

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Although it approaches the subject from the point of view of the reader, this book is fundamentally about the origins of children's literature as a distinct and secure branch of print culture, a development that took place in Britain over the course of the long eighteenth century. Deplorably little is known about precisely how and why this happened. The new commodity was the product of a number of interconnected factors. It was a development based on enterprising entrepreneurs, talented authors and illustrators, and technological innovations, but also shifting cultural constructions of childhood, demographic changes, and socio-economic transformations. Its consumers were absolutely central to its sudden take-off. Indeed, this book will be arguing that the very concept of children's literature was in large part the product of its purchasers and users.

What this argument springs out of is a very detailed examination of children's book usage between 1700 and 1840 - who these users were, how they acquired and used their books, what they thought of them - and it is these enquiries that form the substance of this book. After all, it is surely self-evident that before we can comprehend how children's literature came into existence, and why it took the forms it did, we must know more about its consumers. Perhaps this book's principal aim, then, is to provide a sound foundation for further study of the early development of children's literature. But in itself, this study should shed light on a number of areas of current concern for scholars of the eighteenth century: attitudes to children and childhood, changing modes of reading, the extent of the reading nation. Indeed, looking at children's reading practices can collapse some of the rather hackneyed metanarratives of eighteenth-century studies: the idea of a 'reading revolution', or the notion that children's literature gradually evolved from books of instruction to books that delighted. Finally, this book presents some fresh methodologies that use inscriptions and other marginal marks, alongside a wide range of other sources, to provide new information for those interested in the history of the book. It is to be hoped

1



Introduction

that pioneering these new methods here might remind others, whether collectors, librarians, students or academics, of the great usefulness to those writing literary history of data that lies outwith the printed texts themselves.

To begin, though, we need to return to the widely repeated yet still controversial contention that children's literature began in Britain and in the middle of the eighteenth century.

THE ORIGINS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

At the root of the origins problem are anxieties about classification. 'Children's literature' is an awkward term – both words being equally problematic. What is childhood? When does it begin and how long does it last? How has it changed over time, or place, or between the young of different sexes, religions and social classes? And what constitutes their literature? Should it include only the texts that were designed for children, or those that they used regardless of intended readership? Should it include schoolbooks and religious texts, or only books written to amuse? Is children's literature perhaps a fiction: a name for something not of, or by, or genuinely for children at all, but something foisted upon them by adults who have conveniently invented an audience for the texts they have produced? This confusion is not a bad thing. It is a valuable antidote to the certainty of some of the earliest studies of children's literature. We were once told that children's literature meant only those printed works produced especially for children and designed to give them spontaneous pleasure. This led to the conviction that children's literature began in London in the 1740s, with John Newbery, Thomas Boreman, Thomas and Mary Cooper, and perhaps Benjamin Collins in Salisbury, as its founders. Current academic tastes are unlikely to assent to an account that is quite so glib, so Anglocentric, so canonising, so reliant on a 'great man' notion of cultural history, so little attentive to the role of mothers as children's first teachers, and children as being themselves active in the construction of their literature. But for many, any history that talks of the invention of children's literature in the middle of the eighteenth century is also simply wrong. 'Ever since there were children, there has been children's literature,' writes Seth Lerer emphatically in his Reader's History, proceeding to discuss the texts that children have read since 'the beginnings of recorded culture'.²

¹ F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 3rd edn, rev. Brian Alderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 1.

² Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 1 and 17.



The origins of children's literature

Others have convincingly constructed detailed cases for medieval, Classical Roman and Greek, Chinese, ancient Egyptian and Sumerian children's literature.³

These findings are fascinating and important, but to say that children have consumed literature for just as long as any other section of the population is surely something of a truism. Who would doubt that young people in the age of Quintilian, or Chaucer, or Shakespeare - or any other age - heard, read and relished stories? But there is no evidence to suggest that either producers or consumers understood these texts as a distinct genre, a set of texts specifically commissioned, written and marketed for the use of the young. After all, almost all of them, save some purely didactic works, were shared with adults. Quintilian, for example, recommended the use of Greek plays, Homer and Virgil, as well as collections of fables, for the education of Roman children.⁴ Likewise, in early modern Britain, children certainly formed part of the readership of romances, ballads, chapbooks, jestbooks, fairy tales, novels and many other forms, but surely did not constitute the primary intended audience. Even when, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, books were published specifically for children - mostly didactic titles produced for schools or religious books written to encourage childhood piety - they were not regarded as a separate subset of literature. Such milestone works as John Bunyan's Book for Boys and Girls (1686) or James Janeway's A Token for Children (1672) may have been published in quite large numbers and they may even have been enjoyed by some young readers. But to denominate them 'children's literature' is an anachronism. The term was not in use, nor did booksellers advertise their wares under this heading.

Moreover, those seventeenth-century commentators who began to take a serious interest in children's education and pastimes unanimously decried the lack of literature suitable for the young. John Locke lamented in 1693 that, other than Aesop and *Reynard the Fox*, he could name no books 'fit to engage the liking of children and tempt them to read'.' The same state of affairs apparently still pertained forty or fifty years later, at just the point when what might be called the 'new' children's literature of Boreman, Collins, Newbery and the Coopers was about to appear. In 1734, Robert

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³ For a concise summary of the Western traditions see Gillian Adams, 'Ancient and medieval children's texts', in *The Routledge International Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 225–38. On the Chinese case see Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 14–19.

⁴ Lerer, Children's Literature, p. 28.

⁵ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarvoc (1693; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), p. 117.



4 Introduction

Wharton complained in his *Historia pueriles* that children who 'get thro' the Psalter and Æsop's Fables, are apt then to be at a Pause . . . because there are so few Books proper for their Entertainment at that age'. ⁶ In 1744, one writer (and in a book published by Mary Cooper) could still name only one 'pleasant Book' – Aesop – as suitable to a child's capacity and fit to 'reward his Pains in reading, and not fill his Head with useless Stuff'. ⁷ From Locke to Newbery, we find, children's literature did exist conceptually, but was understood only in terms of its lack.

This was to change dramatically from the 1740s. Individually, Thomas Boreman's Gigantick Histories (1740-3), Thomas and Mary Cooper's Child's New Play-Thing (1742), Benjamin Collins' Pretty Book for Children (1743), John Newbery's Little Pretty Pocket-Book (1744), or any other single publication, should not be regarded as the point of departure for children's literature. After all, other isolated works designed to entertain and instruct children had been published before: The Little Book for Little Children by T.W. (1702?), for example, and Wharton's Historia pueriles (1734). The important point is that the 1740s texts arrived more or less together. What followed was hardly a flood of similar titles, but numbers did increase steadily. By 1761, Newbery was advertising twenty 'Books published for the Instruction and Amusement of Children' and a further sixteen (generally more didactic) for 'young Gentlemen and Ladies'. 8 Such advertisements are an indication of the success of Newbery's venture, but they must also have done much to create children's literature as a new taxonomic category in the public consciousness. This is not to say that this new trade was not precarious. Of the 1740s innovators, only Newbery's enterprise endured beyond 1761, and several of even his experiments failed - The Lilliputian Magazine, for example, the first children's periodical, which was abandoned after a year in 1752. Newbery could not have survived by publishing only children's books - his patent medicines, as well as his predominating adult books and textbooks, and his interests in periodicals may have subsidised the children's books. And when others began to compete with him in the juvenile market from about 1770 - John Marshall, Joseph Johnson, Henry Roberts and others – they issued children's books only as part of a wider portfolio.9

⁶ Robert Wharton, *Historiæ Pueriles* (T. Wotton, 1734), p. iii.

Anon., The Common Errors in the Education of Children, and Their Consequences (M. Cooper, 1744), pp. 54–5.

⁸ Tom Telescope, *The Newtonian System of Philosophy Adapted to the Capacities of Young Gentlemen and Ladies* (J. Newbery, 1761), pp. 127–40.

⁹ S. Roscoe, *John Newbery and his Successors, 1740–1814: A Bibliography* (Wormley, Herts.: Five Owls Press, 1973), pp. 4, 10–11 and 13; Brian Alderson and Felix de Marez Oyens, *Be Merry and Wise: Origins of Children's Publishing in England, 1650–1850* (British Library, 2006), pp. 62–76.



The origins of children's literature

But children's literature had nevertheless become established. Booksellers' advertisements display this clearly. In 1755, J. Dowse was listing 'Books for Children' as a separate category of his wares. In Falmouth, perhaps even a little earlier, Matthew Allison was advertising 'children's books of all sorts' as distinct from 'horn-books', 'primmers', 'psalters', 'spelling-books', 'testaments' and 'Children's lotteries'. By 1769, about a third of the London bookseller Homan Turpin's catalogue was composed of 'New Books for the Instruction and Amusement of Children, printed for H. Turpin, and sold to the Country Traders at the same Prices as Mr Newbery's, &c'.10 A 1755 caricature of a hack writer makes the same point: from writing 'bloody murders', 'dying speeches' and 'bog-house miscellanies' he eventually graduates to a more respectable branch of print culture, 'little books for children'. II By the end of the century, one commentator regretted that 'children are taught to expect a daily supply of literature, and a daily supply is industriously provided for their gratification'. 12 Summing up Newbery's career, his bibliographer, Sydney Roscoe, acutely summarised what had happened from the 1740s: 'John Newbery's achievement was not to invent these juvenile books, not even to start a fashion for them, but so to produce them as to make a permanent and profitable market for them, to make them a class of book to be taken seriously as a recognised and important branch of the book-trade. '13 Clearly this had happened by the end of the 1750s. 14

A full account of this process has yet to be written, although it is difficult to disagree with Brian Alderson and Felix de Marez Oyens that what was needed for this new literary form to flourish 'was a recognition on the part of the book trade that children constituted a public whom it might be profitable to serve'. 15 But such a statement raises more questions than it

¹⁰ 'Books, plays and pamphlets sold by J. Dowse, opposite Fountain Court in the Strand', advertisement at the end of vol. 1 of Richard Johnson, The Renowned History of the Seven Champions of Christendom (2 vols., J. Dowse et al., 1755); M. Allison, Bookseller on the Market-Strand, in Falmouth; Sells the Following Articles, Wholesale and Retail, single-sheet advertisement ([Falmouth: 1750?]); Homan Turpin, Catalogue of Several Thousand Volumes, in Various Languages, Arts, and Sciences, Containing Several Parcels of Books, Lately Purchased, with advertisement ([Homan Turpin, 1769]), pp. 109–10.

[George Colman and Bonnel Thornton], The Connoisseur, 86 (18 September 1755) (2 vols.,

R. Baldwin, 1755-6), vol. 11, pp. 517-22.

¹² Sarah Trimmer, Guardian of Education, 1 (1802), 15. ¹³ Roscoe, John Newbery, pp. 8–9. ¹⁴ Parallel developments in France, Germany and Holland are discussed in Penny Brown, A Critical History of French Children's Literature 2 vols., (Routledge, 2007), especially vol. 1, pp. 85–128; Theodor Brüggemann and Hans-Heino Ewers, Handbuch zur Kinder- und Jugendliteratur: Von 1750 bis 1800 (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchlein, 1982); Jeroen Salman, 'Children's books as a commodity: the rise of a new literary subsystem in the eighteenth-century Dutch republic', *Poetics*, 28 (2001), 399–421; and Arianne Baggermann and Rudolf Dekker, trans. Dianne Webb, *Child of the Enlightenment:* Revolutionary Europe Reflected in a Boyhood Diary (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 118-69.

¹⁵ Alderson and Oyens, Be Merry and Wise, p. 40.



6 Introduction

answers. When was this 'public' formed? Did a widespread appetite for children's books pre-exist the 'new' children's literature, or did Newbery and his competitors kindle it? Did demand and supply develop in tandem? And who were these consumers — without whom, of course, the new children's literature could not have survived?

THE HISTORY OF READING AND THE CHILD READER

It will be unnecessary here to review how far the history of reading in the long eighteenth century has come since the first steps taken by R. K. Webb, Richard Altick, Rolf Engelsing, Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton and other pioneers. Comprehensive surveys already exist, and new studies appear with such frequency that literature reviews soon become out of date. 16 There is now general agreement that it is possible to discover a great deal about reading publics without relying only on literacy data, or the critical reception or publishing histories of certain successful titles, or the ways in which texts themselves imply and construct their own readership. Many of the operations and institutions of the book trade have now been investigated in great detail. The history of eighteenth-century women readers, and of the working-class readership, is now almost as fully explored as that of privileged and educated men.¹⁷ Forceful overarching analyses have forced us to rethink assumptions about readership, notably William St Clair's The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period with its warning always to consider the actual not putative availability of texts to readers. Meanwhile examinations of individual reading experiences, particularly of obscure and lowly men and women, are suggesting (as Stephen Colclough puts it) 'that Robert Darnton was overly pessimistic when he argued that historians of reading may never get beyond the response of "a few great men about a few great books". 18 New digital resources will surely facilitate more of this kind of work, and take the history of reading

¹⁷ See, for instance, Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Stephen Colclough, Reading Experience 1700–1840: An Annotated Register of Sources for the History of Reading in the British Isles (Reading: History of the Book – On Demand Series, no. 6, 2000), p. iv, quoting Robert Darnton, 'Readers respond to Rousseau: the fabrication of romantic sensitivity', in The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (Allen Lane, 1984), p. 217.

For useful snapshots see Leah Price, 'Reading: the state of the discipline', Book History, 7 (2004), 303–20 and Ian Jackson, 'Approaches to the history of readers and reading in eighteenth-century Britain', The Historical Journal, 47 (2004), 1041–54.
 See, for instance, Jacqueline Pearson, Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation



The history of reading and the child reader

beyond its current stage of (according to St Clair) 'astronomy before telescopes' and 'economics before statistics'. 19

But what of children's reading? Among those working in the field of children's literature, reading habits have always been a central concern. This is largely because much of this work was undertaken by educationalists, keen to find out how contemporary children relate to their books, how literature should be taught, how books might be used as support or therapy for the young, or why boys, or teenagers, or children of minority ethnicities, or with special needs, read differently, or unwillingly, or not at all.²⁰ This emphasis on the need to recover the experiences of ordinary readers would be taken up only much later by historians of the book. Indeed, these accounts of literary preferences and attitudes will doubtless prove to be rich resources for future historians of reading. However, almost all of this work lacks a historical dimension.²¹

Much more surprising is the striking omission of children's experiences from studies of readership in the long eighteenth century. In many studies non-adult reading does not appear at all. In others, it is lazily conflated with adult reading. Even the most comprehensive accounts make only very limited reference to childhood reading. ²² If youthful reading is mentioned, it is usually tangentially (as in accounts of the diarist Anna Larpent's reading with her family), or considered only as it can be shown to influence what a child would grow up to write. ²³ In other studies, children's reading may

William St Clair, The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 9. The most notable online resource currently available is the Reading Experience Database: www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/ (accessed 14 January 2010).

²¹ Exceptions include Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 1837–1914 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially ch. 6 ('Reading in school'); Gretchen R. Galbraith, *Reading Lives: Reconstructing Childhood, Books, and Schools in Britain*, 1870–1920 (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); and Kathleen McDowell, 'Toward a history of children as readers, 1890–1930', *Book History*, 12 (2009), 240–65.

²³ John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the reader: prescriptions, texts and strategies in Anna Larpent's reading', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 226–45; Judith Barbour, 'The

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See, for example, Aidan Chambers, The Reluctant Reader (Oxford: Pergamon, 1969); Nicholas Tucker, The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Jack Thomson, Understanding Teenagers Reading: Reading Processes and the Teaching of Literature (Sydney: Methuen, 1986); J. A. Appleyard, Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Charles Sarland, Young People Reading: Culture and Response (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991); Christine Hall and Martin Coles, Children's Reading Choices (Routledge, 1999).

The index to Stephen Colclough's admirably wide-ranging *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695–1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), for instance, includes many sorts of readers, from actual, annotating and bourgeois, through gay, intradiegetic and invisible, to typical, working-class and women, but not, specifically, the young. In *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) only one chapter deals specifically with children (Martyn Lyons, 'New readers in the nineteenth century: women, children, workers', pp. 313–44).



8 Introduction

be briefly discussed, but typically only to support larger arguments, such as that the ending of copyright in 1774 meant that *all* kinds of British reader became familiar with the 'old canon' of seventeenth-century poets. ²⁴ There are some important exceptions. Studies of women readers, and (naturally) of education, tend to be particularly apt to include children's experiences: the work of Jacqueline Pearson, Mary Hilton, Michèle Cohen and E. Jennifer Monghan will often be cited in the chapters that follow. Jan Fergus' attention to the children who, she has found, comprised a sizable proportion of the English provincial reading audience has also been extremely useful. ²⁵ As things stand, though, our picture of the eighteenth-century child reader remains very indistinct. Richard Altick wrote in 1957 that much could be said 'on the contribution that juvenile literature made to the early instilling of a taste for reading . . . but that story requires a volume to itself'. ²⁶ His invitation has gone very largely unheeded; and, fifty years later, this book is a response to the challenge.

But attempting work that bridges the fields of book history and children's literature studies is not without its difficulties. It might even be argued that there is a structural clash between the two disciplines. Children are not, and have never been, readers in the sense that book historians usually envisage. The adult reader may be variously constructed as an ideal reader, an actual reader, a resisting reader, an implied, inscribed or informed reader. ²⁷ But all these models rely implicitly on the notion that the reader is a voluntary and independent consumer, who generally selects and acquires what he or she wishes to read, and who wishes to have some kind of relationship with the text. We can think of exceptions – adult readers presented with books, or compelled to read certain texts in certain ways, or who gain non-textual gratifications from their books. But these do not fit squarely within the normal paradigms of book history scholarship and are generally considered as special cases (if at all). Children, though, were very seldom 'normal' consumers. It is usually assumed that they seldom purchased their books themselves, nor chose their own reading (these presumptions are considered in Chapter 4). Furthermore, reading – if undertaken at all – was often done

professor and the orang-outang: Mary Shelley as a child reader', in *Frankenstein's Science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic Culture, 1780–1830*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 33–48.

²⁴ St Clair, Reading Nation, pp. 137-8.

²⁵ Jan Fergus, Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁶ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public*, 1800–1900 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 9.

²⁷ Elizabeth Freund, The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism (Methuen, 1987), p. 7.



The history of reading and the child reader

in collaboration with others, usually adults. The conscripted child reader was the norm – not only in Garrett Stewart's sense of being subtly manoeuvred by the text into the proprieties of readership, but also in the literal sense of being forced to read, to read particular texts, and to read in particular ways. 28

Nor, as we will see in Chapter 6, can we assume that children always understood or used their books in the same ways as adults. A new generation of book historians has rightly been keen to emphasise that books are objects and must be understood as such. But how much more true was this for children? Their books were often actually designed for people who could not, or would not, read. Illustrations proliferated, and the books' appeal was frequently based less on text than physical appearance – pretty binding, miniature size, moving parts. John Newbery may have been joking when he advertised books that cost nothing, 'only paying one penny for the binding', but he had hit on a truth about children's books: that their owners often understood them as material rather than textual entities.²⁹ This is why, in this study, the term 'user' is generally preferred to 'reader'. Again, one might object that some adult readers had a distinctly material understanding of their books – collectors, say, or the semi-literate – and of course some children had very textually intensive relationships with their books. Nevertheless, the fundamental assumption remains that the purpose of book history, as Stephen Colclough puts it, is to ask 'why did [readers] choose to read and how did texts change, or fail to change, "the minds and lives" of those who chose them?'30 These questions require modification when we consider children.

Even leaving aside the first half of this statement (though children often did not choose their reading), the question of reading's effect on 'minds and lives' is both especially pertinent and revealingly inappropriate in the case of the young. It is likely that children were more than any other group of readers changed by their books, for these were their first encounters with literacy and its possibilities. But it is surely not overly patronising to eighteenth-century children to say that they would not, in general, fit with the standard notions of textual effect explored by intellectual and book historians. Scholarly focus has been on the intellectual influence of books, the ways in which texts affect social mentality, bringing psychological, philosophical or political

³⁰ Colclough, *Reading Experience 1700–1840*, p. iii.

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²⁸ Garrett Stewart, Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Nurse Truelove's Christmas-Box (1750): Roscoe, John Newbery, p. 204.



10 Introduction

change. Eighteenth-century readers in particular are imagined as citizens of the 'republic of letters', a rival public sphere, a place for 'the public use of reason by private individuals', in which text can bring Enlightenment.³¹ Even when historians have considered texts as evoking responses that were emotional not rational, conservative not reformist, or subversive not complicit, the model remains rigidly causal, with text straightforwardly envisaged as occasioning a reasoned and thus intelligible mental response. But how true is this of children's reading? Children could be volatile readers, whose reading, very often, was not intellectual and absorbing, as adults' experiences have usually been imagined to be. Children were certainly deeply affected by their books, but not always in ways that can be straightforwardly ascribed to the persuasive powers of comprehended text. The old book history model, of readers deeply engaged with, and rationally affected by, text, is not quite suitable when we consider 'what texts do' to children.

AIMS, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This survey covers a long version of the 'long eighteenth century', drawing evidence from as far back as the 1660 Restoration and as far forward as the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. The main focus, however, is on the period in which the new commercial product, children's literature, was introduced and became established, from the 1740s to the 1820s or 30s, during which period the number of books being published for children increased exponentially.

No single new model of the child reader is proposed in this book. After all, just what constitutes – and who invented – the 'child' of 'children's literature' has been a subject of much debate, especially since Jacqueline Rose's 1984 *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Historians have been similarly insistent that eighteenth-century childhood varied not only according to class, gender, location, religion, and across time, but also from family to family. 'No single images can accommodate the diversity of journeys through childhood, adolescence, and youth,' wrote Harvey Graff in a study of early American childhoods.³² The idea that the early modern child was a 'miniature adult' until he or she suddenly

³¹ Roger Chartier, paraphrasing Jürgen Habermas, 'Introduction', in A History of Private Life, general editors Phillippe Ariès and Georges Duby, volume III: Passions of the Renaissance, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1989), p. 17.

³² Harvey Graff, Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 26.