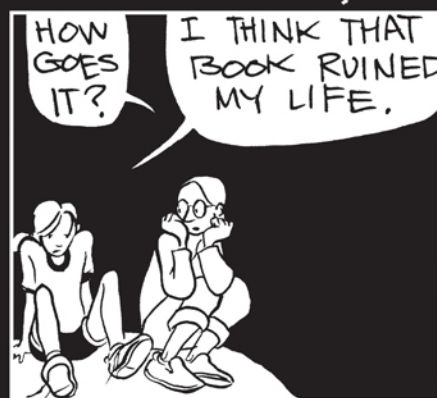


Handbook of Research on

Children's and Young Adult Literature

Edited by
Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats,
Patricia Enciso, and Christine A. Jenkins



Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature

This landmark volume is the first to bring together the leading scholarship on children's and young adult literature from three intersecting disciplines: Education, English, and Library and Information Science. Distinguished by its multidisciplinary approach, it describes and analyzes the different aspects of literary reading, texts, and contexts to illuminate how the book is transformed within and across different academic figurations of reading and interpreting children's literature.

- Part 1 considers perspectives on readers and reading literature in home, school, library, and community settings.
- Part 2 introduces analytic frames for studying young adult novels, picturebooks, indigenous literature, graphic novels, and other genres. Accompanying each chapter are commentaries on literary experiences and creative production from renowned authors and illustrators including David Wiesner, Lois Lowry, Philip Pullman, Jacqueline Woodson, Markus Zusak, Joseph Bruchac, and M.T. Anderson.
- Part 3 focuses on the social contexts of literary study, with chapters on censorship, awards, marketing, and literary museums.

Editors' part-opener essays and chapter introductions point academic and practitioner colleagues to each field's histories, contemporary concerns, and research methods, while outlining the potential for intersecting research and scholarship in all three fields.

Chapter authors write from a combination of scholarly as well as personal perspectives. Readers—scholars, teachers, librarians, parents, publishers, editors, and those on the verge of entering the field—are invited to join the conversation, to raise their own arguments, contradictions, and questions, to look for personal reflections on their own lives and their lives among youth and their books.

The singular contribution of this *Handbook* is to lay the groundwork for colleagues across disciplines to redraw the map of their separately figured worlds, thus to enlarge the scope of scholarship and dialogue as well as push ahead into uncharted territory.

Shelby A. Wolf is Professor of Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Karen Coats is Professor of English and Director of English Education at Illinois State University.

Patricia Enciso is Associate Professor of Literature, Literacy, and Equity Studies at The Ohio State University.

Christine A. Jenkins is Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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For Ashley and Lindsey—You started me on this path
and have helped to guide me every step of the way.

Shelby A. Wolf

For Will and my girls, Emily and Blair—the three of you are my story—and
for Him who provides the work and the grace with which to do it.

Karen Coats

For Mary Ann Enciso, my mother; Susan Hepler, my first children’s literature
teacher; and Brian Edmiston, my partner and colleague—storytellers and story
revelers whose words and teaching encouraged me throughout this book’s journey.

Patricia Enciso

To my two best librarians: my mother, Marjorie Jenkins Wezeman, and my partner,
Susan Searing. “Books are friends. Come, let us read!”

Christine A. Jenkins

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PREFACE

In 1977 Margaret Meek, Aidan Warlow, and Griselda Barton assembled a collection of essays on children's and young adult literature entitled *The Cool Web*. The collection brought together the visions and voices of authors and scholars, blending classic pieces with new scholarship that would later become classics. Building on earlier understandings that "...writing and reading stories for children [is] an activity of creative significance which adults could take seriously" (p. 3), they took the argument further by bringing in the readers themselves. They asked: "What is the nature of the experience which gives a young reader a memory and a past not his [sic] own, or projects him into a future he might never have anticipated?" Furthermore they argued, "It is the responsibility of all those who play a part in teaching children to read to examine the nature of certain specific aspects of the reading experience, notably those concerned with narrative, story, or fiction" (p. 5).

In the decades following the publication of this groundbreaking book, research on children's and young adult literature and literary engagement has grown at exponential speed, but in the process branched off into a variety of fields. As a result, scholars often become isolated within a discipline. For example, scholars in English and literature tend toward a text-oriented approach that historically excluded the reader from view. Scholars in Education focus on the reader, but may well ignore the insights to be gained from the text being read. And scholars in Library and Information Science are often between intellectual worldviews of either end of the text-reader continuum, because their professional work is located precisely in the intersection between texts and young readers.

In the view of theorists Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2003), the three fields we represent in this *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* and the artifacts, practices, and relationships we construct operate as distinct "figured worlds." By figured worlds, Holland and her colleagues mean "...the socially and culturally constructed realm(s) of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). We argue that the realms of interpretation for youth literature have, likewise, developed particular practices of reading, writing, and constructing audiences that carry accompanying values

for determining useful ways of describing and analyzing relations among readers, texts, and contexts.

We are interested in what is considered "normal" practice regarding the teaching of children's and young adult literature in our disciplines, how the book is transformed within and across different academic figurations of reading and interpreting children's literature. We ask, "What 'gets accomplished' and what is valued about books and readers from the locations of these different figurations of interpretation?" Thus, the purpose of this *Handbook* is to bring scholars representing all three disciplines to describe and analyze different aspects of literary reading, texts, and contexts.

For all of us the book is a central "pivot" (Holland et al., 2003, p. 61) through which it is possible for us to focus our conversations and examine what we know and how we know it. In general, we recognize the book as a place we can all turn to as we consider the changing forms, purposes, and social practices that accompany research and scholarship in children's literature. For example, we are all interested in award-winning books, but we differ in how, where, and with whom we value their inclusion in our scholarship. We argue that a view of our fields as figured worlds can help us begin to examine the continuities in our practices that create boundaries, as we also point to the edges and intersections that could be productively exploited for expanding our conversations—and the scholarship of children's and young adult literature.

In Part 1, we focus on the position of the reader, but in relation with changing forms of literature and contexts. As a way to understand the evolving meaning of reader and reading, we frame the meaning of childhood, adolescence, and reading in historical and contemporary contexts, describing ways youth read with adults and peers, both inside and outside school boundaries. Across this section, we engage the following questions: Where and how do young people become readers? How are youth and books defined and how are those definitions changing? In what ways can familial and institutional efforts influence or even boost access to and interest in literary reading? And how do youth, who recognize and celebrate their racialized and multilingual identities, move across different spaces to make sense of themselves as readers of literary texts? How do adults, in schools, libraries, and communities, assist

youth in their efforts to reach out to new possibilities for themselves and others within the world?

Part 2 concentrates on the book, but again not in an effort to turn away from reader or context. Here we concentrate on literary criticism—various kinds, various genres, various sociopolitical lenses. Critical here will be the evolving nature of the literature—often to meet the needs of the changing reader and the changing view of what the reader wants and needs within a rapidly changing world. As Bruner (2005) explains: “We know all too clearly already that the world of the future will *not* be a stable and easily predictable one. It’s such a world that we must have in mind in thinking about our pedagogy. How do we go about preparing a next generation for a world of expanding possibilities?” And this is certainly true of the kinds of books that children and young adults read to find sustenance and possible answers to their many questions while raising more questions in turn. To this end, these chapters, as well as a few in Part 3, feature the perspectives of tradebook authors and illustrators who describe what they perceive to be “points of departure” for new narrative and illustrative forms, new ways of including multimedia, and new topics.

Part 3 is devoted to the context and the larger world that surrounds the multiple connections among books and youth. How do books get into—or not get into—the hands and minds of youth? In what contexts do reader-book connections take place? Under what conditions do these connections flourish or languish? We’ll acknowledge the critical translation of children’s literature around the globe, the business of literature and the power of publishing houses and media, the grass roots and institutional connections with censorship, as well as the awards, review journals, websites, and museums that are devoted to the preservation and proliferation of literature. Children’s and young adult books have multiple audiences that include not only young people and the adults around them, but also scholars who study the literature from an even wider range of research traditions.

Because the international scholars and tradebook authors and illustrators represented here come from widely diverse perspectives, we’ve asked them to raise arguments, contradictions, and questions—to trouble rather than settle issues in definitive ways. We’ve encouraged them to shift away from the isolation of normal practices within a discipline and up the ante on the theoretical possibili-

ties that might result when knowledgeable people come together for good conversation. Most unique, perhaps, for a *Handbook of Research*, we’ve asked our authors to write from a combination of scholarly as well as personal perspectives. While some chose to remain more academic, others let us into the interior worlds of lives lived in books for the young.

Knowing that books can never lift off the page without readers, we ask *our* readers—scholars, teachers, librarians, parents, publishers, editors, and those on the verge of entering the field—to join the conversation, to raise your own arguments, contradictions, and questions, to look for personal reflections on your own life lived or about to be lived with youth and their books. Though we have carefully ordered the chapters in the sequence that made the most sense to us, we hope that as readers, you will move around the text as you will. To aid in this process and following the lead of Meek and colleagues (1977) in *The Cool Web*, we have provided introductions for each chapter—brief insights into the sights and sounds of particular arguments. We’ve set a course, but hope you will navigate your own way, stopping first perhaps at favorite places of interest, but then hopefully moving to other ports that may offer tantalizing ways to widen your own perspective.

For far too long the fields of English, Library and Information Science, and Education have pushed ahead in their various directions—exploring theoretical ideas, conducting wide-ranging research, writing books and articles, and attending conferences within our separate figured worlds. We’ve rarely journeyed out of the small spaces of our own circles. It is our hope that this *Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature* will enable our colleagues across disciplines to redraw the map of our separately figured worlds so we may enlarge the scope of our scholarship and dialogue as well as push ahead into uncharted waters.

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Part I

THE READER

The book may be at rest when found on a shelf, in an adult's hands, at home, or in a classroom, but young readers are on the move and they often pull the book out of its stillness into a whirl of play, voices, media, and memories. The image of the silent, isolated child-reader has dominated reading theories and pedagogies over the centuries, but as scholars show across this section on The Reader, that idyll was wholly constructed from the presumption that words on a page can exist only in the mind.

Along with the silent reader, another image usually springs to mind of a Madonna-like mother and child, at rest, leaning in toward a book. Such images have been popularized today by the “Read to your bunny” campaign, spearheaded by author and illustrator Rosemary Wells. A parallel campaign, aimed at young adolescents, featuring celebrity athletes and film stars happily looking up from their favorite novel, suggests that the child will grow beyond the reach of home and need a more peer-oriented, popular base for motivating a love of books. In fact, never mind the poster campaigns, publishers have already learned that “book trailers,” styled after film trailers, can take the book to where many youth spend a great deal of time—on Youtube and social media internet sites.

The reader is moving, and educators, researchers, and publishers are in a hurry to catch up. But a single perspective on how reading should be experienced and what it should look like will be inadequate for understanding the histories, thought processes, and social relationships that inform all that makes reading an integral part of youth experience. The truth is, reading is as much a social, political, and embodied experience as it is cognitive and critical. Cognitive views on reading rely on the belief that

the mind is schematically organized and seeks reason and form, while social, cultural, and political theories understand reading as an effort, and often a struggle, to establish one's vision and experiences as meaningful and valued. From both theoretical angles, the reader is active; but each has a different orientation to the person—the fully embodied and social being—who is interpreted along with the book.

Many teachers and educational researchers look to young people and their social worlds to understand what connects them to reading; but as national policies impose more restrictions on extensive literary reading and focus increasingly on testing outcomes, they often worry most about, and organize research and interventions around, the cognitive domains of reading (e.g., word identification, comprehension skills, fluency). So where does that leave younger readers who are subject to an ever-widening range of theories, practices, and policies—what Foucault (1988) would describe as “technologies of reading”?

For some, their school and public libraries remain the single most important places for them to discover a favorite author, picturebooks, nonfiction literature, and glorious shelves full of graphic novels and manga. For others, no book found in school has yet told their stories, so literary worlds become available in places that innovative and activist teachers create with youth: like the reading club at a community center for LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, & Questioning) teens, young adults, and allies; or a class of first generation immigrant teachers who find the poetry and literary legacy of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the online archives of El Centro; and the second generation Filipino fifth graders in Los Angeles,

who return to their family's oral narratives of migration and education to reconstruct a story of dignity for themselves and their classmates.

Vital places for reading, whether in community centers, online, or in classrooms, are usually structured by an emphasis on emergent understanding over finalized, predetermined meaning. Social psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1987) suggested that two forms of sense-making are important to learning: the first, translated as "sense," can be understood as a storm cloud of thought and the second as "meaning" or what eventually becomes represented as a stable and unified idea or concept (Smagorinsky, 2001, p. 145). Given opportunities to engage in what Ricoeur (1983) calls "configurational acts" of reading, sense and meaning combine to create a composite understanding, distributed among readers that situates some of what is known about a story as changeable across circumstances, times, and people (sense), and other ideas about the story as articulated and held relatively constant (meaning).

Much of the pleasure and challenge of reading literature lies in finding out what sense and meanings can be made of another world, how that world intersects with one's own and others' worlds, and how it might be possible to think and move as someone in that world. These are exploratory, inquiry-oriented questions that rely on readers' willingness to risk being simultaneously engaged with their own life's memories and sensations, and "outside themselves," bringing their feelings to others' lives and to a temporary, imagined self.

An individual reader might find this configurational experience wholly enjoyable and engaging, but in a group situation, where diverse and differentially valued identities are also in play, many young people learn that unless they offer the predetermined meanings of a traditional literary analysis or go along with the prevailing valences of power and popularity in classroom interaction, they really have nothing to add to a discussion of literature. Reading experiences, even when they are supposed to be open to discussion, can become, again, isolating and exclusive instead of widening readers' approaches to sense and meaning. And even among those students whose voices are most often heard, the literature often becomes a site for rehearsing and reproducing dominant social norms and values rather than a forum for questioning assumptions or social status.

Too often, reading and literature education are restricted by finalized meanings that leave teachers and students on the outside of literary worlds, moving across words instead of through them; and missing altogether the many narratives and ways of viewing the world that youth bring to a story. Indeed, such narratives are not all that may be silenced. Eva-Maria Simms (Chapter 2) points out that although reading produces a wider net for understanding and imagining experiences, it also carries with it the loss of genuine interest we feel through our embodied experience of intense conversation and oral storytelling. When

reading and readers are regulated by implicit and sometimes explicit beliefs about what and how a reader should sound, sit, move, and even look, such losses multiply and categories of deficiency, illiteracy, and "at risk" become a taken for granted part of life with books.

Perhaps it is not surprising to find, then, that the most promising responses to disengagement in reading are those pedagogies that get everyone moving again—through image-making, dramatization, film-making, social advocacy, and creative writing. The "lived through experience" of a story as Louise Rosenblatt (1978) described it, does not have to be created alone. Stories were shared, enacted, and remembered long before they were written down; in part because a good story, well told and well acted, will hold an audience of peers over hours as they collectively step out of "here and now" and create "if." When a story becomes shared again through drawing, or as an enacted exchange between characters, it is possible to look together at the ways one moment holds many stories, raises questions, makes us feel, and makes us want to examine what we thought was true.

As several chapters on secondary students' reading and writing show, the pleasure of making stories has been revived with gusto, but not necessarily in school settings. While "disciplinary discourses" (Lewis & Dockter, Chapter 6) in contemporary classrooms reproduce the same reading lists, assignments, and forms of analysis instituted some 50 years ago, young people are moving to online spaces, where they can freely access the stories they care about and create their own book reviews, blogs, and fanfictions (Dutro & McKiver, Chapter 7). The question of equity and access, however, makes such creative endeavors online a mirror of the economics of literacy associated with early 17th- to late 19th-century homes, where parents with economic resources were able to foster their youngsters' literary sensibilities with books, paper, art materials, and games. Those children creatively remade and invented new stories as they enjoyed the comforts of their familiar surroundings. They could run with stories.

Today, the pleasure of moving into and through stories is afforded to those young people whose adult caregivers, teachers, and communities recognize and support the inventiveness of youth narratives, whether these are in the form of digital videos, theatrical performances, or poetry slams. Those youth might also travel with their stories across the global economy of digital media. But other children, whose literary and digital experiences are more limited by availability or shortsighted use of media and literature, are not simply "out of the game" because of economic disparities; they, too, should have every opportunity to shake a story from its stillness, whether that story was made by their friend, an author, or their grandparent, and move it—out loud, in action, through images, and rhythm—into a place that invites them to shape life with others.

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Children Reading at Home

An Historical Overview

Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles

University of Glasgow and University of Cambridge

Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles, well known for their work together over the years, provide an historical account of parent/child reading. From a framework of connections, creativity, and critique, they demonstrate the similarities and differences in children reading at home over time—both children of privilege and those who had a hard time finding any books at all. The authors begin with their high adventure and close scholarly detective work in unveiling the reading lives of Jane Johnson and her family, and they end their chapter with modern day parents moving with their children into 21st century technologies. From “reading cards” to digital books, Arizpe and Styles offer us an insider’s view into the reading patterns in homes across the centuries.

...the ephemera of childhood...reside almost entirely in memory. Blocks, card sets, small chips and game parts, pictures torn or cut from magazines...lose their value and are thrown out. But what might such ephemera tell us of what went on in the nursery, before the hearth, or in the corner of rooms where children were sent to be entertained or to entertain themselves. (Heath, 1997, p. 17)

Though the ephemera are often missing, other sources sometimes lead us into understanding of the relationship between children and books. For example, an essay by Robert Louis Stevenson (1992) drew attention to the Scottish poet Robert Burns’s home-schooled education and the influence of his father on his reading. Although a poor man, William Burns took pains to educate his children by borrowing books for them “and he felt it his duty to

supplement (their knowledge of theology) by a dialogue of his own composition, where his own private shade of orthodoxy was exactly represented.” Stevenson wrote: “Such was the influence of this good and wise man that his household became a school to itself, and neighbours who came into the farm at mealtime would find the whole family, father, brothers, and sisters, helping themselves with one hand, and holding a book in the other” (p. 89).

This chapter seeks to celebrate, understand, and cast some light on other such enlightened parents as well as the practices of children’s home reading between the 18th and the 21st centuries. Given the enormity of the field, we have had to be selective in the accounts discussed here. However, we were guided by the fact that there are relatively few longitudinal studies of children’s development

as readers, particularly before the 20th century. We were greatly helped by secondary sources such as biographies and histories of reading and literacy. Our primary sources included personal journals, letters, autobiographies, and other published texts; in some cases, there were also artifacts, such as drawings or teaching materials.

Given the sketchy and uneven corpus of research, we have tried to provide some structure by organizing accounts in terms of particular families for whom there exists more information, usually parents teaching their own children to read or encouraging, supervising, and observing children's early reading in the home context. However, we have also included some more individualistic accounts, particularly from selected writers in the 19th century, drawing on their early reading autobiographies and recollections of their own childhoods. The accounts from the 18th and 19th centuries have been patched together, some pieces larger and more colourful than others, some rather threadbare, but together providing a strong enough pattern to allow us to imagine what reading in the home was like for some families in the past. Accounts from the 20th century are easier to find with parent observers offering the most structured and detailed descriptions of their children's early reading, which is why we have given them a large section of this chapter.

While we do touch on schooling, our emphasis remains on childhood reading in the home. Inevitably, those who have taken the time and trouble to both educate their children at home and to document the process have been those who were economically and educationally advantaged. That means that most of our evidence is middle class in origin. We know, however, from Spufford's (1985) pioneering work on 17th century literacy, as well as the research of other historians and sociologists, that domestic literacy also went on in impoverished households, and we are keen to tell their stories, too. For example, there are fascinating accounts of the early reading experiences of working-class people in the home, but these tend to be less detailed and comprehensive than those we have consulted elsewhere.

The writers of this chapter have to own up to both the Anglocentric scope of this study and giving most space to British evidence. While wishing to offer an international outlook, to do justice to such wide scope would be hard to achieve in a single chapter. We also know the research coming from the UK much more intimately than elsewhere. We have, therefore, compromised by providing an account that includes data that was relatively easy to obtain from North America, Australia, New Zealand, and some parts of Europe, while concentrating on the UK. It is also important to bear in mind that not only do other cultures have different views on reading practices and the value of early literacy (e.g., Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984), but also that wide differences can occur within neighbouring communities in western societies, as Heath's (1983) seminal research has shown.¹ What

follows is fairly typical of the history of domestic literacy in western countries elsewhere, and we hope that it will provide food for thought in considering reading in the home in other cultures as well.

Connections, Creativity, and Criticism

In their fascinating study, *The Braid of Literature*, Shelby Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath (1992) select three key characteristics shared by Wolf's daughters who had been closely observed reading in the home by their mother: connections, creativity, and criticism. The notion of *connections* was mainly concerned with the text-to-life associations spontaneously made by the young readers. The links that these readers spontaneously make reveal the deep impact of reading—almost like a lens through which we view our own lives, allowing us to reflect on our experiences and thereby deepen our enjoyment and our learning. An important part of *creativity* refers to the performative aspects of reading (using voice, gesture and movement), which were borne out again and again in our research as adults recalled their own or their children's fascination with storytelling, role playing, and toy theatres or puppets. However, our understanding of creativity also includes all the created "artifacts" related to play and learning that stem from reading, much of the "ephemera" which Heath refers to in the quotation that opens this chapter—a spontaneous re-working of narrative, characters, and language into other media, such as writing, drawing, artwork and, more recently, computer-generated images. Finally, *criticism* refers to the evaluative responses of children to the texts they read; indeed, we would question whether children are actually reading if there is not, in Dorothy Butler and Marie Clay's (1979) words, communication "between one mind and another" (p. 5). We believe that Wolf and Heath (1992) have not only identified some of the most important aspects of what it means to read, but also those features that young readers themselves think important. Therefore, in this chapter, we attempt to trace connections, creativity, and criticism throughout the accounts we have found of children reading in the home across three centuries.

Family Case Studies from the 18th Century

She has a little Compendium of Greek & Roman History in her Head; & Johnson says her Cadence, Variety and choice of Tones in reading Verse are surpassed by nobody, not even Garrick himself: it was Pope's Ode to Musick that she read to him. (Hester Thrale Piozzi, cited in Hyde, 1977, p. 40, on her daughter Queeney, age six)

In this section, we discuss some early case studies of domestic literacy where either the mother or father took a special interest in the domestic education of their children and where there is enough data on which to draw. Apart from the special case of Jane Johnson, about whom the

authors have a particular interest and for whom extensive archival material is available, each of these families has at least one person in it who is a published author; often there is more than one. We focus, therefore, on *family* portraits of reading in the homes of the Johnsons, the Mathers, Richardsons, Thrales, Edgeworths and, finally, the Taylors who take us into the first decade of the 19th century. While it can be argued that these were rather exceptional families (for different reasons), it is also true that they reflected the thinking of their time about the teaching of reading and in some cases, were themselves influential in developing reading practices in the home.

We start with a brief introduction to each of these families and then proceed to discuss the patterns that cut across them, such as the reading environment of the home, everyday literacy practices, and the books and other texts that were available, as well as broadly considering the notions of connections, creativity, and critique. Although we may not have much evidence of children's responses to books and methods of teaching, or even know whether they enjoyed the activities provided for them or became accomplished readers, the details that can be gleaned from these historical cases do provide some basis for a general description of the literacy teaching that was going on in homes in both England and the United States in the 18th century.

The Families

Our first historical case study has to be that of Jane Johnson (1706–1759) and her children, and in this account we will continue to refer to her by her first and second name in order to avoid confusion with Samuel Johnson who is mentioned below. As far as we know, it is the earliest and richest archive on domestic literacy in the 18th century and the authors' in-depth research has shown it is invaluable for understanding home reading during this period. Jane Johnson was a well read and pious woman, a "genteel lady," married to the clergyman, Woolsey Johnson who lived in Olney, in Buckinghamshire and later in Witham-on-the-Hill, in Lincolnshire.

As well as the Nursery Library, which contains the reading materials she made for her children, there are many other noteworthy documents in this archive, including a story she wrote for her children in 1744, "A Very Pretty Story" (2001) and family letters and journals. We will highlight the most relevant findings from this nursery library, but because we cannot do justice to this extraordinary archive in a couple of paragraphs, we refer the reader to *Reading Lessons from the Eighteenth Century* (Arizpe & Styles, 2006) and to the Lilly Library website.²

Of all the case studies in this section, Jane Johnson's is the only one that specifically points to methods for teaching reading. Letters reveal that Johnson not only taught her own children to read as soon as they could talk, but that she greatly enjoyed doing so and approached her task through a mixture of methods. As well as reading

and writing, "classifying, observing, and reflecting in the pursuit of understanding mathematics, botany, zoology, philosophy, and theology" (Heath, in Arizpe & Styles, 2006, p. 204) were part of Jane Johnson's curriculum for her children, all of which contributed to their becoming highly literate adults.

Slightly earlier than Jane Johnson is the case of Cotton Mather (1663–1728) and his family. Better known for his numerous sermons and other religious works, this Puritan minister in Boston was intensely interested in the education of his children. Although he had sixteen children, only two of them survived him; one of them, Samuel, was born in 1706, the same year as Jane Johnson. Mather's diaries, covering about 21 years of his life, provide a detailed description of both his methods for teaching reading and writing and his reflections on those methods. E. Jennifer Monaghan's study (1991) of his diaries examines these as well as the general literacy activities, which involved all family members, including the family's three slaves.

Although we do not know how his children learned to read, Mather had a clear idea of his role as instructor: giving specific assignments, modelling ways to comprehend text, and constructing "bridges between life, language and literacy" (Monaghan, 1991, p. 364). Even though he quite clearly directed their learning, Mather also allowed the children some choice and self-expression. We do not know what his children thought of his methods, but the few glimpses there are of those who survived to adulthood show that they also believed in the importance of reading and writing. Mather's case provides evidence of how connections, critique and, to the extent permitted by the religious context, some limited creativity were present in this family of readers and writers.

One of the most popular authors in Jane Johnson's generation and beyond was Samuel Richardson (1689–1761). Richardson's work as a writer and publisher, as well as his interest in pedagogy and children's reading (he composed a version of *Aesop's Fables* in 1740) must have influenced his own daughters' education. Naomi Tadmor (1996) draws on Richardson's correspondence to build up a picture of reading activities in his household that had religious and moral, as well as social, purposes.

A close friend of many writers of her day, Hester Thrale (later Piozzi, 1741–1821) started keeping a journal of her children's progress, originally called "The Children's Book," in 1766 when her first child, Hester Maria Thrale (known as Queeney) was two years old. It is likely that she was encouraged to keep this record of her children's progress by Dr. Samuel Johnson whom she met in 1765 and who soon became a keen family friend as well as tutor to Queeney. Mrs. Thrale's journal was kept over 13 years (sometimes with long gaps between entries) as she produced 10 more children. As she also recounted happenings of other family members, the name of the book was changed to the "Family Book" in due course.

While Queeney's intellect seems to have thrived in

the hothouse atmosphere created for her, the demanding educational expectations of her mother and her lack of sympathy with Queeney as a person clearly made the child most unhappy. This reminds us how much of the domestic literacy project is affective and contrasts keenly with Jane Johnson's approach to teaching her children where her interest in educating the child in the widest sense is evident and the word "love" predominates. There were few text-to-life connections made for poor Queeney in her rigorous educational schedule. Feats of memory seemed to be valued more than understanding, while creative aspects of learning and critical reading were not encouraged.

The Edgeworths were another exceptionally literate family whose practices are well documented and were made public through the writing of two of its most famous members: Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817) and his daughter, Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849). His four marriages resulted in 22 children with nearly 50 years between the birth of his first son in 1764 and his last son in 1812. Maria was the second eldest and, although she never married or had children of her own, through her siblings she had vast experience of children, which she drew on in writing textbooks with her father and in her own stories.

Edgeworth's initial project was to find a method for learning to read, but it soon went beyond this and he and his second wife, Honora, conceived a plan to teach scientific and technical knowledge as well as morality through stories for children. In a sense, they are a case of parent-observers, trying out their lessons on real children, which other educational thinkers of the period did not do and registering their reactions to new knowledge and experiences. In this way, they would gather empirical evidence to support their methods, thus "making education an experimental science" (Maria Edgeworth, quoted in Butler, 1972, p. 65). Perhaps for the first time, the actual responses of children—albeit not to imaginative literature but to didactic texts—was being taken into account. As Maria grew up and after the death of Honora, she and her father began to work as partners in this educational enterprise.

Another outstanding family were the Taylors of Essex and Suffolk that, like the Edgeworths, was busy with reading, writing, and educating children (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). Isaac Taylor (1759–1824) came from a family of goldsmiths who were "steeped in a literate, religious milieu" (p. 61). He married Ann Martin and they settled with their growing family in Lavenham, Suffolk, where their "two eldest bright and uninhibited little girls were much admired. The family had little capital but education, skill, and a formidable energy fuelled by active religion that centred on raising their children and enlightening their community" (p. 61). Later they moved to Colchester, Essex, where there were always apprentices and pupils living in the house alongside the family. The daughters of the family, Ann (1782–1866) and Jane Taylor (1783–1824), are now remembered for their poetry for children published in the first decade of the 19th century.

Literate Environments

There is evidence that in all these households, reading and writing were regular practices throughout the day and that these involved, to different extents, the aspects of creativity, connections, and critique. In the Mather family, reading aloud was part of the daily routine, from the reading of Scripture during morning and evening prayers to lessons and the reading of what the father deemed suitable devotional books before bedtime. Monaghan (1991) provides details from Mather's diaries, which show how literacy was a communal activity, and fostered interactions between Mather and his wife and children, but also among siblings as they read to each other. In the Richardson household, reading also took place at various times during the day, beginning before breakfast with Mrs. Richardson reading aloud from the Psalms and after breakfast, when she heard her daughters reading their lessons for the day. In the evenings, reading was often combined with other activities such as needlework or drawing (Tadmor, 1996). Children in the house would therefore be listening to a variety of texts during the day and in the evening—from magazines and plays, to Milton, Locke, and Richardson himself. We have speculated that conversation would probably have followed reading, thus allowing for making connections between texts and life, the moral and the literary.

Marilyn Butler (1972) describes a similar scene in the Edgeworth household in her detailed biography of Maria Edgeworth:

At certain times of day—after breakfast, for example, and in the evening—the family gathered around the library table. The children were offered books to read (adult books, necessarily) on any desired subject—history, biography, travels, literature, or science. Short passages that were considered to be within a particular child's comprehension had already been marked for him [sic]. When the child had read the passage, the adult teaching him would go carefully over the sense of it, word-by-word and idea-by-idea. The atmosphere at these sessions was pleasant, and the child was encouraged to ask questions.... Intellectual work from breakfast time until the family went to bed was executed in the communal situation, and accompanied by the hubbub of questions and answers, or the steady flow of reading aloud. (p. 99)

One gets a slightly different impression from Mrs. Thrale's diary. She had been a prodigious scholar herself and she expected great things of Queeney, so she carefully supervised what would now be considered a taxing curriculum for a pre-school child. Although there must have been a great deal of reading and writing going on in this household, there is less of a sense of it being done as a communal activity and more as direct instruction in subjects such as geography and mathematics. At the age of barely three, her mother described Queeney as a "miserable poor Speller & can scarce read a word" (Hyde, 1977, p. 26), a comment that suggests the learning environment was neither relaxed nor entertaining for the children.

On the other hand, the description of the Taylors again stresses the familial literate atmosphere. As well as taking up the ministry and working hard at engraving, Isaac Taylor also managed to write books of travel, nature, and advice for young men, and produced learning aids such as flash cards with anatomical drawings to be coloured in. Even so, Isaac spent time with his children “at meal times, for lessons, in the workroom, on daily walks or special excursions, family evenings and amateur theatricals” (Davidoff & Hall, 1987, p. 61). The children also enjoyed the companionship of their mother who regularly read aloud at meal times. After raising a large family, Ann turned author in middle age writing popular books on domestic life. As the literary essayist, E. V. Lucas (1905), suggested, “It was practically inevitable that Ann and Jane Taylor were to write, for writing was in the blood” (p. v).

Books and Other Texts

We don’t have a description of daily reading practices in Jane Johnson’s family, but judging from the existence of the extensive hand-made reading materials and the books we know she was reading, it is likely that literacy events would have permeated this household as well. It was probably during the 1740s that Jane Johnson created her extraordinary “nursery library” for her four children: Barbara (1738), George (1740), Robert (1745), and Charles (1748). This library comprises more than four hundred “reading cards”, most of them decorated with “scraps” painstakingly cut out of lottery sheets and coloured in by hand and then framed with Dutch floral paper. Some of them also have a threaded cord on the top probably in order to hang around the nursery. She also made a couple of little books that in the manner of primers of the day, included letters, simple words, and short sentences. Given that Jane Johnson used some of the material from published primers, we can assume that some of these were also available in this household.

It is probable that other mothers would have created similar artifacts for teaching their children to read because they were encouraged to do so by some of the pedagogues fashionable at the time, such as John Locke and Charles Rollin. Mrs. Thrale, for example, made her daughter a “little book” in 1766. Yet, Richard Edgeworth was dismissive of the books and primers available at the time except for Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children from Two to Three Years Old*, which he liked for its simplicity, clarity, and familiar settings (Butler, 1972, p. 61). Following this method, two of his daughters apparently learned to read in six weeks, and this led Edgeworth to begin to formulate his own theories on the subject.

He was influenced not only by the Lunar society’s notions on scientific inquiry, but also by the very early ideas on educational psychology. He proposed that texts for children must be pleasing and therefore founded on children’s natural preferences for stories. Although the children did read some books by the new generation of women writers

such as Mrs. Trimmer’s *Fabulous Histories*, Edgeworth did not find them intellectual enough for his children, so he and Maria set out writing their own stories for them as well as for cousins and other family friends.

Performance, the Visual Image, and Other Creative Activities

In the case of the Thrale family, performance mainly took the form of recitation in front of adults as a way of displaying the child’s prodigious learning. Nor was Queeney the only prodigy in this family as Mrs Thrale recounted how her son, Henry, then four years old, “reads the Psalms quite smartly, seldom stopping to spell his Way; can repeat the Grammar to the end of the Genders...& reads vastly better than his sister did” (Hyde, 1977, p. 45).

Fortunately, Jane Johnson’s nursery library provides richer evidence of creative performance. Wolf and Heath (1992) distinguish between the creativity of moving from text to performance and the making of artifacts involving visual images; there are indications of both in some of the households in this section. Jane’s nursery library was clearly intended not only for learning to read, but also for developing the genteel arts of conversation and performance. It is almost certain that this was extended to the reading aloud and enactment of some of these texts which would have involved gestures and other dramatic expressions, and the use of voice from the hushed rhythm of a lullaby to exclamations. Heath (in Arizpe & Styles, 2006) shows that the “play” in many of Johnson’s texts is influenced by the public stage in the use of postures, expressions, and backdrops.

One of the many notable aspects of the Jane Johnson Nursery Library is the use of visuals, particularly the images on the cards. The cut-outs, which beautifully illustrate the cards, are not only eye-catching but are also full of potential for discussion and storytelling as they can be related either to the text or to other stories. Jane was aware of the importance of images in teaching reading, but was also using them to foster aesthetic awareness and creativity, which included drawing, painting, writing, and the careful construction of little books and paper games.

Text-to-Life Connections, Intertextuality, and Critique

Just as Wolf and Heath (1992) found in their portrait of modern young readers who made connections between their lives and what they read, the Jane Johnson archive reveals that there were many connections for the children to make as they read and played their way through their nursery library. The materials are distinctive in that they reflect everyday conversational language and also their inclusion of ordinary familiar experiences. The texts sometimes include the names of the Johnson children themselves and refer to particular events in the household. The inclusion of familiar stories and jokes, games, street-cries, and names of people the family

knew encouraged connections between life and text and resulted in material that was more interesting and amusing for the children—and it made religious and moral topics more accessible as well. The children would also be able to recognize intertextual references, particularly to the Bible, but also to Aesop's fables, nursery rhymes, and chapbook tales.

The aspect of critique is also apparent in this archive. As her commonplace book shows, Jane Johnson herself could be very critical of other texts and given the nature of the narratives and images from the Nursery Library, we can assume that she encouraged her children to talk and write about the texts, ask questions, and express their opinions. The correspondence and journals that the Johnson siblings maintained throughout their lifetimes reveal them to have become critical and intelligent readers as well as can be seen in their frequent comments on books or poems which they recommended (or not) to each other. Their writing reveals a similar use of wit, humor, and irony to that which appears in both the personal and the didactic texts their mother wrote.

Although Mather's belief that "improving in Reading" meant "improving in Goodness" is similar to that of Jane Johnson, reading in his household seems to have been more limited to strictly religious material. However, he often assigned his children books or compositions that he considered were particularly relevant to their situation (for example, to deal with bereavement). Mather also encouraged his children to comprehend and reflect on their reading; in his case, he commented on the verses or passages, turning them into prayers or writing about them. Even when his children were at school, he continued with his own educational program and encouraged them to write their own prayers as well as "agreeable and valuable Things" in the equivalent of a commonplace book. He provided them with material from both devotional and scientific texts to copy but also encouraged them to transcribe passages that had "most affected" them.

While his motivation was different to that of Jane Johnson and Mather, Richard Edgeworth also proposed that children should be capable of understanding the experiences of the characters in the story and relating them to his or her own experience:

So long as the child responded to what he met in his reading, he would himself, by the associative process of the human mind, combine that experience with an infinitely proliferating number of fresh impressions. He would relate the significantly chosen single instance to analogous cases: intellectually and imaginatively, what he read would become part of him. (Butler, 1972, pp. 62–63)

As we arrive at the end of the 18th century, we see that even though changing views of childhood and pedagogy led to variations in the way teaching occurred at home, those three aspects of reading—connections, creativity and critique—are still interwoven through the accounts from the 19th century.

Individual Accounts of Becoming Readers at Home in the 19th Century

It gives my grandchildren so much pleasure to look at pictures and hear me tell stories about them; how natural therefore that I should go on to paste loose pictures, with appropriate texts, on to sheets of paper, either in the form of a letter, or like a book. (Adolph Drewsen, cited in Dal, 1984, n.p.)

By the beginning of the 19th century, efforts to create a literate population were evident in the Sunday School movement in England and the development of church schools from various religious groups that taught thousands of children to read and write. The rationale behind universal literacy was less founded on notions of equality of opportunity than the need for an educated workforce and the fear of their radicalization. In England the government established a national system of compulsory education for children between the ages of five and eleven in 1870. A similar growth of educational institutions occurred in Europe and the United States where schools were established for girls and women, for African Americans, and for aspiring teachers. By the late 19th century, the widespread belief in the power of education to mold individual character and improve human life was evident. Parents were encouraged to send their children to the professionals to be educated and to use commercial methods and textbooks rather than teach them at home.

Changes in technology and printing also influenced the materials that were available in the home. The beginning of the 19th century saw a growth of interest in print and a series of new inventions which enabled the printing process to operate more rapidly and efficiently, mainly through the application of steam-power to printing presses, which also made longer print-runs possible. This meant that all manner of commercial printing (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, chapbooks, and broadsides) could reach a larger audience. Techniques for making and reproducing illustration also improved and added to the appeal of printed materials through finer and, in some cases, colored images. Even poorer families would have had the opportunity to acquire some of this printed material, thus increasing the opportunities for children becoming literate from an earlier age.

Writers as Young Readers

Detailed accounts of domestic literacy seem to be thin on the ground in the 19th century in comparison to what came before and after. However, there are rich pickings on reading in the home when one examines the memoirs, autobiographies, and accounts of authors' early lives.

"A verra takkin' (appealing) laddie, but ill (difficult) to guide" (Eisler, 1999, p. 22) was the astute verdict on George Gordon Byron (1788–1824) by his Scottish relatives. Byron spent his early years living above a shop in Aberdeen, a stubborn, fearless, "holy terror"! As a little boy, Byron was subject to a beloved and devout

scripture-quoting nurse who “introduced him to the beauty of biblical language” (Longford, 1976, p. 6). His fellow Scot, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94), “suffered” the same advantage, and both were without siblings. We know something of Stevenson’s interest in reading from his letters, essays, and his poems of childhood, *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885). His formal education was extremely patchy—most of what he learned was at home from books.

John Clare (1793–1864) was a farm labourer who became one of the finest Romantic poets. He enjoyed a brief publishing success but finished his life in poverty, indeed, in a lunatic asylum. Clare’s poetry was inspired by the countryside around him, but he did write about his early reading experiences for his publisher, John Taylor, on which we draw.

Charles Dickens (1812–70) wrote constantly about children, childhood, and schooling in fiction mainly aimed at adults. Dickens enjoyed little conventional schooling himself; when he was still a youngster, his father went into prison for debt and the young Charles was sent to work at a blacking factory for about a year. Dickens was outraged both at having to endure such treatment *and* being denied an education.

We could have provided many examples from Europe, but we will only mention one, known not only as a writer but also as a storyteller, performer, and creator of extraordinary paper cuts. Among the few factual details that Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) provides in his autobiography is that his father was fond of reading and among the books he owned were the *Bible*, Ludwig Holberg’s comedies, and the *Arabian Nights*. Andersen went to school near his home in Odense around the age of five, having already been taught to read in the infant school and, like all the authors mentioned above, he soon developed into a voracious reader.

Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855) and her highly gifted siblings spent much of their lives isolated from wider society, partly because of the remoteness of where they lived, partly because their mother died young, and partly because their eccentric clergyman father was a loner largely leaving the children to their own devices. Another talented, highly literate family about which there is copious information are the Rossettis; the children (Maria, Gabriele, William, and Christina (1830–94) were quick to learn to read and soon became devoted to books. This is unsurprising as they were brought up in an affectionate, demonstrative, bookish Italian/English bilingual family. Three of the four children went on to become gifted writers.

Reading the Word and the World

Examples of writers using reading to reflect on their own lives and connect themselves sympathetically to wider humanity are legion. Books gave these children what they needed to develop wide knowledge of the world; imagina-

tion, tenacity, and natural talent did the rest. Indeed, Byron had most of the books of the Bible under his belt before he was eight, preferring the drama of the Old Testament “for the New struck me as a task, but the other a pleasure” (Eisler, 1999, p. 26). During Aberdeen’s freezing, wind-lashed winters, the *Arabian Nights* offered escape into desert tents and palace harems. At the very end of his life Byron remembered Knolle’s *Turkish History* as “one of the first books that gave me pleasure as a child; and I believe it...gave, perhaps, the oriental colouring which is observed in my poetry” (p. 26).

Byron and his mother were both avid readers, she a devourer of newspapers, periodicals, and novels and a passionate believer in the French revolution. As Eisler (1999) put it, “Byron literally learned his republican sympathies at his mother’s knee” (p. 26). He probably picked up her reading habit, too. Later in life, he boasted that he had read four thousand works of fiction including Smollett and Scott before he was 10 years old. Clare, too, educated himself through reading; and although he is reputed to have said that he would rather have written *Babes in the Wood* than *Paradise Lost*, he certainly read Milton, Chaucer, Pope, Cowper, and Defoe as well as contemporary poets like Byron and Keats.

The adult neglect of the Brontë children, combined with the fact that their father was a scholar and shared his library with his offspring, led to precocious juvenile reading and writing on their behalf. There is clear evidence that the children’s eclectic childhood reading included Aesop’s fables, Shakespeare, Milton, Scott, Byron, plenty of history, periodicals, annuals, works of art, and Blackwood’s magazine: “Maria read the newspapers, and reported intelligently to her younger sisters....But I suspect that they had no children’s books and that their eager minds browsed undisturbed among the wholesome pasturage of English literature” (Gaskell, 1975, p. 93).

According to a contemporary, Mary Weller, Dickens was also “a terrible child to read” (Slater, 2007, p. 4):

He constantly read and reread the books in his father’s little library—the 18th C essayists, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, the works of Fielding and Smollett, and other novels and stories.... These books became fundamental to his imaginative world, as is clearly attested by the innumerable quotations from, and allusions to, them in all his writings. (Langton, 1891, pp. 5–6)

Stevenson was another autodidact whose early education was provided by his nurse, Alison Cunningham, to whom *A Child’s Garden of Verses* is dedicated. Although she looked after young Stevenson devotedly, Frank McLynn (1993) describes her as a religious maniac filling the child’s head with terrifying stories: “When he was still an impressionable infant she read the entire Bible to him three or four times...Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* and from *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Worst of all, she told stories...in which hell-fire and the noonday demon seeking all whom he could devour were living realities” (pp. 14–15).

Storytelling and Performance

The performative and creative side of reading was highly advanced in most of our chosen authors. Calder (1990) shows how Stevenson's writing, which came early, "went hand-in-hand with an addiction to stories and dramatising" (p. 8). Stevenson (1992) wrote, "Men are born with various mania: from my earliest childhood it was mine to make a plaything of imaginary series of events; and as soon as I was able to write, I became a good friend to the paper-makers" (p. 209).

Stevenson was particularly perceptive on the role of play and performance in children's learning as the following quotation shows. He was addicted to a stationer's shop in Leith Walk in Edinburgh, which sold Shelt's play theatres with books to paint and figures to cut out. Stevenson "handled and lingered and doted on these bundles of delight; there was a physical pleasure in the sight and touch of them" (p. 64).

Indeed, out of this cut-and-dry, dull, swaggering, obtrusive and infantile art, I seemed to have learned the very spirit of my life's enjoyment; met there the shadows of the characters I was to read about and love...acquired a gallery of scenes and characters with which, in the silent theatre of the brain, I might enact all novels and romances. (pp. 128–129)

Calder (1990) notes how Stevenson not only relished this fantasy life, but also made every effort to stay in touch with it when he became an adult. Like Kipling, Stevenson was late to learn to read, so "until that age he was totally reliant on the stories that were told and read to him and the stories he invented himself" (p. 41). As Stevenson (1992) explained, "It is the grown people who make the nursery stories; all the children do, is jealously to preserve the text" (p. 58).

Clare's mother "knew not a single letter" (Robinson, 1986, p. 2), but she encouraged him to read and learn and she spent hard-earned money sending him to school whenever funds could be spared: "...every winter night our once unlettered hut was wonderfully changed in its appearance to a school room the old table...bearing at meal times the luxury of a barley loaf or dish of potatoes, was now covered with the rude beginnings of scientific requisitions, pens, ink, and paper" (p. 4). Clare described his pleasure in learning favourite passages of the Bible by heart, singing ballads with his father and reading "those sixpenny chapbooks hawked by pedlars from door to door which shaped (his) childhood imagination" (p. xii). He also remembered old village women telling story upon story of "Giants, Hobgoblins and fairies" (p. 2).

It is no surprise to learn that Dickens' mother was also "an inimitable storyteller" (Slater, 2007, p. 1) who taught him the alphabet and rudiments of English at home. Langton (1891) tells us that Dickens also enjoyed "games of make-believe with his friends and getting up magic-lantern shows, also performing...comic songs and recitations" (p. 26). Theatre, of course, remained one of the great passions of his life.

"When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own" (Gaskell, 1975, p. 94). Indeed, it was for their juvenile writing and play-acting that the Bronte childhoods are now famous but it is unlikely that the well known little books (tales, dramas, poems, romances, plays), in which Charlotte penned her lively stories in miniature writing, would have come about without a childhood also devoted to reading.

Frances Rossetti was a fine storyteller. Indeed, Christina dedicated one of her own collections of tales to her mother "in grateful remembrance of the stories with which she used to entertain her children" (Marsh, 1994, p. 27). The Rossetti children often acted stories from history at home, and Christina started writing poetry herself at eleven. William Rossetti (quoted in Thomas, 1994) described a typical family evening as adults talking and the children "drinking it all in as a sort of necessary atmosphere of the daily life, yet with our own little interests and occupations as well—reading, colouring prints, looking into illustrated books, nursing a cat, or whatever" (p. 26).

Hans Andersen remembers his father reading aloud to him in the evenings and also making him a toy theatre. One of Andersen's stories is called "Godfather's Picture Book" (2006/1868) and in it he portrays himself as the creator of stories:

Godfather could tell stories; so many and such long ones. He could cut out pictures and he could draw pictures; and when it was near to Christmas, he would take out an exercise book with clean white pages, and on these he would paste up pictures taken from books and newspapers, and, if he had not enough for what he wanted to tell, he would draw them himself. I got several such pictures when I was little.

Although this is a description by an expert storyteller, Andersen's story also provides a glimpse into the way in which grownups may have interacted with children when looking at a text which, in this case, contains pictures as well as words, and is both amusing and instructive: "'See, that's the title page,' said Godfather. 'That's the beginning of the story you're going to hear. It could also be given as an entire play, if one could perform it'" (n.p.).

Although "Godfather's Picture Book" may have only been fiction, Andersen made many real picturebooks, sometimes with little stories or verses, for the children of his friends. The only picturebook by Andersen to have been printed is one that he helped his friend Drewsen make for his granddaughter Christine for her third birthday in 1859, revealing a desire to entertain rather than to teach. Alderson and Drewsen (1984) suggest that the "pages may also have been compiled with an eye to the talk that could arise as Christine turned to them" (n.p.). There were many printed sources available at the time from which pictures could be cut out and pasted, such as calendars, periodicals and annuals, but the most common sources were the "Bilderbogen" or picture-sheets (sometimes known as "lotteries"), which were printed by the thousands in Europe,

particularly in Germany and France. Jane Johnson used the same sort of sheets for her nursery library.

Critical Readers

From an early age our gifted young writers were also critical readers who knew their own minds and held strong opinions of the texts they read. While Byron was able to translate Horace's verse into English by the age of six, he didn't take to poetry at first. However, the lively stories in the Old Testament were relished and history was enjoyed for the sense of adventure and drama it offered.

On the other hand, Clare writes movingly about the moment he discovered poetry when he was thirteen before he understood "blank verse nor rhyme either" (Robinson, 1986, p. 9).

I met with a fragment of Thomson's *Seasons*.... I can still remember my sensations in reading the opening line of Spring. I can't say the reason, but the... lines made my heart twitter with joy: I greedily read over all I could before I returned it and resolved to possess one myself.

Frances Rossetti encouraged her children to read fiction by Maria Edgeworth and "tried to interest them in pious children's tales, such as *Sandford and Merton* and *The Fairchild Family*, but the little Rossettis were not impressed" (Thomas, 1994, p. 27). Christina claimed only to read what took her fancy—Perrault's fairy tales, Dante, Keats, Shelley, Byron, and other poets. Maria read Greek, loved Homer, and tackled Euripedes in translation, valiantly trying to keep up with her brothers once they went to school. Marsh (1994) explains: "Almost from the cradle the young Rossettis knew a true metre from a false one, in both English and Italian, and they grew up with a knowledge of couplet, lyric and ode, to add to the rhymes of the nursery and the hymns at church" (p. 35).

Working-Class Readers

It was in the 19th century that at last we begin to hear the voices of the men and women whose labour produced many of the luxuries that middle- and upper-class families took for granted. David Vincent (1982) argues that despite grinding poverty and harsh working conditions, there was an "established tradition of laboring men embarking upon the pursuit of knowledge. There was a sufficient availability of reading matter, a sufficient level of literacy... [and] a sufficient access to elementary education to endure that even in rural communities it would be possible to find two or three 'uneducated' men who were lovers of books" (p. 31). E.P. Thompson (1980) cites a typical example—the poet-weaver, Samuel Low from Todmorden whose work revealed knowledge of Virgil, Ovid, and Homer.

For the first half of the nineteenth century, when the formal education of a great part of the people entailed little more than instruction in the Three Rs, [it] was by no means a period of intellectual atrophy. The towns, and even the villages, hummed with the energy of the autodidact. Given the elementary techniques of literacy, labourers, artisans,

shopkeepers and clerks and schoolmasters, proceeded to instruct themselves, severally or in groups. (p. 781)

Thompson goes on to talk about a working-class culture with its eager disputations around the booksellers' stalls, in the taverns, workshops and coffee-houses but, as Vincent (1982) pointed out, the autobiographical writings of working-class people, while almost always finding their way to books and valuing them highly, also emphasised the "general recognition of the subordination of education to the demands of the family economy" (p. 94).

Most working-class children received, at best, a basic and fragmentary elementary education and those who provided it were often barely literate themselves. As the miner John Harris recounts: "In those days any shattered being wrecked in the mill or the mine, if he could read John Bunyan, count 50 backwards, and scribble the squire's name was considered good enough for a pedagogue" (Vincent, 1982, p. 100).

And Sunday Schools apart, this education was almost always domestic—usually in the sitting rooms or round the kitchen table of people in the local community. The eight-year-old, Charles Shaw for example, remembered the bitterness of poverty, not so much because of hunger and want, but the injustice in terms of access and time for books: "I had acquired a strong passion for reading, and the sight of this [advantaged] youth reading at his own free will, forced upon my mind a sense of painful contrast between his position and mine.... I went back to my mould-mining and hot stove with my first anguish in my heart" (p. 91).

The fact that money, books, and a decent education were in short supply, however, meant that what learning was available often had to be shared; those with literacy skills were in close contact with those who were non-literate with the likelihood that sharing of access to print was a regular occurrence. Still, Vincent explores how the tensions between aspiration and opportunity were often more keenly felt by women who had few avenues in which to pursue emerging intellectual and literary interests. One thing many of these women did was to take a deep interest in the education of their children, particularly their sons. D. H. Lawrence's famous account of just such a mother in *Sons and Lovers* rings extremely true for the 19th century as well as the early 20th century. Vincent (1982) explains, "What was left to both men and women was the freedom of all those who survived the lessons in one-two and three-syllable words to travel outside the walls of their homes and beyond the streets of their neighbourhoods through the agency of the fiction" (p. 277).

This brief overview of the 19th century allows us some insights into what was going on in working-class homes. As the century turned, higher literacy levels among parents, wider availability of books, and new theories of development and education all influenced how children learned to read in the home. Despite universal state education, parents have not been discouraged from doing some pre-school teaching at home.

Contemporary Case Studies

... our reasons for reading are as strange as our reasons for living. (Pennac, 2006, p. 174)

The most detailed accounts of children reading in the home in the 20th century are almost exclusively those of economically and educationally privileged families who, through their own academic training, become aware of the potentially rich data that are revealed through observing their own children's early literacy.

Although adults writing about their childhood memories of reading transmit strong impressions of particular books, pictures, or moments of reading, the most detailed observations of how children become readers in the home are provided by parents or carers who kept regular notes and diaries or made audio recordings of their children's language and interaction with books. These observations allow us access to the earliest stages of reading behavior, beyond most people's memories. Although some researchers have observed other people's children at home, the parental records show that in most cases the deeper understanding and interpretation of children's interactions with and responses to books (including play, performance, art and writing) is only possible through continuous, intimate contact with the young readers. There now exists a group of texts that have become classics in the literature on early reader response and pre-school literacy.

In this section, after briefly introducing each case study, we will discuss them as a whole, attempting to highlight the main features of this wealth of evidence through the three strands of connections, creativity, and criticism. It cannot be denied that these studies present a view limited to white, middle-class households in which book-loving adults (most of them academics) had the time and resources, as well as the firm intention to introduce their children to the world of books and reading (this also meant either limited or no access at all to television). Thus, the children in these studies were atypical in this respect. With a few exceptions, they can all be considered pre-digital because, like television and videos, computers either did not exist or were used minimally.

Largely academics, the parents were familiar with the literature on the subject and therefore highlight observations related to current issues and controversies on literacy learning. The fact that most of the studies deal with children growing up in the second half of the 20th century and in English speaking countries, allows us to make useful comparisons.³

The Families

The pioneer among these studies is Dorothy Neil White's (1984/1954) *Books Before Five*. She records her daughter Carol's reactions to books from the age of two to the age of five, just before she begins school in New Zealand. The diary is informal and by no means comprehensive, yet White provides a clear picture of her daughter's reactions

to text and the context in which they take place and adds her own questions and interpretations to those responses. Curiously, Carol had little experience with books under the age of two, which perhaps is a reflection of earlier approaches to child-rearing where babies were considered too young to be given books (Dorothy Butler's *Babies Need Books* was not published until 1982).

Because of her granddaughter's special circumstance, Dorothy Butler (1980) does trace the responses of the child to books almost from birth in *Cushla and her Books*. Born in New Zealand in 1971 with several severe handicaps, Cushla developed a special relationship with books, which would sustain her and her parents through a difficult infancy (the record ends at the age of four). Despite Cushla's difficulties, Butler's record reveals that she went through many of the same response stages as other child-readers, and in some instances her understanding develops even earlier because of the intensity of her reading experiences.

Anna Crago was born in Australia in 1972. Her parents, Maureen and Hugo Crago (1983), recorded her reactions to particular books (and pictures), as well as observations on language and storytelling, from before the age of two up to the age of five in *Prelude to Literacy*. Also Australian, Rebecca (born in 1971) and Ralph (born in 1975) are contemporaries of both Anna and Cushla. Their mother, Virginia Lowe (2007), was inspired by White's book to keep a diary of her children's encounters with books, and she does this almost obsessively from when they are weeks old to the age of eight and even beyond. Her text, *Stories, Pictures and Reality*, presents the most detailed record to-date and includes evidence on particular cognitive developments occurring earlier than psychologists have believed were likely. She focuses in particular on topics such as reality, fantasy, and identification.

The conversation among these parent-researchers is further enriched by Wolf who co-wrote *The Braid of Literature* with Heath in 1992, based on records of her daughters' encounters with books and print, from their birth in the 1980s until 1991. Lindsey was born in Saudi Arabia but was three when the family moved back to the United States, where both she and her sister Ashley grew up. Wolf also looks at how the girls respond to and make meaning within "possible worlds" but, due to Lindsey's intense interest in performance, explores this aspect more fully than Lowe.

Among the other longitudinal studies that present some useful insights is Marcia Baghban's (1984) account of her daughter, Giti (born in 1976) whose pre-school literacy practices (in the U.S.) are recorded from birth to the age of three, but the focus is mainly on the development of oral language and writing/drawing and only more generally, on reading. Glenda Bissex's (1980) often quoted case study—*Gnys at Work*—is on her son Paul's developing literacy, mainly writing, from the ages of five to eleven years of age. Her records show the influence of reading on

Paul's writing, but it does not begin until Paul is already at school.

Brian Edmiston's (2007) case study of his son Michael's play between 18 months and 7 years has been published recently as *Forming Ethical Identities in Early Childhood Play*. Although he does mention reading where it is a source for early play, his particular focus is on play, myth, ethics, and identity. It is interesting to note that Edmiston's research was a way of making sense of his son's fascination with horror and violence in books, television, and videos because this is a response very much missing in the accounts of all the girl readers mentioned above. Two other boys have been the subjects of reading case studies published in the magazine *Books for Keeps*. In 2001 these were short, more impressionistic pieces by Gary McKeone (then Head of Literature at the Arts Council of England) on his son Jack's (born in 2000) interactions with books until the age of one year. These were followed in 2002 (and continue at the time of writing this chapter) by more detailed observations by Roger Mills on his son Hal from the age of 12 months. Mills's account presents the view of a psychologist and describes Hal's responses in terms of issues about security, predictability, and the development of self-consciousness, yet it also portrays the way in which the particular fascination of boys with machines and transport, for example, can stimulate their interest in books.

Finally, we include here extracts from Evelyn Arizpe's unpublished diary, which records the language and reading of her two daughters, Isabel (born in 1997) and Flora (born in 2000) from birth to the age of three in England. Children's books played an important role in this academic household because of Arizpe's particular interest in this area but her focus was on the development of bilingualism (Spanish/English). As well as books in Spanish, her daughters read many of the same English books read by the children in the case studies mentioned above and Arizpe's observations support much of the evidence obtained from them.

The Reading Environment and the Books

Despite different parental approaches to both child-rearing and research within their own families, and the different personalities of the children involved, it is interesting to note how similar some of their reactions are. However, it is not surprising that the children in these studies were so enthusiastic about reading at such an early age given that they were all born to parents already deeply involved with books, many in a professional capacity, and therefore into a print-rich environment that was extended by the purchasing and borrowing of children's books. As well as books, there were a plethora of other printed sources, from newspapers to maps, all of which provided impetus for talking, reading, and sometimes also writing. Books were clearly valued as objects and therefore they were to be looked after although they could be play objects at the same time. In this setting, book reading becomes a sig-

nificant activity and "has special powers, since it demands the total cessation of all other activities by the adult. It centers exclusively around child and text, and language and lessons from this context are thus highly signalled for children as nonordinary" (Wolf & Heath, 1992, p. 80).

Another common element in these households was that reading occurred in an affective context where the children were in close contact with the reader, whether it be a parent or another adult. Mills (2002) stresses the "security" that reading together means for the child who at this stage is usually going through "separation anxiety" (p. 9). In this situation, dialogue and other interactions around the books arose naturally, as well as teaching, although this was not the objective of the reading session. Children knew that in this situation, they and the book had the full attention of the adults and that their comments and opinions would be listened and responded to.

These children had favorite books that they could stroke or even sleep with, and they were often given further texts by the same authors or illustrators who were part of the reading process and became household names. Older siblings encountered the same books again when they were read to younger siblings, and younger siblings were exposed to challenging books for older children. Children knew they had the power to initiate a reading, choose a book, or stop the reading when they were bored or frightened. They also knew they were allowed to ask questions and that they could openly say if they liked or disliked the text or pictures, the first steps towards becoming critical readers.

These children were fortunate in that their generation was among the first to benefit from developments in printing technology that allowed them to have access to a greater number of books than any generation before them. Yet although their reading was much more extensive than that of the children mentioned in the other sections of this chapter, it cannot be said that their acts of reading were any less intensive. Printing technology also offered them much higher quality image reproduction, particularly important in the now thriving genre of picturebooks. This allowed the children to peruse many more books on their own before knowing how to read print.

Despite the fact that some of the parent-researchers lived in rather isolated areas, they were able to provide their children with a wide range of books, including hand-made books such as cloth-books and scrapbooks which were so important to children in previous centuries. Indeed, Lowe (2007) made alphabet books and a series of "little readers" which included Rebecca's reading vocabulary (at the age of four) and adventures featuring her and her brother. In general, the parents were aware of new publications and endeavored to find books that would match the children's interests.

All the children in these studies seem to have been exposed to nursery rhymes from an early age and parents give examples of how these rhymes entered the children's

early speech, sometimes in more than one language. Fairy tales clearly played a big part in the re-creations and performances that Anna, Lindsey, Ashley, Isabel, and Flora enacted in their everyday lives. They went through a prince and princess phase even before the Disney Corporation seized on the marketing potential of this fascination and turned it into a consumer craze. Rebecca and Ralph seem to have had less exposure to fairytales, and perhaps because they were taught from a very young age that fairies and dragons were “just pretend,” they did not become a major part of their play. Michael based his pretend play on myths more than fairy tales, but these did include dragons and other fantastical beasts.

For the most part, the children in these studies were read texts that had already become or were fast becoming classics. Among the picturebooks that had the greatest impact were those by Beatrix Potter, Dick Bruna, Maurice Sendak, Ludwig Bemelmans, Margaret Wise Brown, Eric Carle, Dr. Seuss, and Anthony Browne. At a very young age, some of the children were also read chapter books that other parents might consider for older readers. As well as nursery rhymes, the children were read poetry, but prose was predominant. Personal circumstances and inclinations determined which books became significant, but all the children had their favorites that were repeatedly re-read.

Text-to-Life Connections, Orality, and Re-creations

Like the other children, Carol made constant connections between her books and her life experiences, not just weeks but even months after the reading. As White (1984) writes when Carol is two: “The experience makes the book richer and the book enriches the personal experience even at this level. I am astonished at the age this backward and forward flow between books and life take place” (p. 13).

Lowe and Wolf, in particular, were able to trace just how the experience of words, literary language, images, and character’s actions became threaded through the lives of their children. In turn, these experiences were connected to other readings and texts, thus forming a familiar network that gave the children security and confidence in both life and books as well as double-fold enjoyment.

The children were well aware of the power of story language to engage both reader and listener or spectator. They could also imitate and reproduce “book talk” themselves which then developed into storytelling; in other words, they had a “sense of how to use language in literate ways” (Wolf & Heath, 1992, p. 228). Whether or not parent-readers dramatized the reading (Lowe’s was undramatized compared to the Cragos’s or Wolf’s, for example), the children were aware of the differences between literary, poetical language, and everyday speech. Words from books appeared in the children’s emergent talk, not only to convey meaning but also as sounds to be played and experimented with. They were fascinated by word play, mining it for humor and enjoyment and then trying it out themselves.

To what extent the texts were re-created depended on the children’s personalities and interests. Most of them made up their own stories and some children, particularly Lindsey, also made up plays based on their reading. However, they all explored what it would be like to be others, either by taking on particular roles or attributes of characters. This form of identification allowed them to become other people or to explore alternative behavior and circumstances with the comfort of knowing they could go back to being themselves at any moment. Through these acts, as readers they were learning about characterization and empathy as well as exploring other potential ways of being.

Learning to Read

In all these households, reading was regarded not as the ability to decode words but as a pleasurable introduction to the world of literature, so none of these parents used early reading schemes or primers of any kind. Although none of them state it expressly, primers were clearly not seen as something that was necessary for their children’s progress as readers and, presumably, not considered beneficial in a literary sense. As we mentioned above, some of the books parents provided would have been considered above the age level of the children they were read to. Curiously, Anna, Rebecca, and Isabel all had difficulties when it came to decoding, so we must be cautious about affirming that intense exposure to books before school will automatically guarantee the ability to read early. However, as Lowe (2007) points out, “the book exposure affected their vocabularies as one would expect, and acted as a framework for complex language structures” (p. 11)—and all three girls eventually became voracious readers. The influence of older siblings probably also plays an important role here, as the younger siblings in these studies did not seem to struggle as much. Certainly, Isabel (at the age of six) was responsible for introducing Flora (3.7 to 4.0) to letters and reading through rather intense instruction during a phase of playing school which went on for several months.

Baghban’s (1984) account shows Giti at the age of 20 months beginning to distinguish letters from environmental print. Whatever we may think of the McDonald’s fast-food chain, their logo introduces children to print long before school. For Giti, labels and logos became so important that her mother made her a homemade book with cut-outs of those she recognized from magazines and newspapers. Baghban cites various other small-scale studies that, like hers and those of other parent-researchers, show how by the age of two that children who are exposed to books are familiar with concepts of print such as directionality and also the idea that print triggers stories and certain types of interactions such as labelling and dialogue. Early pretend reading, a common activity among the children in these studies, seems to lead naturally to “real” reading. As Bissex (1980) writes: “Before a child can read, must he not have some global sense of what reading is about and what it feels like?” (p. 130).

To a lesser or greater degree, parents encouraged their children to question, to predict, to create hypotheses about the text, and thus to become critical readers. From these interactions, the child-readers knew that they could participate in the making of meaning with the adult readers and also in the evaluation of the texts.

Baghban (1984) emphasizes the interdependency of the language arts which also occurs before formal reading lessons take place: "Giti used oral language, reading, writing, and drawing as partners within a larger system of mutually reinforcing processes" (p. 97). There is no room here to discuss the development of writing (before school) that some of these case studies describe; however, it is closely linked to reading behaviors particularly because from an early age these children experimented with scribbles that they interpreted and read. Bissex (1980) puts her finger on the importance *meaning* has in the process of becoming readers and writers: "Paul, like his parents, wrote (and read and talked) because what he was writing (or reading or saying) had meaning to him as an individual and as a cultural being" (p. 107).

The Visual Image, Digital Literacy, and Popular Culture

Even before the 21st century, changes in media and technology were beginning to affect the ways in which children became readers in the home, and the visual image has perhaps been most influential in these changes. There are many references to the children's responses to visual images, not only in children's books, but also to "adult" art. Crago and Crago (1983), for example, record Anna's developing responses to shapes, sizes, incomplete objects, and representations of movement as well as her color preferences, visual memory, and the connections she makes among images. Lowe (2007) also has a chapter on her children's understanding of picture conventions while Wolf and Heath (1992) connect response to illustrations with other responses such as drama and play. Before the age of two, Isabel and Flora expected pictures on one page to be narratively linked to pictures on the next page and would point things out in the images as they read to their dolls. Clearly, the visual image was important to all the children in both functional and aesthetic ways and it helped them develop as readers by inviting them to predict, interpret, and make intertextual connections.

Crago and Crago (1983) suggest that Anna's high exposure to book illustrations resulted in her being more critically aware earlier than expected—such as using the realism of color as an evaluative criterion—a suggestion which applies to some of the other case studies as well. By the age of five, parents observed that the children were able to understand different versions of the same story and possessed an awareness of artistic style, which allowed them to recognize the work or the "stylistic signature" (p. 271) of particular illustrators. The importance of this exposure is confirmed in the Crago's conclusion that recognition and

understanding depends on previous artistic experience, not just (or necessarily) life experience.

Although there are no studies on children responding to new types of media that are as detailed as the ones mentioned above, two articles in particular provide examples of observations of children in the home interacting with both books and some new technologies. One case study by Robinson and Turnbull (2005) is on their goddaughter Veronica (born in 1998) who, like Isabel and Flora, was exposed to popular culture in both English and Spanish. An enthusiastic reader of books (who evinces behavior similar to that of the other children mentioned in this section), she also watched television, videos (including home-made videos), and CD versions of stories as well as computer games. Robinson and Turnbull argue that all of these "have been truly porous as she has moved between them with little need to recognise media boundaries" (p. 69), and that they all contributed to enriching Veronica's connections and recreations. This also occurred with James whose exploration of CD-Rom storybooks led him to computer-based dramatic play (Smith, 2005, p. 2005).

Isabel and Flora loved watching the British program for toddlers *The Teletubbies*, which was taped so that they could watch them over again. Their first computer games, on the BBC website, were linked to this program, and by the age of three, they could manipulate the computer mouse on their own, both clicking and dragging objects. As soon as they mastered a few keyboard skills, they were writing their stories using word-processing software, selecting relevant images from Clip Art, and when Isabel began teaching Flora letters and numbers, she created the worksheets on the computer and printed them out.

As these and other studies show, new generations of children are more likely to be exposed to the electronic or digital version of books, sometimes before reading the original book and before starting school. Not enough research has been done on how this changes the ways in which children respond to the original text or on how the possibility of the repeated viewing of so many videos that are now available affects their understanding of, for example, narrative, character, and image. As Robinson and Turnbull (2005) point out, media boundaries have been broken and it now becomes more difficult, if not impossible, to follow particular connections children make between one media and the other. Yet, in a different but inseparable way from book reading, children's interactions with video, television, computers and other new technologies also have the possibility to lead them to make connections, evaluations, and re-creations of text.

Conclusion

...it is my inward autobiography, for the words we take into ourselves help to shape us... (Spufford, 2002, p. 21)

This concluding section begins with two contemporary writers, Frances Spufford and Daniel Pennac (2006). Pen-

nac, whose *The Rights of the Reader* has been a publishing sensation, reflected honestly on himself as a caring and sometimes anxious and demanding father of emerging readers, whereas Spufford (2002), in a tour-de-force reading memoir, *The Child that Books Built*, documents his own domestic reading development.

Pennac (2006) reminds us of the sheer obsessiveness involved in deeply engaged domestic reading by making reference to his own boyhood when people were always trying to stop him from reading: “Stop reading for goodness’ sake, you’ll strain your eyes! Why don’t you go outside and play? It’s a beautiful day” (p. 15). He also points out the frequent discrepancies between what parents expect children to read and what children choose to read:

It’s interesting that even back then reading was rarely a matter of choice. So it became a subversive act. You didn’t just discover a novel, you were disobeying your parents too. A double victory. The happy memory of reading time snatched under the bedclothes by torchlight. (pp. 15–16)

Thus, the subversive act becomes a creative act as children begin to make their own pathways through books, developing their own identities as readers and as human beings.

Spufford’s (2002) account of what it means to be totally engrossed in reading as a child focuses on the transition from being part of real life to the journey into the imaginary world created between the reader and the writer. Like many of the young readers in our study, Spufford, read indiscriminately everything he could get his hands on but, at the same time, was forming intelligent critical judgments about the texts he encountered. He also reminds us of the powerful significance of the adults who first made us fall in love with books and of the lessons we learn from stories: “We tell stories all the time when we speak. Storytelling may be the function that made language worth acquiring.... The medium of the first encounter is an adult voice speaking, and saying the same words in the same order each time the story comes around” (p. 46).

These lucid descriptions not only highlight the strands suggested by Wolf and Heath (1992), but also identify some of the common themes that link children from different centuries reading in the home. Despite the gaps in our knowledge before the 20th century, the accounts we have presented here allow us a glimpse into the connections, interpretations, and re-creations that were involved in children’s readerly behavior as early as the 18th century. We will now briefly bring these insights together and point to possibilities for further research in this little explored field.

Although there were differences between the 18th century families described in our first section, there were also similarities. First, they show that in privileged, literate families, reading aloud was an important and frequent daily activity, which children encountered regularly from a very young age. According to Lorna Weatherill (1996),

estimates of time spent doing various household activities in the 18th century show that up to two hours daily were spent reading (p. 143). Conversation, questions, and reflections followed this reading, so that children would be encouraged to apply morals to their own lives and presumably link their reading from the Bible to other texts.

Mothers told children stories and usually taught them their first letters through primers or hand-made materials which began with the alphabet and continued with words and sentences of increasing length. Sometimes these materials included images, which would also be sources of conversation and storytelling. Like Jane Johnson, some of these mothers and fathers must have provided opportunities for their children to express their own interests and to find pleasure in these activities. In some families, games and toys also encouraged early reading. Drama and performance—where allowed—naturally followed the processes of reading and reciting. Finally, reading was linked to writing as children copied passages or lessons and, in some cases like the Taylor sisters, created their own poems and stories.

In the 19th century, individual accounts provide clues as to the development not only of voracious readers but also of gifted writers. Books provided knowledge but also the space for reflection, sometimes in economically deprived or in difficult emotional circumstances. In terms of books, quantity and quality did not seem to matter as much, nor did the extent of parental education and involvement or even the amount of schooling, as long as there was a strong will to learn. There is rich evidence for the links to storytelling, performance, and other creative pursuits.

These latter trends carried well into the 20th century. The detailed cases, which were often full research studies, reveal that, well before they can decode text, the children *behave like readers* as they make links between books and reality (and among texts), interpret, and re-create literary elements in their ordinary life and use these links and interpretations to analyze and evaluate not only texts but life.

Some of the expectations with which we began this research clearly emerged in the data: that the roles of parent/carers would be different according to the views of childhood of their time, that the affective relationship between children and these parent/carers would be important, that storytelling would be central, that pictures would add to the pleasures offered by books, and that reading would be linked to some kinds of performance. However, other themes also emerged and proved to be significant factors in creating perceptive young readers:

- omnivorous reading of books for adults as well as those specifically aimed at children;
- popular fiction and comics (chapbooks in the 18th century) playing as strong a part in the domestic reading diet as rich literary texts of which adults were more likely to approve;

- the liberty to make one's own reading choices;
- the time to do plenty of reading.

These themes suggest directions that future research in the field of domestic literacy might take, but there also remain important areas that we did not have time to address fully here:

- the differences in the ways in which imaginative and information texts are offered and taken up;
- the ways in which the home context has changed given the more vital role of school;
- the impact of new methods of teaching reading;
- the question of close involvement of parents/carers versus children finding their own ways to reading;
- the influence of siblings;
- the importance of gender—of the reader and of the parent/carer;
- the incursion of new technologies into the very heart of the home and the ways in which television and other electronic media have changed perceptions of the act of reading itself.

And yet, we would venture, that despite all the future and past research—the histories, the memories, and reflections from autobiographies as well as the close, informed observation of contemporary children—there is still much about the process in which children become readers that will always remain highly personal and totally mysterious.

Notes

1. Heath (1983) provides the most detailed record of learning to read in working-class and/or ethnic minority households. Jonda McNair (personal communication) noted that pre-school reading practices in African American families changed when reading more African American literature because these books reflected their personal experiences. She referred us to Durkin's (1984) study of poor, black, fifth-grade students which found that successful readers were those who had been read to at an early age, had been provided with challenging materials, and had been encouraged by their families to love reading.
2. This archive is mainly divided between the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The former can be accessed online at <http://urania.dlib.indiana.edu/collections/lilly/janejohnson/index.html>
3. As Wolf and Heath (1992) point out, "For a comparative perspective, it is necessary to ask also about what this book says for single-parent families, cultures incorporating oral story-telling habits, and extended families that must cram three generations into a one-bedroom apartment" (p. 192).

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2

Questioning the Value of Literacy

A Phenomenology of Speaking and Reading in Children

Eva-Maria Simms

Duquesne University

It may seem odd, in a handbook that studies and celebrates the written word for children, to include a chapter that attends to the losses involved in the child's acquisition of traditional literacy. But as we are reminded in Betsy Hearne's essay, our first introduction to literature is through oral stories; thus we need to consider what it means that our young readers were first speakers and listeners, and how that transformation from orality to literature fundamentally changes perceptual frameworks. Phenomenologist Eva-Maria Simms asks readers to consider the embodied contexts of language use in children and how these contexts change with the advent of alphabetic literacy. Such understanding can help us discern what's at stake for the "reluctant readers" we encounter in our classrooms, as well as in Campano's and Ghiso's discussions of immigrant children learning to read books from cultures other than their own, or in the arguments Bradford highlights surrounding the inscription of indigenous narratives.

Reading as Technology

The Chirographic Bias

Reading and writing seem to be harmless, innocuous skills, mere addenda to the basket of natural skills that children develop throughout their formative years. At least, this is the impression promoted by handbooks and research reports on early childhood education (Spodek, 1993; National Reading Panel, 2000; Hall, Larson, & Marsh, 2003; Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2006). The contributions by psychologists consist of discussions of cognitive/information processing abilities, memory strategies, Piagetian

stages, and Vygotskian proximal zones—all presented as part of the cognitive/developmental scaffolding that makes learning to read possible. But how does the acquisition of literacy affect the child's consciousness? There is a surprising silence on this topic. Even among authors who are critical of the power relations in the educational system (Burman, 1994; Canella, 1997; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997; Soto, 1999) the value of reading *per se* is rarely questioned. One of the few instances where the value of literacy is problematized occurs in the clash between indigenous cultures and the U.S. education system: The Native American Cochiti people have

denied the transcription of their language into alphabetic notation and refused to have the written language taught to their children in schools (Martinez, 2000).

Our mainstream cultural belief in the desirability of literacy is what the phenomenological tradition calls a “natural attitude” (Husserl, 1952): Everyday phenomena are accepted without question and the opportunity for reflection does not arise. The phenomenological method attempts to bracket or suspend the unquestioned belief in the obviousness of what is given to our experience, and the researcher *suspends assent* (Gurwitsch, 1974). This withholding of assent does not mean that the *phenomenon* is suspended, merely that the researcher creates openness for a deeper exploration of what is there (Ihde, 1979). Husserl’s (1969) call “to the things themselves” (pp. 12–13) is a challenge to direct our attention more fully to what phenomena themselves can disclose through a process of faithful description. What was taken for granted before appears now as strange and interesting. Phenomenology is a philosophical method that, by suspending assent, awakens wonder (Held, 2002).

The intent of this chapter is to suspend the belief in the goodness of literacy—our *chirographic bias*—in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the engagement with texts structures human consciousness, and particularly the minds of children. In the following pages, literacy (a term which in this chapter refers to the ability to read and produce written text) is discussed as a consciousness altering *technology*. A phenomenological analysis of the act of reading shows the child’s engagement with texts as a *perceptual* as well as a *symbolic* event that builds upon but also alters children’s speech acts. Speaking and reading are both forms of language use, but with different configurations of perceptual and symbolic qualities. Children’s literature uses textual technology and, intentionally or not, participates in structuring children’s pre-literate minds. Some of its forms, such as picture books and early readers, are directly intended to bridge the gap between the pre-literate listener and the literate reader and ease the transition into the literate state. It is my hope that the phenomenological analysis of the experiences of speaking and reading might help us understand more clearly how children’s literature impacts the minds of children. Such an analysis can awaken a critical awareness of the power that letters wield as they shape the reader’s psychological reality, and it can sharpen our sense of wonder about the metamorphosis of language from speaking to writing.

The question of the value of literacy is not an academic issue for me. As a parent and as a teacher of parents and therapists, I am often confronted with the issue of what children (and the society as a whole) *lose* by taking on literacy. One day my eight-year-old son and I wandered through the glass rooms of the botanical conservatory. Hundreds of plant species lined the banks of our path, spilled down from baskets, pots, and ledges, reached through the humid air towards the glass-filtered sunlight

or the shade of their companions. I tried to read as many identification tags as I could, but Nick was more interested in the markers for the treasure hunt, which the staff had hidden among the roots. He did not like reading. We entered a long glass room which was lined with a dozen topiaries representing Aesop’s fables. Assuming that this could be a “teachable moment,” I stopped before the first one, and told Nick that this was the fable of the fox and the stork and started to tell him the story. “You left out the good parts,” he interrupted me, and proceeded to recite Aesop’s tale from beginning to end. Then he rushed to the next topiary, and, standing before the exhibit, declaimed the next fable, exactly with the wording and intonation of his second grade teacher. And the next one. And the next one. At the end of the hallway he had told me six fables, metered and formulaic, with coherent plots, interesting details, and varied voices for the animal protagonists. I marveled at his ability to remember. Here was a child who recalled the words of a teacher verbatim. And he could not read.

This rhapsodic feat of memory, which recalls lengthy story lines and the details of content and delivery, is typical of pre-literate, oral people (Goody, 1968). Memory changes when people learn to read, and Nicholas was no exception: His recall prowess fell by the wayside a few years after he became literate. I have always wondered what other abilities of our children’s perception, imagination, feeling, and cognition we have sacrificed when we taught them how to read.

Textuality as Technology

Literacy is deeply entwined with the structures of human consciousness, and it changes the culture that embraces it, as well as the individual who learns how to read. This has been documented by historians and philologists (Eisenstein, 1979; Havelock, 1982; Parry, 1971) as well as authors with a historical and cultural interest in anthropology (Goody, 1968), psychology (Luria, 1976; Ong, 1982), education (Egan, 1988; Sumara, 1998), and communication (McCluhan, 1962; Postman, 1994). On the cultural level, the phenomenon of textual literacy appears in sharper outline when it is contrasted with the literary and educational practices of oral cultures, which transmit their knowledge and traditions without texts, or with cultures that have pockets of literacy practices that are very different from our own.

Illich and Sanders (1988) have argued that alphabetization, i.e., the translation of the phonetic sound system into visual alphabetic notation, is an epistemological practice with far-reaching impact on mind and culture.¹ Illich (1996) has traced the creation of the “bookish” (p. 5) mind to the monastic reading and writing tradition of the 12th century, which built the foundation for new thinking practices, the founding of schools and universities, and the dissemination of ideas through the printing press in

the following centuries. Reading is a mind-technology. The word “technology” is generally defined as the application of tools and methods, particularly the study, development, and application of devices, machines, and techniques for manufacturing and productive processes. On a deeper level, however, technology is the disclosure and manipulation of the essence of things (Heidegger, 1993). Technologies extract the essences out of human abilities by instrumentalizing them and by depriving them of their original lived context. An example is the invention of the automobile: The essential ability of human movement is extracted and intensified through the technology of the car, which, in turn, reduces the lived and embodied context of human motility. When we sit in the speeding car, our senses are insulated from the heat, smell, and touch of the places we pass, and we do not notice their details anymore. The adoption of automobile technology, in turn, has required changes in infrastructure, which have deeply altered the landscapes and social fabric of American cities. According to Illich (1996), when human experience becomes technologized, a double process of intensification of some experiential elements and the de-contextualization *and* reduction of others can be observed. Literacy as a technology extracts the essence out of human speech—the content of what is said—and instrumentalizes and intensifies it through the process of alphabetic notation and textual practices. The lived context of oral language is reduced and restructured. In the following sections we will trace this process of reduction and intensification as language becomes written text.

Introducing literacy into non-literate cultures has had profound effects on their cultural practices (Eisenstein, 1979; Goody, 1968; McLuhan, 1962; Ong, 1982). Some of the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, as we saw above, have refused to allow their languages to be written and taught in schools as recently as the 1990s. They argue that written language is sacrilegious, gives indiscriminate access to esoteric religious practice, and is an imperialist tool that undermines the cultural identity and political sovereignty of Pueblo peoples (Martinez, 2000; Webster, 2006). This echoes Ong’s (1982) statement that “writing is a particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity that tends to assimilate other things to itself...” (p. 12).

The Phenomenology of the Speech Act

A Visit to the Kindergarten

Pre-literate children engage in language all the time, and their oral culture and the variety of the language forms they use is surprisingly sophisticated. It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the research in the field of language acquisition, but the consensus of the experts is that by the age of four pre-schoolers use grammar almost as well as adults (Bruner, 1993; Chomsky, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 1996; Pinker, 1995). The complexity of young children’s speech practices is

apparent in the conversation between five children, which were recorded by Vivian Paley (1981) in her kindergarten classroom. Even though Paley’s children are exposed to written language in the form of story books or reference works fetched from the library, textual material comes to them in the oral form: It is read aloud and explained by the teacher. The following analysis of a typical kindergarten conversation is guided by the ideas of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and his discussion of the phenomenology of speech.

Paley’s (1981) kindergarten class had soaked and planted lima beans in milk cartons, but after a few weeks only two sprouted. When Wally sifted through the dirt in his planter he could not find any lima beans—and neither could the other children. They were puzzled by the mystery of the vanished lima beans and for weeks argued and theorized that robbers had stolen the beans. Here is one of their typical conversations:

Andy: My father has two cactus plants in the big windows in his office. You know why? When robbers come in at night they touch the cactus plants and have to go back where they came from. To get the prickles out. That’s why my daddy has those plants.

Deana: What if you got stuck in the desert when you weren’t stealing anything?

Eddie: What if he stole the whole cactus plant?

Andy: Then he might fall on it and get stuck by it.

Tanya: How about if the robber came in another way except by the way the cactus are?

Andy: He can’t. The doors are locked.

Tanya: Does he have a cactus in all the windows? The robber could come through another window.

Andy: Only if he has a ladder. And how can he open the window if the lock is on the inside? And if he tries to break the window he could cut his arm.

Wally: They take him to jail if he breaks the window.

Eddie: He could break through the door.

Tanya: Then he might fall on the cactus.

Andy: I am going to tell my daddy to get more cactus plants for every window. And also one by the door.

Wally: Hey, here’s a great idea. Let’s put a cactus by the lima beans the next time. (p. 61)

Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out that speech is always situated in an interpersonal field and a particular location, with a speaker and a listener taking turns exchanging language: The children have their conversations in the classroom, from which the lima beans disappeared mysteriously. This provides the lived context for the conversation and the stimulus for what is talked about. The children are embodied and share the same environmental and historical context (they are in the here and now). This particular conversation refers to conversations the children had in the previous weeks, and it is part of the historical stream of speech, which spans a temporal frame that

recalls the past and sets up themes for future conversations. In oral cultures, as with these children, the context of the conversation is clear and shared and does not need to be filled in (Ong, 1982): Wally's indignation when he found the lima beans gone from the dirt in his container is remembered by all, and so are other things lost over the weeks before this conversation. In his study of illiterate people in Uzbekistan and Kirghizia, Luria (1976) documented how the exclusive immersion into conversational contexts affected the kinds of thinking and speaking his participants engaged in: They refused to give definitions or comprehensive descriptions of things because situational events are obvious, and because a description or definition would miss many essential (non-visual) experiential aspects of things. Paley's (1981) children do not have to describe or define "cactus," but have an immediate grasp of the spiny, dangerous plant and its world, and they weave it into their conversation.

Speech is profoundly interpersonal and social and makes it possible "to think according to others which enriches our own thought" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 179).² The children have an implicit understanding that turn-taking makes speech generative: The cactus theme suggested by Andy is picked up by Eddie, Tanya, and Wally, who spin it forward. On the other hand, Deana's introduction of "cactus in the desert" falls flat because it leads too far away from the present location and the urgency of solving the mystery in this room. In oral conversation there is an immediate feed-back loop between speaker and listener in the service of the conversation. It is surprising to notice how well the children listen and take up, or "think according to," the ideas suggested by their conversation partners. They excitedly contribute their ideas, which link up closely with what the other child said but also amplify and modify and add to the other speaker's expressions. When we listen to a conversation partner we are "taken over by the other's speech, it fully occupies our mind," "we are possessed by it" as if under a "spell" (p. 180). Andy's story of the cactus on his father's windowsill has power, and the children become deeply engaged in the images and speculative thoughts it suggests. Only Deana drops out of the conversation because the other children were not willing to follow the spell of her speech, and she was unable or unwilling to change tack.

There is a profound connection between thinking and speaking, but Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out that language is not a simple utensil of cognition, as the constructivists claim (Piaget, 1955): It is not thinking that clothes itself in the garb of language, but the process of linguistic exchange produces and sustains thinking. Thought urges toward expression in language, and expressive speaking moves thinking forward. We do not know what we think before we speak it. "Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 178). Andy's idea of connecting the cactus to the mysterious robbers is a wonderful conver-

sational gambit. It has so much potential for speculation, and it intersects with the emotional puzzle of missing things that has occupied the children for a while. We could say that speech awakens thought and even accomplishes it by gathering and directing it and combining old thoughts into new ones in order for the language exchange between speakers to flow. The thought processes that Andy, Deana, Wally, Tanya, and Eddie produce are not individual but communal: Thought is born and accomplished in the evolving of their conversation. It flows through them, augmented (or stifled) by each individual contribution. Together they think better and more creatively than alone. The children speak to each other not in order to exchange information, but to re-live and approach the mystery of vanishing things. The excitement of their conversation lies not in its conceptual content, but in how much of the imaginary world they can open up.

At the beginning of the children's conversation, they are not sure where it will go. Andy introduces the themes of "robbers" and "protection against robbers," but it is by no means sure that the conversation will connect the themes to the missing beans. And yet it seems that the conversation tends that way. Before our own words are spoken, we reach for them. Words have a "near presence," they are "behind me," and come to realization in the act of speaking (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 180). This emergence becomes particularly clear in Wally's final statement, as he discovers what everyone was reaching for: "Let's put a cactus by the lima beans the next time." Cactuses protect against robbers in a physical and magical way. "Cactus," "robbers," and "lima beans" are intuitively connected from the beginning, but it takes the children a while to consciously see the associative chain. It is as if they are working from the emotional complex of "protection against robbers" towards the final cognitive connection between cactus and lima bean, but need the bridge of speech to get there.

The conversation about the cactus allows for an imaginary participation in thoughts that are not connected to the here and now. The cactus does not reside in the room and is not present to their senses. It exists for all but Andy—who probably saw it in his father's office—outside their field of sensory experience. It is a purely imaginary object, which Andy introduces into their thought processes. However, the conversation partners treat it as completely real, as real as the lima beans to which it is linked. Language forms an "organism of words," which establishes a linguistic world and a new dimension of experience alongside the perceptual world. The word "cactus" has a location in the linguistic world for which the children reach, and some do it more successfully than others. Every human language, spoken or read, is a symbolic form of communication, in which the secondary world of invisible symbols is experienced as compelling and as real as the world of the senses. Luria (1981) succinctly summarized the power that language gives to the human child:

The enormous advantage is that their world doubles. In the absence of words, humans would have to deal only with those things which they could perceive and manipulate directly. With the help of language, they can deal with things which they have not perceived even indirectly and with things which were part of the experience of earlier generations. Thus the word adds another dimension to the world of humans....animals have only one world, the world of objects and situations which can be perceived by the senses. Humans have a double world. (p. 35)

The coming of words in the conversation between the children is based on the activity of trying to affect the world shared with the other. Speech has an expressive substructure that is deeply emotional, rather than conceptual. Through their speech, they want to draw each other in and create a common world, where everyone contributes to the complex cactus/robber/lima bean problem. Speech is a fundamental activity whereby human beings project themselves towards a "world" that can be illuminated and shared with the other. Paley (1981) does not tell us what happens after this conversation, but I am sure that if the class plants beans again, the children will want to "put a cactus by the lima beans the next time," as Wally suggests. The linguistic/symbolic world and its gestures are intermingled with the structure of the sensory/experienced world, which they outline and concur with. If a speech act is too far removed from the experienced world and does not fit into the emotional substructure of shared concerns, the conversation ends or the speaker's interjection is ignored. Not every thought is generative. Language, ultimately, is not a tool for expressing thought, but "it is the subject's taking up a position in the world of his meaning" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 193). The positions, even within the same conversation, can vary: Andy's role is that of an eye witness and defender of cactus-power, Deana's that of a silenced fool, and Wally's that of the synthesizing genius.

Throughout the year the children talk about the same theme of robbers when matchbox cars, coats, sweaters, and rugs disappear mysteriously. The intention to speak resides in an open experience, which leads to the productivity of speaking and is not merely repeating the memorized stack of words stored in the speaker's memory. The young child's desire for speech arises from "the ever-re-created opening in the plenitude of being" (Merleau-Paley, 1962, p. 197), and it is this plenitude that lets these kindergarteners approach the vanishing of the beans repeatedly and speak to each other over and over again. The conversations in Paley's kindergarten are productive, and we get a glimpse of the many possible themes and directions for thinking and speaking that open up when the children speak with each other: They discuss the nature of the man in the moon, if mothers collect bones and water and put them into their unborn babies, the functioning of pulleys, and how sugar comes from sugar beets. There is always more that could be said: The silence of the "more" is the fertile ground for all speaking.

Key Themes/Constituents of Oral Language Experience

Our brief phenomenology of the speech act highlights some key themes in the structure of oral language experience (we should keep in mind, however, that the following descriptions of the features of spoken language are written as positive descriptions, but that each of them also contains the possibility for failure and distortion within it).

1. The Embodied Context:

Speech is situated in an interpersonal field and a particular location, with a speaker and a listener taking turns exchanging language. There is a lived context for the conversation, which is also the stimulus for what is talked about. Conversation partners are embodied and share the same environmental and historical context (they are in the here and now.) Engaged in a conversation, we think according to others, which, in turn, enriches our own thought. Moreover, we are taken over by other's speech, it fully occupies our mind, and we are possessed by it as if under a spell.

2. Speaking and Thinking:

Thought urges toward expression in language and expressive speaking moves thinking forward. We do not know what we think before we speak it. Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it. Before our own words are spoken, we reach for them. Words have a near presence; they are "behind me" and come to realization in the act of speaking. Language is not a simple utensil of cognition. It is not thinking that clothes itself in the garb of language, but the process of linguistic exchange itself produces and sustains thinking.

3. Sense and Symbol:

Language provides us with an organism of words, which establishes a linguistic world and a new dimension of experience alongside the perceptual world. Every human language, spoken or read, is a symbolic form of communication, in which the secondary world of invisible symbols is experienced as compelling and as real as the world of the senses.

4. Shared Worlds:

Speech is a fundamental activity whereby human beings project themselves towards a world that can be illuminated and shared with the other. The linguistic/symbolic world and its gestures are intermingled with the structure of the sensory/experienced world, which they outline and concur with. Language, ultimately, is not a tool for expressing thought, but it is the subject's taking up a position in the world of his or her meaning. Speech has an expressive substructure that is deeply emotional, rather than conceptual.

5. Language is Generative

The intention to speak resides in an open experience, which leads to the productivity of speaking and is not merely repeating the memorized stack of words stored

in the speaker's memory. Language arises out of the ever-re-created opening in the plenitude of being. There is always more that could be said: The silence of the "more" is the fertile ground for all speaking.

Reading and Perception

To Be Alphabetized

Language enters the child's life as a powerful and transformative event. It begins as a sensory-musical presence in the womb (DeCasper & Spence, 1986), develops alongside the toddler's symbolic play, and undergoes a radical transformation when the young child learns how to read. The musical, the symbolic, and the textual aspects of language are all manifestations and possibilities inherent in language itself. Reading is rooted in human speech, but it also deviates from oral speech practice. Learning how to read requires that children change the way they perceive and think about the world. Textuality, in particular, reduces certain aspects of the language experience and intensifies others.

In their research on oral and literate competencies of children from kindergarten through third grade, Torrance and Olson (1985) discovered that children who are better readers use more psychological verbs that reflect cognitive processes (*think, know, decide, wonder, etc.*), but do not use a greater variety of affective verbs (*like, hate, love, care, etc.*). They argue that the predominance of cognitive verbs in young readers indicates their mastery of de-contextualization: The children understand that there is a difference between what a person means and what is actually said, i.e., that words and sentences per se mean something independent of a speaker. In order to understand the word on the page, the child must be able to recognize that words are words and can be represented in different media. "This is a basic move in coming to recognize 'words' as constituents of utterances, and it is a move that may be prerequisite to 'reading' any words at all" (p. 268). On the other hand, the researchers found that good conversational skills and oral competence, such as turn-taking and holding up one's end of a conversation, does not relate to success in learning how to read. This discovery indicates that successful engagement with text requires that the child achieves a reflective distance from the speech act. Language for these readers is no longer an intuitive, unconscious extension of their bodies, but a consciously, reflectively used tool.

Speech, in the conversation between Paley's (1981) children, was woven into a full sensory field. As Andy spoke about the cactus on his father's window sill, the children were sitting or standing together in close proximity. They saw each other, heard Tanya's breath as she got ready to interject her "how about" into the conversation, and sensed each other's gestures and facial expressions. The oral speech act is performed in a synesthetic sensory environment, where seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and

touching together make sense out of the flow of conversation and its context.

Before phonetic/alphabetic writing systems were invented, many cultures used pictograms as signs for objects, but the drawback of pictographic systems is that a vast number of signs are needed to code the many words of a spoken language (Goody, 1968). Alphabetization, on the other hand, is the translation of the sound system of a language into a small set of pictographic signs, which in the current Western alphabet means 26 symbols that code 5 vowels and 21 consonants (with some standard combinations between them). The invention of the alphabet created an economical and convenient instrument for recording languages, and we often forget what a momentous achievement this was: Goody (1968) remarked that the notion of representing a sound by a graphic symbol is "a stupefying leap of the imagination" (p. 38).³

While pictographic notation in general maintains its connection with the visual world by imitating it in pictures, alphabetic notation imitates language itself, and not what it refers to. Reading alphabetic notation means to decipher the sound of language from an abstract letter pictograph and then translate it into linguistic references. Alphabetic signs encode the symbolic system of spoken words, which are already one step removed from the world of the senses. The difficulty that many children have with this system is that the visual letters on the page have no intrinsic pattern relation with the phonemes they represent. They are arbitrary and have to be learned as a system. We could even argue that discrete phonemes do not exist in the flow of language that children use, and that a system of phonemes is an artificial and unintuitive construct, which then has to be linked to the artificial system of the alphabet. Before writing can make sense, beginning readers have to submit themselves to the rules of a senseless, arbitrary system of letters and phonics. Meanwhile teachers hope that each child will somewhere undergo Goody's "stupefying leap of the imagination" in which the chicken scratches on the page suddenly come together as a referential text.⁴

Alphabetic notation, then, is the visual representation of language sounds (as determined by cultural conventions). Engaging with texts, child readers have to restructure their perception: Language that existed primarily as an intuitive, oral event must be translated into a reflective, visual happening, where the visual spectacle of letters on the page has nothing to do with the multifarious visual experience of the perceptual field surrounding the reader. A written text is a visual abstraction which represents sound and context by eliminating it. Here we have the first example of the insertion of writing technology into oral discourse and the dynamic of intensification and reduction which it brings. The very structure of alphabetization, which is the foundation of Western reading practices, intensifies the representational capacity of language while at the same time unmooring it from its sensory anchor in the perceived world.

Reading in an Oral World

In the history of literacy there is an interesting chapter which describes the transition between reading as an oral and a visual event. Long after the invention of the alphabet, the written word remained closely tied to the ear and the voice: Until the 13th century most European literate people could not read silently. When you entered a medieval scriptorium, you would not find a hushed, silent library, but a community of mumblers and munchers (Illich, 1996). The readers would softly read out the words from the page, the scribes would dictate the words to their hands as they copied the text, and all would have intense bodily experiences as the sound settled into their senses and bones; some readers, like Talmudic scholars today, would rock back and forth. It is almost unimaginable to us that most people in the 12th century, even highly learned scholars, did think it impossible to read silently without moving their lips. When Peter the Venerable had a cough, he could not read a book, neither in the choir nor in his cell to himself. True silent reading was occasionally practiced in antiquity, but it was considered a feat: Augustine was amazed that his teacher Ambrose sometimes read a book without moving his lips. For the mumbling reader, the page was a “sounding page,” a “soundtrack picked up by the mouth and voiced by the reader for his own ear. For the medieval reader the page is literally embodied, incorporated” (p. 54). This medieval oral reading practice was still closely related to the embodied, synesthetic speech act that we discussed above. The written text maintained its deep sensory connection to the spoken word, and reading was a slow recapitulation of an earlier speech act. Compare this carnal, oral, “deep view” of the written page to our contemporary understanding of texts as primarily *visual* events: “The modern reader conceives of the page as a plate that inks the mind, and of the mind as a screen onto which the page is projected and from which, at a flip, it can fade” (p. 54).

The text as a purely visual event is a historical invention with far reaching consequences, and it appeared in the late Middle Ages when silent reading and a new technology of text-production took over. The late 12th century invented (for the Western world) page lay-out, chapter division, the consistent numbering of chapter and verse, indices, tables of content, introductions, library inventories and concordances. Illich (1996) points out that this change in the technology of textuality fostered a change in the way reality is conceived. It created a new kind of reader who could read silently and swiftly, “one who wants to acquire in a few years of study a new kind of acquaintance with a larger number of authors than a meditating monk could have perused in a lifetime” (p. 96). The new kind of readers and writers looked at the page and experienced the exteriorization of a *cogitatio*, a thought structure, a thought outline of reasons. It became the foundation for the study practices of European universities and the production of bodies of knowledge in academic disciplines.⁵

The new relationship between text and mind, the ability to conceive of the written word as an abstract and inaudible record of thought, was the psychological foundation for the print culture, which began with Gutenberg in the 15th century. The elimination of sound intensified and sped up the reading process and involved the mind in a different way. The field of sound, as Ong (1982) pointed out, is not spread out before human beings but is diffuse and all around them. The visual field, however, is focused and laid out before the eyes. In the oral world human consciousness experiences itself surrounded by sound and enveloped by a cosmos. In the visual/textual world the cosmos is spread out before the eye: “Only after print and the extensive experience with maps that print implemented would human beings, when they thought about the cosmos or the universe or “world”, think primarily of something laid out before their eyes, as in a modern printed atlas, a vast surface or assemblage of surfaces (vision presents surfaces) ready to be explored” (p. 73).

Pre-school age children experience their books in a way that is much closer to the oral, meditative reading of the mumbling monks. Our son, from the time he was 18 months old, insisted that we read the same book every night. For years we read Alley’s *Busy People All Over Town* (1988), a picture book with extensive descriptive text. (Even though the book has been out of print for 20 years, there are still three current reviews on the Amazon website: Parents report that their young children want to “read” the book “over and over,” “a hundred times”). Sitting together on Nick’s bed, my husband or I read the text to him and we talked about the pictures. We were not allowed to abbreviate or change the wording because even as a toddler Nick knew the text by heart. The repetitive reading of the book was not an act of gathering information or new experiences, but it served to re-evolve a familiar world, which soothed him before sleep. Ong (1988) points out that in the oral world the word is essentially a call or a cry to the other, and that speech is not a reification of concepts or information, “but an event, an action” between people (p. 267). Every night we—and the other parents and children who have loved this book—enacted and performed the same story-event because it made our child feel safe, comfortable, and protected.

Synesthesia

Reading restructures the perceptual experience of human beings. We saw that the alphabet requires the translation of the language field into phonemes, which then are represented by symbols on the page. As a perceptual event alphabetization reduces the surrounding soundscape to the words that the reader can recreate in the mind, and the field of vision to the linear progression of letters on the page. While the medieval reader maintained the close connection between letter and sound, silent reading practice suppresses auditory perception and language becomes less and less a matter for the voice and ear. Visual perception,

as well, is altered: The reader must see through the letters on the page in order to conjure up the invisible presence that the text encodes.

In his phenomenological analysis of alphabetization as a perceptual phenomenon, Abram (1996) shows how perception changes in the transition from oral to textual engagement with the world in non-literate, animistic cultures. His analysis, however, also applies to the restructuring child consciousness undergoes in the transition from orality to literacy. Prior to the immersion into textuality, the creative, synesthetic interplay of the senses with the perceived world creates a sense of magical envelopment. The earth is experienced as alive and meaningful and full of messages to the perceiver: "Direct, prereflective perception is inherently synesthetic, participatory, and animistic, disclosing the things as elements that surround us not as inert objects but as expressive subjects, entities, powers, potencies" (p.130). Abram's description of direct perception parallels Piaget's findings that young children's thinking is participatory, magical, and animistic (Piaget, 1929/1951).

Synesthesia works by bringing all the senses into play in the act of perception. We see something and know what sound it will make when we knock on it, how its texture should feel to the touching fingers, or how heavy it is when we pick it up. Even very young infants have this ability of cross-modal, synesthetic perception (Meltzoff & Borton, 1979; Stern, 1985). When one sensory mode is evoked the others come into play as well.

In learning how to read we must break the spontaneous participation of our eyes and our ears in the surrounding terrain (where they had ceaselessly converged in the synesthetic encounter with animals, plants, and streams) in order to recouple those senses upon the flat surface of the page. As a Zuni elder focuses her eyes upon a cactus and hears the cactus begin to speak, so we focus our eyes on these printed marks and immediately hear voices. We hear spoken words, witness strange scenes or visions, even experience other lives. (Abram, 1996, p. 131)

Abram's analysis of the relationship between alphabetization and perception makes clear that the magical synesthesia, the evocation of all the senses, is relocated from the world to the text. When the eye perceives something, the other senses participate, even if they do not perceive directly. This is the virtual, imaginary dimension of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). As the eyes read through the signs on the page, the mind brings all the senses into play to create a whole virtual world complete with sensory resonances. The magical power of books has its roots in the phenomenon of synesthesia: As we read, the world of the book is as compelling and sometimes more real to us than the actual world of the senses. "As nonhuman animals, plants, and even 'inanimate' rivers once spoke to our tribal ancestors, so the 'inert' letters on the page now speak to us! This is a form of animism that we take for granted, but it is animism none the less—as mysterious as a talking stone" (Abram, 1996, p. 131). And Abram is correct: We

are animists when it comes to textual signification. We give ourselves over to the mysterious voices and beings that arise through the letters on the page and take them seriously—and among literate people we take the world of texts more seriously than the world of the senses: Most children spend more time in the text-centered symbolic discourse of school than in exploring and talking about the world they directly perceive.

The introduction of literacy changes children's relationship to the world because it shifts their attention from the animated, meaningful context of their perceived worlds toward the purely symbolic and *unperceived* dimension of the text's virtual world. Abram argues that the magic of full, synesthetic perception, the spell that it casts upon us and the force with which it draws us into a connection with the world, has changed its direction when we enter a literate world. Literacy is a technology that distances us from the life world and dulls our ability to attend to and "read" fully the expressions of the world of minerals, plants, animals, and the elements: "It is only when a culture shifts its participation to these printed letters that the stones fall silent" (p. 131). Here we have a second instance of the structural intensification and reduction which chirographic technology brings: The synesthetic intensification of the virtual/symbolic dimension of language and the reduction of the body's engagement with a plentiful, signifying, sensory environment.

Reading and the Symbolic Order

The Loss of Context

In order to perform the act of reading and to make the strange restructuring of auditory and visual perception possible, the young reader's experiential field of speech must be reconfigured. As long as children pay attention to the fullness of the perceptual field around them, the magical transportation into the world of the text cannot happen. In order to be a reader, a child has to let go of the lived context of the situation they find themselves in. Vygotsky (1986) noted that the young child's entry into literacy introduces an abstract process that is removed from the child's actual situation. Attention must focus through the visual process of decoding to the world of meaning the text transmits. This world of the text has no relationship to the child's here and now. The lived context for the conversation between speakers has to be eliminated: The room must be forgotten, other children must be blocked out, and the only one speaking is the text. Other bodies, and even the child's own body, are intrusions and must be restrained to a chair behind a table so that they don't occupy the space in social and disruptive ways. This is a change in the situatedness of language (Theme 1: *The embodied context* from our analysis of the speech act above). Andy, Deana, Eddie, Tanya, and Wally must stop talking to each other. Postman (1994) puts it succinctly:

But with the printed book another tradition began: the isolated reader and his private eye. Orality became muted, and the reader and his response became separated from a social context. The reader retired within his own mind, and from the sixteenth century to the present what most readers have required of others is their absence, or, if not that, their silence. In reading, both the writer and reader enter into a conspiracy of sorts against social presence and consciousness. Reading is, in a phrase, an asocial act. (p. 27)

When we are teaching children how to read, we should be aware that reading requires a profound change in the child's language experience. Speech is a very social and embodied activity, which has its own momentum and rewards. Most children love to talk to each other, and as we saw with Paley's (1981) class, they draw each other forward into the world of ideas that they talk about. Reading as an "asocial act" requires the child to engage with a speaker, the author, who is disembodied and unresponsive and does not create openings for the child's own introjections into the web of language and thought. The conversation, from the child's perspective, is passive and receptive, and the reader has no power to shape and alter the course of the conversation other than to disagree or put the book down. The child moves from the dialogue of oral exchange to the monologue of the text (Vygotsky, 1986). This is especially difficult for beginning readers, who cannot yet reconstitute the symbolic world behind the letters on the page, and have not yet tasted the pleasure that a good text evokes. Even though reading also requires an active mind, its activity is virtual, solitary, and disembodied. The very power of texts comes from their reduction of the actual, social, and embodied dimensions of language experience. The loss of the immediate social context opens the reader to the new context that the text offers. From a lived sociality the child moves into a virtual sociality that promises encounters with fictional characters. These encounters are powerful, disembodied, and invisible to others, which intensifies the reader's sense of privacy and interiority.

The Phenomenology of Entering a Text

Most children love stories. As an adult I remember being spellbound by one of David Abram's lectures about the gestural connection between humans and animals. He mesmerized us with words and movement, and as I glanced around the auditorium I saw my colleagues unconsciously bob their heads in imitation of a sea lion, which they clearly saw in their imaginations. The virtual reality created by language is extremely powerful. Oral story telling is supported by the physical presence and the shared context of narrator and listener. This is also the case when an adult reads aloud to children. In reading to oneself, however, this context is missing. The full magic of the written text can only come alive when the child overcomes the resistance of body and senses and enters into the particular symbolic structure that the web of sentences creates.

In his phenomenological analysis of the literary work of art, Ingarden (1973) suggests that out of the component parts of textuality (phonemes, words, sentences, and the textual unfolding as a whole) a particular *world* arises, and it is this world (which transcends the author's intended meaning) which the reader finds compelling—or not. The child has to be able to "climb aboard" and "accept the given perspectives" (Iser, 1972, p. 282), while at the same time be willing to collaborate with the text to allow it to come to fruition in the imagination:

The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it represents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. The virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination. (p. 284)

The world displayed by the text refers to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) idea of the organism of words, which creates a new dimension of experience alongside the perceptual world (Theme 3: *Sense and symbol*). The child's imagination fills the gaps in the text, supplies what is not there. The text, on the other hand, allows the child to live and experience worlds that could never come to his or her immediate, embodied senses. A book takes on its full existence only in its readers (Poulet, 1969). If it receives their full participation, it allows them to absorb new experiences:

As soon as I replace my direct perception by the words of a book, I deliver myself, bound hand and foot, to the omnipotence of fiction. I say farewell to what is, in order to feign belief in what is not. I surround myself with fictitious beings; I become the prey of language. There is no escaping this take-over. Language surrounds me with its unreality. (p. 55)

The reader's thoughts and feelings are occupied by the thoughts of the author, and these in their turn draw new boundaries in our personality. The consciousness of the reader "behaves as though it were the consciousness of another" and "on loan to another" who feels, suffers, and thinks in it (pp. 56–57). Here we have another intensification and reduction of speech: The possibility of thinking according to others (Theme 2: *Speaking and thinking*) is intensified in the monological exposure to the text's voice. While in the oral speech act, the child participates momentarily in the speech of the other and then takes his or her turn; however, the written speech act requires the sustained immersion in the fictional world created by an author. The writer extends his or her own being by displaying a world with the hope that readers will share it (Theme 4: *Shared worlds*). The silence of the reader and the temporal structure of the continuous, uninterrupted voice of the author preclude the reader from interjecting and changing the direction of the language exchange. The world of the book worms its way into the consciousness of the reader. All a reader can do is close the book and refuse participation in the symbolic world the text promises.

The Symbolic Order

The conversations in Paley's (1981) class revealed how language gave the children a linguistic/symbolic world, which contained things (like the cactus) that were not actually present. This second order symbolic reality which is created in ordinary conversations is intensified and amplified in texts. The term "symbolic order" refers to the organism of words and the new dimension of virtual experience beyond the senses that appear in human language exchanges (Theme 3: *Sense and symbol*). It influences young infants before they themselves engage in symbolic activities (Lacan, 2002) because their parents participate in and are shaped by the languages and values of their cultures. Reading, once the child has mastered the decoding system, allows the child "to think according to others" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 179) to have experiences not available in the immediate sensory environment, and to be immersed in the cultural symbolic order more intensely.

In oral conversations, children take up each other's thoughts and weave a shared web of mind processes. In textuality, however, others' thought processes, memories, and images are recapitulated and accomplished in the child's mind without the child's direct, embodied response. Silencing the back and forth of embodied conversations intensifies the reader's exposure to the author's thoughts, images, and feelings. The most significant change that literacy introduces is the amplification of the symbolic order in the minds of children. As soon as children cross over the threshold of alphabetic decoding, they enter a compelling wonderland of ideas and experiences *which are not their own*, but which powerfully shape the mind. Literate cultures know that they need this world and that they have to colonize it. Through this process, on a massive scale, literate cultures reproduce themselves over the generations by establishing canons of texts that have to be read and internalized by children. Cultural memory is transmitted by texts. We call this process "education."

We can get a better view of the significance of the symbolic order when we look at it from a cultural-historical perspective. Literate cultures have commerce in the realities that are created by texts: Books hold knowledge and cultural memory. Books (and electronic media today) are a storehouse for memories of all sorts—records of legal transactions, historical events, philosophical arguments, poetry, scientific inventions and ideas, religious texts and commentaries, maps and calendars. Book content is the cultural currency that is transferred in the conversations of literate people and determines the intellectual and moral climate. Mumford (1934) argues that the invention of the printing press and the ensuing spread of writing technology led to a radical transformation of Western culture. "More than any other device, the printed book released people from the domination of the immediate and the local.... Print made a greater impression than the actual events.... To exist was to exist in print: The rest of

the world tended gradually to become more shadowy. Learning became book learning" (p. 28).

The proliferation of the symbolic order is fueled by the desire of writers to share their language and virtual worlds with others (Theme 4: *Shared worlds*). Print technology multiplies the audience for texts, as well as the number of authors who want to occupy the reader's mind. In turn, the dissemination of ideas in print, as Mumford indicates, inserts itself into everyday life practices and changes them radically (Theme 5: *Language is generative*). The invention of the automobile, the telephone, and electronic media was possible because their inventors could acquire the sedimented knowledge of previous generations through reading. In turn, these inventions changed where and how people lived, how they attended to and perceived their environment, and what they talked about with their neighbors.

Books do not merely contain information, but structure the way we think about reality. Literacy makes it possible to erect a conceptual scaffold above our everyday experience, which then is disseminated and transmitted through the authority of media and education. This makes the virtual reality of texts believable and compelling, even if it contradicts our senses: To exist is to exist in print. The immediate and local experience has been sacrificed to the symbolic dimension of texts.

Historically, the invention of print and the symbolic world it produced led to the cultural appearance of childhood. Those who could read and were educated were altered by literacy. The invention of "the Literate Human" inaugurated a symbolic distinction between childhood and adulthood:

From print onward, adulthood had to be earned. It became a symbolic, not a biological achievement. From print onward, the young would have to become adults, and they would have to do it by learning to read, by entering the world of typography. And in order to accomplish that they would require education. (Postman, 1994, p. 36)

Unlike biological adulthood, which comes with puberty, symbolic adulthood requires education and has to be culturally reproduced in children. We ask each child to make a series of sacrifices on the way to literacy: Bodies do not lie on the floor or skip through the streets, but must sit in rows; the speech of friends is forbidden and re-defined as idle chatter; the magic of the sense-world is drained until it becomes dulled and distant, like the flat piece of sky beyond the sealed classroom window.

Notes

1. In *Of Grammatology* (1974), Derrida argues that the alphabet should not be thought of in terms of visual notation of phonemes, but as a differentiated system of visual signs that relates to the differentiated system of phonetic signs without complete congruence between the two. This complicates Illich's (1996) and the philologist's argument since it makes the historical leap into alphabetization (and I would include here also ideographic systems of signs) even more surprising

- as a feat of the human mind: The acquisition of the alphabet requires the translation of one arbitrary system into another. But essentially Derrida's argument does not challenge the observation that pervasive writing technology brings radical changes to a culture (see also note #3).
2. The debate over the nature of language has been one of the most important discussions in 20th century philosophy. Since the Greeks, the study of language had been divided into grammar, logic, and rhetoric, with logic taking the pride of place in the philosophy of language. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, the late Wittgenstein, and Derrida shifted the emphasis—which was still apparent in Husserl's work—away from language as a conceptual tool of the logical mind towards language as performance within a personal and cultural context. Here language is no longer the expression of a private subject, but a means by which thinking is possible (Garver, 1973). Heidegger (1971) speaks of language as “the house of being” (p. 132). Merleau-Ponty (1962) thinks of it as the grillwork through which we can catch our thinking, and Derrida (1974) states that “we can think only in signs” (p. 50).
 3. Since Derrida's (1974) *Of Grammatology*, many post-structuralist thinkers have given primacy to writing over speech. However, Derrida's notion of writing does not refer to the distinction between the spoken word and symbolic notation, but refers to the complex and infinite web of signification that comes with every language act. Textuality for Derrida means that every language act exists within a context and requires interpretation (Caputo, 1997), and that language as text is a “heterogeneous, differential, and open field of forces” (Deutscher, 2005, p. 33). Language is never the tool of an interiorized subject, but is given to us by our culture and is a repetition of what came before. As such it pre-determines what is expressible on the one hand, and what cannot be said on the other. Its conventional forms structure human cognition, identity, and experience.

From the perspective of child psychology, however, language does not pre-exist in the minds of children: It does not burst forth fully fledged like Athena from the head of Zeus. *Developmentally*, voice and gesture come before speech, and speech comes before writing. Before infants are able to engage in the symbolic dimension of the language field that surrounds them, they are attuned to the music and mood of what is spoken. Speech is an embodied, co-existential phenomenon, and infants acquire speech only if they are given the opportunity to interact with other people of their culture. There is a developmental sequence to language acquisition, a sequence which goes hand in hand with the development of interpersonal relationships, perception, and cognition. Infants, for example, have to be about nine months old before they grasp that a pointing finger (signifier) refers to something beyond itself (signified), and they have to have relationships with others that allow them to want to engage in joint attention. Developmental changes also mean that language exists for the child in different ways than it does for adults.

This does not negate Derrida's (1974) notion of textuality, but it adds the bodily dimension to the human experience of language. Even though the language a child “bathes in” is culturally constructed and instituted, the child's understanding and use grows on a daily basis through bodily engagement with the world. Language—and particularly grammar—as contemporary linguists have recognized, is not taught by adults, *but acquired by children*. We cannot prevent children from picking it up as long as they live in a speaking environment. This attests either to a biological/genetic foundation for language acquisition, as Chomsky (1959, 1969) claims, or to the child's insertion into a complex existential ensemble of bodily, co-existential, spatial, and temporal structures,

complemented by the child's inborn capacities for attention and learning that allow him or her to construct their native language (Tomasello, 2003).

4. Spoken language encompasses other forms of symbolic expression, which do not use the human voice. American Sign Language (ASL), for example, is a form of speech and a full language that is not dependent on the modulations of the voice. As with hearing infants, deaf infants who grow up in signing households acquire the language of their parents almost effortlessly within the first three years of life (Meier, 1993) (while children who learn ASL past puberty rarely achieve fluency). Writing, for deaf and hearing children, is an often-difficult modification of their speech acts. In writing the primary speech/language system of a child, such as ASL, is translated into the alphabetic system. Deaf children, for example, have an easier time deciphering alphabetic visual notation if they also learn how to fingerspell (Alvarado, Puente, & Herrera, 2008), which is comparable to hearing children being taught the relationship between phoneme and grapheme. For both groups of children the in-between step of translating speech into phoneme, and symbolic gesture into fingerspelling attests to the difficulty in transitioning from embodied, contextual, and unreflected language use to the conscious acquisition of alphabetic notation and writing.
5. I have argued elsewhere (Simms, 2008) that the late middle ages saw not only shifts in literacy, but also in the ways people thought about themselves and how they conceived of childhood. The (re)-invention of silent reading, the instituting of confession in the Catholic Church, prolonged adult pilgrimages, and the children's crusade happened within a few decades of each other. The literate adult, the interiorized self, and the concept of childhood were invented at this time, and they comprise a web of profoundly entwined historical and psychological phenomena.

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3

The Book as Home? It All Depends

Shirley Brice Heath

Stanford University and Brown University

What is it to feel difference—to feel a sense of distance from the traditional happily-ever-after portrait of parent and child reading together at night? Such a narrative has been instantiated in the public mind as the *right* way to be. It's not just one possibility, but the predictive indicator not only of assured school success but also of a guaranteed, life-long love of reading. In Arizpe and Style's opening *Handbook* chapter on reading in the home, the literary world Jane Johnson crafted for her children clearly demonstrates this narrative. Yet, in this chapter, Shirley Brice Heath, ethnographer and author of the groundbreaking *Ways with Words*—deconstructs the romance and tells us in a highly personal way what no bedtime story means. The intertwining of her childhood identity with her evolving adult academic identity and community work braids together a tale of multiple surprises and serendipitous turns narrating the many paths we take to reading.

No Way to Read

He left our interview, puzzlement written on his face. He walked across the campus parking lot, crowded with students, speaking to no one. For more than a week, I heard nothing from him until he confronted me outside the classroom where I was about to begin teaching. "I don't believe you. What you tell me goes against everything we believe about learning to love reading."

Ken Macrorie, teacher, essayist, editor, and inspiration for so many young writers in secondary school English classrooms, had asked to interview me for a book he was writing on language educators. I was flattered. It was 1985, and we were both faculty members at the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College. This program brought secondary English teachers together to study

literature and writing toward a Master's degree. When I joined the Bread Loaf faculty in 1982, Ken was a legend in English education. His books had inspired the "I-search" paper, an approach to undertaking research essays that had taken a generation of high school students to success with the elusive school-favored genre (Macrorie, 1985, 1988).

In the summer of 1986, Ken expected to complete a book of biographical essays based on his interviews with scholars he viewed as key influences in the field of language education. He began our interview by telling me how much he had enjoyed the stories from eminent men and women who were to be in his book: James Britton, Janet Emig, James Moffett, and others whom I had long admired. Ken told me that each of his previous

interviewees had credited childhood teachers and favorite works of children's literature with shaping their desire to become language educators. Now Ken turned to me.

"I really have no story about favorite books."

Ken prodded: "Tell me about a teacher who instilled your love of literature."

I shook my head and looked out the window of the classroom where we sat together with Ken's audio recorder. I searched my memory. Nothing came to meet Ken's expectations.

He persisted: "What about your favorite books as a child?"

"But, Ken, there weren't childhood books as favorites—my grandmother's Bible, and she could not really read."

Ken forged ahead, certain now that it must have been teachers who brought me to a love of children's literature during my elementary school years. They must be the inspiration for my life's work in language and literacy. I continued to shake my head, and the interview ended shortly thereafter.

I could not tell Ken the story he wanted—yet another in the chain of accounts from eminent academics whose childhoods had been worlds away from my own. I kept my dissent silent then.

This chapter breaks that silence. Now I tell my story—one sure to resonate with narratives similar in consequence if not in detail for some readers of this volume. My story does not belong just to me. It has much in common with the unique tales that I hope children all over the world will stand up and tell at some point in their lives.

Their stories and mine come not out of anger but from a sense of difference. Our childhood histories are not laced with bedtime stories, favorite books, academic ambitions, family models of reading, and a circuit of moral and personal valuations in support of children's literature. Our families have not traveled for leisure or lived in exotic parts of the world. Like me, these children have lived their early lives in small spaces, with few possessions of lasting worth, and with frequent moves from place to place. When asked where they live, they answer, "I stay at my grandmother's house some of the time, and other times, I'm..." Their addresses represent households, not homes; these households have few if any books.

Adults in their lives cannot step back from the demands of work to tell stories or to sing songs with children. Except for the occasional Golden Book or Disney-film-inspired book picked up at the grocery checkout, books have no real claim on the budgets of the households in which they live. Their neighbors and friends find it hard to believe that some people "collect" books. Children like me encounter books randomly, usually only when someone else has made the book selection for whatever reason. We are not guided to cherish books and the time they might allow us to demand from adults for reading together. If and when we do find our way to books written especially for children, it is likely to come later in life, when some

unexpected change of status or accidental acquaintance makes it possible for us to bond with such books. Someday these children with few books and bedtime stories in their early lives may, as I did, become enthusiastic converts and steadfast promoters of bedtime stories, book shelves, and collections of books for their own children and for the children of others. But perhaps not.

This chapter tells a counter story to that generally told by language educators, widely read authors of fiction and poetry, or scholars, illustrators, and authors of children's literature. Theirs is the enchanted tale of the literary culture of childhood, told and retold by parents and readers nostalgic for the pleasures that books brought them as children (e.g., Arizpe & Styles, this volume; Hearne & Trites, 2009; Scholes, 1989; Schwartz, 1996; Spitz, 1999; Spufford, 2002; Tatar, 2009; Tucker, 1981).¹ All these works tell us what reading is and what it should be. These are good people thinking good thoughts and wishing for others the good that children's literature has to give. They (like Ken Macrorie) want others to share their joy, passion, and convictions surrounding the moral, pedagogical, and enriching experiences of reading.

My childhood story reminds us that there is no one age or reason to read, value, and absorb these worlds of children's literature. In many households, space, time, work, and social relationships ensure that there is no way to read at will and in peace. Children's literature makes demands; it involves the "witchery" of story; it can lead to "addiction" (Nell, 1988; Rugg & Murphy, 2006). Avid readers, including booksellers, collectors, and scholars, underscore this point in the genre they have created of collections of quotations from others like them who have never recovered from being infected with the "venom of language" that left them in the joyful stupor of the fantasy worlds of early childhood literature (Breakwell & Hammond, 1994, p. 18).

Reading with young children requires time for snuggling and conversing. As children grow in their reading, they need ample space for sprawling bodies and books whose numbers and sizes may overwhelm the capacity of available bookshelves. Children who read books demand time for stop-action attention from adults willing to inspect drawings, watch dramatic re-enactments, and listen to retellings of tales. Childhood reading comes with a price, literal and figurative, in time, space, and commitment by intimates who love their children and value reading as part of the expression of that love.

My narrative reminds us that ways to meet and learn to love children's literature have always been divergent and multiple and have not necessarily come with attentive parents and grandparents who spend time reading and talking with children. Learning to feel at home and to want to fill one's home with objects, values, ideas, and even relationships not experienced in childhood comes for some of us only with adulthood. For some, neither the books nor the time and space for conversations about books will ever

come. For others who have these gifts in childhood, the accidents of life can erase their promise.

Storied Romance

Literacy educators hold tightly to the long-standing happily-ever-after transformational effects of children's literature or the beloved teacher who instills a love of books. Since the opening of the 18th century, the Anglo world has repeatedly made use of this romance, weaving it into children's books and through ideals of family literacy (cf. Lerer, 2008). Chapters in this volume attest to the strong ties that children's literature holds now and has historically held in the values of middle- and upper-class families. The ideology that links books with leisure, literate identity, and well-roundedness encourages parents to "cultivate" their children in an extended production process (Lareau, 2003). They manage time, space, and talk to ensure their children's familiarity with books. They look for performances and films, as well as accessories, to extend the characters and contents of children's books. They take pleasure in their children's language play, metaphors, and humor derived from bedtime stories. Parents draw on children's literature to tease, praise, chide, and coax their children (cf. Wolf & Heath, 1992).

Some leisure time of parents goes to reading for pleasure. Family conversations reference books and films, and outings include art museums with paintings whose narrative origins lie in written texts. Parents often believe children can acquire a fondness for science or mathematics on their own, but reading and knowing books must be taught. Educators and child-rearing guidebooks urge parents to read to and with their children. Didactic recommendations proclaim the power of storybooks to *instill, inspire, enthrall, influence, teach, enable, and direct* the ways of children. Children's songs and musical experiences often echo the lessons of books—from shapes, colors, and letters of the alphabet to moral cautions. The cultural resources that early childhood experiences with books offer are believed to sustain lifelong habits of reading and even to change the lives of children forever (cf. Fox, 2001; Meek, Warlow, & Barton, 1977; Pennac, 2006).

For centuries, upwardly mobile and financially established families of European, Anglo, and Scandinavian societies have believed that reading instills discipline and morality and bears a special relation to ethical action (Miller, 1987). The stories of children's worlds reinforce religious, musical, and visual values, model and inspire performance, and define not only what to stand for but also how to stand up to the world.

Picture books and illustrated stories, as well as chapter books, demonstrate the wit, curiosity, tenacity, and shrewdness of the young. In all these accounts, the young consistently out-manuever adults, make friends with non-human creatures, and enlist magic, fantasy, science fiction, and a host of spirits to reshape the world to their

will. Children's literature enables its heroes and heroines to overcome risk, pursue and achieve the impossible, and reconcile contradictions—all the while underscoring visions of the world to which adults around them subscribe (Wolf, 2004). Children can be anything they wish and travel anywhere on the "story road" (Hildreth, Felton, Henderson, & Meighen, 1940). Parents, older siblings, grandparents, librarians, bookshop owners, formal educators, authors, and edutainers—teachers all—have faith in the "magic of reading." Thus, the romance of children's literature and the wondrous potential of children merge into a unified whole.

Work Narratives

All romances rely on expectation. Those that extol the promise of picture books and written texts for children expect children and adults to have abundant leisure time free from the time demands of work. Reading is the enemy of chores and household tasks, for unlike storytelling, reading stops all other actions. Literary authors speak of their need to "hide," "steal time," "disappear," or feign deafness to avoid having to stop reading and to obey an adult's call to tasks. In homes and communities where family members do craft work, gardening, home and yard maintenance, food preparation and clean-up, and animal care, time for reading must be stolen away from chores and responsibilities. To read to or with a young child, adults step aside from the demands of their surrounding work. When youngsters begin to read for themselves, they must do so as solitary beings making themselves at home in their chosen book, disassociated from surrounding demands.

As a child, I had little chance for such disengagement.

For me, stories were told either by my grandmother or created in my own head in the midst of chores on my grandmother's small farm. I was an only child, born to parents who had caught one another on the rebound from prior too-early marriages. My father was a traveling salesman and refrigerator repairman; my mother a traveling waitress fond of following her favorite customers home. I have never known the full story of their life before me, and by the time I was five, each had decided that for the most part their lives were fuller and freer when I was not around. For my part, their absence was normal, for my life was full of play in work, choice of adventures, and the freedom to create imaginary places, people, and narratives.

I spent most of my early life with my grandmother in rural Virginia (in counties identified in 2008 as those with the lowest life expectancy in the United States). The woman I called "Granny" was really my mother's aunt, the sister of my mother's birth mother, who had died giving birth to twins. My mother had the misfortune of being the female of fraternal twins. Her father took her twin brother, leaving my own mother to die. Granny rescued the 3-pound infant and raised her. As soon as possible, my

mother left home, and I was a product of her wanderings that she brought home to Granny.

When my grandfather died, my grandmother and I moved to a two-room tarpaper house without electricity while a cinderblock house was being built between our temporary home and the dirt road that fronted the farm. Our cinderblock house seemed to me a mansion, complete with oil stove and electric lights. Granny had a bedroom; so did I. There was an extra bedroom for my parents on the rare occasions when they came independently or together. I raised pigs and calves; my grandmother took care of the chickens. We had a garden and a small orchard. The change of seasons, care of animals, and rhythms of planting and harvesting told their own stories—the narratives of life and work for Granny and me.

On Sundays and sometimes early in the morning, Granny sat in her chair at the window of her room, where she had a front-row seat to everything that passed. There she had “good light” for “reading” her Bible. Each day she also sat quietly before picking up one of her several small thin-lined notebooks. She bent her head close down over her work as she laboriously wrote bits of sayings she had learned from her parents and short poems memorized during her few years of schooling. When I sat on her lap, she retold the adventures of Daniel, Jonah, and other young risk-taking males from the Old Testament. My grandmother had barely finished elementary school, and she had gone to the local church up the road all her life. Her grip on reading was precarious beyond the stories she had heard again and again in Sunday School and church services. Bible School had instilled in her and passed on to me a joy in reciting Bible verses while we worked. We practiced to prepare me for the competitions of Bible School. Across the dirt road in front of our house was the local Black church that had services once a month. Granny and I went to stand at the back of the tiny church with too few pews for the congregation. There, a deacon taught me how to read a hymnbook. Granny and I held the book together and sang our hearts out. Years later I knew I had learned something else standing in the back of that church: the printed word cannot restrain the soaring stories of gospel music, testimonials, and sermons.

Before I started school, the only books that came into my grandmother’s house arrived in our mailbox. They carried inscriptions that read “To Shirley, a little girl who likes to read.” They were signed with names like “Chuck” and “Bob,” acquaintances of my mother. As a child, I sometimes puzzled over how these people I had never met knew of my existence or why they thought I knew how to read or would even like to read. I remember an over-sized book with the strange title “Bambi,” a very long thin book of Mother Goose rhymes, and several Little Golden Books about tailors, elves, brown puppies, and ducklings. As strange to my grandmother as they were to me, these books were slipped reverently into shelves behind the front door.

When or how I learned to read, I don’t know. I learned to recite the alphabet song my grandmother sometimes sang as we picked string beans. Their shapes of lines and curls went into letters of the alphabet—a welcome diversion as Granny and I prepared beans for canning.

By the time I was old enough to go to school, my father, pressured by his two younger sisters to take some responsibility for me, hired as my foster family a couple that my mother and father had met during their residence in North Carolina. They lived in High Point, North Carolina, where I could walk to the red brick elementary school. I spent that first-grade year away from Granny, holding onto the promise that I could come back to her in the summer.

Sensed Memories

My foster mom, “Mi,” worked in a patent-leather purse factory; my foster dad, Carl, was a milkman. They had one child, Dick, a year older than I. They became my family intermittently—at any point when my aunts pestered my father too much about the absence of any “real schooling” with my grandmother. There I could walk just up the road to a three-room school that ran on the agricultural yearly schedule, starting late in September after tobacco, the local crop, had been harvested. So far as I ever knew, none of the local White families included anyone who had ever finished secondary school. For most of us, school was a palace of play, with its surrounding forest and meadows and long recesses.

For the first grade, I lived with Mi and Carl and walked to school each day. Bookcases with books lined the first-grade room and the school library. Mi had bookcases in the front room, and she sometimes read in the early evenings, but Carl went to work at 3 a.m. each morning, and our tiny house offered no well-lighted spaces for escape with a book at night. In that first year of school, I discovered the thrill of reading little bits of print for unexpected details. My foster mother gave me my first spanking when, during a bout of the measles, she found me, shut away in the darkest area of the house, shaking the pennies from my penny bank to read their dates with a flashlight.

At school, we ended the year with a “second reader, level two” hardback book entitled *The Story Road* (Hildreth et al., 1940), but we did not get to keep our readers. By early May when I knew I would have to part with that little orange-covered book filled with stories of barnyard and circus animals, I read the stories over and over again so as to take them with me back to the farm. I wanted to tell Granny stories from my book. As I prepared to leave Mi at the beginning of that summer, she gave me a package wrapped in brown paper and told me to open it when I got to Granny’s house. The car ride with my father took forever. As soon as we reached the farm, the three of us carefully removed the wrapping. There was *The Story Road* (Hildreth et al., 1940). My father read the inscription:

“To a little girl who likes to read. From some one that loves her very much, Mi and Dick.”

That summer I tried to interest Granny in the books that had been secreted away behind the door. The pictures of Bambi, Smoky the horse (James, 1926), and the wild creatures of Thornton Burgess’ Old Mother West Wind Series entertained us on nights when we were not too tired to stay awake. On my birthday late that summer, Granny gave me a package wrapped in a paper bag. Inside was *Elsie Dinsmore* (Finley, n.d.). The book, with its faded green cover, carried an inscription in a handwriting I knew well: “Presented to Rosa May [sic] by Mamma Dec. 25, 1920. Besure [sic] to read it and tell me what you think of Elsie D.” Granny had given this book to my mother (Rosa Mae) the Christmas of her 10th year. I had never seen the book. My own stories from my first-grade reader and our sporadic summer evening reading had resurrected Granny’s memory of a long-forgotten gift she had given my mother more than two decades earlier.

For that summer’s birthday, as though to meet some deep notion of what parents do when they cannot do what others might expect of them, my father gave me a bookend in the shape of a black Scotch Terrier. I did not go back to Mi’s for school that year or the next or the next.

I spent most of my elementary school years with Granny. I walked to the three-room seven-grade school of forty-some pupils with its “library” of three shelves of books kept behind the desk of the head teacher. She taught seventh grade, and prize pupils in her classroom won book-borrowing privileges. Otherwise, “books” meant workbooks.

Black on White

Down the road from my grandmother’s house lived two teachers at the local Black school, a large brick building boasting resources, bus transport, and a staff trained at Hampton Institute, the historically Black college in a nearby county. Aunt Berta was their mother and the matriarch who lived in the big wooden house with the detached kitchen in the backyard. From her porch, Aunt Berta could see the smaller brick homes of all her children set nearby under the large oak trees that surrounded her property. Aunt Berta always welcomed me with a bear hug and took me back to the kitchen for fresh corn bread and buttermilk. When my chores were done at home, Granny knew I might be down the road with Aunt Berta or back of the big house playing with her grandchildren. Music, talk, laughter, and an abundance of food and children marked frequent family celebrations—a sharp contrast to the quiet life Granny and I lived. Back at home, I had to tell Granny who had come home to see Aunt Berta, who was getting married, and who was building a new house. Then we could unwrap the packet of food Aunt Berta always sent home with me. Aunt Berta did not venture far from home, but her family members stopped by to see Granny and visit

whenever they went up the road to the store. A decade later, I realized they never came to the front door.

My grandmother and I were one of the few White families in an area where Black farmers owned most of the land and raised tobacco, corn, and large gardens. We looked forward to late August when tobacco season began. In fields around the area, farmers pulled tobacco and brought it in large mule-drawn slides to curing barns. There, children handed bundles of tobacco to women who tied the tobacco onto sticks the men placed high in barn lofts where curing took place. We measured the weeks of tobacco season by the staged smells of green leaves fresh from the field to the pungent smoky odor of the yellowed dried leaves on the sticks taken down from barn lofts and hauled to tobacco auctions at the end of September. On water breaks, we splashed one another and played with tobacco worms fat from feeding on the green tobacco leaves.

By early October, the few White children watched their Black playmates board school buses for transport to the Black school 15 miles away. That school was a new sprawling brick building. But the small three-room elementary school for White students was plenty big for the few of us. Unlike the Black churches that held bi-weekly services, the two local White churches had circuit preachers who came only once a month except during the two weeks of summer Bible School. On Sunday mornings, White families collected either in the back of Black churches or in their own church to plan the annual Homecoming, clean the cemetery, or hold an informal Sunday School and sing-a-long.

White schoolteachers were “hired in” for the three-room school, given a small house, and watched with a cautious eye. Few stayed more than a year or so. A test of their adaptation to local ways came in the speed with which they honored our flexible attendance rules. They also had to learn quickly that we required long recesses to run home for chores or to complete our elaborate games based on comic book characters, such as *Batman* and *Wonder Woman*. How we got those comic books, I don’t remember, for the nearest city was over 50 miles away. But the comic books we shared among ourselves incited vivid reenactments with weapons crafted from tree limbs cut from the forest that surrounded the school.

Beyond the seventh grade, I walked to the paved road intersection where a bus took me and the few White students to the county seat, location of the small regional secondary school. The school had no library, but it did have a jousting field adjoining the fair grounds. The year’s highlight, the county fair, featured a jousting tournament, 4-H booths, and competitions for the best chocolate cake, biggest pig, and finest rooster.

Late in my secondary school years, my mother returned and decided to take Granny and me to south Florida. There my mother worked as a seamstress in winter months. In our small town—said to be the tomato capital of the world—Blacks lived on the other side of the tracks, at-

tended their own high school, and almost never crossed the tracks except to work in the tomato fields. The house where we stayed was very near the tracks on the “White” side. I sometimes rode my bike to the tracks where I could hear muffled voices and laughter and catch refrains of songs I had learned in the Black church at home in Virginia. Now that my mother was around much of the time, my grandmother told no stories and our household lived in silence.

At high school, I met my first Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Filipinos, Jews, and self-proclaimed atheists. Outsiders all, individuals from these groups became my friends, and I learned the stories of the Alvarado, Spitzer, and Mendoza families and the travels that had brought them to south Florida. My fitful peripatetic schooling left me woefully behind all my classmates in every subject. I studied every spare moment. My Spanish class, taught by a Puerto Rican woman who spoke little English, topped my list of terrifying experiences, for I had had no contact with any foreign language other than a bit of Latin from the secondary school in Virginia. I sought out more opportunities to be with Puerto Rican and Cuban friends, confessing my fear of the teacher and the language, and, most of all, of being called on to speak in class. As though to prove to myself that I was not an utter failure at this language, I turned more and more to reading Spanish literature, which I did with ease. My best-spoken phrases were those I used in private with the teacher to ask to borrow books in Spanish, so I could “practice” the language. She started me with children’s books and allowed me to graduate to novels and classics from Latin America and Spain. My practice with the language remained largely restricted to silent listening and solitary reading.

At 16, I went to work as a grocery store clerk, and I occasionally baked pecan pies to sell to neighbors. I never remember going to the school library, though I found my way to the town library, which was near the grocery store where I worked. There I found the resources I needed to write research papers to meet class requirements. I became editor of the school newspaper, and in the days when typesetting and “going to press” were literal activities, I spent most nights of my senior year after work at the small press that published local small-town newspapers. There the typesetter talked to me of books, asked about my reading, and gave me ideas on how to edit, inspire younger writers on the newspaper staff, and read beyond the headlines and obvious stories of newspapers.

Never wanting to displease or disappoint, I thought I should turn all the typesetter’s questions into action. One of my self-identified atheist friends was a reader, and one day I found my way to her house to ask her about what she read. She drew from the pile of paperbacks: “Start with these.” I found solitary reading for pleasure outside of class assignments or religious contexts strange and recalled the times when as a young child, my grandmother and I leafed through the gift books sent to me by

my mother’s acquaintances. If Granny found me reading alone, she would ask: “Don’t you have something you should be doing?” Her “should be doing” never included reading without instrumental purpose. Her disapproval and cautionary tone stayed with me through my senior year of high school. I read alone, but with guilt, for now I was reading books I could not share with her.

By the middle of my senior year, the guidance counselor asked what I was doing about college. I looked at her in puzzlement. She called in my mother, having recognized the need to convince her that college was a possibility for me. A friend was applying to the University of Chicago; I decided to do so as well. My father, who weighed in at that point from afar, nixed that idea by declaring any college north of the Mason Dixon line off limits for me.

The college I would attend came down to a choice between a small women’s college in Georgia and Wake Forest in North Carolina. My mother heard that the Georgia college would feed me well (I weighed 99 pounds and stood 5’8” tall), and Wake Forest was a Southern Baptist school. But in the choice between food and God, the latter won. I headed to Winston Salem in the first year that Wake Forest admitted females. The campus banned dancing, required that dating be only double-dating, and insisted female students wear hats to compulsory Sunday chapel.

The summer before I was to enter Wake Forest, a single event shaped the course of my life’s work and my future of trying to understand families and children in relation to language, literacy, culture, and belief systems. Thomas Mendoza, my Filipino friend from high school, was driving through Virginia on his way to college in the Northeast. I wrote to ask him to come by my grandmother’s farm in Virginia. When my parents learned of the invitation, they issued a definitive “no,” explaining that his dark skin proscribed such a visit. On this denial pivoted all the accumulated observations of exclusion, racism, and discrimination I had seen but not fully reckoned with in Virginia or Florida. I had been too busy just playing and working to sort out any analysis of the strangeness of the givens and the choices that made up my unique world.

Perhaps my blindness came because in Virginia I had neither witnessed nor felt exclusion. Blacks and Whites went to different schools, but the Black schools were better. Blacks and Whites worked together, but the Blacks owned most of the land and hired us White children to work as “hands” in tobacco season. Granny and I went in and out of our neighbors’ houses and shared garden bounty. We gathered with friends in the back of Black churches to hear sermons and sing hymns. The Mendoza denial brought all that I had *not* seen into glaring detail in my memory. Uneasy in spirit and full of shame, I left for college that fall.

After a year of immersion in European history and Spanish literature, and a host of courses in mathematics, I left Wake Forest. The precipitating event came in the spring of my freshman year when I declared mathematics

as my major. My professor called me to his office a week later. He counseled against my decision: "You cannot enter what is a man's world." Denial and discrimination had twice cut short my choices. Now I made my own choice. I ran away to Mississippi to work in the Civil Rights movement.

There I lived on the generosity of Black families. I tutored children in Black schools and took part in meetings and protests. Now I began to seek out children's books that related to the lives of the children, families, and churches that took me in. The few books I could find carried little of the richness of oral stories or the relevance to contemporary times I sought. Wonderful as Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day* (1962) was, neither the children in Mississippi nor I found much there in common with our experience of either climate or environment. Night after night, Sunday after Sunday, I listened to grandmothers, aunts and uncles, and parents tell stories, stage performances of their neighbors' lives, and plead with and sing for a god they believed knew them as characters and shaped the plotline of their days ahead.

From Mississippi, I went to southern California to work as a part-time substitute teacher in "special education" with migrant farm workers' children with whom my spoken Spanish now flourished. By now, I knew the work of my life would be to understand the shaping of cultural differences and the place of language(s) within everyday ways and values. Finances meant that I moved often, each time enrolling in a different college along with correspondence schools. As a result, I finished college with concentrations in Anthropology, Sociology, Education, Spanish literature, and English. Readings required across these fields provided some answers to a few of my many questions. But none acknowledged the role of stories, oral and written, for children and adults hard at work shaping and reshaping their lives and trying to make words and ideas do things for them and the social world around them.

Searching Stories

Forces that mold what goes into our memories and values remain largely hidden from us. Only from time to time do we believe we know what defined who we now are. For most of us, any such revelatory insights bear little definable relationship with who we were yesterday or will be several years hence.

Ken Macrorie and others whose livelihoods are made in industries that surround children's reading (from publishers to librarians and educators) urge consistency in the course of each individual's history with language and literacy. They trust in the causal and directional powers of socialization into literary culture. Yet reliable patterns based on single chains of influence are more often wished for than achieved. A generalized trajectory cannot account for the variation of routes that may lead at any point to respect, reverence, and fascination for books.

After college, doctoral work in anthropological linguistics and Latin American Studies at Columbia University took me to Mexico to study the history of language and literacy from the arrival of Cortés until the mid-20th century. From 17th-century archives through contemporary practices in indigenous villages, the power of oral stories for children came through again and again. Friars sent from Castile to Mexico learned the indigenous languages by collecting children within the walls of the monasteries and then listening through the thin walls of the children's dormitory to the stories and legends the older children told the younger ones to calm their fright. Language policies of the Castilian Empire in the New World resonated with expectations that children and their stories were the best teachers for the missionaries (Heath, 1972).

In the 1980s, my teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English fed my anthropological interest in how readers and writers of contemporary American fiction connected with one another throughout the 20th century. I began that work by hanging out in workshops that creative writers attended and by observing readers and writers in their separate environments. In the fiction sections of bookstores in 27 cities across the United States, I loitered, asking every fifth client who bought a work of fiction what led them to the purchase and if I might phone them at set intervals in the coming months to see how their reading had gone. Writers from creative writing workshops I attended allowed me to observe them over a full week at random times during a single year. I followed this pattern for eight years, socializing in literary events across the country with major contemporary writers reading and talking with their devoted readers.

One of the young novelists I met during the course of my study was Jonathan Franzen. Initially, he had resisted my project and "the whole idea behind it." Several years later, he entered the national scene with his award-winning novel *The Corrections* (2002). Critics saw him as a young writer to be reckoned with in the future.

In April of 1996, Jonathan published an article in *Harper's Magazine* entitled "Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, A Reason to Write Novels." A major New York newspaper had asked him to write a piece on the topic of "the great American novel." When he undertook the task, he remembered my research. With my blessing, he wove my findings into his reflections on his own life as reader and writer. He noted that novelists dislike social scientists and the idea that anyone could poke into matters of readership. He described me as a "beacon in the murk" that inadvertently jarred him from his depression about the state of the literary world and of his place as writer in that world. Most meaningful to Franzen from my poking about in the ways of readers and writers of American fiction was the fact that I could give names and reasons to his own childhood discovery of literature. I had found two key factors in the lives of readers who habitually read "serious" fiction as adults. The first was experience as a

child with reading models—intimates who valued reading and encouraged others to take up this good habit. Franzen solemnly reported that he could not remember seeing either of his parents read a book, except when they read to him as a child. He could not declare them good models of reading or even promoters of the habit. He smirked, thinking he had demolished my social science “findings.”

I continued: “But there’s a second kind of reader. There’s the social isolate—the individual who from an early age feels different from everyone else and who may or may not read as a child, but will, if fortunate, later discover literature and find others sorting out their unique destiny in life.” His silence permitted me to go on. I said to him: “Readers of the social isolate variety are much more likely to become writers than those of the modeled-habit variety. You, Jonathan, are one of those socially isolated individuals desperately wanting to connect with your own past, a substantive imaginary world, and your intense lonely existence. You want these to be of some consequence in the future.”

Franzen’s piece for *Harper’s Magazine* argued that writers, almost by definition, feel estranged from the world around them and most comfortable constructing and inhabiting an imagined world (1996, reprinted 2003; see also Franzen, 2007). The writer Don DeLillo had told me, as he later wrote to Franzen, that “the writer leads, he doesn’t follow.” This is because the dynamic behind the creative act will always live in the writer’s mind and not in questions the writer ponders about acceptance or readership. In response to his article for *Harper’s Magazine*, Franzen received many supporting testimonies to confirm the ties between loneliness and imagination in the lives of writers.

Readers wrote to say that they too were lonely and found joy, solace, and togetherness in reading the complexity of the lives of others. Echoing through these letters were voices railing against the death of either the novel or of book reading. Readers and writers both do what they do to fill a need—generally unexpressed though keenly felt and certainly denied to the individual’s harm (Fox, 1992). Society simply had to keep books and reading alive. Though romance, mystery, and even compulsion surround ideas of literature, whether for children or adults, reality lies in the cultural apprenticeship they afford and the company they provide for lonely writers who will be society’s keenest critics.

Uncommon Readers

In 2007, the British playwright Alan Bennett fictionally portrayed his monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, as a reader who came quite late in life to reading fiction and poetry. As she did so, four changes came over her that she attributes to her new self-identity as reader. First, she wants to talk about her reading with others. Then, she wants to meet with the authors themselves to probe their motivation

and inspiration for writing. Along the way, she organizes principles of her reading that derive from to-do and do-not-do lists, for she wants to read all the works of authors she comes to admire. For a long time in her reading, she tells herself to avoid the writings of authors whose characters live their lives in social classes with which she has little familiarity but considerable responsibility, but she overcomes this limitation. Ultimately, she determines that she will co-mingle in the world of writers by becoming a writer herself. She moves from recording her reading in her diary to wishing to shape her responses and her own creative worlds into written texts.

Despite the overdrawn humor and satirical framing of his book, Bennett hit a nerve for those among us who see something of our own later immersion in the world of books in the Queen’s march of revelations. Like her, we have experienced the disdain of those who equate reading with shirking other responsibilities. Like her, during our daily routine duties, our thoughts remain on pages in the middle of a chapter cut short by the call of responsibilities others thrust upon us. And like the Queen, we have lost consciousness of outward appearance and relished curling up before the fire in our favorite baggy clothes and warmest socks. We have expanded the comfort zone that the escape of reading offers so that we may distance ourselves from the intruding world. Ultimately, we have come to decide we too can write, and we have turned out our own books or found ways to promote books to others² (cf. Gilbar, 1989).

Like Bennett’s Queen, I too took up writing books. But I did so early in my career with an eagerness to explore and express what I learned about language and its uses in oral and written forms. Unlike the Queen, however, I was fascinated by more than words: I was drawn also to the powers of visual illustration. During fieldwork in Mexico, I spent time with not only archival remnants of Mexico’s past but also in sites of excavation of monuments, settlements, and religious centers in Oaxaca, Puebla, the Federal District, and the Yucatan Peninsula. There texts came along with sculptured profiles of individuals and events carved into the stonework of panels that surrounded temples and public buildings.

Having completed my book on Mexico (Heath, 1972), I settled in the Piedmont Carolinas to teach in the midst of the initial turmoil of desegregation, busing, and laments by White teachers that they could not understand the language of their Black students. At first I spent my out-of-school time between Black and White working-class communities, working in gardens, gossiping on front porches, helping can food, and attending church and Bible School. I gradually wore a natural pathway into Black and White middle-class communities, where parents followed the romantic idea that early experiences with books would ensure their children’s school success and establish lifelong reading habits.

In White working-class communities, I watched parents

read religious stories for children, point to illustrations and letters in alphabet books, and talk through books that recounted simple “true” stories written for children about pets, farm animals, and birds and small animals of the fields and forests. For these families, reading in and about the Bible held highest place in time and honor. Their questions asked for straight and familiar answers—no opinions or chases into imaginary places.

In Black working-class communities, I relived my years in the family compounds just down the road from my home with Granny. I heard gossip laced with jokes, family stories, and tales full of fun and moral lessons. Entire families used newspapers, letters, and circulars as prompt and props for stories.

For White working-class families, the exaggerated stories of their Black counterparts seemed to be nothing but lies. For Black working-class families, the stories their White counterparts told were just plain boring. My book, *Ways with Words* (1983), about the ways of reading and telling stories in these two communities laid bare just how uncommon some readers are.

In the decade in which my book was published, academics in fields from anthropology to religion began to study what being literate could mean across cultures and situations. Again and again, these works showed the intertwining of literate habits with different norms of time, space, relationships, as well as religious, academic, and commercial incentives (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Boyarin, 1992; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984, 1993; Taylor, 1983). Books, their accompanying artifacts and values, and their relation to children’s socialization and adult habits of child-reading could not be considered apart from socioeconomic class, geographic location, religious beliefs, or cultural milieu. The only “common readers” were, in fact, those created out of the cultural habits and ideals elevated in Western societies where reading held a place right up there with morality and advancement in class status. The majority of the world was filled, instead, with “uncommon readers,” albeit of a very different sort than the Queen Elizabeth of Alan Bennett’s fiction.

By the early 1990s, the unquestionable importance of sociocultural context to the structures and uses of language was firmly established by social scientists and historians. Professional educators acknowledged the idea, but generally could not fit the wide-ranging differences into their fixed curricula and assessment tools for teaching reading. Educational policy, texts, and tests in the United States generally ignored the unique language and cultural patterns of African American communities in the South as well as the North.

Meanwhile, in both the United States and other economically advanced nations, migrations, relocations of refugees, and absorption of asylum seekers further challenged fixed normative ideas of routes to literacy and academic achievement. Motivations behind migration varied greatly for newcomers, as did the extent and type

of their prior experience with either written language or formal schooling. Some read in non-alphabetic scripts, some only in a non-Indo-European language. Others had little experience with schooling or literate expectations.

Yet the norms and modes of teaching reading narrowed. The appeal of phonics accelerated while arguments for children’s literature that had previously held for homogeneous populations fell away as inappropriate and ineffective. Decoding became the goal. Comprehension according to formulaic dictates of “main idea” and “supporting evidence” became the primary purpose of such pedagogical practices. Education policymakers viewed interpretation and imaginative language, along with creative learning, as impossible with children vastly different in oral language fluency and background experiences. Learning to read mattered more than reading to learn. Surveys of book buying and reading for pleasure showed that both were on the decline. The “death of literature” was sure to come with the reduction of print and growth of images, technological shortcuts in communication, and shifts in habits of work and leisure (Kernan, 1990).

Nevertheless, children’s literature and its power to inspire learning and to initiate a lifelong love of books and reading lived on in the intuitional wisdom of confident teachers and many middle-class parents whose family life was increasingly feeling pressure from the information economy and its partner technologies. Literary and art critics continued to hold onto the Western-model-tells-all-we-need-to-know framework. Books on reading and its values across the ages of individuals and of Western history proliferated (cf. Manguel, 1996). Romance is a difficult thing to dislodge.

Making Images, Expanding Modes, Shrinking Words

Particularly challenging to established thinking about children’s reading and their literature have been picture books and illustrated books, comics and graphic novels (Eisner, 1996; Fox, 2008; McCloud, 1993). In such works, image often dominates word. As images expand in their conveyance of meaning, words shrink in their own power or work in sync to retain it. Authorities beyond the child reader lose control over interpretation. Through images, young readers can take charge.

Once the child has learned to speak, picture books engage child and adult relatively equitably. Infant laughter, gesture, and imitation are soon followed by the child’s growing takeover of the story beyond the written words. Characters and their moves and motivations belong to the child who now reads images to take them beyond the written words. Adults *read* for meaning while children *look* for meaning. With the discovery of comics, children carry their expertise in reading images further into imitation of entire scenes with their friends and sometimes into their own attempts to draw graphic narratives. The

visual can quickly outpace the verbal. For decades, young readers have charged into the “plague” of comic books and all that it represents by its open inclusion of readers of the lower classes, derision of social norms, promotion of consumerism, and representation of the horrors of “man’s inhumanity to man” (Gordon, 1998; Hajdu, 2008; Spiegelman, 1986, 1991, 1994). With graphic novels, the imagined world within the page and beyond belongs almost entirely to the young (Adams, 2008). The intimacy of the adult-child reader dyad fades away.

Concern over the graphics of narrative derives from the long-standing linkage of children’s literature with control over the moral, behavioral, and linguistic futures of children. Children’s literature developed and has continued in relatively few regions of the world—the majority of those steeped in Anglo traditions, Judeo-Christian values, and often the tying of nationalism to moral certainty.

Early in their history, Scandinavian nations enlisted religious leaders to reinforce the habit of parents reading with their children, withholding services of the Church to resisting parishioners. Along with their empire, the British spread a high estimation of reading with children and entrusted books to build foundations for commitment to hard work, individualism, academic promise, and commercial success. American colonies, more than any others, renewed Protestant faith in reading the Word for life guidance and placed responsibility on parents to bring up their children as believers and practitioners of Biblical truths (see Stevenson, this volume). Sunday School books, pamphlets, daily devotional readings, and later video films, DVDs, and illustrated music books expanded meanings of ancient dicta in contemporary life.

The history of visual art in the Western world leaves little doubt about the spiritual convictions behind the idealized image of mother and child reading together in intimate pose with a book. European and American painters have given us the classic metaphor of the reading mother through Mary, the mother of Jesus, who becomes spiritual authority reading with her child as novitiate. The earliest now-familiar rendering of this narrative comes from Simone Martini’s 14th-century depiction of the Annunciation. Medieval and Renaissance artists repeatedly portrayed the Virgin Mary startled from her reading by Gabriel’s announcement of the forthcoming birth of Jesus, the Christ child. Uses of light, the cast of the eyes of the reader, and the positioning for the perspective of the viewer outside the paintings combine to reflect absorption, tranquility, and solitude in the presence of book as altar (Adler & Bollmann, 2005). The handling and elevated placement of the Bible as the Word during Protestant church services echo these sentiments of Judeo-Christian art. Such visual narratives portray the duality of being both outside the mundane world and inside the sacred realm of certainty, loving care, and promise. The family Bible in quiet times of intimacy leads to reenactment. Granny had never seen a work of Western visual

art, but she knew how to take her Bible and sit me on her lap where our reading encircled us.

Women Who Read Are Dangerous

However, an oppositional genre of painting has told another story. From the Middle Ages forward, artists have suggested that reading may lead the weak and innocent away from the sanctity of home and into danger, foul play, and wrongly-placed passion. The romance of reading has, until recently, largely ignored any such idea. But by the late 20th century, art critics began to deconstruct details of classical works of art. This scholarship, along with the growing body of research on women readers by feminist writers, revealed images of women reading letters and other materials that could lead women into danger or even, more menacing, make them dangerous influences. The book as home, retreat, and reliable source of knowledge could be inciting resistance or rebellion.

These paintings suggest the potential of book reading, especially for women weak in resolve, to disrupt their devotion to family, their home, and their chastity. Images in these paintings show that reading stops time and action and allows viewers to read into images the secret desires of women. Jacob Ochtervelt’s *La Requête amoureuse* (1670) and Johannes Vermeer’s *The Love Letter* (ca. 1669–1670) tell more than is seen. When these artists portray facial expressions of women reading book or letter, viewers across the centuries have imagined lovers, plans of escape, and inclinations to temptation beyond the bonds of propriety. *Les femmes qui lisent sont dangereuses* [Women who read are dangerous] is a volume of paintings of women lost in reading through the ages (Adler & Bollmann, 2005). The images remind viewers that books and their secrets may stir in women the disobedient nature and weakness of will of their progenitor Eve. They may step out of place and wish to be “the woman on top” (Davis, 1965). Yet the message is that they must not succumb to either the temptations of others or their own ambitions (Liedtke, 2001). They must not lose themselves in nature, a favorite suggestion artists have repeatedly made in their paintings of women reading in open fields, on park benches, and before a window looking out onto a garden of rambunctious flowers (cf. Updike, 2005 on “looking”).

Reading invites self-knowledge as well as exploration of distant places and unsanctioned behaviors. Reading takes one away from home to places where authority, ownership, and responsibility differ. Maps and legal documents, along with instruments for measuring and recording, figure in the background of many paintings of individuals reading and hint of multiple forms of “accounting.” We must take measure of ourselves, but there are many ways to do so. Reading books can dislodge the weak and uninitiated—women and children—from received values that seem not to account for love or desire for freedom. Books introduce subversive ideas and lead women and the young to imagine

behaviors and relations unaccountable in society's ways of measuring us. Reading may give women pleasure when their lives offer little else. *La Liseuse*, a Renoir (1877) portrait entitled "The Reader," became synonymous with a woman reader "lost in a book" and likely therefore to shirk her responsibilities as wife and mother.

Some painters portrayed women with books as resistant to the world of external power. Impressionists often juxtaposed the woman's inner world of peace in a book with the external world of upheaval (see, for example, Claude Monet's *La Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877). Female artists, such as Gwen John (1911), perhaps best known for her *Girl Reading at the Window*, made women reading a favorite theme in their work. The 1970s awakening to the subject of female artists consistently points to their serene portrayals of "the reading woman" (with her child or children) (cf. Barlow, 1999; Fine, 1978/1995; Schur, 1991).

But the quiet world of women reading changed after World War I when women were vitally needed in the workplace. Once called upon to work outside the home, women no longer had to read books to enter the world of dangers and temptations. They were now in the middle of them in a world of war and work. Throughout the 20th century, the realities of women in the workforce eroded the ideal of mothers having time and place to read at home with their children. By the end of the century, infants and toddlers went off to caregivers outside the home for much of each day; their evenings and mornings with parents held little time for reading. The image of mother at leisure to read with her child disappeared from Western art and norms of family life.

Dislodged and Dislocated

The idea that written texts undermine authority through alternative readings began well before the printing press. Storyboard narratives within medieval illustrated manuscripts and stained glass windows of cathedrals took readers and worshipers beyond Biblical text. In illustrated manuscripts of the Middle Ages lie the origins of comic books, graphic novels, books with illustrations, and children's picture books. This era established the ability of images to expand modes and shrink the power of words and bears examination when we turn to the question of what contemporary children read and the relative extent of image, print, and talk in their everyday worlds (Kress, 2003). Here the issue is not so much that written texts may lead the weak away from duty, morality, and ethical behavior, but that images, even more than words, explode with unpredictable meaning.

Borders of illuminated manuscripts, as well as sidebars to the Biblical narratives depicted in stained glass windows of medieval churches, tell of artistic license. *Vignettes*, the term used for borders of medieval illustrated manuscripts, contained images that suggested stories that only sometimes related to Biblical texts (Watson, 2003). Vignettes that ap-

peared alongside the text and within initials that opened textual materials included scenes of everyday life along with fantasy and foolhardiness. Monkeys covered their ears, grotesque animals frolicked, children teased dogs, and wives berated their husbands (cf. Stallybrass & White, 1986). Monks and scribes who illustrated manuscripts slipped into their images license to let the mind wander, question, and turn cynical (Heath & Wollach, 2007).

Illustrated manuscripts and stained glass windows of cathedrals may be the first crossover texts of Western history. For example, the windows gave parishioners in cold medieval cathedrals incentive to look up to find well-known Biblical characters moving through their narratives in grouped story-board-like panels. For children, the appeal must have been in the floating images—the butterfly, industrious squirrel, and bird on its way to build a nest. These designs were child-like and child-ready as were embellishments buried in garment folds and background scenes of distant castles. Cathedral windows were the kind of text and image artists believed children and adults might like to read. Text and illustration worked together and yet apart from one another.³

Chapbooks of the 18th century continued the pesky trend of working text and illustration into intimate partnerships that sometimes quarreled with one another and at other times joined peacefully. Chapbooks used the license of image to let young readers see the lives of the poor, the renegade, and the miscreant. Picture books and illustrative didactic materials created by educated mothers in the home to support their children's reading sustained the inclusiveness of chapbooks (see Arizpe & Styles, this volume; Heath, 2009). Children could look through the visual lens of the stories of their less fortunate counterparts.

Comic books of the 20th century do the same, telling stories of war, racial and ethnic divisions, violent crimes, and supernatural powers that contrast dramatically with the relatively tame stories of discovery and adventure rendered only in print (Hajdu, 2008; Heath & Bhagat, 1997). American, British, and European illustrators differ in use and extent of detail, suggesting national variation in assessment of when and how young readers can work out ambiguities and draw judgments on their own from images and text. In the 21st century, comic books joined graphic novels in their appeal to the shrinking attention spans of young people. Films and video games animated images and added sound effects, further reducing words—even in the spoken mode. Hand wringing over the dominance of image over text was inevitable. Official reports, such as *Reading at Risk* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004) and *To Read or Not to Read* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007), declared the decline in both amount of time youngsters spent reading and their comprehension skills with extended texts. Public media and educational reports lamented that young people not only read less now than in the past; they understood less of what they read.

Debates continue, with extremists certain that not only

is literature “dead,” but the entire publishing industry is in peril. Still, moderates and advocates of images in every learning life view the widening range of modes and media young people use to read, write, and act in the world as a welcome though drastic change (Kress, 2003; Spitz, 1999). They argue the need to view the current rise of image, performance, and autonomy—as well as imagination—among young people as a desirable challenge and expansionist opportunity for educators (Buckingham, 2003; Doherty, 2002; Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2008; Hobbs, 2007).

But this opportunity comes with a price. Adults trained in guided reading and interpretation of print have little understanding of how the young actually see and interpret images and print in relation to one another and layer meanings through multiple media. A sense of dislocation prevails for adults who hesitate to invest in learning how to navigate visual texts from comic books to on-line multi-party role-playing games. On the other hand, young people see themselves as disconnected from resources and identities that might guide them in ways to deepen skills and knowledge. The most astute young feel the dislocation coming for them in a world where their skills with entertainment and diversion via the internet will be no match for rapidly increasing computing power and electronic control over their lives (Heath & Wollach, 2007). Adults feel their past disconnects them from the present; young people see their present dislocated from the future. The romance of children’s literature seems distant indeed.

Why Do We Care?

In the history of literacy studies, few topics have generated as many words of confession and conviction as reading and writing. Aristotle and Plato held strong views, based on their own lives and protections of the State. Religions of the world have celebrated vision as our greatest sense, and their evocation of the eye as the soul of human essence reminds us that we are knowledge makers and interpreters. We speak of cognitive understanding as “seeing,” “gaining a perspective,” having a viewpoint,” and “glimpsing meaning.” Scientists, artists, philosophers, and theologians have let us look over their shoulder as they read and left us their accounts of transformation brought about through their reading of words and interpreting of visual images that reveal narratives fundamental to life.

Judgments such as these lead individuals to be unduly self-conscious about their lives of reading and writing. How much? What kind? And for what?

When I ask these questions of myself, I admit that my life with reading started late. In the anger and violence of Civil Rights in Mississippi, I felt helpless. It was the same when I confronted in California educational institutions’ exclusion of migrants from their language and culture. All I could see to do was learn; perhaps books could prepare me to know how to change things. I had to catch up for lost time.

It took me more time to overcome the silence of my childhood and to learn that conversations about ideas had to come along with book reading.

I threw myself into literature and the social sciences, burying any memory of my exclusion in college from further study of mathematics. Research on people and their ways of living and thinking came naturally to me. I liked listening and looking in silence. Fieldwork in Mexico and archival discoveries opened to me past and present contrasts in values and uses of literacy across languages and cultures. A keen observer of human behavior, I was never satisfied with only what I could see in the present scene before me. I had been fooled by that complacency in my childhood. Now I questioned every form of exclusion and use of language—oral and written. I searched for origins, reasons, and consequences. What were the personal pains and joys, the current shaping forces and those of history? A career in linguistic anthropology and social history fell into place gradually and certainly without long-term goal-directed planning. My reading was eclectic and frantic, the need to know relentless. Yet my life of scholarship was still void of extended talk about books. I read alone.

Extended conversations with books came in my head as I wrote books. I typed *Telling Tongues* (1972), based on archival research and fieldwork in Mexico, on an unfurling roll of shelf paper fed into the typewriter so as not to have to stop to insert separate sheets of paper.

When bilingual education became a national possibility in the mid-1970s, I wanted to help. I spent time in Washington, D.C. with fellow sociolinguists and educators. Slowly my writing and reading became less dependent on my solo conversations with my reading and writing. Expanded opportunities for conversation came when desegregation of Carolina schools raised questions about relations, linguistic and behavioral, between Whites and Blacks. I spent time in local communities and classrooms talking with teachers and children about their learning. I traveled to state capitals of South and North Carolina to lose myself in letters and diaries of plantation owners and small-town people whose lives centered on farming and raising tobacco and evolved into millwork with the coming of textile mills in the 1920s.

I filled the lives of my young children with books but without knowing good from bad, rich from shallow. Grocery store racks and the school library provided their books. Marriage, divorce, remarriage, and a move to Stanford University just as my children ended primary school brought possibilities I had never imagined. My husband, Charles Ferguson, was a prominent linguist whose love of language, distant places, and cultural supports for literacy was as intense as my own. Also an only child, he had grown up in working-class Philadelphia. As a young boy, he had been free to explore the city’s many bookstores, hear other languages, and explore language in the many religions of the city. Our household was filled with children’s literature and talk of politics, travel, and

languages. Visitors from around the world came to our home in Palo Alto, and we traveled to parts of the world where numerous languages and cultures competed for political and social legitimation.

At Stanford University, I met Shelby Wolf, a young mother of two girls whose early childhoods with literature differed immensely from anything I had ever imagined. Together we talked for hours about how to interpret her fieldnotes documenting her children's talk about literature, dramatic reenactments, and entry into solitary reading. We discovered together the writings of other scholars who had also documented their children's lives with books. We brought this work together in our analysis of children's worlds of reading (Wolf & Heath, 1992).

Children's literature presented itself as another field in which I could feel simultaneously the panic and joy of catching up. By happenstance, several years later, I learned of the existence of an early 18th-century manuscript collection of children's literature in the Lilly Library at Indiana University. Over nearly a decade, I studied British history while analyzing the nearly 500 pieces in the "Nursery Library" (see Arizpe & Styles, this volume). I was "possessed" by the quest to learn about Jane Johnson, the maker of the collection (cf. Byatt, 1990). British scholars of children's literature Morag Styles, Victor Watson, and Evelyn Arizpe joined me in the search to know more about Johnson's life. Occasions for conversation, debate, and museum exhibitions, conferences, and books followed (Heath, 1997; Hilton, Styles & Watson, 1997; Styles & Arizpe, 2009).

Simultaneously, I was immersing myself and young ethnographers from Stanford in the lives of urban youth living in under-resourced neighborhoods across the United States. Theirs was a world different from my own and from any romantic notions about books in early childhood as essential to learning in later life. We studied young people who found their way to community organizations in their early teens to join theatre and music groups, artist cooperatives, and community service projects. They took up reading for pleasure, often motivated by the collaborative work of the group. But they also relished risk-taking, challenge, and long conversations. Talking about what they had read or were learning became socially acceptable among peers and adults who shared their interests. Talk motivated reading that they could take into action, contemplation, and further accumulation and testing of information (Heath & Roach, 1999; Heath & Smyth, 1999; Heath & Soep, 1998).

Meanwhile, I continued to follow the Black and White families of communities I had begun to study in the 1970s. The twists and turns of their lives took them far away from the South we knew in those days. Within two decades, their definitions of family, social life, religious values, opportunity, race, and work bore no resemblance to the lives I had captured in print in *Ways with Words* (1983/1996; Heath, 1990). I wrote and continue to write to document

the dynamic of their mobile existence as individuals and families in "liquid times" (Bauman, 2000).

Knowing books, talking ideas, and seeing the world is sure to dislodge certainties—one's own and those that others try to force on us. For me, sweeping generalizations about language, culture, youth, childhood, race, gender, family, and tenets of socialization were boulders to be pushed away in order to open landscapes of difference, possibilities, and human capacities. The issue of difference is not that it is there, but how much difference we allow it to make for us.

When we are *in difference* as distinct from *indifferent*, we see that persistence of either children's literature or book reading as intimate parent-child dyads in quiet spaces of homes cannot take us where we now have to go. Families in economically advanced societies, those that have been the primary producers and consumers of books for children and young adults, have less and less time, space, and inclination to read with and for their children beyond the toddler years. Economic realities, two-working-parent homes, single-parent homes, and competing forms of home entertainment push interactions with print, image, music, and talk into layered mediated forms, places, and relationships. Recently, the number of hours libraries remain open across the United States has decreased, and many libraries have closed. Libraries and schools, as public institutions, are increasingly required to censor young learners' access to the internet and to new media, such as graphic novels and novels written for young adults.

Yet young people who learn that reading books may feed their special interests will find ways to get what they want. On buses, in community centers, and with special friends, they create for themselves mobile home-like atmospheres. The future of the book's home will be the "non-spaces" of supermodernity, away from private households into public spaces and in search of human company around and through technologies (Augé, 1995, p. 94).

Coda

What about Ken Macrorie's proposed collection of autobiographies of language educators? It never appeared. Whether or not my dissonant pattern moved him to set aside the project, I do not know. In the intervening years, I have resisted attempts to universalize ideas about literacy, language development, readers and writers, and modern childhood and youth. As individuals, we matter not in the ways we fit into categories or meta-narratives. Instead, we matter in the ways we experience and remember the emotions, expectations, and connections of our early lives and attempt to understand how those of others affect who they have become. "Each childhood is a nightlight in the bedroom of memories" (Bachelard, 1960, p. 140).

All childhoods of promise do not begin with reading as an archetypal activity. In this chapter, I have tried to