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**Lessons After Barbault: The Conversational Primer in Late-  
Eighteenth-Century Britain**

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## **Declaration**

This dissertation is the result of my own work. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or which is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma, or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution.

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## **Lessons after Barbauld: the Conversational Primer in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain**

This thesis explores how Anna Letitia Barbauld's book *Lessons for Children Aged Two to Three Years* (1778) facilitated the development of the conversational primer. This genre, which has not yet been theorised, may be identified by the way the texts present themselves as verisimilar and replicable sets of conversations, and depict parent-teachers and child-pupils as companions. This genre challenges the idea that there is a dichotomy between 'adult' and 'child' readers, a concept that inflects many contemporary approaches to children's literature studies. Through a close reading of *Lessons for Children* and subsequent conversational primers, this thesis suggests that Barbauld's Rational Dissenting value of discursive diversity influenced British middle-class children's culture, enabling the voices of verisimilar children to proliferate children's books on a previously unknown scale.

The Introduction establishes ways in which concepts of child-parent relationships were used as paradigms for understanding modes of government in eighteenth-century Britain. Chapter One examines how children's books prior to *Lessons for Children* addressed different types of implied child readers with the aim of producing members of an ideal society. Chapter Two explores how Barbauld created a space in which parents could participate in the children's literature market through her introduction of the parent-author as a literary trope, her portrayals of verisimilar mother-child interactions in accessible, domestic spaces. Chapter Three charts how *Lessons for Children* became the prototype from which subsequent conversational primers drew their literary identity. The fourth chapter contextualises *Lessons for Children* as an expression of Barbauld's Rational Dissent, and posits that the rise of the conversational primer is indicative of the influence of Rational Dissenting values upon British middle-class children's culture. Chapter Five contrasts the afterlife of the conversational primer with children's books that generated readers' imaginative identification with characters. This comparison suggests that conversational primers encapsulated middle-class Georgian ideals regarding familial learning; an historical specificity that is, in part, responsible for the genre's popular demise.

This thesis studies the lifecycle of the conversational primer in the British children's literature market. It examines the porousness between paratextual materials and texts, and shows how an individual author stimulated generic development by popularising specific literary tropes. By theorising the genre of the conversational primer, this study provides a new and productive discourse concerning adult-child interactions in children's literature.

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## Introduction

### Reading Children in Eighteenth-Century Britain

In 1778, T. Beecroft published the anonymously authored *The Infant's Miscellany: Or Easy Lessons, Extracted from Different Authors*, while Joseph Johnson published Anna Letitia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children Aged Two to Three Years*.<sup>1</sup> Existing twenty-first century scholarly approaches to children's literature could easily highlight the books' similarities. To use Anja Müller's words, both books appeal to a 'rational' child' who is expected to become 'a responsible citizen capable of rational judgements.'<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the books' titles foreground their pragmatic function.<sup>3</sup> They are 'lessons' for 'Infants' or 'Children Aged Two to Three Years'—similar, if not identical, age groups. However, a cursory glance of the two prefaces indicates that the books present inherently different understandings of the identity and capacity of a young child reader. The afterlife (or non-afterlife) of Beecroft's *Infant's Miscellany* in comparison to Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* highlights how Barbauld's book reshaped the British children's literature market. This study examines Barbauld's innovations in constructing a specific relationship between her implied child and maternal readers, and in popularising the figure of the parent-author, features that facilitated the creation of a culturally specific genre of pedagogical children's books: the conversational primer.

The conversational primer's distinctiveness from its earlier cousin, the primer, is suggested by a comparison of the advertisements inside the books' front covers. Beecroft's *Infant's Miscellany* is akin to a classical primer. It is advertised to target 'the very first set of readers—children from the age of four, to eight or nine years old,' insisting, 'Utility alone was the end designed' (*Infant's Miscellany*, pp. iii, vi). The book

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<sup>1</sup> *The Infant's Miscellany: Or Easy Lessons, Extracted from Different Authors. On a New Plan. Intended to facilitate the Attainment of the English Language to the youngest Readers, by teaching them not only to read, but likewise to understand clearly what they read* (London: Printed for the Author; and sold by T. Beecroft, 1778), cited in-text as *Infant's Miscellany*; Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Lessons for Children Part I. For Children From Two to Three Years Old* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1788), cited in-text as *Lessons I*.

<sup>2</sup> Anja Müller, 'Identifying an Age-Specific English Literature for Children' in *Mediating Identities in Eighteenth-Century England: Public Negotiations, Literary Discourses, Topography*, ed. Isabel Karremann and Anja Müller (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 17–30, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Müller, p. 28.

defines children under the age of ten years as ‘infants,’ suggesting the period of a child’s extreme physical fragility and mental ignorance is thus elongated. The extended title defines the utility sought by Beecroft’s lessons as the *Attainment of the English Language to the youngest Readers, by teaching them not only to read, but likewise to understand clearly what they read*. To this end, the book consists of fables, moral tales, and short lectures. One lesson, titled ‘Inquisitiveness,’ dissuades readers from being curious about ‘things which there is no occasion you should be acquainted with’ (*Infant’s Miscellany*, p. 58). It discourages the spirit of curiosity fostered in Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*, instead extolling education for its ‘gentle pow’r [to] controul [sic] / Each wayward passion of the soul’ (*Infant’s Miscellany*, p. 83). The suggestions of the ‘infant’ reader’s tendency to ‘wayward’ wildness suggest that the implied child reader is incapable of controlling his or her passions, and needs to be tamed through cognitive discipline.

By contrast, the term ‘infant’ is absent from Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children Aged Two to Three Years*. Barbauld’s target audience is significantly younger than Beecroft’s ‘very first readers’ aged four to nine years. By referring to two to three year-olds as children, Barbauld’s book suggests that very young readers are capable of the rationality implicitly denied to them through Beecroft’s use of the term ‘infants.’ Barbauld explains in her preface that she wrote her book ‘for a particular child [...] but the public is welcome to the use of it’ (*Lessons I*, p. iii). This authorial emphasis on the unique, real-life origins of a mass-produced book signalled the birth of the figure of the parent-author, a figure that became trope in the British children’s literature market. Barbauld’s parent-author addresses her implied users with permissive language, positioning purchasers and readers as outsiders granted access to a personalised manuscript item. The ‘particular’ child’s uniqueness does not prevent Barbauld’s author from hoping that her abstract audience(s) may apply the book to their own circumstances. Instead, her parent-author expresses hope in the potential general applicability of a particular incident—the use of *Lessons for Children* in educating the author’s child, and the children of others.

Barbauld presents a remarkable vision of the capacity of this heretofore-unconsidered category of infant readers. In her preface she asserts, ‘A grave remark, or a connected story, however simple, is above his capacity; and *nonsense* is always below it,’ likening the book to the ‘first stone of a noble building [...] the first idea in a human mind’ (*Lessons* I, pp. iii, v). Rather than describing the child’s mind as a building, Barbauld’s metaphor casts knowledge as a building. This suggests that each child possesses the mental capacity to comprehend and critique concepts from different perspectives. If the mind can contain a building of knowledge, a child can, theoretically, consider different aspects of that edifice of knowledge.

In an historical sense, *Lessons for Children* may be described as the ‘first stone of a noble building’, for it quickly resulted in the dissemination of particular literary tropes. Such tropes include the figure of the parent-author who addresses parents and young children simultaneously; and the affectionate parent-teacher who walks children through fields, observing and reflecting on their surroundings. In short, *Lessons for Children* originated the genre that this thesis terms the conversational primer.

No previous scholarship has conceived of this genre as a distinct category. This thesis examines how Anna Letitia Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children* facilitated the formation of the conversational primer. This genre uses ‘dual address’ to speak both to young child readers and their implied parent-teachers.<sup>4</sup> Authored by parent-teachers, conversational primers were presented as the products of personal experience and as replicable tools enabling fellow middle-class British members to become ideal parents. The form flourished in the late eighteenth century. By 1800, conversational primers were such culturally recognisable forms that they became an object of scorn amongst the Romantic Lake Poets and their coterie. As early as 1802, Charles Lamb penned an invective letter to Coleridge:

Knowledge insignificant and vapid as Mrs. B.’s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge* [...] instead of that beautiful Interest in wild tales [...] Think of what you would have been now, if, instead of being fed with tales and old

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Wall, *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991), p. 35.

wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history!

Hang them! I mean the cursed reasoning crew, those blights and blasts of all that is human in man and child.<sup>5</sup>

Lamb's letter is vituperative and insightful. He identifies a 'form' that characterises a set of 'reasoning' books, which 'cram' child readers with scientific modes of knowledge. He names a set of authors associated with these books, 'the cursed reasoning crew,' identifying the group's leader as 'Mrs B' (Anna Letitia Barbauld), alongside a fellow writer, 'Mrs [Sarah] Trimmer.' Lamb discerns a 'form' of literature and its associated group of authors, prefiguring Stephen Neale's concept of 'genre' as a 'system of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring [to a text].'<sup>6</sup> This thesis explores ways in which the 'form' of the conversational primer constituted a genre of children's literature, and the implications of this primarily parentally authored genre for the history of children's literature.

This thesis examines the changing landscape of British children's literature at the turn of the eighteenth century by focusing on a form of educational children's books. It interacts with two closely related scholarly fields: eighteenth-century theories of child education, and studies of children's literature. The thesis does not include detailed study of eighteenth-century theories of child education; that scope is too ambitious for this study. However, it is crucial to note that the British children's literature market flourished alongside moral philosophical debates about the nature of a child, and the future social member into whom that child might develop. The question of educating a child became a matter of conceptualising the relationship between a child and society.

Two seminal ideas regarding the child and ideal child education were expressed in John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, Or on Education* (1762, translated in English 1763). Locke's most

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Lamb, letter no. 136 to Coleridge, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, vol. II or III, ed. Edwin W. Marris Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 81–82.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Neale, 'Questions of genre', *Approaches to Media: A Reader*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Chris Newbold (London: Arnold, 1995), 460–472, p. 460.

famous insight, that a child is ‘Nine Parts of Ten [...] their Education’ was, in part, a refutation of the Platonic theory of Innate Ideas.<sup>7</sup> Instead of discussing education as a process of metaphysical remembrance, Locke insisted that humans are instinctual creatures. His pedagogical method accommodated lessons to each child’s sensory and emotional perceptions. He encouraged teachers to individualise lessons so that they were ‘suited to the Child,’ theorising this was best achieved by understanding and responding to each child’s delight in pleasure and fear of pain (*TCE*, §48, §66, §74, §81). Locke highlighted the effect of ‘almost insensible Impressions’ upon a child’s cognitive and moral development from the moment of the child’s birth, through the child’s cognitive development (*TCE*, §1). Locke’s subsequent ideal educational programme was rigorous and broad. He pontificated on an ideal children’s diet; he considered educative possibilities of toys; and he discussed specific socio-cultural expectations for the aristocracy in late seventeenth-century Britain. For instance, he wrote about riding and fencing because they ‘are so necessary parts of Breeding, that it would be thought a great omission to neglect them’ (*TCE*, §198). In short, Locke’s pedagogy assumed that the child’s malleability was the impetus and opportunity for guardians and educators to raise children to become healthy, benevolent, rational social participants.

This education was selective on the basis of class. A Lockean education ‘all [tended] towards a Gentleman’s Calling (*TCE*, §201),’ limiting education to wealthy and upper class children. Locke sought to train future adults who could uphold, reform, and disseminate the values of restraint necessary for individual and social government. In this, his concept of child education cohered with his vision of social government. Locke asserted that young children ‘should look upon their parents as their lords, their absolute governors [...] when they come to riper years, they should look on them as their best, as their only sure friends’ (*TCE*, §41). His metaphor of the child as an unripe fruit implies that age, physical, and mental development are correlated with the realisation of the child’s potential as a civic member. His idea that children only become their parent’s friends as adults echoes his reflections in his *Second*

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<sup>7</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), ed. John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), §1. Bd in-text as *TCE*.

*Treatise on Government*: ‘all men by nature are equal [...] Children, I confess, are not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it.’<sup>8</sup> Locke conceived of children as social participants in formation, suggesting that his idea of the child’s ‘equality’ depended on the child’s realisation as a sociable adult:

The *younger* [a child is], the less, I think, are their unruly and disorderly Appetites to be complied with [...] the more are they to be under the Absolute Power and Restraint of those, in whose Hands they are (*TCE*, §39).

Locke associates impulsiveness with childishness—indeed, with animalistic ‘Appetites.’ This apparent inclination to discuss children as ontologically different to adults paradoxically sits with his claim that the child’s teleology was to attain equality with adults. His political discourse contrasts the revolutionary-tinged ‘unruly’ and ‘disorderly’ childish desires and behaviours with a parent’s ‘Absolute Power’ and ‘Restraint.’ These by contrast, connote order and monarchical authority. Locke’s hierarchical vision of the child as a not-yet human is emphasised by his invocation of legal discourse when he describes children’s ‘Want of Judgement [that] makes them stand in need of Restraint and Discipline’ (*TCE*, §40). Equating restraint with power and wisdom, Locke depicts the child as a not-yet human being. The child must be treated affectionately because he or she can become a fully functioning social participant, but until then, the Lockean child is not an adult. This concept of the child as a malleable individual who is not fully human, informs—but is not exactly reflected by—many children’s books published in eighteenth-century Britain.

Related to, but distinct from the Lockean child, was the Rousseauvian child. In the mid-eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s works were quickly translated from French into English and the merits of his pedagogical theories were debated in France and Britain alike. Anna Letitia Barbauld certainly read Rousseau’s work,

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<sup>8</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government (An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government) and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. J. W. Gough (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), §§54–55. Quotations cited in-text as *STG*.

criticising his assertion that children should be educated without prejudice.<sup>9</sup> Like Locke, Rousseau saw children as impressionable beings; and like Locke, Rousseau recommended teaching children in stages of immersion.<sup>10</sup> However, where Locke conceptualised children as beings of potential, with a teleology geared toward social membership, Rousseau asserted that children were the untarnished embodiment of all that is naturally good in man. Education, Rousseau claimed, should not be a functional programme geared toward producing social members. Such an education, Rousseau argued, was a case of ‘seeking the man in the child, without reflecting what he is before being a man’ (*Emile*, p. 34). He further argued that a functional education was a poor compromise of an ideal education (*Emile*, p. 34). Rousseau rejected Locke’s vision of the child as a man-in-becoming, reifying childhood as a dignified state. Nevertheless, Rousseau gave his ideal tutor ultimate authority over this ostensibly ideal child. While letting the child *think* the child is in control of his actions, Rousseau recommended that the tutor should control the child’s learning environments and hence the child’s behaviours, as, ‘There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom’ (*Emile*, p. 120). Far from encouraging children to continue being natural, Rousseau implies that even his education will reduce the natural wholeness of the child to an outward appearance—the ‘appearance of freedom.’ The artifice of Rousseau’s pedagogy is inscribed from the beginning. After waxing lyrical about the nobility of a tutor, Rousseau asks, ‘is this rare mortal not to be found? I do not know,’ and admits he himself failed as a tutor (*Emile*, p. 50). The impossibly ideal tutor, so central to Rousseau’s pedagogical scheme, suggests that the art of education is appearance, incapable of altering the reality of human existence.

Nevertheless, Rousseau asserted that children provided a glimpse of human existence as it ultimately was, beneath the overlay of education: ‘Natural man is entirely for himself. He is numerical unity, the absolute whole [...] Civil man is only a fractional unity dependent on the denominator [...] Our first duties are to ourselves’

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, ‘What is Education?’ (1798), *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry & Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 321–332, pp. 327–30. Cited in-text as ‘Education.’

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or on Education* (1762), trans. Allan Bloom (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 62–64. Cited in-text as *Emile*.

(*Emile*, p. 39, p. 97). The Rousseauvian child embodies ‘nature’ and ‘wholeness.’ Rousseau disparaged the Lockean idea that a child’s ideal teleology is to become a social participant. As he contemptuously remarked, citizens are ‘but the numerator of a fraction.’ Despite this, Rousseau claimed that education performed a necessary ameliorative function: ‘Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man [...] Were he not [trained], however, everything would go even worse’ (*Emile*, p.37). Rousseau’s claims that human civilisation harms God’s good creations sits alongside his insistence that things would be worse without ‘training.’ Yet this training, in Rousseau’s method, is not based on rationality: indeed, Rousseau declared, ‘Reading is the plague of childhood and almost the only occupation we know how to give it. At twelve Emile will hardly know what a book is’ (*Emile*, p. 116). Instead, ‘training’ in Rousseau’s programme should be communicated implicitly through environmental learning experiences rather than taught explicitly. Ultimately, the Rousseauvian child is a contradiction. Although the child is untainted by social convention, the child’s ostensibly natural instincts must be shaped by an education that fits him or her for his or her roles in society. Subsequently, Sophia’s education is fundamentally different to Emile’s, in concordance with the social expectation that Sophia will become Emile’s decorous and submissive wife. These twin Rousseauvian ideas of the child as a malleable being who needs to be reshaped to inhabit society, and who is idealised as the embodiment of pure humanity unstained by social convention, shaped differing literary depictions of children. One can see in Wordsworth’s infant ‘trailing clouds of glory’ a Rousseuvian child embodying the ‘natural man’, that good state in which God created things.<sup>11</sup> Initially, however, and crucially for this study, the depiction of Emile as an impressionable being, educated in a rigorous and holistic manner, generated literary and philosophical debates regarding the role of books in the education of a rational child.

As Chapter One explores, many eighteenth-century books addressed to child readers assume that children should learn in gradual stages, a belief shared by Locke

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<sup>11</sup> William Wordsworth, ‘Intimations of Immortality’ in *Selected Poetry (Oxford World’s Classics)*, ed. Stephen Gill and Duncan Wu, (Oxford: OUP, 2008), line 65.

and Rousseau. This study avoids categorising children's literature as a debate between Lockean and Rousseauian concepts of the child. Instead, it shows how an awareness of Lockean and Rousseauian concepts of the child enables a historicised understanding of contesting eighteenth-century British concepts of the child, the child's ideal education, and the role of the educative children's book. This thesis eschews an assessment of Locke and Rousseau's influence over children's literature. Instead, Chapter One presents a framework for analysing eighteenth-century British children's literature that diverges from the three main paradigms that shape children's literature studies. The first of these common paradigms explores the struggle between 'didactic' and 'delightful' children's literature; the second examines the power dynamics and ethics of children's literature using post-colonial concepts; the final attempts a sociological-historical identification of children's literature within historical ideas of childhood and modern capitalist structures. Although I have drawn on elements from each of these paradigms, my work operates on a distinct set of assumptions. My study of the conversational primer is informed by a comparative and close study of eighteenth-century children's books that do not align themselves comfortably to concepts of what is 'fictive' or 'non-fictive.' Conversational primers were marketed on the basis of their applicability, and did not conform to non-fiction formats like the autobiographical confession or the conduct book. Central to the conversational primer's appeal to its practical applicability was its parent-author.

In conversational primers, parent-authors assume a position of normative hope, placing trust in the rational and affectionate capacities of the book's implied child and adult readers. My model for interpreting the construction of implied child readers in eighteenth-century British children's books incorporates Adrienne Martin's philosophical insights regarding the practical nature of hope. Central to Martin's theory of hope is her concept of the 'justificatory rationale,' by which means hoppers '[incorporate] certain considerations into [their] rational agency or scheme of ends.'<sup>12</sup> Martin asserts that hope is deeply practical, not merely a desire for an unrealised

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<sup>12</sup> Adrienne M. Martin, *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 35.

goal.<sup>13</sup> She identifies two faces of hope: ‘impersonal’ hope in a non-agential world, and ‘normative’ hope placed in agents.<sup>14</sup> With the former, individuals invest hope in attractive but uncertain outcomes, acting in ways that ‘bring our agency to bear on our passivity.’<sup>15</sup> The latter form of hope, meanwhile, ‘[asks] without demanding that [people] become or continue to be admirable, loveable, or respectable.’<sup>16</sup> This stance of normative hope means that individuals relate to one another as rational agents. What is displayed in conversational primers is the interaction between these two faces of hope.

If we recall Barbauld’s preface to *Lessons for Children*, her impersonal hope is that ‘the public [will] use [the book]’, while her normative hope is that *Lessons for Children* may become the ‘first stone of a noble building’ in her potential readers’ minds. This thesis applies Martin’s idea of practical hope to the conversational primer, seeing in the stance of the parent-author an impersonal hope in the beneficial power of a pedagogical book, and a normative hope in the potential benevolence of the book’s implied readers. This provides a means for moving away from paradigms that interpret children’s literature as a struggle between modes of didacticism and delight. It presents a radically different view of children’s literature to the paradigm that sees children’s books as a colonially inflected form of tyranny exercised over child readers by adults. In so doing, this thesis identifies how British middle-class moral ideologies are intertwined with eighteenth-century consumer culture in a specific genre of children’s books.

### **a. Scholarly Paradigms: the Teleology Toward Delight**

Although F. J. Harvey Darton’s *History of Children’s Literature* was published over eighty years ago, that seminal tome continues to colour children’s literature scholarship. Twentieth and twenty-first century children’s literature scholars echo Harvey Darton’s dichotomous insistence that children’s books have ‘always [been] the scene of a battle

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<sup>13</sup> Martin, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, pp. 144–45.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, p. 145.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, p. 144.

between instruction and amusement, between restraint and freedom, between hesitant morality and spontaneous happiness.<sup>17</sup> Few apply this categorisation as pejoratively as Percy Muir, whose *English Children's Books: 1600–1900* titles Anna Letitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, and the Taylor sisters ‘A Monstrous Regiment’, and whose study concludes with the chapter, ‘The Triumph of Nonsense.’<sup>18</sup> Few echo Geoffrey Summerfield’s truculence in describing Victorian fantasy as an historical necessity generated in response to the ‘didactic fashion in books for children [...] where no room was left at all for the play of pre-critical, pre-conceptual intuitive understanding.’<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, this scheme of differentiation underlies Peter Hunt’s defence of children’s literature studies, and his rejection of the notion that children’s books are a ‘stepping stone’ to adult literature: ‘The less a book appeals to those literary [...] artistic values [...] the more it is a children’s book.’<sup>20</sup> Hunt’s attempt to justify children’s literature as a category of study distinguishes ‘literacy’ from ‘literature,’ a differentiation that suggests that what is functional is separate to that which deserves literary analysis. This distinction troubles scholars of didactic children’s fiction, as much pedagogical literature for child readers in eighteenth-century Britain was published under the slogan ‘Instruction with delight.’ As Lissa Paul confessed in her study on the children’s book publisher, Benjamin Tabbart,

[M]y reading had been conditioned by the historical pattern of children’s literature shaped by Darton in *Children’s Books in England* and assumed by [Marjorie] Moon in her preference for the “fair field of literary flowers” [...] over the “history books and other useful works.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children’s Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), v–vi.

<sup>18</sup> Percy Muir, *English Children’s Books: 1600–1900* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954).

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason: Children’s Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen & Co, 1984), p. 233.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Lissa Paul, *The Children’s Book Business: Lessons from the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 49.

This narrative of progression celebrates the ‘Golden Age’ of Victorian children’s fiction featuring ostensibly child friendly tropes like adventure, fantasy, and absurdity. These books are contrasted with earlier factual-ethical children’s books, which are often pejoratively termed ‘didactic’ works. This construct of the Victorian ‘Golden Age’ allows little scope to analyse the nuances of eighteenth-century children’s books.

Recent critics have contested the usefulness and accuracy of this narrative. Marah Gubar, for instance, convincingly dismantles the notion that Golden Age texts are ‘child friendly.’<sup>22</sup> However, in order to critique the idealisation of Golden-Age texts, Gubar maintains a pejorative approach to didactic literature, describing it as ‘pushy’, ‘controlling’, and ‘preachy’, unintentionally upholding the critical paradigm she seeks to question.<sup>23</sup> Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin deconstruct the instruction/delight dichotomy by arguing that educational children’s literature is manifestly doomed to failure: ‘even the most basic texts on and for education were, and still are [...] interpenetrated by opposing ideas and shades of resistance making them morally and ideologically unstable.’<sup>24</sup> Yet Hilton and Shefrin’s criticism of the inefficacy of the didacticism-to-delight narrative as a paradigm for the study of children’s literature only enables them to say pedagogical children’s texts are ‘ideologically unstable.’ This insight has little consequence on the forms that such texts might take.

More recently, Katherine Wakely-Mulroney’s PhD thesis on memorisation and inner-subjectivity in Isaac Watts and Lewis Carroll’s *oeuvres* suggests that a thaumatropic interaction of instructive and delightful elements occurs in ‘didactic’ eighteenth-century texts and ‘fantastical’ Victorian works, rendering inaccurate genre evolution narratives.<sup>25</sup> This pattern of exchange, conflict, and reciprocity within the development of children’s literature is increasingly seen as more historically sensitive.

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<sup>22</sup> Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Gubar, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin, ‘Introduction’, *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices*, ed. Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 1–20, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, “Where You Cannot See to Read”: *Memorisation and Mental Space in the Work of Isaac Watts and Lewis Carroll* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, September 2015), pp. 242–43.

David Rudd describes the narrative of children's literature as a transition from instruction to delight as the result of an ideological struggle between female writers and male establishment figures.<sup>26</sup> However, these analyses leave scholars and readers with the same vocabulary with which to discuss eighteenth-century children's works: as didactic literature and/or moral tales. This somewhat impoverished vocabulary is only now being developed.<sup>27</sup> Instead, for years, many scholars have debated the merits of postcolonial-influenced readings of children's literature, which interpret children's books as acts of authorial aggression.

### **b. The Ethics of Children's Literature**

In *Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Literature*, Jacqueline Rose described children's literature as a site of power struggle and abuse. She compared children's literature to acts of colonisation on the part of adult writers, and declared children's literature a contradiction in terms:

The adult comes first [...] and the child comes after [...] neither of them enters the space in between.<sup>28</sup>

While subsequent scholars have criticised Rose's denial of a child's agency, her model of alterity, which pits the child against the adult, remains prevalent in children's literature scholarship. As David Rudd and Anthony Pavlik note, 'Rose's case does still haunt children's literature criticism.'<sup>29</sup> Recent attempts to provide productive models of understanding children and their engagements with children's literature include Rudd's Bakhtinian reading of the 'space in between' the child and the adult as a site

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<sup>26</sup> David Rudd, 'The Development of Children's Literature', *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. David Rudd (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 3–12, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Louise Joy and Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, 'Introduction', *The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry: A Study of Children's Verse in English*, ed. Louise Joy and Katherine Wakely-Mulroney (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> David Rudd and Anthony Pavlik, 'The (Im)Possibility of Children's Fiction: Rose Twenty-Five Years On', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 35 (2010), 223–229, p. 225.

facilitating border dialogue.<sup>30</sup> In a similar vein, Sebastien Chapleau theorises that children's literature enables acts of communication between the dichotomous groups of adults and children.<sup>31</sup> While these images of communication provide a more positive model for understanding children's books, they are fundamentally based on concepts of alterity between adults and children, implying that educative children's literature ultimately is an imposition of adult discourses upon unwitting child readers.

Recent alternative paradigms seeking to resolve the ethical dilemma of reading children's literature as an 'imposition' upon child readers focus on ideas of 'kinship'.<sup>32</sup> Murah Gubar posits that 'kinship' models emphasise the common experience of temporality shared by children and adults.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Clementine Beauvais discusses children's literature with a focus on the temporality of child and adult readers. She theorises that in children's literature, the child reader is treated as a project in whom adults invest their hopes and fears. Beauvais locates in the futurity of children a 'might' in which the child's 'unrealised' time provides a richer currency than an experienced adult's 'realised' time.<sup>34</sup> However, Beauvais's model is constructed largely for secular twentieth-century texts, and does not adequately account for eighteenth-century didactic texts, which almost universally contain a Christian ethos and vision of eternity. Beauvais implies there is something akin to a death-drive in children's literature, as the child's gaze 'fixes' the adult, making children 'symbolic killers' of adult figures.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, Beauvais's model of temporality sees death as the ultimate end. By contrast, many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century didactic children's texts express an implicit or explicit hope in eternity. This extra dimension of non-chronological time emphasises that adult paternalism over young children is temporal.

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<sup>30</sup> David Rudd, 'Children's Literature and the Return to Rose', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 35 (2010), 290–310, p. 294.

<sup>31</sup> Sebastien Chapleau, 'Alterity and the Production of Books for Children: A Linguistic Approach', *Changing Concepts of Childhood and Children's Literature*, ed. Vanessa Joosen and Katrien Vloeberghs (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 45–53.

<sup>32</sup> See forthcoming book, *Intergenerational Solidarity in Children's Literature*, ed. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Zoe Jaques (Missouri: University of Missouri, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Murah Gubar, 'The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies', *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8 (2016), 291–310, pp. 299–300.

<sup>34</sup> Clémentine Beauvais, *The Mighty Child: Time and power in children's literature* (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015), pp. 18–19.

<sup>35</sup> Beauvais, pp. 207–09.

This transforms educative eighteenth-century children's books into dynamic expressions of futuristic hopes and anxieties. Crucially for this thesis, however, Beauvais identifies the centrality of temporality in navigating ideas about childhood agency. This temporal awareness coheres with eighteenth-century concepts of the subjective child as a future citizen.

Reclaiming a future-oriented teleology within a temporal framework is the foundation of eighteenth-century concepts of government, and shapes eighteenth-century concepts of the child's agency. Political theorists frequently invoked models of the family to describe or analyse civil government structures and power relationships. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes claimed that paternalism, the 'right of dominion by generation,' was proof of the 'contract' between a governor and the one governed.<sup>36</sup> In his words, children consent to obey their parents, 'either [by] express, or by other sufficient arguments declared,' making obedience 'an act of the will' (*Leviathan* I.xiv, §24). Hobbes's influential parallel models of the parent-child and the governor-governed emphasise the agency of the governed. Locke and Rousseau echoed this model with mild variations. While Locke protested that 'paternal power' should be understood as 'parental power,' promoting a more democratic (and potentially feminist) model of social formation, Locke maintained Hobbes's analogy between the family and wider social governmental structures (*STG*, §53). As Locke wrote, parental authority within the nursery is inherently temporal:

Children [...] are not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it. [...] The bonds of this subjection are like the swaddling clothes [...] age and reason as they grow up, loosen them, till at length they drop quite off. [...]  
[Parents] inform the mind, and govern the actions of their yet ignorant nonage, till reason shall take its place (*STG*, §55; §58).

Locke describes adult guidance as swaddling, emphasising the limited time period in which adults possess the educational and moral authority to guide children. He

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), II, xx, §4. Cited in-text as *Leviathan*.

indicates that the natural and right consequence of adult influence is that children should develop an adult capacity to make decisions, suggesting a shared teleology between children and adults. Locke's prepositions are carefully chosen. Though infants are not born 'in' this state of equality, they grow 'to' it. The initially vertical relationship of power structure changes shape, as children have their own 'property,' a word that implies a child's legal and moral rights (*STG*, §44). In *The Second Treatise of Government*, the teleology of a child enables an ontological similarity with a child's parents, as the process of maturation significantly alters the power relationship between the governor and the governed.

Several decades later, Rousseau extended Locke's concept of shared teleology between adult and children, suggesting an ontological similarity between adults and children. Rousseau asserted, 'no man has any natural authority over his fellow man, and [since] force produces no right, there remain only conventions as the basis of all legitimate authority among men.'<sup>37</sup> His image of a convention between the governed and the governor suggests a fundamental parity between parent and child as participants in a meeting. This suggestion is made explicit when he describes how the 'natural bond' between a parent and child dissolves when the child's survival no longer depends upon his or her parents (*Social Contract*, p. 132). Although more extreme in its republicanism, this image bears resemblance to Locke's assertion that individuals possess innate 'property.' The assumption that young children held a form of temporally compromised but innate agency underlay both Locke's and Rousseau's concepts of the child. Hence, understanding these contemporaneous models of childhood, and philosophical conceptualisations of the temporality of humanity, enables a deeper understanding of children's literature as an act of temporary government, rather than an aggressive act of colonialism.

### **c. Children's Literature and the Rise of the Middle Class**

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<sup>37</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 4, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, translated by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters, and Christopher Kelly (Dartmouth College, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), p. 134. Cited in-text as *Social Contract*.

In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* Andrea Immel claims, ‘of all the new markets for print that emerged between 1695 and 1833, the one for rising generations of young readers was arguably among the most important to Great Britain’s polite and commercial society.’<sup>38</sup> Her statement gestures toward the third key approach to children’s literature, which studies children’s literature as a product of socio-cultural developments. This approach characterises the work of J. H. Plumb, John Morgenstern and Andrew O’Malley,<sup>39</sup> and is an assumption underlying Matthew Grenby’s historical studies of children’s literature. These studies focus on the production and dissemination of eighteenth-century children’s books in relation to middle-class British consumer culture, and examine these books’ recurring themes of economic prudence and social benevolence. This shifts the focus of children’s literary studies from the rise of Victorian fantasy, back to the mid-eighteenth century, a time period especially important for the codification of children’s literature as a print category.

This approach to Western children’s books emphasises the close association between children’s literature and the formation of middle-class ideologies. O’Malley notes that children’s books and the children’s literature industry were crucial in disseminating middle-class ideologies of prudence and benevolence.<sup>40</sup> As Grenby’s survey of surviving eighteenth-century British children’s books suggests, the moral tale protagonists were frequently middle-class citizens, and, by the end of the eighteenth century, over 50% of children’s book consumers came from the upper-middle class.<sup>41</sup> Subsequent studies of the commercialisation of children’s literature include Dennis Denisoff’s *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, where Denisoff asserts that ‘new notions of the child and childhood helped nourish a society defined by desire and consumption,’ where children ‘functioned [...] as proof that middle-class materialist

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<sup>38</sup> Andrea Immel, ‘Specialist Markets: Children’s Books and School Books’, *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. Michael F. Suarez, SJ and Michael L. Turner, vol. 5 (1695–1833), 736–749, p. 736.

<sup>39</sup> J. H. Plumb, ‘The New World of Children in Eighteenth-century England’, *Past and Present* 67 (1974), 64–95; John Morgenstern, ‘The Rise of Children’s Literature Reconsidered’, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 26 (2001), 64–73; Andrew O’Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children’s Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> O’Malley, p. 56, pp. 57–58, pp. 104–05.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Grenby, *The Child Reader 1700–1840* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 73–74, p. 82.

ventures were assisting in the formation of a more ethical society.<sup>42</sup> The concept that the children's book is an object from the commercial world allows scholars to study the ways in which literary depictions of virtue consolidated middle-class commercial virtues. From a material cultural historical perspective, Teresa Michals suggests that toys and games 'helped children develop a sense of private property' in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Britain by virtue of being physical, purchasable objects.<sup>43</sup> This sense of private property was inflected by middle-class moral ideals of temperance and benevolence. Eighteenth-century children's games included E. Wallis's *Explanation to the Mirror of Truth. A New Game*, an early version of snakes and ladders, where 'ladders' were historical figures known for specific virtues, enabling the player to move forward several places, and 'snakes' were moral vices such as ingratitude, which forced the player to skip a turn or move back several places.<sup>44</sup> Grenby's uncontroversial claim that children's culture, 'at least for the middle and upper classes, had become largely commoditised by the end of the century' is the basis for historical-cultural studies of eighteenth-century children's books.<sup>45</sup> Thus far, this approach has favoured bibliographic studies, with few scholars performing close readings of texts or genre studies. S. Roscoe, for instance, claims that John Newbery's greatest achievement was not that he created a distinctive form of juvenile literature, but rather, that Newbery made juvenile literature a 'permanent and profitable market.'<sup>46</sup> This focus on the book market provides an important backdrop to studies of eighteenth-century children's literature, but does not allow detailed formulations of the literature produced in that period.

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<sup>42</sup> Dennis Denisoff, 'Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child', *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. Dennis Denisoff, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 1–26, pp. 1–3.

<sup>43</sup> Teresa Michals, 'Experiments before Breakfast: Toys, Education and Middle-Class Childhood', *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. Dennis Denisoff, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 29–42, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> E. Wallis, *Explanation to the Mirror of Truth. A New Game*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Printed for J and E. Wallis, n.d.).

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Grenby, 'Children, Childhood, and Children's Culture', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2006), 313–319, p. 319.

<sup>46</sup> S. Roscoe, *John Newbery and his Successors, 1740–1814: A Bibliography* (Herts: Five Owls Press, 1973), pp. 8–9.

This does not negate the scholarly possibilities enabled by this historical-culture approach. When justifying the narrative that British children's literature developed in correlation with British middle-class culture, Ludmilla Jordanova wrote: 'Hostility to the overindulgence of the wealthy and the neglect and deprivation of the poor serves to clear a middle ground for the moderate, rational treatment of children.'<sup>47</sup> Jordanova's phrase, 'the moderate, rational treatment of children,' allows us to question how ideals of moderation and rationality were composed in children's books. Returning to the London booksellers in 1778, we see that Beecroft's *Infant's Miscellany* emphasised the power of moderation to reshape the implied child reader's internal values: the book should 'controul / Each wayward passion of the soul' (*Infant's Miscellany*, pp. 58–59). By contrast, in Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*, Charles is surprisingly uncontrolled. He wanders around the house and occasionally distracts Mamma from her activities. Yet in another sense, his mental activity is directed, or controlled, as Mamma encourages Charles to observe and reflect upon his surroundings. Moderation adopts a different guise in *Lessons for Children*. Moderation is expressed in the exercise of rational inquiry in the context of an affectionate domestic familial space. This location of rationality within a sympathetic familial space is central to the conversational primer, which adopts a stance of normative hope concerning its implied child readers' rational and affectionate capacities.

#### **d. Conversational Primers and a Rational Dissenter's Hope**

Thus far I have highlighted the limitations of employing scholarly paradigms that define didactic eighteenth-century texts as precursors to children's fantasy novels; or as a form of ethical abuse, in which knowing adult authors impose knowledge upon unwilling child readers. I have also gestured toward more productive attempts to contextualise children's literature in eighteenth-century Britain. My thesis unpacks the ways in which the socio-historical *milieus* in which literary forms find their being and influence the content and structure of those literary forms. In accordance with Andrew

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<sup>47</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Child Labour', *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10 (1987), 189–199, p. 191.

O'Malley's study, this thesis locates children's literature in the codification of British middle-class culture. Significantly, it locates in late-eighteenth century British children's literature the dissemination of Rational Dissenting values within British middle-class children's culture. O'Malley compellingly described late-eighteenth century British middle-class culture as 'oppositional', established in distinction from the extravagant aristocracy and the ostensibly undeserving poor.<sup>48</sup> However, where O'Malley concurred with J. H. Plumb's claim that Radical Dissenting literature was largely absorbed within British middle-class values of 'sobriety, obedience, industry, thrift, [and] benevolence,'<sup>49</sup> this study posits that the discursive oppositional values of Rational Dissent directly impacted the form and content of Barbauld's conversational primer, affecting the shape and tone of British middle-class children's culture.

My analysis of Anna Letitia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* as a text structured around Rational Dissenting philosophies and principles coheres with Martin's emphasis on the practical nature of hope as a means by which individuals justify their actions to pursue a desired but unrealised goal. For Barbauld, this goal encompassed the cultivation of a conversational society capable of socio-political reformation. Barbauld's experience as a member of the 'family' at the Warrington Academy of Rational Dissent nourished her belief that familial conversations could reform the masculine world of public power. She grew up in a community that asserted a structural link between the domestic family and the civic sphere of middle-class education and commerce. The terminology of the academy-family suggested a network of interpersonal relationships, strengthened through shared faith, communal learning, and the prospect of business connections.<sup>50</sup> Dissenting attempts to synthesise these ideas included Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge's attempts to disseminate Dissenting ideas and practices beyond Dissenting communities using the print market. Watts and Doddridge circulated practical devotionals addressed to non-scholarly readers.<sup>51</sup> Such was the popularity and influence of these devotionals that, by the mid-

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<sup>48</sup> O'Malley, pp. 3–6.

<sup>49</sup> Plumb p. 69; O'Malley, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Tessa Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent 1720–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> Whitehouse, pp. 129–31.

eighteenth century, practical devotional books were *passé*. As Isabel Rivers notes, practical divinity sought to transcend their existence as idealised texts and ‘become a motivating force in its reader’s life.’<sup>52</sup> Although non-doctrinal in its content, *Lessons for Children* participated in this Dissenting literary tradition of seeking to become a ‘motivating force’ in readers’ lives. It invites child and adult readers to transpose the text onto their personal surroundings; to embody the words of the text’s speakers; and to internalise the text’s ideological resistance against arbitrary power claims.

While the belief in the right to disagree was not isolated to Dissenters,<sup>53</sup> it formed an ideological point of unity between various Dissenting groups. This ideological point of unity is significant, for Dissenting groups often lacked points of theological or political unity. Any non-Anglican (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or non-Christian) was a Dissenter, and even within Protestant Dissent individuals held a range of theological convictions, ranging from Calvinism to Unitarianism. Although Joseph Priestley exaggerated ‘only a little’ when he declared, ‘I never expect to see Dissenters agree,’<sup>54</sup> due to the range of theological and political positions that a Dissenter could hold, being a Dissenter generated the same socio-political consequences. Dissenters could not run for government or vote in elections, and were excluded from Establishment-affiliated institutions including Oxford and Cambridge. As it is more pertinent to talk about what Dissent meant to individuals, this thesis primarily uses the term ‘Rational Dissent’ in reference to Anna Letitia Barbauld’s *Rational Dissent*.

Rational Dissent provided the foundation for Barbauld’s belief that free inquiry was most productive when limited by the boundaries of social sympathy. Barbauld valued people’s ability to think critically, and supported educational methods that

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<sup>52</sup> Isabel Rivers, ‘Dissenting and Methodist books of practical divinity’, in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 127–163, p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing 1790–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> William McCarthy, ‘How Dissent made Anna Letitia Barbauld, and what she made of Dissent’, in *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740–1860*, ed. Felicity James and Ian Inkster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 52–69, p. 55.

trained children to evaluate claims from multiple perspectives.<sup>55</sup> However, she believed that the purpose of inquiry and disagreement was to produce social harmony, for she saw humans as fundamentally communal beings. She therefore affirmed the benefits of teaching a child with a predisposition toward or against practices and opinions based on the value of respect for others ('Prejudice', p. 335–37).

Barbauld's *Rational Dissent* defined affection as the seat of learning and the goal of inquiry, a vision she articulated in *Thoughts on Devotional Taste, and on the Establishment of Sects*. Her pamphlet characterises the spirit of inquiry as one of 'deep humility, unaffected earnestness, and a ferocious attention to every argument that may be offered,' in contrast to a disputatious spirit with its 'fondness for controversy, [...] with an aptness to call in question the most established human truths.'<sup>56</sup> Barbauld promoted limited inquiry as the right method for seeking spiritual devotion. She rejected attempts to debate the attributes and existence of a Deity—making it difficult to determine her ideas about the attributes of the potentially non-Trinitarian Deity she worshipped. Instead, she defined the boundaries of ideal limited inquiry. Ideal inquiry accepted 'the most established human truths' yet produced questioning individuals able to contemplate others' perspectives. Individuals with 'deep humility' and 'ferocious attention', Barbauld implies, would be more likely to listen to the voices of others. True inquiry, then, has a social gaze that respects and listens to others. The implicit corollary is that a collective of individuals who are open to the contemplation of alternate perspectives may facilitate the reformation of social values in a period of 'reasoning and examination' ('Devotional Taste', p. 224).

By implication, social reformation was generated by a conversation of ideas. This vision resonates with Barbauld's experience of growing up in the Warrington Academy, which was formed around a 'collaborative, egalitarian ethos.'<sup>57</sup> Barbauld's children's books implicitly hope that the books may enable unknown readers to

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<sup>55</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, 'On Prejudice', in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry & Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 333–345. Cited in-text as 'Prejudice.'

<sup>56</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, 'Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, On Sects, and On Establishments', *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 209–233, p. 214. Cited in-text as 'Devotional Taste.'

<sup>57</sup> Scott T. Krawczyk, *Romantic Collaboration: Familial Authorship from Barbauld to Shelley* (Unpublished PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2004), p. 16, p. 44.

transpose Barbauld's experiences of critical conversation within an affectionate familial community onto their lives. This impersonal hope was based on Barbauld's normative hope in print culture participants as individuals within affectionate familial communities. Jon Mee has written extensively on the value Rational Dissenters placed on the ability to assess multiple perspectives,<sup>58</sup> and Michèle Cohen notes that this right was extended to children.<sup>59</sup> The Warrington association between familial culture and intellectual rigour created an 'intimate sphere' in which the potentially austere civic Dissenting values of rational enquiry were softened by the sensibility and domesticity of the family.<sup>60</sup> Warrington provided an intellectual-familial climate where a young Anna Letitia felt comfortable interrupting her father in the middle of a theological debate, and was rewarded for her observational skills rather than berated for pertness.<sup>61</sup> In a similar way, *Lessons for Children*, along with Barbauld's other children's books, provides literary space for child characters' speech and observations.

This thesis examines the textual characteristics that facilitate the interaction of impersonal and normative hope within the conversational primer. These features include the figure of the parent-author, whose book is presented as the product of personal experience, which may be applied by real-life readers. There is also the identifiable structure of conversational exchanges between a mother and child. In these interactions, the textual content is composed solely by the characters' speech, rendering inaccessible the fictional characters' inner consciousness. This literary act invites children to learn using sensory experiences in everyday domestic settings and to embody the speakers in an interactive and performative reading practice. This thesis examines how authors of subsequent conversational primers used similar justificatory methods, thereby establishing the conversational primer as a genre.

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<sup>58</sup> Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 115–24.

<sup>59</sup> Michèle Cohen, 'The pedagogy of conversation in the home: "familiar conversation" as a pedagogical tool in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England', *Oxford Review of Education* 41 (2015), 1–17, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> William McCarthy relates this incident in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 32.

There are many difficulties with handling the term ‘genre.’ For one thing, the word was not in use in the eighteenth century. Moreover, critics like Rick Altman have problematized the way ‘Genres [are] [...] treated as if they spring full-blown from the head of Zeus.’<sup>62</sup> Altman compellingly criticises ahistorical definitions of genre as a fixed concept, suggesting that genres are formed in the interaction between generic forms, audience desires, and subsequent institutional (in Altman’s case study, Hollywood-based) accommodations.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, this thesis uses the term ‘genre’ in the tradition of genre theorists such as Ralph Cohen, who describe genre as a system, rather than a fixed concept.<sup>64</sup> The instability of genres has caused discomfort with the term, as is suggested by Alastair Fowler’s titular preference for the term ‘Kinds’ of literature.<sup>65</sup> However, Fowler’s substitution of the term ‘genre’ with ‘kind’ does not undermine his description of genre as a function that establishes expectations and influences reader interactions with texts.<sup>66</sup> Fowler’s framework affirms the fluidity of texts, and hence, of genres. The evidence Fowler cites for the evolutionary ‘states’ of generic development include authorial statements and formal choices; contemporaneous textual practices; and initial critics’ comments.<sup>67</sup> This thesis borrows Fowler’s conceptualisation of genre as a system regulating and affecting readers’ expectations. It analyses authorial prefaces in combination with the content of conversational primers to study how the conversational primer became a genre in the British children’s literature market.

### **e. Chapter Overview**

Chapter One examines the children’s literature landscape in Britain preceding the publication of Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*. As Grenby notes, ‘very few commentators

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<sup>62</sup> Rick Altman, ‘A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre’, *Cinema Journal* 23 (1984), 6–18, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Altman, pp. 12–15.

<sup>64</sup> Ralph Cohen, ‘History and Genre’, *New Literary History*, 17 (1986), 203–218, p. 207.

<sup>65</sup> Alistair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)

<sup>66</sup> Fowler, pp. 50–57.

<sup>67</sup> Fowler, p. 52.

sought to impose an upper age limit on the use of children's books.'<sup>68</sup> Indeed, as Michals identifies, individuals' awareness of their own age was a largely eighteenth-century development.<sup>69</sup> Age-levelled books for child readers were not popular until the 1780s. *Lessons for Children Aged Two to Three Years* (1778) was one of the first books to identify the ages of its implied readers. Chapter One analyses how late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century children's books characterised different implied child readers. It identifies four kinds of child readers addressed in these books: the juvenile reader of indeterminate age; the ageless child in need of education and maturation; the child as spiritual guide; and the potentially ungovernable child. The second and fourth implied child readers may be described as Lockean children requiring guidance, while the third implied child reader appears to be a Rousseauvian child embodying the ontological ideal of humanity—yet to use these labels overlooks the nuance that exists in the different addresses used for these implied reading audiences. Hence, this chapter discusses concepts of implied child readers, as identified by the narrator's address. The end of the chapter discusses how Daniel Defoe's child reader *The Family Instructor* influenced the depiction of child readers in Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*.

Chapter Two analyses how Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* made the mundane marketable, featuring the conversations between a mother and her young child (aged two to three years) participating in everyday domestic activities. Barbauld infuses the quotidian with a sense of wonder by showing how mundane objects encompass complex scientific, social, and symbolic structures upon which society functions. This chapter uses spatial theory to examine how Barbauld creates abstract spaces for adult-child interaction by depicting conversations with unidentified adult and child speakers. This chapter also uses spatial theory to analyse how Barbauld invokes abstract places that can be mapped onto implied readers' concrete surroundings through her evocative but geographically vague descriptions of domestic and rural locations. The chapter examines how Barbauld composed her book to invite a particular reading experience, where the book facilitates affectionate adult-child interactions, transforms

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<sup>68</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, p. 11, p. 51.

<sup>69</sup> Teresa Michals, *Books for Children, Books for Adults: Age and the Novel from Defoe to James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 6.

learning into an associative activity, and places the mother-child relationship at the basis of social (re)formation.

Chapter Three explores how the ‘form’ of relational, domestic knowledge codified in *Lessons for Children* facilitated the development of the conversational primer. Critics have identified a distinct brand of age-targeted ‘rational’ books for child readers that foregrounded the books’ mimetic and pragmatic conventions,<sup>70</sup> but as of yet, no one has comprehensively studied the books’ shared textual and material features. This chapter examines how contemporaneous children’s authors and critics invoked *Lessons for Children* as a prototype and benchmark for educative children’s books. It analyses authorial prefaces in books that assert their kinship with *Lessons for Children*, and explores the content and form of books that feature parent-child conversations in routine daily situations. By combining close readings with comparative studies, this chapter argues how the conversational primer developed as a distinct genre in British children’s literature. This indicates the need to foreground the importance of Rational Dissent in the historical landscape of children’s literary developments, and allows for a more specific discussion of mothers’ contributions to late-eighteenth-century children’s literature.

Thus, Chapter Four places *Lessons for Children* within the context of Barbauld’s more overtly Rational Dissenting works. It analyses the points of continuity between *Lessons for Children*, *Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Evenings at Home for Children* within the context of Barbauld’s essays on education and Rational Dissent. In doing so, this chapter explores how Barbauld’s values of Rational Dissent allowed her to create a type of children’s literature based around the nascent subjectivity and rationality of the socially oriented child. By reading Barbauld’s children’s literature as the basis from which to extrapolate these concepts, the chapter suggests that Barbauld’s Rational Dissent influenced the popularity of conversation as a pedagogical method in children’s books, and helped create rational sensibility—as distinct from sentimentality—as a form of knowledge.

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<sup>70</sup> Müller, pp.17–30.

Chapter Five theorises why the conversational primer failed to evolve in the nineteenth century. It contrasts the conversational primer's mode of engaging readers through implied interactive and performative reading practices, with nineteenth-century authorial techniques of engaging readers through reader-character identification methods. This latter form of reader engagement increasingly became a feature in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century children's books. This chapter contrasts the textualisation of characters' interiorities with the script-like conversational primer, arguing that the literary constraints of the conversational primer marked it as a historically bound genre. This chapter further explores how the inextricable association between Barbauld and the time-bound form of the conversational primer limited cultural awareness of Barbauld's significance in the history of British children's literature.

The act of reading Barbauld's children's books, however, is characterised by immediacy rather than historical distance. On one level, the continuing significance of her work is obvious. No longer are five to nine year-olds considered the youngest book readers, as in Beecroft's *The Child's Miscellany*. The expectation that children will have contact with books by the age of two is a twenty-first century commonplace assumption, and children's books are a firmly established sector of the book market. When one opens the covers of *Lessons for Children*, Mamma's call, 'Come, let us go into the fields,' is ahistorical. The simple syntax and open invitation extends beyond Georgian Britain print culture into a contemporary abstract possibility. 'Us' can include any number of unnamed participants, and the nondescript 'fields' could be any field. The potential for implied mothers and child readers to bring Barbauld's book into personal spaces, and to use those spaces as sites of rational learning, is central the innovative aims and messages of Barbauld's children's books. These books helped reconceptualise notions of the literary capacity of the young reader. They forged, for a time, a distinctive and Rational Dissenting-based genre of British children's literature, creating space in the Georgian British children's literature market for the wide-scale publication of ostensibly private parent-child interactions.

## Chapter One

### Reading Children Before *Lessons for Children*

While meditating on ideal pedagogical methods, Isaac Watts suggested:

[W]here Time and Fortune allow it, young People should be led into Company at proper Seasons, should be carried abroad to see the Fields, and the Woods, and [...] Towns and Cities distant from their own Dwelling; they should be entertained with the Sight of strange Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Insects, Vegetables, and Productions both of Nature and Art of every Kind, whether they are the Products of their own or foreign Nations: And in due Time, where Providence gives Opportunity, they may travel under a wise Inspector or Tutor to different Parts of the World [...] that they may bring home Treasures of useful Knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Watts's programme echoes Locke and anticipates Rousseau in recommending an intimate, holistic, and immersive educational format. This *zeitgeist* of Enlightenment middle-class family values finds a literary realisation in *Lessons for Children*, in a medium accessible to child readers. Mamma walks Charles through the seasons of the year and through agricultural fields, culminating, in Part IV, in their journey to France in which Charles brings home 'Treasures of useful Knowledge.' Barbauld's book for young child readers features the same educational episodes and environments recommended in Watts's pedagogical manual. However, Watts's work was not intended for children's eyes. The concept of the reading child, and books for children, then, does not lie in the *content* of a children's book.

The answer to how concepts of the reading child were generically created lies in the mode of authorial address. As Barbara Wall notes,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind: Or, a supplement to The Art of Logick: Containing a Variety of Remarks and Rules for the Attainment and Communication of Useful Knowledge, in Religion, in the Sciences, and in Common Life* (London: printed for James Brackstone, 1741), p. 53.

If a story is written *to* children, then it is *for* children, even though it may also be for adults. [...] It is not what is said but the way it is said, and to whom it is said, which marks a book for children.<sup>2</sup>

This study builds on Wall's influential theory that children's literature is defined by the narrator's voice. As Wall identifies, address, or *voice*, is essential to the creation of children's fictional forms and genres. There are several voices at play in this process: that of the implied author, the fictional characters inside the text, and the relationships between both these voices and the ostensible voices of the book's implied readers. This study employs the terms 'authorial voice' and 'narrator's voice.' The former refers to the persona who speaks in the peritext of a book—in prefaces, dedications, and appendices.<sup>3</sup> The term 'narrator' refers to an omniscient speaker who frames a fictional story within the body of the narrative. While Wall's study focuses on fictional children's novels written after the eighteenth century, her insights into the operations of narrative voice and authorial address aid the study of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century children's books. As this chapter elaborates, the stances assumed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British children's authors indicate how different concepts of the child reader shaped the structure and content of the authors' respective children's books. This historically informed awareness of concepts of the child reader enables us to see how Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* built upon, and deviated from, pre-existing forms of children's books.

It is difficult to analyse eighteenth-century children's books using existing literary generic concepts. For instance, Peter Hunt's statement that children's books feature action rather than reflection equates narrative fiction with children's literature, an assumption that prevents him from theorising the development of distinct forms of didactic eighteenth-century children's books.<sup>4</sup> This study, by contrast, explores children's books that frequently lack narrative plots. It explores how such books' addresses to the 'child reader', both explicit and implicit, helped define the child's book as a print category.

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<sup>2</sup> Wall, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, *An Introduction*, p. 12.

The development of the British children's book influenced cultural definitions of the child's age and assumptions about the child's capacities. It is relatively uncontested that social concepts of the child have changed through history. While childhood historians may—and do—disagree with Philippe Ariès's suggestion that parental affection for young children is a largely post-Medieval phenomenon, Ariès's fundamental claim that notions of the age, social functions, and responsibilities of the child have evolved, remains pertinent.<sup>5</sup> It is in the particulars that Ariès's claims are most contentious. At one point he uses a thirteenth-century folk poem to prove that parents did not love their children, without considering the problem of the survival of evidence.<sup>6</sup> Ariès's assumption that one textual dismissal of a child's significance represents a wider cultural disregard for children is questionable. Indeed, it is impossible to talk about 'the' concept of a child, and hence, of the function of books for 'the child', as at any point in history there are competing concepts of what a child is, and what a child's book should be.

This chapter explores how five key concepts of the child reader, or at least, the non-adult reader, shaped the function and form of children's books from the 1670s to the 1760s. The first of these categories is that of the book for the juvenile reader: books like Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749) and Newbery's *Tom Telescope* books (1761). These books for juvenile readers were produced for literate youth on the cusp of assuming the socio-legal expectations that adulthood entailed. Juxtaposed to this was a concept of 'ageless child':<sup>7</sup> a reader defined not by age or socio-legal expectations, but by his or her state of ignorance. This ageless child reader is addressed by the Puritan writer John Bunyan in *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686), and in two less religiously-oriented books: the ironic cultural guidebooks *Gigantick Histories* (Thomas Boreman, 1740–42), and John Newbery's production, *The History of Goody Two-Shoes* (1765). Simultaneously, a notion existed of the child as a spiritual guide: a temporally young but spiritually authoritative figure. Youthful saints characterise James Janeway's popular work, *A Token for Children*

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<sup>5</sup>Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962); Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 2, p. 9–10.

<sup>6</sup>Ariès, p. 22; Orme's rebuttal, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Wakely-Mulroney, 'Where You Cannot See to Read', p. 29.

(1671–72). At the same time, the awareness that children were defined by their temporal youth produced another concept of the child as an individual requiring temporary governance. The child's youthfulness was seen as an opportunity to lead a child toward spiritual and social growth, but children's malleability also meant that poorly governed children could spiral into spiritual and social degeneration. The potentially ungovernable child in Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs* (c.1715) and Mary and Thomas Cooper's *The Child's New Play Thing* (1742) generates a measure of apprehension. Of course, these conceptualisations of the child as a potential reader, and as a literary object about which to read, were porous, not prescriptive. In the early eighteenth century an alternative literary depiction of the reading child emerged, incorporating elements of several of the above categories. Daniel Defoe's *The Family Instructor* (1715), while not directed at child readers, depicts a literate child as a rational and spiritual familial member, requiring careful, affectionate governance. It is in Defoe's child reader that the ancestry of Barbauld's fictional Charles may be most clearly traced.

Significantly, these concepts of child readers do not align with religious or secular views, nor even to denomination. Bunyan, Janeway, Watts, and Defoe can all be classified as Evangelical Dissenters, and more specifically as Puritan Dissenters. This myriad of attitudes concerning the figure of the child, and hence the reading child, affected the functions and forms of children's books. This chapter unpacks the ways in which the multiplicity of ideologies of the child and forms of children's literature in Britain created a literary environment that enabled Barbauld, in 1778, to produce *Lessons for Children* and generate the conversational primer.

### **a. The Juvenile Reader**

Some of the earliest children's books were addressed to youths on the cusp of assuming the socio-cultural and legal obligations of adulthood. The genre of the conduct book is perhaps the most well known of such books. Less numerous but arguably as influential were fictional stories that centred upon the education and recreational activities of school pupils. These texts formed an important bridge in

the move from the conduct book to educational fictional books produced for young readers. One of the earliest and most seminal novels in this regard is Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; Or, The Little Female Academy. Calculated for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Ladies in their Education* (1749).<sup>8</sup> Fielding's book features students between the ages of five and fourteen, suggesting a wide sweep of ages in the term 'young ladies.' At the end of *The Governess*, the oldest pupil, Jenny Peace, leaves the academy. Jenny's departure suggests that the 'young lady' Fielding addresses is on the verge of adulthood: too young for marriage, but old enough to prepare for her imminent social responsibilities as the head of a domestic household.

Fielding slides between what Wall calls 'double' and 'dual' address, speaking alternately to adult and juvenile audiences, or writing for her juvenile readers but speaking 'over their shoulders' to a potential or implied adult reader.<sup>9</sup> This mode of address implies that ideal youthful readers will internalise the book's values of moderation and politeness, and will become adults capable of exercising restraint and behaving sociably. Fielding's dedication to Mrs Poyntz shows Fielding's awareness that adult guardians are the primary purchasers of books for children or youths. Her separate address to 'young readers' suggests that the book is designed for children who are similar in age to the characters depicted in the narrative (between five and fourteen years). At the same time, the narrative element that Fielding inscribes within *The Governess* implies that the accounts of the girls' meetings exist because they were written for and read by their teacher, Mrs Teachum. This facilitates a dual address in which Fielding presents the narrative as an instructive transcript for a female educator, and as an exemplary tale of reconciliation for schoolgirls.. The slippage between double and dual address suggests that Fielding conceived of juvenile readers as malleable individuals whose teleology was to become like the adults around them, an achievement that could be facilitated by reading Fielding's juvenile book.

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Fielding, *The Governess; Or, The Little Female Academy. Calculated for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Ladies in their Education. The Fifth Edition. Revised and Corrected* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1768). Cited in-text as *The Governess*.

<sup>9</sup> Wall, pp. 21–22.

In line with this vision of social conformity, Fielding's narrator encourages her readers to perceive reading as an activity that may foster respectful and harmonious relationships within the domestic sphere. In the Introduction, the narrator tells an illustrative Aesopian fable in which the birds ask a magpie to teach them how to build a nest. However, the birds interject so frequently that the magpie cannot teach them, and not a single bird can replicate the magpie's nest. Fielding explains the birds' folly: 'instead of trying to learn what the *Pye* told them, they would boast of knowing more already' (*The Governess*, p. vi). This *epimythium* invites readers to consider how this lesson in humility may be applied in their daily lives, providing Fielding's vision of the function of reading. It is easy to criticise Fielding's apparent insistence that a fable has one specific meaning, 'the' reason. However, Fielding is not making this claim. Later in the book, the exemplary student Jenny Peace affirms the veracity of multiple responses to the fairy tale about Princess Hebe. Instead of invalidating multiple responses to a text, Fielding's introductory claim is that stories have a socially functional purpose. In a retrospective reading, Fielding's *epimythium* suggests that reading may generate humility, teaching readers to listen to and consider the words of another. Such humility enables people to build 'Nests.'

Fielding's narrator thus suggests that moral virtue is defined by its social outcomes. The image of nest building reveals Fielding's vision of female readers effecting change in the domestic sphere, the 'Nest'. Subsequently, Arlene Fish Wilner has scathingly claimed that *The Governess* anticipates 'Rousseau's decorative, compliant, and self-effacing Sophie.'<sup>10</sup> *The Governess* certainly celebrates domesticity, and the girls' education is barely depicted in the text. However, Wilner's critique overlooks the fact that Fielding's vision of social reformation begins with the domestic sphere and moves outward. After the fable, Fielding tells the story of Miss Hannah and Miss Fanny, two disorganised girls whose punishment is to be left at home; a punishment that prevents the girls from participating in wider society (*The Governess*, p. viii). Fielding's interpolated fable and moral tale depict a movement from the home outward. They express an eighteenth-century paradigm that celebrated domesticity as a form of female

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<sup>10</sup> Arlene Fish Wilner, 'Education and Ideology in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 24 (1995), 307–327, p. 308.

empowerment.<sup>11</sup> This paradigm asserted that women could reform the cultural tone by encouraging men in their familial and kinship circles to adopt female values and practices of politeness in positions of public authority.

In *The Governess*, the girls at Mrs Teachum's school construct a harmonious society by reading and discussing texts together. The narrative begins with the girls' fractious fight over an apple. This fight evokes connotations of the Fall and suggests that one of the primary outcomes of human sin is a fractured society. To restore friendship amongst the students, Jenny Peace inaugurates a pattern of community-formation through storytelling. She shares her autobiographical confession, providing a spiritual intensity to the acts of reading and friendship formation. The rest of the novel demonstrates Fielding's belief that reading is instrumental in creating social communities shaped by respect. The plot revolves around the girls' successive meetings in the arbor as they share their spiritual confessions and read stories, discussing which virtues and moral principles to glean from these acts of storytelling and story making.

*The Governess* implies that the longevity of communities of relational readers depends upon interactions between adult and youth readers. Interaction in a shared physical environment, however, is not forced prematurely. Initially, Mrs Teachum's relationship with her students' reading group is mediated through Jenny Peace. Early in the narrative, Mrs Teachum realises that her presence 'at those Relations [in the arbor] might be a Balk to the Narration... She would have [Jenny] get the Lives of her Companions in Writing' (*The Governess*, p. 47). As verb, 'relations' describes the girls' confessional self-narrations, and as a noun it describes the outcome of those self-narrations: the formation of community. That Mrs Teachum thinks of her pupils as 'Companions', a term implying partnership, if not equality, reveals a future-oriented vision of what it means to be a 'young lady.' The emphasis is on the promise of what the 'young lady' will become—an

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<sup>11</sup> Susan J. Wolfson, "'Domestic Affections" and "the spear of Minerva": Felicia Hemans and the Dilemma of Gender', *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776–1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 128–170, p. 129; Mary, Hilton, *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young: Education and Public Doctrine in Britain 1750–1850* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p. 39; Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The most public sphere of all: the family' *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700–1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 239–256.

accomplished and responsible social participant. To this end, Mrs Teachum requests Jenny to record her classmates' confessions so that Mrs Teachum may participate in the storytelling from a distance. The girls' written confessions become, in some senses, a means of surveillance. Judith Burdan interprets this as a process of subjection,<sup>12</sup> but these written narratives also bridge the power gap between student and teacher. The written version of the girls' confessions creates a reading space in which the authoritative adult, Mrs Teachum, is transformed into a receptive reader. Simultaneously, the relatively disempowered students assume the authoritative role as primary speakers. In this space, the girls' confessions become expressions of textual power and vocalisations of self-identity. Moreover, the stories enable Mrs Teachum to listen to her students' personal stories, giving her the opportunity to sympathise with the girls to an extent that could not be achieved were she physically present as an authoritative teacher. The success of this companionship between juvenile and adult readers is celebrated when Mrs Teachum finally joins the girls in the arbor, and they read and discuss a play together. This suggests that juvenile readers and adult readers should only read together once juvenile readers can comprehend their futurity as adults and can view adult readers as friends. At the close of the novel, the reading communities at Mrs Teachum's school gain a lasting reputation, suggesting that Fielding envisioned communal reading as a method for creating communities characterised by respectful affection.

The juvenile reader is, in *The Governess*, on the cusp of youth and adulthood. Implied readers' ages are suggested by the fact that most of Fielding's pupils are aged between ten and fourteen years. However, Polly Suckling is merely five years old. Her infantile age and name suggests a breadth to the identity of the juvenile reader. This breadth of age of the juvenile reader is also present in John Newbery's 1761 production, *The Newtonian System or Philosophy; Adapted to the Capacities of young Gentlemen and Ladies, and familiarized and made entertaining by Objects with which they are intimately acquainted [...] collected and methodized for the Benefit of the Youth of these*

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Burdan, 'Girls Must Be Seen and Heard: Domestic Surveillance in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 19 (1994), 8–14, pp. 10–12.

*Kingdoms*.<sup>13</sup> On one hand, Newbery's 'young Gentlemen and Ladies' are defined by their age; they are of age to attend school and participate in evening social visits. However, a closer reading implies that Newbery's 'young gentlemen and ladies' are defined primarily by their status as the socially elite. The book opens in Lady Twilight's home, and several lectures take place in Mr Setstar's home, a mansion with a private observatory containing 'proper instruments' such as telescopes and other scientific implements that could only be owned by wealthy members of society (*Tom Telescope*, p. 4). Tom Telescope illustrates complex scientific concepts using objects with which young children could be familiar, for instance, using a spinning top to discuss the relationship between friction and movement. This content implies that children young enough to play with spinning tops could be old enough to learn these scientific principles. Moreover, the frontispiece implies that the children for whom this book was written could be quite young. A physically diminutive child, presumably the eminent Tom Telescope, stands on a table, expatiating to his listeners, among whom are parents and young children. Addresses to a 'Young gentlemen and lady', then, would appear to encompass very young children.

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<sup>13</sup> Anon, *The Newtonian System or Philosophy; Adapted to the Capacities of young Gentlemen and Ladies, and familiarized and made entertaining by Objects with which they are intimately acquainted: Being the Substance of Six Lectures read to the Lilliputian Society, by Tom Telescope, A. M. collected and methodized for the Benefit of the Youth of these Kingdoms* (London: John Newbery, 1761). Cited in-text as *Tom Telescope*.

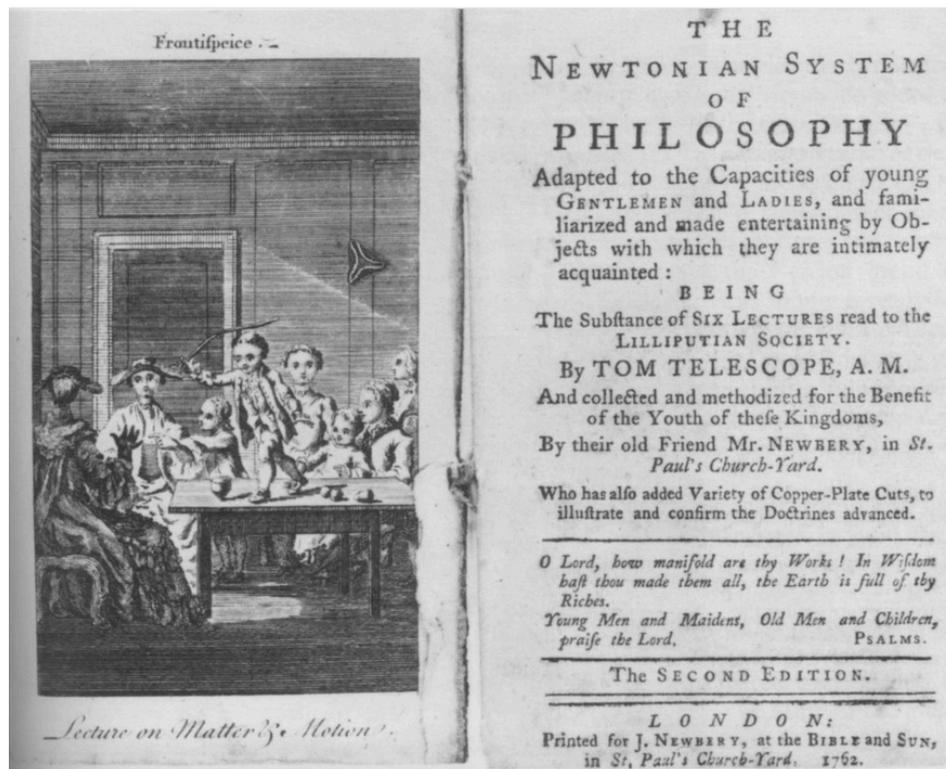


Fig 1.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the confusion of terminology and age identification remained with relation to ‘young gentlemen’ and ‘young ladies’. In 1826, nearly half a century later, Lucy Aikin edited *A Legacy for Young Ladies*, a collection of unpublished manuscripts written by the late Anna Letitia Barbauld.<sup>15</sup> Aikin’s collection demonstrates the on-going confusion of ideas regarding the age and expected reading abilities of ‘Young Ladies.’ At least one riddle-allegory, ‘The King in His Castle’, was directly addressed to a young child—specifically, to Lucy Aikin as a child. The piece purports to sympathise with Lucy as an outsider (and implied older sibling) to this ‘king,’ teasingly likening a toddler’s needs to the demands of an incompetent king. When metaphorically describing an infant’s legs as officers, Barbauld playfully half-complains, ‘these lazy porters are very apt to get their business done by deputy, and to have people to carry *them* about’ (*Legacy for Ladies*, p. 39), using humour that appeals to precocious children and to parents. Several letters, however, are written in a way that exceeds

<sup>14</sup> Image courtesy of the University of Oxford.

<sup>15</sup> Mrs [Anna Letitia] Barbauld, *A Legacy for Young Ladies*, ed. Lucy Aikin (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826), cited in-text as *Legacy for Ladies*.

the comprehension and enjoyment of young children. In ‘On the Classics’ and ‘The Uses of History’ Barbauld theorises the criteria that enable pieces of literature to endure through different ages and political regimes, and the moral uses to which the study of history may be directed. The manuscripts exist in the form of letters to Lydia Rickards, Barbauld’s one-time live-in pupil, dated from when Lydia was around sixteen years old.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to see which aspects of these letters would engage a young child’s attention. Moreover, some of the allegorical riddle-poems are sensual and sexually charged, directed to readers who have reached sexual awareness. Barbauld’s remonstrance to ‘Dear Miss D\*\*\*\*’ for indulging in too much sleep is one such instance:

When at length he has left you, do I not behold you languid, pale, bearing in your eyes and your whole carriage the marks of his power over you? When we parted last night, did not I see you impatient to sink into his arms? Have you never been caught reclined on his bosom, on a soft carpet of flowers, on the banks of a purling stream [...]? (‘Allegory on Sleep’, *Legacy for Ladies*, p. 215).

Barbauld’s elongated vowels and gentle fricative and approximant consonants lend aural sensuality to the image of a female charge reclining in her lover’s arms, charging the image of the ‘purling stream’ with sexual energy. It is difficult to imagine a young girl to whom ‘The King in His Castle’ is addressed reading and understanding ‘Dear Miss D\*\*\*\*.’

The ambiguous addresses to ‘young ladies’ and ‘young gentlemen’ of various ages in eighteenth century texts demonstrate the challenges of determining the characteristics of the not-adult reader. Sarah Fielding’s address to ‘young ladies’ presents the young ladies’ book as an exemplary model enabling girls to realise their social functions and opportunities as women. Understanding a ‘young lady’ or ‘young gentlemen’ in relation to their social context, however, meant that the address could be a hierarchical codification of the upper class, regardless of the individual’s social function or age. This is implied in Newbery’s *Tom Telescope* books. In the extreme case of Lucy Aikin’s posthumous collection of Anna Letitia

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<sup>16</sup> More information on these letters may be found in William McCarthy’s forthcoming Oxford edition of Barbauld’s works.

Barbauld's manuscripts, the phrase 'Young Ladies' denotes less a sense of a non-adult reader than it does a desire to act as an alliterative and recognisable literary marketing term associated with works that were, in some form, educational. In all cases, the idea of addressing a 'young' lady or gentlemen indicates the books' future-oriented purpose, in which the ladies and or gentlemen in question are 'filled' with knowledge or skills in order to prepare them to lead socially beneficial and virtuous lives. This notion of equipping or 'filling' the child reader shares deep affinities with another concept of a child reader: that of the ignorant reader as an ageless child.

### **b. The Ageless Child**

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known (1 Corinthians 13: 11–12, KJV).

When St Paul penned his 'Hymn to Love' in his first epistle to the first-century Corinthian church, he popularised a way of thinking about childhood as a state of ineptitude unbound by age markers. This equation of being a child with a state of childishness allows speakers to address children and adults as childish. To borrow Wall's phrase, this enables an authorial use of 'single address.'<sup>17</sup> It implies the possibility for both child-aged addressees and the childish adults to 'put away childish things' and enter adulthood, a state of metaphorical sight and knowledge. This is related to a fundamentally Christian conception of selfhood that insists upon the essential ontological sameness of children and adults, who find their ontological contrast in the eternal and perfect divine God. It is thus unsurprising to see the Calvinistic Puritan John Bunyan address his ageless child readers in this manner in *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686). However, this characterisation of childhood also underpins two popular eighteenth-century children's texts that are better known for *not* addressing matters of faith: Thomas Boreman's *Gigantick*

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<sup>17</sup> Wall, p. 32.

*Histories* (1740–42) and the anonymously authored *The History of Goody Two-Shoes* (1765). Thus the idea of ignorance as a mark of the child is not a purely theological concept, but a social construct that affected both religious and non-religious children's books.

*A Book for Boys and Girls: Or, Country Rhimes for Children* was one of the last of the forty-two works John Bunyan published before his death in 1688. It articulates the Calvinistic doctrines of Original Sin and human depravity, and insists upon the human need for salvation and forgiveness through God's grace. *A Book for Boys and Girls* is thematically consistent with Bunyan's better known works, the Calvinistic allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* and his spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). In his opening address to the reader, Bunyan draws attention to the full title of his work:

The Title-page will shew, if there thou look,  
 Who are the proper Subjects of this Book.  
 They're Boys and Girls of all Sorts and Degrees,  
 From those of Age, to Children on the Knees.  
 Thus comprehensive am I in my Notions;  
 They tempt me to it by their childish Motions.  
 We now have Boys with Beards, and Girls that be  
 Big as old Women, wanting Gravity.<sup>18</sup>

The inconsistent rhythm does not, initially, speak volumes for Bunyan's poetic ability. For instance, his preponderance of monosyllables can lead to an odd emphasis on 'all' in the third line. The playful but irregular rhythm created by interspersing polysyllables with monosyllabic words belies a want of poetic stability, creating an unintentional irony in Bunyan's condemnation of overgrown children wanting 'Gravity.' More conceptually, though, Bunyan's ill-fitting rhythms and rhymes support his claim that spiritual ignorance disrupts what is right and orderly. His distinction between 'those of Age, to Children on the Knees' implies that being a child is not defined by the biological limitations of temporal

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<sup>18</sup> John Bunyan, 'To the Reader', *A Book for Boys and Girls; Or, Country Rhimes for Children* (London: Printed for N. p, 1686), 1<sup>st</sup> ed. facsimile digitised by the University of Michigan, lines 1–7. Cited in-text as *Boys and Girls*.

youth. Rather, he describes ‘Boys with Beards, and Girls that be / Big as old Women,’ using plosive alliteration and irregular meter to indicate that a state of extended childhood is possible, but is transgressive and unnatural. Bunyan explicitly states that ageless children are ignorant, and ‘please themselves with childish Toys.’ He bemoans the fact that Christian ministers cannot adequately engage with their parishioners because they treat their congregation members as ‘not Boys but Men [...] / But hit them not ’cause they were Girls and Boys’ (‘To the Reader’, *Boys and Girls*, lines 20, 22.) The militaristic imagery and language establishes the argumentative tone of Bunyan’s book. He spends over seventy lines excoriating ‘Artificial Babes,’ (‘To the Reader’, *Boys and Girls*, line 96,) leaving a mere eleven lines to encourage children who are ‘in years but such’ to learn their alphabet (‘To the Reader’, *Boys and Girls*, line 95). This reinforces that his primary pedagogic vision is to facilitate his readers’ spiritual maturation. In these near-seventy lines (lines 23 until 95), Bunyan justifies his use of a ‘childish’ form to realise his pedagogical and didactic goal of leading spiritual children to maturity. He assumes a simultaneously apologetic and justificatory authorial posture that marks the majority of children’s books published in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Britain. Bunyan acknowledges that his work is (or is supposed to be) playful, rather than employing a more serious sermon-like form:

Wherefore good Reader, that I save them may,  
I now with them, the very *Dottril* play (‘To the Reader’, *Boys and Girls*, lines 27–28).

Bunyan differentiates his ‘good Reader’ from the overgrown children, ‘them,’ but simultaneously addresses his implied readers as children, either because of their age or their spiritual immaturity. As Bunyan declared in his opening lines, the ‘proper Subjects of his book’ are those who want ‘Gravity’—the spiritual implications of which are explained when Bunyan declares his aim to ‘save’ his readers, an invocation of the spiritual concept of salvation (and hence, spiritual maturity). It is unclear whom the subject is that Bunyan refers to as ‘Dottril.’ It may be Bunyan’s condemnation of his implied readers’ foolishness; it may refer to what Bunyan perceived as the simplistic nature of verse. Alternatively, it may

indicate Bunyan's awareness that he, as a preacher-author, is using a form that identifies him as a didactic playmate and writer of 'country rhymes,' a term connoting rural simplicity and a lack of cultural sophistication. In any case, 'dotril' suggests that Bunyan is accommodating his work for less sophisticated readers. This a distinct air of apophasis to his assertion,

Nor do I blush, although I think some may  
Call me a Baby, 'cause I with them play ('To the Reader', *Boys and Girls*, lines 33–34).

Although Bunyan insists that he need not be ashamed to use a format that he has deemed childish, his declaration begins with a negative, and he articulates in detail why he need not feel any shame. Six lines later, Bunyan invokes the apostolic tradition of St Paul to further account for his use of an ostensibly childish form, arguing that childish readers will respond more enthusiastically to a childish textual form, enabling a more effective communication of the important spiritual truths that Bunyan sought to impart. This authorial contortion and apophatic justification reveal Bunyan's fervent desire to teach children spiritual gravity and provide the possibility of salvation. This desire becomes the basis for Bunyan's 'justificatory rationale' to employ a mode of literary levity, rhyming couplets, which are designed to encourage readers to finish his work and memorise (and thereby internalise) its messages.<sup>19</sup> The poems in *A Book for Boys and Girls* speak to temporal and spiritual children with a single address and a single intention.

The first poem, 'The awakened Child's Lamentation' is the cry of an age-bound child who is aware of his or her sin. The ninth stanza contrasts the prayers of other children with the speaker's decision to play, and Bunyan's rhyming couplet 'played / strayed' suggests a Puritanical criticism of play as an expression of spiritual negligence. This ageless child's hope is found in spiritual salvation:

Lord: thou wast crucified  
For Sinners, bled and dyed ('Awakened Child', *Boys and Girls*, p. 5, stanza 23).

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<sup>19</sup> Martin, p. 62.

Bunyan summarises the doctrine of penal substitution in a neat couplet. He frames the words as a child's reflections. By articulating complex spiritual insights in simple language, he highlights the possibility that children may attain spiritual gravity. Yet the child's agelessness is implied by the poem's logic, which shows that a child's progression from childhood to sainthood is synonymous with growing in spiritual maturity. In stanza 27, the speaker bemoans that he has 'unfitted' his Soul for Heaven but expresses gratitude that God has extended 'pardon' to sinners in stanza 28. The closing rhyming couplet implies that the child speaker's identity depends on his or her status as a mortal human, a state that makes individuals dependent on the sustaining power of the divine God:

Yea in thy Faith maintain me,  
And let thy Love constrain me! ('Awakened Child', *Boys and Girls*, p. 5, stanza 27).

Bunyan's speaker locates agency and possession in God. God's Faith maintains the speaker, and God's active constraint of the speaker produces the speaker's spiritual salvation. This denial of human agency suggests that humanity requires divine boundaries within which the self, 'me,' may be articulated. This poem is, according to its title, a lamentation by 'An awakened Child,' suggesting that Bunyan envisioned the child as one in need of spiritual enlightenment. As Bunyan identifies that adults, too, depend on God's guidance, his child readers are defined by their status as humans who require spiritual maturation—the knowledge for which will, ideally, be communicated through Bunyan's allegoric spiritual riddles.

This concept of the child as an ageless being requiring guidance was not unique to Calvinistic Protestant thought. The non-religious children's books, *Gigantick Histories* (1740-42) and *The History of Goody Two-Shoes*, also address the ageless child. These books, respectively authored and sold by Thomas Boreman, and published by John Newbery do not share Bunyan's goal of providing spiritual enlightenment. Rather, both books cultivate their ageless child readers as British consumers—a very different aim to Bunyan's attempt to 'save' his readers from an overdependence on materialist toys. Like Bunyan, Boreman and the author of *Goody Two-Shoes* address age-bound children and adults as child readers with a

single address. Moreover, they aim to bring their readers to a state of maturity—though maturity in Boreman and Newbery’s books has financial, not spiritual, connotations.

Thomas Boreman’s cultural guidebooks, *Gigantick Histories*, induct readers in print culture and promote consumerist behaviours. The ironically named series consist of a set of miniature books, measuring two-and-a-half by three inches. These books facetiously and fastidiously adhere to printing customs. The books are around one hundred pages, in which each page contains an average of twelve lines of text with an average of five words per line, and each book includes a dedication, preface, list of subscribers, and contents page listing individual chapters (usually two to three pages). The book teaches child-aged readers what to expect in a book, suggesting an implicit hope that its child readers will continue to participate in literary consumption. At the same time, the extensive peritextual material invites readers who are cognisant of print culture to laugh at the ludicrous inclusion of prefatory material. Boreman’s preface to his *Gigantick History of the Two Famous Giants* encourages readers to become insatiable consumers, promising his ‘little masters and misses’ that if they each buy the book,

Then, very soon  
I’ll print another,  
Which, for size,  
Will be its brother.<sup>20</sup>

Boreman’s address to the ‘little masters and misses’ is, *prima facie*, a patronisingly incongruous address to children. On a secondary reading it appears a semi-duplicious address to child readers’ parents and guardians. However, the books also treat child readers as adults in the making: as future masters and misses who will have the power and means to purchase books, and who need to be taught to act upon this consumerist desire to accumulate more items. Boreman’s repeated addresses to his ‘little masters and misses’ recalls the Hobbesian and Lockean

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Boreman, *Gigantick History of the two Famous Giants, and other Curiosities in the Guildhall, London*, 2 vol 1 of 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Thomas Boreman, 1740), ii–iii. Quotations cited in-text as *Two Giants I/II*.

notion that all individuals possess innate property, or rights. We cannot extrapolate from this textual directive the responses of real-life readers, though David Hounslow and Matthew Grenby's studies indicate that many subscribers of Boreman's books were indeed London-based children.<sup>21</sup> In any case, Boreman's generic directive illuminates his literary construction of the child reader as one uninitiated in the art of property. This corresponds with O'Malley's insights into the role children's literature played in codifying middle-class ideologies concerning self-discipline, morality, and economic practices.<sup>22</sup> To be a 'master and misses' is to be familiar with, and active within, the world of property. This lesson in the desirability of consumer culture is again implied in the significance that Boreman gives to the list of subscribers. Boreman expects his child readers to read these pages—or, at least, Boreman rewards readers who trawl the lists, humorously including fictitious subscribers like Giant Gogmagog alongside more plausible subscribers like Master Tommy Glegg or Miss Nancy Fitzer. Boreman comically highlights the arbitrary nature of subscribers' lists while affirming their importance to print culture (*Two Giants* I, p. xii). By presenting children with the subscriber's list, Boreman inducts implied child readers in the economic and commercial realities of print culture, preparing them as future participants in the British book market.

Boreman's author adopts a playfully condescending tone as a knowledgably superior speaker addressing ageless child readers. His declaration that his readers are 'masters and misses from three years old unto threescore' suggests that once a reader owns Boreman's book, he or she becomes a 'master' or 'misses,' a possessor of property (*Two Giants* II, p. 96). This address highlights the temporal disjunction between adult and child, as there is a time period necessary for the master and/or misses to progress from the age of three to the age of threescore. Simultaneously, it gestures toward the lack of effect time has upon a reader's status as a child, as there is an ontological sameness to individuals aged three years and sixty years. In the second volume of *Two Giants*, the narrator promises 'my little masters,'

They all may see

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<sup>21</sup> David Hounslow, cited in Grenby, *The Child Reader*, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> O'Malley, p. 3, p. 101.

What in good time

They'll come to be (*Two Giants II*, p. 96).

The grounded monosyllables and alternating rhymes convey a sense of certainty and fixedness, suggesting that the children reading this book *will* grow up, and *will* internalise the lessons in consumerism imparted by the chatty author of *Gigantick Histories*.

The idiosyncratic commentator of *Gigantick Histories* encourages implied readers to adopt attitudes of cultural superiority derived from familiarity with British heritage sites. At their size of two-and-a-half by three inches, the books would fit in the pockets of adults and children alike as they walked through the buildings described by the books. Boreman's books implicitly suggest that guidebooks should promote culturally significant buildings. Boreman writes about the Guildhall, a centre of British trade and commerce; Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral, sites where British state and religious authority intersect; and the Tower of London, the seat of British monarchical history and heritage (though admittedly, Boreman spends as much time describing the then-functioning zoo as he spends describing the history of Tower). Though Boreman sold the majority of his books in London, he had subscribers in Yorkshire, and even as far as Oporto and Bengal.<sup>23</sup> As such, the chatty tone of Boreman's guidebooks invites such readers to imagine using the books as tourists. Even to these readers, Boreman extends an invitation into a sphere of privileged London-based knowledge. He mocks unnamed non-English individuals who fail to appreciate the significance of British heritage sites. In Chapter VI of *Two Giants*, Boreman lambasts a 'Scottish author' for describing the Guildhall giants as 'scandalous and monstrous wooden statues that [...] reflect ignominy and reproach on the city' (*Two Giants I*, p. 28). Boreman's commentator declares this statement 'treachery,' and invites his readers to join in mock-outrage over this 'weighty affair,' launching into a series of rhetorical questions that highlight the folly of the Scottish author (*Two Giants I*, p. 29). Boreman's critique of this unnamed Scotsman comments operates on several levels. To readers unversed in irony, his rhetorical questions invite Anglo-centric

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<sup>23</sup> Grenby, *Child Reader*, p. 61.

indignation against the unwelcome comments made by this ‘Scottish author’, an unnamed individual whose moniker identifies him as a non-Londoner and an outsider to the heart of British culture. To readers more versed in irony, Boreman’s mock-outrage and overly dramatic discourse highlights the pettiness of the Scottish writer’s complaints. His subtle insertion of the writer’s national identity again foregrounds the Scotsman’s otherness, suggesting that Scottish outrage is too ‘weighty’ for the elegant, quick wit of a British Londoner (the sort of reader trained by Boreman’s book). Readers of *Gigantick Histories* are treated as individuals with intellectual and emotional subjectivities, but as individuals whose subjectivities must be directed by the idiosyncratic author’s ideologies and values.

More than twenty years after *Gigantick Histories*, John Newbery’s *Goody Two-Shoes* adopted a similar approach to the ageless child reader, presenting the book as the solution to the reader’s maturation from childish ignorance. *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes; Otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes. With the means by which she acquired her Learning and Wisdom, and in consequence thereof her Estate; set forth at large for the Benefit of those, Who from a State of Rags and Care, and having Shoes but half a Pair; Their Fortune and their Fame would fix; And gallop in a Coach and Six* (1765) is seriously and facetiously titled. It is facetiously titled, for, like Boreman’s guidebooks, *Goody Two-Shoes* is small. A first edition copy in the British Library measures three-point-two by five-point-six inches. Young children could easily hold the book, but the font is cramped, necessitating the presence of a literate adult to decipher the print. The extended title runs into descriptive narration and moralistic poetry, inviting knowing readers to laugh at the extensive claims and promises made by the small volume. At the same time, the title is serious in its codification of middle-class values and ideologies. Newbery’s rags-to-riches story identifies ‘Learning and Wisdom’ as virtues that facilitate the attainment of social prestige and financial comfort.<sup>24</sup> The book positions itself as the means by which this lesson may be learned and this goal may be achieved. It implicitly addresses child readers as individuals incapable of upward social mobility. As a ‘History’, the book claims an association with authoritative biographies and connotes the universal (or at least

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<sup>24</sup> *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes; Otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes. With the means by which she acquired her Learning and Wisdom, and in consequence thereof her Estate; set forth at large for the Benefit of those, Who from a State of Rags and Care, and having Shoes but half a Pair; Their Fortune and their Fame would fix; And gallop in a Coach and Six* (London: J. Newbery, 1765). Cited in-text as *Goody Two-Shoes*.

socially broad) applicability of its commercial values. Before the story begins, the title provides a consumerist and materialist trajectory. Margery begins her life in ‘Rags’ with ‘Shoes but half a Pair’ but obtains property and goods, even a ‘Coach and Six.’ The title encourages readers to place emotional and social investments in the book, which is ‘set forth at large for the Benefit of those, Who [...] would [...] gallop in a Coach and Six.’ As the book positions readers to adopt the roles of purchaser and consumer, it subjects potential readers to the book’s commercial values before the first page of the narrative commences.

*Goody Two-Shoes* relentlessly addresses its readers as cultural and economic consumers. Its paratextual materials attempt to mould purchasers and readers into culturally discerning consumers. Appended to the long title is the claim, ‘See the Original Manuscript in the *Vatican* at *Rome*, and the Cuts by *Michael Angelo*. Illustrated with the Comments of our great modern Critics.’ The statement initially appears to be an absurd attempt to justify the book’s value by invoking the cultural authority of Michael Angelo and the Vatican Apostolic Library. At another level, the addendum implies that its readers must possess a basic level of cultural awareness in order to know *why* the claims are absurd. For readers to laugh at the idea that Michael Angelo illustrated the crude woodblock cuts, they must have some idea of the type of art Michael Angelo produced. At another level, the reference to the ‘Original Manuscript’ affirms the power and aspirations of print culture in the dissemination of cultural capital, in contrast to the more private models of cultural dissemination associated with manuscript culture. *Goody Two-Shoes* positions itself as a mass-produced print object that has superseded the manuscript, a form so out-dated that it can only be found in the Vatican Library, in the Roman Catholic stronghold. By contrast, the book implies, in Britain—a nation of progressive, print-literate Protestants, multiple readers can read the same text of *Goody Two-Shoes*, constructing a literate community of cultural consumers.

At an ideological level, *Goody Two-Shoes* encourages readers to assess the values that build a stable community, while subjecting readers to the narrator’s values. The chatty commentator of *Goody Two-Shoes* invites readers to sympathise with the suffering and socially ameliorative Margery Two-Shoes. Margery is presented as virtuous for resisting capitalist attitudes and morals. The conclusion

praises her initiative in establishing a non-profit field that provides sustenance for the poor and prevents individuals from capitalising on their gains. Whenever individuals attempted to sell the food they had gleaned from that field, the narrator informs us, ‘they were deprived of that Privilege [of gleaning] ever after’ (*Goody Two-Shoes*, p. 137). This idealisation of ameliorative charitable work that maintains existing social hierarchies recurs throughout the text. In the introduction, the narrator launches into a tirade against social injustices created by the enclosure of common land, then abruptly reflects:

But what, says the Reader, can occasion all this? Do you intend this for Children, Mr Newbery? Why do you suppose this was written by Mr. Newbery, Sir? [...] this is not the Book, Sir, mentioned in the Title, but the Introduction to that book [...] it is intended, Sir, not for those Sort of Children, but for Children of Six Feet High (*Goody Two-Shoes*, p. 11).

Through a series of rhetorical questions, the narrator foregrounds the question, what is the purpose of children’s literature? He anticipates the protest that common-land property disputes are inappropriate reading material for young children. However, his two-pronged response does not answer the question of what constitutes appropriate reading material for children. Rather, it invokes the question, who and what is a child? There are, he says, ‘Sorts’ of children, some of whom may be six feet high. To be a child, then, is to exist in a state of ignorance. Maturity requires insight into the ethical injustices perpetuated by avaricious landowners. Moreover, maturity includes the ability to navigate the different components of a book. As the writer pertly notes, we are not reading the book, but the introduction. This is meant for a different ‘Sort’ of child, an implicit acknowledgement of the fact that adults often read prefaces before purchasing books for children. The address acknowledges that children are youthful individuals who may yet grow six feet high, and that adults may still possess what the narrator deems is a childish understanding of the ethics of property ownership and print culture. The narrator’s address indicates a hope that the child reader will be so influenced by the book’s narrative and themes that he or she will adopt its value systems as adults, and may even effect socio-political change.

The narrator's concept of the child reader as one who needs to be inducted in middle-class economic principles is suggested by the narrator's recurring complaints against unethical aristocrats. The narrator repeatedly re-enters the narrative to critique aristocratic displays of excess, encouraging readers to adopt a socially ameliorative bourgeois mind-set. Describing the funeral of an aristocrat, mockingly named Lady Ducklington, the narrator observes,

Well, I never saw so grand a Funeral in all my Life, but the Money they squandered away, would have been better laid out in little Books for Children, or in Meat, Drink, and Clothes for the Poor (*Goody Two-Shoes*, p. 46).

The narrator's colloquial and conversational opening, 'Well', creates an atmosphere of congeniality. From this atmosphere of reader-writer camaraderie, the narrator plunges into plethora of condemnations, diminishing the grandeur of the funeral procession and positioning readers to judge negatively the excessive display of wealth at Lady Ducklington's funeral. By presenting a series of social welfare options toward which the money could have been funnelled, the narrator wrests readers' attention from the narrative episode to consider social justice issues close to the narrator's heart. Significantly, the narrator does not criticise material possession, but rather, the poor usage of it. As Teresa Michals points out, the restoration of property to its rightful owners is crucial to the climax and resolution of *The History of Goody Two-Shoes*.<sup>25</sup> These authorial addresses encourage readers to consider the needs of the poor and reflect on their own uses of resources. Crucially, the book assumes its readers have access to these resources, placing the agenda and the concept of the child's book within middle-class British society. The function of the children's book, *The History of Goody Two-Shoes* implies, is to educate child readers into socially responsible property owners in consumerist, commercialised Britain. *The History of Goody Two-Shoes* acknowledges that the child reader is not a single entity but may come in different 'Sorts': age-bound children and adult-aged children. Nevertheless, it addresses children as ageless entities who need cultural and ethical lessons in property management in order to understand how to govern property with sympathy for others. As with other children's books

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<sup>25</sup> Michals, *Books for Children, Books for Adults*, p. 87.

that treated the child reader as an ignorant dependent, *Goody Two-Shoes* is characterised by a strong authorial voice. This feature was not unique to children's books, but was consistent across seventeenth and eighteenth-century books that addressed an ageless child.

### c. The Spiritually Ideal Child Guide

*Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein* (Mark 10:15, KJV).

In contrast to the ageless child of ignorance, there existed an idealisation of the physically frail, temporally young, and spiritually pure child guide. One of the earliest and most popular children's books, James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671–72), celebrates children's capacities to effect change in adults' lives, despite children's young ages and limited cognitive abilities.<sup>26</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, this elevated image of the child shares a heritage in Scriptural tradition alongside the equation of childishness as a state of ignorance. The elevated vision of the spiritual idealness of children is based on Jesus' proclamation of a special affinity between children and the kingdom of God. Janeway's positive vision of the child's spiritual capabilities is striking when one considers the similarities between Janeway's theological beliefs and those of his contemporary John Bunyan. The similarities in their doctrinal professions suggest that differing views of the spiritual capabilities of a child (and indeed, what makes a child) are not aligned to religious beliefs but are individual interpretations of cultural ideas. Like Bunyan, James Janeway was a Dissenting Presbyterian preacher with Calvinistic proclivities. Like Bunyan, who was twice imprisoned for preaching outside the Establishment, Janeway suffered political persecution for self-identifying as a non-Anglican preacher. Edmund Calamy lists Janeway as a minister 'ejected or silenced' by the 1662 Act of Uniformity.<sup>27</sup> *A Token for Children: Being an exact Account of the Conversion,*

<sup>26</sup>James Janeway, *A Token for Children: Being an exact Account of the Conversion, holy and exemplary Lives, and joyful deaths, of several young children. By James Janeway, Minister of the Gospel*, 2 vol. (London: Dorman Newman, 1676); cited in-text as *Token I/II*.

<sup>27</sup> The veracity of this claim has been questioned by N. H. Keeble who notes Edward Calamy's inclusion of Janeway in the list of 'ejected or silenced' ministers is the only evidence Janeway took

*holy and exemplary Lives, and joyful deaths, of several young children* is emphatic that children may possess a similarly powerful conviction to that Janeway himself held.

*A Token for Children* is a compilation of spiritual biographies of zealous, dying children.<sup>28</sup> It was designed to excite identification, religious fervour, and inspirational zeal in its readers. Early-to-mid twentieth-century scholars denigrated Janeway's work, describing it as 'grisly, 'macabre', and 'morbidly titled,'<sup>29</sup> but by the 1980s, Gillian Avery could observe that Janeway depicted children with dignity and esteem.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Janeway does not merely depict children as spiritually eminent; he addresses his implied child readers with respect. He acknowledges his implied child readers in his book title, and in his prefatory remarks. Janeway's title notes that the book is '*for Children.*' His implied readership is the only clear feature of the otherwise ambiguous title. In Biblical discourse, a token denotes an act demonstrating divine power or authority, but tokens are also objects indicating affection.<sup>31</sup> Janeway does not identify what his token is for, or what it signifies. However, the fact that it is *for* children reveals Janeway's belief that children can comprehend acts of divine power, and that children are worthy recipients of material books as gifts. As an 'exact' account of children's lives, the book attests to children's abilities to make decisions of eternal spiritual consequence, to lead 'exemplary Lives,' and to die joyfully, all of which were empowering concepts in a society where children lacked legal rights and often died young. As an account of the 'Conversion' of children who led 'holy and exemplary Lives' the book demonstrates how children may act as religious

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any position in the established church; 'Janeway, James', N. H. Keeble, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14651>> (accessed 10 June, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> I use the term biography even though the OED lists the earliest use of 'biography' as 1681, because Ian Donaldson identifies the word as being in common usage by the 1660s in 'National Biography and the Art of Memory: From Thomas Fuller to Colin Matthew' *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St Clair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 67–82, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Mary V. Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic: Children's Literature in England from its Beginnings to 1839* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 29; Siobhan Lam, 'Be good, Dear Child... or else', *Victorian Web*, 14 July 2007, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/childlit/moraltales.html>>.

<sup>30</sup> Gillian Avery, 'The Puritans and their Heirs', *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 95–118, p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Token (2018). Available at: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/202947?rskey=3L57Db&result=1> [Accessed 7 December 2015].

witnesses. Janeway specifies the ages of the children when they come to spiritual awareness and when they die. Mary A is merely 4 years old when she begins considering the needs of her soul, dying with a mature understanding of faith at the age of 12 (*Token I*, Example III). The majority of the children die between the ages of 9 and 14, but begin their spiritual journeys from as young as 3 years (*Token I*, Example II). By emphasising the children's young ages, Janeway suggests that a child's physical frailty and young age may facilitate, not inhibit, his or her spiritual authority.

Janeway uses double address in his expitextual addresses, but moves to a dual address when recounting the children's lives. This dual address suggests that Janeway expects that his adult readers may be convicted of their spiritual frailties by his child characters, whose spiritual piety exceeds any declarations of faith made by adults in the text. Janeway's vision of a child's potential to provide spiritual guidance is further suggested by his epigraph, which is taken from the Gospel of Mark when Jesus tells his disciples to 'suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God' (Mk 10:14, KJV). Janeway later refers to his implied child readers as 'dear lambs' ('Preface,' *Token I*, p. ii). This mildly condescending term is, simultaneously, honorific, as the lamb invokes Biblical references to Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, Revelation 5:6–8), an association that confers immense spiritual authority to children.

Janeway explicitly rebukes adult guardians for not recognising children's spiritual value and potential. In his first address, 'To all Parents, School-Masters, and School-Mistresses, or any that are concerned in the Education of Children,' Janeway stresses the enormity of the spiritual responsibility of caring for children. He uses rhetorical questions to attack an apparently widespread cultural assumption that children are incapable of comprehending and acting upon profound spiritual doctrines. His accumulation of anaphoric questions, 'Are the souls of your children of no value? Are you willing that they should be brands of hell?' climax in a declaration of the spiritual nobility of children in Christ's eyes: 'You see that they are not subjects incapable of the grace of God: whatever you think of them, Christ does not slight them [...] *For, of such is the kingdom of God.*' ('To Parents,' *Token I*, p. iv.) Janeway's invocation of Christ's respect for children is the

ultimate rebuke against those who would identify children as individuals defined by inability and lack, whether or knowledge, wisdom, or even, to borrow Bunyan's term, gravity (*Boys and Girls*, line 7.)

Janeway presents children as spiritual guides capable of comforting adults around them with the assurance of forgiveness and everlasting life, despite a child's limited cognitive abilities. When recounting the life and death of Tabitha Alder, Janeway notes a conversation between Tabitha and a friend in which Tabitha expresses her struggles to love an invisible God, and asks that her friend will pray that she may comprehend the incomprehensible (Volume I, Example X). This inclusion of a child's cognitive difficulty in loving an invisible being is a moment of cognitive realism. It shows children being confused by intangible objects. Nevertheless, Janeway shows children like Mary A. and Tabitha Alder joyfully grasping profound spiritual concepts (Examples III in *Token I* and X in *Token II*, respectively). Mary A. and Tabitha Alder are jubilant on their deathbeds, certain they have secured eternal life in Christ. As if authorised by their frailty, Janeway's dying children rebuke adults and prophesy from Scripture. Mary A chastises her mother for weeping 'exceedingly' when her father dies, 'for God is a good God still,' (*Token I*, p. 29) and Ann Lane (Example IX) pleads with her father to 'redeem his time' (*Token II*, p. 15.) The word 'redeem' brings with it spiritual connotations of Christ's redemption, aligning Ann Lane with Jesus Christ and recalling Janeway's epigraph, 'for of such is the kingdom of God' (Mk 10:14, KJV).

Janeway's text was not entirely atypical: exemplary hagiographies and Puritan spiritual autobiographies were reasonably popular in late seventeenth-century England.<sup>32</sup> What is unusual about *A Token for Children* is that Janeway wrote of everyday children, not martyrs. *A Token for Children* celebrates the ways in which children's frailty and youthfulness enables them to become powerful spiritual agents for the good of wider Christian society. This paradigm operates on a positive concept of futurity, on the expectation that children will attain citizenship of the heavenly world to come. As an author, Janeway adopts a stance of normative hope concerning his implied child readers, who are, apparently, likewise inclined to seek after God and become spiritual guides.

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<sup>32</sup> Avery, 'Puritans and their Heirs', pp. 110–112.

However, the idea that children were powerful spiritual agents also generated anxiety, as adults realised they could not definitively govern a separate individual's agency. The concept of individual governance was of pertinent political concern in late-seventeenth century Britain. The metaphor of childhood as representative for social members who did not hold political office allowed the formation of a cultural association between children and political agency. Hobbes and Locke, for instance, used models of the family and childhood governance to assess the efficacy of representative government in the forms of a monarchy and a democratic representative parliament, respectively.<sup>33</sup> Despite their different assessments, both Hobbes and Locke applied to their theories of civil government an Augustinian-inflected understanding of temporality as a mode of human perception. By conflating ideas of representational government with temporality, Hobbes and Locke propagated ideas of the child as the fulcrum on which political and social formation and reformation rested. Hobbes and Locke suggested that individuals who anticipated future fulfilment could restrain their immediate desires, though this fulfilment depended on the guarantee offered by the legal protection of property.<sup>34</sup> This idea of *restraint* is a crucial feature in children's works that provides overt moral and spiritual guidance to direct the child's capacious internal moral and cognitive selves. This combination of authorial hopes and anxieties surrounding the child's potential is expressed in Isaac Watts's preface to *Divine Songs*, and in the Coopers' interactive abecedary, *The Child's New Plaything*.

#### **d. Hedged Hopes: the Potentially Ungovernable Child**

This will be a constant furniture for the minds of children, that they may have something to think upon when alone, and sing over to themselves. [...] Thus they will not be forced to seek relief for an emptiness of mind out of the loose and dangerous sonnets of the age.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hobbes, II.xx, §4 and I.xiv, §4; Locke, *STG* §53, §55, §58.

<sup>34</sup> José Brunner, 'Modern Times: Law, Temporality and Happiness in Hobbes, Locke and Bentham', *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 8 (2007), 277–310, pp. 305–06.

<sup>35</sup> Isaac Watts, Preface to *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (London: Printed for H. Woodfall, J. and F. Rivington; T. Longman; W. Fenner; T. Field; and E. and C. Dilly, 1769) p. v. Cited in-text as *Divine Songs*.

Isaac Watts's preface to *Divine Songs* reveals his anxious concern regarding the inaccessible interiority of a child's mind. As Wakely-Mulroney insightfully notes, Watts conceived of children as subjects with an interior mental space, within which children internalised values and attitudes.<sup>36</sup> Watts addresses his implied child readers as powerful agents who can access mental spaces beyond the direct surveillance of their guardians and educators. Watts presents his doctrinal hymns as a potential spiritual shield against morally unhelpful ideas that could take root in a child's mind. He describes the hymns as 'constant furniture,' suggesting the unfilled nature of a child's mind, and as protection against 'the loose and dangerous sonnets of the age'—a warning that confers to words a great agential power as the shaper of human actions. Watts emphasises the urgency behind his mission of 'furnishing' a child's mind with correct spiritual doctrine, as a child's choices 'sows the seeds of misery or happiness in this world, and that to come.'<sup>37</sup> This temporal conflation of this world and the next address the child as a child and as the adult he or she will become. As Wakely-Mulroney notes, Watts's conflation of temporalities in relation to spiritual decisions means that a child's trajectory is codified at the moment of the child's death.<sup>38</sup> However, while Wakely-Mulroney posits that death creates the 'ageless' child, Watts ensures that his dichotomy of this world and the next does not elide the difference between the child in need of governance, and the adult. Watts's dichotomy between this world and the world to come imputes a similar spiritual responsibility to children's and adult's actions. Nevertheless, he treats the ambivalent agency of the not-fully educated child as the basis for establishing an adult-child hierarchy. This is expressed in his hymn, 'Obedience to Parents', where fear of the Lord is equated with filial obedience:

Let children that would fear the Lord  
Hear what their teachers say;  
With reverence meet their parents' word,  
And with delight obey.

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<sup>36</sup>Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, 'Isaac Watts and the Dimensions of Child Interiority', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39 (2016), 103–119.

<sup>37</sup> Dating is unclear as the book was first published as *Divine Songs* in 1715 and was extended as *Divine and Moral Songs*. The earliest editions of *Divine and Moral Songs* appeared around 1750.

<sup>38</sup> Wakely-Mulroney, 'Where You Cannot See to Read', p. 29.

[...]

But those who worship God, and give  
 Their parents honour due,  
 Here on this earth they long shall live,  
 And live hereafter, too (*Divine Songs*, Hymn 23).

The rhythmic patterns of alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter compel readers to internalise and accept the rhyme's logic. As part of this logic, readers are asked to conclude that the 'Lord' authorises the implied child reader's 'parents' word.' The enjambment in the final stanza equates worship of God with filial honour—the practice of which involves 'meeting' a parent's words by 'obeying' them, as is explained in the first stanza. Watts insists that children ought to treat their parents' words with the same reverence with which Christians ought to obey God's words. This sits alongside his claim that the 'seeds of misery or happiness in this world' affect the world to come. The child in *Divine Songs* is a powerful spiritual agent, whose choices in this world determine his or her fate in the world to come. As the child can theoretically withdraw into his or her own mind, this child causes Watts great authorial anxiety. The most that an adult can do, in his formulation, is furnish the child's intellect with devotional meditations and doctrinal hymns, and ask for outward obedience as an indicator for the child's internal spiritual state. This external, behavioural cultivation forms part of Watts's attempt to control the child's uncontrollable internal spiritual state.

As part of Watts's desire to direct the unknowable subjective child, he adopts an authorial posture of justification comparable to that of his predecessor, Bunyan:

I have endeavoured to sink the language to the level of a child's understanding, and yet to keep it, if possible, above contempt, so I have designed to profit all, if possible, and offend none ('Preface', *Divine Songs*, pp. vii–viii).

Watts's image of 'sinking' his language to a child's comprehension equates child cognition with a state that is somewhere above 'contempt' but is below that which he expects of educated adult readers. His utilitarian and economic discourse creates a cost-benefit motivation behind his decision to modulate his language. Watts's goal of cultivating children's internal mental spaces to ensure their eternal spiritual health justifies his use of simple literary language and forms.

Watts's concern in directing a child's spiritual behaviours with an eye to the child's eternal status may be attributed in part to his awareness of a child's interiority, and, in part, to his Calvinistic belief in Original Sin. He feared the mind's corruptive potential and proclivities, and the lack of 'Cultivation' that could cause the mind to be 'overspread' by errors (*Improvement of Mind*, p. 2). The level of adult control Watts proscribes reveals his fear that adults cannot fully guide children's thought patterns. Watts encourages his adult readers to negotiate with child readers by using his book as a promise and reward: 'giv[e] [children] the privilege of learning one of these songs every week, if they fulfil the business of the week well, and promising them the book itself, when they have learned ten or twenty songs of it' (*Divine Songs* p. vi). By promising the physical book as a reward, Watts encourages adults to employ pedagogical methods that acknowledge a child's desire to receive tangible rewards for his or her efforts. Thus, in addition to implying a child's immense spiritual potential, Watts suggests that children have the power to reshape their guardian adults' pedagogic practices. In Watts's formulation, adults must responsively direct a child's spiritual potential in order to produce the ideal conditions in which a child's healthy spiritual growth may be achieved.

A similar attitude toward the child as a potentially wild agent requiring adult guidance is present in Thomas and Mary Cooper's *The Child's New Play Thing*.<sup>39</sup> The Coopers' abecedary attempts to generate an interactive relationship with the implied child reader, physically engaging the child reader by positioning

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<sup>39</sup> *The Child's New Play-Thing: Being a Spelling-Book Intended to make the Learning to Read, a Diversion instead of a Task*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Printed for Ware, Hitch, Corbett, Dodsley, and Cooper, 1760). Quotations cited in-text as *Plaything*. The Cotsen Collection names Thomas Cooper as the author; the UCLA History of the Book catalogue names Mary Cooper, <[https://hob.gseis.ucla.edu/HoB\\_ABCs\\_Exhibit/HoB\\_ABCs\\_The\\_Childs\\_New\\_Plaything.html](https://hob.gseis.ucla.edu/HoB_ABCs_Exhibit/HoB_ABCs_The_Childs_New_Plaything.html)>.

itself as an interactive, playful item. At the same time, the book's content and material construction depend upon adult supervision and a hierarchical relationship between the governor and the governed. This simultaneous stance of the book as a child-friendly toy and an object facilitating hierarchical adult-child relations is embedded in the book's physical format. The abecedary includes a folded set of alphabet cards, and includes directions that the cards should be 'cut into single Squares for Children to Play with' (*Plaything*, p. 11.) The book invites readers to adopt a reading posture in which a literate preceptor with developed motor skills shares a physical space with a young preliterate or semi-literate child, assisting the child to cut up and play with the alphabet cards. The book presents itself as a didactic tool and a material object that allows adults to train children in the physical activity of folding and unfolding pages, and in the cognitive activity of recognising letters and stringing them together to form words. The book's directions and alphabet cards attempt to impose a particular reading activity upon readers, in which children are trained by adults to participate in the material and cognitive world of print culture.

Of course, the extent of this participation in real life cannot be ascertained. The projected interactive nature of the book reveals more about the book's implied readers and implied reading circumstances than it does about historical readers or reading. The existing copy in the Cotsen Collection was owned by at least two children, one of whom possessively inscribed the inside cover, 'Elizabeth Blake. Her book. November 12<sup>th</sup> 1763,' and the other of whom felt enough pride (or familial duty) to note that the book was a gift from a Mrs Rawle in 1819. Neither child owner cut the pages. This could mean that some child readers were already trained to value books as material objects linked with specific ritual practices—namely, *not* altering the physical structure of a book by cutting its pages. However, if child readers did dissect the book, such copies may have been considered too scrappy to be preserved for posterity. In any case, the copy in the Cotsen Collection indicates a gap between the interactive reading practice directed by *The Child's New Play Thing* and historical reading practices carried out by contemporaneous child readers (and, perhaps, their accompanying guardians). This gap is facilitated, in part, by the book's recognition that readers are active,

and hence unique subjects. Indeed, the Coopers' abecedary recognises, with some apprehension, the potential implications of children acting as independent subjects.

*The Child's New Plaything* attempts to inculcate a hierarchical governor-governed paradigm. Its paratextual address reminds readers to maintain a 'correct' submissive posture within dominant socio-cultural paradigms. The subtitle indicates that the book was 'Designed for the Use of Schools, or for Children before they go to School.' The invocation of this didactic reading environment imbues the preceptor with teaching authority: the book was designed primarily for school use, and secondarily for the children in that school. The book is granted pedagogical authority through its association with the adult preceptor. In the preface, teachers are directed to 'let the Child proceed to the following Chapters of this Book' in the hope that children will be filled with knowledge and virtuous principles (*Playing*, p. 12). The language of permissibility frames the book as an object containing desirable knowledge that must be revealed gradually. The direction also grants preceptors the authority to 'let' the child 'proceed' to read the book. This dynamic hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student suggests that the vertical gap between the learned and learner is lessened as the student absorbs the book's lessons. Yet *The Child's New Plaything* seeks to maintain this gap between the governors and governed, suggesting that a side-goal of children's primers and schoolbooks may have included the affirmation of British socio-political hierarchies.

The Coopers' book simultaneously empowers children as readers and inculcates postures of subjection and submission. In the years preceding the rapid growth of the late-eighteenth-century children's literature market, common reading materials for the preliterate and semiliterate included basic abecedaries, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostle's Creed. In continuation with this tradition of combining Scriptural lessons with basic literacy, the Coopers' abecedary interprets Scriptural tradition from an Anglican perspective. In particular, the Coopers' lessons attest to the divine right of kings. In a rhyming alphabet, the rhyme for K proclaims: 'Honour the King!—Even Birds will bear / Treason, tho' whisper'd, thro' the Air' (*Plaything*, p. 17.) The short

imperative places readers in an obligatory position. The implied reader's fragile subjectivity is emphasised by the implied kinship between birds and the reading child subjects capable of 'whispering.' On the other hand, this warning also implies that the untamed child is capable of destabilising the social fabric by articulating treasonous words. The abecedary, then, exists to control the potentially disruptive power inherent within a child by stabilising the child's words and governing his or her language within a paradigm of fixed hierarchies. This acknowledgement of the child's agency shows that youthfulness is not synonymous with social or spiritual powerlessness. Rather, the authorial anxiety surrounding the potential utterances of the young child points to an unrealised power inherent within a child's speech. It is the unpredictability of the untamed child which gives rise to this authorial desire to tame the child. Paradoxically, this almost fearful attitude toward the child betrays reverence for the capacity of the child as a spiritual and social agent—for good or ill.

#### **e. The Familial, Rational, Spiritual Child**

Although Defoe's *The Family Instructor* (1715) was published the same year as Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs*, it was not as immediate a success, and its readership was largely limited to Dissenting Protestant circles. Moreover, although Defoe's book has the word 'Family' in its title, the intended reader of his work is the family *instructor*—the father. Nevertheless, Defoe's text presents a unique, literate, spiritually curious child. Defoe's child stands in distinction from a Lockean child of ignorance, and from the Rousseauvian child of spiritual purity, prefigured in Janeway's *A Token for Children*. In *The Family Instructor*, the reading child is a cognitively limited but spiritually alert agent, whose family interactions form the basis for his, and his parents', spiritual and emotional maturation. *The Family Instructor* cohered with a popular Dissenting vision in which the family was seen as the unit best able to effect social reform.<sup>40</sup> As Barbauld noted in her edition of *Robinson Crusoe* in *The British Novelists*, *The Family Instructor* had remained popular in

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<sup>40</sup> White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, pp. 67–70.

Dissenting families throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup> This suggests an historical affinity between its depiction of the family as a site of mutual spiritual growth, and its use within families.

Defoe's text developed from the religious conduct book. In religious conduct books, family members' duties are articulated in dialogue form, promoting idealised, rather than actual, behaviour. These dialogues emphasised concepts of 'duty' and 'obedience,' especially in relation to wives and children, and depicted hierarchical families as the basis for an ideal society. William Bent's list of Divinity and Ecclesiastical History books published in Great Britain between 1700–1799 names several family religious conduct books, such as family prayer books and family Bibles, placing Defoe's work in a recognisable genre.<sup>42</sup> Within *The Family Instructor*, Defoe cites two seventeenth-century conduct books from which he took inspiration: Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* (a work so popular it produced fifty editions between 1659 and 1889) and Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety* (1611). However, *The Family Instructor* performs significant modifications to the religious conduct book, particularly with regard to its depiction of children. These variations are echoed in Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*. As Diana Brooke emphasises, Defoe's characters are not hortatory. Instead, 'real' characters propel the dialogue.<sup>43</sup> Published in two volumes in 1715 and 1718 respectively, *The Family Instructor* was written in dialogue form and focused on the interactions between individual family members and their understandings of faith and religious practice. Volume I depicts how a father's failure to introduce familial religious practices and theological discussions has generated his son's emotional crisis. This child, 'thinking and inquiring [...] about five or six Years old,'<sup>44</sup> is a verisimilar child who struggles to differentiate between the physical and the metaphorical. His questions propel forth as a series of paratactic queries:

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<sup>41</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *The British Novelists; with an essay, and prefaces biographical and critical: a new edition. Defoe*, vol. XVI (London: Printed for F. C. and J. Rivington, et al, 1820), p. iv.

<sup>42</sup> William Bent, *A General Catalogue of Books in all Languages, Arts, and Sciences, that have been printed in Great Britain, and published in London, since the Year M.DCC. to the Present Time. The whole Alphabetically and Classically disposed under the several branches of literature; with their sizes and prices* (London: William Bent, 1779).

<sup>43</sup> Diana Jean Brooke, *Daniel Defoe: The Family Instructor* (unpublished PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2016), p. 170.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor in Three Parts; I. Relating to Fathers and Children. II. To Masters and Servants. III. To Husbands and Wives*, 3 vol., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Printed for E. Matthews at the Bible in Paternoster Row, 1715), p. 5. Cited in-text as *Family Instructor* I/II/III.

I was looking up there, *says the Child*, pointing up in the Air. [...] I was wondering what that Place is. [...] Does God dwell there? [...] Have you been there, Father? (*Family Instructor* I, p. 7).

His questions reveal the interplay of metaphysical and religious concepts with the corporeal. His empirical sense of his own body and the physicality of his surroundings provoke his philosophical confusion as to how spiritual and ontological planes interact with the physical: ‘Have you been there, Father?’ It is not difficult to see a trajectory between this and Barbauld’s principle of observing one’s physical surroundings to elucidate the scientific and religious principles underlying existence.

Defoe altered the terms of the ideal dialogue in *The Family Instructor*, providing scope for Barbauld to interrupt her conversations in *Lessons for Children* with moments where Mamma expresses irritation or incomplete knowledge. In *The Family Instructor*, Defoe’s dialogues are ideal, inasmuch as they lead to discussions of the doctrine of God and religious practice. However, the characters initiating these conversations are not ideal. In the second dialogue, when the mother encounters this same child crying in his room, convicted by his personal sin, she ‘speaks coldly [...] having no other View at first than only quieting the Child [...] but she soon sees with other Eyes’ (*Family Instructor* I, p. 45). Both mother and the child possess knowledge that will contribute to the other’s growth as thinking, feeling individuals, and both mother and child need to correct their current frames of mind. When the mother realises her son’s sincerity, her imperiousness is softened into affection, and when she answers his questions, he finds comfort from his sadness. While Barbauld’s Mamma in *Lessons for Children* is a far more idealised figure than Defoe’s mother, she displays flashes of frustration and imperiousness, telling Charles to walk himself, and to let her finish her work (*Lessons* I, p. 24, p. 26). These shared interests in the arresting power of a child’s questions and the limitations of the ostensibly ideal adult suggest that Defoe’s *The Family Instructor* influenced the depiction of fallible adults and curious and rational children in *Lessons for Children*.

This curious and critical child existed alongside other concepts of the child, including that of the ageless and ignorant child; the child as a spiritual guide; and the potentially ungovernable child. Yet, despite their differences, these concepts all share an awareness of the child's potential to develop into a mature reader. Although maturity could be defined in terms of knowledge and skills, or age, the focus on the child's age became an increasing feature in British children's books. By the end of the eighteenth century, children's books began to target categories of child readers according to their ages. To return to Barbara Wall's study of narrative voice in children's books, it was indeed the case in the eighteenth century that the manner of address employed by narrators and authors determined whether or not their book was marketed as a children's book. Early British children's books bore a clear sense of the child's futurity as a social participant and/or potential heavenly citizen. This shaped the function of the authorial addresses toward the implied child readers.

By the time Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* entered the children's literature market, it operated within a widely accepted cultural understanding that the education of children was the fulcrum directing the future of society. Building almost directly on Defoe's concept of the child as a familial, social, rational agent, Barbauld introduced in *Lessons for Children* a new mode of simultaneously addressing adult and child readers without conflating adults or children into 'ageless children' requiring authorial correction. *Lessons for Children* is Barbauld's negotiation between her concept of child readers, adult readers, and the ideal nature of child-adult interactions. It formed her most seminal contribution to the ever-debated questions, what is a children's book, and what should a children's book be.

## Chapter Two

### Form and *Lessons for Children*

In *The Family Instructor*, Defoe placed the child at the centre of familial reform, as his inquisitive child successfully convicted his parents of their failure to provide a more holistic familial religious education. *The Family Instructor* was enduringly popular in Rational Dissenting circles, as Anna Letitia Barbauld noted in the introduction to her reprint of *Robinson Crusoe*. Barbauld also praised Defoe's use of the dialogue form and his detailing of daily-life phenomena, suggesting that *The Family Instructor* inspired *Lessons for Children* in form and content. However, where Defoe directed his book toward adult readers, Barbauld appropriated the familial dialogue in *Lessons for Children*, making it accessible to young child readers *and* their implied adult guardians. The dual address reflects Barbauld's vision of education as a relational process that affirms the academic and moral principles taught in explicitly pedagogic environments.

In 1798, Barbauld reiterated her conviction that children are inherently observant and imitative beings:

Your example will educate him; your conversation with your friends; the business he sees you transact; the likings and dislikings you express; these will educate him [...] above all, your rank and situation in life, your house, your table, your pleasure-grounds, your hounds and your stables will educate him. [...] The moment he was able to form an idea his education was already begun; the education of circumstances—insensible education—which, like insensible perspiration, is of more constant and powerful effect [...] than that which is direct and apparent ('Education', p. 323).

Barbauld argues that education begins the moment a child becomes aware of his or her surroundings. She claims, paradoxically, that this process is 'insensible.' The word 'insensible' implies a lack of mental or corporeal feeling—or at the very least, it suggests that something has occurred so gradually it is not perceived or

understood.<sup>1</sup> Barbauld seems to gesture toward this latter meaning, as she describes children as innately perceptive beings who mimic social and familial behaviours before they are able to reason critically. Her essay highlights how adults' unquestioned social behaviours shape his or her children's worldviews and behaviours. For instance, she notes that children observe and replicate their parents' habits of curtsying or removing their hats for certain people and not for others, depending on a person's dress and apparent social class. In this way, she implies that adults need to be made aware of what their actions suggest about the people they interact with, and the environments in which they operate. This shared stance between the child and adult as pupils does not render the adult an ageless child in a negative sense, as in Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls*. Rather, Barbauld's concept of adults and children as pupils differentiates between the nature of the adult and child's pupillage. Though adults require guidance in understanding their role as educators, they bear more responsibility than children as more experienced pupils of life, as absorbing child students will imitate their actions and attitudes. As such, Barbauld posits that what adults may consider 'insensible' is observable and observed.

Barbauld's essay subsequently explores what it means to live in a hierarchical class-based society. She criticises the fact that social codes provide more deference for the outwardly wealthy, arguing that social practices teach children to internalise the idea that an individual's worth depends upon his or her social class. However, rather than argue, like Rousseau, that children should be isolated from communities shaped by arbitrary social codes, Barbauld insists that children are necessarily social: 'the poor man educates [his child] while working in his cottage—the man of business while employed in his counting-house' ('Education', p. 330). Barbauld did not hold a utopian vision of children as asocial beings capable of transcending social structures of class. Hers was a practical vision of children as participants in and shapers of culture and society. It was also a deeply radical vision. By training those in charge of teaching children to notice and question their own social behaviours, Barbauld's essay encourages adults and

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<sup>1</sup> John Dryden, 'Insensible', in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language in 2 Volumes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Printed for J & P Knapton, T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes; A. Millar; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1755). Henceforth cited as *Johnson's Dictionary*.

children to be critical of the unwritten social codes and cues that constitute society. This awareness allows individuals to challenge the basis of those behaviours. And children, Barbauld suggests, have the skill and ability to become these culturally critical members of society: ‘Be as cunning as you will, [children] are always more cunning than you’ (‘Education’, p. 327). At first glance, this reads as a deeply pessimistic view of humanity and the innate deceitfulness of children. However, Barbauld’s antanaclasis suggests that parents and children demonstrate different forms of cunning. While parents may act deceitfully by unintentionally (or intentionally) teaching one principle then acting in a contradictory way, children are cunning in the sense that they are skilled in the arts of observation. Hence, while Barbauld uses the phrase ‘insensible education,’ it would be more accurate to describe her vision of education as minutely sensible, as she describes every action, tone of voice, and circumstance as observable things that children will imitate and question.

This observant, questioning, inherently social child is central to Barbauld’s seminal children’s book, *Lessons for Children*. Barbauld initially published *Lessons for Children Aged Two to Three Years* in 1778, expanding her work into four parts between 1778–79, and finally producing an extended edition of *Lessons for Children in Four Parts* in 1808. Like Defoe’s *The Family Instructor*, *Lessons for Children* eschews a hortatory mode. It depicts verisimilar dialogues between Mamma and little Charles and is set in evocatively domestic middle-class spaces. Unlike *The Family Instructor*, *Lessons for Children* focuses on Mamma and Charles’s quotidian actions without using the domestic space as a backdrop for theological exchanges. In *Lessons for Children*, everything is a sensible observation worthy of being recorded in print. The book depicts Mamma taking the pre-literate Charles on her lap and teaching him to read; it shows us the moment where Charles learns how to pet the family cat; it transcribes Mamma’s description of the production chain involved in making a loaf of bread; it records Charles’s confusion over the mismatch between the map of the sea and the physical sea. The content and structure of *Lessons for Children* follow a pattern in which Mamma and Charles observe an activity or object in the domestic or agricultural sphere; Mamma teaches Charles the principles or processes of human labour behind that activity or object; and in

response to the intricacies of natural and cultural structures, Charles is encouraged to adopt a stance of wondering critical reflexivity. This chapter studies how *Lessons for Children* reshaped the children's literary market in two ways: by introducing new formal content and making marketable the literary depiction of mundane activities; and by exploring new dimensions of the physical form of the children's book.

### **a. Formal Content in *Lessons for Children***

Prior to *Lessons for Children*, popular children's fiction rarely, if ever, featured prosaic domestic activities. Thomas Boreman's books encouraged child readers to use (or imagine they were using) his guidebooks while walking around significant cultural sites in London; Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* took place in a distant boarding school. Even Tom Telescope's lectures, which took place inside family homes, required the young scholars to journey to specific aristocratic houses 'that they might have the use of proper instruments' (*Tom Telescope*, p. 4). Barbauld redefined notions of marketable subject matter in children's books by writing non-dramatic domestic activities into the children's literature publishing world, presenting literary pedagogical theories of immersive learning in a literary form accommodated for child readers.

*Lessons for Children* depicts the apparently verisimilar, largely domestic, and remarkably non-religious activities of a mother and her young son. By emphasising the literary and educational potential of the mundane, *Lessons for Children* showed the breadth of topics that could be marketed toward children and their parents. This triggered a surge in the publication of conversational primers in the years following *Lessons for Children*, as is discussed in the following chapter. Moreover, as *Lessons for Children* developed from Barbauld's belief in the inherently social nature of human beings, it celebrates quotidian forms and practices as embodiments of the ways in which humans create, uphold, and participate in cultured societies.

In *Lessons for Children*, Charles and the book's implied readers frequently are presented with mundane practices or objects, from which are elucidated a set of guiding scientific principles. This understanding leads to a state of wonder and

critical reflexivity, as the initial empirical observation facilitates the observer's cognitive awareness of abstract concepts. Many critics have noted Barbauld's materialist gaze in her children's books, but few have explored how Barbauld's pattern of focusing on the particular leads to a contemplation of the abstract, and hence, to a state of imaginative wonder. Donnelle Ruwe discusses Barbauld's method of teaching mathematics using 'manipulatives' by which Barbauld makes abstract concepts concrete;<sup>2</sup> and Sonia Hofkosh explores *Lessons for Children* using thing theory.<sup>3</sup> Joanna Wharton identifies Barbauld's patterns of association as literary mirrors of mental development, identifying the relationship between the conceptual and the physical in Barbauld's books as a '[movement of] ideas out into the world.'<sup>4</sup> This study builds on Wharton's analysis of the relationship between the conceptual and the concrete in *Lessons for Children*, but it is also interested in the aesthetic dimension of Barbauld's work. While Mary Hilton examines Barbauld's materialist gaze in relation to cognitive development, she dismisses Barbauld's interest in the aesthetic of the sublime.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to Hilton's analysis, I see in Barbauld's emphatic empiricism the production of what Isabel Rivers terms a Unitarian understanding of the Sublime, and which I term Enlightenment wonder: 'Expansion, the movement of mind out of itself.'<sup>6</sup> This Enlightenment wonder is different in kind to a Burkean Sublime. In a Burkean model of the Sublime, the process of experiencing wonder is generated by modified terror,<sup>7</sup> in which the power and vastness of an object or person strains the observing individual's comprehension (*Philosophical Enquiry*, II §V, §VII–VIII). By contrast, the Enlightenment wonder that Barbauld cultivates is derived from an empirical

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<sup>2</sup> Donelle Ruwe, *British Children's Poetry in the Romantic Era: Verse, Riddle, and Rhyme* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Sonia Hofkosh, 'Materiality, Affect, Event: Barbauld's Poetics of the Everyday', *Anna Letitia Barbauld: New Perspectives*, ed. William McCarthy and Olivia Murphy (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 83–105.

<sup>4</sup> Joanna Wharton, "'The Things Themselves': Sensory images in *Lessons for Children* and *Hymns in Prose*", *Anna Letitia Barbauld: New Perspectives*, ed. William McCarthy and Olivia Murphy (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 107–126, p. 114, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> Hilton, *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young*, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Isobel Armstrong, 'Anna Letitia Barbauld: A Unitarian Poetics?', *Anna Letitia Barbauld: New Perspectives*, ed. William McCarthy and Olivia Murphy (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 59–82, p. 59, pp. 66–71.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste; and Several Other Additions* (1757), (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999), I §VII, II §I–II. Cited in-text as *Philosophical Enquiry*.

interest in the particular and accessible. The realisation that daily objects embody complex natural and human networks and actions produces delight. The individual awareness of oneself as a participant within a culture of exchange and a network of natural and cultural relationships allows one to conceptualise ‘others’ who cannot be contained within the single comprehending self. In *Lessons for Children*, this movement from observing mundane events to experiencing a wondrous appreciation of the concepts behind such these actions and objects is applied both to natural processes, and the formation of human culture.

Barbauld depicts observation, identification, and differentiation as pivotal stages in the development of a critically reflexive mind. She models this by using the list as a dominant structural feature in *Lessons for Children*. At first glance, lists suggest restriction rather than literary complexity or mental expansion. However, as Hayden White notes, narrativisation, the interpretation of causal relations, is a basic human impulse, and simple lists with unexpected associations may ‘provoke a story.’<sup>8</sup> While White’s terminology is derived from twentieth-century scholarship, Seth Lerer has demonstrated the potential of the list to imply theological and cultural associations and create narratives across various time periods and contexts.<sup>9</sup> *Lessons for Children* demonstrates how the associative possibilities of the list facilitate the formation of critical minds of wonder. Barbauld’s lists are steeped in Enlightenment empiricism, in which knowledge grows out of rational sensibility; where learning is based upon individuals’ sensory perceptions. In *Lessons for Children* Part II, Mamma walks Charles through the months of the year. In each month, Mamma describes the temperature, the flora and fauna, and common human activities associated with that month. Her lessons in natural science are also lessons in literary composition. Mamma’s language mimics the activity of the natural world. Her description of winter months is sparse: ‘It is January. It is very cold. It snows.’<sup>10</sup> The rhythmical anaphora mimics the snowfall, and the monosyllabic single-sentence clauses evoke winter’s stillness. In the spring months, as flowers unfurl, Barbauld’s sentences become progressively paratactic: ‘April is come, and

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<sup>8</sup> Seth Lerer, ‘Children’s Literature and the Stories of the List’, *The Yale Review* (2001), 25–40, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Lerer, pp. 25–38.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Lessons for Children of Three Years Old. Part I*, (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1788), p. 9. Quotations from this are cited in-text as *Lessons* II.

the birds sing, and the trees are in blossom, and flowers are coming out, and butterflies, and the sun shines' (*Lessons* II, p. 14). This lesson in literary elegance, in which 'the choice [of language] seem[s] to spring from the impression of the idea,'<sup>11</sup> reveals the interrelated nature of science and literature in Barbauld's encyclopaedic scheme.

Significantly, Mamma *walks* Charles through the months. She does not merely describe abstract concepts. In August Mamma says, 'It is August. Let us go into the corn-fields to see if the corn is almost ripe. Yes, it is quite brown [...] Eat some, Charles; rub it in your hands' (*Lessons* II, pp. 27–28). Her declaration, 'It is August,' would not be out of place in a traditional primer. However, Mamma then offers a relational invitation, 'Let us go,' echoing the sensual refrain from the Song of Solomon (*Song of Solomon* 7:11–13, KJV), thereby suggesting that basic literacy and learning can and should involve poeticism and sensuality. This sensory invitation is compounded by Mamma's directives to Charles to 'go', 'see', 'eat', 'rub.' Charles learns about corn through sight, taste, and touch. This empirical knowledge operates within the frameworks of sensibility as a mode of knowledge gained through sensory experience. This lesson in empiricism is catalogued within a list of the months. This contextualises the knowledge Charles gains through sensibility within a framework based upon categorisation and definitions, a paradigm identifiable with Enlightenment values. Mamma's instructions to Charles to 'go', 'see', 'eat', 'rub', are invitations to participate in rational sensibility. Her empirically inflected list contributes a rationally inflected vision of sensory learning to eighteenth-century debates about the form and function of sensibility as a mode of knowledge.

In *Lessons for Children*, knowledge is acquired through individual bodily experience. Through Mamma's invitations to Charles to see and touch and consider, he learns to think logically and critically about natural processes. This form of touch-based knowledge, which I refer to as 'rational sensibility,' operates within the framework of eighteenth-century sensibility. It is concomitant with David Hartley's theory of vibrations, in which Hartley used scientific and medical paradigms to postulate that repeated sensory perceptions were communicated to

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<sup>11</sup> 'On Elegance of Language' (from Mr. Webb's Literary Amusements), *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Jan 1791), p. 17.

the brain through vibrations, ultimately producing patterns of mental recollection.<sup>12</sup> In *Lessons for Children*, Barbauld employs visual and aural repetition in her repeated phrases, ‘Come let us see/go’, inviting her readers to associate the pattern of seeing with physical engagement with the object in question, followed by logical deductions regarding the nature of that object.

Rational sensibility in *Lessons for Children* provides a scientifically deductive interpretation of eighteenth-century sensibility as a mode of knowledge, in contradistinction to the more recent scholarly focus on sensibility as an expression of aristocratic and feminised values. Since George Rousseau framed eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility as a response to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical discoveries concerning the nervous system and brain anatomy, twentieth- and twenty-first scholars have discussed eighteenth-century sensibility as a form of personalised, touch-based knowledge and self-expression.<sup>13</sup> Ann Jessie Van Sant describes sensibility as a translation of ‘all sensory experience into a form of touch,’<sup>14</sup> and Ildiko Csengei identifies Enlightenment medicine and Whytt’s influential ideas concerning ‘body-mind sympathy and the physiological concept of nervous sensibility’ as the grounds from which theories of sensibility were articulated.<sup>15</sup> Rousseau, Van Sant, and Csengei interpret this concept of touch-based sensibility primarily as a form of knowledge that produced class-based and gender-specific social codes. Upper-class individuals, particularly women, were believed to have more refined nervous systems and were almost expected to have more receptive sensibilities. By the time Jane Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility*, she could depict Marianne Dashwood feeling socially pressured to look haggard following Willoughby’s unexpected curtailment of their courtship.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Marianne Dashwood’s sensibility, which leads to outbursts of sentimental excess, the sensibility in *Lessons for Children* leads to critical observation. Charles discovers

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<sup>12</sup> David Hartley, *Various Conjectures on the Perception, Motion, and Generation of Ideas* (1746), trans. Robert E. A. Palmer (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1959), Propositions 10–12.

<sup>13</sup> George S. Rousseau, ‘Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility’ (1975), *Nervous Acts. Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 157–184, pp. 171–74.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century sensibility and the novel: The senses in social context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 92, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ed. Kathleen James-Cavan (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 115.

his 'being,' his sense of identity and self-agency, in his actions. In observing a caterpillar, he learns that he does not metamorphose like an insect; that he is capable of logical thought; that he is equally wondrous as a metamorphosing butterfly despite their differences. Sensibility in conversational primers, then, encourages fictional children and implied readers to focus their sensations into rational reflections and logical deductions, rather than bodily displays of emotion.

However, Barbauld's rational sensibility does not exclude emotion. She uses affectation in her empirically inflected lists to teach Charles the value of non-human life:

Hark! Somebody is letting off a gun! [...] Here is a bird dropped down just at your feet. It is all bloody. Poor thing! How it flutters. [...] What bird is it? It is a partridge. Are you not sorry, Charles? It was alive a little while ago (*Lessons* II, pp. 30–31).

'Hark!' Mamma exclaims. Her breathy exclamation closes on a harsh ejective 'k', evoking her sudden bodily reaction to the sound of a gun being fired. The episode is insistently physical, even if the language is not tactile. The phrase 'dropped down' emphasises the bird's weight, and the corporeality of the bird's body is reinforced by the information that it is located near Charles's feet. Mamma—or Charles—remarks on its dying jerking motions. It is from this physical proximity that Charles identifies the bird as a partridge. Instead of providing a scientific description of a partridge, Mamma's hypophora emphasises the tragedy of the situation. Charles is told to be 'sorry' that the bird is no longer alive, an emotion provoked by the physical reality of the bird's pain and imminent death. Charles learns multiple lessons: he is taught to identify the sound of a gunshot; how to recognise a partridge by its body; how to lament the tragedy of death and to value life. He is also taught, implicitly, to criticise the violent practices of the British cultural elite. Mamma conveys these lessons by situating Charles in an aural, visual, and visceral world. By witnessing an aristocratic shooting party, Charles learns tangible lessons in natural geography, is introduced to ethical judgements concerning social cultural practices, and is taught conceptual values about life and death. This lesson in emotional sympathy and the value of animal life comes

within the context of the list of the months. Emotion finds its place within a world that can be categorised systematically.

Nevertheless, Barbauld's lists challenge Richard Yeo's characterisation of eighteenth-century dictionaries of arts and sciences as embodiment of an 'Enlightenment culture' that sought to 'reduce knowledge to manageable essentials.'<sup>17</sup> Just as William McCarthy has shown how Barbauld's scientific lessons frequently move from specific experiences to general ideas,<sup>18</sup> so Barbauld's lists gesture toward a larger paradigm of thinking. Instead of providing facts for rote memorisation, Mamma's lists are paradigms of identification and differentiation that enable individuals to develop the observational and rational skills necessary for making ethical and imaginative judgements. Barbauld explicitly addresses the impossibility of obtaining an essential body of knowledge in her extended version of *Lessons for Children*:

If you learn a little every day, you will soon know a great deal.

Mamma, shall I ever have learned all that there is to be learned?

No, never, if you were to live longer than the oldest man but you may learn something every day.<sup>19</sup>

Explicitly eliminating the possibility that individuals can contain an infinite body of knowledge, Barbauld presents Mamma's lists as structures of consciousness through which individuals may observe and categorise objects and events. Mamma's lists are also forms that enable Charles to discover unexpected connections between humans, the natural world, and cultural objects.

In *Lessons for Children* Part III, Barbauld depicts wonder as a natural component to the scientific principles on which human life and culture function. When Mamma teaches Charles about the formation of shadows and perspective, she positions science as a handmaiden to wonder. It is unclear whether Mamma or Charles echoes the Classical Hebraic poetic refrain, 'Come let us [go].'<sup>20</sup> If it is

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 281.

<sup>18</sup> McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, p. 199.

<sup>19</sup> Mrs [Anna Letitia] Barbauld, *Lessons for Children, in Four Parts* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1808). Quotations from this are cited in-text as *Lessons in Four Parts*.

Mamma, she reiterates her affectionate authoritative stance, and if it is Charles, he is responding to Mamma's tender posture with his own invitational directive. Nevertheless, it is clearly Charles who exclaims in surprise when he sees his shadow:

Come, let us go home, it is evening. See, Mamma! How tall my shadow is. It is like a great black giant stalking after me.

Your shadow is tall because the sun is low in the sky; it is near sunset  
(*Lessons in Four Parts*, pp. 82–83).

Charles likens his shadow to a 'great black giant.' His simile suggests an affinity with folkloric supernatural elements, and hence suggests the influence of his nursemaid (a figure associated with the dissemination of folklore).<sup>20</sup> Implicitly disassociating herself from a Lockean mother who would disapprove of supernatural tales, Mamma does not chide Charles for using a folkloric simile. Indeed, as Charles's simile is printed in the book, Barbault invites her implied readers to imagine their own shadows as giants—albeit, giants with a scientific basis. In response to Charles's exclamation, Mamma proceeds to explain the effect of the movement of the sun upon Charles's perspective of size and light. Mamma uses the explicative model to implicitly dispel Charles's potential fear of his shadow, but does not use her scientific descriptions to counter Charles's flourishing literary imagination. The implication of the exchange is that wonder and science operate symbiotically, not dichotomously.

The wonder of science is a constant theme in *Lessons for Children*, as Barbault highlights the observable yet inexplicable beauty of natural transformations. In another episode, Mamma and Charles put a caterpillar in a box, and monitor its growth:

Let us go and look at it. It is gone—here is no caterpillar—there is something in the box; what is it? I do not know. It is a little ball of yellow stuff. Let us cut it

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<sup>20</sup> Sarah Trimmer, review of *Practical Education* in *The Guardian of Education*, ed. Matthew Grenby, vol. 1 of 5, (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002), p. 164, quotations cited in-text as *GE I/II/III/IV/V*; Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 of 3 (London: J. Johnson, 1801), pp. 189–193.

open, perhaps we may find the caterpillar. [...] Charles, this grub is your caterpillar; it is indeed. That yellow stuff is silk. [...] Take it, and lay it in the sun: We will come and look at it again to-morrow morning. Well, this is very surprising! Here is no grub at all to be found. [H]ere is a white butterfly. I wonder how it came here, for the windows are shut. Perhaps the grub is turned into a butterfly. It is, indeed; and look, here is the empty shell of the grub. But the butterfly is too big: this shell could not hold him. Yes, it did, because his wings were folded up, and he lay very snug. It is the same, I assure you, Charles; all the pretty butterflies that you see flying about were caterpillars once, and crawled on the ground.<sup>21</sup>

Mamma encourages Charles to embrace empiricism within the framework of rational sensibility as a way of touching, seeing, and thinking: ‘look at it [...] cut it open [...] Take it, and lay it in the sun.’ The imperative mode encourages implied readers to perform similar experiments, charting the metamorphosis of caterpillars into butterflies. Mamma indirectly teaches Charles the scientific methods of observation and deduction. They examine the caterpillar daily in a controlled environment: the windows are closed, and the caterpillar box limits the observational space. Charles learns that the caterpillar is a grub, and that the grub becomes a butterfly using his sight, touch, and mental reflection. This episode is also a lesson in wonder. It is curiosity that facilitates scientific observation and discovery: ‘I wonder’, and ‘perhaps,’ Mamma and/or Charles muse, midway through the experiment. Indeed, the discovery of scientific principles and patterns produces wonder. As Mamma says, ‘all the pretty butterflies that you see flying about were caterpillars once, and crawled on the ground.’ Mamma’s syntax of comparison contrasts the height and movement of the flying butterfly with the crawling bug. Her images of buoyancy highlight the incomprehensibility of a butterfly’s metamorphosis. Humans can mimic the tangible action of crawling on the ground, but they cannot fly. Human air-borne travel had not been achieved when Barbauld wrote *Lessons for Children*, and was only potentially attainable through complex scientific and technological experiments. Yet Mamma

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<sup>21</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Lessons for Children, of Three Years Old. Part II* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1788), pp. 32–38. Quotations are cited in-text as *Lessons III*.

encourages Charles to consider this conceptual activity of flight through the process of touching, seeing, and deducing. The state of wonder that Mamma performs and encourages Charles to mimic suggests that an awareness of scientific principles is the basis for Enlightenment wonder.

Undergirding Barbault's vision of the expansion of the mind is her understanding that socio-cultural relationships shape human behavioural patterns and meaning-making practices. *Lessons for Children Part I* establishes human relationships—more specifically, affectionate familial relationships—as the basis from which an ideal education is given and received:

Come hither, Charles.  
 Come to mamma's lap.  
 Make haste.  
 Sit in mamma's lap.  
 Now read your book (*Lessons I*, p. 5).

The anaphoric 'Come' implies that the universal human impulse is to build relationships, the ideological and theoretical basis from which knowledge is discovered. It establishes Mamma's authority while acknowledging Charles's subjectivity. Though Mamma commands Charles to 'come', it is an invitational imperative. If Charles does not respond, Mamma's imperative loses its declamatory power. At the same time, the familial lexis insists that Charles is emotionally beholden to his mother, the affectionately nicknamed 'Mamma'. This social construction of maternal affection is created through a performative act. Charles goes to Mamma and sits in her lap, affirming her authority and their bond of affection. It is from this position of physical intimacy and implied emotional affection that Charles's lessons take place.

Charles's first lessons emphasise his existence within a framework of human society and culture. In an early episode, Charles throws his breakfast on the floor:

Do not throw your bread upon the ground.  
 Bread is to eat, you must not throw it away.  
 Corn makes bread.

Corn grows in the fields.

Grass grows in the fields.

Cows eat grass, and sheep eat grass, and horses eat grass.

Little boys do not eat grass; no, they eat bread and milk (*Lessons* I, pp. 10–11).

Mamma, an ideal pedagogue, treats Charles's apparent toddler tantrum as an opportunity provide lessons concerning social etiquette and human dietary cultural practices. Interweaving epistrophe with isocolon, Mamma tells Charles that humans consume produced goods derived from nature. Corn, a natural agent, 'makes' bread—a lesson Mamma complicates in *Lessons* Part III when she lists the stages of the production chain involved in making bread. Nevertheless, her point remains: the central thing that differentiates humans from animals is the fact that humans 'make' their food. Charles consumes 'made' bread and is a 'little boy' rather than a grazing animal. The rhythm created by these linguistic sets of repetition highlights the association between corn and grass as products of the field, indicating human's fundamental dependence on the natural world. At the same time, it introduces the human capacity to create things using natural elements: that is, the human propensity to make culture. It is this feature, Mamma suggests, that differentiates people from animals.

Mamma insistently reminds Charles (and Barbauld, her implied readers) that humans are unique because they are culture-making beings. Humans have a special faculty for learning languages, and differ from animals in their ability to apply their industry to realise imagined concepts. When Mamma makes a list of noises animals makes, she ends by reminding Charles of his unique linguistic facility: 'Charles talks' (*Lessons* II, p. 56). A similar list identifies common animal activities and lists the predatory instincts of kites and hawks, the spider's characteristic of making webs, the nocturnal habits of owls, and 'the carpenters [who] makes tables and boxes' (*Lessons* II, p. 57). The singularity of human industry is highlighted by the repetition of the word 'make.' The power of the creative human act infuses quotidian objects like tables and boxes with human effort, even Enlightenment wonder. In a world in which living beings behave in strange ways, humans *make* objects.

Barbauld positions her readers to realise that mundane acts of daily

consumption can and should generate wonder, as consumption is dependent on physical acts and complex socio-economic processes. When Charles requests bread and butter, Mamma responds:

But the bread is not baked. Then bid Christopher Clump heat his oven and bake it.  
 – But the loaf is not kneaded. Then bid little Margery take the dough and knead it –  
 But the flour is not ground. Then take it to the mill, and bid Roger the miller grind it. –  
 But the corn is not threshed. Then bid John Dobbins take his flail and thresh it.  
 – But the corn is not reaped. Then bid Dick Clodpole take his sickle and cut it down  
 - But the wheat is not sown. Then bid Farmer Diggory take the feed and sow it –  
 But the field is not ploughed. Then bid Ralph Wiseacre take the horses and plow  
 (sic) it – But the plough is not made. Then go to Humphrey Hicory the carpenter  
 and bid him make one – But there is never a plough-share. Then bid Firebrass the  
 smith go to his anvil and beat one. – But we have no butter. Then go to market,  
 Susan, and buy some – But the butter is not churned. Then take your churn, Dolly,  
 and churn some – But the cow is not milked. Then take your pail, Cicely, and milk  
 it. Now, Betty, pray spread Charles a slice of bread and butter (*Lessons III*, pp. 27–  
 31).

Here Mamma complicates her earlier lesson that ‘corn makes bread.’ Her exhaustively repetitious list of the multiple stages of bread production uses anaphoric phrases (‘then bid’ and ‘then go’) provoking in readers a literary fatigue that mimics the physical fatigue produced by labour. By naming individuals as metonymic embodiments of stages of production, Mamma claims that economic production and consumption are socially constitutive acts. By inscribing human identities and relationships within the economic cycles of supply and demand, Barbault teaches her readers that industry is a social process, because simple objects designed for daily consumption are imbued with human effort. She injects an unromantic object—a loaf of bread—with wonder. Neither Charles nor the implied reader can individually produce something as complex as a loaf of bread. Even ostensibly simple objects are the culmination of a chain of human effort that exceed the scope and ability of any given individual. Cultural production, the passage implies, is a wondrous and dizzying thing. To be an ethical consumer is to be an aware participant within a

complex chain of human labour and interaction. This lesson, Mamma implies, is comprehensible to children even before they are old enough to be fluent in economic discourse.

To be a child in *Lessons for Children* is to be a member of society. Mamma teaches Charles to become a responsible and responsive cultural contributor. Based on the observations of basic social behaviours and routine objects, Charles learns to be aware of other people's efforts in creating culture, through which interpersonal and objective exchange occurs. This transforms an impersonal economic culture of supply and demand into an interpersonal network, in which each person recognises their role and that of the other as a cultural participant.

In a radical shift from earlier British children's books, which sought to inculcate patriotic normativity within its readers, *Lessons for Children* extends this respect for the 'other' to a global scale. Evan Gottlieb's study of Romantic global hospitality emphasises that such concepts were based upon the 'formal acceptance of otherness [... that] holds out the possibility of greater accord between individuals as well as nations, without eliding their differences.'<sup>22</sup> This principle of accepting the 'other' while maintaining an acknowledgement of his or her difference from the speaking self is a key animating principle in *Lessons for Children*.

Barbauld's affirmation of the difference of the cultural 'other' is indicated by the addition of a list in the extended version of *Lessons for Children*:

The Dutchman loves cheese and red herring.

The Frenchman loves soup and salad.

The Italian loves macaroni.

The German loves ham and pompernicle.

Turks sit cross-legged upon carpets.

Negroes are black, their hands are black, and their faces are black, and all their bodies. It will not wash off; it is the colour of their skin. Negroes have flat noses and thick lips, and black air, curled all over like wool.

The Indians, in North America, have copper-coloured skins.

Greenlanders drink train oil (*Lessons in Four Parts* I, pp. 18–19).

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<sup>22</sup> Evan Gottlieb, *Romantic Globalism, English Literature and Modern World Order 1750–1880* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), p. 14.

The passage is a far cry from Barbauld's more nuanced literary compositions. It inconsistently identifies some cultural groups through their physical features, and others through their cultural practices. (The claim that Greenlanders drink 'train oil' may appear factually absurd, but is in fact a reference to the consumption of whale oil.) Nevertheless, the passage normalises cultural differences by presenting 'Negroes' alongside Italians, Turks, French, Dutch, and Greenlanders as distinct cultural groups with their own practices and features. In that sense, it decentres an Anglo-normative vision of society. It was possibly this culturally radical perspective that led to later editors omitting this passage, as is suggested by the passage's absence from the 1830 edition of *Lessons for Children* published by Baldwin and Cradock and other significant London firms.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, publishers could not excise Barbauld's anti-Anglo-centric vision of global community and respect, which underlies Mamma and Charles's journey to France.

The journey to France is one of the most popular episodes of *Lessons for Children*. It was so popular that in 1847 Edward Livermore published *Charles's Journey to France, and Other Tales*.<sup>24</sup> During this journey, Charles learns the importance of communicating with the cultural other on the other's terms. Barbauld records Charles's confusion when he meets people who do not speak English. 'But I do not understand French,' Charles says, and asks, 'And why do you speak French?' He is subsequently chastised by the French for assuming that everybody shares his Anglo-centric practices: 'Here is a foolish little boy come from a great way over the sea, and does not know that every body speaks French in France.'<sup>25</sup> Charles is placed in a position of confusion and estrangement. He is forced to realise that his normative medium of exchange, the English language, is not the global normative medium of exchange. Instead, he realises, individual cultures have unique language practices, and those language practices ought to be respected by foreigners to that national culture. *Lessons for Children* counters Charles's assumptions of British normativity by challenging him to accommodate and respect the French language and cultural

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<sup>23</sup> See Mrs. [Anna Letitia] Barbauld, *Lessons for Children. By Mrs Barbauld. In Four Parts. A New Edition* (London: Printed for Baldwin and Cradock; R. Hunter; Harvey and Darton; J. Booker; Hurst, Chance, and Co.; and Simpkin and Marshall, 1830).

<sup>24</sup> *Uncle Thomas's Stories for Good Children. Charles's Journey to France* (New York: Edward Livermore, c. 1847).

<sup>25</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Lessons for Children From Three to Four Years Old* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1788), p. 70. Quotations from this are cited in-text as *Lessons IV*.

modes of engagement. This episode takes Charles's assumptions and allows him to be shaken by the smallness of his place within a larger, global network of relations. However, this exchange does not leave Charles in terrified isolation. Though he leaves France, he returns with Mamma to a rich socio-cultural network, where he learns the language skills necessary for a more productive journey across the Channel.<sup>26</sup> Charles's journey to France enacts Barbauld's literary pattern of expansion: from domestic spaces, Charles, and Barbauld's implied leaders, are led to an experience with global cultures.

The speakers and settings in *Lessons for Children* mimic Barbauld's pattern of expansion. The opening lines of Part I begin with Charles sitting in Mamma's lap; in the final pages of Part IV, the reader's gaze is directed outward to the sky. The final speeches are monologues delivered by the sun and the moon, in which science and poetry coalesce in a mythopoeic exchange. The sun's monologue combines anthropomorphism and biology:

The Sun says, My name is Sun. [...] I make the fruit ripen, and the corn ripen. If I did not shine upon the fields and upon the gardens, nothing would grow. [...] I have been in the sky a great while. Four years ago there was no Charles; Charles was not alive then, but there was a Sun. I was in the sky before Papa and Mamma were alive, a great many years ago; and I am not grown old yet (*Lessons IV*, pp. 95, 98, 100–01).

The mythic quality of the Sun's speech is highlighted by the ritualistic weight of its formulaic sentence structures. Yet the Sun's statements are also biologically factual. Sunlight is an essential component in the photosynthetic process, which enables fields to grow, and which ripens fruit and vegetables. Though there is a discontinuity between the scientific reality of the speaking Sun and the sun as an object of biological necessity, Barbauld uses scientific theories as a basis for literary and imaginative wonder. When the Sun says, 'I have been in the sky a great while,' Barbauld gestures toward scientific theories of uniformitarianism, a mid-late eighteenth-century natural philosophical principle articulated by James Hutton,

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<sup>26</sup> This language acquisition is implied in the 1808 version of *Lessons for Children* when Charles knows that the French word for horse is 'cheval.' (*Lessons in Four Parts IV*, p. 98.)

John Playfair, and Charles Lyell, among others. Yet there is also a mythic element to the Sun's declaration that it was in the sky 'a great many years ago; and I am not grown old yet.' The Sun's timelessness gains divine associations. Its declaration of its name recalls the Judeo-Christian God's claim 'I AM who I am' (Exodus 3:14, KJV). When Barbauld writes, 'The Sun says, My name is Sun', the congruency between the subject and its representation further invokes the age-old Christian metaphoric association between the Sun and the Son, contrasting eternal power with temporal human existence. The Sun was there when 'Charles was not alive [...] before Papa and Mamma were alive.' The repetition of 'alive' asserts the ontological sameness between the child and his parents as living, temporally bound beings. Papa and Mamma, figures of human authority, are just as fleeting and young as Charles is, in comparison to the ageless Sun. The Sun's vastness, which extends beyond time, appears to invite a Burkean encounter with the Sublime. Yet even in its vastness, the Sun emphasises the centrality of social relationships: Charles exists in relation to 'Papa and Mama.' In juxtaposition to the timeless sun, Charles and Papa and Mama are ontologically temporal beings, whose existence depends upon scientific principles of sunlight and aesthetic qualities of imaginative wonder and divine allusion.

The beauty of allusive wonder and coexisting subjectivities finds its fulfillment in the Moon's soliloquy. The Moon recognises Charles's smallness with great tenderness: 'When you are asleep I shine through your curtains with my gentle beams, and I say Sleep on, poor little tired boy, and I will not disturb you' (*Lessons IV*, p. 107). The airiness of the Moon's semivowel sounds, 'when' and 'with' complement its claims that it is 'gentle,' creating an almost sub-vocal mimesis between the Moon's words and its tone of address. The Moon tenderly acknowledges Charles's physical limitations and his need for sleep: 'I will not disturb you.' Instead, the Moon allows 'even the little glow-worms shine, which are quite dark by day. The stars shine around me' (*Lessons IV*, p. 106). The Moon's luminescence enables marginal bodies of light to express their individual identities. Scientifically, the moon itself is a marginal body of light reflecting the light of the sun. *Lessons for Children* thus implies that the greatest diffusive good that an individual can perform is to facilitate another subject's self expression, so that 'even the little glow-worms shine.' The Sun expresses itself through its bright rays, which provide

the light by which the Moon speaks; by the light of the Moon, marginal creatures like glow-worms and stars shine. The parallels between the scientific reflection of light, and literary and cultural claims to individual and differentiated subjectivities, facilitate poetry and wonder. The Moon's monologue ends with the paradoxical image of the nightingale singing 'melodiously all night long, while the dew lies upon the grass, and every thing is still and silent all round' (*Lessons* IV, p. 108), prefiguring the closing image of S. T. Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' by nearly twenty years. The Moon's elongated vowels and lateral consonants create a slow, lulling rhythm that evokes the nightingale's song. The image of the singing nightingale invokes a history of Classical and poetic allusions, imbuing the Moon's address with mythic poeticism. Yet this auditory image is also associated with stillness and silence: a state of reverie and unforced reflection. In contrast to Burke's claim that 'Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action' (*Philosophical Inquiry*, II §17), Barbauld suggests that the gentleness of birdsong in the moonlight can suspend action, facilitating sublime encounters.

Sublimity in *Lessons for Children* does not overwhelm the individual, but produces a reflective reverie. The book closes with Charles tucked in bed, and the quiet night bathed in moonlight. Arriving at this state of wonder differs from the experience of Burkean Sublimity as a modified form of terror. *Lessons for Children* produces wonder and reverie through an empirical process of observing one's particular and immediate surrounding, and reflecting on those observations. The lessons in *Lessons for Children* range across multiple fields of study, as Charles learns that observable processes of natural transformation are filled with wonder; that human culture is a complex and incredible process; that he as an individual exists within interlocking natural and human relationships. This is the culmination of Enlightenment wonder in *Lessons for Children*: the recognition of one's place within a culturally-constructed world, and the celebration of one's place within that complex network of human and non-human relations.

## **b. Format and *Lessons for Children***

When a book is transformed through reading into a text, it no longer is (or has) a volume but becomes instead a temporal event. All that is spatial about it, except for the imagined world it signifies, has been left behind along with the bodily posture of the reading agent.<sup>27</sup>

Garrett Stewart's claim that the reading act is 'siteless' is, by his own admission, based on his observations of nineteenth-century novels. Nevertheless, Stewart's statement calls attention to the unique way in which *Lessons for Children* insists upon its sited-ness. The first image it provides is of a child reader, and its repeated use of tactile language foregrounds spatiality in the reader's mind. Just as *Lessons for Children* leads its readers from observations of physical surroundings to a reflection of abstract principles, the physical format of *Lessons for Children* invites readers to interrogate the relationship between the particular and the abstract. Through its conversational form, the book invites an interactive reading practice. Moreover, through its physical features of size and material construction, the book invites readers to map the text's domestic and abstract lessons onto their physical, observable surroundings, further transforming reading into an intensely interactive activity.

*Lessons for Children* conceptualises reading as a familial, oral practice, capable of heightening readers' awareness of their surroundings, and highlighting the importance of social interactions to produce a harmonious society. Spatial theory asserts that space is a social entity and that 'The form of social space is encounter.'<sup>28</sup> This chapter uses spatial theory definitions of 'place' and 'space' to examine how Barbauld presents her idea of social spaces. It utilises Yi-Fu Tuan's differentiation between space as an abstract concept characterised by movement and potential, and place as a specific geographic area 'created' by individuals' experiences. Tuan's definitions juxtapose 'abstract' space with geographic, time-bound 'place.'<sup>29</sup> Religious scholars of ritual practices have further developed Tuan's claim that

<sup>27</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 101; also p. 116, p. 411.

<sup>29</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 17, p. 161, p. 179.

individuals who pause transform ‘space’ into ‘place’ by associating unique values and memories with particular geographic features.<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, for instance, defines ritual ‘a mode of paying attention’ and a way of ‘bring[ing] place into being.’<sup>31</sup> Although *Lessons for Children* is not a religious text, it shares features with ritual practice, inasmuch as Smith defines ritual as a sense of heightened awareness. Indeed, *Lessons for Children* seeks to cultivate a heightened awareness within its implied readers. As such, this study employs spatial theory terms to analyse Barbauld’s manipulation of the physical dimensions of the page; her creation of an abstract space of adult-child kinship; and the methods by which *Lessons for Children* transforms reading into a ritualistic, familial practice capable of reforming social values.

A primary claim set forth in *Lessons for Children* is that the family is the basic unit of social cohesion, and that ideal learning takes place within the domestic space. This vision is inscribed in the opening lines:

Come hither, Charles.  
Come to mamma’s lap.  
Make haste.  
Sit in mamma’s lap.  
Now read your book (*Lessons* I, p. 1).

The image of the young child on his or her mother’s lap, peering into a book, recurs in frontispieces in a range of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century British children’s books. Critics like Friedrich Kittler locate in this ‘major Romantic icon [...] the origins of language and poetry in the voice of the mother,’<sup>32</sup> a reading shared by William McCarthy, who posits that the opening scene in *Lessons for Children* is a secularised image of the Madonna and child.<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to claim that Barbauld initiated these socially important concepts of the mother-teacher in late-eighteenth century Britain, as manuscript evidence suggests

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<sup>30</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 154, pp. 183–85.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 28, p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, tr. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 24

<sup>33</sup> McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, p. 198.

that contemporaneous middle-class mothers fashioned themselves as their children's affectionate teachers.<sup>34</sup> However, *Lessons for Children* captures and foregrounds the *zeitgeist* where the mother-child relationship was associated with the shared use of books. Patricia Crown's research charts the increase in the number of late eighteenth-century paintings associating the mother-child bond with books and other objects associated with childhood pedagogy.<sup>35</sup> In fact, when Mamma implores and commands Charles to sit on her lap and read his book, their functional relationship is defined by their respective relationships to Charles's book. Mamma defines herself as the emotionally sympathetic and intellectually and physically authoritative teacher, and positions Charles as the listening and observing subject. Yet when Mamma tells Charles to read 'your' book, she names Charles as the owner of the object that determines Mamma's pedagogic identity as the book's interpreter. Moreover, Charles is an active agent. Mamma must call him to a position of stasis ('Sit in Mamma's lap'), from which she is compelled to allow him to play merely eight lines later. Charles's book defines the roles Mamma and Charles are invited to perform—Mamma, as the literate instructor, and Charles, as the active owner of a book he does not yet understand.

The words that Mamma and Charles say form a relational act and create an abstract space of parent-child interaction. These exchanges are shaped by kinship, rather than a competition for verbal dominance. As Deborah Tannen notes in her linguistic analysis of conversations, the roles of speaker and listener overlap, as speakers 'simultaneously [project] the act of listening.'<sup>36</sup> Tannen identifies repetition as a resource by which conversationalists 'create a discourse, a relationship, and a world.'<sup>37</sup> The idea that a shared linguistic world creates a space where the identities of speaker and listener are not fixed corresponds with Tuan's idea of space as an area of potential and movement.<sup>38</sup> The abstract nature of this space is emphasised by Mamma and Charles's lack of personality. In *Lessons for*

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<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, the Jane Johnson Manuscript Nursery Library, housed in the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

<sup>35</sup> Patricia Crown, 'The Child in the Visual Culture of Consumption 1790–1830', *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity*, ed. Anja Müller (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 63–80, pp. 66–67.

<sup>36</sup> Deborah Tannen, *Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Tannen, *Talking Voices*, pp. 81, 84–85

<sup>38</sup> Tuan, 16, p.161, p.179.

*Children*, readers are given no sense of Mamma's or Charles's appearance or personality quirks—save that Charles, like many toddlers, is impatient for his meals and demands his mother's attention even when she is attempting to work. Catherine Gallagher's theory that eighteenth-century novels flourished because readers responded to the obvious fictionality of characters applies to novels with protagonists who are 'deeply and impossibly familiar'—a perspectival decision that enables readers to feel intimate with characters while recognising the unreality of being able to access that character's internal thoughts.<sup>39</sup> In *Lessons for Children*, this idea of the fictional character's internal space is non-existent; even the idea of the physicality of the characters is left beyond the text. Mamma's and Charles's words form the content of the book. Their conversations gain physical contexts only if read out loud in verisimilar environments, or when readers imaginatively project verisimilar environments based upon past (or imagined) reading experiences.

As part of the process of reading aloud, implied child readers are given the chance to articulate the authoritative Mamma's words. There is potential, therefore, for a real-life child to embody the words uttered by a literary authoritative adult. However, this remains an unrealised potential until readers perform the text. In this sense, Mamma and Charles's exchanges occur in an abstract space. Implied readers are invited to give these exchanges a corporeal reality in their specific environments by enacting the dialogue and reading the words aloud. In a similar manner, Charles's education in sensibility only becomes a tangible reality when readers physically enact his lessons. Readers of *Lessons for Children* cannot participate in Charles's sensorial education. They cannot glean from the page what it feels like to touch a caterpillar or feel the sun from different places in the sky. The closest readers can come to participating in Charles's education is by placing themselves in environments where they can see and touch similar objects.

Barbauld's book thus invites implied readers to transform disembodied acts in literary space into physical acts in the reader's specific geographic environments. After instructing Charles to read his book, Mamma asks, 'Where is

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<sup>39</sup> Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in *The Novel*, vol. 1 of 2, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 336–363, p. 351, p. 356.

your pin to point with?’ (*Lessons* I, p. 2). This question is directed as much to implied readers as to Charles. Mamma’s description of and direction to the child reader to trace the words of the book invites implied child readers to use physical objects to mark the words on a page. Moreover, Mamma’s monosyllabic words and simple syntax invites child readers to read her words aloud. The potential that real-life children may speak the words of the authoritative literary Mamma, or a real-life adult may adopt the voice of a young child, facilitates a form of role-playing. Allowing children to speak with authority and knowledge enables them to imagine their futurity as adults. Similarly, allowing adult readers to ask questions about basic social norms and constructions reminds them of a time when they were children.

This performative element of *Lessons for Children* is imbricated in its identity as a conversational primer. In her analysis of the literary form of pedagogical conversations, Michèle Cohen posits that the authors either understood the form as a mode of transcription, or marketed it as such.<sup>40</sup> In either case, the form resembles an idealised script. There is a fundamentally scriptive element to *Lessons for Children*; a desire to use the print medium to reinforce individuals’ skills in preparation for social conversation. Growing up in the Warrington Academy, Barbauld participated in a politicised environment where conversation was considered a means of generating social reform, investing the human voice with innate political power.<sup>41</sup> The concept of conversation as a productive, democratic ideal continued through the Romantic period, though Jon Mee’s studies suggest that it encapsulated ‘metaphorical clusters’ and by the 1820s was understood less as a spoken medium and more as a textual space of inquiry.<sup>42</sup> Barbauld shows her awareness that conversation can be a simultaneously oral and textual practice by manipulating the textual layout of *Lessons for Children*.

Barbauld’s use of the physical space of the printed page inspired new printing practices among British children’s literature publishers in the eighteenth century. Contemporaneous publication journals praised the book for being

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<sup>40</sup> Cohen, ‘The pedagogy of conversation’, pp. 454–56.

<sup>41</sup> Mee, pp. 119–22; Felicity James, ‘Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld circle, 1740–1860’, *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld circle, 1740–1860*, ed. Felicity James and Ian Inkster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–27, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Mee, p. 16; Mee also discusses Hazlitt’s printed conversational essays pp. 239–277.

practically applicable.<sup>43</sup> Critics singled out Barbauld's focus on the material aspects of the children's book as something that made her book especially accessible to young children. *The Monthly Review* praised Barbauld's 'simplicity of language' printed in a large typeface that enabled children to 'fix their wandering eyes steadily upon the separate words.'<sup>44</sup> Sarah Trimmer commended *Lessons for Children* for its conversational tone and its child-friendly material presentation, noting that it generated a 'new turn both to the composition and mode of printing the little volumes designed for young children' (*GE II*, pp. 43–44). Barbauld's printing choices highlight her awareness of the slippage between printed primers and vocal utterances.

The page layout of the first version of *Lessons for Children* (1778–79) foregrounds the slippage between printed text and vocal utterance. This is particularly noticeable in Part I where Barbauld prints each sentence on a new line. As Donelle Ruwe observes, 'A happy consequence of Barbauld's new mode of text presentation is that her prose appears to be lineated as poetry.'<sup>45</sup> Ruwe's reference to poetry is connotative, for poetry is frequently designed to lead to performance, in which readers are encouraged 'to make oneself into the speaker.'<sup>46</sup> This idea of personation, in which readers are encouraged to embody a character's qualities, thereby becoming the character in the text, informs the dialogue-format of *Lessons for Children*.<sup>47</sup>

The dialogue format of *Lessons for Children* also highlights the ease with which a mother and son may adopt each other's words, suggesting an intimate kinship between parent and child. This is particularly evident when Charles and Mamma interrogate the family cat:

But puss, why did you kill the rabbit?

You must catch mice; you must not kill rabbits.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Review of *Lessons for Children from Two to Three Years Old*,' *The Westminster Magazine* (Oct 1778), p. 549.

<sup>44</sup> 'Article IV & V. *Lessons for Children from two to three Years old* and *Lessons for Children of three Years old*,' *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 59 (1778), 25–28, p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ruwe, *Children's Poetry in the Romantic Era*, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: an introduction and anthology* (Boston: Bedford St Martin's 2002), p. 183.

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Howell Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 186.

Well, what do you say, did you kill the rabbit?

Why do you not speak, puss?

Puss cannot speak (*Lessons I*, pp. 7–8).

The repetition of the affectionate, juvenile term ‘puss’ implies that Charles is the primary interrogator. Moreover, the motivation-based query is directed at an animal, suggesting that the speaker is young enough to assume that animals are rational beings capable of articulating comprehensible responses to theory of mind questions.<sup>48</sup> The words, then, appear to be uttered by Charles. The simple dialogue and short sentences are composed chiefly of single clauses, and almost beg to be read aloud. Aware that the book is designed to teach young children literacy skills, Barbault ensures that the visual syntax of the exchange encourages implied child readers to read. The repetition of the epistrophic question, ‘did you kill the rabbit?’ encourages child readers to develop their visual-literacy skills of word and clausal recognition. Yet the balanced, imperative insistence, ‘You must catch mice; you must not kill rabbits’ is strangely arbitrary for a child affected by the sight of animal violence. It is unclear whether Mamma is reprimanding the cat, or if Charles is assuming Mamma’s role as the rule-setting scolder. In some ways, it does not matter who speaks, for the authority connoted by the balanced sentence and the repeated imperative ‘must’ is destabilised by the surrounding questions, ‘why did you kill the rabbit?’ and the even more uncertain, ‘did you kill the rabbit?’ The ensuing silences suggest that Mamma, like Charles, has a limited capacity to understand and direct the actions of another living being (in this case, Puss). Understanding this shared limitation enables adults and children to sympathise more deeply with the other.

Essential to the formation of this conceptual space of parent-child understanding is the literary depiction of physical spaces of parent-child intimacy. Barbault achieves this in part by describing elusive visual situations where adults and children perform physical activities in a close space, but which require real life adult-child physical interactions in order to make sense. One such situation is

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<sup>48</sup> Michelle M. Chouinard, P. L. Harris and Michael P. Maratsos, ‘Children’s Questions: A Mechanism for Cognitive Development’, *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 72 (2007), 1–129, p. 73.

Mamma's lesson in how to pet the family cat. She tells Charles, 'You stroke her the wrong way. This is the right way' (*Lessons* I, p. 7). There are no further instructions as to how to pat the cat, and the book lacks engravings that might indicate how to stroke a pet. This gap becomes an invitation to implied adult readers to provide their own explanations and demonstrations as to how to stroke a cat. If, as Gillian Brown identifies, pictures in children's books demand the presence of adults to identify and explain the image,<sup>49</sup> the lack of images in *Lessons for Children* make adult-child interactions even more necessary. Without real-life explanation of enactment, the episode is a *non sequitur*. As Wharton notes, *Lessons for Children* was unusual for being a children's book that eschewed pictures, yet, paradoxically, critical praise 'centered on the book's images.'<sup>50</sup> This paradox may be understood using spatial theory concepts. *Lessons for Children* creates evocative literary spaces that provide enough definition to be mapped onto real-life places, but the literary space lacks enough details so that *any* place can become that location. Any mamma can teach any child how to pet a cat. The episode aims to encourage adults to enact that lesson in close physical proximity to their own children.

Barbauld's apparent vision of using the book to facilitate real-life actions moves readers from print back into the world of the aural and the physical. This challenges claims that 'print locks words into position,'<sup>51</sup> and 'reduces [...] utterances to lines of equivalent evaluative status on a page.'<sup>52</sup> Instead, Barbauld's imagistic dialogue emphasises the power of the physical. Indeed, the book opens with the iconic scene of a young child clambering onto his mother's lap: 'Come to mamma's lap' (*Lessons* I, p. 1). The invitational imperative is addressed to Charles and to all of Barbauld's implied readers. Wall notes that '[w]riters for children [speak] to children in the presence of other adults.'<sup>53</sup> In accordance with Wall's observation, Barbauld's imperative is addressed to implied children and to implied accompanying adults. To this latter group, Mamma offers a model for how to

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<sup>49</sup> Gillian Brown, 'The Metamorphic Book: Children's Print Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39 (2006), 351–362, p. 354.

<sup>50</sup> Wharton, p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literature: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Tannen, 'Relative focus on involvement in oral and written discourse', *Literacy, Language, and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing*, ed. David R. Olson, Nancy Torrance, and Angela Hildyard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 124–147, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> Wall, p. 13.

articulate parental authority with tenderness. The command, ‘Sit in mamma’s lap’ paints the mother’s lap as a physically intimate space. The gentle atmosphere is further connoted through the fond derivative ‘mamma’. By providing implied adult readers with a set of affectionate imperatives, Barbauld’s parent-author invites adult and child readers to enact a similar reading posture.

Barbauld invites her readers to adopt this posture, but she cannot enforce readers to mimic Mamma and Charles’s postures. The only space in which this posture may be replicated definitively is the literary imagination. As Garrett Stewart notes, the depiction of enacted reading scenes ‘trope[s] rather than reproduce[s] the reading experience.’<sup>54</sup> In writing about Charles and Mamma’s physically intimate and emotionally affectionate spaces of reading and speaking, Barbauld created the trope of the loving parent-teacher and child pupil. While this trope recurs in conversational primers after *Lessons for Children*, the extent to which historical readers performed this trope cannot be ascertained.

Nevertheless, Barbauld and her publishers encouraged implied readers to adopt this literary posture in real life by manipulating the physical dimensions of *Lessons for Children*. The material constraints of *Lessons for Children* indicate the desirability of proximal adult-child reading postures. Printed over a span of around twenty years, the Joseph Johnson-published copies of *Lessons for Children* held in the British Library are consistently sized around three-and-a-half inches in width and four inches in length.<sup>55</sup> This size allows young children to hold the books. Since these children should be, according to the title, ‘two to three years old,’ the book assumes that literate guardians will accompany these pre-literate children. This enables real-life readers to mimic the reading posture of a child sitting in an adult’s lap as the adult helps the child decipher the words in the child’s book. As Walter J. Ong writes, texts generate readers’ roles by teaching or encouraging them to ‘conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least [...] operate in terms of these projections.’<sup>56</sup> There is a similarity between Mamma and Charles’s posture described in *Lessons for Children*, and the reading position encouraged by the physical dimensions of the book.

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<sup>54</sup> Stewart, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Sizes vary due to page trimming; my estimate is that the books were likely 32mo folds.

<sup>56</sup> Walter J. Ong, ‘The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction’, *PMLA* 90 (1975), 9–21, p. 12.

The textual and material form of *Lessons for Children* implies that being a student is characterised by postures of affectionate respect and dependence upon a caring teacher. Barbauld projects a reading environment in which children are taught how to hold books, which as the preface insists should be made with quality paper; and how to identify printed text, with its large typeface and generous line spaces. For the price of a single book, readers were purchasing fewer words. This style of reading favoured a middle-class market. Moreover, buying a copy of *Lessons for Children* was an investment that assumed that adult purchasers could spend time with their child, or could hire a suitable literate guardian to supervise the reading child. Rather than seeking to overturn hierarchical class structures, *Lessons for Children* sought to reshape the middle-class domestic space into one of familial affection and continual learning.

Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* encouraged children to continue reading by providing visually accommodated versions of 'adult' books. Like books marketed for consumers fluent in literacy, *Lessons for Children* has a cover, a preface, and printed pages. Unlike books printed for proficient readers, the words in *Lessons for Children Aged Two to Three Years* (later, *Lessons for Children Part I*) are spaciouly surrounded by white and are printed on the *verso* only (see fig. 1). The single-sided printing is less visually demanding on non-literate eyes. Barbauld's preface does not specify this printing decision. However, copies of *Lessons for Children* published by Joseph Johnson over a span of twenty years show the consistency with which the successive parts of *Lessons for Children* progressively increase the ratio of printed text to white space. Johnson editions of *Lessons for Children* print Part I on the *verso* only; Parts II and III have text on the *verso* and *recto*, encouraging child readers to embrace more visually-demanding literary texts (see fig. 2). Earlier editions of Part IV include catchwords at the bottom of pages, preparing readers to anticipate what was a common printing convention (see fig. 3). As catchwords became an out-dated printing feature, the catchword in *Lessons for Children* was removed (see fig. 4). This process of gradually filling the page facilitates a correlation between the text's format and its implied readers' literacy skills, reading confidence, and familiarity with print conventions.



Fig. 1: *Lessons for Children* (1787), p. 9, courtesy of the British Library



Fig 2: *Lessons for Children Aged Three Years Old. Part I* (1788), pp. 4–5. Courtesy of the British Library



Fig 3: *Lessons for Children Aged Three to Four Years Old* (1788), pp. 48–49, courtesy of the British Library



Fig. 4: *Lessons for Children Aged Three to Four Years Old* (1808), pp. 98–99, courtesy of the British Library

Barbauld's act of gradual filling the page indicates her awareness that increased reading fluency enables readers to participate in a wider range of reading

practices. *Lessons for Children* affirms, with Roger Chartier, that reading is always physical:

Readers, in fact, never confront abstract, idealized texts [...] They hold in their hands or perceive objects and forms whose structures and modalities govern their reading or hearing [...] reading is always a practice embodied in gestures, spaces and habits.<sup>57</sup>

The idea that reading occurs in conceptual space *and* physical places informs Barbauld's depictions of social reading acts and her manipulation of page space. Her social reading practices aimed to cultivate sociable, critical thinkers. While authors of other conversational primers did not necessarily share Barbauld's Rational Dissenting beliefs, they mimicked Barbauld's printing conventions and similarly attempted to create affectionate, polite, and discerning readers. Barbauld's Dissenting authorial aesthetic was therefore seminal in the development of age-specific conversational primers in late-eighteenth-century Britain. *Lessons for Children* recast the children's book as an object that could generate an abstract space supporting parent-child interactions and a physically interactive space.

*Lessons for Children* further facilitates the potential for implied readers to transform the book's interactive spaces into physical sites of play by using literary gaps. These gaps encourage readers to treat *Lessons for Children* as an episodic and interactive text. Wolfgang Iser presciently identifies gaps as the impulse for communication and action: 'What is concealed spurs the reader into action [...] Whenever the reader bridges gaps, communication begins.'<sup>58</sup> When Charles tells Mamma, 'Lay by your work, mamma, and play with me' (*Lessons* I, p. 33), the episode ends. There is a line break, and the next section begins with a different setting and scene. These indicate that Mamma complied with Charles's request. This textual break invites implied readers to pause their reading and use their surrounding objects to affectionately and physically interact with each other. The

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<sup>57</sup> Roger Chartier, 'Labourers and Voyagers: From the text to the reader', *The Book History Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 87–98, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Wolfgang Iser, 'Interaction Between Text and Reader', *The Book History Reader* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 391–396, p. 393.

episodic gap reaches out to implied readers outside the book and encourages them to transform their reading places into sites of play. This creates a theoretical space in which pedagogic hierarchies are momentarily leveled and potentially upended.

Barbault further affirms the idea that reading momentarily destabilises pedagogic hierarchies by suggesting that the slippage between the sign and the signifier facilitates forms of mental play. This occurs when Charles and Mamma journey to France, and reach the sea. Charles asks what the sea is, and she replies:

It is the Sea: did you never hear of the sea? What! Is this great water the same sea that is in our map at home? Yes, it is. Well, this is very strange! We are come to the sea that is in our map. But it is very little in the map (*Lessons IV*, p. 50).

As in other passages where both Charles and Mamma speak, it is difficult to determine who speaks and when, given the lack of nametags. It is most likely Charles who wonders whether the body of water he encounters is the ‘same sea’ in the family map. However, the repeated invocation of the map could be Charles exclaiming in surprise over the discrepancy between the representation of an object and the object itself, or it could be Mamma repeating Charles’s words to help him understand the slippage between representation and reality. In some ways, Mamma ‘talks down’ to Charles by adopting his vocabulary and syntax. Crucially, as Barbara Wall notes, ‘talking down’ only gained pejorative connotations in the late twentieth century, and it may express the hope that the one being ‘talked down’ to will be able to talk ‘up.’<sup>59</sup> The interplay of exclamations, explanations, and questions mimics, though it does not enact, the catechistic rhetoric of question and answer. Unlike a catechism, there is no formula in which the questioner and the questioned operate within a hierarchy of knowledge. Instead, the adult’s potential repetition of the child’s words validates the child’s exclamations, and the hierarchical nature of the pedagogical exchange is mitigated by the fact that it takes place in a shared linguistic space. Although Ann Wierda Rowland theorises that the prattling child was a literary trope that signified isolation from adult culture,<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Wall, pp. 15–16.

<sup>60</sup> Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 177–84.

Barbauld's Mamma's probable use of her toddler's simplified language suggests that she is attempting to bridge, not polarise, child and adult linguistic cultures. Indeed, eighteenth-century persons used 'prattle' to enable the establishments of friendships between people from different positions.<sup>61</sup> By bringing real-life practices into the public print market, *Lessons for Children* suggests that prattle can soften the power imbalance in hierarchical relationships.

The scene also demonstrates how a wondrous child and knowing adult may witness the same event but respond differently. Charles is amazed by the disparity between the physical sea and its map representation, while Mamma is surprised chiefly by Charles's confusion: 'did you never hear of the Sea?' They experience the same event from different positions of experience and knowledge. The reader, who reads and potentially speaks both Charles and Mamma's words, is enabled to inhabit multiple positions of knowledge and experience. The implied adult reader can re-experience childlike surprise over the arbitrary nature of visual signification; the implied child reader is taught to recognise discrepancies between objects and their representations. Readers of all ages are reminded that communication is built around gaps, and that language is a site of potential confusion. This dimension of horizontal parent-child interaction in a mutually incomprehensible linguistic space adds breadth to a potentially simple hierarchical pedagogical relationship.

Yet at the same time, the words in *Lessons for Children* are printed in books and are fixed in specific textual places. Barbauld was self-reflexive about the ways in which print invites readers to return to the text, bringing new insights to bear upon their interpretations. In her extended version of *Lessons for Children*, Mamma brings Charles a picture of a horse, and shrewdly asks, 'Is that *like* a horse?' Charles struggles to answer: '*I do not quite understand the question, it means horse*' (*Lessons in Four Parts* IV p. 98). When Mamma asks Charles what a Frenchman would say if asked which word means horse, Charles answers, 'He would say *Cheval*' (*Lessons in Four Parts* IV p. 99). Mamma challenges Charles's direct correlation between meaning and representation by pointing out that people can recognise images of a horse,

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<sup>61</sup> Alvaro Ribeiro identifies a similar pattern of letter correspondents using 'prattle' to bridge a socio-economic gap and create a shared space of interaction in 'The "Chit-Chat way": The Letters of Mrs Thrale and Dr Burney', *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, S.J. and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 25–40.

even if it were cut in sections, but that cutting the word ‘horse’ in pieces only produces individual letters. She concludes: ‘*Words are arbitrary marks of our ideas*, but you cannot understand that sentence yet; I have tried to explain the *thing*’ (*Lessons in Four Parts* IV, pp. 106–07). Barbauld’s complex lesson in the arbitrary nature of words shows an interest in the philosophy of language and a theoretical belief in the idea that language is culturally mediated. While the exchange is presented as a conversation, Mamma is aware that Charles cannot understand the exchange, just as Barbauld is aware the average four year-old reader will not comprehend it: ‘you cannot understand that sentence yet.’ This exchange is an abstract concept fixed in print. Its physical, textual nature allows readers to grapple with the idea through repeated encounters with the text.

*Lessons for Children* presents a seemingly ordered world in which, to apply Leonard Marcus’s analysis of Margaret Wise Brown’s *Goodnight Moon* (1947), Mamma ‘summon[s] forth a secure, whole existence simply by naming its particulars.’<sup>62</sup> Yet Barbauld destabilises this seemingly secure world by identifying the arbitrariness of the language that names the world. Pre-dating the insights of educational theorist Paulo Freire by nearly two centuries, *Lessons for Children* posits that language has transformational power:

[N]aming the world becomes a model for changing the world [...] Education [...] is indispensable to [political action] because of the role it plays in the development of critical consciousness.<sup>63</sup>

Barbauld affirms the power of language to shape individuals’ perceptions, emphasising the importance of considering how and why words are used. In *Lessons for Children* implied readers are provided with increasingly specific vocabularies for naming the world. The implied reader is given a deeper experiential awareness of the arbitrariness of language. This understanding of the limitations of communication and comprehension will, Barbauld’s Mamma implies, enable

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<sup>62</sup> Leonard Marcus, cited by Lerer, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Ann E. Berthoff, ‘Forward’ in *Literacy: Reading the Word & the World*, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. xix.

readers to reinterpret ideas encoded in a text that were too far above the reader's comprehension during the reader's first textual encounter.

Barbauld's vision of education is of a relational process that begins in the family home, and encompasses physical places and abstract spaces. She depicts children as observant beings who imitate the activities they witness at home, participating in processes of socio-cultural formation. The sociable child underpins *Lessons for Children*. If the point of education is to raise children to be socially aware and critically reflective of their place within networks of human and cultural relationships, then the purpose of children's books is to facilitate a consciousness capable of reflecting on those conceptual thoughts. *Lessons for Children* presents maternal affection as the foundation of a child's education, and as the environment that facilitates a child's first engagement with a book. It encourages children to engage in empirical learning as a mode of rational sensibility; touching, smelling, and reflecting on one's sensorial experiences. Charles is led to ponder inexplicable yet observable processes in the natural world, and is moved from that wonder to a greater wonder regarding the complexities involved in the creation of human culture. This process of conceptual reasoning is consonant with the experience of Enlightenment wonder. Barbauld's ostensibly simple literary forms, lists and conversations facilitate these expansive thoughts, providing child readers with paradigms for processing sensory experiences. She celebrates scientific principles as a handmaiden to literary poeticism and experiential wonder. Moreover, Barbauld's vision of the all-encompassing scientific, aesthetic, and familial education finds its realisation in its textual mother. Mamma is affectionate and knowledgeable; an ideal guardian and the author of practicable books for real-life mothers. Her speech is captured on the page, and her words are based on an ideal script. *Lessons for Children* presents this textual maternal teacher as consonant with a real-life maternal author. This figure of the parent-author became one of the cornerstones of the conversational primer, as women authors followed Barbauld in the 'New Walk' into the nineteenth century.

### Chapter Three

#### Barbauld's *Lessons* and Conversational Primers

The intimate and almost idyllic depiction of Mamma and Charles's everyday exchanges introduced a practical and tender tone to educational children's books. Previously, primers like the Coopers' *Child's New Play Thing* had been designed for non-familial environments such as schools, where rote teaching was common. By contrast, the conversations structuring *Lessons for Children* provided exemplary scripts for parent-teachers while facilitating young children's familiarity with everyday objects and social practices. Barbauld's focus on quotidian objects, too, was new. John Newbery's Tom Telescope took his friends to rich benefactors' houses to understand expensive scientific tools, and Thomas Boreman's books described London sites associated with the aristocracy and the institutionally powerful. By contrast, Charles's incidental lessons take place in a nondescript middle-class home and in common agricultural fields. These settings corresponded more easily to readers from the middle-class, particularly families based outside London. Moreover, *Lessons for Children* was accessible to parents, as adults without a formal education could teach the content. Even Defoe's *Family Instructor*, most akin to *Lessons for Children* in its dual address to adults and children, required from its implied father-readers a rigorous theological knowledge. Barbauld's Mamma communicates a wealth of knowledge gleaned from personal experience and empirical observations of her surroundings, and an interest in the processes that formed those environments. She is the first of several mother-teachers in eighteenth-century British children's literature. Unlike Sarah Fielding's Mrs Teachum, who only begins teaching once her sons have died, and who spends much of the book observing from the side, the Mammams of conversational primers are active mother-teachers and are central speakers in the text.

*Lessons for Children* enabled parent-authors to present their credentials as the real-life caretakers of young children as the justification for their literary efforts. The proliferation of authors adopting this posture and mimicking the conversational format and tone of Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* produced the genre of the conversational primer. It is possible, even likely, that some authors

were induced to publish private works, suggesting that the relationship between parent-authors and publishing was not always harmonious.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the pressure to publish domestic scenes indicates the increasing commercialisation of the family. In any case, some authors explicitly chose to publish works as parent-authors, such as Sarah Trimmer, one of Britain's most prolific children's authors, and the first systemic reviewer of children's literature. In *The Guardian of Education*, Trimmer theorised the history and purpose of British children's books and popularised the idea that Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* was a seminal children's book:

These well-known little books have the merit of being the first of their kind [... giving] a new turn both to the composition and mode of printing the little volumes designed for young children. [...] Mrs. B's lessons are so well known, and so generally approved, that there is no occasion to point out their excellencies; that person must be destitute of taste who does not admire them; and whoever is conversant with young children, cannot but perceive that they are peculiarly suited to the infant mind (*GE* II, pp. 43–44).

Trimmer's declaration that *Lessons for Children* was 'the first of [its] kind' imputes historical primacy to Barbauld's work as the originator of a 'kind' of British children's books featuring similar textual content and physical formats. Her language prefigures Neale's concept of genre.<sup>2</sup> Specifying the 'mode of printing' as something that Barbauld introduced to British children's books, Trimmer attributes to Joseph Johnson's publications of Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* the increasing prevalence of British children's books printed in a larger typeface with wider page margins. As a result, Trimmer evaluates *Lessons for Children* as an exemplary practical book for young children. Her claim that it possesses 'taste' could reference the book's intellectual or aesthetic superiority in comparison to other books of its kinds. In a Humean sense, 'taste' conflates intellectual and

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<sup>1</sup> Michèle Cohen, 'The Lady Charlotte Murray Educational Boxes: A Symposium,' presented at Newcastle University, 15 June 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Neale, p. 463.

aesthetic connotations and includes a moral dimension.<sup>3</sup> As Trimmer does not define what she means when she describes *Lessons for Children* as a tasteful book, she invokes all the word's connotations, promoting Barbauld's book as intellectually rigorous, aesthetically pleasing, and morally virtuous. Subsequently, Trimmer's final judgement is that *Lessons for Children* is 'peculiarly suited to the infant mind.' Her intimate metaphor of clothing transforms an educative book into an object assisting affectionate domestic exchanges. Thus Trimmer used her review of British children's books to establish the approachable and unassuming 'Mrs B' as an authorial embodiment of intimate domesticity.

When Trimmer claimed, eighteen years after *Lessons for Children* was published, that Barbauld had established a pattern in children's literature, she was joined in this declaration by an unlikely contemporaneous literary figure: Charles Lamb. In 1802, Lamb identified Barbauld as the head writer of a 'cursed reasoning crew,' whose books, which derivatively termed 'stuff' and 'nonsense', possessed a distinctive 'shape of knowledge.'<sup>4</sup> This chapter theorises how these 'kinds' of children's books became a recognisable genre, despite the non-existence of the term 'genre' at the time. It analyses the 'conversational primer' as a book designed for parent-teachers and child readers, in which the parent-author depicts ostensibly verisimilar accounts of real-life activities, affirming the work's efficacy in real-life parenting situations.

As noted in my introduction, the North American School of genre studies has effectively problematised the use of linguistic or textual features to identify fixed genres.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, understanding genre as a 'system of expectation' provides a set of interpretive tools to analyse how the marketing and reception of a text influenced the presentation of contemporaneous, like-texts.<sup>6</sup> In other words, genre may best be understood as the interaction between responders and their expectations, textual features associated with the generic corpus, and the social

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<sup>3</sup> 'Taste' [v.a.] meanings 5–6; 'Taste' [v.n] meanings 3, 6; 'Taste' [s.] 3, 5; ' in *Johnson Dictionary*; David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', *Four Dissertations* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1757), pp. 202–240; digitised by Chadwyck-Healey (1999) on the Literary Theory Full-Text Database.

<sup>4</sup> Lamb, letter no. 136 to Coleridge, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, 'Locating Genre Studies: Antecedents and Prospects', *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 1–22.

<sup>6</sup> Neale, p. 460.

norms governing both.<sup>7</sup> Although Neale formulated his concept of genre as a ‘system of expectation’ when discussing cinema, this concept is applicable to the eighteenth-century British conversational primer. On its own, *Lessons for Children* did not create a literary genre. However, other authors emulated Barbauld’s authorial posture within *Lessons for Children*, and her conversational format. In accordance with Fowler’s identification of evidence for ‘states of genre [development],’<sup>8</sup> the prefatory addresses of early conversational primers informed cultural expectations about what a conversational primer was. In conversational primers’ prefaces, writers adopted the persona of the parent-author, assuming a stance of normative hope toward their implied child and adult readers. Through this stance they implicitly, and at times explicitly, contributed to the expectation that conversational primers provided verisimilar domestic learning environments that real-life parents could apply within their own homes. In this way, the conversational primer addressed a dual readership. Written for very young readers and their parent-carers, the British conversational primer was marketed as a book that adults and children could read together, and thereby become more observant and benevolent middle-class members.

This chapter explores how the conversational primer developed into three key subsets, ultimately evolving into a type of text that was barely comparable, in terms of its form and purpose, to *Lessons for Children*. The first wave of conversational primers tends to focus on a mother teaching her children patterns of observation and reflection. Simultaneously, the familial conversational primer emerged, among the most prominent of which was Edgeworth’s *Harry and Lucy* stories. Familial conversational primers devote more textual space to their fictional children, whose observations reveal details about their parent-teacher’s pedagogical methods. At the turn of the century, the social conversational primer emerged, increasingly focusing on teaching children social decorum. Despite these variations, each of these forms uses parent-child conversations to assist the child to develop into an affectionate familial, social member. The conversational primer was built upon implicit middle-class assumptions. By depicting parents reading with children and attending to their questions, conversational primers assumed

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<sup>7</sup> Neale, p. 463.

<sup>8</sup> Fowler, p. 52.

that the books' purchasers occupied similar socio-economic positions, with the time and means to participate in recreationally educational family activities. Cementing the conflation of the domestic educational space with middle-class commercial values was the figure of the parent-author. This figure embodied the familial ideal of the educative parent, and the socio-economic ideal of the ethically benevolent social participant. Conversational primers, and their parent-authors, participated in the British commercial print industry while training the next generation in affectionate familial sociability.

### **a. Authoritative and Affectionate Mammams**

Carolyn R. Miller has described genre as 'a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence' connecting 'the singular with the recurrent.'<sup>9</sup> Although Miller was discussing the relationship between genre and public socio-cultural movements, her statement also applies to a key feature of the first wave of conversational primers: authors' justificatory statements for why they wrote their books. In *Lessons for Children*, Barbauld set the precedent for the way that authors of conversational primers positioned themselves as social benefactors sharing their lived wisdom with the unknown reading public. Barbauld presented her work as though unfolding a private familial object for more general use: 'This little publication was made for a particular child, but the public is welcome to the use of it' (*Lessons I*, p. v). By asserting the specificity of *Lessons for Children* as a gift for an individual child, Barbauld's parent-author transformed family interactions into a public object. Her parent-author invites the implied reader, almost as an afterthought, to witness moments of familial exchanges. She expresses muted normative hope in her readers' ability to replicate the lessons in her text; if she did not have some hope that her book might influence parenting methods, she would not have opened it to the public. Yet, by insisting upon the historic origin of the book as a specific family object, Barbauld's parent-author expresses what Martin terms 'hedged reliance.'<sup>10</sup> Barbauld's parent-author has a secondary aim in

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<sup>9</sup> Carolyn R. Miller, 'Genre as Social Action', in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 23–42, pp. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Martin, p. 22.

publishing her book. Should real-life parents fail to re-enact her ideal teaching method, *Lessons for Children* remains a printed record of Barbauld's parent-author's ideal parenting practices.

This authorial stance of welcoming readers into the theoretical space of the family home, while justifying the literary work in question on the basis of the author's experiences as a mother, is unique amongst other eighteenth-century texts featuring female pedagogues. As Rebecca Davies notes in her history of 'written maternal authority,' eighteenth-and nineteenth-century novels often depicted women educators who were not mothers—even Sarah Fielding's Mrs Teachum only began her school once her sons had died—or mothers whose authority was generated through letters theorising child pedagogy, rather than active parenting methods.<sup>11</sup> An exception to this was a form Davies associated with Maria Edgeworth, a practical educational book in which the female familial-author 'undermined the expectations of written educational authority' by implying that other women could achieve a similar authority.<sup>12</sup> This invitation to other women to enact the role of the mother-teacher is central to the conversational primer.

Barbauld asserts that she wrote *Lessons for Children* to fulfil a cultural need: 'amidst the multitude of books professedly written for children, there is not one adapted to the comprehension of a child from two to three years old' (*Lessons* I, p. v). Existing children's books, she claimed, were inappropriate for infant readers. They were not physically accommodated to the needs of young readers unpractised in the art of turning pages or following textual sequences. Barbauld's prefatory address ends with a justificatory assertion that her literary 'task is humble' and noble (*Lessons* I, p. vi), creating an anticipatory frame for readers to expect a work that is primarily of social moral value, and only secondarily poetic. In creating a book defined by the figure of the parent-author, Barbauld prefigured Carolyn R. Miller's analysis of genre as, in part, a rhetorical connection between the private and public.<sup>13</sup> Following *Lessons for Children*, the persona of the parent-author became a literary trope in children's books, solidifying expectations that the

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<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Davies, *Written Maternal Authority and Eighteenth-Century Education in Britain. Educating by the Book* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 2–3, pp. 17–21, pp. 40–42.

<sup>12</sup> Davies, p. 95–96.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, pp. 36–37.

conversational primer was as much a practical guide for parents for young children.

Sarah Trimmer was one of Barbauld's first imitators as a parent-author, and she was crucial in propagating the idea that *Lessons for Children* was the progenitor of the conversational primer. This chapter opened with Trimmer's review of *Lessons for Children* in *The Guardian of Education*, a periodical devoted to the systematic review of children's books and the theorisation of what a children's book should be. Trimmer's influence cannot be underestimated. As Matthew Grenby highlights in his introduction to *The Guardian of Education*, Trimmer was an incredibly widely read writer, and she held enough literary significance that the *Edinburgh Review* made passing reference to her as an author valued by 'mothers and aunts' seeking to 'pour the milk of science into the mouths of babes and sucklings.'<sup>14</sup> The writer's disparaging simile suggests that teaching an infant scientific knowledge is absurd. Beneath the insult, though, the writer presciently notes the functionality, applicability, and accessibility associated with Trimmer's children's books. These are the very qualities that Trimmer praised in Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* and modelled in her own conversational primer.

In 1780, Trimmer published *An Easy Introduction to the knowledge of nature, and reading the Holy Scriptures: Adapted to the capacities of children*, paying homage to Barbauld as the originator of the parent-author, and invoking Barbauld's name to justify Trimmer's adoption of this textual persona.<sup>15</sup> In her preface, Trimmer describes *Lessons* as:

[T]he best [book] adapted for the Purpose of teaching [children] to read [...] being wrote in a stile of familiar conversation, and free from all formality. I have endeavoured to [...] build upon the ground work which the ingenious author has laid for the Education of Children (*Introduction to Nature*, p. xii).

Trimmer's architectural metaphor depicts *Lessons for Children* as something authors can 'build upon,' suggesting that writers could use similar literary features and

<sup>14</sup> *Edinburgh Review* (1806), cited by Grenby, 'Introduction,' *The Guardian of Education*, vol. 1, p. ix.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Trimmer, *An easy introduction to the knowledge of nature, and reading the Holy Scriptures: Adapted to the capacities of children* (London: J. Dodsley; J. Robson; T. Longman and G. Robinson; J. Johnson; Mess. Welles and Grosvenor; J. Shave, 1780). Quotations cited in-text as *Introduction to Nature*.

forms to produce a publicly recognisable body of like-works—a genre. In claiming that *Lessons for Children* was ‘the best adapted for the Purpose of teaching [children] to read’ (own emphasis), Trimmer identifies Barbauld’s book as a primer, a book designed to teach literacy. However, Barbauld’s primer depends upon verbal and aural exchanges, and is ‘in a stile of familiar conversation,’ suggesting that the educative power of *Lessons for Children* lies in its ability to communicate its educational agenda implicitly. In other words, the conversational primer increases children’s literacy by mimicking a form of aural and verbal exchange with which young children would presumably be familiar: chitchat between a mother and child.

Trimmer casts herself as a similar maternal-authorial figure to Barbauld, and positions her book in the same ‘chain of Education’ as *Lessons for Children* (*An Easy Introduction*, p. ix). This image suggests the continuity of Trimmer’s work with Barbauld’s book as a practical and immersive domestic pedagogical project. The similarities are explicit: in *An Easy Introduction*, as in *Lessons for Children*, Mamma walks her children through fields of wheat and oats, through a dairy and a farmyard, and describes how to use educational objects in their middle-class house.<sup>16</sup> Like Barbauld’s Mamma, Trimmer’s Mamma uses simple syntax and short syllabic words to create a shared linguistic space with her children. This ambiguity as to who is speaking emphasises the affection and kinship between mother and child. When Mamma asks, ‘Can you tell me, Henry, what grows in this Field?—Why, they are Turnips.—I will pull one up’ (*Introduction to Nature*, p. 22), it is unclear whether Mamma is hypophorically answering her own question or whether Henry has identified the turnips. This positions mother and child as participants in a world of empirical exploration. Indeed, Mamma repeatedly confesses her knowledge gaps. Instead, she encourages her fictional children and implied child readers to compare their observations with other print materials. At one point, Charlotte gathers a bouquet, and Mamma identifies ‘Daisies, Cowslips, Buttercups: As for the rest, I do not know their names, so we must search the Herbal, and we shall find Prints of them’ (*Introduction to Nature*, p. 5). Trimmer’s

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<sup>16</sup> Objects include microscopes, suggesting microscopes were accessible to middle-and-upper-class purchasers; see Trimmer, *Introduction to Nature*, pp. 100–102.

Mamma resists attempts to read educative dialogues as an ‘idealized pedagogy initiated by learners but controlled in all its details by its teachers.’<sup>17</sup> She initiates the search the flowers, but encourages her children to continue researching the names and identities of the flowers they have gathered. Trimmer’s Mamma decentres the concept of the adult as an ultimate authority, emphasising the kinship between adults and children as observers in a temporal, physical world.

Like Barbauld, Trimmer uses her conversational primer to chart a movement from observation and wonder to reflection, though the nature of Trimmer’s reflection differs from Barbauld’s depictions of self-reflexivity. Where Barbauld’s Mamma encourages Charles to make deductions from his observations, Trimmer’s Mamma encourages her children to compare their observations with external textual sources. In all cases, the pattern is from individual observation to reflection. As in Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*, observation involves physical action. Mamma and Henry ‘pull [...] up’ the turnips to examine them. Like *Lessons for Children*, Trimmer’s book is not illustrated. Readers are implicitly encouraged to identify turnips in real-life fields, or at least, to use separate educational cards to visually identify turnips. In the latter case, the text invites readers to mentally ‘pull’ a turnip, indicating the extent to which rational empirical discourse had become a literary trope. In either case, the episode requires child readers to use materials outside the book in order to make sense of the conversational primer.

Ultimately, this pattern of observation culminates in a sense of wonder. When Charlotte collects a nosegay, Mamma gives a dizzying list of the flowers:

Look at those Tulips! Examine those Carnations! Observe that Bed of Ranunculas! And then admire that Stage of Auriculas! The Whiteness of this Lily exceeds that of the finest Cambrick.— [...] Pray, Charlotte, gather one of those very little Flowers,—I have forgot its Name; but now one sees it near it is as beautiful and curious as the large ones.— [...] Have you taken Notice that every Flower has different Leaves from the rest? [...] their Beauties are too many to be numbered, and when you come to be able to read Books of Natural History, you

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<sup>17</sup> Greg Myers, ‘Fictions for Facts: The Form and Authority of the Scientific Dialogue’, *History of Science* 30 (1992), 221–247, p. 233.

will be astonished to find how much can be said about them (*Introduction to Nature*, pp. 30–32).

On one level, Mamma is not at all scientific. Her breathless exclamations stumble over dashes between and at the ends of her sentences, suggesting an ecstatic response in the face of abundant floral beauty. She lists flowers without identifying their features and acknowledges that she has forgotten the name of a flower. Yet Mamma is insistently empirical: ‘Look! Examine! Observe! Gather.’ Her performance suggests that one *will* be astonished by the nature’s beauties, and by the scientific principles and features inscribed within. This movement from physical encounter to observation, and wonder, corresponds with the pattern of observation, reflection, and wonder present in Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*.

*An Easy Introduction to Nature* differs from *Lessons for Children* in that it makes the theological claim that the Bible is the superior book that reveals God most fully. Nevertheless, it consciously casts itself as a similar text, a conversational manual written for maternal use. Like Barbauld, Trimmer’s parent-author justifies the conversational presentation of her book. As with *Lessons for Children*, Trimmer’s Mamma’s conversational lessons take place in accessible rural fields and domestic spaces. In these spaces, both Barbauld’s and Trimmer’s children are encouraged to participate in the rational sensibility of touching, seeing, and reflecting on objects. Their lessons are situated within a shared linguistic space with their mother-teachers, with whom they share bonds of affection. Trimmer’s *An Easy Introduction to Nature* stands as one of the first imitators of *Lessons for Children*, and contains one of the earliest and strongest assertions of Barbauld’s role as the progenitor of the conversational primer.

One emulator, of course, does not create a genre. Further imitations of *Lessons for Children* and *An Easy Introduction to Nature* helped consolidate the conversational primer as a literary form. In addition to featuring tropes such as mothers walking her child through agricultural fields, and guiding them through daily household tasks, books such as *A New Sequel to Mrs. Barbauld’s Lessons* and Elizabeth Somerville’s *Lessons for Children Aged Three Years* invoked Barbauld’s maternally-centric, conversational primers to promote a form of rational sensibility. Such books offer models for both parents and children, operating on

the assumption that parents had enough time to read with their young children. They also projected a similar set of interactive reading expectations.

The anonymously authored *A New Sequel to Mrs. Barbauld's Lessons, adapted for Children from Four to Seven Years Old* (1797) simultaneously invokes a sense of textual likeness and difference to Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*.<sup>18</sup> It invites potential readers to expect that the book will be similar to Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* inasmuch as it is for young children, and will be composed of affectionate and informal parent-child conversations. These expectations are confirmed by the book, which is structured around day-to-day activities as a mother leads her young child around a nearby farm. Just like Trimmer, the author of *A New Sequel* invokes Barbauld as a seminal figure within the children's literature nursery: 'As you are a good child, and in form me you have read over Mrs. Barbauld's Lessons, I shall now place before you an addition to that pleasing and useful book' (*A New Sequel*, p. 5). The introduction marks the entrance of the parent-author, who determines whether the implied child has been 'good.' Reading Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* confers on children this status of 'goodness,' implying that personal virtue is a result of a child's practical studiousness, displayed through acts of reading. *A New Sequel* positions itself as a reward: because the child has read Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*, he or she may now read *A New Sequel*. This encourages potential buyers to view the book as an aesthetically enjoyable object that will train a child to fulfil his or her socio-economic expectations as a 'useful' middle-class participant. More importantly, the title is also a generic claim. In positioning itself as like and unlike *Lessons for Children*, *A New Sequel* situates itself as another 'link in the Chain of Education' (*An Easy Introduction to Reading*, p. ix): a book with generic likeness to, and a shared purpose with, *Lessons for Children*, yet is a distinct literary entity.

The writer of *A New Sequel* mimics Barbauld's immediate tense and active voice, borrowing her invitational language: 'Come, Frances, we will now take a walk in the garden' (*New Sequel*, p. 14). In this walk, however, Frances is silent. Mamma identifies things that Frances should observe—tulips, rose-trees, the sunset—but Frances does not speak, and the walk is not a true conversation.

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<sup>18</sup> *A New Sequel to Mrs. Barbauld's Lessons, adapted for Children from Four to Seven Years Old*. By the compiler of *An Easy Introduction to Reading*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: G. Sael, 1797). Quotations cited in-text as *New Sequel*.

Though Mamma uses simple language, she does not use repetition to create a shared discourse with Frances. Rather, Mamma accommodates her language so that the cipher-like Frances, clearly standing in for the implied child reader, may echo, ‘How great, how good, is God!’ (*New Sequel*, p. 15). In a standalone episode, Mamma’s register mimics that of a child, and she addresses a theory of mind question to an animal: ‘Pray, Miss Pussy, what business have you to be watching and trying to frighten [the bird]?’ (*New Sequel*, pp. 51–52). However, this incident is isolated, suggesting that it exists to build a sense of camaraderie between the implied child readers and the narrating Mamma, rather than to encourage an exchange of perspectives. Nevertheless, in its depiction of ordinary activities, *A New Sequel* invites implied readers to mimic the book’s conversational premises. The book is akin to a transcript of exemplary affectionate parent-child relationships. This script seeks to inculcate obedience as a virtue. It is unclear how the book requires children to be older or more literate than Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*, as obedience requires a different sort of discipline, and less critical thinking, to Barbauld’s lessons in empirical sensibility. What is clear in *A New Sequel* is the increasing cultural acceptance of the generic association of *Lessons for Children* with books featuring the author as a mother-teacher, whose conversational exchanges teach her fictional children (and implied child readers) to observe and reflect on daily life.

Further establishing Barbauld’s parent-author as the progenitor of a type of pedagogical children’s books was Elizabeth Somerville’s *Lessons for Children of Three Years*,<sup>19</sup> a title that mimics Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children Aged Three Years Parts 1 and 2*. Notably, Somerville’s book lacks an authorial preface. The implication is that the conversational primer was by then an accepted text type within the middle-class British children’s library, not requiring an authorial apology. Somerville’s book plunges into a conversational format: ‘Put on your hat; we will go and take a walk’ (*Somerville Lessons*, p.7). Unlike Barbauld, Trimmer, and the unnamed author of *A New Sequel*, Somerville’s mother begins with directive, not invitational, imperatives: ‘Put on your hat; we will go’ (own emphases.) The literary child is given no choice. However, Somerville’s book recalls both Barbauld’s *Lessons for*

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<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Somerville, *Lessons for Children of Three Years Old* (London: Sampson Low, 1800). Cited in-text as *Somerville Lessons*.

*Children* and Trimmer's *An Easy Introduction* in its celebration of rational sensibility. While on an autumnal walk, Somerville's Mamma encourages her children to make hay:

Toss it with the fork, and lay it in small heaps, when it is quite dry it will be put in the cart, and sent to the barn or the hay-loft.

How sweet it smells. See the men load the cart; the horses will draw home their food, for the time when there is no grass (*Somerville Lessons*, p. 25).

Instructing her children to 'toss' the hay, 'lay' it in heaps, and smell it, Somerville's Mamma describes the manual labour involved in farm work, inviting implied child readers to imagine the physical exertion involved in preparing hay. Just as Barbauld's Mamma encouraged Charles to think about how the production of bread involves multiple tasks in a variety of unseen sites, so Somerville's Mamma encourages Ann to conceptualise something she cannot visually see: a time 'when there is no grass.' As part of this lesson in conceptualising the unseen, Somerville's Mamma teaches her son, also named Charles, to associate natural observation with spiritual devotion: 'See the birds; God gave them wings to fly' (*Somerville Lessons*, p. 9). This devotional practice of identifying a deeper divine reality inherent in the mundane act of a bird's flight imbues the act of viewing birds with spiritual revelation, producing a sense of wonder through observation.

The ultimate lesson in Somerville's *Lessons for Children of Three Years*, however, concerns the development of a mercantile mind-set. In the final pages, one of the children requests the purchase of a new book with 'long words' to which Mamma replies, 'You are right; we will go and buy the next part of this book, and in time you will read well as a good boy and a good boy ought to do' (*Somerville Lessons*, p. 93). This blatant instance of self-marketing illustrates how the conversational primer could encourage the formation of an ethical and virtuous British consumer. Mamma affirms that the child's desires to own a book and read more fluently are 'right.' Indeed, Mamma implies that this is a socio-moral imperative: 'you will read well as a good boy and a good boy ought to do' (own emphases). Mamma's repetition of 'good boy' equates a 'good' reader with a morally 'good' boy who 'ought' to be literate. Somerville thus redefines literacy

from the mere recognition of letters and words to describe a skill that enables children to fulfil their social responsibilities. The children's book becomes a tool that helps readers observe surrounding objects, and directs that observation into religious devotion and social productivity. Somerville's conversational primer envisions reading as a holistic and a communal activity, overseen by the mother-teacher. As Somerville's *Lessons for Children Aged Three Years* does not appear to have reached multiple print editions, the importance of Somerville's work in literary history should not be overstated. Nevertheless, the book's existence, and its lack of an authorial preface, indicate an awareness amongst the reading public that books featuring a mother-teacher conversing with her young child claimed to be transcripts of real-life events, and scripts for hypothetical parent-child interactions.

The interest in producing books that mothers could, ostensibly, use with their children on a daily basis meant that some conversational primers were written in urban settings. Sarah Guppy's 1804 text, *Instructive and Entertaining Dialogues*, is set entirely in the family home, and does not include ventures into rural fields.<sup>20</sup> As the book reached only four editions by 1833, it was not a text that revolutionised the children's literature market (by contrast, Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* was being published in 'new editions' by Routledge as late as 1869).<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Guppy's book is testament to the reasonably enduring legacy of the conversational primer, even when authored by a small-name author. Just as Somerville felt no need to justify her work, so Sarah Guppy also eschewed an authorial preface. However, by publishing her work under the name 'Mrs Guppy' rather than 'Sarah Guppy,' Guppy implicitly perpetuates the figure of the parent-author by claiming pedagogical and literary authority through her status as a married woman and a presumably real-life mother. The conversational form of Guppy's primer is almost identical to that employed by Barbauld, Trimmer, and Somerville. The text is composed of a child's questions and the mother's answers, and there are no textual markers to differentiate the speakers. Instead, the simple linguistic structures and short syllabic words invite implied child readers and

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<sup>20</sup> Mrs [Sarah] Guppy, *Instructive and Entertaining Dialogues for Children*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Printed for E. Wallis, 1833), cited in-text as *Entertaining Dialogues*.

<sup>21</sup> Mrs [Anna Letitia] Barbauld, *Lessons for Children: New ed., with forty engravings on Wood* (London: G. Routledge, 1869).

mothers to read aloud together. Due to printing innovations and decreased printing costs, the book even allows mothers and children to enact the same lessons as Guppy's Mamma and child. When Guppy's child learns about circles and ovals, the shapes are printed into the text. What is, perhaps, most remarkable about Guppy's text is that Mamma's lessons do not require situational learning. When the child asks what hay is made of, Mamma explains:

It is first cut down with a very sharp Iron Instrument, called a Scythe, and that cutting down is called mowing. When it has lain a little Time, it is turned with a Fork, which is repeated once or twice a Day, during which Time the Sun (which you know is very warm in Summer) dries it. After it has been sufficiently turned, and is nearly dry, it is thrown together in little Heaps, which are called Cocks, and then the Haymakers get their Rakes, and rake together all the loose straggling bits that lie about (*Entertaining Dialogues*, p. 13).

Mamma's description is simultaneously evocative and abstract. She does not describe what a scythe looks like, or point to an image of a scythe, to help the child recognise the tool. She uses adjectives of degree to convey the purpose of the scythe, which is defined by its sharpness. Moreover, Mamma's description of the process of turning hay includes abstract time periods. The grass lies in the sun 'a little Time' and is then 'sufficiently turned', phrases that do not give a scientific sense of the time period required to make hay. Unlike Somerville's Mamma who encourages her children to turn the hay, Guppy's Mamma implies in parentheses that it is not summer. Instead, she requires her children to imagine the production of hay. This education, therefore, can take place entirely in the family home, suggesting that the book may have been written for more London-based families with less ready access to rural fields. Whatever the case, the Guppy's book's domestic setting and simplified language implies the applicability of her conversations for real-life mothers in their domestic spaces, and affirms the breadth given to mother-teachers in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British print culture.

## b. With a Familial Focus

Concurrent with Sarah Trimmer's *An Easy Introduction*, the family conversational primer emerged with the publication of *Practical Education; or, the tale of Harry and Lucy* (1780). This book, commonly attributed to Maria Edgeworth, appears to have been written by Richard Lovell Edgeworth. In the preface, the author employs male pronouns to describe his experience as a father, and it is unlikely that Maria authored the work as she was twelve years old at the date of publication.<sup>22</sup>

Published in 1780, the same year that Trimmer published *An Easy Introduction to Nature*, *The History of Harry and Lucy* extended the authorial figure of the mother-teacher to include the parent-author. *The History of Harry and Lucy* depicts both parents as parent-teachers and develops the figure of the child by adopting a third-person narrative voice. Yet, despite these developments, R. L. Edgeworth did not emphasise the innovations of his work but aligned it with Barbauld's. In his preface his author adopts a similar stance of normative hope in the rationality of his implied child readers, and in the time that his implied adults readers will invest in their children's educations. He justifies the publication and form of his work based on his personal experience as a parent-teacher, and apologises for the literary merit of that form on the basis of its intended readership (parents with young children). The preface is worth quoting in its near entirety:

The following little book is part of a work, the object of which is to unfold in a simple and gradual manner such of the leading principles of human knowledge, as can be easily taught to Children from four to ten years of age [...] by such pictures of real life, as may make a Child wish to put himself in the place of the characters intended to excite his emulation [...]

The Author [...] above all conscious of his own inability, submits the following attempt to the judgment of those, who may have wished for a book, which a child could understand [...]

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<sup>22</sup> Many thanks to Anne Markey for alerting me to the extreme likelihood of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's authorship of *Harry and Lucy*, rather than Maria's, in drawing my attention to the publication date and the authorial preface of *Practical Education: Or, the History of Harry and Lucy* (Lichfield: Printed by J. Jackson for J. Johnson, 1780). References to this book are cited in-text as *History of Harry and Lucy*.

Though the ingenious Mrs. Barbauld [sic] has favoured the public with lessons far superior to any, that have hitherto been written, yet there is room for much to be done in this part of Education. [...]

The Author can speak with confidence upon this subject, as he speaks from experience; He taught his elder children in the common manner, and his younger by a method founded upon very different principles; the latter made a greater progress in six weeks, than the former had done in as many months [...]

The following little book has been read at different times to several Children of four or five years old, who all seemed highly interested in the story and impatient to have it continued. And though simplicity of language and minuteness of detail may be tedious to parents, yet they are absolutely necessary in books, which are intended to give Children an early habit of Attention (*History of Harry and Lucy*, p. iii–xv).

Edgeworth repeatedly describes discovery as a process of ‘unfolding’ principles of knowledge in a ‘gradual’ manner. These principles of knowledge, as in *Lessons for Children*, involve the cultivation of individuals’ curiosity, observational skills, and deductive reasoning. To Edgeworth, the defining feature of the conversational primer was its method of training children to question and to *think*, rather than memorise facts. Where Trimmer used the image of the chain to indicate her work’s shared aims and methods in Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*, Edgeworth uses the image of the room. This implies an association with Barbauld’s vision of childhood education as providing the structure that will contain the facts and ideas a child will encounter and possess.

Edgeworth’s preface betrays a protracted anxiety over the literary merits of a functional family conversational primer. On one hand, he asserts that he can ‘speak with confidence’ about the work’s applicability, citing his experience as a parent-educator. He simultaneously appeals to real-life parent-readers who may use the book, apologising for the potential ‘tedium’ of the simplified vocabulary and sentence structures. Employing legal discourse, he ‘submits’ his book to the ‘judgment’ of readers. Yet even from this position of subjection, Edgeworth attempts to define his judges, whom he limits to ‘those, who may have wished for a book, which a child could understand.’ Thus Edgeworth adopts a similar stance to

Barbauld's parent author: justifying his work based on its applicability, and apologising for its simple sentences, though he complicates his apology by attempting to control the parameters by which literary judgements of his work can be passed.

Edgeworth does not simply replicate *Lessons for Children*. He provides a new focus on the child reader's ability to identify imaginatively with exemplary characters. Where Barbauld invited her readers to enact and embody the exemplary speakers in *Lessons for Children* by offering characters devoid of personalities or internal thoughts, Edgeworth desired that his child readers should empathise with Harry and Lucy, and 'put [themselves] in the place of the characters intended to excite [...] emulation.' Edgeworth asks his readers to imagine that they are Harry and Lucy, imaginatively and rationally embodying the characters, altering their real-life behaviours through processes of emulation. In doing so, Edgeworth introduced a different narrative voice to the conversational primer: the third-person narrator who textualises his characters' internal lives.

Edgeworth depicts his educational programme of rational sensibility based upon encounter, observation, reflection, and deduction using children's internal perspectives, rather than questions and answers. Lucy's lesson in the production of dairy items occurs incidentally because she was following her mother (*History of Harry and Lucy*, p. 21). Lucy's lesson is largely self-taught, and she models Edgeworth's educational method of observation and deduction through her unuttered thoughts. When Lucy enters the dairy, the scene is presented through her perspective. A series of paratactic phrases suggests that Lucy is following the method of observation, curiosity, and deduction:

She saw, that the dairy was very clean; the floor was a little \*damp, which made her think, that it had been washed that morning, [...] and she \*perceived that the room smelt very \*sweet: she looked about, to find out, if there were any flowers, that could make that pleasant smell, but she could not see any thing but a great many clean empty \*vessels of different \*shapes and a great many \*round, \*wide, and \*shallow \*pans full of milk: she went near to them, and thought the smell came from them (*History of Harry and Lucy*, pp. 22–24).

The sentences follow a causal structure. Lucy observes the floor and deduces that it has been washed. Similarly, she smells the room, reflects that something must be producing the scent, and deduces that the odour comes from the milk pans. The passage presents the method of observation and deduction as a paradigm that Lucy has internalised. Her education is directly modelled for child readers.

Nevertheless, the primer insistently demands parent-child interactions. The asterisks in the above passage are printed in the original. The glossary explains that the asterisks mark words where adults should pause the reading process and explain the words to young readers. This pattern of encouraging children to ask questions, and inviting parents to provide thoughtful answers, is also given literary representation. When Lucy asks her mother about the cream and milk in the dairy, Lucy's mother explains that milk is taken from cows' udders and asks,

[D]id you never see the maids, with milk-pails, going a milking? [...] When they have got the milk in the pails, they carry it into the dairy, and put it into such milk-pans as you saw, and they let the milk-pans stand still [...] the heaviest part of the milk falls as low, as it can towards the bottom of the pan, and the lightest part of the milk remains above it, [...] and that thick light part, called cream, as, you thought, it was: When the milk has stood long enough, the cream is taken from the other part of the milk, and doing that, is called skimming the milk  
(*History of Harry and Lucy*, pp. 30–33).

Through her rhetorical question, Lucy's mother trains Lucy in the art of recollection and mental visualisation. The paratactic sentences encourage a methodical visualisation of the process of separating milk and cream and skimming the milk. At a literary level, Lucy's mother uses elongated sentences to evoke the labour and time intensive process of producing milk. She spends two phrases explaining what happens to the 'heaviest' part of the milk, letting the length of her explanation correspond with the image of falling, while her explanation of the way lighter milk particles rise requires only one clause. Such efforts to literary detail suggest an element of anxious authorial posturing in Edgeworth's preface, where he apologises for his simplistic literary style. They also suggest that Edgeworth perceived that readers might have aesthetic expectations from a book presenting

itself as a conversational primer. This perception corresponds with contemporaneous middle-class values concerning tastefulness. Indeed, Lucy's mother's explanation of the separation and skimming of milk reveals an extremely middle-class perspective. Lucy's mother speaks as a lady who employs milkmaids, and her description of the process of milking a cow is scant in comparison to her account of what happens after the milk is collected. The ingrained assumption that the parents and children who purchased and used family conversational primers were middle-class eventually became more explicit.

Familial conversational primers always assumed a middle-class readership. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Lessons* (1795/97), posthumously published by William Godwin,<sup>23</sup> make frequent reference to a maid, Betty, and depict a family where Papa has time to play with his young children. Wollstonecraft's *Lessons* began as a series of personal letters to Fanny in 1795, when Mary believed her planned suicide would leave Fanny orphaned. Wollstonecraft resumed working on it in 1797 when she was pregnant with Mary. As Lissa Paul notes, the work is a personal letter to Fanny, reflected by the intimate and tender second person address, but Wollstonecraft was also aware that her pedagogical text could be useful to mothers of young children.<sup>24</sup> Like *The History of Harry and Lucy*, Wollstonecraft's *Lessons* focuses on its child protagonist, and incorporates Father in its episodes. Where Edgeworth examined how Harry and Lucy's cognitive processes were influenced by their affection for their parents, Wollstonecraft studied the nature of the familial relationships that structure the conversational primer. The unfinished lessons help prepare a child to become an older sibling, and they encourage that older sibling (a young child of around four years) to understand that she is capable of thinking, feeling, and sympathising.<sup>25</sup> Addressed in the second person voice, *Lessons* positions implied readers as young children granted an insight into their mother's thoughts. This facilitates an intimate relationship between the implied reader and the implied author.

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Lessons in Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Women. Four Volumes*, vol. 2, ed. William Godwin (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1798), 171–196. Quotations cited in-text as *Wollstonecraft Lessons*.

<sup>24</sup> Lissa Paul's forthcoming book, *Eliza Fenwick (1766-1840): A Life Rewritten* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Paul, *Eliza Fenwick*, p. undetermined.

*Lessons* are written in a verisimilar style, but they were written as hypothetical, idealised conversations rather than transcripts of real-life exchanges. This suggests that a powerful feature of the conversational primer included its element of fancy, which enabled mothers to imagine that they were ideal parents, either in the present or in the future. Wollstonecraft's use of the first person voice enables mothers and fathers to identify with her parent-author, especially as she does not give herself a gendered identity as Mamma until Lesson VI. In the first lessons, Wollstonecraft's parent-author provides lists of seemingly unconnected, monosyllabic words: 'Book. See. Look' (*Wollstonecraft Lessons*, p. 177). Recalling the opening lesson in Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*, Wollstonecraft's parent-author encourages her infant to perceive books as objects worthy of attention, associating parent-infant interactions with literacy and attention. In Lesson V, she says,

Come to me, my little girl. Are you tired of playing? Yes. Sit down and rest yourself, while I talk to you.

Have you seen the baby? [...] Four years ago you were as feeble as this very little boy (*Wollstonecraft Lessons*, pp. 179–80).

Wollstonecraft's parent-author echoes Barbauld's Mamma by speaking with the invitational imperative, 'Come.' She further shows her attentiveness to her child by asking questions and responding to her child's needs. Wollstonecraft affirms the kinship that all family members share as one-time infants. She alliteratively encourages her daughter to imagine a time she cannot remember, 'four years ago,' when she was as 'feeble' as her brother. In Lesson IX, Mamma remembers, 'My mamma took care of me, when I was little girl, like you' (*Wollstonecraft Lessons*, p. 185). By casting herself as a child, 'like you,' Wollstonecraft's parent-author places herself in a perpetual line of girls-become-mammas. She gestures both to her own childhood, and to her daughter's futurity as one who will be responsible for a child's physical and mental development. This mental time traversal is presented almost entirely in monosyllables, as Wollstonecraft's parent-author becomes a linguistic companion (rather than superior guardian) to her daughter.

Despite Wollstonecraft's interest in rational sensibility, demonstrated by Mrs Mason's lessons in *Original Stories*, *Lessons* does not include specific lessons in

rational sensibility. Instead, *Lessons* focuses on the basis for human rationality itself, encouraging its addressee to realise that affection is the root of cognitive understanding, and that reason shapes individuals' actions. Mamma recalls:

When I caught cold some time ago, I had such a pain in my head [...] Papa opened the door very softly, because he loves me. You love me, yet you made a noise. You had not the sense to know that it made my head worse, till papa told you.

[...]

The other day papa was tired [...] he fell asleep on the sofa [sic]. I did not bid you be quiet; but you thought of what papa said to you, when my head ached. [...] Whisper——whisper. Pray, mama, call me, when papa wakes; for I shall be afraid to open the door to see, lest I wake him.

[...]—Creep—creep—and shut the door as softly as I could have done myself.

That was thinking (*Wollstonecraft Lessons*, pp. 194–96).

Mamma defines reason as a confluence of emotion with action. Papa (Godwin) is quiet around Mamma because he loves her, and to show his love, he tries not to exacerbate Mamma's headache. The child addressee, however, lacks 'sense' and is noisy until Papa tells her the effect this has on Mamma. Mamma compares this incident with another episode, when Papa fell asleep in the sitting room. Mamma shows her child that she has grown in reason and empathy, using different subjunctive prepositions to describe her child's response to finding a tired parent. 'Yet you made a noise' is contrasted with, 'but you thought of what papa said.' Wollstonecraft's intensity of affection for, and attention to, her child, is suggested by the visual and aural evocation of her child's actions, 'Whisper——whisper' and '—Creep—creep—.' The elongated em-dashes and the repeated verbs suggest the care with which her child moves, the length of time these actions take, and the tenderness with which Mamma watches her child. Mamma's final words, 'That was thinking,' confirm that her child has grown in rationality, developing from an

infant unable to string together a sentence, to a child able to act with empathy for her parent. Reason, Wollstonecraft implies, is inherently relational. Because familial conversational primers are structured around affectionate relationships, it is an ideal form to communicate Wollstonecraft's rationally sympathetic pedagogy.

Wollstonecraft's decision to shift the focus of her conversational primer from providing lessons in rational sensibility to the cultivation of sympathetic family relationships marks *Lessons* as a hybrid text, halfway between a familial primer and a social conversational primer. The social conversational primer, which emerged in the 1780s, moved away from Edgeworth's interest in providing children with 'the principles of knowledge', that is, an observing eye, curious mind, and the ability to deduce connections of causality. Instead, as in Wollstonecraft's *Lessons*, social conversational primers were more concerned with cultivating relationships. However, unlike *Lessons*, which emphasises reason as the convergence of affection with action, social conversational primers were more frequently concerned with teaching social decorum.

### **c. Polite and Benevolent Children**

Conversational primers are identifiable by their dual address to middle-class parents and children, and by their everyday familial settings. In terms of content, however, conversational primers did not always seek to teach principles of observation and reflection to disseminate scientific knowledge. A popular stream of social conversational primers, first written by Lady Ellenor Fenn, used the familial conversational mode to celebrate the values of child deference and adult authority, and to affirm the importance of performing socio-cultural roles. These ideas of propriety and decorum grew out of, and reinforced, the culture of politeness that had been constructed since the era of Addison and Steele's *The Spectator* (1711–1712).

In *The Spectator*, Addison and Steele sought to reform British manners and notions of taste. They painted a picture of a polite culture where modesty and restraint were supreme virtues. On July 17, 1711, Addison released an issue of the *Spectator* discussing manners and modes, asserting, 'By Manners I do not mean

Morals, but Behaviour and Good Breeding.<sup>26</sup> By redefining self-improvement from a purely internal concept of codes of virtue to include external practices and marks of social class, Addison championed middle-class politeness as the mark of ‘Good Breeding.’ Addison’s article derides French culture, rural British social practices, aristocratic social customs, and habits of the lower class to assert the supremacy of this middle-class-inflected virtue of politeness. When articulating his vision of polite conversation, he uses the logic of apophasis: polite conversation is not ‘too stiff, formal and precise,’ a set of practices associated with ‘one of the first Distinctions of a well-bred Man’ (*The Spectator* 119, para. 5). Neither is conversation like that ‘polished in France’ which ‘make[s] use of the most coarse uncivilized Words in our Language’ (*The Spectator* 119, para. 5). Addison’s disapproval of overly open and impolite conversation is encapsulated in his concept of the ‘uncivil,’ a term that signifies all that is impolite and, hence, antithetical to British culture. This culture of eighteenth-century politeness has received much scholarly attention in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>27</sup> Discussions often focus upon works by male writers like Addison and Steele, and Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, but ‘the enhanced stature of sociability and politeness involved a normative enhancement of the feminine,’<sup>28</sup> providing women writers with a public space in which to shape notions of decorum and social practice. As Michèle Cohen notes, women were ‘central figures in the practices of sociability, and their conversation was held up as a model of politeness men ought to emulate,’ though, by the end of the century, politeness was ceasing to be a dominant cultural form and conversation began to become a method, rather than the practice of social skills.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* 119 (17 July 1711), digitised by Scholarly Communication Centre Rutgers University Libraries, <http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/spectator/text/july1711/no119.html>. Cited in text as *The Spectator* 119.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Gender, conversation and the public sphere in early eighteenth-century England’, *Textuality and Sexuality. Reading theories and practices*, ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 100–115; Mee, *Conversable Worlds*; Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Michèle Cohen, ‘“A Proper Exercise for the Mind”: Conversation and Education in the long Eighteenth Century’, *The Concept and Practice of Conversation in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1688–1848*, ed. Katie Halsey and Jane Slinn (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 103–127.

<sup>28</sup> Klein, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, ‘A Proper Exercise for the Mind’, p. 119.

The fluidity with which conversation shifted from the practice of social skills into an educative method is reflected in Lady Ellenor Fenn's social conversational primer, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* (1783).<sup>30</sup> Initially published under the pseudonym Mrs Lovechild, Fenn foregrounded her authorial identity as a married woman who cares for children, invoking the figure of the parent-author. Like *Lessons for Children*, the dialogues depict familial interactions, and the book was written with the expectation that it would be read in families. In her preface, Fenn urges older siblings to 'oblige' their siblings:

[B]y reading my address aloud to them, after which you will resign my first volume, to one of the younger children, who is only able to read words of three letters [...] [for] the satisfaction of entertaining the whole family (*Cobwebs I*, p. xx).

This reading practice transforms the act of reading a pedagogical children's book into a performance of familial bonding. Like Barbauld, Fenn presents *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* as an object that was created as a result of family affection. Just as Barbauld claimed to have written *Lessons for Children* for Charles, her nephew and adopted son, so Fenn identifies *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* as the culmination of stories she wrote for her nephew-son, deploying the verisimilar nature of the text as verification of its efficacy as a familial pedagogical tool.

At first glance, the metaphorical and alliterative title *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* suggests that adults are predatory spiders who use thinly veiled educational methods to ensnare innocent children. However, the title does not identify who are the flies, or the cobwebs. This ambiguity also allows one to interpret the book itself as a metaphorical cob of wisdom, able to catch and immobilise flies, metaphorical social vices. Furthermore, the cobweb, an aesthetically pleasing object known for its architectural strength, could connote the potential strength of a child's moral fortitude. The pattern of the dialogues favours the secondary interpretation, as the children's interactions with adults promote the virtues of politeness and hard work.

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<sup>30</sup> Mrs Lovechild [Lady Ellenor Fenn], *Cobwebs to Catch Flies: Or, Dialogues in Short Sentences, Adapted for Children from the Age of Three to Eight Years. In Two Volumes* (London: Printed by John Marshall, 1783). Cited in-text as *Cobwebs I/II*.

Despite Fenn's focus on educating children in manners and polite behaviours rather than scientific knowledge, she pays homage to Barbauld and positions *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* as a book in the same genre of 'prattle for infants' as *Lessons for Children*:

I think that I am mistress of the infantine language [...] Nor need I blush to supply prattle for infants, since a lady of superior genius condescended, long since, to set the example (*Cobwebs I*, pp. vi–vii).

Though Fenn claims she need not blush, her defensive assertion indicates the contrary. Her term 'prattle for infants' suggests the artlessness and the innocent non-reflexivity of a child's speech, but it also suggests her internalisation of the belief that her familiarity with children's unsophisticated speech patterns requires justification. Paradoxically, it is the very thing that Fenn claims as the basis for her authority as a children's writer—her familiarity with their speech patterns—that she feels the need to defend.

Fenn's conversational primer presents individual 'lessons' that mimic Barbauld's simple syntax and vocabulary, creating a shared linguistic space for adults and children. In the first conversation, when the boy asks, 'Our cat can get a rat, can she not?' Mamma does not introduce her son to a more sophisticated set of verbs, but speaks at his level: 'Yes, she can, but she was bit by an old rat one day' (*Cobwebs I*, p. 27). Fenn's Mamma modulates her vocabulary to correspond with her son's, even speaking in monosyllables to describe the cat's injury. The child's question offers Mamma an opportunity to perform and affirm familial affection. However, this conversation does not follow a Barbauldian or Edgeworthian trajectory of observation, reflection, and deduction or wonder. Instead of discussing animals' predatory practices, Fenn's Mamma directs her son to consider the socially appropriate boundaries of showing pets affection. The episode ends with the boy asking his mother, 'May the cat get on my bed? [...] you may sit on the bed' (*Cobwebs I*, pp. 28–29). This conversation becomes the template for the next several conversations, in which the preponderance of the word 'may' shows the exemplary son's deferential stance toward his mother. The

overriding virtue a child learns to articulate while reading Fenn's lessons is politeness, rather than reflection or wonder.

In addition to teaching politeness, Fenn's conversations impress upon the fictional children and her implied child readers the virtues of filial quiet and obedience. At one point, Mr Steady admonishes a boy who asks why he should go to school: 'Good children ask for no reasons;—a wise child knows that his parents can best judge what is proper [...] he obeys without enquiry' (*Cobwebs II*, p. 43). In a later lesson, a guardian blatantly disregards one boy's questions. In response to his questions, 'our cloth is made of wool; how can they weave cloth? And how can they stain it?' the woman changes the topic: 'Who heard the clock? [...] I left my watch in my room' (*Cobwebs II*, p. 73). Where Barbauld's Mamma would have seized upon this child's curiosity as an opportunity for lessons in industry and science, Fenn's adult diminishes the significance of the child's questions and asserts the primacy of her concerns (the time of day and the importance of her time). This equation of silent submission with wisdom circumscribes the child in a deferential relationship to the adult.

Moreover, as a conversational primer, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* encourages children to emulate the textual adults' behaviour when they, too, are adults. That is, child speakers reading Mr Steady's lessons are implicitly led to assume that adults in real life should assume pontificating tones. This reinforcement of different social roles of deference or declamation, based upon an individual's age, suggests a shift in the nature of the dual address within the conversational primer. Barbauld and Trimmer addressed implied adult readers as pupils in need of guidance in their role as parents, even as the implied children need guidance to contextualise themselves in complex environments supported by multiple socio-cultural networks. Fenn, however, takes the parental authority of her implied adult readers as a given. She directs her address more to her implied child readers as figures in need of socialisation through the internalisation of hierarchical structures.

While subsequent social conversational primers featured less hierarchical child-adult relationships, there *were* other social conversational primers. Fenn's *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* signifies the point at which the social conversational primer emerged as a distinct subgenre. Other social conversational primers included

Mary-Ann Kilner's *Familiar Dialogues*,<sup>31</sup> which depicted apparently verisimilar mother-child interactions, providing a pattern for implied child and adult readers to emulate in real life. Appearing in the print market sometime around 1779, it did not feature any preface, justifications for its existence, or any homage to Barbauld. The only indication of the parent-author was implicitly present in Kilner's pseudonym, Mrs S. These indications of Kilner's apparent authorial comfort with this form, and the established association between conversational primers and maternal pedagogical authors, signify the codification of the conversational primer as a genre.

Like *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, *Familiar Dialogues* trains children to perform social roles. In one of the first episodes, Mamma teaches Mary how to curtsy. The lesson is accompanied by an engraving (*Familiar Dialogues*, p. 16). The images suggest that it is less necessary for a real-life parent to be present while the implied child reader is taught by the book, suggesting a shift toward individualised reading practices. Alternatively, the inclusion of illustrations could simply indicate that John Marshall did not think that publishing a conversational primer was a sufficient reason to break from the tradition of including images in children's books. Whatever the case, *Familiar Dialogues* accentuates the child's kinship with his or her parents, suggesting that the book sought to add a dimension of friendship to parent-child relationships. When Mary complains about her reading and sewing lessons and points out that her mother does not need reading or sewing lessons, Mamma says, 'When I was a little girl I could not read' (*Familiar Dialogues*, p. 8). By acknowledging her past identity as a child, Mamma highlights to Mary the evolving nature of power relationships between adults and children. Moreover, Mamma's pedagogy incorporates space for affectionate digressions. While she teaches Mary how to sew, Mamma tells the tale of a girl who owned a pincushion. Mary interrupts, asking for details as to the pincushion's colour. Instead of chastising Mary for interrupting or for asking irrelevant questions, Mamma elaborates upon the colour of the pincushion and the silk bag (*Familiar Dialogues*, p. 48). Although Mamma knows more than Mary, this unevenness of knowledge-power is revealed through Mamma's affectionate exchange of skills to her

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Ann Kilner, *Familiar Dialogues for the Instruction and Amusement of Children of Four and Five Years Old* (London: John Marshall and Co., 1779?). Cited in-text as *Familiar Dialogues*.

daughter, communicating Mamma's implicit hope that Mary will progress to a comparable temporal and social stage to Mamma herself.

Kilner's depictions of reading environments where adults engage in literate activities with their children associate inner moral virtue with external displays of politeness. This is most evident in the final dialogue, where Mamma mediates an argument between Dick, Tom, and James. When James refuses to lend his cart to Tom, even though James is not playing with it, Mamma warns him:

Here, I have got a card in my hand, with *cross boy* written upon it; I shall sew a string to it, and put it round your neck, and then every body will know how naughty you are (*Familiar Dialogues*, p. 90).

The scene is designed to inculcate child readers with the fear of this potential shame, and it provides implied adult readers with a method of child discipline. The recommended punishment involves the inscription of shame on the child's body, highlighting the material power of words. 'Every body' will see and interact with this child branded as a 'Cross boy.' The reason why Mamma threatens to make James wear the label is because James is over-possessive, a trait she claims is an external expression of internal mean-spiritedness. James's surly expressions make him 'naughty' because they indicate his lack of generosity. His social performance of emotions is equated with inner moral virtue or vice. As this is the final episode in *Familiar Dialogues*, the overriding impression given to readers is that the social conversational primer exists to instil the middle-class virtues of politeness by associating inner moral virtues with external social practices.

By the mid nineteenth century, Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* was used to justify the practicality of books designed to teach gendered social *mores*. Sometime between 1836 and 1841, Charles Tilt published a version of *Lessons for Children* entitled *Mrs. Barbauld's Easy Lessons for Little Mary*,<sup>32</sup> reproducing Part I of *Lessons for Children* but substituting Charles's name with 'Mary.' Tilt made few substantive

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<sup>32</sup> Mrs [Anna Letitia] Barbauld, *Mrs. Barbauld's Easy Lessons for Little Mary* (Fleet Street: Printed by David Bogue for C. Tilt, n.d.), cited in-text as *Lessons for Mary*. Dating is based on Bogue's active years as a printer (1836–1856) and C. Tilt's business years (1826–1841); Robert L. Patten, 'Bogue, David (1807/8–1856) publisher and bookseller,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Logan Delano Browning, 'Tilt, Charles (1797–1861), bookseller and publisher,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004.

changes to the text, but extends the passage where Mamma promises ‘Mary’ a pony of her own: ‘and a side-saddle, and bridle, and a whip’ (*Lessons for Mary*, p. 41), as though concerned that simply promising a girl horse-riding lessons without modifying her expectations about the socially required horse-riding equipment was dangerously insufficient.

In a similar but even more gendered vein, E. Nightingale released *Lessons for Children: Altered and Arranged for Little Girls* sometime between 1830 and 1850.<sup>33</sup> The title indicates the longevity of Barbauld’s book in educative contexts.

Simultaneously, Nightingale’s title implies that Barbauld’s text is unsuitable for female children, and that Tilt’s *Lessons for Mary* provides an insufficiently gender-specific education. In the preface, Nightingale claims that she read Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children* while growing up:

Who does not remember the delight of being able to read the first pages? The large print, short and easy sentences, so adapted to engage the mind of a child. These considerations have induced the authoress, who has been for many years engaged in the instruction of little girls to alter it for their use by leaving out the parts intended for boys, and introducing a few stories for girls, following Mrs. Barbauld’s plan as nearly as possible. It was at first written for the use of one particular child but it may be serviceable to others, and should it prove so, will answer the design proposed in its publication (*Lessons for Little Girls*, pp. iii–iv).

The stance Nightingale adopts is precisely that of the parent-author: specifically, the mother-teacher. She echoes Barbauld almost word-for-word in claiming her work was ‘first written for the use of one particular child,’ emphasising the kinship between her work and *Lessons for Children* by highlighting the verisimilar origins of both works. She foregrounds the language of utility, and assumes the position of a Barbauldian parent-author and social benefactress. Writing a generation after Barbauld, Nightingale implies that she, as a child, experienced delight in deciphering the first pages of *Lessons for Children*. This indicates that the market

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<sup>33</sup> Two copies of this book are held in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, and are dated 1830 and 1850 respectively; this thesis cites from E. Nightingale, *Lessons for Children: Altered and Arranged for Little Girls, With additions by E. Nightingale* (London: Edward Colyer, [c.1830?]). Cited in-text as *Lessons for Little Girls*.

Nightingale wrote for included middle-class parents who presumably grew up reading *Lessons for Children*.

Considering the closeness with which Nightingale patterned her work after Barbauld's, it is enlightening to note that Nightingale retitled and rewrote *Lessons for Children* for 'Little Girls.' Gender distinctions were not new to children's literature. Over a century before, Newbery marketed *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* selling different toys for boy or girl readers. However, conversational primers in the late eighteenth century were distinctive in that they demarcated child readers by age rather than gender. Barbauld's books, in particular, made no distinction between male and female intellectual and moral capacities. The colon in Nightingale's title, by contrast, separates 'Children' from 'Little Girls', suggesting the cultural and pedagogical insufficiency of Barbauld's non-gender-differentiated lessons in nineteenth-century Britain. Some of Nightingale's amendments are superficial—she changes Charles's name to Jane to increase the potential for female reader-character identification. The 'lessons', however, are changed substantially. Nightingale gives Jane a doll, for which Jane makes clothes—an act that Barbauld criticised as an extravagant misuse of resources in 'Live Dolls.'<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, Nightingale facilitated the process by which editors and writers treated Barbauld's works as unliterary stepping-stones in the development of a child's literacy skills. Nightingale's mother-author addresses readers at the end, saying,

I hope you have been able to read [these lessons]. If you have, you will be able to read better books, books which good and clever men have written on purpose for you to read (*Lessons for Little Girls*, pp. 155–56).

Nightingale claims 'better books' are written by 'good and clever men', revealing her assumption that the literary space occupied by women writing educative texts is inferior to the literary space occupied by men writing (presumably) non-educative books. Barbauld's name and stories are positioned firmly in that inferior

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<sup>34</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, 'Live Dolls,' *Evenings at Home, or, the Juvenile Budget Opened: Consisting of a Variety of Miscellaneous Pieces for the Instruction and Amusement of Young Persons. Fourteenth Edition. Carefully revised and corrected throughout by Arthur Aikin, Esq. FLS., &c. And with some additional Pieces, by the Authors. The whole newly arranged*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 4 of 4 (London: Printed for Baldwin Cradock and Joy; R. Hunter; Longman Rees and Co.; Joseph Booker; Harvey and Darton; Hamilton Adams and Co.; and Simpkin and Marshall, 1823).

field of preparatory books written by women. Nightingale's book expresses the hope that the children's book will help socialise her child readers and facilitate their familiarity with literate communities. However, Nightingale amends Barbauld's text to reflect Victorian expectations about female social codes as distinction from male activities. The book reveals the extent to which editors had transformed the sense of Barbauld's works from that of an *oeuvre* featuring structural and thematic integrity, into segments that could be utilised for culturally specific goals. Nightingale's *Lessons for Little Girls* altered Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* to prepare girl readers to perform Victorian codes of femininity, rather than sharing Barbauld's vision of training a gender-neutral critical mind.

In some ways, the parent-author of Nightingale's *Lessons for Little Girls* is a mildly anachronistic feature in the social conversational primer. Several decades earlier, social conversational primers had begun to depict child-driven, not parent-driven, interactions. One such text is *Infant Prattle or, Early Lessons for Children* (c.1804),<sup>35</sup> which enfolds Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* in its title, but focuses on the figure of the infant rather than the parent. It further invokes the genre of the conversational primer by titling itself 'Prattle,' basing the book's core identity around the Barbauldian pattern of accommodating language for the comprehension of young child readers. *Infant Prattle*, however, differs from previous conversational primers, in that the parental influence is absent. It features child-to-child conversations, providing templates for implied child readers to interact with playmates their own age. The lessons are basic etiquette classes. In one episode, a girl throws a tea party with her doll, and she and her siblings set the table:

My doll expects some company to dinner. [...]

Clean the apartments, arrange the chairs, put the looking-glass upon the toilet, and lay the carpets. Where is the napkin? [...]

We shall have some soup, some fish, some beef, some chickens, some tarts, and some cream.

Let us have a dessert? [...]

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<sup>35</sup> *Infant Prattle or, Early Lessons for Children* parts II–IV (London: John Marshall, 1804), cited in-text as *Infant Prattle*.

We will have some apples, some pears, some nuts, and some peaches (*Infant Prattle*, pp. 12–13).

The text invites an oral reading. It also invites readers to imagine the sights and smells of the food, foreshadowing the interest in sumptuous feasts in British children's novels, and gesturing to imaginative engagement techniques. However, the presence of a parent-teacher, even a parent-author, is at best implicit. The text uses children's conversations to encourage implied child readers to participate in imaginative role-playing games to learn how to entertain guests and interact politely in social situations. The textual children absorb the role and voice of the implied parent-author by instructing implied (uninitiated) child readers in the etiquette of social entertainment. This signals a move in children's literature toward obfuscating the guiding didactic voice within children's books. In this case, the children share and perform the role of parental pedagogue.

Most of the social conversational primers discussed, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, *Familiar Dialogues*, and *Infant Prattle*, were published by John Marshall, suggesting that he was a key figure in popularising the combination of the conversational primer with the social conduct book. In these social conversational primers, parent-teachers disappear from the text. Even parent-authors become less textually visible, adopting the stances of omniscient narrators who record the dialogue of children too young to write the transcript of their games. The increasing disappearance of the parent-teacher from the conversational primer also appears to have coincided with R. L. Edgeworth's development of the textual depiction of the child's internal thoughts. Thus, both the familial conversational primer and the social conversational primer facilitated a move toward texts that less resembled Barbauld's conversational primer, and more resembled moral tales featuring psychologically and linguistically developed verisimilar children.

#### **d. Imaginative Identification: the Conversational Primer Transformed**

Eliza Fenwick's *Lessons for Children Or, Rudiments of Good Manners, Morals, and Humanity* (1809) illustrates the rapidity with which, and the extent to which, the conversational primer became a set of character-driven moral tales told in a conversational manner. Fenwick aligns her work to other conversational primers, recalling Barbault's seminal book in her title and echoing Trimmer in claiming that Barbault's *Lessons for Children* was the progenitor of the conversational primer. However, the significant narrative differences within Fenwick's work reveal the extent to which the systems of expectation associated with the conversational primer had become divorced from the content of the early texts. In 1823, when Fenwick revised *Lessons for Children*, she added a 'Note to the Publisher' that maintained that her work was 'a sequel to the celebrated Lessons of Mrs Barbault [...] precisely adapted to the progress the understanding may be supposed to have made during the perusal of those well known productions.'<sup>36</sup> Fenwick's claim that *Lessons for Children* stood as a 'sequel' to Barbault's *Lessons for Children* positions Fenwick's text as being of a kind with Barbault's text, characterised by its simplified language. It also suggests Fenwick's *Lessons for Children* builds on and develops new aspects to Barbault's conversational primer, and does not seek simply to replicate Barbault's use of language and character voices.

Fenwick's book cannot be classified as a conversational primer in the same way that Trimmer's, Edgeworth's, or even Kilner's, can. Where Barbault structures *Lessons for Children* around an individual parent-child relationship, Fenwick constructs a relationship between her narrator and implied readers. Instead of positioning herself as a parent-author whose experiences are similar to that of her readers, Fenwick's author uses her preface to distance herself from her readers. She adopts Watt's model of using the book as a physical reward for children's progress in learning: 'All good young folks, who have gone on for some time to spell and read small words, may have a book like this' (*Fenwick Lessons*, p. 3).<sup>37</sup> This address is at once colloquial and distant. Though the author uses

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<sup>36</sup> Mrs Eliza Fenwick, *Lessons for Children: Or, Rudiments of Good Manners, Morals, and Humanity. A New Edition* (London: M. J. Godwin & Co at the French and English Juvenile And School Library, 1823), p. i. Cited in-text as *Fenwick Lessons*.

<sup>37</sup> C.f. Watts, *Divine Songs*, p. vi.

informal words, she is clearly not one of the ‘good young folk.’ Fenwick’s author maintains this position of distance by interjecting into narratives with character judgements. For instance, she concludes her description of the wealthy Miss Lucy Temple with the assessment: ‘she was idle’ (*Fenwick Lessons*, II, p. 19). Later in Part IV, Fenwick’s narrator tells a story that recalls Barbauld’s tale of Harry, Peter, and Billy (also in Barbauld’s *Lessons IV*). In Fenwick’s tale, two girls have the opportunity to show generosity by giving or withholding a plum cake. Barbauld left an authorial gap after asking which child showed compassion, inviting implied readers to converse and decide for themselves. Fenwick fills the space, fearful that the narrative gap will not be supplemented by conversation, and perhaps expecting that child readers will be unaccompanied by adults: ‘Which of these little girls was humane? It was not Ellen. No, no! She did not truly feel for the distress of the poor’ (*Fenwick Lessons*, IV, p. 7). Fenwick’s hypophora and amplification prevent her implied readers from reaching independent conclusions, establishing the narrator’s judgement as the only right value judgement. She limits child readers’ opportunities to evaluate the story through the conversational practice of examining different perspectives.

Moreover, Fenwick’s narrator demonstrates her authoritative textual identity by controlling the flow of information. The story, ‘The sur-prize’, tells of George Green, who is so engrossed in his book that he nearly misses dinner, and hastily leaves his book on the floor. After the meal, he cannot find his book, which the dog ate, and George’s father refuses to buy the book until George promises to care for his books: ‘So George Green never knew what it was that was heard to groan in the wood, nor what became of the poor old Man of the Hut, and his faith-ful dog Tray’ (*Fenwick Lessons*, I, p. 9). In the apophatic tricolon, Fenwick’s narrator withholds the vital climax of the interpolated story. Simultaneously, the apophasis invites child readers to imagine their own endings to the story. This suggests that texts, by virtue of *not* giving information, can stimulate reader’s imaginative fancies. Though Fenwick’s book claims titular allegiance to Barbauld’s conversational primer, it presents a radically different vision of the child’s reading experience. In Fenwick’s *Lessons for Children*, the implied child reader is asked to consider the extent to which a book can excite one’s imaginations and trouble

one's emotions. Like George, the implied child reader is left in suspenseful ignorance as to what happened to the Man of the Hut and his dog Tray. To envisage some end to the narrative, the implied child reader must imagine what is not written. Rather than inviting implied readers to use the text to reshape his or her interactions in the physical world outside of the book, Fenwick encourages child readers to be emotionally involved in the text, imaginatively projecting possibilities that might fill literary gaps. As the primary speaker is an implicit narrator, rather than a textual Mamma, Fenwick augments the interaction between the book and the implied real-life reader, rather than blurring the boundaries between the textual and the real. Instead, Fenwick positions her book and its narrator as substitutes for external interactive familial reading experiences.

Fenwick's conversational primer, if it may thus be labelled, presents a distinctive pedagogical aim. Her conversational primer does not express any hope, implicit or explicit, that children and adults will read together and use rational sensibility to refine their individual and familial knowledge, or religious devotion. Nor is it written in the hope that families will become communities of learning; nor that children will learn middle-class values of politeness by patterning their actions on the book's dialogues. Fenwick's *Lessons for Children* expects child readers to engage imaginatively with the text, internalising moral values through a process of imaginative identification, rather than by vocalising and embodying conversational speakers. The titular and prefatory invocation to Barbault suggests that Barbault's name had become disconnected from the textual features of *Lessons for Children*. The non-synchronous development between Barbault's name as an advertising tool and the transformation of the conversational primer as a literary form is further discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, Fenwick's *Lessons for Children* suggests that the conversational primer's familial and conversational mode had a longer lasting effect in the British children's literary market than the figure of the parent-author.

While conversational primers from the 1780s and the 1800s differed greatly, there is a recognisable family resemblance in their audience and aim. Although Eliza Fenwick's *Lessons for Children* and Barbault's *Lessons for Children* imply different ideal reading practices, both authors addressed a similar set of

purchasers with a similar set of expectations. Their books, as their titles imply, strive to be comprehensible to children. They are to be ‘lessons,’ forming a child’s knowledge formation and moral development by disseminating middle-class values of politeness. These expectations are projected and applied to the conversational primer, the familial conversational primer, and the social conversational primer alike. Produced both for very young readers and their parents, conversational primers taught young child readers to become familiar with apparently verisimilar yet ideal words uttered by literary children. They also, for the most part, provided parent-teachers with idealised scripts and models of affectionate parental pedagogy. The lessons are presented in familial contexts in easily accessible spaces, implying the transferrable and applicable nature of the dialogues to everyday life. As authors identified different tropes as being central to the conversational primer, certain features lost valence. The celebration of methods of discriminative observation that was so central to the earliest conversational primers was among the first features to disappear. Ultimately, the parent-author became a less central feature, as demonstrated by Fenwick’s *Lessons for Children*. As the textual presence of adults in conversational primers waned, the focus on fictional children’s thoughts and words became more pronounced, a development that receives further exploration in the final chapter of this thesis.

Nevertheless, for a time, the conversational primer created a system of expectation that British children’s writers like Trimmer invoked, and writers like Charles Lamb repudiated. Indeed, Lamb’s vituperative condemnation of ‘that cursed Barbould crew’ is as illustrative of Barbould’s influence over the British juvenile literary market as Trimmer’s praise.<sup>38</sup> It implies that Lamb felt the need to justify his forays into children’s literature by disclaiming Barbould’s concept of how children’s literature acted a socio-cultural educative tool. Embedded in the conversational primer is a vision of teaching the family to raise a child for the sake of an ethically benevolent mercantile Britain. It was this textualisation of Enlightenment middle-class British values that children’s authors like Lamb felt necessary to isolate and belittle, in order to create an adequate space in the literary market in which less overtly socially-oriented children’s books could flourish.

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<sup>38</sup> Lamb to Coleridge, *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, vol. 6, p. 253.



## Chapter Four

### Rational Dissent and *Lessons for Children*

The proliferation of conversational primers within the British children's literature market reveals the extent to which literate non-Dissenting communities welcomed Rational Dissenting aesthetics and values in late-eighteenth-century Britain.

Although Plumb claimed that Rational Dissenting virtues, rather than values, were codified in British middle-class children's books, the conversational primer's focus on the verisimilar voices of questioning children differed from earlier primers that propounded the virtues of 'sobriety' and 'obedience.'<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the textualisation of a rational yet inexperienced children's questions and observations alongside the comments made by an empirically minded adult suggests a Rational Dissenting celebration of heterogeneity. This chapter examines how *Lessons for Children* embodies Barbauld's Rational Dissenting principles. Close analysis of Barbauld's more overtly Rational Dissenting children's books, *Hymns in Prose for Children*, and *Evenings at Home*, which she co-authored with her brother, reveals the thematic consistency between Barbauld's children's works. The Rational Dissenting roots of *Lessons for Children* make remarkable Sarah Trimmer's support of the conversational primer, considering how emphatically Trimmer supported the Anglican church-state Establishment. By contrast, Barbauld resisted Britain's church-state partnership, embodied in the monarch who is head of both church and nation, on account of her belief that discursive opposition generated authentic socio-religious zeal and enabled socio-political progress.

During her lifetime, Anna Letitia Barbauld was known as an outspoken Rational Dissenter. In the 1780s, when Barbauld penned a letter to Hannah More, expressing regret that the two did not correspond, someone—presumably More—wrote on the letter, 'This Church Woman was alas! A Socinian!!'<sup>2</sup> In later years, Barbauld was alternately criticised as a figurehead for Unitarianism by Anglicans and praised for her public profile as a Unitarian writer by Unitarians. The Anglican *Church of England Quarterly Review* bemoaned the fact that Barbauld

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<sup>1</sup> Plumb, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> This letter is held by the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

was a ‘pre-eminent writer [...] unfortunately, deeply imbued with Unitarian principles,<sup>3</sup> while the Unitarian periodical *The Christian Reformer* reified Barbauld as a figurehead for Unitarianism.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, Barbauld never identified herself as Unitarian. Instead, as Daniel White has demonstrated, Barbauld’s Dissenting affiliations were complex. She hailed from a line of Calvinist Presbyterians that evolved into a community of liberal Dissenters, and her beliefs may be characterised as liberal Arminian and Arian Presbyterian, though she associated with Unitarian politics.<sup>5</sup> Barbauld believed that human free will shaped Divine-human relations, and was hesitant to proclaim the divinity of Jesus Christ. This combination of theological scepticism, and belief in the innate power of human free will, inform Barbauld’s concept of the child as an inherently socialised being, capable of critical thought and sympathetic feeling. It is more accurate to say, using Isabel Armstrong’s words, that Barbauld was committed to the aesthetics of Unitarianism, embracing ‘Unitarian poetics [...] that began with the evidence of sense data and relied on the association of ideas.’<sup>6</sup> As has been demonstrated, *Lessons for Children* is built on this pattern of observation, depicting associative frameworks in which daily objects and environments are discovered to embody complex scientific principles and processes of human labour. Barbauld’s ideological allegiance to Rational Dissent shaped her poetics and the principles underlying her books for children and her essays and tracts. Her emphasis upon the inherent sociability of humans acts as the foundation for learning, and also the boundary for free inquiry.

In *Thoughts On Devotional Taste and the Establishment of Sects*, Barbauld laid out her vision for how inquiry might operate in a socially harmonious yet theologically diverse society. She argued that ‘sects’ or minority groups were crucial in facilitating social conversations. At a national level, she argued, Dissenting religious groups excluded from the institutionalised Establishment partnership

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Review of ‘Hymns in Prose for Children. By Mrs. Barbauld. A New Edition, with additional Hymns by the Wife of a Clergyman. London: Painter, 1840’, *The Church of England Quarterly Review*, vol. 8 (London: William Edward Painter, 1840), p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Article III. Review of *Hymns in Prose for Children, by Mrs. Barbauld. A new edition, with several additional hymns, by the wife of a Clergyman.* London: W. E. Painter, Strand. 1840’, *The Christian Reformer*, Vol. 8, Jan 1841, pp. 38–43.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong, ‘A Unitarian Poetics?’, p. 59.

between the Anglican Church and the government provided an important discursive opposition. Their very existence should, theoretically—and Barbauld implies, historically did—encourage the Establishment and the sect(s) to justify their principles and practices and operate with more integrity. Charting the lifecycle of a ‘sect,’ Barbauld identified how the institutional pressure to conform often filled members of minority groups with zeal, drawing public attention to the minority group’s plight. This, she posited, would lead to a period of reasoning and examination of the sect’s ideas, in which a ‘diffusion of knowledge’ in the public space could occur (‘Devotional Taste’, p. 224). The third stage in the formation of a sect involved the lessening of opposition from the central institution, and a subsequent lapse on the part of sectarians into indifference. Barbauld painted the perpetual formation and cessation of sects as vital to the re-evaluation of cultural values: ‘Sects are always strict, in proportion to the corruption of establishments and the licentiousness of the times; and they are useful in the same proportion’ (‘Devotional Taste’, p. 230). Her tripartite balanced sentence emphasises the beauty of ‘proportion,’ celebrating corporeal harmony. It points to her vision of society as a community engaged in constant conversation and reflection with different ideas. At the same time, she argued that a partiality of beliefs should be paired with an impartial enforcement of beliefs:

We may see such good in an establishment, the doctrines of which we cannot give our assent to without violating our integrity; we may respect the tendencies of a sect, the tenets of which we utterly disapprove (‘Devotional Taste’, p. 231).

Barbauld’s ideal social vision as a Rational Dissenter was that Britain could be a community where the Establishment would need to account for its structure and socio-cultural ideologies in opposition to sects. These sects could, in turn, remain vital discursive voices of opposition in the face of a distinct institutional Establishment.

In accordance with her Rational Dissenting vision of harmonious disunity, Barbauld redefined prejudice and argued for its individual and social utility. Barbauld defines prejudice as an individual’s values, expectations, and preferences, determined by the particularity of that individual’s life experience:

A child has occasion to act long before he can reason. Shall we leave him destitute of all the principles that should regulate his conduct till he can discover them by the strength of his own genius? If it were possible that one whole generation could be brought up without prejudices, the world must return to the infancy of knowledge, and all the beautiful fabric which has been built up by successive generations must be begun again from the very foundation ('Prejudice', p. 338).

Barbauld describes behaviour as a currency shaped by knowledge and moral values, and circulated within a socio-economic system. To Barbauld, depriving a child of any predisposed moral values is reprehensible; it is a way of cutting the child out of a socio-economic body of shared knowledge. Her metaphor of inter-generational, social knowledge as a 'beautiful fabric' transforms a material object of merchandise into an object encapsulating shared human labour. This supports her metaphor of social conduct as an alternative currency to money. Barbauld's essay insists that 'successive' generations build upon shared cultural knowledge and values, and that individuals are necessarily and beneficially exposed to prejudices that teach them to treasure similar values. The individual can eventually—but only then—test these principles using the 'strength of his own genius,' a contrastingly individualised image to that of the network of social knowledge embedded in the 'beautiful fabric.' In Barbauld's estimation, reason and critical self-reflection come only after individuals have recognised their places within a community of exchange and mutuality. Barbauld's insistence that individuals can and must learn within communities bound by affection finds its literary realisation in *Lessons for Children* when Mamma teaches Charles from the seat of her lap. It is echoed in the affectionate relationships between the adult speaker and child speaker(s) in *Hymns in Prose for Children*, and the familial dialogues and bedtime tales depicted in *Evenings at Home*.

A child's predispositions, Barbauld suggests, involve an in-built chronology of experience and knowledge. Nevertheless, prejudice is not merely a temporal state out of which a child can be educated. Rather, Barbauldian prejudice is an indelible part of human experience that shapes individuals and enables them to become critically reflective social members. Barbauld insisted that people must act

consistently with their individual prejudices, allowing inquiry within the bounds of community to transform that individual's community into a reflexive, evolving entity. In Barbauld's formulation, societies consist of establishments and sects. Thus, awareness of one's own prejudices enables individuals to identify, respect, and learn from alternative belief systems and values. As White notes, Dissenting culture was organised by 'dual and conflicting models of self-understanding [...] united by libertarian principles of separation.'<sup>7</sup> This ability to separate establishments from sects, church from state, and individual prejudice from external observation of a social good or valuable principle, underlies Barbauld's Rational Dissenting use of conversation as a vehicle for social reformation.

In light of this, Sarah Trimmer's praise for, and imitation of, *Lessons for Children* appears to be an ironic instance of an Establishment writer cementing the broad social acceptance of a Rational Dissenting text as an iconic children's book. This is particularly ironic in light of Trimmer's negative review of *Evenings at Home*, the miscellany co-authored by Barbauld and Barbauld's brother, John Aikin. Trimmer's review of *Evenings at Home* reveals the sensitivity with which she reacted to any suggestions that a monarch could be flawed—an implication that, theoretically, could destabilise the rationale behind both the British state and the Anglican Church. Her extensive review concludes with a warning:

The Budget has been so long open to the public, that it would be needless to give a circumstantial account of its various contents [...] the child, who from the time of its being able to read for itself with pleasure, till its eighth or nine year, is restricted to these books alone [...] will, at the end of that period, be found possessed of a greater number of clear and distinct ideas, and of a greater vigour and conception, than one that has run over all the instructive and entertaining stories that ever were written for children of that age.

[...]

We have now searched the Juvenile Budget to the bottom; many of its contents we have passed by unnoticed; not because we were insensible of their merit, but from

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<sup>7</sup> White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 11.

an idea that in respect to them, *silence* would be construed into *praise*, as we were professedly looking for *blemishes*; but we cannot take our leave of this very ingenious and amusing miscellany, without lamenting that it should contain *any thing* which a Believer in Divine Revelation, a Christian [...] cannot approve. Under the care of a judicious parent or teacher, children may gain much useful instruction from this composition; but if left to themselves, ‘to read it over and over again in their leisure hours, to ruminat upon all its contents, without discrimination, it may prove very injurious [...] Let us ‘Take heed, and beware!’ (GE II, pp. 304–05, pp. 352–53).

Trimmer’s final assessment is not as scathing as her nearly fifty-page breakdown of each the stories might suggest. Despite her emphatic warning that a widespread dissemination of *Evenings at Home* poses potential social dangers, Trimmer commends the work as an effective tool in training children to think with precision and rigour. Such an objective coheres with Barbauld’s vision of the child as an imaginative and rational being, as presented in *Lessons for Children*. The reason Trimmer took offence at *Evenings at Home* was because, in her estimation, the literary effect of Barbauld and Aikin’s political-religious affiliation as Dissenters formed an ethical problem. While acknowledging *Evenings at Home* as a ‘very ingenious and amusing miscellany,’ Trimmer insisted that it contained features of which ‘a Christian [...] cannot approve.’ Trimmer’s equation of ‘a Christian’ with ‘an Establishment-supportive Anglican’ becomes apparent during the course of her review. She asserts that the fable ‘The Rat with the Bell’ is not applicable to the British monarchy because ‘British kings are not arbitrarily tyrannical monarchs’ (GE II, p. 344), and she describes Barbauld and Aikin’s pacifist dialogues as a rejection of Providence, arguing that governments should engage in defensive or just wars (GE II, p. 308). In other words, Trimmer defined Christians as members of the Church of England, in which the interconnection between church and state rendered heretical any political comments against the state or the head of state. This position was diametrically opposed to Anna Letitia Barbauld’s religious-political views as a Rational Dissenter. Trimmer’s ideological stance positioned her as an inevitably critical reader of the politics embedded within Barbauld’s books. It

is a mark of her close reading ability that Trimmer so adeptly and infallibly identified the anti-Establishment sentiments inscribed in *Evenings at Home*.

Yet in other ways, Trimmer's rejection of the anti-Establishment ideas underlying Barbauld and Aikin's *Evenings at Home* shows a point of similarity between Trimmer's brand of Anglicanism and Rational Dissenting principles. As Trimmer wrote in her review of *Evenings at Home*, 'if [children are] left to themselves [...] to *ruminate upon* all its contents, without discrimination, it may prove very injurious.' The act of rumination, a digestive and mental activity, suggests prolonged reflection and repeated consumption of ideas. Trimmer does not say that an extended engagement with the anti-Establishment principles in *Evenings at Home* is itself a bad thing. Rather, she notes that this engagement must involve 'discrimination,' the ability to identify and assess. This characteristic of discrimination structures Mamma's lessons in *Lessons for Children*, and is embedded in *Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Evenings at Home*.

This chapter examines the effects of Barbauld's Rational Dissent upon her children's work through an analysis of *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) and *Evenings at Home* (1792–96), as illuminated by *Thoughts on the Devotional Taste; on Sects, and on Establishment* (1775) and 'On Prejudice' (1800). Barbauld's acknowledgement of her theological and political beliefs as a Rational Dissenter allowed her writing personas to adopt a worldview that affirmed the importance of listening to multiple perspectives while constantly promoting one view over others. Close readings of *Hymns in Prose* and *Evenings at Home* demonstrate that this philosophical principle of tolerance based on the separation of state and moral religious authorities is also at the heart of *Lessons for Children*. Each of Barbauld's children's books invites readers to perform the text, implicitly affirming the validity and significance of different and differing voices within a familial context. Moreover, Barbauld's children's books features exemplary parental guides who model the exercise of evaluative skills, providing the framework for children to question assumed ideas while unabashedly promoting one perspective.

### **a. Invitational Interaction and Rational Dissenting Principles in *Hymns in Prose***

Just as *Lessons for Children* opened with Mamma's invitation to Charles to 'come to mamma' and sit in her lap, so too does *Hymns in Prose for Children* feature amicable adult-child interactions. *Hymns in Prose*, as I refer to it, initially comprised of twelve hymns and was enlarged to encompass fifteen hymns in 1812. Its slight physical size, in combination with its large typography and generous page margins, recall the child-friendly format of *Lessons for Children*. Moreover, the hymns evoke tropes and phrases from *Lessons for Children*, suggesting a continuation between the domestic world in *Lessons for Children* and the rural world of *Hymns in Prose*. Hymn II opens with a communal imperative-invitation that echoes, almost word-for-word, Mamma's invitation to Charles to 'Come let us go in the fields' (*Lessons I*, p. 27):

Come, let us go forth into the fields, let us see how the flowers spring, let us listen to the warbling of the birds, and sport ourselves upon the new grass.

The winter is over and gone, the buds come out upon the trees, the crimson blossoms of the peach and the nectarine are seen, and the green leaves sprout (*Hymns in Prose II*, pp. 5–6).

This hymn is paradigmatic of the adult speaker's invitational stance. Speaking in the plural 'us', Barbauld's authoritative teacher invites in-text children to speak and move with the initial adult speaker. This transforms the hierarchical act of an adult imposing a religious didactic text upon students into an act of communality and shared speech. The anaphoric isocolons abound in their imagistic invocation of sensory perceptions. Within the field in which the hymn is said, flowers 'spring,' a pun on spring as a natural and symbolic time of growth and a verbal evocation of floral growth. In the second verse-sentence, the details become more explicit. The speaker identifies the 'crimson blossoms' of peach and nectarine trees. The details enable a clearer image of the field while simultaneously evoking an idealised, non-specific, even spiritual, garden. The 'crimson' blossom invokes Jesus' 'crimson' blood and spiritual redemption, implying the restoration of an

Edenic garden. The speaker's observational list of the natural phenomena of the fields evokes an imaginative rural field as a theological site of possibility. As in *Lessons for Children*, the speakers and implied readers are invited to move from observations of nature to praise and wonder. This image of communality is written into the combination of child and adult voices and the preponderance of the use of the collective 'us' in *Hymns in Prose for Children*. It demonstrates, yet again, the consistency of Barbauld's Rational Dissenting vision of community as the foundation and goal of individual's educations.

This vision of communality is inscribed in the form of *Hymns in Prose*, which, as its title suggests, draws upon practices and ideologies associated with the hymn form. The hymn is a largely, but not exclusively, religious form. Hymns are dynamic and communal texts, creating interaction between texts and their readers, who become the hymns' implied speakers or singers. The lessons and values expressed in and imparted by hymns provide reader-speakers with a communal identity. This antiphonal dynamic is intimated through the presentational format of *Hymns in Prose for Children*, which Johnson retained between the first version (1781) and the extended version (1812). The sentences are printed as separate verse-stanzas, mimicking the printing practices used for antiphonal responses in the Book of Common Prayer. Moreover, hymns accommodate a range of performance scenarios and audiences. Watts, for instance, insisted that hymns could be read or spoken, and published hymns alongside lyric poems in *Horae Lyricae*.<sup>8</sup> The religious hymn also holds cross-denominational appeal. Philip Doddridge, a fellow Unitarian, wrote Unitarian-friendly hymns that were favourably received by Anglicans.<sup>9</sup> Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose* may be spoken and read.<sup>10</sup> Like Doddridge, Barbauld addressed an apparently non-denominational Christian community in her Unitarian-friendly hymns. As her title indicates, her hymns invite oral recitations. Significantly, Barbauld implies that these recitations

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<sup>8</sup> John Knapp, 'Isaac Watts's Unfixed Hymn Genre', *Modern Philology* 109 (2012), 463–482, pp. 471–72.

<sup>9</sup> Françoise Deconinck-Brossard, 'The Circulation and Reception of Philip Doddridge's Hymns', *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*, ed. Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68–94, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose* are to be spoken, not sung; a fellow Dissenter, Philip Doddridge, published a set of hymns in a compendium that lacked reference to any musical tunes to which the words could be sung; see Deconinck-Brossard, pp. 87–88.

should ideally occur in spaces of natural beauty. She places her fictional speakers in rural landscapes with fields, brooks, and oak trees, and encourages her speakers and her implied readers to realise that encounters with nature enable divine revelations.

*Hymns in Prose* invites its implied readers to map the evocative yet non-geographically specific fields and brooks onto the readers' own reading spaces: either onto readers' real-life rural village environments, or onto abstract spaces mentally reconstructed from the readers' experiences with rural villages. In both cases, *Hymns in Prose* provides a model in which everyday activities like walking through fields or seeing roses can become moments of ritualistic awareness and religious devotion. Like *Lessons for Children*, the hymns allow implied readers to transpose the literary spaces described within the hymns onto geographic, physical places. The prose hymns are set in idyllic rural spaces that encourage child readers to observe natural processes and re-perceive aspects of God, seeing God's presence in the physical, natural environment. As Robert Darnton highlights, 'The "where" of reading is more important than one might think, because by placing the reader in his setting it can provide hints about the nature of his experience.'<sup>11</sup> While Darnton is speaking at a macro-level about cultural contexts, his insight applies to the specific place in which readings take place. In *Hymns in Prose*, the child's body becomes a physical site of potential virtue capable of internalising the words of the prose hymns, and the fields and natural settings become spaces that can be mapped onto the reader's surrounding locations. By facilitating these techniques of embodiment, *Hymns in Prose* encourages implied readers to encounter the divine presence in the natural world, building on the age-old Christian metaphor of nature as God's book. This focus on nature as a revelation of the divine grants a spiritual aspect to the Enlightenment wonder that Barbauld evokes in *Lessons from Children* through observations of the natural world. In *Hymns in Prose* it is because this divine cause is imbricated within the natural world that the speakers can experience wonder. The collective 'we' encounters and is amazed by nature. The hymn speakers' fluid and communal identities gesture toward Barbauld's vision of children and adults mutually joined in a stance of spiritual devotion.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Darnton, 'First Steps Toward a History of Reading', *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 (1986), 5–30, p. 13.

As in *Lessons for Children*, *Hymns in Prose* facilitates a mode of role play in which implied child readers are invited to speak and potentially understand things from an adult's perspective, and vice versa. This is generated through the fluid identity of the 'I' speaker, who is a child congregant in some hymns, but in others, is a 'Mamma-like figure [that] guides, explains, and interprets.'<sup>12</sup> In her extended version of *Hymns in Prose*, Barbauld suggests that the instability of the identity of the 'I' speaker expresses the truth that adults and children are, fundamentally, ontologically identical:

Think of the wisest man you ever knew or heard of; think of the greatest man; think of the most learned man [...] think of a man who stands like that tree, sheltering and protecting a number of his fellow men, and then say to yourself, the mind of that man was once like mine, his thoughts were childish like my thoughts, nay, he was like the babe just born [...] The child may be a foolish man [...] but he must be a man.<sup>13</sup>

Barbauld's anaphoric invocation, 'think of,' draws readers into an abstract cognitive space where human identity is not tied to temporal age or stages of life. She alliteratively insists that children and adults are ontologically the same: a child 'must' be a 'man.' On one level, her superlatives suggest the impossibility of this thought experiment to envisage the wisest, greatest, most learned person. Yet, paradoxically, Barbauld insists that this impossible feat is possible, as 'the mind of that man was once like mine [...] he was like the babe just born.' Her alliterative patterns suggest a connection between the epitome of humanity, the 'mind' of that ideal 'man,' with the speaker: 'mine.' The hymn insists that there is a basic teleology being a child, and that is to become an adult; whether or not that adult is morally virtuous and socially beneficial depends upon his or her education.

The ideal education, Barbauld suggests in the preface to *Hymns in Prose*, is one where devotional feelings are 'impressed' in its young readers, as this internal impulse enables children to 'see the Creator in the visible appearances of all around

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<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, pp. 207–08.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children. By the Author of Lessons for Children. 22<sup>nd</sup> version, Much Enlarged*, (London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy; and R. Hunter, 1821), pp. 49–50, 52. Cited in-text as *Hymns in Prose Enlarged*.

[...] [and form] that habitual piety, without which religion can scarcely regulate the conduct, and will never warm the heart' (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. vi–vii).<sup>14</sup> Social conduct is presented as a physical and personal matter: a 'warm [...] heart' alone regulates social 'conduct'. This warmth of heart is generated through an observant 'habitual piety' by which individuals 'see the Creator in the visible appearances.' The ocular discourse suggests that invisible divinity may be tangibly perceived. This forms part of what Hofkosh terms Barbauld's 'relational physics' in which human existence is inextricable with the movement of matter of all sorts. However, where Hofkosh identifies this as an 'object-oriented ontology',<sup>15</sup> Barbauld's preface suggests that it is an object-based ontology with a divine-eternal oriented teleology: to 'see the Creator' is the goal that may be achieved through the cultivation of piety and the regulation of social conduct.

*Hymns in Prose* therefore models social conduct as a process of exchanging perspectives and observations. This is implied by the text's visual encouragement to read the prose-hymns communally. Structured in verse-paragraphs, visually echoing antiphonal responses in the Book of Common Prayer, Barbauld's hymns invite antiphonal reading and recitation. Through Barbauld's hymns, her child speakers are increasingly granted the linguistic and spiritual insights of the leading adult speaker, as the 'I' who narrates the hymns shifts from the voice of the adult speaker to the child speaker(s). This act of role-play facilitated by the unstable 'I' enables children to vocalise adult observations and allows adults to vocalise childlike questions. Moreover, the shifting 'I' speaker means that the adult and child speakers' observations are granted equal textual representation, creating a textual and conceptual space in which adult and child perspectives are equally valued and communicated.

The visual indentation between the sentence-paragraphs further invites antiphonal reading practices. The effect of this page layout is magnified when the initial, Johnson-published productions are compared with editions published by Johnson's successor, R. Hunter. While Hunter maintained the indentation of each sentence-paragraph in Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose*, he eliminated the blank spaces

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<sup>14</sup> Quotations from Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children. By the Author of Lessons for Children* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1781), cited in-text as *Hymns in Prose*.

<sup>15</sup> Hofkosh, p. 105.

between (see fig. 5 and fig. 6). The decreased amount of white space limits the extent to which the text mimics the appearance of a script, limiting the conceptual space in which implied readers are encouraged to role-play. In Johnson's publications, the spaces between sentence-paragraphs encourage readers to 'try on' the speakers' voices, allowing readers to gaze with a child's wonder and an adult's cognitive awareness, providing a deeper and broader sense of the devotional possibilities of everyday existence.



*Fig. 5, Hymns in Prose*, image courtesy of the British Library



Fig. 6, *Hymns in Prose Enlarged*, image courtesy of the British Library

The shared linguistic space between adult and child speakers is crucial in making *Hymns in Prose* a space where children and adults may form bonds of sympathy and understanding. The early hymns feature a strong authoritative adult leader, who speaks in the plural ‘us’ to invite the in-text children to participate in shared activities of observation and worship:

Come, let us go forth into the fields, let us see how the flowers spring, let us listen to the warbling of the birds, and sport ourselves upon the new grass (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 5-6).

To some extent, this invitational speech act is proscriptive. ‘Come, let us go,’ the speaker declares, directing implied child speakers and child readers to follow. In this position of authority, however, the adult speaker acknowledges that child speakers possess the agency to follow. Indeed, the adult speaker is aware that children possess a spiritual agency that demands respect, declaring that children are priests who can ‘thank him [God] for those that cannot speak’ (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 10–11), a notion against which the Anglican Trimmer objected (*GE II*, p. 47).

By the penultimate hymn, the child speaker has been elevated to the linguistic and theological position of the authoritative adult speaker declaring, ‘Thus shall it be with thee, O man!’ (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 86). The speaker could be the adult leader; it is equally possible that the triumphant cry springs from the child. In one sense this indicates conformity, as the child becomes the adult speaker. Yet this is also empowering. If the child speaker adopts a similar worldview to that of the adult, he or she shares in the adult’s authoritative rhetoric, participating in a deeper insight into the relationships that sustain the world in which all live.

This pattern of promoting one worldview while encouraging critical thought is consistent with Barbauld’s allegiance to the Rational Dissenting value of discursive opposition. This paradigm of necessary opposition to a centralised body of authority structures *Lessons for Children* and *Hymns in Prose*. In *Lessons for Children*, the conversational format allows Mamma to teach Charles, implicitly, to respect non-British cultural and linguistic practices. In *Hymns in Prose*, the catechistic method of question and answer allows the child speaker to articulate his or her thoughts, and to digest Rational Dissenting principles about the rational nature of humanity and the familial quality of social relationships.

*Hymns in Prose* and *Lessons for Children* affirm the veracity of children’s observations. They depict the maturation of children’s perspectives by showing child speakers who come to share their adult guardian’s attitudes based on personal experiences. In *Lessons for Children*, when Charles decides that he should learn French before he attempts to interact with French people on French soil, the collective ‘we’ makes it unclear whether Mamma speaks for Charles, or whether Charles speaks for himself and for Mamma: ‘We will not go to France again till Papa has taught us to talk French’ (*Lessons IV*, p. 71). Charles either adopts Mamma’s inclusive mode of speech, or he implicitly accepts her mode of logic. Crucially, Charles only comes to this point of agreement with Mamma because he has experienced the shame and frustration of not being able to communicate with French people. In a similar way, the child speaker in *Hymns in Prose* affirms the adult speaker’s religious devotion only after he or she has been given space to question why death occurs in the world. These patterns allow *Lessons for Children* and *Hymns in Prose* to operate as expressions of Barbauld’s Rational Dissenting

vision in which contesting views are reconciled through personal experience and reflection.

*Hymns in Prose* promotes a spirit of religious inquiry within a stable framework of Rational Dissenting attitudes toward religious praise. When the Child of Mortality laments the incomprehensible presence of death in the world in Hymn X (1781) or Hymn XIII (1812), the child's lament comprises the entirety of the hymn. The adult speaker does not interrupt the child who mourns the death of a rose, a tree, and a human. This is distinct from the earlier hymn featuring the 'child of reason,' where the adult speaker rebukes the child for describing a meadow, a forest, and a thunderstorm, but not seeing God in nature. The adult speaker repeatedly says the refrain, 'Didst thou [see / hear] nothing [more/but that]? [...] Return again, child of reason, for there are greater things than these' (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 37, p. 39, p. 41). Thus, it is vital that the lament of the 'child of mortality' occurs *after* the 'child of reason' has been rebuked. It is only because the child speaker has been taught to see God's divinity in all things that the 'child of mortality' can cry out in confusion and anguish without denying God's deity in the face of pain.

When the adult speaker opens the poem, asking, 'Child of mortality, whence comest thou?' (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 77), the archaic phrasing recalls God's address to Satan in the book of Job (Job 1:7; Job 2:2, KJV). This implies that the child speaker, like Satan, is unaware of the extent of God's work in the world. Unlike Satan, the child, by virtue of being a child, has the potential to grow in spiritual maturity and leave his or her state of ignorance. The child describes how a rose has died on its stalk and a tree has been killed by the east wind, expressing sorrow over the reality of death:

[T]herefore do I weep because Death is in the world; the spoiler is among the works of God: all that is made must be destroyed; all that is born must die: let me alone, for I will weep yet longer (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 82).

Crucially, the child does not deny God's presence in nature. The child identifies that the world consists of 'the works of God', and weeps because 'Death is [...] the spoiler' of good things that reveal a benign Creator. This causes the child speaker

pain: 'Therefore do I weep [...] I will weep yet longer.' The child's discomfort in the present and the future marks the child with a 'spirit of inquiry' rather than a 'spirit of disputation,' a mental distress that propels the speaker to search for the truth of what it means for God to be present in a world marked by pain and death.<sup>16</sup> The adult speaker's silence affirms the veracity of the child's despair.

Yet the hymn is quickly followed by another hymn, suggesting that that same spirit of observation and rational thought leads from a spirit of sadness to devotion and joy. The child observes the natural cycle of regeneration:

I have seen the flower withering on the stalk, and its bright leaves spread on the ground—I looked again, and it sprung forth afresh; the stem was crowned with new buds and the sweetness thereof filled the air (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 83).

The child speaker recalls the rose that died in the previous hymn, but modifies his or her descriptive terms, using natural theology to reveal God's commitment to life. In the previous poem, the child saw the rose 'dying,' but here the flower is 'withering.' While there is no technical difference between the words' meanings, 'withering' is more closely associated with botanical discourse, and does not invoke the religious connotations of finality associated with 'dying.' Moreover, the half-vowel sound of 'withering' is gentler than the plosive 'd' in 'dying,' creating an aural decay, rather than abruptly stopping the sound. This aural effect maps onto the philosophical corollary of conceptualising life and death as part of the same process, rather than seeing death as a painful cessation of life. Further emphasising the child's revelation is the contrast between the way the 'child of mortality' described the leaves as 'scattered' and chaotic, and the child in this hymn describes the leaves that are 'spread' in an orderly manner on the ground. In response, the child exultantly identifies botanical patterns of regeneration: the withered flower 'sprung forth afresh.' The semi-onomatopoeic 'sprung' invokes an unspoken association with its present-term verb 'spring,' also suggesting the season of growth. The flower is 'crowned' with new buds, a majestic image associated with Jesus' crown in the following hymn. The accumulation of these observations of

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<sup>16</sup> See Barbauld on the spirit of inquiry versus the spirit of disputation, 'Devotional Taste', pp. 214–15.

natural cycles of rebirth causes the child speaker to exclaim triumphantly, ‘Thus shall it be with thee, O man!’ (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 86).

As has been noted, this final speaker might be the adult or the child speaker, indicating the porous exchange of adult and child perspectives encouraged by *Hymns in Prose*. The cry resolves the child’s queries about the nature and power of God in a world marked by sadness and death, but it does not erase the child’s questions. The child speaker’s textual and temporal space to mourn and question God is fixed in print. However, this space is bookended by hymns where the child learns to see God’s presence in nature. Thus the child speaker embodies the ‘spirit of inquiry’ introduced in Barbauld’s *Thoughts on Devotional Taste*, inquiring after the ways of God without questioning God’s goodness and life-affirming values. In *Hymns in Prose* the child observes nature and associates God’s presence within nature in the context of an affectionate, familial relationship. When the child comes to question the disjunction between his or her experience and the understanding that God is good, it is an earnest and sorrowful episode, but it is limited within the bounds of belief and affection instilled and affirmed in the opening and closing hymns.

*Hymns in Prose* affirms Barbauld’s belief that Rational Dissent provided a framework that allowed children to come to an understanding of the nature of God using individual experience and observation. Barbauld also believed that Rational Dissent provided a logic that enabled individuals to reject plenary claims of authority made by the church-state Establishment. She subtly introduces this Rational Dissenting logic by positioning her hymns as Dissenting-friendly hymns, using non-Trinitarian invocations to God and Jesus. Barbauld’s hymns do not ascribe divinity to Jesus, though, he is described as ‘the Son of God’ who ‘cometh in the glory of his Father; he hath received power from on high’ (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 88). Barbauld uses the Hebraic poetic technique of synthetic parallelism, indicating, on the one hand, a Biblical basis for her work and suggesting a broad non-denominational accessibility to her Christian poems. However, Barbauld pointedly uses synthetic parallelism, in which her second clause explains her first clause. Jesus’ glory is not innate; rather it is something he has ‘received.’ Barbauld echoes Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit to believers: ‘And, behold, I send the

promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high', (Luke 24:49, KJV; emphasis added). This statement, from the Gospel of Luke, was used by Trinitarian Christians to justify Jesus' divinity. But subtly challenging the doctrine of Jesus' eternal divinity is Barbauld's past tense 'hath received,' which suggests a non-Trinitarian Adoptionist theology. Adoptionism claims that Jesus 'received' his divine calling at a particular moment in time due to his sinless devotion to God's will.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, while Barbauld describes Jesus as the 'Son of God', a title also used by Trinitarian Christians, this does not affirm Jesus' divinity. 'Son of God' could refer to humans. In Exodus 4:22 God calls Israel 'my firstborn son,' and in the Apocrypha, a righteous man is labelled a 'Son of God' (Book of Wisdom 2:18, KJV). Even in the final hymn, where the speaker says, 'There we shall see Jesus [...]; and there we shall behold the glory of the high God' (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 98), the semi-colon and the imprecise anaphora enable readers to differentiate between Jesus and 'the high God.' Barbauld's references to Jesus thus facilitate non-Trinitarian understandings of Jesus' identity.

In a similar way, Barbauld invokes Trinitarian, Establishment models of worship in order to revise them:

Come, let us go forth into the fields, let us see how the flowers spring, let us listen to the warbling of the birds, and sport ourselves upon the new grass (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 5–6).

The invitation 'Come [...] into the fields' recalls Scriptural calls to worship in Psalm 95, a psalm encoded in the Church of England Morning Prayer service. Barbauld positions her prose-hymns as alternative, non-Establishment liturgical devotional models. *Hymns in Prose for Children* seeks to 'impress devotional feelings' upon its readers ('Preface', *Hymns in Prose*, p. v), moving from individuals from observations of physical spaces to a contemplation of their cause, the divine creator, and hence, to responses of praise. This logic to worship follows the structure of Psalm 95, which ascribes God's glory to his creation. However, Psalm 95 recalls God's acts in Scripture, invoking the Exodus narrative and the Israelites'

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<sup>17</sup> Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 139.

disobedience in the desert. Barbauld's *Hymn I* does not mention any Biblical narratives. Her hymn implicitly rejects the logic of Psalm 95, which suggests that the human tendency is to disobey God. Instead, Barbauld's speaker suggests that Divine revelation through nature means that humanity is oriented towards knowledge of God. She provides a vision of humanity's relationship with God that is more in accordance with Psalm 139:

He made all things; the sun to rule the day, the moon to shine by night.  
 He made the great whale, and the elephant; and the little worm that crawleth on the  
 ground.  
 [...]
   
 The little birds sing praises [...] The brooks and rivers praise God. [...]
   
 I will praise God (*Hymn I*, pp. 2–3).

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;  
 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. [...]
   
 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy  
 works; and that my soul knoweth right well (Psalm 139: 9 – 10, 14, KJV).

As in Psalm 139, Barbauld's speaker asserts that God's act of creation necessitates the human imperative to praise Him. The anaphoric patterns in Barbauld's hymn evoke a rhythm of logic. The opening isocolon recalls the creation story in Genesis I, conferring Scriptural authority to the practice of observation as a basis for devotional wonder. In the second line, Barbauld's caesura highlights the antithesis between the whale and the worm, generating a sense of wonder that such vastly different creatures are the handiwork of a single creator. This interplay of relations and contrasts motivates all living things, including birds and rivers, to praise God. There is a logical rhythm in which the speaker's declaration, 'I will praise God', becomes the natural cadence in a trio of anaphoric isocolons. As this speaker is a child, Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose* foreground the child as a figure with an innate and exalted spiritual capacity.

In Barbauld's Dissenting paradigm, the child speaker attains spiritual enlightenment through patterns of observation and critical thinking because he or

she is unaffected by Original Sin. Hymn I foregrounds the power and privilege of a child's voice through its implicit rejection of the Establishment doctrine of Original Sin. Barbauld's hymn insists that speech and rationality provide the keys to understand God's divinity: 'I did not know the great name of God, for my reason was not come unto me / But now I can speak, and my tongue shall praise Him' (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 4). Barbauld's caesura suggests that this is a logical causal response: when the speaker can reason, the speaker will praise. This logic implicitly challenges Trinitarian Establishment doctrine. One might expect the speaker to attribute his or her lack of divine knowledge to Original Sin, and subsequent spiritual awareness to divine revelation and the sacrament of baptism. However, for Barbauld's child-speaker, it is only his or her lack of *reason* that is at fault. Reason, speech, and divine knowledge are conjoined in a Herder-like vision of humans as reasoning creators: 'an image of His nature,' suggesting that human language is divine because it is rational.<sup>18</sup> This rejection of Original Sin presents children's voices as spiritually pure and ignorant. If children are intrinsically oriented toward goodness and their only fault is ignorance, then learning to observe nature will enable the child to grow in spiritual maturity and to perform acts of worship. Moreover, if the child is a spiritual priest (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 10–11), then children can attain the spiritual and moral authority to challenge the Establishment logic that vests state and religious authority in the single figure of the monarch.

In Hymn III, Barbauld poses a theological challenge to the theocratic structure of the Church of England, which unites civic and religious power in the figure of the monarch. Barbauld's hymn utilises a catechistic question-and-answer method to vocalise a Dissenting political consciousness, rejecting the spiritual authority of the King granted by the Church of England. The hymn establishes a series of rhetorical, chiasmic, catechistic question-answers: 'But who is the shepherd's shepherd? [...] God is the shepherd's shepherd' (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 13–14). Barbauld's epistrophic question-answer formula employs a moderated form of diaphora: the general notion of a shepherd is redefined as an almost Platonic notion of the ultimate shepherd, who is characterised as a caring leader. Through

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<sup>18</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, 'On the Origin of Language', *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 90, p.163.

these diaphoric patterns, Barbauld moves children to consider who is the parent of the parent, and, ultimately, who is the sovereign of the King. The child speaker dutifully answers with a pattern of repetition: ‘God is the parent of the parent,’ and, ultimately, ‘God is the sovereign of the King’ (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 16, p. 18). The hymn then leads the child to consider that the King may act in discordance with the will of God: ‘Who commandeth him [the king] what he must do? Whose hand is reached out to protect him from danger? And if he doeth evil, who shall punish him?’ (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 18). The accumulating rhetorical questions reach their climax in the final question: ‘And if he doeth evil, who shall punish him?’ The hymn explicitly alerts child readers to potential fallibility of that ultimate Establishment authority figure, the monarch, and asserts that monarchs answer to a greater authority.

Hymn III thereby provides children with the linguistic facility and spiritual logic to dismantle the paradigms of spiritual authority assumed by the structure of the Establishment church-state partnership. Barbauld’s subversive use of the catechistic mode suggests that Richardson’s interpretation of Barbauld’s use of the question-and-answer mode as a pedagogic model based around ‘containment’ and ‘discipline’ is misguided.<sup>19</sup> Instead of using the catechistic method to inculcate a widely accepted set of religious principles, Barbauld’s questions expand a child’s concept of affection and authority, while suggesting that this capacious mental exercise is supported by the principles of Rational Dissent. By using the principles of Rational Dissent in a catechistic form, Barbauld condemns the British monarch as complicit in the slave trade. Through the use of the ostensibly controlling catechistical response, ‘God is the sovereign of the king,’ Barbauld shows child readers the radical spiritual and political authority that may be claimed through the logic of Rational Dissent. She provides them with a Rational Dissenter’s rejection of the British monarch’s arbitrary claims to authority.

This resistance to centralised authoritative bodies, derived from Barbauld’s Rational Dissenting value of discursive opposition, coheres with Barbauld’s belief that the domestic family is a paradigm that can deconstruct monarchical claims. Families consist of parent-teachers and child-pupils, in which the family bonds of

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Richardson, ‘The Politics of Childhood: Wordsworth, Blake, and Catechistic Method’, *English Literary History*, 56 (1989), 853–868, p. 854, p. 856.

affection and learning become paradigmatic for Barbauld's vision of a sympathetic global community. Just as *Lessons for Children* presents the nuclear domestic family, particularly the mother-child relationship, as the ground from which children can orient themselves in the wider social world, *Hymns in Prose* uses the nuclear domestic family as paradigmatic for a global community. This may be seen in Hymn VIII, an overtly pastoral poem that opens by invoking the image of a labouring family. It recalls Virgil's *Georgics* in its pastoral setting and in its suggestion that the farmer is metonymical for the nation. However, Barbauld subtly criticises Virgil's idealisation of imperial modes of government. She uses her rural nuclear family to explain global and divine citizenship in terms of a mutually affectionate and productive network of relationships:

See where stands the cottage of the labourer, covered with warm thatch; the mother is spinning at the door [...] the elder [children] learn to labour, and are obedient [...]

The father, the mother, and the children make a family (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 53–54).

The industrious farmer with his industrious textile-working wife recalls Virgil's farmer, who:

[S]tays up late by winter firelight  
With a penknife pointing torches;  
Meanwhile, singing a song to lighten the lengthy task,  
His wife runs through the loom with her shrill-rattling reed.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to Virgil, Barbauld focuses less on the farmer's work, and more on the structure of his family. They are depicted as the basic unit upon which society operates and in which divine order is best expressed. Echoing Paul's injunction to the Romans to 'Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep' (Rom 12:15, KJV), Barbauld describes how, 'If one is sick, they mourn together; and if one is happy, they rejoice together' (*Hymns in Prose*, pp. 54–55). Barbauld's family is not, to use Lawrence Stone's terminology, a restricted patriarchal nuclear family

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<sup>20</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* Book 1, *The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. C. Day Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), lines 291–94.

shaped by a hierarchy of deference; neither is it a closed domestic nuclear family, characterised by an inward turn away from the wider community.<sup>21</sup> Barbauld's family is a nuclear unit bound by affection and mutual labour, and it is the paradigmatic unit from which larger social communities are formed.

Barbauld describes villages as collections of families, and kingdoms as larger collections of villages, and hence, of families. This logic means that, 'All are God's family' (*Hymn in Proses*, p. 59). In light of this, each member bears a familial obligation to family members across the globe, and here Barbauld makes an Abolitionist plea. Addressing an enslaved 'Negro' woman, Barbauld's emphasises the woman's dignity: 'though no one seeth thee, God seeth thee; thou no one pitieth thee, God pitieth thee' (*Hymns in Prose*, p. 60). Having moved from a general image of the globe to a specific instance of cultural injustice, Barbauld invites child readers to internalise a global perspective that appreciates the dignity of people of different cultures; a global perspective rooted in the notion that the world is composed of interlocking familial networks. By implication, Barbauld's Hymn VIII suggests that individuals have a responsibility to attend to the suffering of other individuals in different countries, on the basis of familial obligation. This obligation is rooted in a Rational Dissenting vision of familial affection as the basic unit on which society operates and through which it may be reformed.

### **b. Familial Conversations and Critical Thinking in *Evenings at Home***

*Evenings at Home* was the most overtly Dissenting pedagogical project on which the Barbauld-Aikin family embarked.<sup>22</sup> As a pedagogical project, it self-consciously associated itself with *Lessons for Children*. One of the children in *Evenings at Home* is named Charles, and the miscellany includes a lesson on metallurgy that expands upon, but follows the same structure, as Mamma's lesson on metallurgy in *Lessons*

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 653–657.

<sup>22</sup> Mrs [Anna Laetitia] Barbauld and Dr [John] Aikin, *Evenings at Home: or, the Juvenile Budget Opened; consisting of a Variety of Miscellaneous Pieces for the Instruction and Amusement of Young* 6 vol. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792–1796) I, p. iv. Quotations cited in-text as *Evenings* I/II/III/IV/V/VI.

for Children.<sup>23</sup> The implication is that *Lessons for Children* exists within the same world of Rational Dissenting texts occupied by *Hymns in Prose* and *Evenings at Home*. This space of Rational Dissenting texts was characterised by the family text. Just as *Lessons for Children* marketed itself as a book that began as a private text used by an individual family, *Evenings at Home* claimed that it originated as a family manuscript. *Evenings at Home* disseminated Dissenting familial conversations in the public world of print culture.<sup>24</sup> While neither Barbauld nor Aikin committed their names to *Evenings at Home*, they implicitly announced their joint authorship through a half-page advertisement on the contents page, effectively claiming joint responsibility for the work's ethical and political agendas.<sup>25</sup> The pieces in the miscellany are unattributed, which has caused historical confusion as to who wrote what.<sup>26</sup> In response to authorial misattributions, Lucy Aikin indignantly identified the fourteen pieces (out of ninety-nine) that Barbauld wrote in *Evenings at Home*.<sup>27</sup> Though Lucy Aikin's attributions are historically useful, they have helped carve up 'a family document' by asserting the importance of individual authorship over the ethos of family that is central to *Evenings at Home*.<sup>28</sup>

The Introduction of *Evenings at Home* echoes its real-life method of production, exemplifying one way in which a Rational Dissenting familial conversational model became reified as a literary trope. It describes the Fairborne family's practice of including their children and educated adult friends in shared domestic activities, conflating familial and 'academic' spheres. This recalls a literary practice in the Warrington Academy, where a standard evening entertainment involved students and participants submitting compositions into Mary Priestley's handbag, affectionately termed the 'Budget.' The group then randomly selected a set of pieces, which they read aloud and discussed. The titular 'Budget' in *Evenings at Home* references the real-life Warrington Academy 'Budget,'

<sup>23</sup> Compare *Evenings at Home*, pp. 42–47 and *Lessons for Children* III, pp. 53–66

<sup>24</sup> Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 10–11, p. 20, pp. 30–31.

<sup>25</sup> Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Copeland accidentally ascribes 'Half-a-crown's worth' to Barbauld in *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England 1790–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Lucy Aikin, *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. With a Memoir*, 2 vol., (1825), ed. Lucy Aikin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. xii–xiii.

<sup>28</sup> Levy, p. 26.

suggesting the text's depiction of real-life familial conversational reading practices. Lucy Aikin affirms that the work developed from a familial context: 'His (John Aikin's) invention flowed freely, - the applause of parents and the delight of children invited him to proceed.'<sup>29</sup> In a similar way, the Introduction of *Evenings at Home* presents the publication of the Fairbornes' 'Budget' as a process of gradual circulation that began in the family home and spread to the community: 'Other children were admitted to these readings; and as the *Budget of Beechgrove Hall* became somewhat celebrated in the neighbourhood, its proprietors were at length urged to lay it open to the public' (*Evenings* I, p. vi). Patricia Howell Michaelson shrewdly observes that naming the item the 'budget' emphasises the link between 'family reading and bourgeois economic virtue,' affirming the middle-class nature of this Dissenting vision of family activities.<sup>30</sup> The price of the books located this social reformation in the middle class—a single volume cost nearly two day's of a labourer's wage at the time of publication. Nevertheless there is a nonconformist democratic vision to this social form of literacy, which White describes as 'a realized poetics of nonconformity,'<sup>31</sup> in which the voices of writers and readers—male and female, adult and child—are equally valid.

As a collection of familial conversations, *Evenings at Home* promoted a Rational Dissenting vision in which the domestic family was seen as the ideal social unit for achieving social reform.<sup>32</sup> Rational Dissenters believed that familial home-based discussions could lead to the articulation and circulation of new socio-political ideas in wider public spheres,<sup>33</sup> ultimately influencing a large enough portion of society to re-mould socio-cultural values.<sup>34</sup> As concepts of the family

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<sup>29</sup> Lucy Aikin, 'Preface', *Evenings at Home*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Longman and Co; Hamilton and Co; Whittaker and Co; Smith, Elder, and Co; H. G. Bohn; Cowie and Co; Harvey and Co; Darton and Clark; L. A. Lewis; J. S. Hodson; G. Routledge; J. Murray; C. H. Law; Grant and Griffith; and Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1823), vol. 1 of 6, p iii.

<sup>30</sup> Michaelson, p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> See Barbauld's Hymn VIII in *Hymns in Prose* where the individual family becomes synecdochic for the world in which 'All are God's family'; Tomaselli also discusses Rational Dissenting concepts of the family, pp. 239–256.

<sup>33</sup> For more on kinship ties extending beyond the nuclear family see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 106–165.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel E. White, "'The 'Joineriana': Anna Barbauld, the Aikin Family Circle, and the Dissenting Public Sphere', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32 (1999), 511–533, p. 513; also White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, pp. 11–13, pp. 67–72.

narrowed from broader concepts of the household (including servants) to the nuclear domestic unit, family rituals developed around practices of reading aloud. Eighteenth-century domestic libraries facilitated performative communal reading spaces.<sup>35</sup> At times, entire families gathered in domestic reading spaces, often to read the Bible.<sup>36</sup> In some ways, *Evenings at Home* operates as a secular Bible. It encourages families to question the reasons behind philosophical and political issues of authority, leadership, and notions of heroism. More specifically, the pieces encouraged readers to question Anglo-centric cultural values and militaristic attitudes in the wake of the French Revolution.

Barbauld and Aikin redefine heroism and challenge military culture in *Evenings at Home* by presenting their ideas of heroism in texts that are juxtaposed with pieces that express militaristic attitudes. This pattern of presenting contesting voices within an overarching framework of harmony is implied in the contents table of *Evenings at Home*, where a variety of textual forms are grouped together in sets of three or four under pseudo-chapter titles ('The First Evening,' 'The Second Evening,' and so forth). There is a structural harmony in the use of chapters, but within the chapters, there is no apparent guiding principle. Fables are alternately paired with dialogues, plays, and scientific lessons, and other forms. Rather, Barbauld and Aikin framed the content table to mimic a random selection of stories from the fictional 'budget,' encouraging readers to encounter the pieces in a particular combination over a specific number of evenings. This is presented as a way of re-performing the Fairbornes' practice of intermittent familial reading. The apparently random selection of texts for an evening's entertainment is 'fixed in print,' inviting readers to seek points of thematic continuity between ostensibly disparate texts. The extremity of this miscellaneous approach was unusual amongst contemporaneous children's miscellanies.<sup>37</sup> The Fairborne family appears only in the Introduction. They do not recur between the interpolated stories, nor are there larger narrative arcs between the chapters that involve the Fairborne

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<sup>35</sup> James Raven, 'From promotion to proscription: arrangements for reading and eighteenth-century libraries', *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175–202, p. 199.

<sup>36</sup> Roger Chartier, 'The Practical Impact of Writing', *The Book History Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2006), 157–181, p. 176.

<sup>37</sup> Aileen Fyfe, 'Reading Children's Books in Dissenting Families', *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), 453–473, p. 457.

family members. This formal resistance to contemporaneous literary practices appears to be an articulation of the ethos of Dissent. Moreover, as Aileen Fyfe astutely observes, this miscellaneous structure projects the family as the specific implied reading audience.<sup>38</sup>

*Evenings at Home* encourages parents to teach children to consider how language facilitates critical thought patterns. This may be seen in the dialogue, ‘A Lesson in the Art of Distinguishing.’ There are many similarities between this dialogue and Mamma and Charles’s discussion about the semantics of a horse in Part IV of the 1808 edition of *Lessons for Children*, suggesting that this family discussion on words and meanings should be a recurrent topic of discussion. In ‘A Lesson on the Art of Distinguishing’, Father teaches Charles how to differentiate between a horse and a cabbage by identifying the specimens’ unique features.<sup>39</sup> Charles comments that he prefers descriptions because the imagery appeals to his imagination, rather than definitions, which categorise objects by identifying what they are not. *Prima facie*, Father seems to deny the beauty of poetic language, a denial inconsistent with Barbauld and Aikin’s poetic sensibilities. In the same miscellany, Barbauld personifies the seasons and the elements in ‘A Masque of Nature’ and ‘The Four Sisters’, defamiliarising concepts such as spring and water by reifying and poeticising them. Nevertheless, Darren Howard’s attempt to read Charles’s protestations as a rejection of Father’s inadequately reductive rationalism also appears misguided.<sup>40</sup> ‘A Lesson on the Art of Distinguishing’ operates in a definitional and non-poetic mode. While Father validates Charles’s preference for descriptions by acknowledging that he would have preferred descriptions at Charles’s age, he is emphatic that definitions have value: ‘I have not given you a definition to teach you what a horse is, but to teach you to *think*’ (*Evenings II*, p. 135). Father’s italicisation emphasises Barbauld’s claim that fostering critical thinking is as important as poetic appreciation. Conceptually, Barbauld defines a ‘definition’ as the articulation of what is deduced and observed, rather than an inductive expression of

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<sup>38</sup> Fyfe, p. 466.

<sup>39</sup> An instance of the datedness of the scientific concepts in *Evenings at Home* is demonstrated when Father differentiates a horse and a cabbage by claiming horses are alive while cabbages have never been alive (*Evenings II*, p. 122).

<sup>40</sup> Darren Howard, ‘Talking Animals and Reading Children: Teaching (dis) Obedience in John Aikin and Anna Barbauld’s “Evenings at Home”’, *Studies in Romanticism* 48 (2009), 641–666, pp. 661–62.

innate things. Father teaches Charles to gaze: not merely to observe and describe things at a surface level, but to analyse and categorise with a discriminating mind. This ability to prise things apart, Father implies, is a critical skill that all individuals can and should learn. The Dissenting pedagogical project sought to teach people to be discerning and precise in their use of language.

Subsequently, *Evenings at Home* models idealised conversations between adults and children, teaching adults and children to be precise with their words. To borrow a concept from Robin Bernstein, *Evenings at Home* is a ‘scriptive’ text, as it does not denote a ‘rigid dictation of performed action but rather a set of invitations that remain necessarily open to resistance interpretation, and improvisation.’<sup>41</sup> In *Evenings at Home*, dialogues and plays look like play scripts. Speech is attributed to specific individuals through italicised names and titles, and there is minimal descriptive information. This act of labelling speakers might appear more proscriptive than the exchanges in *Lessons for Children*, but the character identifiers allow readers to perform the text in multiple ways. In Lucy’s lesson on gravity, for instance, ‘Father’ and ‘Lucy’ make distinct contributions to the dialogue, yet these divisions of speech allow readers to perform the lesson in various ways—as a father and daughter re-enacting the scene, or as a single reader embodying two speakers. The dialogue provides the transcript of a father-daughter interaction, and, in addition to individual reading practices, it invites multiple readers to stage this scientific familial lesson.

The intended familial reading audience of *Evenings at Home* is suggested through its title, its frame story, and through the content of its stories. ‘A Boy Without Genius’ explores the growing eighteenth-century interest in individual genius and criticises contemporaneous parenting models and attitudes, and is clearly addressed to adult readers with parental and pedagogical responsibilities.<sup>42</sup> The story sits between an animal poem and a fable, directed toward child readers. This juxtaposition implies that Barbauld and Aikin conceived of the work as a family reading project, in which children and adults could encounter *Evenings at*

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<sup>41</sup> Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> This interest in ‘genius’ as a virtue is expressed by Edward Young, ‘Conjectures on Original Composition. In a letter to the author of *Sir Charles Grandison*’, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2005), 338–347.

*Home* together and be challenged to re-evaluate socio-cultural paradigms and social expectations. In a further indication that the ostensibly random organisation of the stories was strategic, Aikin and Barbauld's extended version of *Evenings at Home* in 1823 retained the 1792–96 structure. If the arrangement of compositions were purely random, a second version would have been a prime opportunity to re-arrange the pieces. Aikin and Barbauld's retention of the original structure suggests that their juxtaposition of stories was intentional, promoting a familial reading experience.

Barbauld and Aikin juxtaposed their compositions so that texts featuring contradictory themes sat alongside one another. This structural decision effectively gives the last text the 'final say' in the conversation of ideas, positioning readers to concur with the ideas expressed in the last text in the set. Thus, Barbauld and Aikin disseminated their criticisms of the adherence to traditionalism that enabled the British Establishment to arbitrarily define nationalistic virtues and social structures. This may be seen in the placement of the opening pieces, the dialogue 'On the Oak' and the following fable, 'A Young Mouse.' The works present radically different attitudes toward the benefit of maintaining traditional social structures. In 'On the Oak' a Tutor teaches George and Henry how to recognise oak trees, and informs them to which uses oak trees are put. It is a lesson in botany, and in British patriotism. It explores the nature and uses of the oak, an emblem for English nationalism, and explicitly discusses the centrality of the British navy to British militaristic nationalism. The Tutor supports the British colonial project, claiming that the oak is the source of Britain's 'chief glory and security' because it enables Britain to build boats and be dominant in international trade and war efforts (*Evenings* I, p. 7). He teaches his charges the song 'Hearts of Oak' and exclaims in a pseudo-Burkean manner, 'whoever drops an acorn into the ground, and takes proper care of it when it comes up, may be said to be a benefactor to his country' (*Evenings* I, p. 9, p. 16). The dialogue celebrates British naval military culture, and the Tutor calls his pupils (and the implied child reader) to nurture the oak, an image that Burke associated with British tradition and traditionalism in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. By attributing Burkean words to the figure of pedagogical authority, the dialogue celebrates militarism as an

expression of patriotism, a popular association encouraged by the British Establishment. Somewhat subversively, even in its conservatism, the dialogue invites readers to adopt the voices of the Tutor, of Henry, and of George, an invitation that carries the potential to invert authoritative figures. It is possible that a child could read the words of the ponderous Tutor, while an adult might adopt the voice(s) of the young pupil(s); a child could also read all the voices. As Jacqueline George notes, public reading challenges the idea of a unitary reader, ‘distributing reading among several different roles’ the reader is differentiated from that which he or she reads, and the audience is aware that the reader and the author are separate people.<sup>43</sup> The subtitle ‘A Dialogue’ invites readers to adopt this multiple awareness of the author, the dialogue characters, and the real-life dialogue reader, enabling implied readers to embody, examine, and critique notions of authority as expressed by the Tutor.

In a further condemnation of the Establishment interest in supporting traditional social structures, Barbauld and Aikin follow ‘On the Oak: A Dialogue’ with ‘A Young Mouse: A Fable’, positioning readers to adopt a Rational Dissenter’s perspective as a politically marginalised figure. In ‘A Young Mouse’, the titular mouse is continually driven out of the family living space by the household cat. She joyously discovers that the ‘good people’ of the house have built her a home, fitted perfectly for herself with a steel door, and complete with cheese inside (*Evenings* I, p. 18). Upon finding this she runs in ‘great joy’ to inform her mother of the humans’ generosity (*Evenings* I, p. 19). The free indirect discourse is indicated by the accumulation of value-descriptors, and the mouse’s belief in the ‘good’ people and her resulting ‘great’ joy create dramatic irony as readers are positioned to pity her misunderstanding. The dramatic irony is confirmed when the mouse’s mother identifies the benevolent house as a fatal mousetrap, delivering the moral: ‘Though man has not so fierce a look as a cat, he is as much our enemy, and has still more cunning’ (*Evenings* I, p. 20). The story seeks to produce within child readers an ability to adopt the dual perspective of animals and humans. By narrating the story from the perspective of a mouse, it allows child readers to imagine daily life in a hostile house. This radical duality encourages readers to

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<sup>43</sup> Jacqueline George, ‘Public Reading and Lyric Pleasure: Eighteenth Century Elocutionary Debates and Poetic Practices’, *English Literary History* 76 (2009), 371–397, pp. 372–76.

mistrust the apparent benevolence of human actions. As Howard posits, this technique of child identification with animals participates in the larger project of *Evenings at Home* of fostering the values of plurality and difference.<sup>44</sup> At another level, the fable operates in a surprisingly non-allegorical mode. The implied readers are humans living in houses that conceivably utilise mousetraps. By humanising a real-life mouse, rather than making the mouse a purely allegorical figure, the fable asserts that it is humane to consider the needs and actions of individuals and groups who are denied a stable place in the social structure. For contemporaneous readers, this involved considering how the modified theocratic church-state in Britain marginalised and depersonalised the needs of individuals and groups outside the Anglican Establishment. ‘A Young Mouse: A Fable’ suggests that the value given to (military) violence in traditional British society enables the social perpetuation of inequalities, producing a community in which defenceless individuals—individual and metaphoric mice—are perennially kept at the fringes the productive space that forms the centre of social industry and power.

To emphasise the danger of unquestioningly accepting a political paradigm based upon the Anglican church-state claim to plenary power, Barbault and Aikin incorporated a series of anti-monarchical plays in *Evenings at Home* that highlighted the ontological sameness shared by monarchs and their supposed subjects, and undermined the basis for authoritative attestations. These anti-monarchical plays, ‘Canute’s Reproof to his Courtiers’ and ‘Alexander and the Robber’, invite interactive and physical readings, encouraging readers to articulate the idea that monarchical hierarchies perpetuate questionable moral value systems.

In ‘Canute’s Reproof to his Courtiers’, King Canute rebukes his courtiers by pretending to believe their fawning assertions that even nature obeys his commands. His courtiers mutter in disbelief as Canute sits among the rising tide, until Canute declares, ‘A king is but a man, and man is but a worm. Shall a worm assume the power of my great God?’ (*Evenings* I, p. 105). Canute publicly disgraces his courtiers and physically removes his crown, enacting Locke’s notion that ‘absolute monarch [...] is indeed inconsistent with civil society’ (*STG*, §90). Canute combines Lockean ethics with Biblical references to Job 25:6 and Psalm 22:6, in

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<sup>44</sup> Howard, p. 653, p. 666.

which Job and King David liken themselves to worms (KJV), undermining the idea that a monarch possesses any innate civic or spiritual supremacy. Packaged as a play, the piece encourages families to stage the scene, domesticating the debate as to whether or not there is a spiritual or logical basis to monarchical claims of absolute power.

Following Canute's challenge to the spiritual and civic basis for the monarchy is the fable, 'The Flying Fish,' which highlights the ethical problems perpetuated by monarchical systems. Initially, the eponymous fish possesses 'an ambitious and discontented temper' (*Evenings* II, pp. 119). When Jupiter grants her wings, the fish is delighted by her distinctive mark, but quickly realises that she is now ill suited to live in the sea, but is inferior to the birds (*Evenings* II, p. 120). The fabular fish is an antithetical foil to Canute, who recognises that there is no essential difference between himself and his citizens. The flying fish's hubris suggests that systems that facilitate the elevation of an otherwise unremarkable individual are more likely to cater to individual pride than to foster benevolence and civic care. The fable implicitly responds to Thomas Hobbes's ideal of the sovereign who acts for the common good because the sovereign represents and embodies the rights of the individuals he governs, and suggests that this Hobbesian ideal is a misguided fantasy (*Leviathan*, II.xvii, §13).

'The Robbers' further implies that monarchical hierarchies facilitate moral double standards. The fictionalised conversation between Alexander the Great and an unnamed Thracian robber ends when the robber challenges Alexander to consider that conquerors and robbers are similar: 'plundering, ravishing, killing, without law, without justice, merely to gratify an insatiable lust for dominion', while Alexander wonders: 'Are we then so much alike? – Alexander to a robber? – Let me reflect' (*Evenings* II, p. 152). While the robber acknowledges his guilt in acting 'without justice,' he also presents himself as the victim of a system that has arbitrarily branded him as an outsider, while the central powers perform similar crimes and are honoured as conquerors. By ending the play with a series of rhetorical reflections, Aikin and Barbauld entreat readers to continue the discussion outside the play: what are leaders' ethical responsibilities? What makes a good moral leader, and what differentiates a monarch from a criminal?

Further encouraging readers to debate these concepts of leadership is the grouping of the pieces in the ‘Tenth Evening’, which presents ‘Canute’s Reproof to His Courtiers’, ‘The Flying Fish,’ and ‘The Robbers’ in a single reading session. The first piece affirms that good kingship is marked by humility and an awareness of how arbitrary monarchical authority is; the second implies, by corollary, that hierarchies supporting monarchical claims are morally suspect; the third play highlights monarchical hypocrisy in defining military success as a virtue while denigrating violence in others. *Evenings at Home* produces a cluster of texts that criticise concepts of kingship, suggesting that an ideal human king should renounce arbitrary claims of power. Canute is a good king because he acknowledges the limits of his authority. By contrast, the flying fish is an inadequate leader whose hubris is based on a flawed claim to distinction. Alexander must choose to be like Canute—or to reject the robber’s claims and continue believing that he is morally superior to criminals by basis of his social standing.

Barbauld and Aikin’s belief that children could assess multiple perspectives without becoming disputatious was informed by their Radical Dissenting belief that humans are social beings capable of rational thought. By encouraging readers to identify with marginalised figures, *Evenings at Home* prefigures William Godwin’s declaration that the child’s sympathetic imagination is ‘the ground-plot upon which the edifice of a sound morality must be erected,’<sup>45</sup> and foreshadows Percy Shelley’s insistence that ‘[t]he great instrument of moral good is the imagination.’<sup>46</sup> *Evenings at Home* invites child readers to sympathise with marginalised figures, and to interrogate truth-claims made by authoritative figures. Aware of the potential for scripts to generate discussion external to the text, *Evenings at Home* invites unscripted familial discussion through its juxtaposition of stories featuring conflicting values.

Barbauld’s children’s books reflect her anti-authoritarian, pluralistic Dissenting principles. *Lessons for Children*, *Hymns in Prose* and *Evenings at Home* model

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<sup>45</sup> William Scofield [William Godwin], Preface to *Bible Stories*, (London: Thomas Hodgkins, 1806), p. 1, in *Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. Pamela Clemit, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, vol. 5 of 7, Pickering Masters Series (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> Percy Shelley, ‘A Defence of Poetry’, in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977, 478–510, p. 488.

individuals' progressions from quotidian observations of one's surroundings to states of imaginative and devotional wonder to produce critical thinkers. Barbauld promotes a global perspective rooted in familial affection, a vision derived from her Rational Dissenting principles. Through her insistent emphasis on familial affection as the basis for recognising and respecting the subjectivity of others, Barbauld reconceptualised the shape and purpose of the children's book. Set in domestic spaces, *Lessons for Children*, *Hymns in Prose*, and *Evenings at Home* affirm the subjectivity of the 'other' by normalising concepts of cultural difference. The books present the family as the paradigm for understanding the global community, making the realisation of this family a social justice goal and an individual family goal.

Barbauld's children first encounter books within a familial context, and it is through familial exchanges that they learn to question and observe, and are challenged to consider different perspectives. Barbauld and Aikin's affectionate and knowledgeably authoritative parent-teachers use conversations to lead their child-pupils to more complex and sympathetic modes of reasoning. She encourages, but does not force, readers to internalise her belief in the fundamental importance of maintaining a discursive opposition to concepts of centralised authority encoded in the British Establishment.

Prior to Barbauld's children's books, it was clear when books addressed adult guardians as educators or child pupils as readers. By contrast, Barbauld's children's books address adults and children, encouraging the family as a group to question, observe, and reflect upon their environments and human cultures. Moreover, *Lessons for Children*, *Hymns in Prose*, and *Evenings at Home* ask to be read aloud. This communal reading experience offers children the chance to role-play as authoritative adults, and allows adults to role-play as children and be reminded of a time when they were unaware of the social and scientific principles they assume as norms. Barbauld's parent-teachers consolidated the discursive space of the parent-teacher in the children's print market, transforming the domestic family space into a 'new public [site] of discourse.'<sup>47</sup>

If the previous chapter explored how *Lessons for Children* instituted the birth of the conversational primer, it is equally important to understand that *Lessons for*

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<sup>47</sup> Goring, p. 67.

*Children* embedded the values of Rational Dissent within British children's print culture. Its form, its values, and its content are all derived from Barbauld's Rational Dissenting principle of valuing discursive opposition and internalising a global familial identity. The conversational primer may be seen as an embodiment of Barbauld's principles of Rational Dissent. That an entire genre grew from a text that is imbricated within Barbauld's poetics of Rational Dissent shows that Rational Dissent reconceptualised the children's book as an object capable of supporting familial bonding and education. In these books, Barbauld disseminated a politically radical vision, providing children and adults with a Rational Dissenting logic that affirmed the spiritual and moral dignity of the individual in the face of institutions claiming total religious and civic authority.

## Chapter Five

### Engaging Readers in Late Eighteenth-century British Children's Books

In the conversational primer, Barbauld created a Rational Dissenting genre in the form of an ideal script that implicitly presented itself as a real-life transcript. The genre crafted a space in the public print sphere in which domestic mothers and young children could participate. As Lawrence Klein notes, the domestication of women did not preclude women from participating in public discourse in the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In the conversational primer, Barbauld gave mothers a prominent print identity as parent-authors, enabling them to infuse their real-life domestic identities into their authorial personas. Simultaneously, Barbauld showed that authorial Mammias could publicise the domestic space while maintaining individual privacy by leaving characters' mental spaces unrepresented by the text. With the exception of familial conversational primers, conversational primers' speakers lack textual interiority. Its speakers are, to be precise, words. They become speakers only when a reader embodies and performs the words, mentally or physically. Thus the parent-author of the conversational primer invites real-life readers to perform the ideal exchanges, implicitly encouraging real-life readers to enact similar conversations outside the book. This reading practice proved popular enough for Lady Ellenor Fenn to publish a manual, *The Rational Dame*, which provided information so that mothers could facilitate the types of conversations led by Mammias within conversational primers.<sup>2</sup> However, this was but one of several ways of reading children's books. Toward the turn of the century, books for young readers increasingly assumed that the child's interaction with the book would be unmediated by adult guardians.

In 1805, William Godwin, writing under the pseudonym Edward Baldwin, published *Fables: Ancient and Modern*. He described the children's book as a substitute, rather than supporting tool, for the parent-teacher:

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<sup>1</sup> Klein, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Lovechild [Lady Ellenor Fenn], *The Rational Dame: or, hints towards supplying prattle for children*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Dublin: Printed by N. Kelly for T. Jackson, 1795); cited in-text as *Rational Dame*.

I have long thought that Fables were the happiest vehicle which could be devised for the instruction of children in the first period of their education. The stories are short; a simple and familiar turn of incident runs through them; and the mediums of instruction they employ are animals—some of the first objects with which the eyes and the curiosity of children are conversant. Yet [...] If we would benefit a child, we must become in part a child ourselves. We must prattle to him; we must expatiate upon some points; we must introduce quick, unexpected turns, which, if they are not wit, have the effect of wit to children. Above all, we must make our narrations pictures, and render the objects we discourse about, visible to the fancy of the learner. A tale [...] told in as few words as a problem in Euclid, will never prove interesting to the mind of a child.

I have fancied myself taking the child upon my knee, and have expressed [the fables] in such language as I should have been likely to employ, when I wished to amuse the child [...]

[...] [A]s few parents, and fewer governesses, are inclined to interrupt their lessons with dialogue, and enter into explanations, the child is early taught to receive and repeat words which convey no specific idea to his mind. [...] [T]he book I was writing, was to be the first, or nearly the first, book offered to the child's attention.<sup>3</sup>

Godwin's authorial stance radically differs to that of the parent-author, whose posture of normative hope toward his or her implied readers emphasised the possibility that those readers could recreate the books' verisimilar reading experiences. Godwin, instead, adopts a stance of impersonal hope that his book will prove 'interesting.' He presents a different vision for how the 'first' child readers should engage with a book. This is the same set of readers addressed by conversational primers—very young children. Godwin's emphatic repetition of 'first'-ness in conjunction with fables attributes a chronology of educational methods, in which the fable becomes the groundwork for future pedagogical efforts. This is, he claims, in part because fables effectively communicate moral concepts. Moreover, he suggests that fables introduce readers to a body of cultural knowledge. Godwin's reference to a pithy Euclidian problem assumes that his readers are erudite enough,

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Baldwin [William Godwin], *Fables Ancient and Modern. Adapted for the Use of Children. Third Edition* (London: Printed for Thomas Hodgkins, 1805), pp. iii–v. Cited in-text as *Fables Ancient and Modern*.

or wish to be so erudite, to recognise the passing reference to the Classical Greco-Roman mathematician. Godwin thus directs his preface toward the same middle-upper class readers addressed by conversational primers.

On one level, Godwin's observations about the ideal children's book may apply to conversational primers. Conversational primers, like Godwin's ideal children's books, feature short, familiar incidents, using objects and animals with which 'the curiosity of children are conversant.' Godwin's alliterative comment affirms that his vision of child education is similar to that of the parent-teacher, involving the direction of children's 'curiosity' through the interactive process of 'conversa[tion].' However, Godwin's concept of being 'conversant' is distinctive from the chattiness implied by a conversational primer. Rather than referring to interactive speech, Godwin suggests that being conversant with something involves a textual familiarity with an object.

Godwin's preface consistently transforms speech into a mode of textual expression. When he insists, 'We must prattle to him; we must expatiate upon some points; we must introduce quick, unexpected turns,' the anaphora positions prattle, expatiation, and wit (or what passes for wit) as solutions to the 'manner in which the Fables are [to be] written, and in which they are read' (emphasis added). In Godwin's hands, conversation becomes a textual mode of expression rather than an oral activity. He is hypothetical when referring to non-textual, physical actions: 'I have fancied myself taking the child upon my knee, and have expressed [myself] as I should have been likely to employ' (emphasis added). Where the conversational primer's parent-authors asserted the real-life origins and practical applications of their texts, Godwin's author uses the subjunctive mode. His emphasis on the imaginative and textual nature of the children's book suggests that the ideal reader response is not to engage in conversation outside the book, but to imaginatively bring the book to life. A well-written fable should make 'pictures [...] visible to the fancy of the learner.' This process of imaginative visualisation implicitly asserts what Godwin's author explicitly articulates: that the process of reading a book, even for very young children, ought to be uninterrupted and unmediated by events outside the book. In Godwin's words, 'as few parents, and fewer governesses, are inclined to interrupt their lessons with dialogue, and enter into explanations,' his narrative

digressions and visually evocative descriptions would encourage an uninterrupted, unmediated reading experience. Godwin's use of the indicative mood could describe what he perceived as the increasing historical preference for uninterrupted reading, or it could articulate his desire for such a change in reading practises to occur. Whatever the case, Godwin's preface shows that the episodic, interactive reading practice promoted by conversational primers (indeed, by all of Barbauld's children's books) was only one reading method amongst several encouraged by contemporaneous British children's books.

This chapter explores how and why the conversational primer lost prominence in the British children's literary market. Firstly, it contextualises the conversational primer amongst other genres of children's literature, including children's fable collections, it-narratives, and variants on the moral tale. It then examines how the separation of Barbauld's name from her work enabled *Lessons for Children* to be associated with non-imaginative pedagogical works. At best, it allowed Barbauld's works like *Hymns in Prose* to become emblems of a quaint past. Ultimately Barbauld's literary afterlife obscured the fundamental importance of Rational Dissent in shaping her children's books into familial texts that trained child readers to value individual claims of dignity, while resisting institutionalised concepts of virtue and power.

The potential quaintness, or at least, the historical fixedness, of the conversational primer, is suggested when examined in the context of contemporaneous children's books. For all that Lamb complained that Barbauld's books 'banished' classics from the shelf,<sup>4</sup> his exaggeration elides, perhaps consciously, the range of popular children's books available that existed alongside the genre of the conversational primer. When Lamb implied that 'Mrs B.'s and Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense' took the form of one type of educational children's books, his insinuation that both women's books were the same was fundamentally misleading. While Sarah Trimmer's *An Easy Introduction* is very close in form and tone to Barbauld's *Lessons for Children*, she authored a corpus of children's books that demonstrate her wide generic versatility. As an author and a critic, Trimmer consistently affirmed that 'the best purpose' of a children's book was to provide religious and moral instruction (*GE II*,

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<sup>4</sup> Lamb, letter no. 136 to Coleridge, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, vol. II, p. 81.

p. 114). At a generic level, this belief found many expressions. Trimmer wrote conversational primers, fable collections, and in the long term she was best known for *Fabulous Histories* (1786). *Fabulous Histories*, which is discussed further in the chapter, was a hybrid moral tale and Bildungsroman. Indeed, many conversational primer authors were well known for works other than their conversational primers. Between 1782 and 1783, Mary Ann Kilner, the author of *Familiar Dialogues*, produced no fewer than three it-narratives: *The Memoirs of a Peg Top*; *The Adventures of a Whipping Top*; and *The Adventures of a Pincushion*—the last of which remained in print until the late 1820s.<sup>5</sup> Richard Lovell Edgeworth, meanwhile, collaborated with his daughter, Maria Edgeworth, who developed her father's experiments in textualising characters' thoughts and motivations. Maria Edgeworth became known for her sympathetic but flawed protagonists who were neither to be totally emulated nor utterly condemned.

In practice, parents continued episodic, interactive reading activities with their children. In 1919 Marguerite Stockman Dickson described the bedtime story as a 'definite institution in many families.'<sup>6</sup> However, the episodic and interactive nature of the conversational primer did not provide sufficient space for literary innovations and evolving modes of reader-book engagement in the nineteenth century. The demise of the parent-author and the rise of the omniscient and omnipresent narrator in the nineteenth century indicate the extent to which Barbauld's conversational primer became an historical-cultural artefact: the embodiment of the *zeitgeist* of late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment Britain.

### **a. Genre Differentiation in the British Juvenile Library: Fables**

The interactions between the conversational primer and the fable suggest that the conversational primer had some influence upon the development of other contemporaneous genres. However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, several discrete genres of British children's books—fables, it-narratives, and moral

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Kilner, *The Adventures of a pincushion: designed chiefly for the use of young ladies, a new edition* (London: Printed for John Harris & Baldwin and Cradock, 1828).

<sup>6</sup> Marguerite Stockman Dickson, *Vocational Guidance for Girls* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co, 1919), p. 90.

tales—reveal an increasing focus on sustained narrative causality, and a proliferation of omniscient narrators, features alien to the conversational primer. These techniques highlight the creative limitations of the conversational primer as a literary form, a limitation that becomes particularly clear when analysing the relationship between the conversational primer and the fable in the late-eighteenth-century British nursery. As didactic children’s book genres, the conversational primer and the nursery fable sat alongside each other. Sometimes authors combined the forms: Barbauld incorporated cautionary fables in *Lessons for Children*, and Lady Ellenor Fenn structured her collection of fables around conversational exchanges. A study of three sets of fables published in Britain between the 1780s and the early 1800s reveals an attempt to incorporate elements of the conversational primer into the fable, but ultimately suggests a preference for narrative over interrupted discussion during the reading process. This decreasing preference for interactive reading facilitated the decreasing popularity of the conversational primer.

In 1783, during the first wave of conversational primers, Lady Ellenor Fenn composed a series of fable collections, attempting to merge the fable with the conversational primer. Fenn’s collection reveals an intense awareness that the fable form raised questions about how one might effectively identify authoritative moral claims in a didactic text. Her uncertainty as to how books should be used to teach moral virtue is reflected in three fables books she published in May 1783. *Fables, by Mrs Teachwell: In which the Morals are Drawn Incidentally in Various Ways; Fables in Monosyllables by Mrs. Teachwell to which are added Morals in Dialogues Between a Mother and a Child; and Morals to a set of Fables, by Teachwell: The Morals in Dialogues Between a Mother and Children in Two Sets* were published between May 12<sup>th</sup> and May 21<sup>st</sup> 1783.<sup>7</sup> Each text depicts, or is based around, the same set of fables. However, the third book only refers to the fables implicitly, and consists of family conversations based upon the family’s readings of the fables (presumably the fables in the first book in the set).

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<sup>7</sup> The books are bound together in the British Library [‘Schoolbooks’ BL 1210.L. 1(5)]: Lady Ellenor Fenn, *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell: In which the Morals are Drawn Incidentally in Various Ways* (London: John Marshall, 21 May 1783), *Fables in Monosyllables by Mrs. Teachwell to which are added Morals in Dialogues Between a Mother and Children* (London: John Marshall, 12 May 1783), *Morals to a set of Fables, by Teachwell. The Morals in Dialogues Between a Mother and Children in Two Sets* (London: John Marshall, 21 May 1783). Cited in-text as *Fenn Fables I/II/III*.

In a nod to the dual audience addressed by conversational primers, Fenn collectively addresses her implied child and parent readers. She indicates that the books ought to be read in familial settings, but foregrounds the figure of the reading child within this communal reading practice. She addresses her first book to ‘my young Reader’ (*Fenn Fables I*, p. v). The book’s narrator continues through the paratext into the text, struggling to cede narrative space to the fables. She anticipates or delays the actions and words of the characters within her fables. At one point she interrupts herself: ‘I seem to forget that my Frog is to give you a lecture upon the subject [of respecting creatures], I will introduce him to you directly’ (*Fenn Fables I*, pp. 10–11). In this aside, Fenn highlights the fictitious nature of the fable and her position as the narrator, while providing space for the didactic frog to assume an authoritative position as a moral pedagogue. Yet Fenn’s narrator does not trust her implied readers to absorb moral lessons that have been delivered by fictitious characters. She repeatedly interjects with dictums on the importance of listening to and learning from others. Moreover, Fenn’s postscript shows her belief that even a children’s book with a morally upright narrator cannot be the ultimate source from which a child gains knowledge and virtues. Fenn exclaims, ‘How important the office [of motherhood]! [...] To such Mothers we look up to form the manners of the rising generation [...] training its youth to virtue’ (*Fenn Fables I*, pp. 84–85). Fenn ascribes to mothers a socio-political significance implicitly linked with the formation of ‘manners’ and the dissemination of cultural moral principles, ‘virtue’. The children’s book, even when peopled by moralistic creatures and an authoritative narrative voice, is subordinate to the idealised mother as an ethical pedagogical tool. Thus Fenn suggests that children’s books are familial objects that may assist mothers to raise their children to become morally virtuous social participants.

Fenn structures her book of fables as a dialogue between a boy and his aunt as they read the fables. Fenn pays homage to the linguistic characteristics of affectionate, colloquial utterances that characterise the conversational primer:

Lady: You know what you should do to please *Jack*, and to please-

Boy: O, yes! Aunt. I should lend them my toys and books and what is fit for them to have, and I *will* do so.

Lady: Good child! (*Fenn Fables II*, p. 35).

The boy interrupts his aunt with a paratactic, enthusiastic interjection that suggests an emotional, rather than an emotionally neutral and rational, response. Instead of chastising her nephew for interrupting, the aunt praises him for expressing sincere emotions. The exchange focuses on the emotional intensity and sincerity of the personal exchange rather than on elegance and balance. This episode suggests that familial conversations, rather than purely textual fables, nurture a child's moral virtues and sympathies.

Fenn's final book in her fable collection, *Morals to a set of Fables, by Teachwell: The Morals in Dialogues Between a Mother and Children in Two Sets*, further displays her attempt to merge the conversational primer with the fable. Specifically drawing on the conversational primer trope of the mother and the child in dialogue with each other, Fenn suggests that moral lessons are best communicated to a child when a child is able to converse with an accompanying guardian. The narrative content of the fables is only indicated by reference to the first book of fables. The book depicts a family's conversations as they read the fables. On one level this is a cheap money grab from John Marshall, a publisher notorious for peddling his own works. On a deeper level, it suggests that the textual and moral authority of a collection of fables is only realised when a fable is read aloud, and when a parent figure is present to discuss the message behind the fable:

Mam-ma. Wil-li-am, do you know what a Fa-ble is?

Wil-li-am. No, mam-ma. \*The child is supposed to be turning over the book of Fables, and remarking as he looks at the Cuts\*

[...]

Mam-ma. See the ninth Fable --- page the six-ty se-venth. "Do what those who are old tell you is best for you to do." (*Fenn Fables III*, p. 5, p. 10).

Unlike early conversational primers, Fenn's script identifies each speaker with a nametag. This reinforces a hierarchy of learning in which the authoritative figure of the female familial pedagogue guides the obedient child's curiosity. Rather than simply telling the child the fables, Fenn's textual Mamma explains the purpose of the fables to her children. However, in the stage direction that tells readers that William is looking at the pictures, Fenn uses the subjunctive, rather than the indicative, mode. The child is *supposed* to be treating the book as a secondary point of interest to the mother's words. The book suggests that moral authority can be inscribed in a text, but that this text is only confirmed when the parent administers the child's access to, and use of, that text. Fenn reiterated her belief in the superiority of familial conversation to the book as a medium of transferring knowledge and nurturing familial affection in *The Rational Dame; or, hints toward supplying prattle for children*. This rather dry book consists of facts about objects that a child might encounter in daily life, designed 'as an introduction for young children; or occasionally for their attendants [...] but I repeat, that a sensible well informed MOTHER can alone come up to my idea of a RATIONAL DAME' (*Rational Dame*, p. 8). Fenn's clear idealisation of the mother as the ultimate mediator places books in a secondary role as tools that help a mother share affection and knowledge, or as a subpar supplement to the mother as a source of learning.

The literary potential of a book that positioned itself as handmaiden to practical parenting, was, however, somewhat limited. Fenn's attempts to combine the fable and the conversational primer were not long-lived or repeated. Even Sarah Trimmer, who had been instrumental in establishing *Lessons for Children* as a seminal children's book, experimented with different forms of textual engagement when she edited her collection of fables. Sometime in the years around 1800, Trimmer revised a collection of fables, *The Ladder to Learning*, producing an edition that remained in print into the 1830s.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Fenn, Trimmer resisted the miscellaneous nature inherent in a collection of fables. She grouped her fables

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Trimmer, *The Ladder to Learning: A Collection of Fables; arranged progressively in words of one, two, and three syllables; with original morals. Edited and improved. 13<sup>th</sup> edition, with seventy-nine wood engravings* (London: John Harris, 1832). Cited in-text as *Ladder to Learning*. For more on the dating of *The Ladder to Learning* see Matthew Grenby, 'Fables and Fairy Tales. 0003: Sarah Trimmer (ed.), *The Ladder to Learning*', *The Hockliffe Project*, <<http://hockliffe.dmu.ac.uk/items/0003.html>>, paras. 2–3.

around specific animals to suggest a continuous causality connecting unrelated fabular episodes, and she employed an omniscient narrator to facilitate a more continuous reading experience. By grouping the animal fables together she created 'life' narratives, attempting to transform fabular animals into Georgian cautionary figures. Her fable sections, 'The History of a Wolf', 'The Life of a Fox', and 'The Life of the Horse' reveal her attempts to stabilise Aesopic animal signification. In the first fable about the wolf and the lamb, the wolf fabricates accusations against a lamb in order to justify its predatory act of killing and eating the lamb. The speaker informs readers that because the wolf was greedy he ate the lamb too quickly, causing a bone to stick in its throat. This segues into the fable of the wolf and the crane. At the close of the wolf fables, Trimmer presents the fable of the wolf in sheep's clothing, at the end of which the wolf is hanged and the speaker triumphantly declares, 'There is no art that can hide rogues and fire' (*Ladder to Learning*, p. 15). Trimmer's Georgic animal narratives impose structural order on Aesop's fable, transforming them into a set of cautionary tales.

However, Trimmer's speaker performs narrative contortions to reach her conclusive *epimythia*. At the close of the fable concerning the wolf and the lamb, her speaker axiomatically pronounces, 'The worst of men know so well that they ought to be good, that when they do wrong, they try, by some art, to make it seem right' (*Ladder to Learning*, p. 15). In this syntactically complex sentence, the enfolded clauses perform logical contortions comparable to Trimmer's attempts to draw clear moral principles from a morally ambiguous fable. The innocent lamb is not vindicated in Aesop's fable, nor is the brutish wolf punished. Rather, the wolf devours the lamb, rendering hollow Trimmer's warning that the 'worst' of men fool themselves. There is no positive model encouraging children to become virtuous citizens; nor is there a sufficient warning against deceit and brute force. In this instance, William Godwin's cynical conclusion from the same fable, that 'might sometimes overcomes right,' appears more apt—though less productive in terms of cultivating civic virtue (*Fables Ancient and Modern*, p. 95). Although Trimmer's speaker implicitly links unconnected fables and explicitly delivers axiomatic morals, the 'slippery sands of fable' destabilise

her axiomatic morals.<sup>9</sup> Trimmer's attempts to stabilise Aesopian fables within life-narrative structures speak to the enduring popularity of the genre of the moral tale, and the slippage between the two forms.

Very soon after Trimmer edited *The Ladder to Learning*, William Godwin released *Fables: Ancient and Modern* (1805), in which he utilised the figure of a conversational narrator to mediate his implied child readers' engagements with the fables, expanding the literary potential of the fable beyond that of a simple moral tale. Although it reached fewer print editions than Trimmer's collection, *Fables: Ancient and Modern* was a reasonably popular book that reached seven editions and remained in print for well over a decade. Godwin's fable collection may be read as a response to Trimmer's fables, in which Trimmer's authoritative speaker confers authority to the didactic text. (Trimmer and Godwin's heated dialogue was heightened by the fact that two authors reviewed each other's works.) Their conflicting uses of narrative voice in the Aesopic fable were part of the politicised debate about the ability of literary form and narrative voice to create exemplary British people.<sup>10</sup>

The British fable had a historical tradition of acting as a direct comment on the state of governmental politics.<sup>11</sup> While some scholars claim that the political fable did not extend to the British nursery,<sup>12</sup> such claims rely on the notion that cultural authority is conferred only by direct access to legally authoritative institutions. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, for instance, writes that the fable was 'consigned to the literary outposts of children's and women's literature [...] social groups who had never identified with the centers of cultural authority,'<sup>13</sup> an assumption challenged by the participation of non-Anglican groups and individuals (such as Rational Dissenters) in significant British economic and

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<sup>9</sup> Srinivas Aravamundun, *Enlightenment Orientalism: resisting the rise of the novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mark Loveridge, *A History of Augustan Fable* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30, p. 1; Thomas Noel, *Theories Of the Fable In the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 12–26.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, p. 2, pp. 25–27; Annabel Patterson, 'Fables of Power' *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 271–296 (pp. 274–75).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen H. Daniel, 'Political and Philosophical Uses of Fables in Eighteenth-Century England', *The Eighteenth Century* 23 (1982), 151–171, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, p. 186.

cultural spheres.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the children's nursery was seen as a crucial space in which cultural authority was created and nurtured.<sup>15</sup> William Godwin appears to have been aware of the socio-cultural politically anarchic implications of his fables, which promoted a relative, rather than an absolute, vision of moral virtue and social cohesion.<sup>16</sup> To this end, Godwin utilised an authorial speaker to mediate his implied child readers' experiences with the Aesopian fables, displacing the parent-teacher with the figure of the omniscient yet affectionate narrator.

Godwin's narrator is a conversational pedagogue who provides factual asides that have little to no bearing on the fable. In this regard, he recalls the parent-teachers from conversational primers who took every opportunity to teach seemingly unplanned lessons. For instance, when retelling the fable of the boy who cried wolf, Godwin's narrator informs readers that the story is set in a time before ploughs were invented. He then provides a brief overview of historical eating patterns in England to contextualise the economic significance of the fact that the boy's father's is a shepherd. Indeed, Godwin's narrator is more interested in teaching children about British economic principles and British history, than in providing moral lessons. He refrains from including an *epimythium* at the conclusion of his fable, and adds a different ending:

So the wolves ate up so many of the flock, that the father was ruined, and obliged to part with the rest, and go a-begging: and, when the boy grew up to be a man, people still pointed at him, and said, That is the son, that told lies, and ruined his father (*Fables Ancient and Modern*, p. 6).

In Godwin's fable, the narrator presents a curiously amoral ending to an apparently straightforward, didactic fable. Instead of focusing on the death or injury of the deceitful boy as a punishment for his dishonesty, the fable closes with an image of the boy's father's socio-economic degradation and the boy's enduring

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<sup>14</sup> White, 'The Joineriana', p. 513.

<sup>15</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'Philosophical Anarchism in the Schoolroom: William Godwin's Juvenile Library, 1805-25', *Bibliion: The Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 9 (2000/2001), 44-70; Janet Bottoms, "'Awakening the mind": the educational philosophy of William Godwin', *History of Education* 33 (2004), 267-282.

<sup>16</sup> Bottoms, 'Awakening the mind', pp. 279-81.

social shame. It suggests that the boy's deception was morally spurious not because he violated an absolute set of innate principles, but because he brought shame upon himself and, even more culpably, upon his father.

Godwin's narrator further elucidates his preference for maintaining social cohesion over the inculcation of an absolute set of principles by presenting a model of social perfectibility in his ending to the fable of the ass in the lion's skin. Although his speaker axiomatically informs readers that, 'Cheats are always found out,' (*Fables Ancient and Modern*, p. 80), he adds a happy ending in which the boys who recognised and shamed the ass end up befriending the ass:

And now, instead of running away the moment they came in sight, he [the ass] would trot to meet them, would rub his head against them to tell them how much he loved them, and would eat the thistles and the oats out of their hand: was not that pretty? (*Fables Ancient and Modern*, p. 81).

The ass is rehabilitated: once a figure of mockery, it is now a domesticated pet. The speaker's conversational opening with the conjunction 'And', mimics a child's sense of excitement and delight in the unexpected twist in the tale. Even as the rhetorical question positions readers to concur with the speaker that the friendship between the once antagonistic ass and children is 'pretty,' it is an open-ended question that does not fix any particular answer in print. The speaker eschews an explicit moral and presents an ideal image of social cohesion based on mutual respect, rather than absolutist principles derived from a higher authority. Little wonder that Sarah Trimmer, when reviewing *Fables: Ancient and Modern*, protested of the lack of moral guidance provided by the narrator (*GE V*, pp. 578–79). Absolute moral standards were not things that Godwin's speaker sought to inculcate in *Fables: Ancient and Modern*. Rather, Godwin's preface suggested that his authorial hope was placed in the sympathetic tendencies of the child reader.

As Godwin outlined in his preface, however, his concept of his role as a children's author was akin to the adult who would *not* 'interrupt [a child's] lessons with dialogue, and enter into explanations' (*Fables Ancient and Modern*, iv). Rather, Godwin placed his hope in the child's ability to sympathise with the speaker and with characters in the fables, and to elucidate morals for him or herself on that

basis. This pattern of reader-text identification gestures toward the increasing preference for works that taught moral and practical lessons using reader-character identification and the cultivation of sympathy, rather than hortatory axioms. The roles played by the speakers in Godwin and Trimmer's fables demonstrate the terms of the debates concerning children's fiction and children's moral education. Could authors trust their texts to communicate absolute principles of moral virtue, or should one use the authority of a textual narrator to communicate a more relative vision of social cohesion? In either case, should authors hope that authoritative adults mediating a child's contact with a didactic text could communicate this message clearly, or should authors hope in a child's individual sympathetic tendencies?

The longevity of Trimmer's *Ladder to Learning* suggests that her axiomatic fables were, ultimately, more popular than Godwin's somewhat more relativistic narratives.<sup>17</sup> One likely reason for this is that her first section features a strong narrative quality with identifiable characters. Although readers are positioned to condemn Trimmer's fabular wolves and lions, the consecutive and accumulative arrangement of the fables imbues the animals with consistently identifiable qualities: wolf is vicious and greedy; the fox covets; the house is proud. By providing a sustained exposition of the personality vices of fabular animals, Trimmer's *Ladder to Learning* provides scope for the literary development of characterisation within the children's book. A second and equally popular genre within the eighteenth-century British juvenile literary market, 'the it-narrative,' further negotiated the relationship between this obviously fictive character, and processes of reader-character identification.

### **b. It Speaks!**

The 'it-narrative', as Christina Lupton terms it, occurs when non-human, often inanimate objects, are anthropomorphised.<sup>18</sup> These objects become the

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<sup>17</sup> In 1856 Grant & Griffith released a 19<sup>th</sup> edition of *Ladder to Learning* in London; by contrast, R. B. Collins released a sixth edition of *Fables: Ancient and Modern* in New York in 1854.

<sup>18</sup> Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 47–69.

protagonists through whom the narrative is focalised. This use of a singular, first person protagonist with whom the reader is expected to sympathise suggests that the reader, with some guidance from the implied author, should possess enough discernment to differentiate between the morally dubious and the morally virtuous. Such patterns may be seen in popular works written by the Kilner sisters-in-law, Dorothy and Mary Ann. Although it is difficult to date the Kilners' works,<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Kilner's *The Life and Perambulation of a Mouse* and Mary Ann Kilner's *The Adventures of a Pincushion* were roughly contemporaneous with Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose*.<sup>20</sup> The Kilners' books implicitly teach moral lessons by cultivating readers' sympathy for a single protagonist through whom the events of the story are narrated, or, in other words, through whom the story is focalised. Both books indicate that a popular method for cultivating readers' sympathy centred on the textual depiction of a non-human consciousness and a subsequent invitation to readers to imaginatively engage with that non-human character through whom the story is focalised.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the books depict a Lockean concept of man as a '*rational Animal*,<sup>22</sup> a concept that implies mankind has an ethical imperative to contemplate the sensations and potential emotions of like-animals. Suzanne Keen's study of reader-character identification and the history of empathy in fiction discusses how theories of eighteenth-century sympathy explored the processes by which individuals could spontaneously shared in the appropriate feelings of another, and formulated how texts might generate responsive emotions like pity.<sup>23</sup> In it-narratives, authors foster reader-character identification by textualising the interior life of the narrating protagonist. This mode of reader engagement is strikingly different to the conversational primer, which presents conversational exchanges in which the speakers require embodiment by real-life readers in order to become more than spoken words. By

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Grenby, 'Stories Before 1850. 0158: Mary Ann Kilner, *Jemima Placid*, *The Hockliffe Project*, < <http://hockliffe.dmu.ac.uk/items/0158.html>>, para. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Ann Kilner, *The Adventures of a Pincushion. Designed chiefly for the use of Ladies* (London: John Marshall, 1780). Quotations cited in-text as *A Pincushion*. Dorothy Kilner, *The Life and Perambulation of a Mouse*, (London: John Marshall and Co, 1783). Quotations cited in-text as *A Mouse*.

<sup>21</sup> O'Malley, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* I–IV, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (1690), *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Book III, §10.

<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 3–5.

contrast, it-narratives focalise their stories through characters whose complex interior lives enable readers to sympathetically identify with the protagonists, and hence become emotionally engaged in the protagonists' texts. However, these figures are things human readers can never embody: a mouse, for instance, or a pincushion. In this way, it-narratives facilitate emotional engagement from a distance. They allow implied readers to imbibe moral lessons from an imaginative distance, instead of addressing implied readers using the words of a verisimilar human pedagogue.

In *The Life and Perambulation of a Mouse* (c. 1783) Dorothy Kilner distances her child readers from her non-human speaker, while cultivating reader-character identification with the fantastical mouse. The authorial note affirms that the history is '*made believe*,' but the introduction creates a verisimilar mood by establishing a frame narrative in which the author struggles to write an educative story based on her experiences. At this point, a mouse, Nimble, offers her autobiography as an instructive tale. Nimble's story is told in the retrospective first-person voice, creating a temporal distance between Nimble's story and the events she narrates. This prevents readers from becoming too emotionally invested in Nimble's story as it provides assurance that Nimble has survived all her encounters until the present. Further preventing reader-character identification, the authorial narrator sometimes interrupts Nimble:

—And here the writer cannot forbear observing how just were the reflections of the mouse upon the crime they had been guilty of, and begs every reader will be careful to remember the fatal consequences that attended their disobedience of their mother's advice [...].—But to return to the history.— (*A Mouse*, p. 46).

As the narrative is predominantly presented through Nimble's eyes, this unexpected interjection suggests an authorial anxiety that the voice of the mouse protagonist is becoming too believable, and that there may be danger if readers over-identify with a fantastic protagonist. By and large, though, the book positions its readers to sympathise and identify with Nimble. It implicates its readers in Nimble's sufferings as human agents that have caused her to exist on the fringes of domestic society. When Nimble watches her brothers being captured and killed,

the episodes are filled with pathos. She describes Softdown's 'most moving accents beg[ging me] to assist him in procuring his liberty' (*A Mouse*, p. 36.) When Nimble claims that Softdown's 'liberty' is at stake, Kilner's emotive, political discourse elevates a mouse's domestic woes into the philosophical-political sphere, concerned with defining individual rights and citizenship. The episode ends in tragedy: 'the inhuman wretch [...] crushed him beneath his foot, and then carelessly kicked him' (*A Mouse*, p. 45). Nimble's impassioned adjectives 'inhuman' and 'carelessly' declaim the cruelty of the humans who have thoughtlessly killed her brother. Because an animal has termed a human 'inhuman,' this estranges the reader's concept of himself or herself as a generally benevolent figure, by showing how humans can be unthinkingly callous when interacting with non-human beings. By contrast, Nimble possesses a strong enough personality and ethical code to judge human actions as 'inhuman.'

In this way, moral lessons are given at a remove. Kilner positions her implied readers as spectators rather than as pupils of an authorial pedagogue. Nimble observes human interactions, making the implied child reader a witness to, rather than a participant in, parent-child interactions. When the fictional mothers chastise their children, this creates a comforting space where implied child readers may watch the spectacle from Nimble's perspective, rather than the perspective of the rebuked child. Yet Kilner ensures that her implied readers are imaginatively and emotionally engaged when moral lectures occur, as they take place during narrative episodes where Nimble is fearful for her safety, or that of her brothers. From this side perspective, Kilner allows readers to scrutinise the content of the lectures, which often reveal human hypocrisy. For instance, after the capture of Nimble's brother, Softdown, Nimble hears a father lecturing his son on the virtue of benevolence. The father rebukes his son for torturing Softdown and thereby displaying '*unmanly... detestable* cruelty [which] calls for my utmost indignation, and abhorrence' (*A Mouse*, p. 56). Yet the episode betrays contempt for the lower class. While the father tells Charles that he should listen to the cries of a mouse, a language 'you perfectly well understood' (*A Mouse*, p. 57), the father condones the 'expeditious' killing of a mouse, and recommends that Charles should 'give it to somebody else to destroy' (*A Mouse*, p. 56). As this lecture follows the episode where

a footman has killed Nimble's other brother, this suggests that only the gentry have the luxury of acting benevolently toward animals. There is a further complication in that Nimble overhears moral messages that she herself cannot enact. When Nimble hears Betty Flood pontificate on how happiness in this world depends upon 'a desire to be *useful* to others,' this is a virtue Nimble cannot perform due to her necessarily nomadic life (*A Mouse*, p. 75). Thus, when Nimble concludes that the life of a mouse was 'never designed for *perfect* happiness [...] 'tis the portion only of beings whose capacities are far superior to ours' (*A Mouse*, p. 75.), it is difficult to escape a sense that the world is fundamentally unjust if it denies the happiness of a creature with whom readers have been positioned to sympathise.

Dorothy Kilner's book remained in print for over a century, with the prominent publishing house Griffith Farran & Co reprinting a new edition as late as 1886. The book's enduring popularity suggests that Kilner found a compelling balance between the fictiveness of her mouse speaker, and the focalisation through which she cultivated reader-character sympathy. This cultivation of a verisimilar, interior character voice is utterly different to the way that conversational primers provided words uttered by characters devoid of any textual interiority. The speakers in conversational primers are essentially devoid of personalities, and only gain an interiority if embodied by implied or real-life speakers. Characters in 'it-narratives', however, possess clear character traits and internal motivations, and they help construct a fictional world which readers are invited, momentarily, to inhabit.

Like her sister-in-law, Mary Ann Kilner authored a popular it-narrative, *The Adventures of a Pincushion* (c. 1782). Unlike Dorothy Kilner, Mary Ann Kilner's protagonist is a non-living being, suggesting that her book is less concerned with encouraging child readers to consider how the gaze of a marginalised creature might encourage readers to be more compassionate. Rather, Mary Ann Kilner's book seems to be more interested in theorising how different modes of being present and aware enables people to become more reflective individuals. The story opens as an omniscient speaker describes a fight between Martha Airy and her sister, Charlotte. Martha and Charlotte build an object to mark their reconciliation, and the speaker reveals that that object is the pincushion

herself—the eponymous narrator. From henceforth, the pincushion assumes the air of a moralising pedagogue, positioning implied readers as students to whom she imparts her wisdom. Unable to affect change in the lives of those around her, the pincushion observes and judges the interactions of adults around her. In order to give shape to the novel, in which the pincushion is a fundamentally passive narrator, the two parts of the book are structured by dilemmas in which the pincushion is thrown into unsuitable places. In the first instance, she is thrown behind a bookshelf. The pincushion uses this episode to lecture readers: ‘although I fretted and fumed every day at my unfortunate condition, I never found it was at all improved by it’ (*A Pincushion*, p. 68). While the pincushion uses the personal pronoun ‘I’, inviting readers to identify with the pincushion’s insights, the continuous past tense transforms the first part of the pincushion’s account into a moralistic reflection. The pincushion, speaking from outside its normal environment, speaks as a wise exile, imparting the importance of patience and longsuffering to impersonal pupil-readers. This emotional distance is consonant with the Stoic message underpinning Mary Ann Kilner’s book, which closes with the forlorn image of the pincushion abandoned in the garden. The pincushion muses:

The catastrophe which has thus reduced me, was entirely unexpected [...] therefore it is a mark of *folly*, as well as *meanness*, to be proud of those distinctions, which are at all times precarious in enjoyment, and uncertain in possession (*A Pincushion*, p. 124).

This retrospective self-narration exemplifies what Dorrit Cohn calls ‘dissonant self-narration.’<sup>24</sup> It allows the pincushion to position her tale as a piece of confessional writing, and to adopt the persona of the exile who has gained wisdom through personal suffering. Yet, because confessional writing uses the first person voice, readers are invited to practise imaginative empathetic identification with the pincushion. In short, the book uses its first-person narrator to awaken a child reader’s moral sympathies, to shape child readers’ moral principles, and to

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<sup>24</sup> Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 145.

influence their worldview. These experiments in engaging child readers' imaginations by narrating tales from the perspective of inanimate or non-human characters facilitated further developments in the genre of the moral tale. As characters were granted a broader depth of motivations, interior reflections, and a mix of emulous and condemnable qualities, the moral tale began, like the it-narrative, to move toward the more recognisable character-and plot-driven children's narratives that came to characterise nineteenth-century British children's literature.

### **c. Awakening Moral Sympathies: Reader-identification and Variations on the Moral Tale**

A classic example of a moral tale from the period is Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783–89),<sup>25</sup> in which virtuous and exemplary characters are contrasted with morally inferior 'cautionary' figures. In a departure from classic moral tales, however, it is the moralistic narrator who affirms that Mr Barlow and the financially poor but industrious Harry Sandford are, indeed, virtuous and exemplary. In a more classic case of using character foils, Tommy Merton is the rich and pampered boy who is shamed into humility when he realises that Harry Sandford is socially inferior, but morally superior, to himself. Tommy's re-education is the template for the book's implied readers. However, *Sandford and Merton* does not operate purely by presenting exemplary figures. It is the omniscient narrator who ultimately affirms that Tommy Merton's reform, Harry Sandford's virtuous work ethic, and Mr Barlow's embodiment of Rousseauvian wisdom and control are exemplary. This omniscient and intrusive narrator is one of the key figures in *Sandford and Merton*. He withholds information about characters' actions and motivations and displays a self-reflexive awareness that readers depend on him to make more informed character judgements. This is demonstrated at the dinner where Tommy's parents thank Harry for saving Tommy's life. When Harry declines to use the Merton's silverware, citing a preference for practical horn cups, Mrs Merton makes a snide side comment about

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton*, ed. Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2010), cited in-text as *Sandford and Merton*.

Harry's taste to her husband. Readers have already been positioned to sympathise with Harry, suggesting that Mrs Merton's negative judgement of Harry is a sign of her own moral failings. However, the narrator feels the need to confirm this character interpretation by retrospectively revealing more information about Mrs Merton's misaligned materialistic values: 'The fact was, that during dinner one of the servants had thrown down a large piece of plate [... Mrs. Merton gave] the man a very severe scolding' (*Sandford and Merton*, p. 53). In a similar way, the narrator affirms that Mr Barlow and Harry Sandford are exemplary models. Mr Barlow's status as the scientific and moral authority depends upon the narrator's affirmation that Mr Barlow is indeed right scientifically knowledgeable and morally virtuous. Readers are oriented to accept the didactic and moral authority of the text through the omniscient third-person narrator. In some ways, this pattern of doubling Mr Barlow and the narrator as authority figures suggests an authorial anxiety over a book's ability to influence children's moral codes and thought patterns. As the decade progressed, moral tales increasingly incorporated elements from other genres including the it-narrative and the boarding-school narrative, presenting characters with which child readers could sympathise, rather than simply seek to emulate.

At a basic level of genre adaptation, Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth extended the application of narrative elements to the moral tale. In the Edgeworths' moral tales, characters' actions generate narratives of causality. In a previously episodic form, this narrative causality encouraged readers to internalise the logic underpinning the expression of exemplary characters' codes of moral virtue. In the address to mothers in later editions of *Harry and Lucy*, the Edgeworths asserted:

Action [...] Action!—Action! Whether in morals or science, the thing to be taught should seem to arise from the circumstances in which the little persons of the drama are placed.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, 'An Address to Mothers', *Harry and Lucy. With an Address to Mothers: The Stories of Little Dog Trusty, The Orange Man, and the Cherry Orchard. Complete in One Volume* (Boston: Munroe & Francis, 184-?), xiii. Cited in-text as *Harry and Lucy: Other Stories*.

Although the Edgeworths affirm the effectiveness of the Barbauldian method of using accessible objects to teach children principles of observation and reasoning, the thrice-repeated invocation of ‘Action’ suggests that causality and dramatic contextualisation are of primary import in didactic books for young readers. Publications like *Harry and Lucy ... collected into one volume*, *Rosamond, a Sequel to Early Lessons*, and *Frank, a Sequel to Early Lessons* testify to the enduring popularity of Maria Edgeworth’s flawed but kind-hearted characters.<sup>27</sup> These stories teach moral principles in association with contextual action and use an intermittent narrator to increase reader empathy with the book’s relatable (though not necessarily exemplary) protagonists. In one sense it is difficult to ascertain the exact reading experience the Edgeworths’ early collections were supposed to create, with Richard Lovell Edgeworth explaining that the earliest publications of *Early Lessons* were not ‘arranged in the order, in which, for the facility of the learner, they ought to be read’ (*Harry and Lucy: Other Stories*, p. 5). Nevertheless, the idea that a text should facilitate readers’ imaginative identification with characters was fundamental to the Edgeworths’ works. In the preface to her 1810 edition of *The Parent’s Assistant*, Maria Edgeworth discussed her attempts to generate reader empathy using realistic, though not necessarily exemplary, characters:

[O]nly such situations are described as children can easily imagine, and which may consequently interest their feelings.

[...]

To prevent the precepts of morality from tiring the ear and the mind, it was necessary to make the stories [...] in some measure dramatic; to keep alive hope and fear and curiosity, by some degree of intricacy (own emphases).<sup>28</sup>

Like fellow authors of episodic conversational primers, Maria Edgeworth depicts verisimilar situations to facilitate child readers imaginatively enacting the text.

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<sup>27</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Harry and Lucy ... Collected into one volume from the ‘Early Lessons’* (London: n.p., 1856); Maria Edgeworth, *Rosamond: a sequel to Rosamond in Early Lessons*, 2 vol., 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Longman [etc], 1850); Maria Edgeworth, *Frank: a sequel to Frank in Early Lessons*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Whittaker and Co, 1844).

<sup>28</sup> E. M [Maria Edgeworth], *The Parent’s Assistant; Or, Stories for Children*, Part I (London: J. Johnson, 1810), ix, xi.

Unlike conversational primers, which provided only the external words of characters devoid of personalities, Edgeworth sought to arouse child readers' 'feelings.' This emphasis upon feeling recalls Adam Smith's notion of the sympathetic imagination. To Edgeworth, facilitating this empathetic identification was more important than depicting a rational concept of moral excellence. Moreover, Edgeworth emphasised the importance of teaching moral precepts through the use of drama, 'some degree of intricacy.' By suggesting an inherent connection between moral lessons and actions, Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth theorised that narrative plots of causality were essential in communicating values in moral tales.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories: From Real Life: With Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (1788) similarly uses an action-based narrative to realise Wollstonecraft's goal of morally educating her child readers. Like many moral tales, Wollstonecraft's moral tale is woven around exemplary figures—Mrs Mason is the perfect pedagogue, and Mary and Caroline Mortimer are ideal students who respond positively to their maternal educator.<sup>29</sup> As Mrs Mason chastises Mary and Caroline and tells them a series of moral tales, she becomes, as Mitzi Myers identifies, the book's 'vital centre' and 'heroic exemplar.'<sup>30</sup> As her name suggests, Mrs Mason forms the girls' minds and behaviours. She does this by directing their experiences. She accompanies Mary and Caroline on visits to poor cottagers and needy families, and observes her wards to the extent that the girls internalise her gaze. Mary even claims at one point that she cannot sleep because she is 'afraid of Mrs. Mason's eyes' (*Original Stories*, p. 51). In addition to her implied omniscience, Mrs Mason is given an authoritative textual voice. She speaks in measured, cadential dictums. It is Mrs Mason who provides the book's fundamental utilitarian principle: 'first, to avoid hurting anything; and then, to contrive to give as much pleasure as you can' (*Original Stories*, p. 5). Thus, as in a conversational primer, *Original Stories* uses the

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<sup>29</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories, from Real Life; with Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1788). Cited in-text as *Original Stories*.

<sup>30</sup> Mitzi Myers, 'Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Tradition in Georgian Children's Books', *Children's Literature* 14 (1986), 31–59, p. 39.

trope of the maternal pedagogue to disseminate Wollstonecraft's practical and personal pedagogic method.

Unlike the conversational primer, *Original Stories* employs a third-person narrator, creating a stronger reader dependence upon the text, and lessening the implied reader's dependence upon an accompanying adult to apply the text to the reader's unique situation. This third-person narrator affirms the efficacy and exemplarity of Mrs Mason's pedagogical method: 'The girls were visibly improved; [...] benevolence gave [Caroline's] eyes the humid sparkle which is so beautiful engaging [...] Mary's judgement every day grew clearer; or, more properly speaking, she acquired experience every hour' (*Original Stories* p. 157). Within the fictional world of *Original Stories*, not a single character, not even Mrs Mason, discusses the girls' transformation. The narrator depicts the girls' internal transformation as an externally objective fact. In the narrator's formulation, benevolence makes people's eyes sparkle engagingly, and the act of reflecting on one's experience produces clear judgement. These assessments reveal what cannot be seen, suggesting that the book was written to encourage child readers to trust in the pedagogic authority of a textual guide, rather than to be used as a tool by real-life teachers.

At the same time, however, Wollstonecraft's prefatory material seeks to place authority back in the hands of the real-life pedagogue. Her preface notes that her book may 'assist the teacher as well as the pupil,' highlighting the way the sentiments are 'abstracted, and not levelled to the capacity of a child' (*Original Stories*, p. viii–ix). She tells adult instructors to modify the book for 'actual young people' (*Original Stories*, p. ix). By asserting that the book is 'abstracted' and must be accommodated for 'actual' readers, Wollstonecraft grants power to implied adult readers to alter the text, reshaping dependent readers' reading experiences. This destabilises the apparently fixed text, as the intrusive narrator encourages real-life readers to treat the printed book as a theme from which infinite reading variations may be created. *Original Stories* encodes the expectation that adult readers will bring their experiences to the text and will tailor each reading experience to suit the educative needs of individual children. *Original Stories* remained in print through

the 1830s, suggesting the enduring popularity of such moral tales, at least amongst adult purchasers (if not necessarily child readers).

In an addition to the hybrid moral tale-narrative, Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* (c. 1785) combined the moral tale and the it-narrative, revealing the breadth of generic evolutionary potential enabled by the moral tale.<sup>31</sup> Trimmer's it-narrative strand follows the story of a family of robins, providing a kind of fantasy Bildungsroman. Trimmer simultaneously presents the lives of the benevolent, industrious Benson family as a counterpoint to the extravagant and ill-disciplined aristocratic Addis family in the tradition of the moral tale. The two narratives are held together by an omniscient third-person narrator who moderates the extent to which readers may emotionally identify with the characters, particularly with regard to the plight of the robins. The narrator prevents readers from identifying too closely with any given character by splitting the narrative between two families, explicitly diverting readers' emotional attention away from episodes with the potential to generate pathos. When Robin is momentarily separated from his family, the narrator does not describe the robin family's reunion, nor does she explore Robin's emotions during this time period. Instead, the narrator chooses the less emotionally intense route of describing how Frederick Benson rescued Robin (*Fabulous Histories*, p. 138). Despite the efforts of Trimmer's omnipresent narrator, though, the coming-of-age of the four robins, Robin, Dicksy, Flapsy, and Pecksy proved most popular in the print market. Trimmer's book was often renamed *History of the Robins*. Books under that title were generating editions and adaptations into the twentieth century, suggesting that the *Bildungsroman* narrative arc concerning the family of robins resonated more with nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers than the episodic nature of the moral tale that characterises Trimmer's account of the Benson children.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sarah Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories. Designed for the instruction of children respecting their treatment of animals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: T. Longman and G. G. J. and J. Robinson; and J. Johnson, 1785). Quotations cited in-text as *Fabulous Histories*. The original date of publication is difficult to ascertain; Grenby dates it to 1786 in 'Stories Before 1850. 0242: Sarah Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories*', <<http://hockliffe.dmu.ac.uk/items/0242.html>>, and it is possible the copy I consulted was printed near the end of 1785 and published near the beginning of 1786. However, as a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, this implies that the 1<sup>st</sup> edition was in circulation in 1785.

<sup>32</sup> Mary MacLeod, *The robins: Adapted from Mrs. Trimmer's History of the robins*, illustrated by Henry Rountree (London: Wells Gardner, Darton, 1912).

Although Trimmer was unsure of the extent to which sympathetic identification with characters could increase children's sympathetic acts in real-life, she was nevertheless aware that it was a powerful way of engaging children's interest in and emotional identification with a narrative. On one hand, she asked that her books should not feature any illustrations, as if concerned that readers would become too emotionally attached to the fictional robins if they saw an engraving of a robin.<sup>33</sup> On the other, Trimmer gave the birds colloquial monikers, imbuing the robins with human characteristics. In giving them the lexis of human family relationships, Trimmer enabled readers to imaginatively enter into, or at least mentally project, the robins' familial and personal struggles. Significantly, these implied readers are not children only, but children and adults, suggesting that Trimmer saw the children's book as a powerful means to influence family attitudes. After Mrs Robin hatches her eggs, Mr Robin leaves to find more worms:

But [...] his mate reminded him of their agreement, to divide betwixt them the care of providing for the family. My young ones are now hatched, said she, and you can keep them warm as well as myself; take my place, therefore, and the next excursion shall be mine. [...] Come, my dears, said he, let us see what kind of a nurse I can make; but an aukward one, I fear; even every mother-bird is not a good nurse: but you are very fortunate in your's, for she is an exceedingly tender one (*Fabulous Histories*, pp. 11–12).

Through the mouthpiece of animals, Trimmer offers a socially progressive vision of shared parental responsibilities, while positioning this vision as a largely fictional, rather than a political, statement. Mrs Robin convinces her partner to stay at home with their young infants while she supports the family. When Mr Robin speaks, he employs maternal lexis that sounds as if it came from Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* or *Hymns in Prose*, or the Song of Solomon: 'Come, my dears.' Casting himself as a nurse, he assumes a feminine and maternal position of care. He assesses the qualities of a good mother, differentiating the status of mother from that of caretaker, a common middle-class eighteenth-century criticism of the hands-off parenting models employed by aristocrats. He continues to speak in the

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<sup>33</sup> Mary V. Jackson, p. 143.

lexis of ideal motherhood, praising his mate's 'exceedingly tender' nature, and affirming that maternal care is reconcilable with an apparently more masculine desire to work. This conversation about parental responsibilities and the freedom for wives to support their families outside the domestic home is scarcely depicted for child readers. Rather, the conversation between the exemplary robin parents appears to exist for implied adult readers, who are given material from which to discuss their own marital responsibilities and relations. This interest in generating parental conversations outside a children's text recalls the familial aims of the conversational primer. Indeed, *Fabulous Histories* incorporates elements of the conversational primer into the moral tale-come-*Bildungsroman*, suggesting that Trimmer's parent-author inhabited genres other than the conversational primer.

As in her conversational primer, Trimmer grounds her narrative in everyday incidents. Harriet and Frederick walk through the garden with their parents and learn how to care for animals without disrupting the animal's lives. Despite claims that Trimmer objected to the 'false sympathy of the imagination' which centred morality within the individual human rather than on God,<sup>34</sup> Trimmer enabled readers to sympathetically imagine that they were the Benson children. Indeed, Trimmer even offers a lesson in Smith-like sympathetic identification when Mrs Benson tells Frederick not to catch butterflies:

Should you like, Frederick, said she, when you are going out to play, to have any body lay hold on you violently, scratch you all over, then offer you something to eat which is very disagreeable, and perhaps poisonous, and then shut you up in a little dark room? And yet this is the fate to which many a harmless insect is condemned by thoughtless children (*Fabulous Histories*, pp. 9–10).

Mrs Benson's rhetorical questions encourage Frederick to imagine that he is a butterfly. She uses Frederick's sense of his own body to encourage Frederick to feel, mentally, the butterfly's corporeal pain. The physically based, imaginatively projected sympathetic identification with which Frederick is encouraged to relate to the robins is a lesson for implied readers as much as it is for Frederick.

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<sup>34</sup> Donelle Ruwe, 'Guarding the Bible from Rousseau: Sarah Trimmer, William Godwin, and the Pedagogical Periodical', *Children's Literature* 29 (2001), 1–17, p. 6.

Ultimately, *Fabulous Histories* is both a moral tale and a Bildungsroman. The success of both genres depends on readers' emotional and imaginative identification with the Benson children and the robins, respectively:

From the foregoing examples, I hope my young readers will select the best for their own imitation, and take warning by the rest, otherwise my histories are written in vain (*Fabulous Histories*, p. 226).

The narrator claims her 'histories' were written so children could model their behaviour on obedient robins, and mimic Harriet and Frederick's politeness and compassion. Presenting her work as a moral tale, she uses emotionally neutral terms, telling readers to 'select' and 'take warning' from depersonalised 'examples.' Yet these 'examples' affirm the power of familial bonds of affection that extends beyond the time period in which the parents' function is to teach their children moral principles and practical survival skills. This is indicated in the penultimate chapter, the conclusion to the Bildungsroman element of the story. In that chapter, the robins are ready to leave the nest, and 'that tender tie dissolved, which had hitherto bound this little family [of robins] together; for the parents had performed their duty' (*Fabulous Histories*, p. 214). Trimmer's mixed metaphor of the dissolving tie highlights the extreme fluidity of her concept of the roles of parent-teacher and child-pupil, recalling Rousseau's assertion that a child's maturation fundamentally alters the nature of familial bonds (*Social Contract*, p. 132). Yet in the final chapter, the narrator reveals that the robins remain united by bonds of sympathy. Robin and Pecksy live nearby, and remain companions to their parents. This image of on-going family affection belies the narrator's attempts to position readers as individuals capable of non-emotionally selecting the best 'examples' of virtue. The robins' coming-of-age narratives transform Trimmer's lessons in prudence, obedience, and familial affection into subjectively affective virtues. By making the robins characters with whom readers can imaginatively identify, *Fabulous Histories* implied that readers' moral education must be effected through imaginative sympathetic engagement, rather than an emotionless depiction of exemplary or cautionary figures.

This narrative depiction of a character's coming-of-age in a children's book had been previously experimented by Dorothy Kilner in *Anecdotes of a Boarding School* (signed October 18<sup>th</sup> 1782).<sup>35</sup> In this book, Kilner complicates the moral tale by presenting competing voices of authority and claims to exemplarity. Her girls' boarding-school story is published in two volumes, and it is the first school story that is narrated by a single protagonist. It invites readers to identify sympathetically with the protagonist, Martha Beauchamp, as Martha determines how to navigate her personal moral codes. Readers are positioned to sympathise with Martha because the story is focalised through her gaze, such that readers can only comprehend events when Martha does. For instance, when Martha prepares to go to school, she leaves her doll at home and weeps, 'I *wish* I could be locked up with you! [...] I could at least peep through the key-hole and see my dear papa and mamma [...] Very true, my love, (said her mamma, who she just then discovered)' (*Anecdotes* I, p. 14). Martha invokes the concept of limited perspective when she wishes that she could be her doll so she could 'peep through the key-hole' to see her parents. This limited key-hole gaze describes the method by which Kilner narrates the story. Limited by Martha's cognisance, the reader is surprised alongside Martha to discover that her mother has witnessed Martha's tears. When characters make personality judgements about Martha, readers are positioned to interpret the validity of these claims from Martha's perspective. On her first evening at school, Martha is so homesick that she cannot eat her supper, for which Miss Starch rebukes her:

It is very *naughty* you won't try and eat Miss!

*Martha*, who had never before been told she was *naughty*, except when she really had been guilty of some crime, found this rebuke so far from abating her tears, that it afforded fresh cause for her grief (*Anecdotes* I, pp. 63–64).

Because Martha deems Miss Starch's accusation to be unjust, readers are positioned to reject the notion that external practices of politeness are expressions

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<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Kilner, *Anecdotes of a Boarding-School; or, an Antidote to the Vices of those Useful Seminaries*, 2 vol. (London: John Marshall and Co, 1782?). Quotations cited in-text as *Anecdotes* I/II.

of internal virtues or vices. The narrative interjection borders on free indirect discourse when Martha's tears are presented as a reasonable response to an unfair 'cause,' the purported 'crime' of naughtiness. The legal discourse implies that Martha speaks from a position of impartial justice, but Martha considers the accusation unjust on the basis of memories from the past 'when she really had been guilty,' a subjective reality inaccessible to Miss Starch. Yet because this mental reality is accessible to readers, we are positioned to mistrust Miss Starch, despite her authority as a teacher.

*Anecdotes to a Boarding School* subsequently acknowledges that power comes in different forms. It suggests that Martha must decide for herself the extent to which she accepts any authoritative figure's guidance. The school's head teacher, Mrs Steward, is so named because she delegates authority to several sub-teachers. Martha negotiates her personal moral code within this community of complex power relationships. Her ethic of obedience is tested when Miss Starch berates Martha for not saying her prayers in French (*Anecdotes* I, p. 99). The idea of such a practice discomforts Martha, whose lack of fluency in French would, in her mind, make her feel like a spiritual imposter were she to pray in that language. A fellow classmate recommends feigning obedience while praying silently in her heart afterward (*Anecdotes* I, p. 100), a recommendation which Martha politely declines, expressing a desire to consult her mother. When she is told that her letters will be read by Miss Starch, 'Poor Martha was sorry to hear she must have such restraint upon her writing to her mama' (*Anecdotes* I, p. 100). The moniker 'Poor Martha' suggests that the narrator affirms that Martha deserves pity in her moral quandary, but the free indirect discourse makes it difficult to determine whether the narrator is speaking, or if Martha has adopted a stance of self-pity. Although Martha is technically under her teachers' authority, the expression of their authority in the act of reading Martha's letters is presented as a negative 'restraint.' Martha's affection for her mother determines Martha's choice to shape her virtues and practices according to her familial values (*Anecdotes* I, pp. 117–27). The novel's occasional use of free indirect discourse in presenting Martha's moral quandaries cultivates implied readers' sympathetic identification with Martha. By presenting Martha's familial-informed values and practices as the authority to which Martha

chooses to submit, *Anecdotes of a Boarding School* suggests that family values may equip individuals with the integrity to act in opposition to an authoritative institution's explicit rules. The integrity with which Martha chooses her moral code recalls Barbauld's Rational Dissenting belief in the child's moral capacity, and the book's affirmation of familial values over institutionalised practices parallels Barbauld's Dissenting depiction of the family as a site capable of training individuals to resist institutionalised social practices. In this regard, *Anecdotes to a Boarding School* responds to the Dissenting principles that produced *Lessons for Children*. At the same time, *Anecdotes to a Boarding School* introduced a new element of interiority to the children's book, focalising the narrative through a single child protagonist and enabling readers to access Martha's unspoken dilemmas.

#### **d. The Making of 'Mrs B.'**

Echoes of 'Mrs B' as a children's writer associated with educational conversations reverberate through British children's literary history. Jane Marcet's *Conversation* books all feature a wise and knowledgeable pedagogue named Mrs B. The breadth of subjects covered by Marcet's conversation books—*Conversations on Chemistry* (1805), *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816), *Conversations on Natural Philosophy* (1819), *Conversations on Vegetable Physiology* (1839), and *Conversations on the History of England* (1842, 1844)—suggest the extent to which the name 'Mrs B' became affiliated with the image of a pedagogue who taught rigorous scientific and economic lessons using conversational methods. However, the publishing and marketing afterlife of Marcet's *Conversations* also indicates the extent to which books inviting interactive conversational engagement, rather than imaginative identification with fictional characters with accessible interior lives, fell out of favour with the juvenile literary market. As notions of 'fiction' became increasingly demarcated from educational textbooks, Marcet's *Conversation* books were increasingly sold as textbooks. There were used by students at several English mechanics' institutes, by medical apprentices, and after women's seminaries were

established in America in 1818, they were marketed more as textbooks than as a books designed for familial (or children's) reading experiences.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, another children's book featuring a suggestively named 'M. B.'—*Mrs Leicester's School* by Mary and Charles Lamb (1809)—suggests the extent to which nineteenth-century conceptions of children's book depended upon building readers' sympathetic identification with fictional characters.<sup>37</sup> The book employs a frame story in which a mysterious figure named M. B. explains that her book is the collection of several testimonies and tales provided by female students on the first evening at their boarding school. However, M. B.'s identity remains hidden, and the only hint of her identity is that she is associated with the school. Indeed, the frame story is dropped after the dedication, and the story focuses on the girls' accounts, which are delivered in first-person. The stories, particularly the first account concerning Elizabeth Villiers, suggest that narrative books are ideal pedagogic tools because they have the potential to generate close sympathy between individuals and texts. Elizabeth Villiers's first memory is of her father teaching her the alphabet from the letters on her mother's tombstone. Aside from a potential real-life nod to the childhood experiences of Mary Shelley (née Wollstonecraft), the tale inverts an image popularised by Barbauld's *Lessons*, that of a parent teaching a child to read, by associating it with stasis and death. As Elizabeth's mother's tombstone cannot generate further readings, Elizabeth's ability to develop as a reader is curtailed by her father's insistence upon using the tombstone as a pedagogical tool. It is only when Elizabeth's uncle arrives and gives her a book that this pattern of stasis is broken. Elizabeth initially resents the present and her uncle's presence, which she understands will disrupt the familial interaction she associates with her reading lessons at her mother's tombstone. However, Elizabeth is seduced when she sees the 'fine gilt covers and gay pictures all fluttering about' (*Mrs. Leicester's School*, p. 19). The book's visual appeal is so strong that the book gains the qualities of a living being and appears to 'flutter'

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<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth J. Morse, 'Marcet, Jane Haldimand (1769–1858), writer on science and political economy', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 15 August 2018, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18029>>.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Lamb and Charles Lamb, *Mrs. Leicester's School; or, the History of Several Young Ladies, Selected by Themselves*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Printed for M. J. Godwin at the Juvenile Library, 1814). Cited in-text as *Mrs. Leicester's School*.

about. Through Elizabeth's love of books, she cultivates a close relationship with her uncle. Elizabeth's story testifies that books are the ultimate and ideal source of learning, capable of preparing individuals to participate in wider social communities. In Elizabeth's case, a shared love of books enables her to befriend her uncle. *Mrs Leicester's School* suggests that the book as an object can equip readers to form relationships with strangers, in addition to finessing readers' literacy and widening a reader's knowledge.

By contrast, Barbauld's vision of the children's book as a tool that facilitated family interactions became dated in the publishing world. When Charlotte Yonge produced a series of essays on 'Children's Literature of the Last Century,' she spoke of *Lessons for Children* as an historical phenomenon:

Her Easy Lessons were a much more true success [than *Hymns in Prose*]. 'Little Charles', as every household tenderly calls 'Early Lessons,' displaced the earlier 'Cobwebs to Catch Flies', and probably three-fourths of the gentry of the last three generations have learnt to read by his assistance.<sup>38</sup>

Yonge provides three alternative names for *Lessons for Children*, none of which were the initial publication names, implying that *Lessons for Children* had been a popular book among many middle-class readers, but that it had sufficiently passed from popular awareness so that its actual name was no longer significant. Yonge claims that many middle-class readers from 'the last three generations' learned to read through Barbauld's conversational primer, relegating Barbauld's book to the past and identifying *Lessons for Children* with children's literature from the previous, rather than the present, century. Moreover, Yonge's review distances Barbauld as an author from her other children's books, *Hymns in Prose*, and *Evenings at Home*. By suggesting that *Lessons for Children* was a 'much more true success' in terms of engaging the emotions and affections of child readers, Yonge overwrites Sarah Trimmer's review of *Hymns in Prose* in which Trimmer attested to the devotional warmth with which real children responded to Barbauld's prose poems (*GE II*, p. 46). It is possible to read in Yonge's statement a testimony of the changed reading

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<sup>38</sup> Charlotte Yonge, *Children's Books of the Last Century*, *Macmillan's Magazine* (July–September 1869), Part I, 229–237, p. 234.

patterns, expectations, and emotional responses of child readers over the course of the century. More significantly, however, Yonge's review associated Barbauld's name chiefly with *Lessons for Children*. The conversational primer as a literary form was unable to graft itself onto a different genre—Fenn's collection of conversational fables, for instance, was not a marked success. In essence, the conversational primer stagnated as a print form. The interaction invited by the conversational primer was between implied readers *outside* the text, providing little scope to experiment with the content *inside* the book. Instead, as nineteenth-century reading preferences turned toward novels featuring causal narratives and using imaginative identification with characters, *Lessons for Children* found itself excerpted and ferried around different texts.

Historically, the metaphorically playful episodes of Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* were the first to be exported and rehoused, suggesting an increasing taste for imaginative works of fancy during the height of the popularity of the conversational primer. 'La Déjeuner' is a short story in Arnaud Berquin's *L'ami des Enfants* (1782–83), and Berquin's Papa echoes Barbauld's Mamma in declaring a tree stump to be a suitable table for a meal, and in literalising the metaphor of the 'carpet of grass' by suggesting that the grass provides an adequate carpet for an outdoor dining room. Berquin also translated and extended Barbauld's moral tale concerning Harry, Billy, and Peter, renaming the characters and titling his short story 'Les Trois Gateaux.' Most notably, 'La Soleil et la lune' is lifted from the last pages of Part IV of *Lessons for Children*. Though Berquin places the Sun and Moon's monologues in the context of a father encouraging his son Antonin to look at the sky, the monologues are direct translations of Barbauld's Sun and Moon's addresses.<sup>39</sup> The general lack of critical attention concerning this literary migration indicates the lack of critical interest in authorial rights in early children's literature, as much as it suggests that these sections of *Lessons for Children* had attained levels of popularity akin to a folk tale. Literary property was contested during the

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<sup>39</sup> Compare M. [Arnaud] Berquin, 'Le Déjeuner', vol. 12 of 24, *L'ami des enfants* (London: chez M. Elmsley, libraire, dans le Strand, 1782–83), pp. 43–48 to Barbauld's *Lessons for Children of Three Years Old. Part II* (London: J. Johnson, 1788), p. 16–18; compare Berquin, 'Les Trois Gateaux', vol. 12 of 24, pp. 49–64 with Barbauld, *Lessons for Children of Three to Four Years Old* (London: J. Johnson, 1788) pp. 15–31; compare Berquin 'La Soleil et la lune', vol. I of 24, pp. 26–31 to Barbauld, *Lessons for Children of Three to Four Years Old*, pp. 95–108.

eighteenth century, and Barbauld's publisher, Joseph Johnson, reproached several publishers for encroaching on his literary property by printing swathes of text that he had registered with the Stationers' Company.<sup>40</sup> However, the exercise of literary property was flexible. Though Johnson was prepared to threaten prosecution on account of the plagiarism, he also criticised those who insisted on prosecuting lawsuits when the other publisher was willing to settle.<sup>41</sup> Presumably, Johnson was unaware of, or unconcerned about, the plagiarism. Either case suggests the secondary importance with which children's literature was considered in relation to the literary property lawsuits that marked the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> To date, only Marjorie Moon has noticed the textual lifting, but Moon states that Barbauld borrowed from Berquin.<sup>43</sup> Although there are no copies of *Lessons for Children* extant that predate 1782 (the date of publication for *L'ami des enfans*), there is textual consistency between Barbauld's editions of *Lessons for Children* published between 1778-79 and 1808, when Barbauld officially extended and re-published *Lessons for Children* with Joseph Johnson. This suggests that Barbauld did not add the sun and moon's soliloquy, the tale of Peter, Harry, and Billy, or the picnic conversation, in response to Berquin's *L'ami des enfans*, challenging Moon's claim that Barbauld lifted passages from Berquin. While the lack of rigour applied to literary property rights in relation to early children's literature is frustrating for scholarship, it also suggests the folk-like migratory qualities inherent in Barbauld's work. In fact, Barbauld may have been flattered by Berquin's use of her work. She praised *L'ami des enfans* in a letter to her one-time pupil and friend, Lydia Rickards, describing his literary sensitivity.<sup>44</sup> Less subtle writers, however, latched onto the

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter 36 to Morison on 26 November 1796, concerning Morison printing Cowper's poems which Johnson had registered; also Joseph Johnson, Letter to Cottle on 6 December 1804 objecting to Cottle printing nearly 1000 lines of Cowper's poetry which Johnson registered at the Stationer's Company, *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, ed. John Bugg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, Letters 36 and 37 to Morison, 26 November and 7 December 1796, in *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, pp. 35–37.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the history of eighteenth-century literary property debates see Ronan Deazley, *Rethinking Copyright: History, Theory, Language* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006), pp. 1–42; William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 50–102.

<sup>43</sup> Marjorie Moon, *John Harris's Books for Youth 1801–1843: Revised and enlarged edition* (Kent: Dawson Publishing, 1992), catalogue no. 36, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> The manuscript is in Anna Letitia Barbauld's letters, held by the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden

possibility of selecting and ferrying excerpts of *Lessons for Children*, and began to publish truncated versions of Barbauld's works that obstructed her authorial intentions as inscribed in her original works, and did little for her name.

In the nineteenth century, as fiction and non-fiction became more demarcated, and the Lake Romantics' literary ideals became more prevalent in British literary print culture, editors began to excerpt Barbauld's work in cheap educational primers. These texts foregrounded their functionality as tools that could train children in literacy. This hampered the reception of Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* as a unified, literary text. The educative vision of the primers that printed segments of Barbauld's texts differed significantly from Georgian juvenile Enlightenment culture. As Kathryn Gleadle identifies, juvenile Enlightenment culture presupposed that children could exercise 'individual moral judgement and intellectual autonomy.'<sup>45</sup> Barbauld's books operate within this culture. However, the nineteenth-century primers and textbooks that excerpted Barbauld's works tended to treat children as passive receptacles of factual knowledge and the primer's religious and/or political biases.

The most blatant instance of this may be seen in Fred Pitman's attempt to use Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for Children* to teach children his phonetic system. Pitman's *Hymns in Prose and Verse: For Children* is not actually titled *Hymns in Prose*, but rather, *Himz in Proz for Children. Bei Ms Barbold*,<sup>46</sup> and is printed entirely in Pitman's phonetic system. It is unclear exactly for whom this book was intended. The back cover describes how Pitman's spelling system is adapted to shorthand and longhand writing, making the 'education of the poor is rendered not only possible, but easy.' This statement, in conjunction with the cheap printing, suggests that it was aimed at a semi-literate readership. However, the print is tiny, and as it is entirely rendered in Pitman's specific phonetic system, it difficult to read—both for children and for semi-literate readers (see fig. 7). From an historical perspective, Pitman's spelling system does not appear to have gained ground in any significant educational circles.

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Foundations; further details in William McCarthy's forthcoming Oxford edition of *The Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld*.

<sup>45</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, 'The Juvenile Enlightenment: British Children and Youth During the French Revolution', *Past and Present* 233 (2016), 143–184, p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> Mrs [Anna Letitia] Barbauld, Dr. Watts, ed. Fred Pitman, *Himz in Proz. For Cildren. Bei Ms Barbold* (London: Fred Pitman, 1853).

While the preface speaks of *Hymns in Prose* as a delight and edification to ‘the child and his instructor’ this book does not appear to be designed to bring much delight. Its instructive attempts focus on teaching a specific phonetic system rather than awakening readers’ devotional impulses or sensorial observations. If nothing else, the book indicates a nineteenth-century association between Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose* and educational platforms. This association was made possible, in part, by, earlier, slightly more subtle editorial utilisations of Barbauld’s children’s works in pedagogical frameworks that devalued the child pupil’s capacity to exert individual moral judgement and critical thinking skills.

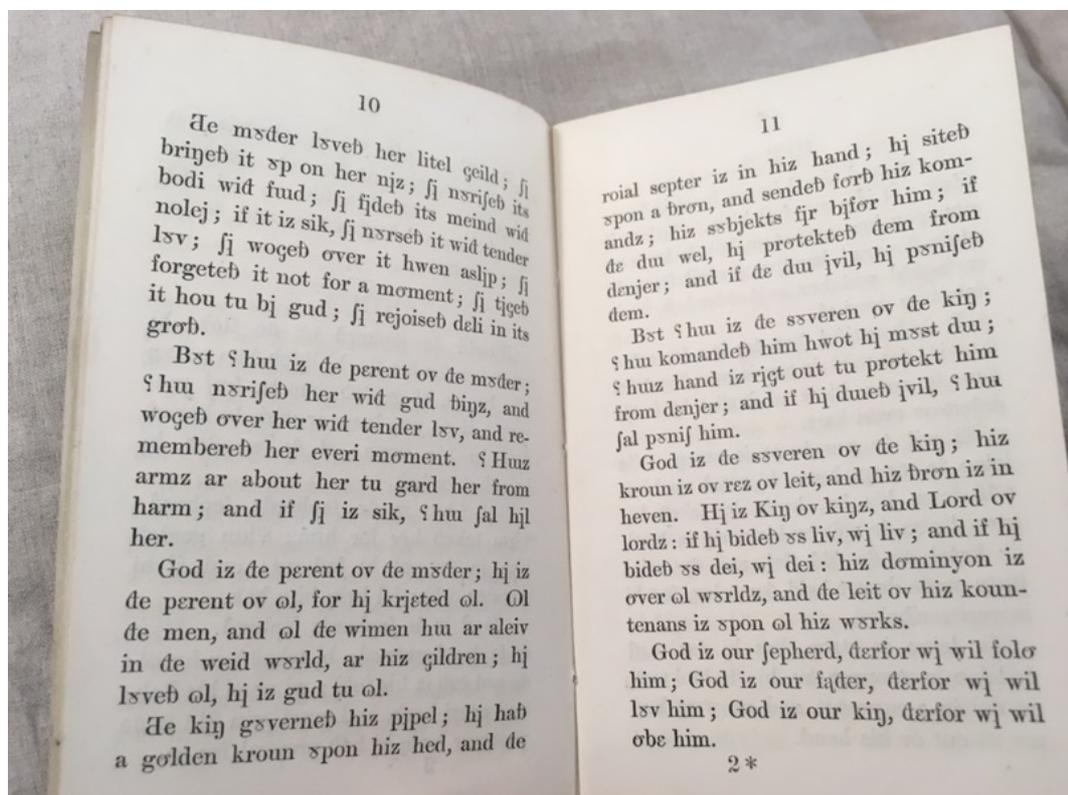


Fig. 7: *Hymns in Prose for Children*. By Ms Barbauld (1853), pp. 10–11. Courtesy of Cambridge University Library

By the 1810s, several editors had begun printing excerpts from Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children* and *Hymns in Prose for Children* in non-conversational primers. This constituted a mode of authorial erasure that disassociated Barbauld’s selected passages from the implied reading practices and Rational Dissenting values of critical thinking and relational reading generated by Barbauld’s original books, as

published by Joseph Johnson. William Fordyce Mavor's primer, *The Way to Reading Made Easy* (1815),<sup>47</sup> Samuel Danks's *Reading Made Completely Easy* (1821),<sup>48</sup> and *Manson's New Primer* were three such texts complicit in repurposing Barbauld's children's works.<sup>49</sup>

Mavor's *The Way to Reading Made Easy* prints excerpts from Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose* between other texts that inculcate the values of unquestioning religious and familial obedience. Mavor's section titled 'Hymns by Mrs. Barbauld' suggests that Barbauld's name provided publishers with a sense of financial security or cultural valence. This attribution is misleading, because the unqualified chapter title could lead readers to believe they were reading the entirety of Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose*, where the selection is decidedly small. Most significantly, Mavor omits the hymn in which the poet criticises the hypothetical monarch and addresses an enslaved mother, warning of God's retribution. The de-politicisation of *Hymns in Prose* in Mavor's primer suggests that some editors felt compelled to disassociate the figure of the political-religious Dissenter Anna Laetitia Barbauld from the pedagogical Mrs Barbauld. Instead, Mavor's primer repositions Barbauld's prose hymns to support a traditionally Anglican association between religious education and filial (and monarchical) obedience.

Samuel Danks's *Reading Made Completely Easy* similarly repurposes Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for Children* while treating the child reader as a passive receptacle who must be filled with inherited British authoritative practices. Danks's primer features 'lessons' or Biblical dictums that assert the importance of religious obedience: 'Ye that fear the Lord, praise him. Wait on the Lord and keep his way' (*Danks Reading*, p. 12). The descriptive address, 'Ye that fear the Lord,' assumes that implied readers have already adopted a posture of deference enabling them to 'Wait on the Lord.' These postures do not align with Barbauld's claims in *Hymns in Prose for Children* that children possess the spiritual authority of religious priests, and

<sup>47</sup> William Fordyce Mavor, *The Way to Reading Made Easy or, the Child's First Book: Consisting of Scripture Sentences, and Other Pieces. A New Edition to which are now added Hymns by Mrs. Barbauld, Lessons by Dr. Mavor, &c.* (Birmingham: Beilby and Knotts, 1815), cited in-text as *Mavor: Way to Reading*.

<sup>48</sup> *Reading Made Completely Easy, or The Child's First Books. To which are added, lessons in natural history; hymns in prose and verse; The Church of England and Dr. Watt's Catechisms* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Bewdley: Samuel Danks, 1821). Cited in-text as *Danks Reading*.

<sup>49</sup> *Manson's new primer, or the child's best guide: containing the most familiar words of one syllable. Considerable improved by additions from Barbauld's fables* (Kilkenny: printed by T. Sherman, bookseller and stationer, High Street, n.d. [1800s]). Cited in-text as *Manson's new primer*.

may remonstrate monarchs for their complicity in unjust practices like slavery. Instead, the primer inserts Barbauld's prose hymns between Isaac Watts's poem 'The Sluggard' and Jane Taylor's poem 'Contented John', both of which assert that developing a good work ethic, rather than seeking social justice, is an ideal goal. This textual placement brackets Barbauld's hymn between texts that inculcate messages of obedience and piety.

At the other end of the political spectrum, *Manson's new primer*, printed in Ireland sometime after the time of the Act of Union, incorporates excerpts from Barbauld's work to disseminate a suggestively anti-monarchical ideology. However, the primer does not encourage child readers to evaluate conflicting ideas. Barbauld's hymns provided space for child and adult speakers to voice differing expressions of religious confidence, doubt, and joy. Manson's child reader is castigated to internalise the primer's lessons, rather than encouraged to consider alternate perspectives. The primer's single-clause phrases are remonstrative:

you came too late  
 you play too long  
 you read too fast [...]  
 be not so dull  
 be not so rash (*Manson's new primer*, pp. 44–45).

The primer isolates sections from both *Lessons for Children* and *Hymns in Prose*, removing the implied communal reading experiences implied in Barbauld's books, as published by Joseph Johnson. *Manson's New Primer* includes a passage from *Lessons for Children Aged Three Years Old: Part II*, in which Mamma teaches Charles that literacy distinguishes humans from animals. However, the primer alters the tone of *Lessons for Children*. The exchange is isolated from the larger context of *Lessons for Children*, where Mamma is affectionate with Charles. This renders Mamma's teasing warning to Charles that if he does not learn to read he had 'better be drowned,' emotionally cold. The primer generally presents Barbauld as a stern writer. One of the only two *Hymns in Prose* presented in the primer is Barbauld's anti-monarchical Hymn VIII. In this hymn the speaker criticises a hypothetical monarch's moral failings, and implicitly accuses the monarch of

unjustly enslaving a ‘Negro mother.’ Published around the Act of Union, this appears to be an expression of anti-monarchical British Irish nationalism smuggled into an Irish children’s text. Whatever the case, *Manson’s new primer* removes Barbauld’s hymn from the context of the affectionate, communal prose hymns in which Barbauld’s speaker invites the child speakers to participate with her in practices of observation and devotion. The repeated invitation, ‘Come, let us [see/go]’ is replaced by dictums that treat the implied child reader as a receptacle that must be filled with anti-monarchical biases, rather than as a fellow human being capable of observing, reflecting, and feeling.

As the nineteenth century progressed, Barbauld metamorphosed from the figurehead of an out-dated didactic school of writers into a member of a school of quaintly outmoded writers. John Murray’s illustrated version of *Hymns in Prose* was popular in the mid-Victorian period; first published in 1864, it remained in print until the 1880s. In Murray’s edition, interweaving floral borders transform Barbauld’s prose hymns into visual spectacles. However, Murray’s then-contemporaneous depictions of children’s clothing quickly allowed the book to become dated (fig. 8).



Fig. 8: *Hymns in Prose for Children* (London: John Murray, 1866), p. 5. Courtesy of the Cadbury Library, University of Birmingham

Near the end of the Victorian period, E. V. Lucas included two of Barbauld's stories in *Old Fashioned Tales* (1905), a book designed to evoke nostalgia. The illustrated frontispiece depicts children in out-dated eighteenth-century outfits (fig. 9), and its epigraph reads:

The children come, the children go;  
 To-day grows quickly yesterday;  
 And we, who quiz quaint fashions so  
 We soon shall seem as quaint as they.<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 9: Frontispiece from *Old Tales*; courtesy of Cambridge University Library

Readers are positioned to approach the stories as disinterested spectators of these historicised children who have already come and gone. The ephemerality of the children's movement, and by implication, the popularity of the books they read, is emphasised by the anaphora that contrasts 'come' and 'go.' Lucas dismisses

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<sup>50</sup> E. V. Lucas, ed., *Old Fashioned Tales* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co, n.d. [1905?]). Cited in-text as *Old Tales*.

Barbauld and Aikin's stories as pieces written 'before the days when authors of books for children added to their ambition to please the nursery the wish to be thought clever outside of it too (*Old Tales*, v)'—an historically outrageous claim to make about the highly educated Anna Barbauld. In other ways, Lucas's epigraphic assessment is valid. In the conversational primer, parent-authors created spaces in which children could 'come' and 'go,' interacting with implied adult readers in a common linguistic domain and shared physical area. However, the episodic and scriptive nature of conversational primers limited the form's ability to evolve alongside nineteenth-century reading preferences for characters with complex textual interiors, with whom readers could sympathetically identify. When Lucas declared, 'It is in the nursery that love of adventure and circumstantial minute narrative begins (*Old Tales*, vi),' he effectively denied the conversational primer a place in the twentieth-century nursery due to its depiction of the circumstantial and episodic nature of life, rather than narrative causality. Yet, in other ways, to 'come' and 'go' implies the possibility of movement; the chance to re-visit the past, however briefly. To read *Lessons for Children* is to hear Mamma's invitation, 'Come, let us go into the fields,' echoing across time and space (*Lessons* I, p. 27; *Hymns in Prose* p. 5).

## Conclusion

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1825, John Clare wrote:

I have been reading over Mrs Barbauld's "Lessons for Children" to my eldest child who is continually tearing me to read them I find by this that they are particularly suited to the tastes of children as she is never desirous of hearing anything read a second time but them.<sup>1</sup>

The UK Reading Experience Database classifies the Clares' experience as a 'reactive' rather than a solitary or unknown reading process. Clare's account shows a real-life family using Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* in a like, if not an exact, manner implied by the book. A father spends time with his child, reading and re-reading sections of a text structured around episodes in which a mother converses with her son, within or around the family home. The reciprocity of family affection, encoded in the practice of episodic, familial reading makes *Lessons for Children*, at the very least, a *zeitgeist* of late-eighteenth-century middle-class British familial culture, indicating the potential for research regarding the conversational primer to inform historical studies of Georgian Britain.

Moreover, Clare's account affirms the importance of practice and performance in the study of written texts, a crucial element to the study of the conversational primer. If read in solitary silence, *Lessons for Children* may be utilised to support didacticism-to-delight models of children's literary studies, or dichotomous adult-versus-child narratives of authoritative imposition. Mamma's questions may appear hypophoric statements enabling her to assert her worldview in place of Charles's, transforming *Lessons for Children* into a work directed by a domineering adult voice. However, this ideological perspective overlooks the implied reading experience presented by the parent-author, and supported by the episodic and linguistically simple nature of the conversations. In *Lessons for Children*, as in subsequent conversational primers, the parent-author invites, even asks,

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<sup>1</sup> John Clare, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 229, <[http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=11209](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=11209)>, accessed: 30 May 2018.

readers to approach the book as a transcript of real-life family interactions, and as a script with the potential to inform the readers' family life. Of course, conversational primers are more ideal scripts than exact transcripts. Nevertheless, they present adults tenderly guiding children's curiosity as verisimilar accounts designed to influence real-life practices. Restoring the importance of *practice* provides more holistic understandings of texts might have operated historically. For formalistic studies, the concept of practice suggests how a text might have asked to be used. As this study has suggested, the conversational primer is a locus at which individual and cultural ideas about parenthood and the role and shape of education converged, making it a useful point from which to explore the depiction and dissemination of late-eighteenth-century middle-class methods of familial reading.

In this sense, the conversational primer may be understood as a tool that resists adult-child dichotomous approaches to children's literature studies. While notions of 'solidarity' grew from nineteenth-century union movements, the conversational primer anticipates the formation of concepts integral to solidarity: the shared interests or aspirations of disparate individuals. The conversational primer creates shared family interests. It presents parental affection as a source that enables adults to engage their children's curiosity and observational skills, facilitating the dissemination of empirical paradigms of deduction and reasoning, and inculcating an association between observation and religious devotional feeling. This study has emphasised the ways in which the transformations of the conversational primer affirmed and expanded Barbauld's vision of the power of verisimilar literary texts to craft a space in which parents and children could share linguistic insights, and build a harmonious social community from the basis of an affectionate family.

Central to Barbauld's depiction of empiricism as a mode of learning and delight is her awareness that learning is shaped by individual experiences. In *Lessons for Children*, Charles's knowledge is shaped by his upbringing in a domestic, rural household. When he implicitly learns the benefit of having a global (rather than a British-centric) vision, it grows from his first-hand experience travelling in France and being unable to communicate with Frenchmen. His education is

sensory and individualised. This shape of learning, which I have termed ‘rational sensibility,’ provides a new language for studying how concepts of sensibility interacted with Enlightenment values of rationality and the history of science. The existence of rational sensibility expands our history of ideas. It shows that eighteenth-century ideas about touch and cognitive formation did not simply become a means of conceptualising the differences between men and women, or upper and lower class individuals. Instead, this thesis suggests that sensibility as a mode of knowing informed the empirical pedagogy championed by parent-authors in the conversational primer.

Rational sensibility depends upon practice, in which individual bodies inform a reader’s unique engagement with a text. In *Lessons for Children*, the content is determined by Charles’s increasing awareness of himself, his family home, and the environment in which his home exists. Written in episodes, rather than using narratives of causality, conversational primers invite, even ask, to be read, serially. With their limited linguistic range, they invite children and adults to read the book together. They teach children literacy skills and encourage parents to join their children in a shared linguistic and physical space that affirms the bond of familial affection, from which human learning can take place.

William McCarthy thus assesses Barbauld’s relationship with Rational Dissent:

What [Barbauld] made of Dissent went into the making of—to list just three things—Coleridge’s poetry, New England’s Unitarianism and Britain’s First Reform Act. Apart from John Milton, can we name another British Dissenting writer of whom so much can be said?<sup>2</sup>

Further to McCarthy’s claims, in *Lessons for Children*, Barbauld’s Rational Dissenting vision of the family as the social unit capable of reforming socio-cultural values facilitated the creation of the conversational primer. Barbauld affected the content and physical shape of British children’s books for decades. In *Lessons for Children*, as in *Hymns in Prose* and *Evenings at Home*, Barbauld channelled parental

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<sup>2</sup> McCarthy, ‘How Dissent made Anna Letitia Barbauld,’ p. 66.

tenderness into pedagogical authority, through which she disseminated her Rational Dissenting vision of the family as the locus for social change. She imbued the conversational primer with the potential to nurture alternate voices to the discursive unity implied by the socio-political religious body of the Church of England. Despite this politically radical aspect of the conversational primer, the form was enthusiastically adopted by Church of England proponents like Sarah Trimmer, and by Latitudinarian Anglicans such as the Edgeworths. Further studies of the conversational primer will enrich our understanding how Rational Dissent informed Georgian Anglican culture, particular with regard to its elevation of the family and the role of the mother.

*Lessons for Children* expands from an awareness of the particular to visions of the global. It expresses Barbauld's vision of Enlightenment wonder, and provided a framework for conversational primers to flourish in the decades afterward. Conversational primers use rational sensibility to teach children to understand their place within the natural and interpersonal networks that compose human society. Written by parent-authors, conversational primers provide scripts for adult and child readers; invitations across time and space, offering real-life readers (with enough time and resources) the chance to perform similar interactive learning activities in their own times and places.

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