail a young girl setting the table.

A number of the poets who have written of a child's leisure activities have specified an activity relating to animals. We have already mentioned Hugo's poem "XXXVII" from Les Rayons et les ombres in which he recalls having tamed birds as a child. This poet also observes three children at the zoo and records in "Ce Que Dit Le Public" their naive and charming conversation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cinq Ans.} \\
\text{Les lions, c'est des loups.} \\
\text{Six Ans.} \\
\text{C'est très méchant, les bêtes.} \\
\text{Cinq Ans.} \\
\text{Oui.} \\
\text{Six Ans.} \\
\text{Les petits oiseaux, ce sont des malhonnetes;} \\
\text{Ils sont des sales.} \\
\text{Cinq Ans.} \\
\text{Oui.} \\
\text{Six Ans, regardant les serpents.} \\
\text{Les serpents . . .}
\end{align*}
\]
Gautier also writes of a childlike activity related to animals, or in this case insects. In his delicate poem "Enfantillage" in which he reveals his happiness at the coming of spring, he states that what he loves best about spring's arrival is being able to watch little girls catching June-bugs:

"Mais plus que tout cela j'aime sous les charmilles
Dans le parc Saint-Fargeau, voir les petite filles
Emplir leurs tabliers de pain de hanneton."

The Breton poet Eugène Le Mouel, moreover, writes of an equally frequent occurrence in the loves of many nineteenth-century children. In "Les Petits Paysans" he discusses the joyous, carefree life of peasant children "bruns, sous leurs blouses blanches," and he notes in particular that they love to chase chickens:

"C'est ainsi, tous les jours! On court après les poules,
On cueille des blues et des coquelicots.
On va sur les versants rouler comme des boules,
A force de chanter on laisse les échos,
Et sous les plants ombreux on court après les poules."
Finally, Albert Samain examines in verse two activities involving children and animals. In "Le Petit Palemon" he describes a determined eight-year-old boy in the process of subduing a goat:

Ils luttent corps à corps; le bouc fougueux s'efforce;  
Mais l'enfant, qui s'arc-boute et renverse le torse,  
Etreint le cou rebelle entre ses petits bras,  
Se gare de la corne oblique, et, pas à pas,  
Rouge, serrant les dents, volontaire, indomptable,  
Ramène triomphant le bouc noir à l'étable.\textsuperscript{181}

Samain has written a second poem in which a child's activity relates to an animal. In "Le Marché" the poet perceptively illustrates how important it can be to a child to be given responsibility. Here the poet writes of the pride of a little girl who is allowed to carry home from the market a duck in a basket:

Alidé bat des mains quand, pour la contenter,  
La mère donne enfin son panier à porter.  
La charge fait plier son bras, mais, déjà fière,  
L'enfant part sans rien dire et se cambre en arrière,  
Pendant que le canard, discordant prisonnier,  
Crie et passe un bec jaune aux treilles du panier.\textsuperscript{182}

Children's activities involve not only animals but other aspects of nature as well. Hugo writes in poem "Ix"\textsuperscript{183} from L'Art d'être grand-père of a walk he took with his grandchildren. He expresses their deep contentment on this "lente promenade" together. Another poet who writes of a child's activity involving an aspect of nature is Paul Fort, who in "L'Enfant"\textsuperscript{184} gives us a fleeting glimpse of a child trying to catch the rainbow in his bucket after a storm. Pierre Louys, in his successful hoax Chansons de Bilitis,\textsuperscript{185} also writes on the subject of a child playing in a natural setting. Among the prose poems of this work is one in which Louys views little children who are playing in a stream as they watch oxen drinking nearby.
A final poet who writes of a child's activity in relation to an aspect of nature is Arthur Rimbaud, who writes in "Mémoire" of a boy, the poet himself, in a boat moored to a riverbank. It is sad to realize that however much the child longs for freedom, neither he nor his "canot immobile" can escape. The same static condition impregnated by the same profound longing for liberation can be seen in "Les Poètes de sept ans," much of which we have discussed previously. In the final moving stanza the boy is alone in his room where his mind may take flight if not his body. Here he reads his novel, which stirs the boy's soul with exotic descriptions of unattainable regions; and he dreams while lying on un-bleached linen, pretending it is the sail of a boat:

Et comme il savourait surtout les sombres choses,
Quand, dans la chambre nue aux persiennes closes,
Haute et bleue, âcrement prise d'humidité,
Il lisait son roman sans cesse médité,
Plein de lourds ciels ocreux et de forêts noyées,
De fleurs de chair aux bois sidéraux déployées,
Vertige, écroulements, deroutes et pitié!
—Tandis que se faisait la rumeur du quartier,
En bas,—seul et couché sur des pièces de toile
Ecrue, et pressentant violemment la voile. 187

These deep-seated yearnings for liberty and adventure, however, will not be poetically satisfied until the embarkation of "le bateau ivre."

Rimbaud expressed more vividly than any French poet before him and perhaps since, the impatience of the child to commence his adult life; he mistakenly believed, as do most children, that once the fetters of childhood are cast aside, there are no restrictions to encumber one's absolute freedom. Yet whatever the joys or disappointments of adulthood, it does arrive in its own time. One of the signs announcing the beginning of the transition from childhood
to adulthood is the child's budding sexual awareness, a phenomenon which in our next chapter we will examine through the verse of various nineteenth-century French poets.
NOTES


9. Ibid., p. 182.


12. François Coppée, Oeuvres complètes, III (Paris: Lemerre, 1892), 143-44.


18. Ibid.


23. Ibid., pp. 531-33.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 151.

Hugo, Les Contemplations, pp. 253-54.

Hugo, Toute La Lyre, pp. 34-38.

Hugo, Les Contemplations, pp. 7-8.


Calvet, I, 160-61.


Delavigne, V, 293-98.

Clifford S. Parker in The Defense of the Child by French Novelists (New York: George Banta Publishing Co., 1925) points out on p. 66 that Hugo, speaking in 1850 in a session of the Assemblée législative, stood for free, compulsory and non-ecclesiastical schooling more than thirty years before these principles were incorporated into law.

Hugo, L'Ane, p. 336.

Hugo, Odes et ballades, pp. 466-73.

See, for example, "A Qui La Faute?" in L'Année terrible, pp. 197-98.

Hugo, Les Quatre Vents de l'esprit, p. 61.
167


28. Rimbaud, pp. 3-5.

29. Ibíd., p. 6.


65 Verlaine, p. 149.

66 Moulin, pp. 158-60.

67 Desbordes-Valmore, "Dormeuse" in Petite Anthologie, pp. 308-11.

68 Lamartine, pp. 71-75.


70 Verlaine, p. 295.

71 Corbière, pp. 129-35.

72 Tastu, pp. 19-20.


76 Ibid.

77 Hugo, Les Feuilles d’automne, p. 111.

78 Lamartine, pp. 434-40.

79 Ibid., pp. 405-15.


81 Coppée, I, 333.

82 Mallarmé, pp. 3-4.

This citation and the following ones from "Les Premières Communions" are taken from Rimbaud, pp. 88-92.

85 Rimbaud, p. 78.

86 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 541.

87 Coppée, I, 179-84.

88 Le Comte de Lautréamont, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: José Corti, 1946), pp. 55-56. Future references to this poem will be taken from the same edition, pp. 55-58.


90 Fort, p. 318. Future references to this poem will be taken from the same edition, pp. 317-18.

91 Jammes, Choix de poèmes, p. 248.

92 Francis Vielé-Griffin, Oeuvres, II (Paris: Mercure de France, 1924), 20.

93 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 539.


95 Hugo, Les Voix intérieures, p. 395.

96 Hugo, Les Rayons et les ombres, pp. 595-96.

97 Ibid., p. 650.

98 Hugo, La Légende des siècles, p. 33.

99 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, pp. 454-55.

100 Hugo, L'Anne terrible, p. 223.
101 Lamartine, p. 1229.

102 Maurice de Guérin, Oeuvres, I (Paris: Le Divin, 1930), 41.


105 Gautier, I, 254.


107 Baudelaire, p. 222.

108 Ibid., p. 290.

109 Ibid., p. 11.

110 Ibid., pp. 7-8.


112 Baudelaire, p. 1159.


115 Baudelaire, p. 1159.

116 Rimbaud, p. 6.


118 Rimbaud, p. 194.

119 Ibid.

121 Baudelaire, p. 143.

122 Rimbaud, p. 177.

123 Sully-Prudhomme, II, 134.

124 Clovis Hughes, "Le Noël des enfants" in Choix de poésies, p. 55.


126 Ibid., p. 228.

127 Hugo, Les Rayons et les ombres, p. 626.

128 Hugo, La Légende des siècles, p. 375.

129 Ibid., p. 376.

130 Coppee, I, 208.

131 Vicaire, "Berceuse" in Anthologie des poètes français p. 592.

132 Ibid.

133 Sainte-Beuve, p. 308.

134 Ibid., p. 34.


136 Coppee, II, 5-16.

137 Jean Richepin, "Il Etait Une Fois" in Choix de poésies, p. 58.


139 Baudelaire, p. 169.
In Mallarme's poem the poor child, who must sing in order to earn a living, is reminiscent of Baudelaire's mention in "La Muse venale" of a choir boy who also must sing in order to eat: "Il te faut, pour gagner ton pain de chaque soir, chanter des Te Deums auxquels tu ne crois guère."

This occurrence may be somewhat explained by a statement of Marcel Braunschvig (Regards intérieurs) quoted by Deborah Losse in "The Concept of the Child in the Works of Charles Baudelaire," Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina 1970. Braunschvig remarks: "Le tort des jouets luxueux et trop perfectionnés est justement de ne pas laisser une assez grande marge à l'activité imaginative de l'enfant." Mrs. Losse continues (p. 17): "Given two objects, the child will choose the bizarre over the richly decorated, for he is still motivated by curiosity rather than by material value." Baudelaire in
Morale du joujou (p. 524) seems to suggest that a child may be motivated by both of these qualities in choosing a toy, for he relates that having been given by a generous lady a choice of many toys, "je m'emparai immédiatement du plus beau, du plus cher, du plus voyant, du plus frais, du plus bizarre des joujoux."

René Galand, moreover, attempts to explain the rich child's interest in the rat by saying that "the most magnificent toys cannot compete with life itself. Conventional values easily turn into dead abstractions. They lack the fascination of the live rat, which may symbolize our animal instincts, the disturbing forces of the unconscious in which Baudelaire would perhaps like us to see not a repugnant beast, but an object rare and unknown." (The French Review, vol. XLIV, Special Issue, no. 2, Winter 1971, 17.) Baudelaire himself said in "Le Voyage": "Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas."

155 Baudelaire, p. 256.

156 For a fascinating treatment of the question of toys and children's varying reactions to them, see Baudelaire, pp. 526-29.


158 Edmond Rostand, "Joujoux" in Choix de poésies, p. 46.

159 Coppée, I, 286.


162 Desbordes-Valmore, "Le Coucher d'un petit garçon" in Poètes d'aujourd'hui, pp. 160-61.

163 Fort, p. 295.

164 Jammes, Choix de poèmes, p. 69.

165 Jammes, Œuvres, p. 238.

166 The poems about children's games here mentioned are all quite harmless. Two striking prose passages, however, emphasize children's games which are characterized by cruelty. (It should be recalled that we have discussed cruelty as a characteristic of the child in
Chapter I.) The first passage is found in the Introduction to
Vigny's Chatterton (Bibliotheque de la Pléiade, p. 767):

Il y a un jeu atroce, commun aux enfants du Midi; tout le monde
le sait. On forme un cercle de charbons ardents; on saisit un
scorpion avec des pinces et on le pose au centre. Il demeure d'abord
immobile jusqu'à ce que la chaleur le brûle; alors il s'effraie et
s'agite. On rit. Il se décide vite, marche droit à la flamme, et
tente courageusement de se frayer une route à travers les charbons;
mais la douleur est excessive, il se retire.—On rit.—Il fait
lentement le tour du cercle et cherche partout un passage impossible.
Alors il revient au centre et rentre dans sa première mais plus sombre
immobilité. Enfin il prend son parti, retourne contre lui-même son
dard empoisonné, et tombe mort sur-le-champ. On rit plus fort que
jamais.

The second passage is found in Baudelaire's "Pauvre Belgique"
(Bibliotheque de la Pléiade, p. 1369):

Barbarie des divertissements des enfants.
Les oiseaux, attachés par une patte à une ficelle, nouée autour
d'un bâton.
Un ami à moi, coupe la ficelle, et se fait un mauvais parti.
La Rue aux pinsons, à Namur, tous les yeux crevés.


168. Charles Cros, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Louis Forestier and
Pierre-Olivier Walzer (Paris: Bibliotheque de la Pléiade, Gallimard,


170. Richepin, "Les Contes de grand-mère" in Choix de poésies,
p. 31.

171. Auguste de Chatillon, "Les Petits Loups" in Choix de poésies,
pp. 33-34.


173. Hugo, Toute La Lyre, p. 83.


175. Sainte-Beuve, p. 361.


179. Gautier, I, 82.


182. Ibid., p. 28.

183. Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 421.

184. Fort, p. 387.


187. Ibid., p. 78.
CHAPTER IV

THE CHILD AND HIS SEXUAL AWARENESS

The omnipresent process of sex, as it is woven into the whole texture of our man's or woman's body, is the pattern of all the process of our life.

--Havelock Ellis

Nineteenth-century French poets have not been hesitant to examine in verse the phenomenon of a child's budding sexual awareness. Their various poems when viewed together form a sequential account of this awareness in a child of sexual stirrings from the time just prior to their beginnings in the potentially fertile ground of early platonic love, through their initial stages of investigation, and even to their consummation. It should be made clear, however, that the poets for the most part have pictured this final stage, the consummation of a child's sexual stirrings, as being forced upon the child rather than as being sought actively by him.

Freud theorized that a child's first important experiences of pleasure arise from "actions involving the erogenous zones." He believed, moreover, that these actions "bring the child into conflict with his parents, and the resulting frustrations and
anxieties stimulate the development of a large number of adaptations, displacements, defenses, transformations, compromises, and sublimations." Alfred de Vigny is not nearly so explicit as Freud nor perhaps so convinced of the early and strong influence of sexual feelings upon a child, but he does state in "La Colère de Samson" that a mother instills in her son, from the moment that "il vient au jour," "un désir d'amour." In this particular poem, the poet sees man's eternal need "de caresse et d'amour" as debilitating, for in order to satisfy his need he must turn again and again to Dalila ("plus ou moins, la Femme est toujours Dalila"), whom the poet sees as the incarnation of deceit:

"L'Homme a toujours besoin de caresse et d'amour,
Sa mère l'en abreuve alors qu'il vient au jour.
Et ce bras le premier l'engourdit, le balance
Et lui donne un désir d'amour et d'indolence."3

It can happen that a child whose desire for caresses is first whetted by a woman, as Vigny says, is permitted certain liberties with women either because he is too young to become sexually stimulated by this contact or because they think he is too young. André Chénier writes in "Epigrammes: IV" of such an occurrence.

Here the speaker recalls the indulgences of a beautiful woman towards him when he was a child, and as an adult he retrospectively regrets his former naïveté and therefore his lack of mature appreciation for her favors:

J'étais un faible enfant qu'elle était grande et belle.
Elle me souriait et m'appelait près d'elle.
Debout sur ses genoux, mon innocente main
Parcourait ses cheveux, son visage, son sein,
Et sa main quelquefois, aimable et caressante,
Feignait de châtier mon enfance imprudente.
C'est devant ses amants, auprès d'elle confus,
Que la fière beauté me caressait le plus.
Que de fois (mais, hâï! que sent-on à cet âge?)
Les baisers de sa bouche ont pressé mon visage!
Et les bergers disaient, me voyant triomphant:
"Oh! que de biens perdus! Ô trop heureux enfant!"

A similar sentiment is expressed by Chénier in "Mysis et Lycas."

This poem records an interview between a child, Mysis, and a young man, Lycas. Lycas expresses his wish that he had access to the kisses and caresses of Chloé as does the child. Sainte-Beuve, moreover, wrote a poem, "A Mon Cher Marmier," the subject of which resembles that of the two poems by Chénier. Here, too, a young man envies a child's intimacy with a woman he loves:

Vite me quittant pour elle,
Le jeune enfant qu'elle appelle
Proche son sein se plaça.
Elle prit sa tête blonde.
Serra sa bouclette ronde,
Ô malheur! et l'embrassa.

Et lui, comme un ami tendre
L'enlaçait d'un air d'entendre
Ce bonheur qu'on me défend.
J'adorais avec envie,
Et j'aurais donné ma vie
Pour être l'heureux enfant.

Puis, elle aussitôt sortie,
Je pris l'enfant à partie
Et me mis à lui poser,
Aux traces qu'elle avait faites
Mes humbles lèvres sujettes:
Même lieu, même baiser.

It is difficult to ascertain the child's feelings in this situation.

In the second stanza the boy is characterized as having "comme un ami tendre [, . ] un air d'entendre / Ce bonheur qu'on me défend."

This would imply that the child is responding somewhat knowingly.
to the woman's embrace. Yet the third stanza seems to indicate that the man considers the child merely a receptacle of the beloved woman's caresses rather than an individual possessing deep emotions of his own. The effect, if any, of the man's kisses upon the child is not mentioned.

In Chénier's "Pannychis" the child, who is designated as being five years old, assumes a more active role than have the children in the preceding poems in this chapter. Here older girls caress the young child as have the women in the previous poems. In this composition of alternating prose and poetry, however, the child is urged to describe in detail his amorous feelings for his cousin Pannychis and to sing the song which he has composed for her:

Plusieurs jeunes filles entourent un petit enfant, le caressent... "On dit que tu as fait une chanson pour Pannychis, ta cousine... --Oui je l'aime, Pannychis... Elle est belle. Elle a cinq ans comme moi... Nous avons arrondi en berceau ces buissons de roses... Nous nous promenons sous cet ombrage... On ne peut nous y troubler, car il est trop bas pour qu'on y puisse entrer... Je lui ai donné une statue de Vénus que mon père m'a faite avec du buis. Elle l'appelle sa fille, elle la couche sur des feuilles de rose dans une écorce de grenade. Tous les amants font toujours des chansons pour leur bergère... et moi aussi j'en ai fait une pour elle... --Eh bien! chante-nous ta chanson [...]."

"Ma belle Pannychis, il faut bien que tu m'aimes; Nous avons même toit, nos âges sont les mêmes. Vois comme je suis grand, vois comme je suis beau."7

The relationship between the two children is obviously a platonic one but at the same time it is a close simulation of an adult marital relationship. This is evidenced by the fact that the children are pretending to live together with a child. The boy, moreover, is concerned with impressing Pannychis; he assumes that
the courtship has been successful ("il faut que tu m'aimes") because not only are they constantly together ("Nous avons même toit") but also he considers himself to be irresistible ("je suis grand [. . .] je suis beau"). It is noteworthy that the boy's father is evidently encouraging, even if unconsciously, this precocious but perhaps not uncommon behavior, for it is he who fashioned for the children "une statue de Vénus," whose association with love is not generally of a spiritual nature.

After the boy has sung his song, he leaves "bien bâisé, bien caressé" in order to join Pannychis. He is followed at a distance by the girls who wish to observe and admire the two children in their verdant hideaway:

Il s'en va bien bâisé, bien caressé ... Les jeunes beautés le suivent de loin. Arrivées aux rosiers, elles regardent par-dessus le berceau sous lequel elles les voient occupés ... à former avec des buissons du myrte et de roses un temple de verdure autour d'un petit autel pour leur statue de Vénus. Elles rient. Ils lèvent la tête, les voient et leur disent de s'en aller. On les embrasse ... et s'en allant la jeune Myro dit: "O heureux âge!"

At this point, Myro tells her companions of a similar experience in her own childhood. Her account testifies to the fact that the boy's relationship with Pannychis cannot be considered an oddity:

Mes compagnes, venez voir aussi chez moi les monuments de notre enfance ... J'ai entouré d'une haie pour le conserver le jardin que j'avais alors ... C'est là que je vivais avec ... Là, il m'appelait déjà sa femme et je l'appelais mon époux. Nous n'étions plus hauts que telle plante ... ."

The young girl in Chénier's "Arcas et Bacchylis" may well be a bit older than Pannychis in the previous poem. In this poem Damalis is not at all interested in taking on "le joug de Vénus"
offered to her by an obviously older suitor, for she is "une enfant encore." Perhaps, unlike the children in the preceding poem, Damalis is in the period which Freud has termed latency—"a hiatus in sexual interest and activity beginning with the resolution and repression of the Oedipus complex [at about six years of age] and ending with the urgent reawakening of sexual desires associated with puberty [at about twelve years of age]."

Tu poursuis Damalis. Mais cette blonde tête Pour le joug de Vénus n'est pas encore prête. C'est une enfant encore. Elle fuit tes liens, Et ses yeux innocents n'entendent pas les tiens.

All of the poems by Chenier which we have discussed here possess the delicacy and grace characteristic of much of his work.

In addition to Chenier and Sainte-Beuve, Victor Hugo has recorded in verse a child's early association in a love-relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Hugo's poem "II" from La Légende des siècles shows the progression of such a relationship through several years of childhood:

Regardez-les jouer sur le sable accroupis, Ou sur l'herbe, au milieu des fleurs, tendre tapis; L'un traîne la charrette et l'autre tient la pelle. Le paradis leur parle et l'hymen les appelle. Six ans donne parfois une tape à trois ans. Puis l'âge vient, on marche, ô frais sentiers glissants! Elle a six ans, il a neuf ans; on se marie; L'aurore et le printemps sont en coquetterie; Les moineaux dans les bois font des choses entre eux Qui changent deux enfants dans l'ombre en amoureux. Encore un an, ou deux; les filles sont farouches, Tout à coup, disent non, et sentent sur leur bouche L'écllosion charmante et sombre du baiser; O mères! prenez garde! Eros vient se poser Dans les cœurs, fauve oiseau, sans loi, sans frein, sans règle, Qui commence en colombe et finit comme l'aigle; N'importel c'est exquis. Cupidon est Bébé; Pyrame ne sait pas de quel sexe est Thisbé; Et Bérénice joue au volant avec Tite. Bel âge, où l'idylle est encor toute petite!"
Of special interest here is the fact that although Hugo, like Chénier, is speaking of a platonic relationship between two children, at the same time he notes that a particular moment will arrive when the girls' attitudes will change ("les filles sont farouches / Tout à coup, disent non, et sentent sur leur bouche / L'éclosion charmante et sombre du baiser"). The platonic relationship is beginning to cede to the physical one ("Eros vient se poser dans les coeurs"). The child is growing up.

In Sainte-Beuve's "A Mademoiselle," we see a rather startling relationship juxtaposing the very young child, who innocently mimics adulthood like the children in Chénier's "Pannychis," with the older child who, approaching adolescence, takes this childish game more seriously, like the girls at the end of Hugo's poem:

Nous aimions à courir sur la verte pelouse;  
Elle avait bien quatre ans, moi j'en avais bien douze.  
Alors mille douceurs charmaient nos entretiens;  
Ses blonds cheveux alors voltigeaient dans les miens,  
Et les nombreux baisers de sa bouche naive  
M'allumaient à la joue une flamme plus vive.  
Elle disait souvent que j'étais son mari,  
Et mon cœur s'en troublait, bien que j'eusse souri.  

One of the experiences which frequently occurs in the sexual development of the child is his infatuation with a member of the opposite sex who is older than he. Such a situation has existed in the two previous poems in which younger girls have been portrayed as being infatuated with older boys. Neither of these poems however has well exemplified this particular phase in a child's sexual development, for in Hugo's poem the age difference between the two children is not vast, and in Sainte-Beuve's poem not only does the poet stress the older party's feelings rather than those of the
younger, but also the relationship could hardly be termed a normal one. There is another nineteenth-century French poem which provides an example of a young girl's fascination with an older boy, or in this case, a man. In "Chant II, 5th strophe" of Les Chants de Mal- doror, Lautréamont discusses in minute detail a ten-year-old girl's attraction to Maldoror and her actions due to this attraction:

Faisant ma promenade quotidienne, chaque jour je passais dans une rue étroite; chaque jour, une jeune fille svelte de dix ans me suivait, à distance, respectueusement, le long de cette rue, en me regardant avec des paupières sympathiques et curieuses. Elle était grande pour son âge et avait la taille élancée. D'abondants cheveux noirs, séparés en deux sur la tête, tombaient en tresses indépendantes sur des épaules marmoréennes. Un jour, elle me suivait comme de coutume; les bras musculeux d'une femme du peuple la saisit par les cheveux, comme le tourbillon saisit la feuille, appliqua deux gifles brutales sur une joue fière et muette, et ramena dans la maison cette conscience égarée. En vain, je faisais l'insouci- ant; elle ne manquait jamais de me poursuivre de sa présence inopportune. Lorsque j'enjambais une autre rue, pour continuer mon chemin, elle s'arrêtait, faisant un violent effort sur elle-même, au terme de cette rue étroite, immobile comme la statue de Silence, et ne cessait de regarder devant elle jusqu'à ce que je disparusse. Une fois, cette jeune fille me précéda dans la rue, et emboîta le pas devant moi. Si j'allais vite pour la dépasser, elle courait presque pour maintenir la distance égale; mais si je ralentissais le pas pour qu'il y eût un intervalle de chemin assez grand entre elle et moi, alors elle le ralentissait aussi, et y mettait la grâce de l'enfance. Arrivée au terme de la rue, elle se retournait lentement, de manière à me barrer le passage. Je n'eus pas le temps de m'esquiver, et je me trouvai devant sa figure. Elle avait les yeux gonflés et rouges. Je voyais facilement qu'elle voulait me parler et qu'elle ne savait comment s'y prendre. Devenue subitement pâle comme un cadavre, elle me demanda: "Auriez-vous la bonté de me dire quelle heure est-il?" Je lui dis que je ne portais pas de montre, et je m'éloignai rapidement. Depuis ce jour, enfant à l'imagination inquiète et précoce, tu n'as plus revu, dans la rue étroite, le jeune homme mystérieux qui battait péniblement, de sa sandale lourde, le pavé des carrefours tortueux.

To this point we have seen nothing unusual in the poem from a psycho- logical point of view. It is not surprising that a young girl might
follow a man to whom she is attracted, even though she is punished by her mother for doing so, and that she might eventually work up the courage to speak with him, if only to ask the time. We could expect the man's reaction to her admiration to be one of flattered sympathy, amusement, or possibly mild annoyance. We are not at all prepared, then, (except by previous association with the perverted character of Maldoror) for the man's violent feelings against the child. At first Maldoror speculates that the child may be something older than what she appears to be, that she may be an eighteen-year-old prostitute and therefore her mother has struck her "parce qu'elle ne faisait pas son métier avec assez d'adresse."

Later he decides that this hypothesis is probably false:

Qui sait? Peut-être que cette fille n'était pas ce qu'elle se montrait. Sous une enveloppe naïve, elle cachait peut-être une immense ruse, le poids de dix-huit années, et le charme du vice. [.] Je crois que sa mère la frappa parce qu'elle ne faisait pas son métier avec assez d'adresse. Il est possible que ce ne fut qu'un enfant, et alors la mère est plus coupable encore. Moi, je ne veux pas croire à cette supposition, qui n'est qu'une hypothèse, et je préfère aimer, dans ce caractère romanesque, une âme qui se dévoile trop tôt.

This last statement made by Maldoror clarifies his feelings of violence and their possible manifestations which Maldoror will presently enumerate. Because Maldoror has rejected mankind, he cannot allow himself to feel even the slightest warmth toward a human being; indeed he must exorcise such a response by incantations of savagery. This depraved need, therefore, arouses our pity and at the same time our horror:

Ahh! vois-tu, jeune fille, je t'engage à ne plus reparaître devant mes yeux, si jamais je repasse dans la rue étroite. Il pourrait t'en coûter cher! Déjà le sang et la haine
Here follows a vividly brutal enumeration of the acts of violence which Maldoror could inflict upon the frail little body housing "une âme qui se dévoile trop tôt." While the child's feelings in Lautreamont's poem may be quite normal, they are completely overshadowed by the aberrant reactions of the man.

There are two poems, however, whose subject matter confines itself totally to the child's tendency to become attracted to an older person. The first of these is by Hugo and the second by Sully-Prudhomme, both of whom have written about a young man enamored of an older girl or woman. While such an occurrence is not unusual, it may be particularly natural in French society and literature where it is it frequently the older woman, "the archetypal initiator," who introduces the boy or young man to the pleasures of sex. In these two poems, however, the relationship has not advanced to an erotic stage, although in both poems contact and its resulting pleasure are mentioned. Hugo's poem "Lise" treats the love that a boy of twelve feels for a girl of sixteen. The feeling is evidently reciprocal ("Elle m'aimait. Je l'aimais"), even though
"mademoiselle Lise" thinks of the boy as a child ("Elle disait de moi: C'est un enfant!"):

J'avais douze ans; elle en avait bien seize.
Elle était grande, et, moi, j'étais petit.
Pour lui parler le soir plus à mon aise,
Moi, j'attendais que sa mère sortit;
Puis je venais s'asseoir près de sa chaise
Pour lui parler le soir plus à mon aise.

Que de printemps passés avec leurs fleurs!
Que de feux morts, et que de tombes closes!
Se souvient-on qu'il fut jadis des coeurs?
Se souvient-on qu'il fut jadis des roses?
Elle m'aimait. Je l'aimais. Nous étions
Deux purs enfants, deux parfums, deux rayons.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...

Elle disait de moi: C'est un enfant!
Je l'appelais mademoiselle Lise.
Pour lui traduire un psaume, bien souvent,
Je me penchais sur son livre à l'église;
Si bien qu'un jour, vous le vîtes, mon Dieu!
Sa joue en fleur toucha ma levre en feu.10

In Sully-Prudhomme's poem "Jours lointains," we do not know the exact ages of the people involved. Subtle clues might lead us to suspect that the age difference here between the younger boy and the older girl is greater than in Hugo's poem. We know, for example, that the boy considers himself a child ("J'étais enfant"); we know that the lady is able to make frequent and evidently un-chaperoned visits to the boy's house ("Nous recevions sa visite assidue"); we also know that she is quite a bit taller than he ("J'allais, les yeux levés tout grands vers elle, / Glisser ma tête sous sa main"). There is a further difference between "Jours lointains" and the poem by Hugo—the infatuation in Sully-Prudhomme's poem is evidently not mutual, or if it is, the boy is unaware of it ("comme inoccupés, / Ses doigts [dans ma chevelure] m'ont fait une
etrange brûlure, / Par l'âge de mon coeur trompés"):

Nous recevions sa visite assidue;
J'étais enfant. Jours lointains! Depuis lors
La porte est close et la maison vendue:
Les foyers vendus sont des morts.

Quand j'entendais son pas de demoiselle,
Adieu mes jeux! Courant sur son chemin,
J'allais, les yeux levés tout grands vers elle,
Glisser ma tête sous sa main.

Et quelle joie inquiète et profonde
Si je sentais une caresse au front!
Cette main-là, pas de lèvres au monde
En douceur ne l'égaleront.

Je me souviens de mes tendresses vagues,
Des aveux fous que je jurais d'oser,
Lorsque, tout bas, rien qu'aux chatons de bagues
Je risquais un fuyant baiser.

Elle a passé, bouclant ma chevelure,
Prenant ma vie; et comme inoccupés,
Ses doigts m'ont fait une étrange brûlure,
Par l'âge de mon coeur trompés.

Comme l'aurore étonne la prunelle
L'éveille à peine, et c'est déjà le jour;
Ainsi la grâce au cœur naissant nouvelle
L'émeut, et c'est déjà l'amour.17

"Jours lointains" is an almost painfully accurate account of a young boy's love for a woman. Particularly noteworthy is the progression of feeling described within the poem as well as the advancement in sexual stirrings depicted here, as compared with the poems previously discussed in this chapter. The boy records that at first he drops all childish games and runs to meet her upon her arrival in order to feel her hand on his head or "une caresse au front." Later he gains enough courage to utter "des aveux fous" and even to risk "un fuyant baiser" but only on the stones of the lady's rings. Finally when she twists her fingers in his hair, he feels himself
surrendering at least emotionally to her ("Elle a passé, bouclant ma chevelure, prenant ma vie"), and he experiences the significant "étrange brûlure" which leads him to conclude that "c'est déjà l'amour."

Fernand Gregh, writing late in the century, also recorded the progression of a child's sexual feelings. In "Nous Étions Deux Enfants" he characterizes the relationship between himself and another child as being a spiritual and innocent one in which the only physical contact consisted of handholding:

Nous étions deux enfants étonnés et joyeux
Deux purs enfants heureux d'être au monde ...

Nous marchions dans une aube éternelle, en chantant,
Les doigts entrelacés sous la bonté des cieux.18

The same volume contains a dreamlike and mystifying poem entitled "Prologue," in which the poet pictures what is most probably the same relationship as being less innocent:

J'habitais autrefois une maison heureuse,
Aux jours du rêve, avant ma vie aventureuse.

La clef du parc, un soir, était tombée à l'eau,
Et je vivais captif au fond du vieux château

Avec une autre enfant belle comme une femme,
Si belle qu'en l'aimant je crus aimer mon âme.

Hélas! Et je baisai sa bouche, et je l'aimai,
Et nous nous sommes enlacés un jour de mai.

Le vent brûlant mêlait au ciel les blanches nues,
Et ce fut comme si nos lèvres étaient nues ...

L'air tiède se pâmait sous des brises ardentes,
Le silence des bois vibrait d'ailes stridentes.

Et nous crûmes sombrer dans une mer profonde,
Et pendant un moment nous fûmes seuls au monde. 19

The most ambiguous statement of the poem is "Et nous nous sommes
The word "enlacements" can obviously have more than one connotation. It may describe a brief and innocent embrace or it may imply an act of sexual intercourse. Due to the context, which first makes it clear that the enlacement occurring on a particular memorable day, was preceded by the boy's kissing the girl and his feeling of love for her ("Et je baisai sa bouche et je l'aimai") and which then describes the couple's strong sensations of engulfment and isolation ("Et nous crûmes sombrer dans une mer profonde, et pendant un moment nous fumes seuls au monde"), we have chosen to believe that the poet is here relating the sexual fulfillment of this relationship. The very next poem in the volume, however, would seem to make this question an academic one, for in "Doute," Gregh himself doubts, as has his reader formerly, the validity of the experience related in "Prologue":

Ai-je vécu vraiment dans le château désert?
Je ne me souviens pas, je ne me souviens plus. . . .

He goes on to say that often in the shadows he believes he sees the blue roof of the château in the sunlight, smells roses, and feels the fluttering of birds' wings. Yet he indicates that the occurrence of "Prologue" was only a vision, a dream. Such a dream is not uncommon in children whose bodies are beginning to feel sexual stirrings and whose minds are frequented by idyllic fantasies:

Et c'est l'ombre soudaine où le songe s'achève,
Et je crois m'éveiller d'un étrange et doux rêve
Où mon âme en songeant des choses, songeait d'elle.

It sometimes happens that one of the child's earliest encounters with the phenomenon of sex may be the unexpected view of his parents in the act of sexual intercourse. It is this experience which, according to Marcel Jean and Arpad Mezei, forms the basis
for "Chant II, 8e strophe" of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. We will here present and expound upon their interpretation which we have found fascinating if not totally convincing. The strophe relates that the boy Maldoror, daring to penetrate "les mystères du ciel," one day approaches a throne upon which is seated "celui qui s'intitule le Créateur." Jean and Mezei believe that this figure represents Lautréamont's father. The "Creator" is eating "le trône pourri d'un homme mort," a figure which represents the poet's mother. The two critics believe that the child has experienced this spectacle of his parents' copulation in terms of the father's brutal consumption of the mother:

L'accouplement est ici représenté sous la forme infantile de l'anthropophagie ("Papa bat maman!" ou plutôt: "Papa mange maman!" s'écrie l'enfant surprenant pour la première fois le corps à corps parental). These critics also note that the boy characterizes himself as being deaf from birth ("On raconte que je naquis entre les bras de surdité") and that his state suddenly began to change after the boy had this disturbing experience ("Une cinquième sens se révéla en moi").

They see the deafness as a symbol of "l'impotence infantile":

On raconte que je naquis entre les bras de la surdité! Aux premières époques de mon enfance, je n'entendais pas ce qu'on me disait. [. . .] Un jour, jour néfaste, je grandissais en beauté et en innocence. [. . .] Il commençait à me sembler que l'univers, avec sa voûte étoilée de globes impassibles et agaçants, n'était peut-être pas ce que j'avais rêvé de plus grandiosse. Un jour, donc, fatigue de talonner du pied le sentier abrupte du voyage terrestre, et de m'en aller, en chancelant comme un homme ivre, à travers les catacombes obscures de la vie, je soulevai avec lenteur mes yeux spleenétiques, cernés d'un grand cercle bleuté, vers la concavité du firmament, et j'osais pénétrer, moi, si jeune, les mystères du ciel! Ne trouvant pas ce que je cherchais, je soulevai la paupière effarée plus haut, plus haut encore, jusqu'à ce que j'aperçusse un trône, formé d'excréments humains et d'or,
lequel trônait, avec un orgueil idiot, le corps recouvert d'un linceul fait avec des draps non lavés d'hôpital, celui qui s'intitule lui-même le Créateur! Il tenait à la main le tronc pourri d'un homme mort, et le portait, alternative-
ment, des yeux au nez et du nez à la bouche; une fois à la
bouche, on devine ce qu'il en faisait.21 Ses pieds plongeaient
dans une vaste mare de sang en ébullition, à la surface duquel
s'élevaient tout à coup, comme des ténias à travers le contenu
d'un pot de chambre, deux ou trois têtes prudentes, et qui
s'abaissaient aussitôt, avec la rapidité de la flèche: un
coup de pied, bien appliqué sur l'os du nez, était la ré-
compense connue de la révolte au règlement, occasionnée par
le besoin de respirer un autre milieu; car, enfin ces hommes
n'étaient pas des poissons! Amphibies tout au plus, ils
nageaient entre deux eaux dans ce liquide immonde! . . .
jusqu'à ce que, n'ayant plus rien dans la main, le Créateur,
avec les premières griffes du pied, saisit un autre plongeur
par le cou, comme dans une tenaille, et le soulevait en air,
en dehors de la vase rougeâtre, sauce exquise! Pour celui-là,
il faisait comme pour l'autre. Il lui dévorait d'abord la
tête, les jambes et les bras, et en dernier lieu le tronc,
jusqu'à ce qu'il ne restât plus rien: car il croquait les os.
Ainsi de suite, durant les autres heures de son éternité.
Quelquefois il s'écriait: "Je vous ai créés; donc j'ai le
droit de faire de vous ce que je veux. Vous ne m'avez rien
fait, je ne dis pas le contraire. Je vous fais souffrir,
et c'est pour mon plaisir." Et il reprenait son repas cruel,
en remuant sa mâchoire inférieure, laquelle remuait sa barbe
pleine de cervelle.25

There are several portions from the above passage which one might
cite in support of the theory of Jean and Mezei. There is the fact
that the boy thinks of the day of the occurrence as "néfaste," un-
lucky and even harmful, and that he considers his life prior to the
event as "en beauté et en innocence." He evidently suspects that
there is something that he does not know ("je n'entendais pas ce
qu'on me disait") and, hesitatingly, dares to seek this mysterious
knowledge. This might indicate that his discovery was not totally
unplanned. It is not difficult to imagine that the boy might see
the bed as "un trône" and his father as "le Créateur," especially
since he specifies that the Creator has given himself that title.
It is equally possible to believe that the boy might view the sheets which cover his father as dirty ("le corps recouvert d'un linceul fait avec des draps non lavés d'hôpital"), especially if one considers how horrifying an impression this experience seems to have made upon the boy. He may have envisioned the mother as "un homme mort" because of her unresponsiveness or submissiveness, and he may have then perceived the father as domineering and sadistic ("Je vous fais souffrir, et c'est pour mon plaisir").

We cannot refute this theory nor do we wish to do so, for there is much psychological truth in it. We should point out, however, that a sexual interpretation is not the only possible one for this rich passage, because the problem may be a metaphysical one, based perhaps upon some profoundly anti-religious experience in the boy's life. In any case, the event elicited a strong reaction from the boy and left a lasting and adverse impression upon his mind:

Les membres paralysés et la gorge muette, je contemplai quelque temps ce spectacle. Trois fois, je faillis tomber à la renverse, comme un homme qui subit une émotion trop forte; trois fois, je parvins à me remettre sur les pieds. Pas une fibre de mon corps ne restait immobile; et je tremblais, comme tremble la lave intérieure d'un volcan. A la fin, ma poitrine oppressée, ne pouvant chasser avec assez de vitesse l'air qui donne la vie, les lèvres de ma bouche s'entr'ouvirent, et je poussai un cri... un cri si déchirant... que je l'entendais! Les entraves de mon oreille se délièrent d'une manière brusque, le tympan craqua sous le choc de cette masse d'air sonore repoussée loin de moi avec énergie, et il se passa un phénomène nouveau dans l'organe condamné par la nature. Je venais d'entendre un son! Un cinquième sens se révélait en moi! Mais quel plaisir eussé-je pu trouver d'une pareille découverte? Désormais, le son humain n'arriva à mon oreille qu'avec le sentiment de la douleur qu'engendre la pitié pour une grande injustice. [. . .] Je vous l'ai dit, depuis la vision qui me fit connaître la vérité suprême, assez de cauchemars ont sué avidement ma gorge, pendant les nuits et les jours, pour avoir encore le courage de renouveler, même par la pensée, les souffrances que j'éprouvai en cette heure infernale, que me poursuit sans relâche de son souvenir.
It is infrequent that a child's earliest encounters with sex are of such a traumatic nature as the experience described above by Lautréamont. More often than not, the sexual investigations of a child are of a pleasurable nature. Often they take the form of an exploration of one's body and then of the body of anyone accessible—a parent, a friend, etc. Baudelaire has presented in Les Vocations, which we will discuss further in the next chapter, a delightful account of a young boy's tentative and ingenuous exploration of the arms, neck, and shoulders of his sleeping nurse. In this prose poem, four boys are talking and each in turn relates to the others a recent and to him at least impressive experience. It is the third boy whose experience was sexual in nature:

"Moi, je vais vous raconter comment il m'est arrivé quelque chose qui ne vous est jamais arrivé, et qui est un peu plus intéressant que votre théâtre et vos nuages.—Il y a quelques jours, mes parents m'ont emmené en voyage avec eux, et, comme dans l'auberge où nous nous sommes arrêtés, il n'y avait pas assez de lits pour nous tous, il a été décidé que je dormirais dans le même lit que ma bonne."—Il attira ses camarades près de lui, et parla d'une voix plus basse.—"Ça fait un singulier effet, allez, de n'être pas couché seul et d'être dans un lit avec sa bonne, dans les ténèbres. Comme je ne dormais pas, je me suis amusé, pendant qu'elle dormait, à passer ma main sur ses bras, sur son cou et sur ses épaules. Elle a les bras et le cou bien plus gros que toutes les autres femmes, et la peau en est si douce, si douce, qu'on dirait du papier à lettre ou du papier de soie. J'y avais tant de plaisir que j'aurais longtemps continué, si je n'avais pas eu peur, peur de la réveiller d'abord, et puis encore peur de je ne sais quoi. Ensuite j'ai fourré ma tête dans ses cheveux qui pendaient dans son dos, épais comme une crinière, et ils sentaient aussi bon, je vous assure, que les fleurs du jardin, à cette heure-ci. Essayez, quand vous pourrez, d'en faire autant que moi, et vous verrez!"27

Baudelaire has demonstrated here keen insight (or perhaps a vivid memory) communicated in a psychologically penetrating yet artistically
light manner. He has captured the "experienced" boy's feeling of superiority ("il m'est arrivé quelque chose qui ne vous est jamais arrivé, et qui est un peu plus intéressant que votre théâtre et vos nuages") as well as the melodramatic and suspenseful air of mystery with which the boy imparts to the eager listeners his "worldly wisdom" ("Il attira ses camarades près de lui, et parla d'une voix plus basse"). Above all, the poet has sketched in one perceptive sentence a classic portrait of the child in one of the most precarious moments of his sexual development, i.e., he is too curious and enchanted not to pursue his sexual exploration and too apprehensive to do so ("J'y avais tant de plaisir que j'aurais longtemps continué, si je n'avais pas eu peur, peur de la réveiller d'abord, et puis encore peur de je ne sais quoi").

A boy's sexual curiosity, depicted rather innocently by Baudelaire, has complex and intense ramifications as portrayed by Rimbaud in "Remembrances du vieillard idiot." Here a man is ostensibly soliciting forgiveness from a priest for "jeunes crimes"—childhood thoughts and actions resulting from an active inquisitiveness concerning sexual matters. These "jeunes crimes," which the poet enumerates in bold detail, will be judged by many as perverted; we, however, believe them to be within the realm of normality, but experienced acutely as befits a voyant and expressed vividly as befits "l'enfance douée maintenant, pour s'exprimer d'organes virils."

To those who view the boy's feelings as depraved, it will not seem surprising that Verlaine in Sagesse has termed Rimbaud "l'enfant prodigue avec des gestes de satyre."
The speaker in the poem begins his confession by implying a constant sexual preoccupation which he believes, as he will later state, to be completely abnormal ("Oh! personne ne fut si fréquemment trouble"). The first evidence he gives to demonstrate his obsession is his childhood tendency to seek out at the fair the area in which he can view the anatomy and perhaps copulation of animals, rather than the area of the commonplace shooting gallery. Such a preference does not seem unusual in a young boy with an inquiring mind. He might well abandon a dull location which offers no challenge or interest ("le tir banal où tout coup gagne") in order to gravitate towards excitement and action ("l'endroit plein de cris"):  

Pardon, mon père!  
Jeune, aux foires de campagne,  
Je cherchais, non le tir banal où tout coup gagne,  
Mais l'endroit plein de cris où les ânes, le flanc  
Fatigué, déployaient ce long tube sanglant  
Que je ne comprends pas encore!

The second testimony to the speaker's "guilt" is his attraction to his mother. Such an attraction does not necessarily suggest sexual deviation for two reasons. First of all, almost every boy goes through a stage known as the Oedipus complex, in which he perceives his mother as an erotic love object. Secondly, we have a clue ("ma mère, avec sa cuisse de femme mûre") that the mother may also represent to him Woman in general and therefore his sexual attention may be directed to her simply because of her proximity:  

Et puis ma mère  
Dont la chemise avait une senteur amère  
Quoique fripée au bas et jaune comme un fruit,  
Ma mère qui montait au lit avec un bruit
The poet then reveals that he used to observe his younger sister as she urinated, an action which he describes, comparing it with his feelings for his mother, as "une honte plus crue et plus calme." Certainly it is not unusual for a curious boy to observe his sister and to compare her physically with himself:

Une honte plus crue et plus clame, c'était
Quand ma petite sœur, au retour de la classe,
Ayant used longtemps ses sabots sur la glace,
Pissait, et regardait s'échapper de sa lèvre
D'en bas, serrée et rose, un fil d'urine mièvre . . . !

In the next stanza is found more forceful language and thought than in the previous stanzas:

O pardon!
    Je songeais à mon père parfois:
Le soir, le jeu de cartes et les mots plus grivois,
Le voisin, et moi qu'on écartait, choses vues . . .
    --Car un père est troublant!--et les choses conçues! . . .
Son genou, câlineur parfois; son pantalon
Dont mon doigt désirait ouvrir la fente . . .--oh! non!--
Pour avoir le bout gros, noir et dur de mon père,
Dont la pileuse main me berçait!

We judge these feelings to be further manifestations of the boy's Oedipal complex. "According to Freud, the boy directs his phallic strivings toward the mother, putting himself in direct rivalry with the father, whom he ambivalently both loves and hates. The father is seen as retaliating with an open or implied threat to injure or cut off the boy's penis--a threat of castration." In order to establish that this child is in the Oedipal period, it is necessary, therefore, to determine his feelings toward his father. We believe that they are indeed ambivalent ("un père est troublant"). Evidence
of the boy's tenderness towards his father can be found in the description of the father's knee as "câlineur parfois," and of the father's hand as "la pileuse main [qui] me berçait." Evidence for the child's repugnance of his father is admittedly more equivocal. We have chosen to consider the line "son pantalon / Don't mon doigt désirait ouvrir la fente ...--Oh! non!--/ Pour avoir le bout gros, noir et dur de mon père" an expression of strong feeling against the father rather than desire for him. This feeling could be caused by jealousy of the father who enslaves the mother (earlier he has called her a "fils du travail"), and by fear of the father who represents the castration threat. There is a third possible reason for this boy to feel bitterness towards the man--rejection of the son by the father ("et moi qu'on écartait"). If we accept the poem as autobiographical, and there is no reason not to do so, then the father's rejection of the son could have been a very real event in the life of the young Rimbaud. The boy was five years old when his father deserted the family, never to return. This is the approximate age at which the average child experiences the feelings ascribed by Freud to the Oedipal period. Even though the child portrayed in "Remembrances du vieillard idiot" may well be older than five, he may still be suffering from an unresolved Oedipus complex due to this abrupt and possibly deeply distressing abandonment.

The following stanza is an enigmatic one, for in it the speaker, giving no explanation, merely lists various objects which evidently, at one time or another, aroused him to an action
(probably masturbation) or a thought which he considered obscene:

We have been prepared by Rimbaud's previously discussed poem "Les Premières Communions" for his scorn of the Church. It does not come as a surprise then that having made this full confession, the speaker rejects any forgiveness the Church may offer him and even utters to the priest the irreverent statement "--et tirons-nous la queue":

However flippant these last few words may seem, it is obvious from the preceding six-line stanza that the boy has long suffered profoundly from guilt feelings brought on by his sexual fantasies and actions. Even the words "vieillard idiot" in the title may imply that the speaker has anticipated a future physical or mental
punishment for his childhood "shames"; indeed he states that his joy was always threatened by "ces terreurs sans nombre."

In the preceding poem Rimbaud has examined a boy's sexual feelings related to his family. In "Les Poètes de sept ans," which we have discussed in connection with a child's education, the poet writes of a boy's early sexual encounters with a playmate, in this case an eight-year-old girl next door to him. In the poem, Rimbaud first relates that he was stimulated by pictures of laughing foreign girls in "journaux illustrés":

A sept ans, il faisait des romans sur la vie
Du grand désert, où luit la Liberté ravie
Forêts, soleils, rives, savanes!—Il s'aidait
De journaux illustrés où, rouge, il regardait
Des Espagnoles rire et des Italiennes.31

These exotic women are quite different from the worker's daughter with whom the boy experiences physical contact. As is not uncommon in children, who are generally less subtle than adults, this contact takes the form of a wild skirmish. Nevertheless, the boy receives from this battle a kind of sexual gratification for having bitten the girl's buttocks, because he is then able to carry back "les saveurs de sa peau dans sa chambre":

Quand venait, l'œil brun, folle, en robes d'indiennes,
—Huit ans,—la fille des ouvriers d'à côté,
La petite brutale, et qu'elle avait sauté,
Dans un coin, sur son dos, en secouant ses tresses,
Et qu'il était sous elle, il lui mordait les fesses,
Car elle ne portait jamais de pantalons;
—Et, par elle meurtri des poings et des talons,
Remportait les saveurs de sa peau dans sa chambre. 32

In addition to a child's sexual thoughts and investigations which are stimulated by other people, it is quite natural for a child to experiment with his own body, i.e., to practice masturbation.
Wallace Fowlie states that Rimbaud has written two poems on this subject, "L'Enfant qui ramassa" and "H." In the first poem, we evidently have the portrait of one who is perched on the precipice between childhood and adolescence. He has been a child playing with toys ("l'enfant qui ramassa les balles"), and now he is approaching adolescence and feels himself changing physically ("le Pubère ... entend germer sa vie avec l'espoir / De sa figure et de sa statue"). He is tired of being classified as a child, tired of seeing only those sights considered appropriate to a child ("[il] veut voir des rideaux autres que ceux du Trône et des Crèches") and he longs for more mature experiences, perhaps such as the theatre or even sexual fulfillment. (In these cases, the "other curtains" for which he yearns would be stage curtains or the curtains of the alcove.) The boy is too impatient to wait for the uncertain future ("son buste exquis n'aspire pas aux brèches de l'avenir"), yet it is too late to return to the security of his earlier childhood ("Il a laissé l'ancien jouet"). His only recourse, then, is "immense solitude" and onanism ("il a sans doute l'Habitude"): 

L'enfant qui ramassa les balles, le Pubère
Où circule le sang de l'exil et d'un Père
Illustre entend germer sa vie avec l'espoir
De sa figure et de sa statue et veut voir
Des rideaux autres que ceux du Trône et des Crèches.
Aussi son buste exquis n'aspire pas aux brèches
De l'Avenir!—Il a laissé l'ancien jouet.—
O son doux rêve! O son bel Enghien! Son œil est
Approfondi par quelque immense solitude;
"Pauvre jeune homme, il a sans doute l'Habitude!"

Rimbaud's second work which presumably deals with masturbation is his brief and cryptic prose poem "H," a letter which stands for Hortense, but at the same time may stand for Habitude:
We have established in "Les Remembrances du vieillard idiot" that masturbation, like other sexual indulgences, may bring on guilt feelings. We can expect then that in this poem characterizing the act of masturbation, which Rimbaud terms "Hortense," the descriptive terms would be derogatory ones ("monstruosités [. . .]] les gestes atroces [. . .]] terrible"). She is pictured as a corruptor of human morality ("là, la moralité des êtres actuels se décorpore en sa passion ou en son action") and yet she can be powerful, irresistible ("0 terrible frisson"). We find it especially significant that Rimbaud has not placed an exclamation point after the words "trouvez Hortense" but has used a period instead. This fact, considered with the words "solitude" and "lassitude," indicates to us that Rimbaud views the results of the quest not as an eagerly-sought goal, but only as a temporary and semi-satisfying resort.

A child can masturbate by manual stimulation and he can do so by mental stimulation as well. Rimbaud gives us an example of the latter experience in the poem which we have discussed in connection with religion, "Les Premières Communions." Here a young girl evidently brings herself to orgasm by a self-induced religious frenzy:
La veille du grand Jour, l'enfant se fait malade.  
Mieux qu'à l'Église haute aux funèbres rumeurs,
D'abord le frisson vient,--le lit n'étant pas fade--
Un frisson surhumain qui retourne: "Je meurs..."

Et, comme un vol d'amour fait à ses sœurs stupides,
Elle compte, abattue et les mains sur son cœur,
Les Anges, les Jésus et ses Vierges nitides
Et, calmement, son âme a bu tout son vainqueur.

Des curiosités vaguement impudiques
Epouvantent le rêve aux chastes bleuities
Qui s'est surpris autour des célestes tuniques,
Du linge dont Jésus voile ses nudités.

Elle veut, elle veut pourtant, l'âme en détresse
Le front dans l'oreiller creusé par les cris sourds,
Prolonger les éclairs suprêmes de tendresse,
Et bave... --L'ombre emplit les maisons et les cours.

Et l'enfant ne peut plus. Elle s'agite, cambre
Les reins et d'une main ouvre le rideau bleu
Pour amener un peu la fraîcheur de la chambre
Sous le drap, vers son ventre et sa poitrine en feu. 38

To support our conviction that this young girl has experienced a sexual climax we would cite such phrases as "Un frisson surhumain qui retourne: Je meurs..." "comme un vol d'amour fait à ses sœurs stupides," "le rêve qui s'est surpris... [des pensées]

du linge dont Jésus voile ses nudités," "les cris sourds," "les éclairs suprêmes de tendresse," and "son ventre et sa poitrine en feu." There is, moreover, another phrase later on in the poem which would indicate a consummation of the marriage of the young girl and Christ the Bridegroom—"Et faisant la Victime et la petite épouse." Rimbaud has capitalized the word victime to indicate that he sees religion or at least Catholicism as an oppressive and despicable force which enslaves its followers and drains them of their natural energies.
Children often discover that the utopian world created by their imaginations is far different from the world of reality and that this discovery may apply to sexual fantasies as well as to other fantasies. Such a difference would doubtless be intensified in the case of a voyant. One of Rimbaud's prose poems, the first part of "Enfance," appears to us an indication of this occurrence. In the poem are many images which have filled the mind of the poet; there is a beautiful solitary girl in an enchanting natural surrounding, there are elegant ladies, pure and "doucement malheureuses," strolling in gardens. These visions are enthralling, while reality, on the other hand, is boring. When the moment of expressing affection arrives in real life, the ecstasy of the dream world has eclipsed. Just as the ideal pictures of exotic laughing ladies in "Les Poètes de sept ans" differed from the real presence of "la petite brutale" from the house next door, so in this poem do the ethereal and lovely ladies differ from the object of the poet's banal compliments—"cher corps," "cher coeur":

A la lisière de la forêt—les fleurs de rêve tintent, éclatent, éclairent,—la fille à lèvre d'orange, les genoux croisés dans le clair déluge qui sourd des prés, nudité qu'ombrent, traversent et habillent les arcs-en-ciel, la flore, la mer.

Dames qui tournaient sur les terrasses voisines de la mer; enfantes et géantes, superbes noires dans la mousse vert-de-gris, bijoux debout sur le sol gras des bosquets et des jardins dégelés—jeunes mères et grandes soeurs aux regards pleins de pèlerinages, sultanes, princesses de démarche et de costumes tyranniques, petites étrangères et personnes doucement malheureuses.

Quel ennui, l'heure du "cher corps" et "cher coeur"!

We must consider that it is quite possible for the poet here not to be rejecting reality at all. On the contrary, he may be
rejecting the imagined world because, not being authentic, it may not offer total satisfaction to the mind, much less to the body. The poet is perhaps telling us that he finds this type of dreaming only a mimicry of real life and therefore eventually boring. The crucial question then is which of the two, illusion or reality, elicits from the poet the words "Quel ennui." We know that Rimbaud, at least as a poet, abandoned at the age of twenty-one the world of illusion for the world of reality. What we do not know is whether this was done because for him the vision of the ideal paled beside participation in the real world, or because the dichotomy between the two worlds became too painful to endure.

Whatever his reason for giving up poetry, he would have to agree that the real world is far from ideal. While it can be beautiful, it can also be cruel, and this cruelty can occur in the realm of sex as well as in every other aspect of life. Paul Fort gives in "Le 'Hollandais'" an example of a sexual atrocity, for here he pictures a weeping little girl who has apparently just been raped by sailors. She tells her story to a man who asks the reason for her tears. She says that men came up the cliff from a ship, the "Hollandais," and seized her:

\[ \ldots \text{mains noires, ils ont saisi mon petit ventre rose.} \\
\text{Ils m'ont pris le bélier qui portait la clochette.} \]

The rape has obviously disturbed the little girl, but she implies in the above passage that the loss of her ram has been an equal calamity. Her naive way of expressing the physical violation of her body ("ils ont saisi mon petit ventre rose") indicates that she is quite young and that neither of these actions directed
against her has been in any way comprehensible. The man pities the innocent little girl whose sexual awareness has been forced so savagely upon her:

--Rentre tes moutons, fillette, de la falaise et pleure à jamais.¹¹

Mallarmé also treats the theme of an innocent young child who is coerced into a sexual act by an older person. We have found his poem "Une Négresse par le démon secoué" to be the most shockingly erotic of the nineteenth-century French poems relating to a child's sexual awareness and experience. It is no doubt deliberately so, for at the time of its composition, Mallarmé was young, just freed from the confines of the classroom, and in a literary period sometimes characterized by "the brutal expression of sensuality" and "an almost morbid eroticism"²²:

Une négresse par le démon secoué
Veut goûter une enfant triste de fruits nouveaux
Et criminels aussi sous leur robe trouée,
Cette goinfre s'apprête à de rusés travaux:

A son ventre compare heureuses deux tétines
Et, si haut que la main ne le saura saisir,
Elle darde le choc obscur de ses bottines
Ainsi que quelque langue inhabile au plaisir.

Contre la nudité peureuse de gazelle
Qui tremble, sur le dos tel un fol éléphant
Renversée elle attend et s'admire avec zèle
En riant de ses dents naïves à l'enfant;

Et, dans ses jambes où la victime se couche,
Levant une peau noire ouverte sous le crin,
Avance le palais de cette étrange bouche
Pâle et rose comme un coquillage marin.³³

It is helpful before analyzing this difficult poem to compare to this version, which Mallarmé published in 1887, the version which appeared in the Nouveau Parnasse Satyrique in 1866, under the title "Les Lèvres roses":

Une négresse, par le démon secouée,  
Veut goûter une triste enfant aux fruits nouveaux,  
Criminelle innocente en sa robe trouée,  
Et la goinfre s'apprête à de rusés travaux.

Sur son ventre elle allonge en bête ses tétines,  
Heureuse d'être nue, et s'acharne à saisir  
Ses deux pieds écartés en l'air dans bottines,  
Don't l'indécence vue augmente son plaisir.

Puis, près de la chair blanche aux maigreurs de gazelle,  
Qui tremble, sur le dos, comme un fol éléphant,  
Renversée, elle attend et s'admiré avec zèle,  
En riant de ses dents naïves à l'enfant;

Et dans ses jambes quand la victime se couche,  
Levant une peau noire ouverte sous le crin,  
Avance le palais de cette infâme bouche  
Pâle et rose comme un coquillage marin.

For this analysis we will draw on both of these versions. The poet is here describing a lesbian sexual act which may be cunnilingus as practiced by "une négresse par le démon secouée" upon "une enfant triste" who, as we learn from the 1866 version, is a white child ("la chair blanche de gazelle"). This could indicate that the black woman is the child's nurse. The woman, who at first has only a notion of trying something new ("Une négresse [...] veut goûter [...] de fruits nouveaux"), becomes deliberately more and more sensually aroused ("elle allonge en bête ses tétines [...] l'indécence vue augmente son plaisir [...] comme un fol éléphant [...] elle s'admiré avec zèle") until at last she thrusts either her mouth or her genital lips between the legs of her victim ("et dans ses jambes quand la victime se couche [...] avance le palais de cette infâme bouche"). It is clear from the text that the child is quite reluctant ("une triste enfant [...] innocente [...] gazelle qui tremble") and she must be tricked by the woman in order to allow this contact ("cette goinfre s'apprête à de rusés travaux").
Almost equally startling and salacious is "Viol" by Paul Valéry. In this poem Valéry describes the statue of a woman who is forcing herself sexually upon a young and quite unwilling boy. Valéry's poem is clearer than is Mallarmé's, for in "Viol" there is no ambiguity in the pronouns and modifiers. Valéry wishes to offer more by his vibrant sonnet than the description of one particular statue, for he proposes a universal symbol: the depiction of Woman as the eternal corruptor of man's innocence, just as Vigny has done in "La Colère de Samson":

Dans le métal sonore et rare de Corinthe,
Un artiste ancien a figé savamment
Le païen rêve--si troublant et si charmant
D'une coupable et triste et trop exquise étreinte.

Belle et chaude!--une Femme agace un mince enfant
Ignorant de l'Amour, qui repousse la lèvre
Et les téétines vers lui dardées, brûlants de fièvre
Et les regards chargés d'un désir triomphant.

... Millénaire! le viol de bronze se consume!
Le petit inquiet, sous le brasier charnel
Se tord et ne veut pas, horreur! devenir homme . . .

Mais Elle le contient! Qui d'un geste éternel
Impose la splendeur de ses chairs odieuses
Et lui cherche le sexe avec des mains joyeuses . . .

However pleasurable or terrifying a child's early encounters with sex may be, it is undeniable that sexual awareness changes a child irrevocably. Heredia has made this clear in his poem "Nessus" which we have discussed in Chapter I. In this sonnet the centaur Nessus contrasts the happy free life of his innocent days ("Tel j'ai grandi, beau, libre, heureux sous le soleil") with the inquietude brought on by the presence of sexual desire ("le desir me harcèle et hérisse mes crins"). And as Baudelaire so beautifully
states in "Moesta et Errabunda," once this change has taken place, "le vert paradis des amours enfantines" is forever lost:

Mais le vert paradis des amours enfantines
Les courses, les chansons, les baisers, les bouquets,
Les violins vibrant derrière les collines,
Avec les brocs de vin, le soir, dans les bosquets,
--Mais le vert paradis des amours enfantines,

L'innocent paradis, plein de plaisirs furtifs,
Est-il déjà plus loin que l'Inde et que la Chine?
Peut-on le rappeler avec les cris plaintifs,
Et l'animer encor d'une voix argentine,
L'innocente paradis plein de plaisirs furtifs?47

As ignorance yields to awareness in sexual matters, just
as in intellectual and emotional ones, the child moves closer to
the adult world. His relationship with this world will be examined
in our next and final chapter.
NOTES

The poets of the nineteenth century were not by any means the first in France to record a child's sexual awareness. An earlier example, for instance, can be found in the detailed account of Louis XIII's childhood kept in diary form by his physician. In Horizon (Vol. XIII, number 1, Winter 1971), J. H. Plumb (p. 8) relays and comments upon the following information taken from this diary:

The dauphin and his sister were stripped and placed naked in the king's bed, and when the children played sexually with each other, Henry IV and the court were hugely amused. The queen, a pious and rather austere woman, thought nothing of seizing his genitals in the presence of the court, and the dauphin often displayed himself, to the amusement of his staid middle-aged governess. He acquired the facts of life as soon as he could talk. At seven, however, all was changed. He was severely reprimanded for playing sexually with a girl his own age, and the need for modesty was constantly impressed upon him. The importance of this very detailed evidence from the dauphin's doctor, who saw nothing odd in it, stresses that the world of children and the world of adults were deeply involved.


Ibid., pp. 404-05.


Chénier, p. 503.
8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


13 Sainte-Beuve, p. 256.


19 Ibid., pp. 5-7.

20 Ibid., p. 8.

21 Ibid.


23 In *A Dictionary of Symbols* (trans. Jack Sage, New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), J. E. Cirlot states (p. 94) that "we find in legends and folktales the surprising association between excrement and gold," and that "Freud . . . has observed that what is almost worthless is often associated with what is most valued."
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24 This story of the Creator who eats his creations is reminiscent of the legend of Saturn, called Cronus by the Greeks. In the myth, Saturn swallowed his first five children because an oracle said they would someday overthrow him. Cirlot (Ibid., p. 265) says "Saturn symbolizes time which, with its ravenous appetite for life, devours all its creations, whether they are beings, things, ideas or sentiments."

25 Lautréamont, pp. 74-76.

26 Ibid., pp. 76-77.


30 Stone and Church, pp. 176-77.

31 Rimbaud, p. 78.

32 Ibid.


35 Fowlie (Rimbaud: Complete Works) points out in a footnote to Rimbaud's poem "Paris" (p. 157) that the term "Enghien" refers to Enghien's mineral water tablets.

36 Rimbaud, p. 121.

37 Ibid., pp. 202-03.
38 Ibid., pp. 89-90.

39 Ibid., p. 176.


41 Ibid.


47 Baudelaire, p. 61.
CHAPTER V

THE CHILD AND THE ADULT WORLD

Of the many areas about which nineteenth-century French poets could have written concerning the child's relation with the adult world, three stand out as important. First of all, the poets were interested in the tendencies a child might exhibit which would indicate a particular direction for his life. For example, several note a child's penchant for the military life, while others detect traits suggesting a nautical vocation. Secondly, some poets have treated various ways in which a child may affect an adult. We have found that in the majority of the poems the adult is affected favorably. Finally, the poets have written autobiographically and for the most part nostalgically of their childhood. Therefore, while the first two sections of this chapter deal with the child in his inclinations toward or influence upon the adult world, the last section deals with the adult who is looking back at his own childhood.
Vocations

The childhood shows the man
As morning shows the day.

--John Milton

Very often a child will display some talent or taste for a particular profession. Our poets observed and noted in verse this phenomenon, but only, with one exception, in the case of boys. We will begin our examination of these poems not with the poets who single out an indicated vocation, but with Rimbaud who has skillfully portrayed in "Enfance: IV" the normal childhood tendency to be attracted toward many ways of life. This occurrence is especially natural in a child who, like the poet, has read extensively in order to nourish his creative imagination:

Je suis le saint, en prière sur la terrasse,—comme les bêtes pacifiques paissent jusqu'à la mer de Palestine.
Je suis le savant au fauteuil sombre. Les branches et la pluie se jettent à la croisée de la bibliothèque.
Je suis le piéton de la grand'route par les bois nains; la rumeur des écluses couvre mes pas. Je vois longtemps la mélancolique lessive d'or du couchant.
Je serais bien l'enfant abandonné sur la jetée, partie à la haute mer, le petit valet suivant l'allée dont le front touche le ciel.
Les sentiers sont âpres. Les monticules se couvrent de genêts. L'air est immobile. Que les ciseaux et les sources sont loin! Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant.¹

The last paragraph suggests that whichever vocation the child will select, it is certain that the route to attain it will be a difficult and long one. We believe that the final statement expresses the hope, which is ironic because it is ever shattered, that each goal, when attained, may be the last one ("la fin du monde") and that the man, be he saint or servant, may rest.
Rimbaud sees many possibilities of a child's future profession; Hugo, however, has specified a child's interest in the life of a soldier. He wrote two poems, both autobiographical, on this subject. In the first of these, "Mon Enfance," the poet states that if he had not become a poet, he would have espoused a military life:

J'ai des rêves de guerre en mon âme inquiète;  
J'aurais été soldat, si je n'étais poète.  

A second poem by Hugo gives us perhaps one reason for his bent toward a martial life. In "Souvenir d'enfance" he informs us that at the age of seven he was privileged to see the great Napoléon. In this poem he relates the awe he felt upon viewing "cette figure illustre et solennelle." He also records, moreover, his mother's apprehension at his fascination with "guerre, assauts et bataille"; this contrast between a son's vocational desires and a mother's fear because of them will appear several times in these poems:

Dans une grande fête, un jour, au Panthéon,  
J'avais sept ans, je vis passer Napoléon.

Pour voir cette figure illustre et solennelle,  
Je m'étais échappé de l'aile maternelle;  
Car il tenait déjà mon esprit inquiet.  
Mais ma mère aux doux yeux, qui souvent s'effrayait  
En m'entendant parler guerre, assauts et bataille,  
Craignait pour moi la foule, à cause de mon taille.

In addition to Hugo, two other poets, Coppée and Heredia, composed poems concerning a child's inclination toward the life of a soldier. Coppée wrote three poems on this subject. The first of these is "Le Fils des armures," a well-written poem with frightening implications. The poet is here contrasting an innocent child with his murderous ancestors, and he is predicting with
assurance that this child will share with the former members of his race the traits which belie "des sourires humains" of "les vieux casques":

Tous les ducs morts sont là, gloire d'acier vêtue,
Depuis Othon le Saint jusqu'à Job le Bancal,
Et devant eux, riant son rire musical,
L'enfant à soulever des armes s'évertue.

Chaque armure, où l'aïeul se survit en statue
Sous la fière couronne et le cimier ducal,
Joyeuse, reconnaît d'un regard amical
Sa race qui déjà joue avec ce qui tue.

Et les vieux casques ont des sourires humains,
Cependant qu'au milieu de la chambre gothique
L'enfant chevauche sur une épée à deux mains.

Coppée's second poem on this subject is an equally meritorious one. "Le Défilé" portrays a small boy's impressed reaction to the grandeur of a military parade and his mother's resulting fears. The special value of the poem is in its sharp contrast of the child's love of adventure with the mother's desire for security—a theme which was mentioned earlier by Hugo in "Souvenir d'enfance":

Le régiment défilé, et l'enfant s'extasie.
Craintif et se tenant à la jupe saisie
De sa mère, il admire, avide et stupéfait,
Et tremble. Mais alors celle-ci qui rêvait,
Le regarde, et soudain elle devient peureuse.

Elle entraîne son fils; elle a le cœur glacé.
Et, bien que le brillant régiment soit passé
Et qu'au coin du faubourg tourne l'arrière-garde,
L'enfant se plaint tout bas, et résiste, et regarde
Son rêve qui s'enfuit, espérant voir encore
Là-bas, dans la poussière, une étincelle d'or,
Et détestant déjà les amis et les mères
Qui nous tirent loin des dangers et des chimères.
A third poem by Coppée about a child's interest in military life is "Le Fils de l'empereur," a poem treating an incident in the life of the nine-year-old son of Napoléon Bonaparte. The boy, exiled in Vienna, dreams of the battles and glory of his father. One day while on horseback, the child gets lost and, upon inquiring as to his whereabouts, is given this answer:

"Vous êtes à Wagram, mon petit officier." 6

The reply indicates to the boy that his obsession with the life of a soldier, and his father in particular ("ce glorieux souci"), will never be abated.

The third poet to have examined a child's inclination toward the military life is Heredia in his sonnet "L'Épée," which is as precisely and solidly forged as the weapon of which he writes. In the poem a child is being advised to take up the sword and pursue a military life. We are not told of the child's propensities in the matter, for he remains a silent listener throughout the poem. Such an approach is unusual among the poems in this section, for in almost every other instance the child assumes an active role:

Crois-moi, pieux enfant, suis l'antique chemin.
L'Épée aux quillons droits d'où part la branche torse,
Au poing d'un gentilhomme ardent et plein de force
Est un faix plus léger qu'un rituel romain.

Prends-la. L'Hercule d'or qui tiédit dans sa main,
Aux doigts de tes aieux ayant poli son torse,
Gonfle plus fièrement, sous la splendide écorce,
Les beaux muscles de fer de son corps surhumain.

Brandis-la. L'acier souple en bouquets d'étincelles
Pétille. Elle est solide et sa lame est de celles
Qui font courir au coeur un orgueilleux frisson,

Car elle porte au creux de sa brillante gorge,
Comme une noble Dame un joyau, le poingon
De Julian del Rey, le prince de la forge.7
In addition to the poets who have portrayed a child's interest in a military life, there are three poets who have treated a child's inclination toward a nautical life. The first of these is Anatole Le Braz, whose "Berceuse d'Armorique" we have mentioned in the third chapter. Here the poet, singing an infant to sleep, says that it is the child's destiny to be a sailor, for he has been born a Breton. Once again there is a mention of the mother's anxiety concerning her child's career:

Déjà dans ton âme a chanté la mer
Son chant doux aux fils, aux mères amer;

Tes yeux ont déjà la couleur des flots.
Dieu prene en pitié les bons matelots!

Car c'est pour les flots que nous enfantons:
Tous meurent marins qui sont nés Bretons. 9

In "L'Epave" Coppée narrates the melodramatic story of a sailor's widow and her son whom she has made promise her that he will study for the priesthood rather than die at sea like his father. The boy wants to obey his mother's wishes, but cannot help dreaming of the open sea. One night during a storm, a boat is not able to reach shore and the boy wants to go out with the other sailors to rescue the boat. The mother is terrified, for her husband was drowned under the same circumstances. She clutches her son, reminding him of his promise. At that moment a bit of debris washes up on the beach; it is the board bearing the name of his father's boat—En avant! The boy interprets this as an order from his father to retrieve the boat. Having successfully executed the order, the son tells his relieved but still frightened mother:

"Maman, ne gronde pas . . . Le père est si content!" 9
A similar situation exists in Corbière’s “Le Mousse,” which is better written than the previous poem because “Le Mousse” is more credible and restrained. The boy in the present poem has also lost his father and is, therefore, doubly dear to his mother. Here, however, there is no miraculous sign from the dead; rather, there is a fierce determination on the part of the boy to avenge his father’s death by becoming a sailor himself. An additional strength of “Le Mousse” as compared with “L’Epave” is that the former employs the stark language appropriate to the young boy rather than the more flowery language typical of a romantic hero:

--Mousse, il est donc marin, ton père? ...
--Pêcheur. Perdu depuis longtemps.
En découchant d'avec ma mère,
Il a couché dans les brisants. ...

Maman lui garde au cimetière
Une tombe—et rien dedans.—
C'est moi son mari sur la terre,
Pour gagner du pain aux enfants.

Deux petits.—Alors, sur la plage,
Rien n'est revenu du naufrage? ...
—Son garde-pipe et son sabot ...

La mère pleure, le dimanche
Pour repos. ... Moi: j'ai ma revanche
Quand je serai grand—matelot! 10

Corbière has written of a child’s mental fierceness and inclination toward a nautical life. Leconte de Lisle, on the other hand, has written of a child’s physical strength and his precocious display of the qualities which will later mark him as a hero. In “L’Enfance d’Heraklès” the poet treats an incident in the infancy of the mythological Hercules. Here, after Hercules’ mother sings him to sleep, the jealous Hera, whose husband sired the child,
incites two dragons to kill the sleeping baby. Hercules, however, already displaying the superhuman force which will characterize his adulthood, seizes the dragons and kills them with his bare hands:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{L'enfant sacré les tient, les secoue étanglés} \\
\text{Et rit en les voyant, pleins de rage et de bave,} \\
\text{Se torre tout autour du bouclier concave.} \\
\text{Puis il les jette morts le long des marbres blancs,} \\
\text{Et croise pour dormir ses petits bras sanglants.}^{11}
\end{align*}
\]

Four poets have singled out a child's tendency toward the vocation of a poet. Mme Tastu writes in "La Poesie à Mademoiselle M. A. Nodier" that this writer's child has surely heard, even at her young age, the "accents immortels" of poetry:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Déjà tu la connais, tu grandis sous son aile,} \\
\text{Jeune enfant aux yeux noirs; demeure-lui fidèle:} \\
\text{N'as-tu point entendu ses accents immortels?} \\
\text{N'as-tu point en secret encensé ses autels?} \\
\text{Oh! que son culte est pur, que sa voix est puissante} \\
\text{Quand elle instruit tout bas une muse naissante!}^{12}
\end{align*}
\]

All three of the other poets who treat this theme, Béranger, Hugo, and Rimbaud, have written autobiographically. None of these poems, including the previous one by Mme Tastu, is particularly distinguished. Béranger writes in "Le Tailleur et la fée" that when he was an infant in his cradle, his grandfather came in to find the baby "dans les bras d'une fée [qui] calmait le cris de mes premiers chagrins." This supernatural creature then predicts that the child will be a maker of verse.\(^{13}\) Hugo relates in "Paysage" with his accustomed lack of modesty that when he was a child the muse promised to grant him the greatest inspiration possible ("Il n'est dans mes trésors rien que je te refuse"). She advises him, however,
to flee the city in order to create his poetry in a peaceful kingdom:

"Mais fuis d'un monde étroit l'impure turbulence."^{14}

To this the poet answers that his attraction for the excitement of the city is too powerful:

Tu le disais, O Muse! Et la cité bruyante
Autour de moi pourtant mêle ses mille voix.\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, Rimbaud has conveyed in verse the experience of being informed as a child that he would be a poet. He does so in his Latin exercise, "Le Songe d'un écolier," which we have already discussed in Chapter III. The fourteen-year-old Rimbaud here envisions in melodramatic language typical of the adolescent imagination a miraculous scene in which the heavens open up and Phoebus emerges to designate the boy as a future poet:

Voici que le ciel s'ouvrit à moi et qu'apparut tout à coup à mes yeux émerveillés, volant sur une nuée d'or,
Phoebus lui-même,
qui me tend de sa main divine le plectre harmonieux;
et sur ma tête il écrivait ces mots avec une flamme céleste:
"TU SERAS POETE!" Dans mes membres se glisse alors une chaleur extraordinaire: ainsi, splendide par son pur cristal,
une fontaine limpide s'enflamme aux rayons du soleil.\textsuperscript{16}

Casimir Delavigne wrote a long and mediocre poem, "Le Prêtre," which is the biography in verse of a priest. In the "Chant premier" he treats the priest's childhood and pictures him as a pious choir boy who is destined for the priesthood:

Quel saint amour de Dieu l'embrasse!
Frère, en passant, ne dites rien;
De l'enfant de choeur Adrien,
Frère ne troubliez pas l'extase!
Sous ces nef, toujours le dernier,
A sa muette rêverie
Il s'abandonne tout entier
Sans penser que la confrérie
Le trouve plus beau quand il prie,
Et rentre pour le voir prier.\textsuperscript{17}
Of the nineteenth-century French poems portraying a child's inclination towards a particular vocation, we have found Baudelaire's prose poem "Les Vocations" to be by far the most appealing and provocative. Here the poet examines the conversation of four boys. Each in turn describes to the others a recent experience which has been particularly impressive to him and which indicates a particular character trait or vocational interest. The first two children are attracted to the theater and to religion respectively, both of which inspire man to project his concern outside of himself and at the same time to look more deeply within himself:

Dans un beau jardin où les rayons d'un soleil automnal semblaient s'attarder à plaisir, sous un ciel déjà verdâtre où des nuages d'or flottaient comme des continents en voyage, quatre beaux enfants, quatre garçons, les de jouer sans doute, causaient entre eux.

L'un disait: "Hier on m'a mené au théâtre. Dans des palais grands et tristes, au fond desquels on voit la mer et le ciel, des hommes et des femmes, sérieux et tristes aussi, mais bien plus beaux et bien mieux habillés que ceux que nous voyons partout, parlent avec une voix chantante. Ils se menacent, ils supplient, ils se désolent, et ils appuient souvent leur main sur un poignard enfoncé dans leur ceinture. Ah! c'est bien beau! Les femmes sont bien plus belles et bien plus grandes que celles qui viennent nous voir à la maison, et, quoique avec leurs grands yeux creux et leurs joues enflammées elles aient l'air terrible, on ne peut pas s'empecher de les aimer. On a peur, on a envie de pleurer, et cependant l'on est content... Et puis, ce qui est plus singulier, cela donne envie d'être habillé de même, de dire et faire les mêmes choses, de parler avec la même voix..."

L'un des quatre enfants, qui depuis quelques secondes n'écoutait plus le discours de son camarade et observait avec une fixité étonnante je ne sais quel point du ciel, dit tout à coup: "Regardez, regardez là-bas...! Le voyez-vous? Il est assis sur ce petit nuage isolé, ce petit nuage couleur de feu, qui marche doucement. Lui aussi, on dirait qu'il nous regarde."

"Mais qu'il donc?" demandèrent les autres.
"Dieu!" répondit-il avec un accent parfait de conviction. "Ah! il est déjà bien loin; tout à l'heure, vous ne pourrez plus le voir. Sans doute il voyage, pour visiter tous les pays. Tenez, il va passer derrière cette rangée d'arbres
We have discussed in the previous chapter the experience of the third boy, who takes such delight in investigating the arms, neck, and shoulders of his sleeping nurse. After the boy has related his adventure, Baudelaire gives us a graphic physical description of the child "en faisant son récit." Having done this, the poet makes a shrewd and witty comment about the boy's future:

"Le jeune auteur de cette prodigieuse révélation avait, en faisant son récit, les yeux écarquillés par une sorte de stupéfaction de ce qu'il éprouvait encore, et les rayons du soleil couchant, en glissant à travers les boucles rousse de sa chevelure ébouriffée, y allumaient comme une auréole sulfureuse de passion. Il était facile de deviner que celui-là ne perdrait pas sa vie à chercher la Divinité dans les nuées, et qu'il la trouverait fréquemment ailleurs."

It is the story of the fourth boy, however, which is the most absorbing. He begins by expressing his feeling of restlessness, then reports his adventure. He had seen at a fair three gypsies about whom two facts seem to predominate in his story and attract him to the men. First, they were free and self-sufficient ("l'air de n'avoir besoin de personne. [• •] Ils étaient si contents d'eux-mêmes"); second, they were artists ("ils faisaient [• •] une musique si surprenante qu'elle donne envie tantôt de danser, tantôt de pleurer, ou de faire les deux à la fois"): Enfin le quatrième dit: "Vous savez que je ne m'amuse guère à la maison; on ne me mène jamais au spectacle; mon tuteur est trop avare; Dieu ne s'occupe pas de moi et de mon ennu, et je n'ai pas une belle bonne pour me dorloter. Il m'a souvent semblé que mon plaisir serait d'aller toujours droit devant moi, sans savoir où, sans que personne s'en inquiète, et de voir toujours des pays nouveaux. Je
ne suis jamais bien nulle part, et je crois toujours que je serais mieux ailleurs que là où je suis. Eh bien! j'ai vu, à la dernière foire du village voisin, trois hommes qui vivent comme je voudrais vivre. Vous n'avez pas fait attention, vous autres. Ils étaient grands, presque noirs et très-fiers, quoique en guenilles, avec l'air de n'avoir besoin de personne. Leurs grands yeux sombres sont devenus tout à fait brillants pendant qu'ils faisaient de la musique; une musique si surprenante qu'elle donne envie tantôt de danser, tantôt de pleurer, ou de faire les deux à la fois, et qu'on deviendrait comme fou si on les écoutait trop longtemps. [. . .] Ils étaient si contents d'eux-mêmes, qu'ils ont continué à jouer leur musique de sauvages, même après que la foule s'est dispersée. Enfin ils ont ramassé leurs sous, ont chargé leur bagage sur le dos, et sont partis. Moi, voulant savoir où ils demeuraient, je les ai suivis de loin, jusqu'au bord de la forêt, où j'ai compris seulement alors qu'ils ne demeuraient nulle part.

Alors l'un a dit: "Faut-il déployer la tente?" "Ma foi! non!" a répondu l'autre, "il fait une si belle nuit!"

[. . .] J'avais eu d'abord envie de les prier de m'emmener avec eux et de m'apprendre à jouer de leurs instruments; mais je n'ai pas osé, sans doute parce qu'il est toujours très difficile de se décider à n'importe quoi, et aussi parce que j'avais peur d'être rattrapé avant d'être hors de France."

It is Joan Evans' opinion that

the children portrayed probably illustrate different facets of the same child, doubtless the author himself. The child in turn loves the excitement of the theater, is mystical enough to see God sitting on a cloud, is sensuous enough to derive illicit pleasure from sleeping in the same bed as his maid, and at the same time desires to flee "n'importe où hors du monde."20

Be that as it may, it is this fourth boy with whom Baudelaire particularly identifies. His sympathy is aroused by this child, "déjà un incompris," who is so like the poet that the latter believes for a moment that he has found "un frère à moi-même inconnu." There may be many reasons for the identification. Among them we note the following characteristics in the man: boredom ("je ne m'amuse guère à la maison"); a feeling of estrangement
from God ("Dieu ne s'occupe pas de moi et de mon ennui"); restlessness ("Je ne suis jamais bien nulle part, et je crois toujours que je serais mieux ailleurs que là où je suis"); sensitivity to beauty, in this case, music ("une musique si surprenante qu'elle donne envie tantôt de danser, tantôt de pleurer, ou de faire les deux à la fois"); admiration for ivresse, again in this case, ivresse de musique ("Ils étaient si contents d'eux-mêmes, qu'ils ont continué à jouer leur musique de sauvages, même après que la foule s'est dispersée"): L'air peu intéressé des trois autres camarades me donna à penser que ce petit était déjà un incompris. Je le regardais attentivement; il y avait dans son ceil et dans son front ce je ne sais quoi de précocement fatal qui éloigne généralement la sympathie, et qui, je ne sais pourquoi, excitait la mienne, au point que j'eus un instant l'idée bizarre que je pouvais avoir un frère à moi-même inconnu.

Whatever special desires and talents a child may possess, he is most often a dreamer of glory. This is a characteristic of the child which Sainte-Beuve notes in "Sonnet":

Enfant, je m'étais dit et souvent répété:
"Jamais, jamais d'amour; c'est assez de la gloire;
En des siècles sans nombre étendons ma mémoire,
Et semons ici-bas pour l'immortalité."21

In spite of this desire for glory, and, as Lamartine laments in "Les Quatre Ages: L'Enfance," in spite of a talent worthy of glory, a child may never reach his full potential:

Peut-être ici dans un oubli stérile
Dort un rival d'Homère ou de Virgile,
Qui n'a jamais fait rendre sous ses doigts
Que de sons durs au chalumeau des bois!
Peut-être ici végète sous le chaume
L'appui, l'éclat, le vengeur d'un royaume,
Jeune César dont le fer inhumain
N'arma jamais la généreuse main;
Et là peut-être un Caton sans mémoire
Vit sans éclat, succombera sans gloire! 22
Hugo, on the contrary, speaks positively of the child’s potential, which he sees as limitless. In "Tentanda via est" he consoles a mother who is worried about her son "si grave et si pensif." Hugo assures her that she should be triumphant rather than troubled, for her child is "un songeur [. . .] et l’enfant songeur fait un homme penseur":

Un jour il sera grand. L’avenir glorieux
Attend, n’en doutez pas, l’enfant mystérieux
Qui veut savoir comment chaque chose se nomme
Et questionne tout, un mur autant qu’un homme.
Qui sait si, ramassant à terre sans effort
Le ciseau colossal de Michel-Ange mort,
Il ne doit pas, livrant au granit des batailles,
Faire au marbre étonné de superbes entailles?
Ou, comme Bonaparte ou bien François premier,
Prendre, joueur d’échecs, l’Europe pour damier?
Qui sait s’il n’ira point, voguant à toute voile,
Ajoutant à son œil, que l’ombre humaine voile,
L’œil du long télescope au regard effrayant
Ou l’œil de la pensée encor plus clairvoyant,
Saisir, dans l’azur vaste ou dans la mer profonde,
Un astre comme Herschell, comme Colombe un monde?23

A child, if he is fortunate, may therefore grow up to be intelligent and influential. Yet he may also exert a certain amount of influence while he is still a child. Of course, he may exercise this power over his peers as well as over adults, but it is the latter phenomenon which particularly interested nineteenth-century French poets, whose poems on the subject we will examine in the next section.
The Child's Effect upon Adults

Quand l'enfant nous regarde, on sent Dieu nous sonder.
Quand il pleure, j'entends le tonnerre gronder;
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Hugo was enchanted by his children, his grandchildren, and, as de Boer has indicated, by those children he encountered "sur la route."

In the second part of Les Contemplations, he recalls the happiness of his life during the childhood of Léopoldine, his beloved daughter who was drowned in 1843. Poem "VI" from Les Contemplations expresses the joy of this period as well as the exhilarating effect this child had upon him:

Quand nous habitions tous ensemble
Sur nos collines d'autrefois,
Où l'eau court, où le buisson tremble,
Dans la maison qui touche aux bois,

Elle avait dix ans, et moi trente;
J'étais pour elle l'univers.
Oh! comme l'herbe est odorante
Sous les arbres profonds et verts!

Elle faisait mon sort prospère,
Mon travail léger, mon ciel bleu.
Lorsqu'elle me disait: Mon père,
Tout mon cœur s'écriait: Mon Dieu!

Again in the same volume he speaks of his delight in this child; in "V" he particularly remembers her habit of entering his room each morning as "un rayon qu'on espère":

Elle avait pris ce pli dans son âge enfantin
De venir dans ma chambre un peu chaque matin;
Je l'attendais ainsi qu'un rayon qu'on espère.

The poems inspired by Hugo's grandchildren, Jeanne and Georges, are especially charming in their exuberance, for they are not tinged with the bittersweet memories of the past. While the former poem changes in tone from its beginning, which we have cited, to its end ("Et dire qu'elle est morte! Hélas! que Dieu m'assiste!"), the poems about Jeanne and Georges are consistently jubilant. Let us consider, for example, "Jeanne fait son entrée," in which Hugo
indicates not only his own pleasure upon hearing the chatterings of Jeanne, but also the pleasure of God:

Jeanne parle; elle dit des choses qu'elle ignore; Elle envoie à la mer qui gronde, au bois sonore, A la nuée, aux fleurs, aux nids, au firmament, A l'immense nature un doux gazouillement, Tout un discours, profond peut-être, qu'elle achève Par un sourire où flotte une âme, où tremble un rêve, Murmure indistinct, vague, obscur, confus, brouillé. Dieu, le bon vieux grand-père, écoute émerveillé. 28

Hugo is equally captivated by Georges, as we see in his lilting poem "L'Autre":

Viens, mon Georges. Ah! les fils de nos fils nous enchantent, Ce sont de jeunes voix matinales qui chantent. Ils sont dans nos logis lugubres le retour Des roses, du printemps, de la vie et du jour! Leur rire nous attire une larme aux paupières Et de notre vieux seuil fait tressaillir les pierres; De la tombe entrouverte et des ans lourds et froids Leur regard radieux dissipe les effrois; Ils ramènent notre âme aux premières années; Ils font rouvrir en nous toutes nos fleurs fanées; Nous nous retrouvons doux, naïfs, heureux de rien; Le coeur serein s'emplit d'un vague aérien; En les voyant on croit se voir soi-même éclore; Oui, devenir aïeul, c'est rentrer dans l'aurore. 29

The poet demonstrates in "XV" from Les Feuilles d'automne that it is not only the children in his own family who bring him joy but children in general, and he wishes to be surrounded by them constantly:

Laissez.—Tous ces enfants sont bien là.—Qui vous dit Que la bulle d'azur que mon souffle agrandit A leur souffle indiscrèt s'écroule? Qui vous dit que leurs voix, leurs pas, leurs jeux, leurs cris, Effarouchent la muse et chassent les périns? . . . Venez, enfants, venez en foule!

Venez autour de moi. Riez, chantez, courez! Votre œil me jettera quelques rayons dorés, Votre voix charmera mes heures.

C'est la seule en ce monde où rien ne nous sourit Qui vienne du dehors sans troubler dans l'esprit Le chœur des voix intérieures!
The lack of originality of this poem does not hinder its charm. As Jean Calvet remarks:

Of Hugo's poems expressing the joy a child is capable of evoking in an adult, we have found "XIX" from Les Feuilles d'Automne to be the most appealing. The idea is repeated later in the poem:

In Chapter I we mentioned Hugo's use of the child as the antithesis of the adult. These lines also suggest this antithesis in their contrast between "[le] doux regard de l'enfant" and "les plus tristes fronts, les plus souillés peut-être." The idea is repeated later in the poem:

Hugo is not alone in testifying to the joy a child can bring to an adult, for several of our poets have done so. Mme Desbordes-Valmore, for example, gives us in "A Inès" a seemingly spontaneous expression of the bliss her daughter causes in her:
As proof, Calvet cites the following unnamed poem, which is reminiscent of Hugo's "Elie Avait Pris Ce Pli":

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T'es ma fille! T'es ma poule!
T'es le petit coeur qui roule
Tout à l'entour de mon coeur!
T'es le p'tit Jésus d' ta mère!
Tiens! gnome pas d' souffrance amère
Que ma fill' n'en soit l' vainqueur.34
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Another poet who writes simply and sincerely of the happiness his children produce in him is Victor de Laprade. Of him Calvet says "il est chaud, lumineux, d'un optimisme réconfortant et les sentiments dont il déborde sont précisément ceux qui font les familles fortes et apportent aux cœurs normaux le bonheur simple."35 As proof, Calvet cites the following unnamed poem, which is reminiscent of Hugo's "Elle Avait Pris Ce Pli":

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Un petit doigt frappe à ma porte;
J'en connais le son argentin:
"Entrez." Je sais que l'on m'apporte
Mon bonheur de chaque matin.

Et si noire que soit la brume,
A leur sourire familier,
Une vive clarté s'allume
Dans mon coeur, dans mon atelier.36
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Charles de Pomairols, a sentimental poet in the second half of the century, writes in a hyperbolic manner in "La Chambre paternelle" of the ecstasy which a father feels upon being kissed unexpectedly by his son of "huit ou neuf ans":

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Cette marque d'amour témoignée en cachette,
Mon père la sentit, car il ne dormait pas,
Depuis il m'a conté, vieillard aux faibles pas,
Que jamais sous le ciel joie intense et profonde
Dont aux jours les plus beaux le cœur humain s'inonde,
Ne saurait égaler celle qu'il éprouva,
Quand sous ses yeux mi-clos son enfant se leva
Et s'en vint lui porter, dans la nuit inquiète
Cette marque d'amour ignorée et muette.37
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Sully-Prudhomme, in his delightful poem "Passion malheureuse,"
records the joy he feels in the presence of his young nephew as well as the chagrin he experiences when he must face the misfortune of being not the father, but only "le pauvre oncle." We have found that the contrast of the gravely-worded title and text with the lightness of tone is refreshing as well as effective:

J'ai mal placé mon cœur, j'aime l'enfant d'un autre;  
Et c'est pour m'exploiter qu'il fait le bon apôtre.  
Ce petit traître! je le sais;  
Sa mère, quand je viens, me devine, et l'appelle,  
Sentant que je suis là pour lui plus que pour elle,  
Mais elle ne m'en veut jamais.

Le marmot prend alors sa voix flûtée et tendre  
(Les enfants ont deux voix) et dit, sans la comprendre,  
Sa fable, avec expression;  
Puis il me fait ranger des soldats sur la table,  
Et m'obsède, et je trouve un plaisir ineffable  
A sa gentille obsession.

Je m'y laisse duper toutes les fois: j'espère  
Qu'à force de bonté je serai presque un père:  
Ne dit-il pas qu'il m'aime bien?  
Mais voici tout à coup le vrai père, ô disgrâce!  
L'enfant court, bat des mains, lui saute au cou, l'embrasse,  
Et le pauvre oncle n'est plus rien.  

Verlaine demonstrates concisely the power a child may exert, perhaps unwittingly, over an adult when in "A Mlle Léonie R..." he relates that the child has changed his state of mind from "horrible" to "triomphant":

Vous me rendez la joie et je suis triomphant  
De moi-même, ce moi-même qui fut terrible.

In addition to producing joy in an adult, a child may also have a calming effect upon him. We have discovered among the poems of Hugo six instances of such an effect. "A Petite Jeanne," for example, a poem written on the occasion of the first birthday of Hugo's granddaughter, relates the child's ability to calm the poet
by her mere presence. This point is rendered more forceful by the fact that the poem is located in the midst of those written during "l'année terrible"—1870-71, the period of the Franco-Prussian War:

Ah! quand je vous entends Jeanne, et quand je vous vois Chanter, et, me parlant avec votre humble voix,
Tendre vos douces mains au-dessus de nos têtes,
Il me semble que l'ombre ou grondent les tempêtes
Tremble et s'éloigne avec des rugissements sourds,
Et que Dieu fait donner à la ville aux cent tours
Désarmée ainsi qu'un navire qui sombre,
Aux énormes canons gardant le rempart sombre,
A l'univers qui penche et que Paris défend,
Sa bénéédiction par un petit enfant.

In "Jeanne endormie" he again stresses that the sight of the little girl fills him with tranquility. In order to emphasize in this poem, as in the previous one, the power of the child's effect upon him, he first relates his disturbed state of mind upon becoming informed of the libel and slander being circulated about him:

Je suis l'empoisonneur public, le meurtrier;
Ainsi viennent en foule autour de moi crier
Toutes ces voix jetant l'affront, sans fin, sans trêve;
Cependant l'enfant dort, et, comme si son rêve
Me disait: --Sois tranquille, ô père, et sois clément!--
Je sens sa main presser la mienne doucement.

The poem "Georges et Jeanne" demonstrates that Hugo is calmed by being near both his grandchildren:

Moi qu'un petit enfant rend tout à fait stupide;
J'en ai deux, Georges et Jeanne;

Je les regarde, et puis je les écoute, et puis
Je suis bon, et mon cœur s'apaise en leur présence.

Yet as we have noted previously, any child can affect Hugo, not merely the children of his own family. In "En Voyant Un Petit Enfant," a moving tribute to the innocence and beauty of the child, the poet mentions the child's soothing effect upon adults:
In addition to these poems stating the child's calming effect upon the poet personally, Hugo gives two examples, one somewhat credible and one totally fantastical, of this same effect the child may have upon others. These two poems differ from the previous poems in that the child assumes here an active rather than a passive role. In the first portion of "Les Petits" called "Guerre civile" Hugo narrates that an angry mob is demanding the death of a man whose six-year-old daughter begs them not to hurt him. The father attempts to send the little girl home, but without success. Finally the father requests of his captors that they untie him momentarily in order to reassure the little girl and they comply. The child's presence, however, has dispelled the wrath of the mob and the man is therefore freed:

"Soit," dit le chef, lâchant le captif à moitié. 
Le père dit: "Tu vois. C'est de bonne amitié. 
Je me promène avec ces messieurs. Sois bien sage, 
Rentre." Et l'enfant tendit au père son visage, 
Et s'en alla content, rassuré, sans effroi. 
"Nous sommes à notre aise à présent, tuez-moi, 
Dit le père aux vainqueurs; où voulez-vous que j'aille?" 
Alors, dans cette foule où grondait la bataille, 
On entendit passer un immense frisson, 
Et le peuple cria: Rentre dans ta maison!"

Although such exaggerated touches as "un immense frisson" are certainly questionable, it is within the realm of possibility that a child could have such a dramatic effect upon a crowd. The events described in "L'Epopée du lion," on the other hand, are totally imaginary. It appears to be a versified fairy tale, perhaps created for the amusement of children. Hugo tells the story of a lion who steals a young prince and takes him to his forest lair. Various people--a knight,
a hermit, soldiers--come in turn to the lair in order to persuade
the lion by words or force to release the boy. None is successful.
At last the angered lion decides to bring the boy back to the
village and to eat him there as the ultimate affront to these
humans. Having arrived at the palace with the boy, the lion comes
upon the young princess who is singing in her bed. Recognizing
her brother, she threatens the lion "avec son petit doigt." The
beast immediately capitulates, apparently charmed by this young
being, and the boy is saved:

Elle se dressa droite au bord du lit étroit,
Et menaça le monstre avec son petit doigt.
Alors, près du berceau de soie et de dentelle,
Le grand lion posa son frère devant elle,
Comme eût fait une mère en abaissant les bras,
Et lui dit: Le voici. Lâ! ne te fâche pas!

While Hugo's poems definitely dominate those treating a
child's calming effect upon an adult, he is not the only poet to
examine such an occurrence. Coppée also tells a story illustrating
that a child's presence can bring about a character change for the
better. In "Le Père" he speaks of a man who is constantly drunk
and his shrewish mistress. Before they had a son, the man beat
the woman continually. At this point the beatings ceased "depuis
que c'était une mère." When once the woman yelled at him in an
argument to strike her as he always had done before, he answered
that he did not want to wake the baby, revealing that the child
has had a calming effect upon him:

Mais le père, accablé, ne parut point l'entendre,
Et, fixant sur son fils un œil stupide et tendre,
Craintif, ainsi qu'un homme accusé se défend,
Il murmura:
"J'ai peur de réveiller l'enfant!"
In addition to Hugo and Coppée, Verlaine also records an incident in which a child's presence causes peace where there was formerly strife. The particular episode related in "A Mlle Jeanne Vanier," apparently an autobiographical one, concerns an argument between Verlaine and his editor. The appearance of the editor's daughter immediately establishes peace between the two men, "bons garçons au fond":

Je n'ai pas l'air commode. Il est mal disposé. 
Choc terrible! Soudain, au fort de la querelle, 
Petite et fine à la croire surnaturelle, 
Une enfant apparaît, grands yeux noirs, teint rose. 

Elle s'enquête, elle tremble, comme inquiète 
--Sérieusement trop? Non,--du bruit de tempête 
Que vont menant ce monsieur chauve et son papa 

Souriant sur-le-champ,--et voici la paix faite 
Entre, en un mutuel et franc mea culpa, 
Votre père, éditeur, et moi, votre poète.

Besides being made joyful and calm by a child, an adult may occasionally feel he can derive support from a child. Hugo indicates this in three poems. In "Georges et Jeanne" he suggests that his grandchildren are a source of inspiration and serenity:

.. et je prends l'un pour guide 
Et l'autre pour lumière. 

Les enfants chancelants sont nos meilleurs appuis. 
Je les regarde, et puis je les écoute, et puis 
Je suis bon, et mon coeur s'apaise en leur présence.

Similarly in "Fonction de l'enfant" he says that the child, who is "plus brave qu'un soldat et plus pensif qu'un prêtre" and whose function it is to inspire men to goodness and to justice, comes to the aid of man again and again:

Ils [les hommes] sont victorieux, formidables, terribles; 
Mais les petits enfants viennent à leur secours.
Moreover, in "A Propos De La Loi dite liberté de l'enseignement" Hugo suggests that man can depend on the child to be his "guide sur la terre":

Quant à moi, je serai satisfait, moi qui songe
Devant les cieux sacrés,

Tant que Jeanne sera mon guide sur la terre,
Tant que Dieu permettra que j'aie, ô pur mystère!
En mon âpre chemin,
Ces deux bonheurs où tient tout l'idéal possible,
Dans l'âme un astre immense, et dans ma main paisible
Une petite main.50

We have one example in nineteenth-century French verse which indicates that a child can inspire an adult to create a work of art. Verlaine explains in "A Fernand Crance" that he has composed this poem so that when this child grows up he might like the poet. He hastens to add candidly, however, that he has actually written this poem, which is not without a certain charm, so that the mother might like him now:

L'enfant avait reçu deux bons yeux dans la tête,51
Quelque chose de dur et de doux à la fois.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Et j'ai fait ce sonnet qui n'est pas régulier
Pour, quand il sera grand, que le cher enfant m'aime
Et surtout que sa mère, en attendant de même

Qu'il grandisse, ait pour moi, le vieil irrégulier,
Tels sentiments d'amitié franche et forte, même!
—Et que vive l'enfant, pour ne pas l'oublier!52

Two poets, Hugo and Vigny, have said in verse that the child, being the embodiment of purity, emphasizes the impurity of the adult. Hugo makes such a statement in "En Voyant Un Petit Enfant":

Il suffit, pour qu'on ait besoin d'être à genoux
Et pour que nous sentions de la noirceur en nous,
Que ce doux petit être inexprimable vive.53
Vigny also indicates that an adult's impurity is intensified in the presence of the child. In "La Femme adultère" a mother who has just committed adultery hesitates to kiss "une bouche pure" --that of her child:

Hélas! elle rougit de l'amour maternel,
Et tremble de poser, dans cette chambre austère,
Sur une bouche pure une lèvre adultère.54

Hugo feels that one important reaction which an adult should have to a child is that the former should feel responsible for all children, especially poor children. He states in "Les Enfants pauvres" that "le bonheur est leur droit" and reminds man that he must keep these children from hunger and cold, for they have come to earth directly from God:

Prenez garde à ce petit être;
Il est bien grand, il contient Dieu. 55

In "Les Pauvres Gens" Hugo gives an example of what mankind's attitude ought to be toward poor and orphaned children. He tells the sentimental story of a poor fisherman and his wife who already have five children of their own when the wife asks the husband if they can take in two orphans. The husband's generous attitude is that he will work harder and drink only water so that the children may have a home:

Ouvrons aux deux enfants. Nous les mêlerons tous,
Cela nous grimpera le soir sur les genoux.
Ils vivront, ils seront frère et soeur des cinq autres.
Quand il verra qu'il faut nourrir avec les nôtres
Cette petite fille et ce petit garçon,
Le bon Dieu nous fera prendre plus de poisson.
Moi, je boirai de l'eau, je ferai double tâche,
C'est dit. Va les chercher.56

Two nineteenth-century French poets discuss in verse the effect upon an adult of being separated from his children. The
first of these, "Le Pauvre Nègre" by Millevoye, a precursor of the Romantics, is the more unusual. This singularity stems from the poet’s having selected as the principal figure in the poem a negro who laments his sad destiny, and the fact that he must suffer so much because of his skin color. He is forced into slavery and separated from his wife who is about to give birth to their first child. The father expresses in moving words his sorrow at never being able to know a closeness with his child. The activities which are described are of interest not only in themselves but also because they announce the Romantic interest in exotic locales. The imagery, moreover, is remarkably fresh and appropriate to the subject:

"Je ne pourrai te bercer dans ta couche,
Enfant aimé, que n’ont point vu mes yeux!
Ni te sourire, en pressant sur ta bouche
De l’orangier les fruits délicieux;
Ni t’enseigner, dès ta robuste enfance,
L’art d’assoupir un serpent venimeux
Ou de surprendre un lion sans défense,
Ou de plonger sous les flets écumeux!"57

Hugo also writes of the pain he feels while separated from his children. In "XXIII" from Les Voix intérieures the poet, "seul et triste," states that he is preoccupied with the thought of his children:

A quoi je songe?—Hélas! loin du toit où vous êtes,
Enfants, je songe à vous!

Moi, rêvant à vous seuls, je contemple et je sonde
L’amour que j’ai pour vous dans mon âme profonde,
Amour doux et puissant qui toujours m’est resté,
Et cette grande mer est petite à côté!58

Rather than writing of an adult’s anguish caused by separation from his child as did Millevoye and Hugo, Verlaine
speaks of a different kind of pain, "la douleur plus exquise" caused by seeing again his son Georges. The boy was, at the time of this meeting in 1881, ten years old, and Verlaine had been away from him for many years, first with Rimbaud and then in prison. Verlaine's feelings appear genuine here as in most of the pieces from Sagesse, a volume inspired by the poet's fervent rededication to the Catholic faith:

Et j'ai revu l'enfant unique: il m'a semblé
Que s'ouvrait dans mon cœur la dernière blessure,
Celle dont la douleur plus exquise m'assure
D'une mort désirable en un jour consolé.

La bonne flèche aiguë et sa fraîcheur qui dure!
En ces instances choisies elles ont éveillé
Les rêves un peu lourds du scrupule ennuyé
Et tout mon sang chrétien chanta la Chanson pure.

J'entends encor, je vois encor! Loi du devoir
Si douce! Enfin je sais ce qu'est entendre et voir,
J'entends, je vois toujours! Voix des bonnes pensées!

Innocence, avenir! Sage et silencieux,
Que je vais vous aimer, vous un instant pressées,
Belles petites mains qui fermerez nos yeux!59

The various effects that a child may have upon an adult as presented by nineteenth-century French poets have been generally favorable ones, except for the poems by Hugo and Millevoye, which treat the suffering of an adult due to separation from his child or children. Several poets have treated in verse other harmful effects which a child may have upon an adult. Two of these poets, Millevoye and Hugo, specify the effect upon the mother of the death or near death of her child. In "L'Amour maternel" Millevoye relates the story of a nine-year-old girl who comes very close to death.

While the child is so dangerously ill, the mother loses her reason.
After this she believes that her real daughter is only an imitation brought in by her husband to help cure his emotionally disturbed wife. At last the mother hears her beloved child speak the same words she had heard on the fateful night of her illness ("Adieu. C'est pour toujours!"). She is convinced and recovers her reason.

In Hugo's poem "Fiat Voluntas" however, the mother is not so fortunate. Having lost her child two months earlier, she can endure life no longer and dies of grief:

> Car rien n'est plus puissant que ces petits bras morts
> Pour tirer promptement les mères dans la tombe.

Two other poets mention that a child may have an unfavorable effect on an adult. Laprade in "Petits ingrâts" scolds his children for not doing their duty, for mocking others, and for being lazy. He reminds them that his good name is in their hands, suggesting that their bad actions, "par orgueil ou par paresse," could quite easily be harmful to his reputation and memory:

> Si, par orgueil ou par paresse,
> Vous prenez de mauvais chemins,
> Songez au nom que je vous laisse;
> Ma mémoire est entre vos mains.

Finally, Vigny, sometimes quite modern in his thought, tells young girls to dance and to enjoy the ball, for when they have children, their life will be all toil and little pleasure. This dreary picture of the unliberated woman is found in the poem "Le Bal":

> Dansez; un soir encore usez de votre vie:
> L'étincelante nuit d'un long jour est suivie;
> A l'orchestre brillant le silence fatal
> Succède, et les dégoûts aux doux propos du bal.
> Ah! reculez le jour où, surveillantes mères,
> Vous saurez du berceau les angoisses amères:
> Car, dès que de l'enfant le cri s'est élevé,
> Adieu, plaisir, long voile à demi relevé,
We have seen that a child, often unwittingly, can affect an adult in numerous ways. He can cause the adult to be joyous, tranquil, or creative. He can cause the adult to feel dependent on him or responsible for him. His separation from a parent may cause suffering or even death for the latter; his being reunited with the parent can produce, at least in the case of Verlaine, an emotion akin to pain. The child is a mirror for the parents' reputation, and the former's carelessness or wickedness can be disastrous to that reputation. Finally, his very presence brings about a drastic change in the life of his mother. The following section will demonstrate that it is not only the child which can generate profound emotions in the adult, but the idea of childhood itself, and of course most particularly, the memories of and reflections about one's own childhood.
The Adult's Recollection of Childhood

Nineteenth-century French poets have generally regarded their own childhood, at least in retrospect, as a blissful period, "où l'âme est toujours en paix." Many of them wrote poems demonstrating that they associated with their childhood a particular positive quality, such as contentment, tranquility, and innocence. Only one poet, Lautréamont, wrote of a particular aspect of his early days which was painful to him. Of these various qualities which the poets have connected with their childhood, it is contentment which most often accompanies their memories. This feeling may result from vague thoughts on the subject or from the recollection of specific occurrences. As might be expected, it is the Romantics who wrote of the joy of their childhood more often than the later poets.

Béranger's "Souvenirs d'enfance" is a typical example of many of the nostalgic poems to be found in this section. As did many of our poets, Béranger revisited his childhood home and felt rejuvenated, remembering the happiness he knew there:

Lieux où jadis m'a bercé l'Espérance,
Je vous revois à plus de cinquante ans.
On rajeunit avec souvenirs d'enfance,
Comme on renaît au souffle du printemps.

Amis, parents, témoins de mon aurore,
Objets d'un culte avec le temps accru,
Oui, mon berceau me semble doux encore,
Et la berceuse a pourtant disparu.64
Mme Desbordes-Valmore also sees her early days as blissful, and at the same time she realizes, regretfully, that those days will never return:

Qui me rendra ces jours où la vie a des ailes
Et vole, vole ainsi que l'alouette aux cieux . . .
Quand l'amour de ma mère était mon avenir,
Quand on ne mourrait pas encor dans ma famille,
Quand tout vivait pour moi, vaine petite fille,
Quand vivre était le ciel où s'en ressouvenir?

Mme Amable Tastu remembers her childhood as happy but points out astutely that it is a fundamental trait of human nature to regard past or future times as happier than the present:

Vous souvient-il des jours de votre enfance,
Objet constant de regrets superflus,
Si chers, si purs, si doux, quand on y pense,
Si beaux enfin, quand nous n'y sommes plus?
Car le bonheur, dans l'humaine carrière,
Marche toujours ou devant ou derrière;
La même loi toujours nous le défend;
On le regrette, on l'attend, on le nomme!
Que dit l'enfant? Oh! quand serai-je un homme!
Que dit son père? Oh! quand j'étais enfant!

It is a typically Romantic characteristic to regard one's childhood as blissful, as a time of innocence and security. This characteristic is seen in "Souvenirs" by René de Chateaubriand:

Combien j'ai douce souvenance
Du joli lieu de ma naissance!
Ma soeur, qu'ils étaient beaux ces jours
De France!
O mon pays, sois mes amours
Toujours!

Te souvient-il que notre mère
Au foyer de notre chaumière,
Nous pressait sur son cœur joyeux,
Ma chère!
Et nous baisions ses blancs cheveux
Tous deux!

This trait of recalling the happy memories of one's childhood which we have seen announced in the earlier writers becomes full-blown
in the works of Lamartine. Lamartine states in Les Confidences:

Je n'imiterai pas Jean-Jacques Rousseau dans ses Confessions. Je ne vous raconterai pas les puerilités de ma première enfance. [. . .] Laissons donc le berceau aux nourrices et nos premiers sourires, et nos premières larmes, et nos premiers balbutiements à l'extase de nos mères. Je ne veux me prendre pour vous qu'à mes premiers souvenirs déjà raisonnés.66

H. M. Scudder, referring in Childhood in Literature and Art to this passage, observes that the poet presents in Les Confidences only two scenes from his childhood.69 What is true of the prose autobiography Les Confidences, however, is not applicable to the poetry, for we have several instances in verse of references to the poet's childhood. He speaks quite specifically and sentimentally of his early days in the lovely "La Vigne et la maison":

Premier rayon du ciel vu dans des yeux de femmes,
Premier foyer d'une âme où s'allument nos âmes,
Premiers bruits de baisers au cœur retentissants!
Adieux, retours, départs pour de lointaines rives,
Mémoire qui revient pendant les nuits pensives
A ce foyer des coeurs, univers des absents!70

In this poem the poet makes mention of a large vine which grew next to his house and which impressed him very much in his childhood days. He speaks of it again in "La Fenêtre de la maison paternelle":

Autour du toit qui nous vit naître
Un pampre étalait ses rameaux,
Ses grains dorés, vers la fenêtre,
Attrayaient les petits oiseaux.

C'est pourquoi la vigne enlacée
Aux mémoires de mon berceau,
Porte à mon âme une pensée,
Et doit ramper sur mon tombeau.71

In "Milly ou la terre natale" the poet writes nostalgically of his family and his childhood home. Like most of our poets, he views
that period of his life as an age of innocence and happiness:

Voici l'étroit sentier où, quand l'airain sonore
Dans le temple lointain vibrait avec l'aurore,
Nous montions sur sa trace à l'autel de Seigneur
Offrir deux purs encens, innocence et bonheur!

In his poem "Le Retour," Lamartine reminisces about many loved-ones and experiences of his childhood. Having done so, he makes the Proustian observation that the smallest sensation, perhaps the sound of "une note perdue," can release in the listener a myriad of memories and feelings which he had believed forgotten:

Notre âme, en remontant à ses premières heures,
Ranime tour à tour ces fantômes chéris
Et s'attache aux débris de ces chères demeures,
S'il en reste au moins un débris!

Ainsi, quand nous cherchons en vain dans nos pensées
D'un air qui nous charmait les traces effacées,
Si quelque souffle harmonieux,
Effleurant au hasard la harpe détenu,
En tire seulement une note perdue,
D'un seul son retrouvé l'air entier se réveille,
Il rajeunit notre âme et remplit notre oreille
D'un souvenir mélodieux!

Finally, in his long poem "Les Préludes," the poet returns to the "douces retraites" and "beaux lieux" of his youth. Recalling the contentment of those days, Lamartine says he now wishes to embrace forever "tes foyers protecteurs":

Oui, je reviens à toi, berceau de mon enfance,
Embrasser pour jamais tes foyers protecteurs;
Loin de moi les cités et leur vaine opulence,
Je suis né parmi les pasteurs!

It is not surprising that Hugo wrote several poems pertaining to his own childhood, which as Calvet indicates was a happy one:

"Rien ne vaut pour attacher à l'enfant le souvenir d'une enfance heureuse. Celle de Victor Hugo fut choyée et féconde en incidents
colores qu'on n'oublie pas." In "Mes Adieux à l'enfance," the poet remembers the happiness of his youth and regrets its disappearance:

Adieux, beaux jours de mon enfance,
Qu'un instant fit évanouir,
Bonheur, qui fuit sans qu'on y pense,
Qu'on sent trop peu pour en jouir;
Plaisirs que mon âme inquiète
Dédaignait sans savoir pourquoi,
Vous n'êtes plus, et je regrette
De vous voir déjà loin de moi.75

Indeed, in "XVIII" from Les Feuilles d'automne, Hugo speaks of "l'enfance éphémère" as "l'âge du bonheur et le plus beau moment /
Que l'homme, ombre qui passe, ait sous le firmament!"76 Although his childhood no longer exists, the memories of it come back to his mind "sans cesse," as he notes in "Sagesse":

Pourquoi devant mes yeux revenez-vous sans cesse,
O jours de mon enfance et de mon allégresse?
Qui donc toujours vous rouvre en nos cœurs presque éteints,
O lumineuse fleur des souvenirs lointains?77

In "Ecrit en 1846" he speaks of a specific memory—that of his first attempts at writing poetry, and the judgment of it he received from a certain marquis who used to visit his family:

J'étais un doux enfant, le grain d'un honnête homme.
Quand, plein d'illusions, crédule, simple, en somme,
Droit et pur, mes deux yeux sur l'idéal ouverte,
Je bégayais, songeur naïf, mes premiers vers,
Marquis, vous leur trouviez un arrière-gout fauve,
Les Grâces vous ayant nourri dans leur alcôve;
Mais vous disiez: Pas mal! Bien! C'est quelqu'un qui naît!
Et, souvenir sacré! ma mère rayonnait.78

Another Romantic poet, Alfred de Musset, speaks of remembering the happy days of his youth in "Sonnet à Mme N. Ménessier," a childhood friend:

Ainsi nous revenaient les jours de notre enfance,
Et nous parlions déjà le langage des vieux.
Ce jeune souvenir riait entre nous deux,
Léger comme un écho, gai comme l'espérance.79
For Sainte-Beuve, who was affiliated at one time with the Romantic school of poetry, recollection of childhood brings to mind a special memory— that of the welcome leisure of Sundays. "A M. Auguste le Prévost" lacks the powerful impact of Rimbaud's "Dimanche" which we have examined earlier, but like the other poems in this section, it is a pleasant evocation of "notre blonde enfance, et ses riants trésors":

Le dimanche est pour nous le jour des souvenirs
Car, dans la tendre enfance, on aime à voir venir
Après les soins comptés de l'exacte semaine
Et les devoirs remplis, le soleil qui ramène
Le loisir et la fête, et les habits parés,
Et l'église aux doux chants, et les jeux dans les prés.

Et nous nous rappelons nos dimanches d'alors,
Et notre blonde enfance, et ses riants trésors.

Of course, it was not only the Romantic poets who wrote nostalgically of their happy childhood. Among the later poets who have done so, Baudelaire is outstanding. We have found two poems which recall the most carefree and perhaps the happiest period in the poet's life—the year 1827, when the child shared his mother's love with neither father nor stepfather. The first poem which treats this period is "XCIX" from Les Fleurs du mal which we mentioned in Chapter I. In this short poem, Baudelaire has preserved the happiness and tranquility of an almost magical year in his life. The poem is as lovely, delicate, and brief as the period it evokes. The poet lovingly presents here the intimacy of an interior scene in which a mother and her son are sharing a meal. The scene is so enviably serene that the sun seems to desire participation in the pleasure:
The second poem by Baudelaire treating this period in his life is "La Servante au grand cœur." While this poem states little directly about Baudelaire's childhood, it strongly suggests a warm and loving relationship between the child and the servant. His mother was evidently jealous of this closeness at the time ("La servante au grand cœur dont vous étiez jalouse"). The poet blames his mother both for this jealousy and for her neglect of the servant's tomb.

At the same time, Baudelaire acknowledges his own lack of attention to Mariette's grave and his consequent guilt feelings:

Lorsque la buche siffle et chante, si le soir,
Je la trouvais tapie en un coin de ma chambre,
Que pourrais-je répondre à cette âme pieuse,
Voyant tomber des pleurs de sa paupière creuse?  

Edouard Plouvier, a contemporary of Baudelaire but with few of the latter's artistic skills, also wrote of a happy period in his childhood. In "Le Moulin de mon grand-père," he recalls the joy of that time:

Ah! le bon temps qui s'écoulait
Dans le moulin de mon grand-père!
Ce que grand-père racontait
Comme en silence on l'écoutait!
Et quel bon temps! quel temps c'était!

A much more gifted poet than Plouvier is Théodore de Banville. In "A Ma Mère" we can see his recollection of a blissful childhood as
well as his typically Parnassian concern for perfection of form:

Lorsque ma sœur et moi, dans les forêts profondes,
Nous avions déchiré nos pieds sur les cailloux,
En nous baisant au front tu nous appelais fous,
Après avoir maudit nos courses vagabondes.

Puis, comme un vent d'été confond les fraîches ondes
De deux petits ruisseaux sur un lit calme et doux,
Lorsque tu nous tenais tous deux sur tes genoux,
Tu mêlais en riant nos chevelures blondes.

Et pendant bien longtemps nous restions là blottis,
Heureux, et tu disais parfois "O chers petits!
Un jour vous serez grands, et moi je serai vieille!"

Les jours se sont enfuis, d'un vol mystérieux,
Mais toujours la jeunesse éclatante et vermeille
Fleurit dans ton sourire et brille dans tes yeux.

Quite different from the precise poetry of Banville is the
fluid verse of Vielé-Griffin. This poet, too, remembers in "Un
Oiseau chantait" the joy he knew as a child playing in "jardins
radieux":

O jardins radieux qui m'avez enfanté
Et je revis chaque heure et toutes vos saisons:
Joie, en rire de feuilles claires par la rive,
Joie, en sourires bleus de lacs aux horizons,
Joie, en prostrations de la plaine passive,
Joie éclose en frissons.

Yet this boundless joy Vielé-Griffin experienced as a boy was
short-lived, for manhood brought sadness with it. In "Le Porcheur,"
the poet wistfully relates various impressions from his childhood
days. He revisits his first home and recalls the loved-ones who
peopled his youth and says that he would like to have told them
that the time he spent with them was the happiest period of his
life:

Pourtant, j'aurais voulu leur dire
Que rien n'est triste en l'ombre de mes chênes,
Que tout, hors la forêt, est pire;

...........
addresses this nostalgic poem. The last line of the poem expresses beautifully the idea that childhood is uncomplicated and full of light:

Oh! La contrée natale ... Qu'elle était transparente.

At the end of the century, Fernand Gregh writes of his blissful childhood days. In "Le Parc" he says that his childhood home is a happy and unsullied memory, smiling at him from the past:

La Maison de l'Enfance au lointain du passé
Se dresse et me sourit blanche parmi les arbres.

In "Hésitation" Gregh contrasts the joy he knew then with the sorrow he feels now. Yet he suggests in this harmonious and poignant sonnet that however far away those days may be, there will ever remain in the man a vestige of the primitive purity of the child:

O mon enfance! Ô grand souvenir! Suis-je digne,
Ame aujourd'hui pleine de soir, pécheur méchant,
Pèlerin triste qui m'en vais le front penchant,
De chanter ta joie âme et ta blancheur insigne?

Le chant s'est tu dans l'ombre et la brume a terni,
Le lac clair où jadis se mirait l'infini;
Mais il y flotte encore une plume de cygne.

We have seen that a number of poets wrote of the happiness they experienced in their childhood. There are others however who recall more specifically the calm of that period, as well as the contentment. Lamartine wrote four poems which refer to the peace
he felt as a child. The first of these, "Souvenir d'enfance," is written to a childhood friend, Prosper Guichard de Bienassis, who never moved away from the spot where he and the poet had lived. Lamartine tells this friend to be grateful that he has been able to prolong the peace they knew as children, rather than to seek less meaningful fame on the tumultuous "routes du monde":

In "A Un Enfant," Lamartine writes to Henry Lyte, a four-year-old English child who visited the poet's family once. He tells the boy that later when he grows up and life appears bitter to him, he should recall the peace he knew during this visit:

In a melodious little poem, "Le Grillon," Lamartine contrasts the time of his childhood, when the chirping of a cricket would lull him to sleep, with the present, when even the cricket's voice seems full of tears. Here as in the following poem, it is a woman through whom Lamartine speaks:
In a final poem recalling the tranquility connected with childhood, Lamartine writes of the calming influence which his "ange gardien" has had upon him all his life, beginning at age twelve. In a note to "L'Ange gardien," the poet clarifies that "la poésie est l'ange gardien de l'humanité." As in "Le Grillon," a woman again speaks:

Quand j'étais petite
Comme ce berceau,
Et que Marguerite
Filait son fuseau;
Quand le vent d'automne
Faisait tout gémir,
Ton cri monotone
M'aidait à dormir.

Grillon solitaire,
Voix qui sort de terre,
Ah! réveille-toi
Pour moi!

Qu'il a moins de charmes
Ton chant qu'autrefois!
As-tu donc nos larmes
Aussi dans ta voix?
Pleures-tu l'aieule,
La mère et la soeur?
Vois, je peuple seule
Ce foyer du cœur! ...

Grillon solitaire,
Voix qui sort de terre,
Ah! réveille-toi
Pour moi.92

Quand, assise à douze ans à l'angle du verger,
Sous les citrons en fleur ou les amandiers roses,
Le souffle du printemps sortait de toutes choses,
Et faisait sur mon cou mes boucles voltiger,
Une voix me parlait, si douce au fond de l'âme
Qu'un frisson de plaisir en courait sur ma peau.
Ce n'était pas le vent, la cloche, le pipeau,
Ce n'était nulle voix d'enfant, d'homme ou de femme;

C'était vous, c'était vous, ô mon Ange gardien,
C'était vous dont le cœur déjà parlait au mien!94

92 As in "Le Grillon," a woman again speaks.
93 "L'Ange gardien," the poet clarifies that "la poésie est l'ange gardien de l'humanité."
Like Lamartine, Musset also speaks of being visited by a vision at an early age. We learn at the end of "La Nuit de décembre" that this poet's visitor is not a guardian angel ("Je ne suis ni l'ange gardien ni le mauvais destin des hommes") but "la Solitude." While this vision does not actively console the poet, it nonetheless seems to exercise a calming influence upon him:

> Ton doux sourire a trop de patience,  
> Tes larmes ont trop de pitié.  
> En te voyant, j'aime la Providence.  
> Ta douleur même est soeur de ma souffrance;  
> Elle ressemble à l'amitié.  

The vision began appearing to the young Musset "du temps que j'étais écolier." Even then the boy was marked as different, and yet he indicates here that the solitude which so often accompanies distinction is not necessarily an unwelcome phenomenon:

> Du temps que j'étais écolier,  
> Je restais un soir à veiller  
> Dans notre salle solitaire.  
> Devant ma table vint s'asseoir  
> Un pauvre enfant vêtu de noir,  
> Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.  

> Son visage était triste et beau:  
> A la lueur de mon flanbeau,  
> Dans mon livre ouvert il vint lire,  
> Il pencha son front sur ma main,  
> Et resta jusqu'au lendemain,  
> Pensif, avec un doux sourire.  

Sully-Prudhomme writes in "Les Berceaux" of the feeling of calm and security given to an infant by his cradle. At the same time, he says that this need to live "blottis," a remarkably expressive adjective, does not cease with childhood, and that we are betrayed by our cradles "si tôt trop petits," for beyond infancy
we can no longer be assured of the complete protection and tranquility that our cradles have conditioned us to expect:

Sur le coeur d'amis sûrs et bons,
Femmes sans taches, sur le vôtre
C'est un berceau que nous rêvons
Sous une forme ou sous une autre.

Cet instinct de vivre blottis
Dure encore à l'âge où nous sommes;
Pourquoi donc, si tôt trop petits, 98
Berceaux, trahissez-vous les hommes?

In "Comme Alors," Sully-Prudhomme also writes sensitively about the vulnerability of children as well as of adults. While he indicates that it may be comparatively easy to calm a child's fears and to answer his needs, he also seems to say that these same needs exist in the adult, for whom satisfaction is more difficult to find:

Quand j'étais tout enfant, ma bouche
Ignorait un langage appris:
Du fond de mon étroite couche
J'appelais les soins par les cris;

Ma peine était la peur cruelle
De perdre un jouet dans mes draps,
Et ma convoitise était celle
Qui supplie en tendant les bras.

Maintenant que sans être aidées
Mes lèvres parlent couramment,
J'ai moins de signes que d'idées:
On a changé mon bégaiement.

Et maintenant que les caresses
Ne me bercent plus quand je dors,
J'ai d'inexprimables tendresses.
Et je tends les bras comme alors. 99

We consider this poem a significant one in that it treats one of the fundamental problems of the human condition. It expresses man's profound yearnings for tenderness and assurance on the one hand and on the other, his hesitation or inability to communicate
these needs. The result is a much more intense suffering than
that of the baby who is able to draw attention to his malaise "par
des cris."

Rimbaud also recalls in verse the calming sensation of a
childhood experience. In a signal poem, "Les Chercheuses de poux,"
the poet describes a scene which most critics believe to be based
on an incident occurring when the poet was not quite sixteen years
old. At this age he ran away from home for the first time; but,
ot having enough money for the trip by train to Paris, the boy was
apprehended and jailed upon his arrival in the capital city. He
wrote to his friend and teacher Izambard, who in turn wrote to the
governor of the prison on behalf of the boy. Rimbaud was released
and used the money Izambard had sent him to reach Douai, where the
teacher lived with the relatives who had raised him—three elderly
maiden ladies, the Gindre sisters. Rimbaud's stay in Douai of ap-
proximately three weeks was evidently a period of rest and respite
from his anxieties. There seems little doubt that these three ladies
are the inspiration for the "deux grandes sœurs charmantes" in the
poem. Although this autobiographical incident occurred in Rimbaud's
sixteenth year, the poem has been included here because it may be
extended to symbolize many situations in which a child is soothed
and succored by an adult. "Les Chercheuses de poux" possesses a
hypnotic beauty which forms a memorable contrast to the unpleasant
activity occurring in the poem—the delousing of a child. It is the
child's point of view which is here presented and which gives to the
piece its special piquancy. The process of delousing lulls the boy
and his cares ebb from him. The last two lines indicate that this is an intensely emotional experience for the child—the release he feels moves him to the point of tears, while the peace he feels quells the tears at their inception:

Quand le front de l'enfant, plein de rouges tourmentes,
Implore l'essaim blanc des rêves indistincts,
Il vient près de son lit deux grandes sœurs charmantes
Avec de frêles doigts aux ongles argentins.

Elles assaient l'enfant devant une croisée
Grande ouverte où l'air bleu baigne un fouillis de fleurs,
Et dans ses lourds cheveux où tombe la rosée
Promènent leurs doigts fins, terribles et charmants.

Il écoute chanter leurs haleines craintives,
Qui fleurent de longs miels végétaux et rosés,
Et qu'interrompt parfois un sifflement, salives
Reprises sur la lèvre ou désirs de baisers.

Il entend leurs cils noirs battant sous les silences
Parfumés; et leurs doigts électriques et doux
Font crépiter parmi ses grises indolences
Sous leurs ongles royaux la mort des petits poux.

Voilà que monte en lui le vin de la Paresse,
Soupir d'harmonica qui pourrait délirer;
L'enfant se sent, selon la lenteur des caresses,
Sourdre et mourir sans cesse un désir de pleurer.

To term Rimbaud's most famous work, "Le Bateau ivre," an expression of the longing for the tranquility of childhood is to limit the poem considerably. It is this aspect of the poem, however, which is relevant to our study. This magnificent piece, written when Rimbaud was only sixteen, is a statement of the dreams of the child which often collapse, leaving the disillusionment of the adult. As Hackett remarks, the end of the poem voices "the desire for the world of childhood to which the wave-like rhythms of tired and frustrated emotions, their force spent, finally return." This is not to say that there is no value in pursuing the visions of
childhood, for the scenes viewed and the emotions experienced can be, as in this poem, overwhelming in their beauty and power. But there may come a moment ("Si je désire une eau d'Europe [ . . . ]") when the dizzying intoxication of the voyant traversing tempestuous seas is not so satisfying as the secure tranquility of the child sailing a toy boat in a European mud-puddle.

The oceanic adventures of the drunken boat are a fulfillment of passionate yearnings—those of Rimbaud in "Mémoire" ("ô canot immobile") and "Les Poëtes de sept ans" ("l'enfant couché sur des pièces de toile écrue, et pressentant violemment la voile!") and of Baudelaire in "Le Voyage" ("au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!"). The pathetic metamorphosis from the liberated and potent "bateau ivre" to "un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai," the mutation of "la Poème de la Mer, infusé d'astres" into "la flache noire et froide," form a tragic prognosis of the alteration of the vibrant voyant seeking adventure and visions into the disappointed wanderer seeking peace and security and therefore returning again and again to Charleville:

Moi qui tremblais, sentant geindre à cinquante lieues
Le rut des Béhémots et les Maelstroms épais,
Fileur éternel des immobilités bleues,
Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets!

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lâche
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

Je ne puis plus, baigné de vos langueurs, ô lames,
Enlever leur sillage aux porteurs de cotons,
Ni traverser l'orgueil des drapeaux et des flammes,
Ni nager sous les yeux horribles des pontons.
Later in the century it is Fernand Gregh who likewise longs for the calm of childhood. In "Dialogue" he presents a discussion between that part of himself which wants to remember the halcyon days of his youth and that part which states that that period is past and that he must now face "le combat héroïque et fatal de la vie." And yet, the poet is unable to delete from his memory "les jours dorés et calmes de l'enfance!":

O les enfants ouvrant leurs clairs yeux agrandis
"Que nous fûmes naguère au seuil blanc des années!

Oh! les jours dorés et calmes de l'enfance!"

In addition to the poets who recall in verse the happiness of their childhood and those who speak of the calmness of their early days, there are some poets who remember particularly their innocence and purity as children. Millevoye points out this aspect of childhood in "A Mon Berceau," a tribute to his "frêle berceau, premier asile":

Age d'innocence et de grâce
Que je regrette votre fuite!

Lamartine also mentions this quality in "A M. de Musset," a poem addressed to the then thirty-year-old Musset whom the older poet calls "enfant aux blonds cheveux":

les jours de ma naïve enfance,
Nos mains jointes, nos yeux levés, notre innocence.

Francis Jammes, moreover, writes in his lyrical "Elégie: III" of the purity of his soul as a child and of his childhood dreams. He returns to the room in which he slept as a boy and is speaking to a friend about his "rêves de petit garçon":

[...]

Nos mains jointes, nos yeux levés, notre innocence.
Two poets, Verlaine and Gregh, remember, as has Jammes in the preceding poem, their childlike tendency to daydream in their youth. Verlaine, in "Résignation" writes wisely of a difference between childhood and maturity, by contrasting early fantasies with the later realization that life imposes limitations upon youthful dreams. At the same time the poet waggishly assures us that although he is "plus calme," he is "non moins ardent," and that he has not surrendered to "la résignation." It is interesting and even amusing to note that the boyhood daydreams of the famous "poète maudit" are not nearly so pure as those of Jammes in "Elégie: III":

Oui, je reviens, amie, à l'enfance si douce.  
Mon âme est pure ainsi que l'âme la plus pure,  
ainsi que la lueur qui argente tes joues,  
ainsi que la lumière au tremblement d'azur  
qui, dans la blanche allée, allume vers onze heures  
la rose noir épaisse et les iris qui pleurent.

Tu peux interroger son bois [de la malle dans sa chambre]  
mystérieux.

Il te racontera mes rêves de petit garçon.  
Ils sont si purs que tu peux, amie, les entendre.  
C'est en dormant sur ce vieux coffre odorant  
que mon cœur s'est peuplé de jeunes filles tendres  
et d'arbres indiens ou montent des serpents.¹⁰⁷

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Tout enfant, j'allais rêvant Ko-Hinnor,  
Somptuosité persane et papale  
Héliogabale et Sardanápale!  
Mon désir créait sous des toits en or,  
Parmi les parfums, au son des musiques,  
Des harems sans fin, paradis physiques!

Aujourd'hui, plus calme et non moins ardent,  
Mais sachant la vie et qu'il faut qu'on plie,  
J'ai dû refréner ma belle folie, ¹⁰⁸  
Sans me résigner par trop cependant.

Gregh writes in a more solemn tone of his childhood dreams which have been disappointed in adulthood. In "Méditation" he characterizes
In addition to those poets who have emphasized a particular quality of childhood in their nostalgic verse, there are several who recall other aspects of their early days. Casimir Delavigne, in "Le Retour," remembers the fervent patriotism of his boyhood days:

Alors j'étais enfant, et toutefois mon âme
Bondissait dans mon sein d'un généreux courroux,
Je sentais de la haine y fermenter la flamme;
Enfant, j'aimais la France et d'un amour jaloux.

.......

Enfant, j'aimais la France: aimer la France alors,
C'était détester l'Angleterre!  

Verlaine mentions his infancy in a brief but baffling poem entitled "Je Fus Un Bel Enfant bleu." The poet wrote this poem in the margin of the painter F. A. Cazal's replica of a portrait of Verlaine as a child:

J' fus un bel enfant bleu,
Puis un beau bébé rose.
En ce moment je pose
Pour me . . . et nom de Dieu!  

The first line presumably refers to Verlaine's earliest days of life, which were no doubt precarious as his mother had had three miscarriages previous to the birth of this son, the only live child she ever had. After the period of danger had passed and the child's good health was assured, he could easily have been characterized as "un beau bébé rose." The poet may be considering these descriptions of his past identities certain, as opposed to the pose he is presently assuming, which he does not clarify, and perhaps
indeed cannot do so ("en ce moment je pose pour me ... "). On the other hand, he may have in mind a specific though unnamed infinitive to follow the words "pour me ... ". Not being able to impose a positive interpretation upon the fourth line, we cannot be sure whether the interjection "nom de Dieu" expresses frustration or nonchalance. In any case, the portrait which inspired these lines evidently suggested to Verlaine a particular contrast between his childhood and his adulthood.

In "Souvenirs d'enfance," Francis Jammes recalls various people and incidents from his childhood days. He remembers "Monsieur Lay l'instituteur" and his classroom with "[le] poêle et [ ... ] la bûche que chaque enfant du village apportait." He speaks also of his father, of the pharmacist in the village, of a young friend's death. He describes the monkeys in a circus he visited as a child. His reminiscences include the recollection of intimacy with many aspects of nature—"eau, feuillage, air, sable, racines, fleurs, sauterelles, lombrics, martins-pêcheurs, brume tombant sur quelque champ de raves." He has not forgotten the sight and sound of his mother in prayer, which he especially loved, "car la prière est la soeur des oiseaux." Nor has he forgotten his great-aunts whom he used to visit, and he sketches in the poem a detailed portrait of "la tante Clémence" of whom he says "Il y avait autour d'elle, de l'ombre, l'ombre, je crois, de l'ancien Testament, l'ombre de la Création du Monde." Like many other nineteenth-century French poets who wrote nostalgically of their childhood, Jammes regretfully observes the antithesis of the carefree days of childhood and the suffering of maturity:
Ah! depuis lors, j'ai mêlé mes souffrances
aux souvenirs de cette heureuse enfance.\textsuperscript{112}

Jammas also speaks of his childhood in "Le Poète," a poem written
on the eve of his thirty-second birthday. Recalling various Octobers,
he remembers childhood autumns with their reassuring sounds, pungent
smells, and "l'école détestée":

L'octobre de l'enfance était la route grise
ou sonnaient les brebis dans l'odeur du brouillard,
l'école détestée, mais la grande cuisine
ou les rouges fagots claquaient au foyer noir.\textsuperscript{113}

Charles Guérin, remembering his early days, thinks especially of
the cemetery where he used to play and of the "mystérieux émoi"
which proximity with this "champ des morts" caused in him:

\begin{verbatim}
Enfant, je jouais sous ces dômes,
A cette heure du jour tombant,
Quand, posant leur front dans leurs paumes,
Les vieillards rêvent sur un banc.

Toute chose plongeait mon être
Dans un mystérieux émoi
Où des ombres me semblaient naître
Du champ des morts autour de moi.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{verbatim}

As we have seen, most of the nineteenth-century French
poets who have written nostalgically of their childhood recall that
period as one of peace, innocence, and, most especially, happiness.
One poet, however, Le Comte de Lautréamont, recalls the pain rather
than the joy of his childhood, at least according to Marcel Jean and
Arpad Mezei in \textit{Maldoror: Essai sur Lautréamont et son œuvre}. The
method of these two critics is psychoanalytical, and is thus Freudian
in application. In their intriguing as well as credible study, they
assert that the leitmotif of \textit{Les Chants de Maldoror} is the theme of
a child separated from his family:
They relate "cet épisode obsédant" to an incident which occurred when Lautréamont was fifteen years old. At that time, "l'âge critique de la puberté," Lautréamont was sent by his no doubt well-intentioned parents from his childhood home in Montevideo to France in order to study there. Jean and Mezei believe that the boy felt rejected and suffered profoundly from this exile. "L'impression douloureuse qu'Isidore ressentit alors, il la conserva toute sa vie." As an example of this dominating theme, let us consider "Chant II, 4e strophe" in which is related the story of an eight-year-old child who has been abandoned by his parents and who, in order to get home, is trying to board a public carriage that will not stop for him. The passengers on the bus, "des hommes qui ont l'œil immobile, comme celui d'un poisson mort," are indifferent to the child's plight and are even annoyed by his cries:

L'omnibus, pressé d'arriver à la dernière station, dévore l'espace et fait craquer le pavé... Il s'enfuit!...
Mais une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement, sur ses traces, au milieu de la poussière. "Arrêtez, je vous en supplie; arrêtez... mes jambes sont gonflées d'avoir marché pendant la journée... je n'ai pas mangé depuis hier... mes parents m'ont abandonné... je ne sais plus que faire... je suis résolu de retourner chez moi, et j'y serais vite arrivé, si vous m'accordiez une place... je suis un petit enfant de huit ans, et j'ai confiance en vous..." Il s'enfuit!... Il s'enfuit!...
Mais, une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement, sur ses traces, au milieu de la poussière. Un de ces hommes, à l'œil froid, donne un coup de coude à son voisin, et paraît lui exprimer son mécontentement de ces gémissements, au timbre argentin, qui parviennent jusqu'à son oreille.
This adolescent may well be the poet himself who, if we accept the theory proposed by Jean and Mezei, would be completely empathetic with the rejected child:

Seul, un jeune homme, plongé dans la rêverie, au milieu de ces personnages de pierre, paraît ressentir de la pitié pour le malheur. En faveur de l'enfant, qui croit pouvoir l'atteindre, avec ses petites jambes endolories, il n'ose pas éléver la voix; car les autres hommes lui jettent des regards de mépris et d'autorité, et il sait qu'il ne peut rien faire contre tous ... Le coude appuyé sur ses genoux et la tête entre ses mains, il se demande, stupéfait, si c'est vraiment ce qu'on appelle la charité humaine. Il reconnaît alors que ce n'est qu'un vain mot, qu'on ne trouve plus même dans le dictionnaire de la poésie, et avoue avec franchise son erreur. Il se dit: "En effet, pourquoi s'intéresser à un petit enfant? Laissons-le de côté." Cependant, une larme brûlante a roulé sur la joue de cet adolescent, qui vient de blasphémer. Il passe péniblement la main sur son front, comme pour en écarter un nuage dont l'opacité obscurcit son intelligence. Il se démène, mais en vain, dans le siècle où il a été jeté; il sent qu'il n'y est pas à sa place, et cependant il ne peut en sortir. Prison terrible! Fatalité hideuse!

Only one passenger, "un jeune homme," is sympathetic with the desperate child but "il n'ose pas éléver la voix" because of the other passengers: "regards de mépris et d'autorité." This adolescent may well be the poet himself who, if we accept the theory proposed by Jean and Mezei, would be completely empathetic with the rejected child:

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The boy is not deserted by everyone, for he is found and taken in by a rag-picker, possibly representative of someone helpful in Lautréamont's life—a teacher perhaps. Yet Maldoror's feelings about this episode are influenced to a much greater extent by the
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Mezei, both because we find it psychologically plausible and because we feel that such violent feelings must stem from a deeply personal and traumatic experience.

Such fury, however intensely it may be felt in adolescence, might fade before middle age. But in Lautréamont's case, the rage could well have lasted "jusqu'à la fin de sa vie," since the poet died at the age of twenty-four. We accept the hypothesis of Jean and Mezei, both because we find it psychologically plausible and because we feel that such violent feelings must stem from a deeply personal and traumatic experience.

Childhood, then, may be joyful or painful but in any event it is unlike adulthood. We have seen that many poets have contrasted the two periods and that they most often regret, for various reasons, the earlier one. Fernand Gregh has written an exceptional poem treating such regret for the period in which he was unaware of "la tristesse de vivre." In the moving poem "Le Regret," the poet expresses the adult's disillusionment over the fact that the child's expectations have been deceived:

O toujours ce regret qui ne peut s'apaiser!
J'étais pur, j'ignorais la tristesse de vivre,
Et j'allais joyeux, fou de surprise et comme ivre
Devant l'aurore immense offerte à mon baiser.

"Va, disait une voix, tu n'as qu'à te baisser,
Cueille toutes les fleurs dont le parfum t'enivre;
La vie est devant toi; va, prends, je te la livre.
Fais ton âme infinie, enfant, pour l'embrasser."
Et j'allais pour cueillir dans le jardin du monde
La joie en fleur, corolle éclatante et profonde,
Qui depuis tous les temps y fleurissait pour moi . . .

L'aurore s'est changée en soudain crépuscule,
Et dans l'ombre où le beau jardin tremble et recule,
Les ronces des sentiers ont fait saigner mon doigt.

Qui l'eût cru, qu'on trompait le doux enfant crédule?

Whatever else childhood may be, it is ephemeral. However much it may be regretted, once it is completed, it can never be relived, except in memories. Yet its worth, while infinite, is too often appreciated fully only in retrospect. Delavigne, in a dedication to his son of his play Popularité, shows that he now realizes the preciousness of childhood:

Ces vers écrits pour toi valent-ils un instant
Que je vole, mon fils, à tes beaux jours d'enfance?

No poetry, even the most meaningful and beautiful, can surpass in value human life; nonetheless nineteenth-century France produced a significant and immortal tribute to the delicate yet indestructible being deep within every adult: the child.
NOTES


5. Ibid., p. 194.

6. Ibid., p. 265.


Just as Rimbaud has recorded in verse ("Enfance: IV") his childhood desires to enter several vocations, Baudelaire records his own such desires in Mon Coeur mis à nu from the Journaux intimes (Charles Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec, édition révisée, complétée, et présentée par Claude Pichois (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1963), p. 1296: "Etant enfant, je voulais être tantôt pape, tantôt pape militaire, tantôt comédien."

All future references to this poem will be taken from the Pléiade edition, pp. 281-84.


Hugo, Les Voix intérieures, pp. 448-49.


Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 545.

Hugo, Les Contemplations, p. 224.

Ibid., p. 223.

Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 410.
29 Ibid., p. 412.


33 Ibid., p. 64.


35 Calvet, I, 148.

36 Ibid., 149.


42 Ibid., p. 413.

43 Hugo, *Le Pape*, p. 56.


45 Hugo, *L'Art d'être grand-père*, p. 525.

46 Coppée, I, 190.

47 Verlaine, p. 434.
48 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 413.

49 Hugo, La Légende des siècles, p. 373.

50 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 537.

51 Y.-G. Le Dantec points out in a note to this poem (Verlaine, p. 1253) that the first line is an obvious parody of the first line in Hugo's "Souvenir de la nuit du 4," which we discussed in Chapter II.

52 Verlaine, p. 827.

53 Hugo, Le Pape, p. 56.


55 Hugo, L'Art d'être grand-père, p. 538.

56 Hugo, La Légende des siècles, p. 305.


60 Millevoye, pp. 322-26.


63 Vigny, I, 89.

64 Béranger, pp. 460-61.

65 Quoted in Calvet, I, 144.

66 Tastu, p. 167.


70 Lamartine, *Oeuvres poétiques*, p. 1491.

71 Ibid., pp. 1205-06.

72 Ibid., p. 396.

73 Ibid., p. 403.

74 Ibid., p. 164.


81 Baudelaire, p. 95.

82 Ibid., p. 96.


84 Théodore de Banville, "A Ma Mère" in *Choix de poésies*, pp. 9-10.
85 Francis Vielé-Griffin, Oeuvres, I (Paris: Mercure de France, 1924), 59.

86 Ibid., pp. 168-69.


89 Ibid., p. 18.

90 Lamartine, Oeuvres poétiques, p. 381.

91 Ibid., p. 1785.

92 Ibid., pp. 1243-44.

93 Ibid., p. 1869.

94 Ibid., p. 543.

95 Musset, p. 75.

96 Ibid., p. 71.

97 While not speaking directly of the cradle, Gaston Bachelard, in La Poétique de l'espace (5th ed., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957, pp. 26-27), suggests that the childhood home also provides the child with a sense of security and that this security allows his imagination to soar:

... il nous faut montrer que la maison est une des plus grandes puissances d'intégration pour les pensées, les souvenirs et les rêves de l'homme. Dans cette intégration, le principe liant, c'est la rêverie... Et le poète sait bien que la maison tient l'enfance immobile "dans ses bras."


100 Among the critics who agree that "Les Chercheuses de poux" is based upon Rimbaud's stay with the Gindre sisters are Wallace Fowlie

101 Rimbaud, p. 87.


103 Rimbaud, pp. 102-03.

104 Gregh, pp. 3-4.

105 Millevoye, p. 350.

106 Lamartine, Oeuvres poétiques, p. 1211.

107 Jammes, pp. 96-97.

108 Verlaine, pp. 44-45.


110 Delavigne, V, 208.

111 Verlaine, p. 792.


113 Jammes, Choix de poèmes, p. 154.


116 Ibid., p. 25.
117 Le Comte de Lautréamont, Les Chants de Maldoror (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1925), p. 58. All successive citations of this strophe will be taken from this edition, pp. 58-60.

118 Gregh, p. 28.

CONCLUSION

On ne connaît point l'enfance:
sur les fausses idées qu'on
en a, plus on va, plus on s'égare.
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In the Introduction we stated that our first intention in
this study was to determine the major themes in nineteenth-century
French poetry treating children. We have discovered five major
themes, which have formed the basis for our chapters. Each of these
themes—the nature of childhood, the child in the presence of birth
and death, the child and his environment, the child and his sexual
awareness, the child and the adult world—has been divided into
various sub-categories. Of the chapters, the one treating the child
and his environment and the one treating the child and the adult world
contain the greatest number of poems. Conversely, the chapter
examining the poems about a child's sexual awareness contains the
smallest number of poems, although we have found these poems to be,
because of their psychological depth, among the most complex and
noteworthy of the works investigated. There seems to be no concen-
tration, numerically speaking, of any particular poetic school in
the poetry about children; because the Romantic Hugo wrote many
such poems, however, it often appears that his school predominates.

We also stated in the Introduction that, in addition to
determining the themes or subject matter of nineteenth-century French poems about childhood, we also wished to investigate the role of the child in the poems, i.e., how the child is employed by the poets to illustrate these themes. We will examine this role first as treated in general by nineteenth-century French poets, then as treated by specific major poets. We have found the former role to be a varied one which manifests itself in six different ways. First of all, we have discovered that the poets have employed the child as an element in a narrative, and most often this is done for the specific purpose of eliciting responsive chords from the reader. Many of our poets have written poems with this purpose in mind—Mme Desbordes-Valmore, Hugo, Coppée, and Jammes, to name only a few. The reader's responses are usually those of pity at a child's misfortune or pleasure at viewing him in his own world.

Secondly, the poets have composed verse in order to express their love and joy in the presence of a real rather than a fictional child. Memorable in this division are Mme Desbordes-Valmore in the touching poetry about her own children and Victor Hugo in the lovely poems inspired by his grandchildren, Jeanne and Georges. Frequently this non-fictional child is autobiographical. Many poets have produced such poems and their work in this area has formed a significant portion of our study. Examples of these poets are numerous and as far apart chronologically and intellectually as Lamartine and Baudelaire or Musset and Gregh.

These poets generally express, as we have said, love and
joy in the presence of a child or happiness in the nostalgic recollection of their own childhood. Their view of the child is for the most part an exterior one. There are other poets, however, whose interest in their childhood assumes psychological overtones, and who investigate in their poetry the mind, personality, and behavior of the child they once were. Outstanding in this category is the poetic prose of Lautréamont and especially the poetry in prose and verse of Rimbaud, whose trenchant studies of himself as a child probe depths never before attained in the literature of childhood.

The fourth role of the child in nineteenth-century French poetry is a symbolic one. We have seen numerous examples of poets employing the child, or childhood in general, as a symbol for innocence, goodness, and happiness, among other qualities. This is frequently but certainly not always true of Romantic poets. Children can also serve as an embodiment of evil, as in Baudelaire's "Le Gâteau," where the child is used as a symbol of the greed, aggression, and violence of man. In addition, we find this fourth role of the child demonstrated later in the century in such poems as Mallarmé's "Don du poème" and "A La Nue accablante tu," where the poet sees literary symbols in a child's birth and death respectively.

A fifth role of the child in nineteenth-century French poetry is his appearance as the principal figure in pièces de circonstances, poems written to commemorate a particular occasion. These poems are found for the most part among those treating the
birth or death of a child. Sometimes, as in the case of Borel's "Larme à mon frère Benoni" and Mme Girardin's "La Jeune Fille enterrée aux Invalides," the poet's emotion is genuine and deeply felt. Other times, however, the poet's feeling is less personal and profound, and the poem serves more as a vehicle for his poetic skills than an expression of his heartfelt emotion. This would be true for Musset's "A M. Régnier de la Comédie-Française après la mort de sa fille" and for the two poems entitled "La Naissance du Duc de Bordeaux" by Lamartine and Hugo.

The final role of the child which we have discerned in nineteenth-century French poetry is his presence in poems written for the edification or entertainment of children. Although most of the poems we have treated have been about children rather than for them, there have been some which the poets most definitely intended for young ears. In Chapter III we have seen many poems in which an adult gives advice to a child. No doubt these were intended to be read to children, as were some of the lullaby-poems. Such narrative poems as "La Fée et le père" by Hugo also were obviously destined for children.

Having examined the role of the child as treated in general by nineteenth-century French poets, let us now consider specifically the child's role in the verse by major poets of the period in order to demonstrate our belief that these poets have for the most part employed the child in a manner consistent with the overall concepts of their poetry. The century's first important poet is Lamartine, whose own happy childhood inspired him to write numerous autobiographical and nostalgic poems such as "Les Préludes" and "La Vigne
et la maison." The themes of nature and death which, in addition to love, are favorites of this poet are often seen among his poems on childhood ("La Retraite," "Le Moulin de Milly," "La Mort de Socrate," "Pensée des morts"). Lamartine's Christian pantheism, moreover, is reflected several times in his harmonious verse treating the child ("Dieu," "La Foi," "Hymne au Christ"). Finally, like many poets and especially the other Romantics, Lamartine often records an admiration for the beauty and innocence of children and particularly of his own child ("A Un Enfant, fille du poète," "L'Etoile").

The second major Romantic poet, Vigny, is, unlike Lamartine, less emotional and more intellectual, less optimistic and more bitter. It is not surprising, therefore, that in his poetry we find mention of the unjust punishment of innocent children which occurs in this world deemed hostile by the philosophical Vigny ("Hélena," "Le Mont des Oliviers"). The pessimistic thinker also warns young and carefree girls that having children will change their lives from pleasurable to toilsome ("Le Bal") and reminds his readers elsewhere that children can be greedy, egotistical, and cruel ("La Sauvage," "Dolorida"). Again unlike Lamartine, Vigny finds no consolation in nature or in God; therefore, we see almost no reference to these themes in his poetry on childhood.

Hugo, the chief of the Romantics and the greatest contributor to the poetry of childhood, subscribes to Rousseau's idea that the child, being close to nature, is fundamentally good and that his antithesis, man, is corrupt. Again and again we see this idea repeated...
in his poetry which extolls the beauty and innocence of childhood in contrast to the baseness of man ("Le Portrait d'une enfant," "Les Innocents," "En Voyant Un Petit Enfant"). Hugo, who remembers fondly his own childhood ("Sagesse," "Mes Adieux à l'enfance"), feels and expresses a profoundly tender and warm response to his grandchildren and to children in general. He is therefore interested in many aspects of the child's life: his birth and death ("Le Revenant," "Petit Paul"); his encounters with nature ("Enfants, aimez les champs"); the games and activities in which he engages ("L'Enfant, voyant l'aïeule"). Hugo's poems about children also reflect his deep concern for the social problems of his time, which of course develops and becomes a dominant theme around 1860. They treat the child's education ("Colère de la bête") as well as the phenomenon of the poverty-stricken child ("Question sociale"). One of the principal characteristics of Hugo's poetry is a persistent personal note. The aspect of childhood which he treats more frequently than any other is the favorable effect which children have upon him ("Jeanne fait son entrée," "L'Autre"). More than any other nineteenth-century French poet, Hugo treats with joyous effusion various aspects of many children, just as Rimbaud later in the century will treat with penetrating insight various aspects of one child: himself.

Musset, the fourth important Romantic poet, has made only occasional references to children in his poetry and these are generally either autobiographical in nature ("La Nuit de décembre") or pièces de circonstances ("Sur La Naissance du Comte de Paris,"
"A M. Régnier de la Comédie-Française après la mort de sa fille"). The fact that a mention of childhood is so rare in Musset's poetry is not unexpected, for while his work, like Hugo's, is infused with le moi, this personal note is manifest in one basic subject: passionate love.

It is Baudelaire who not only bridged the gap between the Romantics and the later French poetic schools but also influenced these schools more than any other poet. One of Baudelaire's fundamental beliefs, as we have seen, is that children, tainted by original sin, are "des Satans en herbe," and that only by determined training can they begin to overcome their base nature. He has noted their egocentrism ("Les Veuves") as well as their violence, aggression, and greed ("Le Gâteau"). At the same time, this poet, who often expresses a fascination with beauty regardless of its source, cannot restrain his admiration for the child's freshness ("Correspondances") and appetite for life ("Le Voyage"). Being an astute observer of the human condition, moreover, Baudelaire has viewed the child with a keen psychological perception ("Les Vocations," "La Corde") unequaled before the poetry of Rimbaud.

Verlaine, an important early Symbolist, is often more concerned with the sound of his poetry than with its content. This is reflected in his verse treating childhood, which, like the bulk of his poetry, is musical and fluid but somewhat lacking in psychological or emotional depth. His poems on childhood are either autobiographical ("Résignation," "Un Veuf parle") or religious in nature ("Sanctus") or they treat the influence a child has had upon him
"A Mlle Léonie R . . .," "A Mlle Jeanne Vanier"). Although Verlaine gave to French poetry as a whole the valuable gift of harmonious suggestion to replace the plastic precision of the Parnassians, perhaps the greatest contribution he made to the genre of poetry about childhood was his recognition and encouragement of the genius of his young companion Rimbaud.

Rimbaud is unique among the poets treating childhood, for he presents not an adult's recollection of the past but a child's evaluation of the present. In his famous Lettre du voyant this poet states: "La première étude de l'homme qui veut être poète est sa propre connaissance, entière; il cherche son âme, il l'inspecte, il la tente, l'apprend." No poet has ever sought out and dissected the soul of the child with greater success than the incomparable Rimbaud. He expresses with incisive perception a child's reaction to education ("Les Poètes de sept ans"), to religion ("Les Premières Communions"), to nature ("L'Aube"), to sexual stirrings ("Remembrance du vieillard idiot"). He presents vividly the sense impressions of childhood: the sense of sight—"ces dorades du flot bleu, ces poissons d'or" ("Le Bateau ivre"); of sound—"le wasserfall blond qui s'échevela à travers les sapins" ("L'Aube"); of smell—"le lourd pain blond . . . [par] ce trou chaud [qui] souffle la vie" ("Les Effarés"); of taste—"la chair [douce] des pommes sûres" ("Le Bateau ivre"); of touch—the seemingly intangible "voiles [de] l'aube d'été" ("L'Aube"). And perhaps the most significant of all Rimbaud's work examining the soul of the child is his magnificent monument to a child's visions—"Le Bateau ivre."
Mallarmé also writes occasionally of childhood, but the
role of the child in his poetry is usually a symbolic one ("Don
du poème," "A La Nue accablante tu"). At the same time, however,
he is not unmoved by the beauty of childhood ("Prose pour des
Esseintes," "Feuillet d'album") nor by the problems of poor or-
phaned children ("Pauvre Enfant pale," "Chansons bas: III," "Réminiscence"). Indeed we would be surprised if a man who was
a schoolteacher for thirty years and who even planned to publish
a volume of nursery rhymes for the amusement and instruction of
his students, 4 did not respond with some sensitivity to the charms
and misfortunes of children.

We have seen in this discussion of the child's function
in the works of the major nineteenth-century French poets that
there is little consistency in the treatment of the child within
the various poetic schools. We cannot say, for example, that the
Romantics generally viewed the child in one manner while the Sym-
bolists viewed him in another, for the difference in the treatment
of the child is too vast between Lamartine and Vigny, for example,
or between Verlaine and Rimbaud. We can observe, however, the
general absence of references to children in Parnassian poetry.
We will speculate that a reason for this is that, while Parnassian
poetry represents a striving for technical perfection, it may be
said to lack the warmth and seeming spontaneity which usually ap-
ppear to be the natural accompaniment of poetry about children. In
addition, the poetry of Leconte de Lisle and Heredia is pictorial
rather than emotional or psychological; it treats the exotic rather
than the commonplace. Finally, the Parnassians stress objectivity, and, as we have seen in the poetry of Hugo and Rimbaud, the two major contributors to the poetry treating childhood, it is the personal note which lends beauty and power to this theme. We feel that it is for these reasons that there is only a slight mention of the theme of childhood in Parnassian poetry, as opposed to Romantic and Symbolistic poetry.  

In addition to examining the major themes in nineteenth-century French poems treating children and investigating the role of the child in these poems, we also announced in the Introduction our intention to determine whether a pattern of change or development exists in the works we have examined. The major development we have discovered is a progression from an exterior view of the child to a psychological view. This change corresponds roughly to a universal rise in interest in the adult's mind, personality, and behavior. Perhaps, therefore, an attempt to explain the adult accounts for this growing interest in childhood. Let us examine this interest as it progresses from the early part to the end of the century.  

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the child was often considered as an abstract representation of qualities admired by the poet or as a real being loved by the poet. While it is true that the Romantics in general view the child as basically good as opposed to the later poets who often write of the dual nature of the child, it must also be remembered that the earlier poets did on occasion demonstrate an awareness of the child's negative traits.
and therefore represent in embryonic stage a concept that will come to maturity in Baudelaire. Illustrations of this early perception of the dual nature of the child can be found in such poems as "Le Petit Rieur," Mme Desbordes-Valmore's poem about a child's insensitivity to the problems of others; Lamartine's "La Chute d'un ange," which mentions a child who becomes totally evil under the influence of an evil adult; Vigny's "La Sauvage," which points out the greediness of children; Hugo's "Le Crapaud," which emphasizes the cruelty of children. It was Hugo, moreover, who spoke of the child as one "[qui] fait [...] le mal sans remords." This awareness of the child's dual nature is infrequent among the Romantics, however, who more often than not view the child as "l'enfant-ange" and do not usually attempt to delve deeply into his thoughts and personality.

Baudelaire marks an important change in the poets' approach to the child, for he recognizes the child's dual nature and, as we have seen, emphasizes the evil side of that nature. Baudelaire most often sees the child as "le petit monstre" and not as "l'enfant-ange." This poet and many poets after him began to realize that the child is a complex and fascinating being. Baudelaire demonstrates a cognizance of the child's actions and thoughts in such prose poems as "La Corde," "Le Joujou du pauvre," and "Les Vocations."

The interest in the psychology of the child, which budded in the Romantic era with its emphasis on introspection, began to bloom in the poetry of Baudelaire with his stress on the negative aspects of the child. It then came to full bloom in the works
of such poets as Lautréamont and Rimbaud. These poets, both of
whom wrote remarkable poetry from the unusual vantage point of
adolescence, were not merely concerned on occasion with the theme
of childhood; this theme forms the very nucleus of their works.
Later in the century, Paul Fort also examined a child's thoughts
and feelings, using a method of free association which anticipated
that of the Surrealists.

The theme of childhood permeates nineteenth-century French
literature more than that of any previous century. There is no
major poet whose poetry has remained untouched by it. Indeed,
rarely have we found a minor poet who neglects this theme. The
child is, therefore, and should be, a significant theme in nine-
teenth-century French poetry, for childhood is not only ever with
us, but ever in us. As we appreciate the beauty of children, as
we discover their imperfections, as we gain awareness of their
thoughts and feelings, we better understand ourselves.
NOTES


2. The examples we have chosen to demonstrate the role of the child in the works of the major poets of the century are only representative ones, and by no means should they be considered comprehensive.


5. It should be clarified that in this discussion of the Parnassian poets, we are not including François Coppée. While he is sometimes connected with this school, he is more often considered only loosely affiliated with the Parnassians, for he is usually identified by the title "le poète des humbles." His contribution to the poetry of childhood has been a significant one in its sincerity and emotion, as we have seen in our previous chapters.

6. We have found no mention of children in the complete poetical works of Jean Moréas or Villiers de l'Isle-Adam or in the works of O. V. de L. Milosz written before the twentieth century. Moreover, no mention of our theme has been discovered in the Poètes d'aujourd'hui series (ed. Pierre Seghers) treating either P.-J. Toulet or Saint-Pol-Roux.
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