A PERUSAL OF CHILDREN'S POETRY
AND THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS FIELD
CONCLUDED BY THE AUTHOR'S OWN POETRY FOR CHILDREN

A RESEARCH PAPER AND CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE HONORS COUNCIL
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by
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INTRODUCTION

The poet's task of writing for children involves bridging the gap between the two worlds of the reality of adulthood and the ideology of childhood. The successful children's poet must be capable of expressing his conception of childhood in an acceptable literary fashion. It is essential that the children's poet's ideas be conceived within the child's realm of optimism. The children's poet must be highly sensitive to the child's emotions, aspirations, frustrations, and interests. To insure the validity of the stated task is in essence to become as a child again.

One purpose of this research paper is to peruse the field of children's poetry and to make a comparative study of how some major poets have undertaken the task of writing for children. A by-product of the intensive study will be the identification of trends in writing as poets gained additional insight into the nature of children. The author has elected to give expression to her creative capabilities by writing some poetry for children. The research was conducted primarily to provide a springboard and an introductory background for the author's poetry. The research paper and creative project is designed to fulfill some other objectives: to develop an awareness of the mechanics of poetry and a skill in their use, to aid in the selection of
appropriate vocabulary, and to facilitate the application of various rhythms to differing themes and moods.

To be creative as well as to write about creativity is the basis for choosing this type of thesis. Paul Fenimore Cooper's definition of fancy summarizes the author's reason for selecting a topic pertaining to creativity:

Fancy is to the imagination what the seed is to the tree. Let it lie in barren ground and it will not grow. But nourish it and care for it through the years and it will grow into imagination, as dear a possession for the man as fancy is for the child. He who lacks imagination lives but half a life. He has his experiences, he has his facts, he has his learning. But do any of these really live unless touched by the magic of the imagination? So long as the road is straight he can see down it and follow it. But imagination looks round the turns and gazes far off into the distance on either side. And it is imagination that walks hand in hand with vision.¹

PART I

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHILDREN'S POETS
AND THEIR LITERARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS
CHAPTER I

CHILDREN AND POETRY

The Significance of Childhood

Throughout the annals of time, men have recited or sung poetry in "times of trouble," according to Toynbee. He also asserts that poetic therapy, like music, is a "healing on . . . its wings." Poetry is a refuge from the humdrum and chaos of everyday reality; poetry revitalizes and sensitizes the human spirit to idealism.

Celia Thaxter, a noted children's poet, has concluded that "we are a part of all that we have met." Assuredly, childhood experiences do play a significant role in molding the adult. Childhood is the source of adult prejudices, traits, likes, dislikes, and attitudes. No one can know which seeds planted during childhood will grow; one can only hypothesize and predict the patterns of growth.

Although childhood has always been a significant and a unique period in every man's life, "the child is a modern

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1May Hill Arbuthnot, "Sing It Again," Top of the News, XV, No. 3 (March, 1959), 58.

discovery."\textsuperscript{1} Centuries ago childhood was regarded primarily as a phase in life to be utilized in preparing the child for maturity. Plato theorized on the child's play as a learning experience but the child was still a tool for the city state. The children of the Spartans and the Romans were raised in an environment of war chants and political speeches;\textsuperscript{2} the same child, if living today, would have an entirely different relationship with the rest of the world. This difference exists in the altered conceptions that adults have formulated about childhood. Children can now stop on the "treasure island" belonging exclusively to them instead of rowing quickly past to the adult mainland.

Kenneth Grahame has offered another definition of children which coincides with the "modern discovery" concept: "Children are not merely people; they are the only really living people that have been left to us in an over-weary world."\textsuperscript{3}


\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 4.

Why Poetry Satisfies Children

That children should delight in reciting or hearing poetry is not surprising for certain traits are inherent in childhood which draw the child like a magnet to poetry. These natural traits which appear are: (1) responsiveness to rhythm, 2) delight in combinations and sounds of words, (3) sensitivity to a tangible world, (4) tendency to form imaginative and unique images of the commonplace, (5) interest in nature and living things, large and small.1

Poetry in its various forms can satisfy all or some of these traits or interests of children, especially if the poetry is directed toward and for children. The characteristics of poetry for children mesh with these traits so perfectly and so appropriately that is is no wonder that good poetry is tucked in children's pockets and cherished for always.

According to Walter Barnes, children's poetry is characterized by: (1) the ideology of childhood, (2) a magnification of childhood virtues, (3) a passive acceptance of children's faults, (4) animals and nature, (5) sports and toys, (6) home life, (7) simplicity, (8) metaphors and personification,

1Annie L. Moore, Literature Old and New for Children, Materials for a College Course (New York: Doughton Tifflin Co., 1934), p. 239.
§) brevity, (10) simple rhyme structures, (11) regular rhythm with emphatic accents, (12) onomatopoeia and alliteration, (13) warm, colorful vocabulary. Children's poetry is not jejune, literal, insincere, babyish, silly, or cheap.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Barnes, op. cit., pp. 5-9.
CHAPTER II

CHILDREN'S POETS

Some Characteristics of Children's Poets

Before children can meet and become friends with poetry, good poetry must be written for them and then made available to them. Children like to hear their own experiences reproduced exactly as they see, hear, and feel them. Ideally, to reproduce a child's feelings, aspirations, hopes, glories, fears, and joys through poetry, a poet must temporarily walk in the child's world in the child's shoes. Relatively few adults have been able to accomplish this feat.

When an adult feels the compulsion to write for children and is a success in projecting himself into the heart of childhood, a genuine children's poet is born. "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter." ¹

The genuine children's poet is a genius for he is a poised adult artist, capable of detaching himself from adult preoccupations. He visits the world of the child through introspection, direct inspiration, revelation, personal experience, and incentive. ²

²Ibid.
Heindert De Jong visits the child's world this way:

To get back to that essence you can only go down. You can only go in--deep in. Down through all the deep mystic, intuitive layers of the subconscious back into your own childhood. And if you go deep enough, get basic enough, become again the child you were, it seems reasonable that by way of the subconscious you have come into what must be the universal child. Then, and then only, do you write for the child.¹

Barnes feels that the contributions of the children's poet should reflect his own personality; that there are as many paths to a child's heart as there are successful children's poets.

The children's poet does not necessarily have to love children. On the other hand, he may idealize the realms of childhood and still fail as a children's poet. Parenthood would also seem to be a likely qualification for the children's poet. The reawakening of the poet's own childhood would be aroused by reliving it through and with his own children. Conversely, it can be theorized that the parent cannot be objective in writing about children for he knows them too well. The glamor and mystery which clothe the child seem to disappear before parental eyes.

The temperament of the children's poet is very similar to a child's. Both act somewhat impulsively and tend to be motivated by curiosity. Both are idealists as well as romanticists. Intuition and a sense of wonderment are also basic constituents

of their total being. The elements of imagination and emotion thrive and exist in affluence in both the children's poet and the child.¹

Emelyn Gardner states that the emotion expressed by a poet is the emotional appeal which children beg for time and again. Emotion and imagination are closely related. Without the creator's gift of imagination, there would be no poets and thus no poetry. Children insist on dwelling in a fanciful, imaginative world.² Thus the child, through poetry, meets the poet "underneath the shade of a toadstool" or "atop a speckled, spectacled frog's slippery back."³

¹Barnes, op. cit., pp. 1-6.


³Quote mine.
Changing Poetry with Changing Times

The researchist, historian, or teacher can identify what seem to be definite trends in the development of poetry for children. Of course, specific periods in history cannot be allocated to the identified trends, but careful research and comparison can aid the researchist in setting up approximate stages in the development of poetry for children.

The author in tracing children's poetry from prehistoric times to contemporary society has categorized children's poets and their contributions in nine groups according to similarity of style or subject or to period when the poets lived. These groups are: (1) the dawn of poetry, (2) moralizing traditionalists teach lessons, (3) humorists introduce fun and nonsense, (4) the justification of subtle moralizing, (5) poets praise the realm of nature, (6) poets investigate fairyland and the supernatural, (7) mid-nineteenth century contemporary poets see the world from the child's standpoint, (8) poets explore the child's world of play and imagination, (9) contemporary poets.
The Dawn of Poetry

Perhaps Gilbert Murray in *The Classical Tradition in Poetry* best describes the dawn or beginning of poetry:

Poetry listens to no argument and opens her heart to no strangers. A thousand years in her sight are but as yesterday, and her home is among things that are very old, old as the battle of man against fate, old as love and death and honour, and the kiss of Helen and the dancing of the daffodils.¹

From the beginning of time man has been busily constructing a "glorious castle of magnificent images" for the enjoyment of his contemporaries as well as for his descendants. Man can find pleasure, comfort, and intellectual nourishment in the spacious rooms of the castle.

This castle is the castle of poetry built by poets who are prophets and teachers, as well as musicians . . . . . . . some poets chose to redecorate or remodel the room of a previous builder; . . . others felt dissatisfied with the form already standing and wrought in a new way, but always one was related in some way to another, and so the entire edifice has unity.²

The foundation for this edifice was laid many years before poets conceived of the idea to write specifically for children. Yet this foundation has formed the basis of many adult lives who in turn have read from this first great piece of literature to


²Ibid.
their children, including the very young. This foundation, which has endured as the steadfast cornerstone and foundation of the castle, is the Bible.

Children and poets can both find pleasure in the beauty of words, in the peculiar and amusing nomenclature of things, people, and places.

The simple enumeration of harmonious names constitutes an effective bit of poetic art which is as old as story and song. Even the "begat" chapters of the Bible used to hold a certain fascination when read aloud in a solemn and sonorous tone: "And Canaan begat Sidon, his first-born, and Heth, and the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and Gergasite, and the Hivite," etc.1

Even the young child reacts to the beauty of words before he has mastered the fundamental mechanics of reading.

Bertha E. Miller asserts that colorful and attractive editions of the Bible should be made available to children. C. W. Hunt's opinion reinforces this statement:

"We know that no finer literature exists, that poetry and pathos, grandeur and tender beauty, all the thoughts of the human heart and glory of earth and heaven are expressed in language matchlessly vivid and simple. Will anyone give a good reason why this language should be turned into commonplace English for children who particularly delight in rhythmical, poetic sound? Only the tiny children need the Bible simplified, except by omission.2"

No specific architect poet can be acknowledged as the constructor of the ballad, the next distinctive room added to the castle of poetry. The ballad may have originated in the minds of singing minstrels, within the sacred walls of monasteries.


2Miller, op. cit., p. 702.
or in a group of dancing and singing villagers as they answered a
talented leader with a refrain. ¹

More recently the literary ballad, has been constructed by
individual writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Rudyard
Kipling. The literary ballad is more fully developed and shows
various characteristics of perfection over those of the tradi-
tional ballad. Modern American ballads emphasize frontier life. ²

The musical and dramatic qualities of the ballad are
especially appealing to the ten and eleven-year-old. The upper
elementary grades are a good starting point for a more serious
study of poetry such as the ballad. ³ The simplicity and repe-
tition of the ballad along with its vigor and action are also
distinguishing characteristics as are the themes of war, religion,
love, adventure, and court life. Traditional ballad favorites
include "Edward," "Get Up and Bar the Door," and "Lord Randall."

Even before the actual foundation of the castle was laid,
blueprints of poetry were being formulated in the minds of primit-
tive men. Subconsciously, man has envisioned and/or written rhymes
from centuries ago to the present. Nursery rhymes have origi-
inated in history, superstitious beliefs, religious customs and
festivals, or in the myths which attempted to explain nature.
From time immemorial the shepherds of England counted their sheep:

¹Hay Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Chicago: Scott,
Foresman, & Co., 1957), pp. 77-81.
²Jess Porter Adams, About Books and Children, Historical
Survey of Children's Literature (New York: Henry Holt & Co.,
³Ibid., p. 265.
Barnes feels that years of aging seemed to add only beauty and luster to the room where Mother Goose dwelled. In the process of oral transmission, her room has been altered and polished from generation to generation up to the eighteenth century. This abode built by accretion, stanza upon stanza, is the result of improvements by folk-artists, not by literary artists.

According to Barnes the term Mother Goose originated in France where there existed a Gallic tendency to personify birds and beasts in folklore. A French poem in 1650 referred to a group of fanciful tales as "la mere L'Oye." In 1697, Charles Perrault published eight of these tales under the title Contes de ma Mere L'Oye or Tales of my Mother Goose. These stories, not rhymes, were translated into English and published by Robert Sambur in 1729 in London. The stories earned success after they were republished by John Newbery as Tales of Mother Goose. This English edition was reprinted with the same pagination by Isaiah Thomas in Worcester, Massachusetts about 1785. The editions of Munroe and Francis popularized the usage in America where Mother Goose has been preserved for all children for all time.

Ten years before Perrault translated his stories, Mother Goose's Melodies was published in Boston by Thomas Fleet. Legend has it that Fleet married Elizabeth Goose and that she or her mother's name is the origin of the name, Mother Goose. The book

1Miller, op. cit., p. 15.
has never been found, though, so its existence remains a legend rather than a fact.¹

The unsophisticated nonsense of the immortal Mother Goose has remained first in the affections of children according to Barnes. Mother Goose does not claim to have all the facts nor is she scientific in nature, yet the same qualities which make her appealing to children justify the teaching of these rhymes. First, children love the dramatic subject matter that emphasizes the grotesque and unusual things of their world. Children enjoy the uninterrupted, never varying recurrence of strongly stressed syllables. The multiplicity of unaccented syllables rapidly uttered is a noticeable factor. The quantitative rhythm then, is the second appealing quality of Mother Goose rhymes. Mother Goose's humor, which pictures characters in hilarious, absurd, and dramatic situations, delights the child's funny bone with surprise endings. Mother Goose can stimulate the child's imagination by a hint or a random remark. The child develops his imagination by building on these hints. The fact that the child has something to call all his own makes the creation of value. The meaning of words like "tuffet" does not bother the child; he defines them to satisfy himself.

The pronounced jingling of Mother Goose rhymes is produced by certain characteristics. These are: (1) short lines, (2) repetition, (3) frequent recurrence of rhyming sounds.

¹Barnes, op. cit., pp. 12-20.
1) double rhymes such as "Mower," "corner," (5) alliteration,
6) nonsensical and onomatopoeic words.¹

Mother Goose rhymes may appear as metrical riddles, gesture songs, bits of popular ballads, proverbs, devices for learning the alphabet, numbers, and months, and parodies or satires hidden by sheer nonsense. Some Mother Goose rhymes with these characteristics jingle along as follows:

"Goosey, goosey, gander,
Whither do you wander?
Upstairs and downstairs,
In my lady's chamber.

There I met an old man
Who wouldn't say his prayers;
I took him by the left leg,
And threw him down the stairs."²

"Higgledy piggledy,
Here we lie,
Picked and plucked,
And put in a pie."³

"As I was going to St. Ives,
I met a man with seven wives,
Each wife had seven sacks,
Each sack had seven cats,
Each cat had seven kits:
Kits, cats, sacks, and wives,
How many were going to St. Ives?"⁴

Children in generations to come are likely to treasure
Mother Goose's contributions because "the stream never runs dry,
though its sparkling waters have refreshed generations of children."⁵

¹Ibid., pp. 21-32. ²Ibid., p. 36.
³Ibid., p. 39. ⁴Ibid., p. 46.
⁵Ibid., p. 11.
Moralizing Traditionalists Teach Lessons

Beginning in the seventeenth century, specific architects can be cited who contributed to the growing structure of the castle. The scanty bits of poetry written for children during this period of rising Protestant trends seemed to reflect the gloom and emphasis placed on hell. Most literature for children concerned itself with instruction on religious issues and on proper behavior.

Cornelia Heige concluded that Isaac Watts, "Independent" English minister, dwelled more on the beauty and majesty of religion rather than on man's sinful nature in Divine and Moral Songs for Children. This characteristic of his writing makes his poetry seem somewhat inappropriate for the didactic period.

Mrs. Arbuthnot feels that Watts had a faint glimmering of the child's separate world for his poems hint at gaiety as he attempts to moralize in a subtle way. Watts wrote to entertain and to teach as this last verse of "Against Idleness and Mischief" shows:

In books, or work, or healthful play,
Let my first days be past;
That I may live for ev'ry day,
Some good account at last.2


John Bunyan, persecuted minister and author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote some poetry for children which left much to be desired in the way of rhyme and meter, but his sincerity and honesty are believed to have made up for his lack of mechanical skills. Bunyan's "The Shepherd Boy Sings in the Valley of Humiliation" speaks of the boy's complete reliance in God. Bunyan's broad knowledge of country life is shown in this humorous verse:

But, Hog, why look'st so big? Why dost so flounce,  
So snort and fling away? Dost thou renounce  
Subjection to thy lord 'cause he has fed thee?¹

About the middle of the eighteenth century, after the Puritan force had begun to fade, parents still sought instructive literature for their children² probably because a rigid limit of subjects dealing with morality, manners, and behavior had previously been laid down by convention.

In the midst of this pious conformity arose William Blake, a man little noticed by his contemporaries. Blake's verses in *Songs of Innocence* reflect originality and naturalness rather than the conventionality and artificiality of his time.³

Blake discovered that children made fine subjects for poetry; yet he did not come to a complete realization that he had reached the goal of recollecting childhood in the spirit of

¹Meigs, op. cit., p. 153.  
²Gardner, op. cit., p. 173.  
³Barnes, op. cit., p. 87.
Blake did not preach or use his poetry as a media for delivering morals. Instead he wrote on childish themes and he envisioned children as mysterious creatures "apparelled in celestial light" and as "trailing clouds of glory." Blake claimed that his poems were inspired by heavenly messengers. The children he wrote for and about existed in an idyllic and celestial state.  

Blake's poems are marked by a perfection in form and by clear singing notes. His words were simple in thought and phrase and, at the same time, they painted vivid and colorful pictures with their form and grouping. Perhaps Blake is the greatest or one of the most imaginative poets adding beauty to the castle.  

Blake said of imagination, "He who does not imagine in stronger and better light lineaments and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all." His poems "O Lamb, Who Made Thee?" "The Echoing Green," and the following poem, "Night," reflect his concept of the innocent child, the peace of nature, and of a heavenly essence.

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.
The moon, like a flower
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight,
Sits and smiles on the night.

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1 Meigs states that no poet would reach this goal for another century (Meigs, op. cit., p. 158-59).

2 Barnes, op. cit., pp. 87-96.

3 Ibid., p. 92.

4 Ibid., p. 91.
Farewell, green field and happy grove,
Where flocks have taken delight.
Where lambs have nibbled, silent move
The feet of angels bright.
Unseen, they pour blessing,
And joy without ceasing,
On each bud and blossom,
And each sleeping bosom.

They look in every thoughtless nest
Where birds are covered warm;
They visit caves of every feast,
To keep them all from harm;
If they see any weeping,
That should have been sleeping,
They pour sleep on their head,
And sit down by their bed.

Although children could not thrive solely on Blake's poetry, he has made a distinctive contribution as he captures the purity of infancy.

The Suffolk countryside of cheerful cottages was the home of two small English girls, Ann and Jane Taylor. Like most children during the mid-eighteenth century, they were overtrained. The verses included in Original Poems for Infant Minds reflected the way they had been reared. Lessons about proper behavior were inculcated within the morals they tacked on many of their poems. Quoting Hawthorne will illustrate the undesirability of this method of instruction, for it "impales the story with its moral, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly—thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude."² The Taylors also wrote in prosaic vocabulary, employing few figures of speech.

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., pp. 49-58.
Despite these criticisms, their poetry possessed attributes which testify to their love for children. Their poetry can be described as having: (1) rhythmic rattling anapestic measures, 2) feminine rhyme, (3) short lines, (4) unity and compactness, 5) sincerity, (6) realism of childhood.1

The Taylor sisters felt that children could grasp the ethical points when they were incorporated into a "Sunday school literature" type of text. "Ball" is a Taylor moral tale which illustrates the "harum-scarum boy" and his resulting punishment:

My good little fellow, don't throw your ball there,
You'll break neighbor's windows, I know;
On the end of the house there is room, and to spare,
Go round, you can have a delightful game there,
Without fearing for where you may throw.

Harry thought he might safely continue his play
With a little more care than before;
So, heedless of all that his father could say,
As soon as he saw he was out of the way
Resolved to have fifty throws more.

Already as far as to forty he rose,
And no mischief had happened at all;
One more, and one more, he successfully throws,
But when, as he thought, just arrived at the close,
In popped his unfortunate ball.

"I'm sure that I thought, and I did not intend,"
Poor Harry was going to say;
But soon came the glazier the window to mend,
And both the bright shillings he wanted spend
He had for his folly to pay.2

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

"The Violet" and "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" are among the ten or fifteen of their beautiful nature lyrics which rank high in children's literature.

1Ibid., pp. 51-52.
2Ibid., pp. 52-53.
"It is something to have been the first to sow poetical seed in the child's garden, in the endeavor to produce moral fruit, even though others have since grown more fragrant flowers."\(^1\)

Thus Ann and Jane Taylor fabricated another room for the castle of poetry. That the room would be somewhat dismantled and remade by others is a matter of progress in the field of architecture.

The trend toward moralistic teaching did not appear to influence the writings of another family twosome, William and Mary Lamb. This brother and sister team displayed real imaginative power in their verse recollections of visits to grandmother's house in the country and of other incidents dear to children.\(^2\) They depict "The Reaper," "The Ride," and "The Butterfly," all in mild easy verse, now and then achieving an energetic swing of rhythm.

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1. Ibid., p. 59.
Humorists Introduce Fun and Nonsense

The nineteenth century marked the advent of fun and nonsensical humor in children's literature. The halls of the castle now rang with the voices of children—not children who lived to be stilled but children who lived to laugh. The sugar-coated moral hid in a closet when Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll crossed the drawbridge and entered the castle.

Edward Lear was probably the first poet to conjure laughter since Mother Goose. Lear wrote for the direct and immediate amusement of individual children he knew and loved. Children did not need to analyze his "unadulterated, topsy-turvy, upside-down, wrong-side-out, delightful, simon-pure" writing to enjoy it. Lear popularized but did not create the limerick. These are a sample from his limerick collection:

There was a Young Lady whose chin
Resembled the point of a pin;
So she had it made sharp,
And purchased a harp;
And played several tunes with her chin.

There was an Old Man of the Nile,
Who sharpened his nails with a file
Til he cut off his thumbs,
And said calmly, "This comes
Of sharpening one's nails with a file."

---

1Barnes, op. cit., p. 140.
2Ibid., p. 141.
His verses are "nonsense, absurd, and exaggerated.

He also employs alliteration and the tongue twister as demonstrated by the first two verses of one of his alphabet rhymes:

A was once an apple pie,
    Tidy,
    Widy,
    Tidy,
    Tidy,
    Nice insidy,
    Apple pie!

B was a little bear,
    Beary,
    Wary,
    Hairy,
    Beary,
    Ta'ty cary,
    Little bear!

When he could not find suitable names for his verse, Lear invented proper names such as "Jelly-Bo Lee," "The Isles of Bo-
shen," "Lake Ripple Popple," and "Cramboolian Plain."

Even adults who have little room in their hearts for nonsense often derive pleasure from watching children read Lear.

Here is one of the children’s favorites:

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea
    In a beautiful pea-green boat;
They took some honey, and plenty of money
    Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
    And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy, O Pussy, my love,
    What a beautiful Pussy you are,
    You are!
    You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

1 Arbuthnot, Children and Books, p. 107.
Fuss: then said: "You elegant fowl, how charmingly sweet you sing! Oh! We are married, too long we have tarried; but what shall we do for a ring?"
They sailed away, for a year and a day, to the land where the long-tree grows:
And there in a wood a piggy-wig stood,
With a ring at the end of its nose, His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.
"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for a shilling Your ring?" said the Pig, "I will.
So they took it away, and were married next day by the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince and slices of quince, which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand, They danced in the light of the moon, The moon,
They danced in the light of the moon.

The nonsense writer sees the world from a different angle. His task is more complicated than that of the sense maker for he lives in a House of Mirrors. That is, he first forms logical images in his mind then he disorganizes and distorts these images to fit the world of nonsense. Carroll did not expect children to behave in a pious manner after reading his verses; his purpose was achieved if they laughed.

Lewis Carroll was the "other half" of Charles Ludwig Dodgson. The Dodgson half of him was a graduate from Oxford where he was a math teacher. Since he did not need the income from his renowned favorites, *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* and other books, he used this money to further good works.

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1Barnes, op. cit., pp. 143-144.
2Ibid., p. 159.
among children, especially children in hospitals. Here is the prefatory poem to his Alice's Adventures in Wonderland:

All in the golden afternoon
Full leisurely we glide;
For both our oars, with little skill,
By little arms are plied,
While little hands make vain pretence
Our wanderings to guide.

Ah, cruel Three! In such an hour,
Beneath such dreamy weather,
To beg a tale of breath too weak
To stir the tiniest feather!
Yet what can one poor voice avail
Against three tongues together?

Imperious prima flashes forth
Her edict "to begin it"--
In gentler tones Secunda hopes
"There will be nonsense in it!"
While Terita interrupts the tale
Not more than once a minute.

Anon, to sudden silence, won,
In fancy they pursue
The dream-child moving through a land
Of wonders wild and new,
In friendly chat with bird or beast--
And half believe it true.

And ever, as the story drained
The wells of fancy dry,
And faintly strove that weary one
To put the subject by,
"The rest next time"--"It is next time!"
The happy voices cry.

Thus grew the tale of Wonderland:
Thus slowly, one by one,
Its quaint events were hammered out--
And now the tale is done,
And home we steer, a merry crew,
Beneath the setting sun.1

Miss M.E. Manners expresses tribute to Carroll for his poetry:

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1Ibid., p. 163-167.
Carroll! accept the heartfelt thanks
Of children of all ages,
Of those who long have left their ranks,
   Yet still must love the pages
Written by him whose magic wand
Called up the scenes of Wonderland.¹

¹Ibid., p. 164.
The Justification of Subtle Moralizing

The replacement of direct moralizing by a more subtle approach to advice-giving was a distinctive characteristic of the poetry from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. If a poet chose death as a theme, the mood of the poem was never morbid; rather it was optimistic and hopeful. Moralizing became psychologically and pedagogically justifiable, provided children could draw their own conclusions from the figures of speech, intimations, and insinuations.¹

Christina Rossetti was one such poet whose poetry contained these subtle morals. Her quiet poems are probably reminiscent of her frailty and lack of strength during childhood. Sincerity, tenderness, imagination, picturesqueness, and musical lyrics describe her poetry. Miss Rossetti would not condescend to nonsense jingles and light-heartedness; these characteristics of writing would not fit her serious personality. Her poetry would be most appealing to a quiet sensitive girl.²

The focal point of Miss Rossetti's room is "Goblin Market," a really great poem with color, action, feeling, and image matched by subtle change in the verses.³

¹Ibid., pp. 106-108.
²Ibid., pp. 110-111.
³Meigs, op. cit., p. 290.

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According to Annie E. Moore, Miss Rossetti's verse possesses spiritual qualities comparable to those present in William Blake's poetry. Flute-like tones are characteristic of her tender lullabies. One of Miss Rossetti's lullabies follows along with two other selected poems:

Lullaby, oh, lullaby!
Flowers are closed and lambs are sleeping;
Lullaby, oh, lullaby!
Stars are up, the moon is peeping;
Lullaby, oh, lullaby!
While the birds are silence keeping,
Lullaby, oh, lullaby!
Sleep, my baby, fall a-sleeping,
Lullaby, oh, lullaby!²

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling
The wind is passing thro'.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads
The wind is passing by.³

Boats sail on the rivers,
And ships sail on the seas;
But clouds that sail across the sky
Are prettier far than these.

There are bridges on the rivers,
As pretty as you please;
But the bow that bridges heaven,
And overtops the trees,
And builds a road from earth to sky,
Is prettier far than these.⁴

¹Moore, op. cit., p. 295.
²Barnes, op. cit., p. 106.
³Ibid., p. 116.
⁴Ibid., p. 109.
Not all architects utilized the same building materials for their rooms, yet their contributions became an integral and durable part of the castle. Barnes feels that Lucy Larcom was neither a supreme nor a great poet but that her honesty and sincerity seemed to justify her weaknesses. She did not have an astounding grasp of lyric power, rhythm, or word choice, yet her verses were concrete and specific, free from mysticism and introspection. Miss Larcom's life, like Miss Rossetti's, wore a note of seriousness with religion playing a very significant role. Her poems are not moralistic nor Puritanical in tone but subtle advice can be detected in poems such as "If I were a Sunbeam." Apparently, Miss Larcom felt that children could be serious, sober and reflective and still retain their frivolous, carefree nature. "The Brown Thrush" is characteristic of her love of nature as well as her subtle moralism:

There's a merry brown thrush sitting up in the tree,
"He's singing to me! He's singing to me!"
And what does he say, little girl, little boy?
"O, the world's running over with joy!
Don't you hear? Don't you see?
Hush! Look! In my tree
I'm as happy as happy can be!"

And the brown thrush keeps singing, "A nest do you see,
And five eggs, hid by me in the juniper tree?
Don't meddle! Don't touch! Little girl, little boy,
Or the world will lose some of its joy!
Now I'm glad! Now I'm free!
And I always will be,
If you never bring sorrow to me."
So the merry brown thrush sings away in the tree,
To you and to me, to you and to me:
And he sings all the day, little girl, little boy,
"O, the world's running over with joy!
But long it won't be,
Don't you know? Don't you see?
Unless we are as good as can be!"

Emily Dickinson has found a nook in the poet's castle
for her gay and fanciful verse. Her verses possess a certain
degree of charm which can comfort the human heart:

Pedigree

The pedigree of honey
Does not concern the bee.
A clover everytime to him
Is aristocracy.  

At the age of sixteen, Miss Dickinson entered Mount Holyoke
Seminary where she was surrounded by the Puritan atmosphere. Since
she never could quite bring herself to testify of her faith as all
the students were expected to do, she discontinued her studies
there. In her travels she met Dr. Wadsworth, a well-known married
Presbyterian minister. When Dr. Wadsworth accepted a position in
the West, they continued their close relationship through corres-
pondence. It is thought by Miss Benet and other writers that Miss
Dickinson isolated herself from the world as a recluse in her home
and garden because of this incident with Dr. Wadsworth.  

She had a lively imagination which she applied to the tiny
happenings she viewed in her garden. She described the world in

1Ibid., pp. 223-229.
3Ibid., p. 76-79.
terns of these small concrete happenings. The imagination of a child coupled with excellent tonal quality are found in Miss Dickinson's dreamy and wistful poem, "Morning":

Will there really be a morning?  
Is there such a thing as day?  
Could I see it from the mountains  
If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like water-lilies?  
Has it feathers like a bird?  
Is it brought from famous countries  
Of which I have never heard?

Oh, some scholar! Oh, some sailor!  
Oh, some wise man from the skies!  
Please to tell a little pilgrim  
Where the place called morning lies!

Laura Elizabeth Richards is indebted to a rich cultural heritage for her success as a nursery poet. She paid the debt to her father, Samuel Gridley Howe, a philanthropist, and to her mother, Julia Ward Howe, author of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," by giving children throughout the world what her parents had given her.

Mrs. Richard's experiences of rearing her family were probably conducive to her writing poetry for children. Hers was a loving and happy family as they played together and grew up on a mother's loving tunes:

I begin to sing to my babies, often making an air, or what passes for an air, to fit the words. As there were seven babies, there are many verses. By far the best of my verses came in this way, spontaneously.  

Her lullabies such as "Johnny's By-Low Song" are refreshing and repetitious. And who has not chuckled over "Elelephony"?

1Adams, op. cit., p. 260.

2Barnes, op. cit., pp. 208-212.
Since Mrs. Richards read Carroll's nonsense to her children, it is not surprising to find the nonsense vein in her poetry. The "Thrisky Phrog" is a favorite which contains humorous and absurd rhymes:

The Thrisky Phrog

Now list, oh! list to the piteous tale
Of the Thrisky Phrog and Sylvan Snayle;
Of their lives and their loves, their joys and their woes,
And all about them that anyone knows.

The Phrog lived down in a gruesome bog,
The Snayle in a hole in the end of a log;
And they loved each other so fond and true,
They didn't know what in the world to do.

But he wouldn't come, and she wouldn't go,
And so they could never be married, you know;
Though they loved each other so fond and true,
They didn't know what in the world to do.

\[1\] Ibid., pp. 208-209.
Poets Reflect on the Realm of Nature

The panorama of nature has been captured by the pens of many writers. Four children's poets, all women, possess one trait in common—they have gained recognition as outstanding architects of nature poetry. Though they had no part in creating the universe, they recorded their impressions of nature's gifts of mystery and beauty for children. These architects are Celia Thaxter, Sara Teasdale, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Hilda Conklin.

Celia Thaxter's love of nature rests almost exclusively on birds and the sea. That her subject matter is so limited can be explained by the fact that she spent her childhood on Appledore Island off the coast of New Hampshire. In a letter to James T. Field she explains: "I believe, I am afraid, I can never put my heart into anything that doesn't belong to the sea."¹

Mrs. Thaxter's verses are not sugar-coated morals; they are tonics but not medicine. Of her divine and sacred songs, "An Open Secret" is noteworthy. She is rarely humorous but "Jack Frost" is fanciful. "If she laugh rarely, she smiles frequently."²

Eames states that the faults of her poetry are easily detected. She rarely uses figurative speech. Also, her verse,

¹Ibid., p. 232.
²Ibid., p. 238.
although even and regular, tends to be monotonous. But the attributes of her poetry—sweet serenity, sincerity, imagination, deep and thoughful sentiment—rank her high as a children's poet in her restricted field.

Mrs. Thaxter possessed a veritable passion for birds of the sea as well as for those of the forest and meadow. Her fervent love for birds probably surpasses that of all children's poets. Her bird poems are graphic illustrations of the fraility of birds contrasted against the violence of the restless and gloomy sea. "The Sandpiper" is exemplary of all her bird poems:

Across the narrow beach we flit,
One little sandpiper and I;
And fast we gather, bit by bit,
The scattered driftwood bleached and dry.
The wild waves reach their hands for it,
The wild wind raves, the tide runs high,
And up and down the beach we flit,—
One little sandpiper and I.

Above our heads the sullen clouds
Scud black and swift across the sky;
Like silent ghosts in misty shrouds
Stand out the white lighthouses high.
Almost as far as eye can reach
I see the close-reefed vessels fly,
As fast we flit along the beach—
One little sandpiper and I.

I watch him as he skims along
Uttering his sweet and mournful cry:
He starts not at my fitful song,
Or flash of fluttering draper,
He has no thought of any woring;
He scans me with a fearless eye.
Such friends are we, well tried and strong,
The little sandpiper and I.
Comrade, where wilt thou be tonight
When the loosed storm breaks furiously
My driftwood fire will burn so bright
To what warm shelter canst thou fly?
I do not fear for thee, though wroth
The tempest rushes throughout the sky:
For are we not God's children both,
Thou, little sandpiper, and I?

When Celia Thaxter's poems find their way into an anthology, children can see the sea, sky, and birds of Appledore Island as Mrs. Thaxter saw these elements of nature.

Sensuous beauty and emotional appeal are the virtues of Sara Teasdale's verses which speak predominantly of love, stars, night, and sea. Wish on a star for a moving poem and the wish may come true in the stars of Miss Teasdale's poetry. The child marvels that he is "witness of the stately procession of stars, marching up the dome of heaven." In the concluding poem of her book, Strange Victory, these lines appear:

I shall find crystal peace,—above me
Stars I shall find.2

Elizabeth Coatsworth tucked her bits of philosophy and her charming verses between the lines of her three books. Her style is characterized by contrast, smooth flowing lines, and sensory words. The contrast in "Swift things are beautiful" is frequently quoted and is exemplary of her skill in perceiving nature's realm in fresh images:

1Ibid., pp. 232-234.
2Arbuthnot, Children and Books, p. 171.
Swift things are beautiful:
Swallows and deer
And lightning that falls
Bright-veined and clear,
Rivers and meteors,
Wind in the wheat,
The strong-withered horse,
The runner's sore feet.

And slow things are beautiful:
The closing of the day,
The pause of the wave
That curves downward to spray,
The ember that crumbles,
The opening flower,
And the ox that moves on
In the quiet of power.¹

That a ten-year-old child could achieve such notable distinction as a result of her role in building another room in the castle's hall of nature seems remarkable. Grace Hazard Conkling, aware of her daughter's talent in producing spontaneous verse, preserved this verse for all time. Poetic expression is a natural response for the child, but few mothers are able to retain or encourage this trait.²

Hilda Conkling wrote in free verse with a sincere and unique outlook. Her poetry cannot be compared or criticized by adult standards for, after all, she was a child. Her room remains open to children for it has withstood the elements of weather or vigorous judgment. Her definition of "water" shows originality, imagination, and insight:

¹Ibid., p. 173.
²Weigs, op. cit., p. 173.
The world turns softly
Not to spill its lakes and rivers,
The water is held in its arms
And the sky is held in the water.
What is water,
That pours silver
And can hold the sky?