

## The “New World of Children” Reconsidered: Child Abduction in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century England

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**Abstract** This article argues that in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, changes in the perceived value of children, both materially and emotionally, put them in a new position of possible danger. The valorization of childhood brought new risks to children. Children were thought to be vulnerable to child abduction, or “child stealing,” as contemporaries termed it. Between 1790 and 1849, 108 cases of child abduction were tried at the Old Bailey and then recorded in its *Proceedings* or heard before magistrates in London’s police courts and at county sessions courts and subsequently reported in newspapers. These cases, along with fictional accounts of child abduction, give insights into what were considered the most common motives for this crime. While some child abductors were motivated by poverty and saw children’s clothes as economic assets that could be sold, others were driven by a desire to assume a mother role and represented stolen children as their own. Popular interest in abduction stories was sustained while contemporaries shared common fears about the loss of children and the limitations of adults to protect children from harm.

POLICE Thursday a woman was brought before Mr Alderman Harley, at Guildhall, charged with stealing a child, about four years of age, son of Mr Vaughan of New-Street, Shoe Lane, which she kept for eight days. The prisoner not being able to give a satisfactory account in what manner she got the child, she was committed to Newgate for trial.<sup>1</sup>

A considerable amount of historical research about children and childhood has been published since J. H. Plumb’s pioneering article declared that by the end of the eighteenth century there was a “new world of children” in England.<sup>2</sup> Children’s worlds of work, school, and play, and their relationships with their parents, siblings, and friends have been explored.<sup>3</sup> Yet as our

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 18 February 1793, 3d.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Plumb, “The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Past & Present* 67 (1975): 64–93.

<sup>3</sup> For a sample of more recent publications, see Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London and New York, 1995); Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Oxford, 2001); Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600–1914* (New

knowledge of children's lives in Georgian England has deepened, what is striking is how most historians have agreed with Plumb's thesis that during this period new, more positive attitudes toward children were accompanied by a transformation of the material world in which they were raised. Parents wishing to demonstrate their affection toward their children, as well as prove their social status, took advantage of the commercializing society to lavish upon their sons and daughters new books, games, and toys. Dressed in clothes made by tailors and milliners who specialized in children's fashions, children were cherished as companions to their parents and shared with them the new pleasures and pastimes of urban life. By the end of the eighteenth century, children "had become luxury objects upon which their mothers and fathers were willing to spend larger and larger sums of money."<sup>4</sup> Children were valued and valuable; they were particularly prized for giving women a role as mothers, and through their aspiring parents they became the miniature models of all that a more affluent consumer society could afford.

Plumb suspected that "all was not gain" for children and that there was a darker side to this new world.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent historians have shown how Plumb was right to identify children's sexual development as subject to control and condemnation during this period.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the ideals of childhood innocence could have negative consequences for children. But this article argues that the changes in the perceived value of children, both materially and emotionally, put them in a new position of possible harm and danger. The valorization of childhood brought new risks to children. Children were thought to be vulnerable to child abduction, or "child stealing," as contemporaries termed it, because of the "new world" of the eighteenth century.

The abduction of the son of Mr. Vaughan in February 1793 is one of some 108 cases of child abduction that were tried at the Old Bailey and then recorded in its *Proceedings* or heard before magistrates in London's police courts and at county sessions courts and subsequently reported in newspapers (most notably *The Times*) between 1790 and 1849. An additional 11 cases have been found for the period 1674 to 1789. Whether published in the *Proceedings* or in newspapers, these were stories of abductions that were prosecuted in the courts and deemed of public interest; there may have been other incidents of child abduction that were resolved without recourse to law or were not recorded in print. First published in 1674, the *Proceedings* were published eight times a year, following each session of the Old Bailey. After 1778, when the City of London took greater control of the publication, it was determined that the *Proceedings* should "contain a true, fair, and perfect narrative of the whole

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Haven and London, 2008); Elizabeth Foyster and James Marten, eds., *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Age of Enlightenment* (Oxford and New York, 2010); Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760–1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Plumb, "The New World," 90.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, R. P. Neuman, "Masturbation, Madness, and the Modern Concepts of Childhood and Adolescence," *Journal of Social History* 8 (1974–75): 1–27; Michael Stolberg, "An Unmanly Vice: Self-Pollution, Anxiety, and the Body in the Eighteenth-Century," *Social History of Medicine* 13 (2000): 1–21; Sarah Toulalan, "'Unripe Bodies': Children and Sex in Early Modern England," in *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (London, 2011), 131–50.

evidence upon the trial of every prisoner.”<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, the accounts of trials became lengthier and more detailed, meaning that the *Proceedings* became more costly both to produce and to buy. At the same time, there was a dramatic increase in the newspaper reporting of crime, and by the end of the eighteenth century, it was from this form of print that most people learned about criminal behavior and justice.<sup>8</sup> Given that much of the work of magistrates in the police courts was conducted informally and that the earliest surviving police register recording its official business dates from 1877, only newspaper reports can reveal what types of child abduction cases were heard in these minor courts.<sup>9</sup> But as well as being selective in their recording, it is crucial to remember that newspaper reporters constructed narratives from what they heard. Thus, the narratives of child abduction that will be presented in this article are not straightforward accounts of what happened; instead, they will be interpreted as multilayered and often conflicting stories told by children, parents, abductors, and their communities. Of course, while the truth of these events may escape us, it is what contemporaries chose to say and how they told their stories that is most revealing to the historian.

Child abduction was not a new phenomenon in the eighteenth century. Indeed, there are even instances recorded in the ancient world.<sup>10</sup> But explanations for child abduction and the ways in which it has been recorded and reported over time have been shaped by the concerns of each period when it occurred. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries abduction was termed “ravishment” in English law, and several statutes provided sanctions for the abduction of wards or wives. Their priority was the protection of family property through the prevention of abduction of heirs, the elopement by wealthy heiresses, or consensual abduction by unhappy wives. The distinction between the offense of ravishment and rape was not always clear, and the cases that were heard in the courts reveal that sexual assault was often a feature. In the medieval period, then, abduction was an offense that was usually directed against young women and men who had reached their teenage years.<sup>11</sup> While the occasional abduction and forced marriage of affluent heirs would continue to provoke sensation well into the nineteenth century, by the early modern period there had been a significant shift in who was thought to be most vulnerable to

<sup>7</sup> Robert B. Shoemaker, “The Old Bailey Proceedings and the Representation of Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 3 (2008): 559–80.

<sup>8</sup> Peter King, “Newspaper Reporting and Attitudes to Crime and Justice in Late-Eighteenth- and Early-Nineteenth-Century London,” *Continuity and Change* 22, no. 1 (2007): 73–112; Simon Devereaux, “From Sessions to Newspaper? Criminal Reporting, the Nature of Crime, and the London Press, 1770–1800,” *London Journal* 32, no. 1 (2007): 1–27.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Davis, “A Poor Man’s System of Justice: The London Police Courts in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Historical Journal* 27, no. 2 (1984): 309–35.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, “World Contexts,” in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity*, ed. Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence (Oxford, 2010), 175.

<sup>11</sup> J. B. Post, “Ravishment of Women and the Statutes of Westminster,” in *Legal Records and the Historian*, ed. J. H. Baker (London, 1978), 150–64; Sue Sheridan Walker, “Convicted Ravishers: Statutory Strictures and Actual Practice in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century England,” *Journal of Medieval History* 13, no. 3 (1987): 237–50; Sue Sheridan Walker, “Widow and Ward: The Feudal Law of Child Custody in Medieval England,” *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976): 108–09; Jeremy Goldberg, *Communal Discord, Child Abduction, and Rape in the Later Middle Ages* (New York and Basingstoke, 2008); Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500* (Cambridge, 2012).

abduction, in terms of age and social status.<sup>12</sup> Babies were taken as well as older children, and children were abducted from across the social spectrum. Like Mr. Vaughan's son, most of the children who were reported as abducted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were under six years of age, with the youngest being taken when she was just three days old. Boys and girls were abducted in almost equal numbers. The reported abductor was typically female (there were just seventeen cases involving male abductors), in her twenties or thirties (and thus of childbearing age), and acted alone (there were only ten cases in which abductors acted in pairs).

However, in marked contrast to the medieval period and assumptions that we make today when a child goes missing, those living in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not link child sexual abuse with abduction. Not only was the label "pedophile" anachronistic to this period, because research on child rape has shown that men who were prosecuted for this offense during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not understood to have developed a particular sexual preference for children, but when abducted children were rescued, there was no thought that they might have been harmed in a sexual way.<sup>13</sup> This is all the more remarkable, given the nature of our sources for the study of child abduction. Neither newspapers nor reports of trials for child abduction, which might be expected to highlight or even sensationalize stories of adults who took children for sexual purposes, provides evidence that sexual desire was a motive for child abduction. This silence in the records is a matter that will be discussed further toward the end of this article.

Stories of child abduction became standard fare in early modern popular culture and would prove attractive as plot devices for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists, including Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Charles Dickens. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, for example, particularly in Scottish culture, the abductors of children were imagined to be fairies. In a period of high infant morbidity and mortality, and when belief in magic was widespread, many stories circulated of how healthy babies were substituted by fairies for sickly ones. A wide range of measures were practiced to protect newborn babies from being exchanged for changelings, and these popular customs continued far into the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime, imperial expansion and the need for labor in the New World meant that by the mid-seventeenth century, children in reality were being taken by agents known as "spirits" to be forced into indentured servitude. Thus, some of the first British imperial captives were taken by their fellow citizens, not by foreigners. The theme of the abducted servant and of the cheating agent who

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Audrey Jones and Abby Ashby, *The Shrigley Abduction: A Tale of Anguish, Deceit and Violation of the Domestic Hearth* (Stroud, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Toulalan, "'Is he a licentious lewd Sort of a Person?' Constructing the Child Rapist Before Paedophilia," (forthcoming in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*); I am very grateful to the author for allowing me to read this article prior to its publication.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (London, 1716), 117–18; Ernest W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (London, 1975), 49, 83; Anne Ross, *The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands* (London, 1976), 94; Tess Darwin, *The Scots Herbal: The Plant Lore of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1996), 128, 164, 176; Trevor Griffiths and Graeme Morton, "Introduction: Structures of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1800 to 1900," in *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1800 to 1900*, ed. Trevor Griffiths and Graeme Morton (Edinburgh, 2010), 13.

had deceived him into crossing the Atlantic became part of a well-rehearsed narrative. The abduction story of one twelve-year-old boy, who was taken in 1728 from Dublin to America, was the inspiration for at least five novels, including Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886). Fact and fiction were being interwoven, very successfully, to fuel the public's imagination about child abduction.<sup>15</sup>

It was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the reality of child abduction was thought to have come much closer to home. Rather than children being taken to far-off lands, English children were described as being abducted from doorsteps and while playing in the streets by adults who lived in the same city or even neighborhood. The nature of our sources means that most recorded cases involved children who were abducted from or within London, but newspapers occasionally reported cases from elsewhere, including Bristol, Leeds, Budleigh Salterton in Devon, Colne in Lancashire, Wallington in Surrey, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Ireland. The distances traveled by abductors with their stolen children were usually very small, with most remaining within London. There were exceptions, the most remarkable of which was the abductor of Joseph Rogers, aged three or four years, who took him from his home near Leeds in June 1824. Rogers was taken to Liverpool, where a boat transported him and his captor to Glasgow. From there, the boy was taken to Edinburgh, London, Seven Oaks in Kent, Carshalton in Surrey, Reigate, Brighton, Dover to Calais and back again, Ramsgate, Margate, and Maidstone. Throughout this long journey, the boy and his abductor were pursued by Rogers's father. Rogers was eventually reunited with his family in September when the abductor and child were found in Swansea, Wales.<sup>16</sup>

The press, accounts of trials such as the *Proceedings*, and fiction combined to give those living in the late eighteenth century a view of child abduction that was quite different from earlier periods. Historians of newspapers have shown how the press had the "capacity . . . to constitute as well as reflect social realities," by fueling fears of crime to provoke both short-term moral panics and more prolonged and general levels of anxiety about crime.<sup>17</sup> In cases of child abduction, the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century press offered a new and public avenue for the expression of loss for the parents of abducted children that had not been previously available. As we shall see, it was how parents experienced their loss in emotional as well as material

<sup>15</sup> John Wareing, "Preventive and Punitive Regulation in Seventeenth-Century Social Policy: Conflicts of Interest and the Failure to Make 'stealing and transporting Children, and other Persons' a Felony, 1645–73," *Social History* 27, no. 3 (2002): 288–308; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London, 2002); Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, *Eighteenth-Century Criminal Transportation: The Formation of the Criminal Atlantic* (Basingstoke, 2004), 11–12; Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill, 2005), 273–74; Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 32; A. Roger Ekirch, *Birthright: The True Story That Inspired Kidnapped* (New York, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 12 July 1824, 5c; 26 July 1824, 3d; 6 September 1824, 2c; 27 September 1824, 3c; 25 March 1825, 3a.

<sup>17</sup> Peter King, "Newspaper Reporting, Prosecution Practice and Perceptions of Urban Crime: The Colchester Crime Wave of 1765," *Continuity and Change* 2, no. 3 (1987): 423; see also J. Davis, "The London Garrotting Panic of 1862: A Moral Panic and the Creation of a Criminal Class in Mid-Victorian England," in *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe Since 1500*, ed. V. A. C. Gatrell, B. Lenham, and G. Parker (London, 1980).

terms that was the focus of press reports. Parental loss was represented as abductor gain, and each reveals how children were being defined in this period. Explanations for child abduction, or what it was about children that was worth taking, in turn focused contemporary attention upon parental responsibility for child protection. This article will reveal that at the heart of many stories of child abduction lay not only a deep-rooted desire to prevent harm to children but also fear about the limitations of adults to do so.

The perception created by the reporting of cases of child abduction was that this was a mounting problem. Citing a number of widely publicized cases, in 1814 Parliament passed an “Act for the more effectual Prevention of Child Stealing.” The belief was that “child stealing” was a practice that “has of late much prevailed and increased.” “Looking upon child-stealing as a crime disgraceful to the country at large, and as one of the blackest in the black catalogue of human offences,” MP Serjeant Onslow supported the 1814 bill. It was a “blot on our legislation,” argued the MP who proposed the act, that before this date abductors could only be charged with stealing the clothes of a child, rather than the child itself.<sup>18</sup> He was wrong: child abductors could be charged with kidnap. But because kidnap was categorized by the common law as a misdemeanor, it could only be punished by a fine, imprisonment, or pillory. After 1814, when child abduction became a felony, those found guilty could be sentenced to transportation, a punishment that was regularly meted out.

By the early nineteenth century, with child abduction featuring in press reports, story lines in popular fiction, and deemed enough of a social problem by Parliament to merit legislation, the act of child abduction was bound to attract attention. In addition, in this “new world of children,” it was more likely to be reported to a public that showed a considerable appetite for crime stories involving children. Child abduction was not a new problem, but it had become newsworthy. In a period of considerable legal reform, it was an offense that contemporaries found so repugnant that it is not surprising to find that changes were enacted to make it subject to harsher punishment. Yet it is remarkable that this is a crime that has not been studied until now by historians of the English family.<sup>19</sup> As we shall see, examining reported cases of child abduction reveals new insights into the history of childhood, family, and community life. The parents of children who were abducted in these cases were working people. The sons and daughters of cobblers, masons, bricklayers, cloth workers, carpenters, butchers, and street sellers were taken. Abductors tended to be either very poor (several were labeled as beggars) or married to men who had “respectable” or “decent” occupations, such as one whose husband was an army captain or another who was the wife of a master jeweler. In an important

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 18 May 1814, 3b; Wareing, “Preventive and Punitive Regulation,” 288–89.

<sup>19</sup> Some research on child abduction has been published using records from other geographical places and historical periods. See, for example, Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Rules of Rebellion: Child Abductions in Paris in 1750*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, 1991), also published under the title, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1991). The article by Donald M. Macraill and Frank Neal, “Child-Stripping in the Victorian City,” *Urban History* 39, no. 3 (2012): 431–52, was published while this article was in press. As its title indicates, it is limited to nineteenth-century abduction cases that involved the theft of children’s clothes.

way, then, child abduction cases often provide us with the opportunity to reveal evidence of the values and practices of those below the middle class; we get a view of the very social group that has so often evaded the family historian's gaze. As this article will demonstrate, it was the children of the laboring poor who were thought most often to fall victim to the "new world of children" in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. Examining first the children who were abducted for material reasons and then those who were taken as a consequence of the emotional value that was attached to having children, this article will show that this was a period in which ideas about children were in flux. Children were still viewed as economic assets, but they had also become priceless because of their sentimental importance to adults.<sup>20</sup> As the third section will show, from the perspective of children, this meant that their world offered new risks as well as opportunities.



On Friday, 19 November 1818, Mrs. Plush, wife of Mr. Plush, a plumber, found a child "nearly dead with cold" in the passageway of her house in Chancery Lane, London. "She wrapped it in a blanket and laid it before the fire, and in a short time it began to recover." A woman arrived and claimed the child was hers, but Mrs. Plush was "determined not to part with it till she described it properly, which she accordingly did, and the infant, on hearing her voice, raised himself, and knew his mother, who had been distracted since Tuesday afternoon at the loss of him." The child, aged nineteenth months, "had been robbed of its shirt, boots, petticoat, feather from the hat, and necklace, only the frock remaining." Mary Anne Gregory was charged with stealing the child and examined at Bow Street.<sup>21</sup>

Stealing children's clothes became a common motive for child abductions in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England. Like the child found by Mrs. Plush, children were the clotheshorses for the new consumer society, but this made them valuable commodities, whose every item of attire, down to the feather on a hat, could be worth something to the desperately poor. Pawnbrokers were the recipients of these stolen goods, with stripped children found sometimes at the backdoors of their premises.<sup>22</sup> Children of wealthy parents clearly offered the richest pickings. Mary Copley, for example, was charged in 1835 with having stolen "a handsome coral necklace" and "a white diaper pinafore" from the two-and-a-half-year-old daughter of a "well-known professional singer."<sup>23</sup> The lists of clothes stolen in these cases, which were often accompanied with estimates of their worth, provide the historian with rare inventories of children's clothing.<sup>24</sup> From these, it is evident that the consumer revolution in clothing was one that affected children, because their clothing had become more elaborate and decorative, as well as simply functional. Accessories, the epitome of the new luxuries that were available,

<sup>20</sup> Hence in England the transition from children being economically valuable to "useless," which Viviana A. Zelizer charts in nineteenth-century America, had yet to take place. See Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 20 November 1818, 3d.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, *Whitehall Evening Post*, 8025, 19 April 1798.

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 6 February 1835, 4c.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *Old Bailey Proceedings* (hereafter *OBP*), consulted at [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), 17 June 1818, Bridget Mahoney, t18180617-76, which listed the clothes of a female child, down to her socks.

were as tempting to the thief as were the layers of clothing that dressed children. The butcher James Swaine, for example, saw Ann Burgess “with a lot of children” on his way to Newgate market, and because she was “feeling down their bosoms—I suspected she was about stealing their necklaces.”<sup>25</sup> Like Daniel Defoe’s Moll Flanders, who steals a necklace of gold beads from a child she abducts from the streets of London, Ann Burgess might have reasoned that while poverty drove her to stealing, it was “the vanity of the mother” that made her child wear expensive, and thus tempting, jewelry.<sup>26</sup> Very often, however, newspaper reporters remarked upon how in reality the perpetrators of this crime were willing to risk capture for little reward. “A little girl, four years of age, was found crying at the door of a house in Piccadilly” one night in August 1808, left with just a “covering of coarse sacking” after she was stripped in Fitzroy Square, “although her garments were worth but a few shillings.”<sup>27</sup>

As with the theft of clothes more generally, stealing children’s clothes was a crime associated with women. It was also a type of property crime that only began to be prosecuted in this period. The earliest reference to stripping children of their clothing has been found in 1674, when Mall Floyd was sentenced in the Old Bailey, “having it seems found a new Trade not simply to Kidnapp or steal little Children quite away, But to Inveigle them to some strange by places and there rifle them, and so turn them abroad to shift for themselves.”<sup>28</sup> By 1789, this offense had become so familiar that one newspaper could report that a female offender “was one of those wretches who make it a practice to decoy children into some retired place, and then strip them.”<sup>29</sup> Women knew the value of children’s clothes, because they were so often involved in making, mending, and purchasing them. This perhaps made them susceptible both to the temptation of stealing them and to the belief that they could pawn or sell them without raising suspicion. Indeed, the elderly woman who abducts little Florence in Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* is able to strip her of her frock, bonnet, petticoat, and shoes, and then return her to the streets without being caught because she works as a rag dealer.<sup>30</sup> But whereas women who committed other types of property crime appear to have been less prone than men to prosecution and conviction, those who stole clothes following child abduction were not treated so leniently. Mall Floyd, like many other women charged with stripping children of their clothes, was sentenced to transportation.<sup>31</sup>

Abducting a child to steal his or her clothes was a heinous property crime that rarely met with mercy from the courts, and it was likely to catch the notice of the eager-eyed reporter of crime. This was not because of its impact on the child involved (whose responses will be discussed below) but because this was an action that ran contrary to all that contemporaries held dear about female moral conduct. It was

<sup>25</sup> *OBP*, 9 July 1838, Ann Burgess, t18380709-1659.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (London, 1722), 201–02.

<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, 1 September 1808, 3d; see also, *The Times*, 2 October 1820, 3c.

<sup>28</sup> *OBP*, 17 July 1674, Mall Floyd, t16740717-16.

<sup>29</sup> *World*, 880, 31 October 1789.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (October 1846–April 1848), chap. 6.

<sup>31</sup> The best historical analysis of female property crime and its prosecution is found in the work of Peter King. See, for example, Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740–1820* (Oxford, 2000), 196–207; Beverly Lemire examined the relationship between consumerism and crime in “The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (1990), 258, 260, where she noted, but did not comment upon, the stripping of children for their clothes.



women's role to nurture and care for children by clothing them. Clothing was a way of indicating to others that a child was valued. Hence Sarah Harvey had a lucky escape from the charge of child stealing in 1802 because she told the Old Bailey jury that when she had taken the child, she "had put a handkerchief about its neck, in order to give it additional warmth." This simple action indicated that although she could not deny taking the child away from its mother, she meant him no harm.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, women who left children shivering in the cold "to shift for themselves" were portrayed as callous thieves who showed no regard for the feminine duties of childcare.<sup>33</sup>

Some women abducted children so that they could take advantage of contemporary sentiment surrounding women and motherhood. The suffering mother was an unsettling sight, meaning that few found it easy to walk past a woman who was begging while she was holding a baby. But child abduction meant that the public could never be sure that the child was the beggar's own. Mary Hulme hired her next-door neighbor Eliza Scott to nurse and then wean her baby. But one day when Eliza took the child out, saying that "the air would do the child good," she was seen sitting in Lambeth Road "with the child in her lap, as if to excite compassion."<sup>34</sup> The problem was that in a rapidly expanding urban environment, in which migrants arrived every day and the divide between rich and poor seemed to be widening, it was becoming more difficult to discern who were the deserving poor. Tricksters, who preyed upon the sympathies of the well meaning, appeared to be everywhere and were lampooned by the popular press. The *Penny Sunday Times* featured an "advertisement extraordinary" on 14 March 1841, listing "three very sickly children (one of them subject to fits) to let on hire," "children taught to shiver naturally, at 6d. per lesson," and "complete instructions given in the whole art, mystery, and science of begging, on the most reasonable terms."<sup>35</sup> But joking aside, cases of child abduction revealed that being duped by beggars could have serious consequences. *The Times* told its readers a cautionary tale in February 1835 when it reported how a Mr. and Mrs. Furniss had given charity to a "shabbily-dressed young woman" who "told them a piteous tale of her distress" when she approached them as they were returning home from a walk. The woman followed them, even after they had given her money, so they allowed her into their home, where she "sat down with the servant, and enjoyed a comfortable meal." But when the couple went out for the evening, the servant allowed the woman to take out their two-year-old child to buy clothes from a nearby shop. The woman and the child had not been seen since.<sup>36</sup>

Children could be taken by beggars to attract the attention of passersby, but they were also deployed by the poor in search of work. Janet Douglas was an unemployed coal bearer who was apprehended at the colliery of Halbeath, Fife, for stealing the

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 30 October 1802, 3b.

<sup>33</sup> *OBP*, 17 July 1674, Mall Floyd, t16740717-16.

<sup>34</sup> *OBP*, 5 April 1815, Eliza Scott, t18150405-89; for further examples, see *OBP*, 2 December 1824, Sarah Lafoy, t18241202-159, and *OBP*, 1 July 1844, t18440701-1858; for context, see also T. Hitchcock, "Festering Wounds and Pregnant Women: Beggars and Their Bodies in Eighteenth-Century London," in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Enlightenment (1650–1800)*, ed. Carol Reeves (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> *Penny Sunday Times and Peoples' Police Gazette*, 14 March 1841, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 5 February 1835, 3f.

three-year-old daughter of James Reach, mason, from Edinburgh. Her case was reported in *The Times*. She explained to the Edinburgh High Court of Justiciary that “the only inducement she had in taking the child was the hopes that she would thereby get employment, as she was starving, and intended to send it back.” Found guilty of the Scottish crime of *plagium*, or “man-stealing,” she was sentenced to death.<sup>37</sup> Janet’s sentencing contrasts with that of the extremely poor and hungry Mary Garrod, who persuaded the six-year-old Alfred Emmanuel Vassie to leave his playmates by offering him a farthing to fetch a loaf of bread. She “owed the baker some money” and so could not go herself, but she thought that the baker would take pity if faced with a child seeking food. Described as an “honest, hard-working woman,” the Old Bailey found her not guilty of child stealing in April 1847.<sup>38</sup> The motives of poor women who abducted children were of interest to juries and readers of crime alike, and the circumstances of women such as Mary Garrod could trigger sympathy and understanding rather than outright condemnation.

Child abduction was also shown as a strategy to secure marriage. This was the case with Eliza Cobb, who was said to have stolen the three-month-old baby of a poor couple living in Kensington to convince her lover that it was “the offspring of their illicit amours.”<sup>39</sup> At a time when remarriage was common and relationships between stepparents and children could be fraught, especially over questions of the inheritance of property, second wives could be desperate to have children of their own. In 1802 Elizabeth Salmon took to her bed to pretend that she was a “lying-in-woman,” while she employed a bricklayer to steal a two-week-old baby girl, in the hope that “her issue might enjoy considerable property to the exclusion of Mr Salmon’s children by a former marriage.”<sup>40</sup> From a rare survival of a child abduction case in quarter session papers, there is a letter from a Mary Price to the mother of the baby she had stolen in Bristol, explaining that she had committed the crime on behalf of “a Lady” whose estate “depended entirely on her having the child.”<sup>41</sup> None, however, was so scheming as one woman indicted for child abduction in January 1822. Living with two different men in London, she convinced both that she had a child by them so that each would pay her a weekly allowance. The trick worked so well over two years that when they became suspicious, she abducted a two-year-old child from her grandmother’s village in Surrey.<sup>42</sup> Such a story, which focused on the sexual promiscuousness and dishonesty of the urban poor, may well have rung true to the prejudices of the more privileged readers of *The Times*, where it was reported.

Mercenary motives for child abduction were also practiced in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when “spirits” made their living from abducting

<sup>37</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1817, 3c.

<sup>38</sup> *OBR*, 5 April 1847, Mary Garrod, t184705-1039.

<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 25 August 1817, 3d; *The Times*, 26 September 1817, 3c; *OBR*, 17 September 1817, Eliza Cobb, t18170917-109; for a similar example, see *The Times*, 29 July 1817, 3e.

<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, 17 September 1802, 3b; *The Times*, 7 December 1802, 3c.

<sup>41</sup> Bristol Quarter Session Records, Examinations and Correspondence Concerning the Stealing of the Child of Reuben Bond, JQS/P/346, (January–February 1816), Bristol Record Office; for the single case of child abduction that has also been found in the Middlesex Sessions Papers, see, MJ/SP/1697/01/031, London Metropolitan Archive.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, 29 January 1822, 3a.

children and selling them into servitude. It was this cause that involved the majority of prosecuted male abductors. John Smith, for example, was indicted at the Old Bailey in January 1700 for “spiriting and trepanning of Samuel Cooper,” aged sixteen years. “It was also affirmed,” that John had “lately bound several Hundreds of young people . . . who are all sent for slaves.”<sup>43</sup> The decline of indentured servitude meant that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century abduction stories tended to focus on the female abductor and her motives for abduction. But the male abductor did not disappear altogether. It was usually boys who were taken by “spirits,” and it was their suitability for manual labor that made boys particularly attractive to those seeking to profit from the nineteenth-century demand for chimney sweeps. It was men who organized this type of child labor and could find themselves accused of abduction. Because older children were abducted for this cause, these cases presented the opportunity for juries to hear tales of abduction directly from the children themselves. The seven-year-old John Walsh, for example, “excited considerable interest, as well for his healthy appearance as the distinct manner in which he gave his evidence,” when he testified against the brothers Abraham and Joseph Lane for attempting to abduct him and force him to be a chimney sweep in November 1827.<sup>44</sup> Children could also be persuaded to leave their homes and families by other children who already worked as chimney sweeps. Henry Wingall, aged fourteen, was sent by his master to London from Stamford, Lincolnshire, to “entice a little boy away, to come and be a sweep.” He was foiled in his attempt to lead away the eight-year-old Jeremiah Sands when he was spotted by a police constable.<sup>45</sup> Stories of men such as Thomas Burridge, who was seen loitering around Bethnal Green workhouse with “a whole lot of boys round him” and who abducted James Hugh Huns, the nine-year-old son of a widowed pauper who lived there, to be a sweep, could be taken straight from a novel by Dickens. In reality, it was the sensational cases of children being used to snatch other children and the cruel fate of “climbing boys” that would eventually galvanize Victorians to campaign against child labor.<sup>46</sup>

Historians have paid much attention to the motives and consequences of child abandonment in this period, but these cases of child abduction remind us that children could be viewed by the poor as economic assets as well as burdens.<sup>47</sup> The labor of older children could make them vulnerable to abduction, but the risks of this should not be exaggerated. Children were thought to be suited to only certain forms of employment, such as being chimney sweeps, and it is worth noting that most children were abducted when they were playing, not working. Tales of gypsies who stole children for profit appealed to readers of eighteenth-century novels, such as Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742), through to the consumers of nineteenth-century popular fiction, but in reality, children were not abducted so that their parents could be held to ransom. The case of the gypsy Margaret Parker,

<sup>43</sup> *OBP*, 15 January 1700, John Smith, t17000115-26.

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 8 December 1827, 3e.

<sup>45</sup> *OBP*, 4 September 1834, Henry Wingall, t18340904-122.

<sup>46</sup> *OBP*, 24 November 1834, Thomas Burridge and Edward Shipley, t18341124-122a.

<sup>47</sup> For child abandonment, see, for example, John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (London, 1988); Alys Levene, *Child-care, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741–1800: “Left to the mercy of the world”* (Manchester, 2007).

“who carried off several children with the view of inducing the parents to offer large rewards for their restoration,” was reported in the newspapers in 1824 because of its rarity. The commercialization of society in this period clearly had its limits.<sup>48</sup>

Instead, children were economically valuable because of what they wore and what they represented. The poor found that children aroused sympathy, kindness, and charity in a way that adults could not. The naïve belief of their wealthier neighbors, that children were innocent of the commercial world and should be protected from its harshest effects, could be manipulated to the poor’s advantage. But ironically, the desire of the middle class to allow women to fulfill their “natural” role as mothers and their reluctance to refuse assistance to beggars who sought to nourish their offspring left all children open to the threat of abduction. Sentiment about children and parenting combined with economic circumstances to produce child abduction in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England.



“Womanliness,” wrote the nineteenth-century poet Robert Browning, “means only motherhood; All love begins and ends there.”<sup>49</sup> Being a mother in this period was regarded as fulfilling both a woman’s biological and social destiny. Over the course of the eighteenth century, women’s bodies were redefined as utterly different from men’s, and their sexuality was submerged under the weighty imperative of bearing children. Nature, it was thought, also generated maternal feelings, giving women the desire to have children and the maternal instincts of nurture and protection once they were born. Because femininity was equated with maternity, being a mother became a full-time social responsibility. Becoming a mother was a status to be earned through the performance of specific moral and spiritual roles in the domestic sphere of the family home. Whether the ideal of “separate spheres” was achievable for any but a small minority is a well-trodden debate among historians, but the importance of bearing and raising children for women’s identity and sense of self-fulfillment in this period is undeniable.<sup>50</sup> Child abduction cases give us a unique opportunity to uncover the psychological consequences of this valorization of motherhood. Through exploring the motives of abductors, the responses of the parents of missing children, and newspaper coverage of abduction stories, we can expose the deeply felt emotions that were commonly held about parenting and children. It becomes evident that a culture that placed motherhood on a pedestal and cherished children as never before created a “new world” of psychological pressures and tensions that could have criminal consequences. Legitimate means for childless couples to adopt children continued to be pursued: Jane Austen’s brother, Edward, was adopted by the Knights, an aristocratic couple, for example. Others acted as surrogate parents through the practice of godparenting.<sup>51</sup> But it is also possible that the

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, 1 October 1824, 3c.

<sup>49</sup> As cited in E. J. Yeo, “The Creation of ‘Motherhood’ and Women’s Responses in Britain and France, 1750–1914,” *Women’s History Review* 8, no. 2 (1999): 202.

<sup>50</sup> The best critique of the “separate spheres” ideal remains A. Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993): 383–414.

<sup>51</sup> Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, “Childless Men in Early Modern England,” in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge, 2007), 181–82.

reporting of child abduction cases in newspapers, and in the Old Bailey *Proceedings*, familiarized women with the notion that if they were unable to bear children themselves, there were other, albeit deviant, ways of becoming mothers.

Harriet Magnis was a “young woman, about 22 years of age, of a prepossessing appearance,” who lived in Gosport, near Portsmouth. She was married to a gunner in the navy, “a very honest fellow” who was “extremely partial to children and had often expressed his most anxious wish to have a little darling, as he used to term it.” Apparently happily married, “he had often told his wife that he liked her very well; but he should like her better if some day or other she presented him with a boy.” Eager to please him, Harriet wrote and told him that she was pregnant, to which he responded by sending her money and a letter “with a particular charge that the infant should be well rigged and want for nothing—if a boy, so much the better.” Harriet’s fantasy of motherhood continued in her next letter to her husband, in which she told him that she had given birth to a son and that she had named him after his father. But her husband’s return from sea in November 1811 pushed her toward more drastic action. “The metropolis occurred to her as the market best calculated to afford her a choice of children,” so she traveled to London, where she saw a “rosy little citizen, Tommy Dellow, and at once determined to make him her prize.” Taking the four-year-old child and his sister to a pastry shop, Harriet made off with Tommy while his sister was distracted. Returning home to Gosport with Tommy, she successfully played the part of being a mother for two months, buying him clothes and showing him so much affection that “when he saw his own father again, he showed no disposition to return with him.” In the meantime, another woman had been falsely accused, tried, but acquitted at the Old Bailey for Tommy’s abduction. The media attention surrounding this case and the wide circulation of handbills advertising Tommy’s disappearance to areas outside London eventually led to Harriet’s arrest. A technical error (the fact that she was indicted in Winchester, not in London where the crime took place) meant that Harriet escaped punishment by the courts, but her marriage was over. Ridiculed for parenting a child that was not his own, in desperation Harriet’s husband begged the Gosport magistrates for a divorce (a privilege they had no legal power to grant).<sup>52</sup>

Like Harriet Magnis, Mary Ridding was in her twenties and married to an army captain who was overseas for long stretches of time. She accompanied him on one trip to India but was sent home when she told him she was pregnant. Informing him that she had given birth to a son at the Cape of Good Hope, she returned to her home in Birmingham via London at the end of August 1819. In reality, there was no child, and knowing that the captain “has been long wishing for a child” and believing that “it would increase the happiness of both, if they had a child,” she became “determined upon adopting one” of “some poor person.” After having encountered some children playing together in a field near Mile-End in London and sending them to buy cakes, one of the children handed her a baby,

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 28 November 1811, 3c; 30 November 1811; 3 December 1811, 3a; 9 December 1811, 3c; 4 January 1812, 3c; 7 January 1812, 3d; Lord Birkett, ed., *The New Newgate Calendar* (London, 1960), 48–51; Harriet Magnis was also known as Charlotte Magnay. Magistrates were consulted in cases of marriage breakdown, but in the early nineteenth century they had no legal powers to grant divorce. See Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857* (Cambridge, 2005), 21–25.

the fourteen-month-old Benjamin Shrier. Later arguing that it was “by the hand of Providence” that she had been given the child, she walked away with him and traveled back to Birmingham. She dressed Benjamin, one of the seven children of John Shrier, a night constable, in fine clothes, including a lace dress, and was seen treating the child “tenderly” and “dancing it in her arms.”<sup>53</sup>

The expectation that young wives such as Harriet Magnis and Mary Ridding would bear and raise children provided the motive for their actions, but it also allowed them to escape suspicion for months at a time. Both women were fulfilling and performing the role that was assigned to their gender, and each found that playing the part of motherhood brought material and emotional rewards. Pregnancy was viewed by contemporaries as a period in a woman’s life when she should be given special care, especially by her husband. Hence Mary Ridding was sent home from India to give birth in the relative safety of England, and Harriet Magnis was generously provided for by her anxious husband. Each woman hoped that her husband would love her more if she had a child.

Other women who abducted babies and then passed them off as their own did not have husbands who were so conveniently absent, and so they had to construct stories about the delivery of their babies. Telling tales of childbirth, however, allowed these otherwise childless women to participate in—rather than be excluded from—the female world of pregnancy and childbed rituals. Mary Murch made herself appear to be pregnant in the summer of 1831, so Cordelia Walters, who lived in the same house, let her have anything from her shop, and when she came home with a baby in her arms, “she was treated like a woman in labour.” Brandy, water, and all that was “necessary” were given, while the baby was wrapped up and placed next to the hearth and a midwife was fetched.<sup>54</sup> Ann Frances Bennett asked one woman to help her make linen when “she said she was in the family way,” and so she was able to share in the pleasure of planning for the arrival of a baby. She then went to the trouble of employing a nighttime wet nurse to feed the baby she had abducted.<sup>55</sup> Margaret Doolan also appeared to be “in the family way” and told an acquaintance that being pregnant “she did not know one minute from another,” before she was charged with abducting an eleven-week-old baby.<sup>56</sup> Acting out the role of the pregnant woman or mother with a newborn was relatively straightforward when these experiences were common to women and so would have been familiar even to those without children. These included the less pleasurable sides to motherhood, such as being tired all the time. On her journey to Birmingham, Mary Ridding entered a shop carrying Benjamin Shrier, saying that “she was unaccustomed to carry a child, and she felt the effects of it, being very tired.” Playing these parts brought the attention that female abductors may have sought; in this instance, a chair was fetched for Mary and milk for the child.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *The Times*, 4 September 1819, 3d; 24 September 1819, 3f; 25 September 1819, 3c; 27 September 1819, 3f; *OBP*, 15 September 1819, Mary Ridding, t18190915-138.

<sup>54</sup> *OBP*, 8 September 1831, Mary Murch, t18310908-185; a petition on behalf of Mary, pleading for clemency following her sentencing to seven years’ transportation, was submitted to the Home Office, see HO 17/46/90, The National Archives.

<sup>55</sup> *OBP*, 23 October 1837, Ann Frances Bennett, t18371023-2278.

<sup>56</sup> *OBP*, 7 April 1845, Margaret Doolan, t18450407-940.

<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 4 September 1819, 3d.

Of course, given that miscarriage and infant mortality were also frequent experiences, there is the possibility that women such as Mary Murch, Margaret Doolan, and even Harriet Magnis and Mary Ridding had been pregnant, and that babies were abducted to replace those who had died. Amelia Smith “appeared to be very large in the family way” and “looked like a woman about to be confined” when she left her lodgings one day in October 1844. When she returned with a baby who was “black round the mouth,” she said it had been “delivered by instruments.” In fact, the baby was the eight-week-old son of Elizabeth Purdy, who being deprived of his mother’s milk, was developing the first signs of malnutrition.<sup>58</sup> In Bristol, Mary Price confessed to her mother that she had stolen the baby of Reuben Bond following her late miscarriage in January 1816.<sup>59</sup> Grieving for the death of a baby, abducting another woman’s child was a way of still fulfilling the mother role. In September 1808, London newspapers reported the abduction of a cobbler’s baby from his home in Dublin. The cobbler and his wife had received visits from a woman who had observed how “her child was amazingly like her’s that died, and was of the same age, two months. She brought them presents of dress for the child, and professed great interest in their welfare.” On her third visit, the woman sent both parents on errands while she offered to hold the child, but on their return both the woman and baby had disappeared without a trace.<sup>60</sup> When Harriet Molyneux Hamilton was charged with abducting the five- or six-month-old son of Henry Porter in 1817, a story ran that Harriet was the wife of a “man of rank,” who left her pregnant before he traveled to India. “The child having died, she took Porter’s to supply its place.”<sup>61</sup>

Such cases give us windows into the mental worlds of nineteenth-century parents. Suffering from the pain and sadness of the death of a child, substituting other people’s children for their own became a desperate coping strategy. These grieving mothers did not intend harm; indeed, in many cases it was emphasized how kindly and well the abducted children had been treated. Little Tommy Dellow so enjoyed his life with the abductor Harriet Magnis that he was less than pleased to be reunited with his real parents, for example. But by cruel irony, the actions of child abductors also inflicted the agony of child loss upon the parents of abducted children. Until, and only if, parents were reunited with their children, they could experience the emotional wrench of parent-child separation.

Many accounts of abduction cases paid considerable attention to the emotional responses of the parents of abducted children. Such a focus can be understood within the context of the cultural discourses about parenting that were circulating at this time. As Joanne Bailey has explained, in an “age of feeling,” parenthood was believed to trigger intense emotions. “Anxiety was the essential state of parenting,” and it was expected that loving parents would demonstrate anxiety over the health and safety of their children.<sup>62</sup> Bereft of their children, the parents of abducted

<sup>58</sup> *OBP*, 21 October 1844, Amelia Smith and Eleanor Stanton, t18441021-2578a.

<sup>59</sup> Bristol Quarter Session Records, Examinations and Correspondence Concerning the Stealing of the Child of Reuben Bond, JQS/P/346, 6 January 1816, Bristol Records Office.

<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, 28 September 1808, 3d.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, 18 June 1817. Harriet was also called Margaret; her case was heard in the Old Bailey; see *OBP*, 2 July 1817, Harriet Molyneux Hamilton, t18170702-58.

<sup>62</sup> Bailey, *Parenting in England*, chap. 1, esp. 37–39.

children were described as “in a state bordering upon distraction,” “nearly deranged by the calamity,” “frantic,” and “in a state of the most dreadful agitation.”<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Purdy, whose baby had been stolen by Amelia Smith, was described by her husband as being in “a dreadful state; and had it not been for the company of other women, my wife would have destroyed herself—she was forced to be kept in a room.”<sup>64</sup> One judge sentencing a child abductor in 1800 commented upon “the terrible anxiety as to its fate, which the parents must feel, during the absence of the child,” and so believed the offense was “scarcely less criminal than murder itself.”<sup>65</sup> Even if a child was returned to his parents, there was the fear that he would have changed irredeemably, and thus that parents would have lost the child they once knew. Tommy Dellow was the “changeling” made real, whose experience of being mothered by a woman from another class and culture had completely altered his worldview.<sup>66</sup>

Crowded courtrooms, the selection of abduction cases for inclusion in newspapers, and the focus in press reports upon the feelings of abducted children’s parents all show a society that had developed a morbid fascination with parental loss. The themes of mourning and the loss of mother and child were played out on the public stage following the death of Princess Charlotte and her stillborn son in 1817, when a nation mourned. Child abduction stories resonated with this royal family tragedy, but they also brought it much closer, and more painfully, to home.<sup>67</sup> The language used to describe the parents of abducted children could even be shared with that of parents whose children had died; Mrs. Freeman was said to be “in a state of mind bordering on distraction at her bereavement” when her two-year-old daughter was abducted.<sup>68</sup> Abduction presented a new terrifying specter of child loss through which more general parental fears could be expressed, for public interest in child abduction was sustained while it touched a raw nerve of anxiety about the fragility of parent-child relationships. Unlike the more common experience of infant death, however, the appeal of abduction stories was that they offered the hope of child recovery and parent-child reunion.

The feelings of the mother of an abducted child were contrasted with their absence in the female abductor. When the judge at the Old Bailey considered the sentencing of Mary Ridding, he thought it important that she had never been a mother. As a result she was “ignorant of those heavenly feelings which subsist in the relation between parent and child; for had you been a mother, you must have respected and regarded, instead of agonizing a mother’s heart.”<sup>69</sup> The magistrate who examined Harriet Molyneux Hamilton asked her directly “how she could be so cruel as to deprive the parents of their child,” and when Harriet claimed to be a mother,

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 24 August 1802, 2c; *The Times*, 9 September 1807, 3d; *The Times*, 28 September 1808, 3d; *The Times*, 9 June 1817, 3a.

<sup>64</sup> *OBP*, 21 October 1844, Amelia Smith and Eleanor Stanton, t18441021-2578a.

<sup>65</sup> *Sun*, 2437, 14 July 1800.

<sup>66</sup> His story has similarities with that of Eunice Williams, the child of Puritan minister John Williams, who was abducted by native Indians in 1704 and who became so absorbed in Indian culture that she married a Mohawk and resisted rescue attempts. See John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (London, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Stephen C. Behrendt, *Royal Mourning and Regency Culture: Elegies and Memorials of Princess Charlotte* (Basingstoke, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> *The Times*, 5 February 1835, 2c.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 27 September 1819, 3f.



he told her “I did not think it possible for a mother to be guilty of such an act.”<sup>70</sup> Babies could die in the care of their abductors, as was the experience of Rhoda Parrott, who admitted stealing a six-month-old baby in 1816, which despite her “greatest care,” died and was buried without ever being reunited with his real mother. Rhoda “expressed strong regret at having committed this offence, observing, that she was now a mother herself, and knew better what the feelings of a mother were.”<sup>71</sup> Sentencing one of the few male abductors of a child abduction in 1819, the Old Bailey justice lectured him about the “feelings which would naturally be excited in the minds of the parents of the children thus torn from them” and said “if you have any feelings yourself, if you have any remorse, you will be conscious of the enormity of the offence you have committed.”<sup>72</sup> Abductors might play at being parents, but their lack of true or “natural” parental feelings condemned them. Women who stole very young babies and deprived them of their mothers’ breast were severing the emotional as well as the physical bonds that breast-feeding was believed to cement. When scientists, medics, and moralists concurred that virtuous motherhood could only be achieved if a mother breast-fed her child, abductors could not hope to experience true maternity.<sup>73</sup> “True” motherhood was being defined and defended in these narratives of child abduction. Thus according to these accounts, being a parent in this period, especially a mother, required the experience of a strength of emotional attachment and the development of special feelings that only a blood tie could bring.

Reporting another case of child abduction in September 1807, *The Times* warned that “this abominable practice has been so frequent within these few weeks, that parents should be particularly careful to watch against those vile miscreants, who, for the sake of a petty larceny robbery, expose infants in the street, and torture the feelings of parents.”<sup>74</sup> Guilt may well have been another emotion experienced by the parents of abducted children for their lack of vigilance and failure to protect their children. Drink could leave parents off their guard. Celebration turned into tragedy for one mother in September 1824, when returning home from having her baby christened at Pancras New Church, she called in at a public house to share a drink with her friends. Because of the “weak state of the poor woman,” the ale “affected her head, and she became rather giddy.” Leaving the pub with her friends, she was accosted by a well-dressed woman, who told her that the baby’s shoe was undone. Passing the baby to her, the mother turned momentarily to speak to a friend, but to her horror when she turned back both her baby and the woman had gone. The mother’s agonized “cries and shrieks” attracted the attention of many local residents, who searched in vain for the baby, and “the poor woman was carried home in a state of distraction.”<sup>75</sup>

In the “new world of children,” children were portrayed as provoking powerful emotions of envy, grief, fear, anxiety, guilt, and love. The desire to have children in

<sup>70</sup> *OBP*, 2 July 1817, Harriet Molyneux Hamilton, t18170702-58.

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, 29 July 1817, 3c.

<sup>72</sup> *The Times*, 29 May 1819, 3b.

<sup>73</sup> Ruth Perry, “Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2 (1991): 204–34.

<sup>74</sup> *The Times*, 9 September 1807, 3d.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 20 September 1824, 2d.

this period was so great that it could lead some to the extreme step of abducting another person's child. Many of the women who abducted babies were described in press accounts as searching for emotional security, commitment, and a feeling of completeness that was thought only to derive from being a mother. But as Paula Fass has commented about mid-twentieth-century cases of child abduction, "while mother love was laudable, too much mother hunger was a dangerous thing."<sup>76</sup>

The desire to be a parent in a period when motherhood was held in such admiration was shown to prey heavily on some women's minds. There was something troubling about Mary Ridding's behavior, thought fellow lodger Mrs. Knight, for she always carried a child's hat in her hand when she went out. For Mary, who was seen dancing Benjamin Shrier in her arms, a child was a comfort and a plaything. In the "new world of children" where parents bought their children toys, Mary regarded Benjamin as her toy. Her main defense witness was the woman who had nursed her when she was a child; it was as if Mary had never grown up. Mary, said her nurse, "always showed a fondness for children." Twisted logic convinced Mary that God's providence had handed her Benjamin but not that it had destined her to be childless.<sup>77</sup>

Contemporaries recognized that an obsession with children could leave some individuals prone to insanity and that the mentally disturbed could develop an unnatural interest in children. Whether insanity was understood to stem from a childhood condition or was seen to be the result of drunkenness, children were vulnerable to being the subjects of attention from those who were mentally disturbed. Mary Ann Dunn was found not guilty of stealing a three-week-old baby in April 1842 after her mother told the Old Bailey that Mary "has had the misfortune [to] have fits ever since she was four years old, and at times is very queer—since the death of her brother she has been a great deal worse."<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Hester Meredith, a "Gipsy-looking woman," was acquitted by Gloucester assizes from the charge of stealing a five-year-old child when it was discovered that "she was a half-witted wanderer who had been turned out by her parents when young." Summarizing the case to the jury, the judge said that Hester took the child away "probably from a sort of doating fondness for children, which is constantly found with poor creatures of this imbecile mind, who even extend their affection to the canine race, when the human species are not within their reach."<sup>79</sup> Henry Euston, a stay maker who was accused of abducting the two-year-old daughter of a master butcher, was said to have an "extreme fondness for children, taking them home when he had been drinking." His young wife, who was childless, told Mr. Laing, the magistrate at Hatton-Garden police court, that her husband "when under the influence of drink was insane. He would frequently bring home children, and keep them till the morning,

<sup>76</sup> Fass, *Kidnapped*, 146.

<sup>77</sup> *The Times*, 4 September 1819, 3d; *The Times*, 25 September 1819, 3c; P. T. d'Orbán has grouped modern-day child abductors into different types according to motive, and the description of Mary Ridding fits well with those in the "comforting offenses" category; see "Child Stealing: A Typology of Female Offenders," *British Journal of Criminology* 16, no. 3 (1976): 275–81.

<sup>78</sup> *OBP*, 4 April 1842, Mary Ann Dunn, t18420404-1381.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 10 August 1826, 3b.

but without intending any harm.” This bold statement provoked the following exchange:

Mr LAING, with considerable warmth—Pray, Ma’am, if you were the mother of a child, how do you think you would feel if your child was kept from you all night without knowing what had become of it?

Mrs Euston—It would be very distressing to my feelings, your worship.

Mr LAING—Then don’t talk of meaning no harm to keep a parent in suspense as to the fate of a child.

After an apology from Henry Euston for his “improper” and “base” conduct, Mr. Laing discharged him, telling him, “your conduct is rather suspicious, I advise you to be more cautious in future, and not to drink if you are subject to those momentary fits of insanity.”<sup>80</sup>

Abduction cases show that it was believed genuine affection for children could only be expressed by parents. Parental feelings cemented a close bond with children that could not be imitated. What would the childless Mrs. Euston know of the distressed feelings of a mother parted from her child? But while children were valued and cherished, this was expected to be within the familial context. A general “fondness” for children was a sign of mental weakness exhibited by those who had yet to graduate from their own infant state. Yet while children were yearned for and parental love was expected and admired, what is most striking about the exchange between Mr. Laing and Mrs. Euston was that, in the 1830s, the harm of child abduction was understood entirely in terms of what it meant to the parents of the abducted child. The consequences for the two-year-old girl who had been kept overnight by Mr. Euston are given no mention. Where are the children in these abduction stories?



Child abductors may not have intended to harm the children they took, but children’s responses make it obvious that they were often frightened, hurt, and damaged, both physically and psychologically, by the experience. Stripping children of their clothes left them cold and shaken; an early case from 1732 describes how a twenty-two-month-old infant was found “very ill” after his clothes had been taken from him.<sup>81</sup> The feet, ankles, and legs of a nineteenth-month-old boy “were a most shocking spectacle from scars and blisters,” it was supposed from “excessive cold,” after he had been robbed of his “shirt, boots, petticoat, feather from the hat, and necklace, only the frock remaining,” in November 1818.<sup>82</sup> Given how important clothes had become to identity, one suspects that older children were left with injured pride after they were stripped. It was because children valued clothes that their abductors used clothes to lure children away from their parents. Jeremiah Sands was among a number of boys who were tempted to go away to be sweeps with the promise of “a good master, plenty of shoes and stockings, and plenty of

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 27 September 1831, 4c.

<sup>81</sup> Ruth Paley, ed., *Justice in Eighteenth-Century Hackney: The Justicing Notebook of Henry Norris and the Hackney Petty Sessions Book* (London, 1991), 11–12.

<sup>82</sup> *The Times*, 20 November 1818, 3d.

victuals.”<sup>83</sup> Children were all too aware of the new clothes and toys that were available, making them hard to resist, even if they were offered by strangers. Emily Gilson was supposed to be looking after her baby sister when she was offered sixpence to buy a doll. Such was her delight that she neglected her charge, allowing the baby to be stolen.<sup>84</sup> Emma Potter said that her abductor told her she would “buy her some biscuits, and make her some doll’s things” if she went with her for a walk.<sup>85</sup> But it was traditional sweet treats, not new toys, which were favored above all by children. Eliza Harvey, aged five or six years old, was induced to leave her playmates one Sunday morning, for example, “by the temptations of sugar, fruit, cakes, etc. held out to her by a female child-stealer.”<sup>86</sup> Determined abductors could be more imaginative; George Aspinshaw played to children’s curiosity when he promised the son of a carpenter and his friend that he would show them a bird’s nest if they came down the road with him.<sup>87</sup>

Sweet things might be offered to comfort a crying child; Elizabeth Ashfield told the abducted daughter of Susannah Dawson, “don’t make such a noise, and I will give you a halfpenny of plums.”<sup>88</sup> But they were a temporary comfort, and the shock of being removed from home and family was too much for many children to bear. Babies who were taken when they were still being breast-fed suffered from starvation and dehydration; when Norah Brady found her five-month-old son, “it was in a very bad state . . . its two hands were in its mouth, and it was quite forced with screaming.” For twelve days her son’s abductor had offered him “her empty breast, to pass as a mother,” leaving her baby frustrated and exhausted.<sup>89</sup> Another four-month-old baby who had been abducted was so ill that her mother said, “at first sight I did not know her, she was so disfigured,” and Selina Hellens was “much reduced” when she was kept from her mother’s breast for two months.<sup>90</sup> It was the emotional reaction of older children to abduction that could raise the suspicions of witnesses and ultimately foil the attempts of their abductors. A street sweeper became suspicious when he saw a woman with a child that was “bathed in tears” and dressed more “respectably” than her companion in September 1831, and four years later a police constable was prompted to question a boy being led by a sweep in Stamford-hill when he saw him crying.<sup>91</sup> In this “new world of children,” the assumption was that happy children were those who were with their parents and that there was something badly wrong if a child was seen crying in public. A witness to the attempted abduction of Emma Potter, “was struck at the reluctance with which a female child of 8 or 9 years of age, accompanied the

<sup>83</sup> *OBP*, 4 September 1834, Henry Wingall, t18340904-122; clothes were often offered to boys who were abducted to be sweeps. See also *The Times*, 8 December 1827, 3c; *OBP*, 24 November 1834, Thomas Burrige and Edward Shipley, t18341124-122a.

<sup>84</sup> *OBP*, 23 October 1837, Ann Frances Bennett, t18371023-2278.

<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 5 November 1817, 3d–e.

<sup>86</sup> *The Times*, 30 October 1823, 2d.

<sup>87</sup> *OBP*, 3 July 1828, George Aspinshaw, t18280703-168.

<sup>88</sup> *OBP*, 25 October 1815, Elizabeth Ashfield, t18151025-98.

<sup>89</sup> *OBP*, 12 September 1821, Ellen M’Carty, t18210912-141.

<sup>90</sup> *OBP*, 23 October 1837, Ann Frances Bennett, t18371023-2278; *OBP*, 5 February 1844, Elizabeth Mary Jones, t18440205-807.

<sup>91</sup> *OBP*, 8 September 1831, Elizabeth Gurnett, t18310908-27; *OBP*, 4 September 1834, Henry Wingall, t18340904-122.

prisoner” through the streets of London. “Judging that the child could not have made so much opposition to a parent as she did to the prisoner, and that the latter could not treat any infant placed under her protection with such cruelty (for the little girl was dragged and beaten by Miss Perkins),” the witness followed the pair for some time, before finally confronting Miss Perkins.<sup>92</sup> By the nineteenth century, corporal punishment was so unfashionable that any adult seen disciplining a child in this way raised alarm. Jane Plumridge was shocked when she saw a woman smack a child on Primrose Hill and told her, “Don’t hit the child, it don’t know any better.” She later testified against the child’s abductor in court.<sup>93</sup>

Tears betrayed abductors, but children’s joy revealed who were the real parents. In the days before DNA, proving parenthood, especially of babies who could not speak for themselves, was problematic. Contemporaries met this challenge by examining the facial expressions and emotional responses of children. Children were seen as belonging to their parents because of the emotional ties they had with their carers, and children were expected to show signs of these ties from a very young age. This gave children a critical role in determining to whom they belonged. When Joseph Horsley was asked if he had any doubt that the three-year-old boy he had reclaimed from an abductor was his son, he described their reunion: “[T]he child came into the room, looked at two or three persons, and then at me; he gave a sort of hysteric laugh, and cried, ‘Oh papa! Oh, papa! my dear papa!’”<sup>94</sup> Following her abduction, when a three- or four-year-old daughter was reunited with her father in Edinburgh, “it expressed great joy, and took him round the neck and kissed him.”<sup>95</sup> Even very young children were thought to be capable of demonstrating emotional attachment to their parents. According to the father of one five-month-old baby, on finding him, “the child immediately recognised me and laughed.” We have seen how Mrs. Plush would not part with the nineteenth-month-old child she had found freezing in her passageway until she was confident that the woman who claimed the baby really was its mother. But because “the infant, on hearing her voice, raised himself, and knew his mother,” her concerns were overcome.<sup>96</sup> The relief of return to parental care could be overwhelming for some children. The five-year-old James Thorpe was found in a terrible physical state after his abduction, and “when restored to the arms of his father, the miserable infant became so frantically overjoyed that he was almost instantaneously attacked with convulsions.”<sup>97</sup> Of course, while there is no reason to doubt the happiness of these children, there was nothing like the good news story of a child-parent reunion to delight readers. Such touching scenes struck a chord at the heart of popular sentimentality about children. That they did so is testimony to the fact that by this period there was expected to be an easy and open expression of affection between children and their parents. Children were loved, and this was a tie that could not be broken but only tested and perhaps even strengthened by abduction.

<sup>92</sup> *The Times*, 5 November 1817, 3d.

<sup>93</sup> *OBP*, 1 July 1844, Emily Lewis, t18440701-1858.

<sup>94</sup> *OBP*, 26 May 1819, Charles Rennett, t18190526-41.

<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1817, 3c.

<sup>96</sup> *OBP*, 2 July 1817, Harriet Molyneux Hamilton, t18170702-58; *The Times*, 20 November 1818, 3d.

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 1 October 1824, 3c.

Children's emotional responses were heeded, and their words, as both victims and witnesses, could place them in a powerful position in relation to their elders. But if their abduction was motivated by sexual desire, then this was the point at which they were silenced. In October 1823 *The Times* reported that Thomas Harmer, "a wretched-looking old man, was charged with stealing the child of John and Jane Morgan," to which he pleaded guilty at the Surrey Sessions. There was another indictment against him for

an attempt on the person of the child, a girl of tender age; but the Court judged it would be possible to meet the plea of guilty on the first indictment with adequate punishment, so as to relieve the Court from the pain of hearing, and the public from the indecency of reading, the details of so foul an offence.

To protect adult sensitivities about childhood sexuality, no more was heard about Thomas Harmer's behavior, and he was duly sentenced to transportation for seven years.<sup>98</sup> The Old Bailey *Proceedings* are similarly limited in their recording of rape cases in this period. When Dennis Nugent was found guilty of raping the eight-year-old Elizabeth Goldsborough on 12 September 1798, for example, the court ordered that the details of the case should not be published.<sup>99</sup> It is here that we meet the greatest difference between late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abduction stories, and those that make headlines today. Our assumption that child abduction is the result of pedophilia and is a sexual crime was absent in earlier periods. Thomas Harmer's case was the only one in the 108 reported abduction cases studied that contained any recognition of sexual intent. Of course, the vast majority of abductors were women, and if attempted or actual sexual assault had taken place, then the perpetrator should have been charged with the felony of rape rather than abduction. Child rape was prosecuted in the courts as an abhorrent crime. While the Old Bailey heard 301 cases of rape between 1790 and 1849, 41 of these cases (14 percent) had child victims under the age of fourteen. Twenty-seven of the 41 prosecutions for child rape were heard after 1841, when the death penalty was removed.<sup>100</sup> Yet the numbers of cases dealing with the sexual abuse of children in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a fraction of those that were heard from the 1870s. As Louise Jackson's work has shown, while over the course of the nineteenth century the number of criminal indictments in England and Wales fell in relation to the population, prosecutions for sexual offenses increased. Furthermore, a greater proportion of prosecuted sexual offenses had child victims. Between 1870 and 1910, 70 percent of sexual assault cases heard at

<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 21 October 1823, 3c; *The Times*, 23 October 1823, 3c.

<sup>99</sup> *OBP*, 12 September 1798, t17980912-46; for the reticence of reporting sexual assault and rape cases, see also Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock, and Robert Shoemaker, "The Value of the Proceedings as a Historical Source," [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org); Julie Gammon, "A Denial of Innocence: Female Juvenile Victims of Rape and the English Legal System in the Eighteenth Century," in *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (Manchester, 1999), 76.

<sup>100</sup> Case numbers were derived from consulting the *Proceedings* at [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org); for comparison with cases for child rape heard in other courts, see Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (London, 1987), 98.

the Old Bailey involved children who were under sixteen years of age, and the sexual abuse of children was attracting widespread publicity.<sup>101</sup>

In marked contrast, at the start of the nineteenth century, reports on child abduction support the view that while children might have been seen as the occasional victims of deviant individuals, their sexuality was of insufficient interest to be the focus of more sustained media attention. Contemporary newspapers give no sense of rising panic or concern about children being subject to the sexual attention of predatory men. Behavior short of rape, which we would label as sexual abuse, was not openly discussed. The question of what Mr. Euston was doing late at night to the small girls he abducted, for example, was not one that the magistrate Mr. Laing was prepared to raise. Thus, the denial of agency and silencing of children who had been raped or sexually assaulted in this period also affected those who may have experienced sexual abuse as the victims of abduction.<sup>102</sup> Early nineteenth-century culture was not readily able to make connections that linked adult sexual desire to children, allowing Mr. Euston's behavior to be regarded as merely "rather suspicious" and warranting only a mild reprimand. Unless rape followed abduction, sexual harm to abducted children remained hidden. The specter of sexual abuse, which so haunts us today, was not one that fueled public interest in child abduction in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.



"I never thought of her taking it away," said James M'Donald, father of a four-month-old baby who was abducted in August 1814. He had been going to Billingsgate market with his wife when he stopped for a drink at the Seven Stars pub and was met at the door by Sarah Simmonds, a woman he had never met before. "It is a fine child, let me kiss it," she said and took the baby out of his arms. "Supposing it would be safe," James and his wife entered the pub, leaving Sarah holding their baby, and did not return for ten minutes, by which time both Sarah and their child had disappeared.<sup>103</sup>

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century society was rapidly changing. Child abduction was an urban phenomenon and became a recognized social problem in a period when a mobile and expanding population meant towns and cities multiplied. Urban centers thronged with young people. Harriet Magnis knew not only that London was "the market best calculated to afford her a choice of children" but also that she was more likely to escape from detection if she abducted a child from there.<sup>104</sup> London was full of strangers, and there were so many mothers with young babies that knowing whose baby was whose was far from straightforward.

Yet in this modernizing society, fathers and mothers like the M'Donalds were remarkably naïve about the dangers their children faced. Flattery persuaded many parents to part with their children, and if abductors presented a "genteel" appearance, they were more likely to engender a false sense of trustworthiness. Economic

<sup>101</sup> Louise A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London, 2000), chap. 1.

<sup>102</sup> Sarah Toulalan, "Child Sexual Abuse in Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century London: Rape, Sexual Assault and the Denial of Agency," in *Children and Childhood in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1650–1900*, ed. Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Aldershot, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> *OBP*, 14 September 1814, Sarah Simmonds, t18140914-145.

<sup>104</sup> Birkett, *New Newgate Calendar*, 49.

necessity meant that child carers were very often other children. Siblings were frequently left with the responsibility of caring for babies. Grace Schrier “of course” threatened to punish her seven-year-old son, Samuel, because he allowed his fourteenth-month-old brother, one of six siblings he was taking care of, to be trusted “to a stranger” and so abducted.<sup>105</sup> Other parents employed girls of eight or nine years of age to look after their children, and while the courts might question the extent to which such young people could give reliable or truthful witness statements in abduction cases, the wisdom of leaving them with the responsibility of another child’s safety was not questioned.<sup>106</sup>

This was a society that was slow to adjust to the realities of urban living and the crime of child abduction. Finding an abducted child was largely left to the initiative of parents. Newspapers played a role in advertising lost children, issuing descriptions of the appearance of child and suspected abductor. Thus began the media’s part in both aiding in the recovery of abducted children and possibly, as this article has suggested, in heightening public awareness and fueling fears about the crime. Nevertheless, many parents resorted to more traditional methods of finding their children, including issuing handbills, or like one father in 1805, having the town “cryer to cry it.”<sup>107</sup> Neither parents nor children seem to have become more streetwise as more cases of abduction were reported. Mrs. Bessett’s chapbook, published in 1854, for “very young children . . . and their mammas” was about Fanny, who “in spite of all she had heard about the danger of children being alone in the streets of London,” ventures out alone and is abducted by an old woman, “for the sake of selling her clothes.” But its principal message was against the wrongs of childish vanity and pride, not the hazards of public spaces.<sup>108</sup> Children were not cautioned to be suspicious of strangers. The eighteenth century may have brought a “new world” of play that centered on toys to be enjoyed primarily within the home, but the old world of play on the street would long continue, even as it became more dangerous.

Since Plumb published his article, historians have shared with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contemporaries their shock at those mothers who abandoned their newborns or who were driven to murder their babies, because this was conduct that ran counter to a culture that cherished children as never before. But this has led to a neglect of a form of criminal behavior, child abduction, which was a source of public fascination precisely because children were so desired. Given the risks that children faced, Plumb’s choice of words for his title seems very apt. The eighteenth century brought a new world *of* but not *for* children.

<sup>105</sup> *The Times*, 25 September 1819, 3c.

<sup>106</sup> For young carers of children, see, for example, *The Times*, 6 January 1815, 3d, and *OBP*, 28 October 1830, Mary Smith, t18301028-151; for doubts about the reliability of child testimony, see, for example, *OBP*, 12 September 1821, Mary Ford, t18210912-114, and *The Times*, 12 July 1826, 3c.

<sup>107</sup> *OBP*, 24 April 1805, Mary Stanyon, t18050424-26.

<sup>108</sup> Mrs. Bessett, *The Lost Child, A Tale of London Streets, And Other Stories, In Words of Two Syllables* (London, 1854), 6, 10.