

What are you reading now?

✓ "The Young Visitors" by Daisy Ashford (Academy Chicago Publishers, \$15)

I'm a great collector of literary oddities, and couldn't resist "The Young Visitors," which was written, amazingly, by a 9-year-old Brighton girl named Daisy Ashford in 1890, and later published with her idiosyncratic spelling and grammar intact.

The story involves one Alfred Salteena, "an elderly man of 42," who wishes to become a gentleman in hopes of impressing young Ethel Monticue. He goes to the Crystal Palace to see the Earl of Clincham, whom he pays to "rub him up" in "Society."

It works (Alfred is given a position at Buckingham Palace "cantering after the royal barouche"), but in the meantime he unwisely trusts Ethel to the supervision of his wealthy friend, Bernard Clark, of Rickamere Hall, who promptly marries her. The tone of the book is entirely unique — part Victorian romance, part inadvertent absurdist comedy.

Ashford sees the ridiculousness of adult society as only a child can.



— Dan Morey lives in Harborcreek.