“Doubtful Characters”:
Alphabet Books and Battles over Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Print Culture

by

A. Robin Hoffman

B. A. in English, University of Richmond, 2003

M. A. in English, University of Connecticut, 2005

M. A. in History of Art, University College London, 2007

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This dissertation was presented

by

A. Robin Hoffman

It was defended on

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and approved by

Stephen Carr, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of English

Troy Boone, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of English

Ronald Zboray, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Communications

Mary Saracino Zboray, M.A., Lecturer, Department of Communications

Dissertation Advisor: Marah J. Gubar, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English

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More than mere tools for reading instruction, alphabet books offered nineteenth-century writers and illustrators a site for contesting dominant versions of literacy. They could address broad audiences in a genre that was uniquely suited to registering shifts in the social and material conditions of publishing, literacy, and education. This historical study recovers these efforts and traces the genre’s co-evolution with Victorian ideas about literacy. It exploits an overlooked material archive in order to refocus attention from the history of rising literacy rates, toward concurrent debates over how visual and oral culture should complement printed text within domestic education and formal schooling.

“Doubtful Characters” focuses on figures prominent in Victorian publishing, and reveals how the alphabet books they designed resisted pedagogues’ overweening emphasis on textual decoding. George Cruikshank, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Walter Crane promoted forms of visual literacy, including caricature and holistic book design. Edward Lear revived aspects of oral culture embedded within print. However, after national education reform (ca. 1870), alphabet illustration tended to leverage nostalgia against pedagogy. This is seen in works by Kate Greenaway and Hablot Knight Brown (“Phiz”). The study concludes by exploring satirical interpretations of the alphabet produced by Hilaire Belloc and Rudyard Kipling at the fin de siècle, which reflected growing ambivalence about industrialized print culture.

While recovering designers' strategic use of satire and production values in alphabet books, "Doubtful Characters" resists assumptions about the transparent goals of didactic texts, and exposes the fragility of audience conventions. Satirical alphabets most clearly challenged a child-oriented perspective on literacy education and illustration that took hold by the turn of the twentieth century, and provided an effective platform for commenting on the ways that literacy was taught and exercised. But this study also shows how alphabet books deployed aesthetic theory, commercial contexts, and other rhetorical strategies in order to address adult audiences alongside or even instead of children. Through a combination of close reading, analysis of material culture, and historical contextualization of a series of illustrated alphabets, "Doubtful Characters" demonstrate how the form routinely interrogated and promoted a configuration of relationships among media forms and audience categories.

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PREFACE

First of all, I must thank my patient and hard-working committee for persevering with me in the face of a writing project that took on kudzu-like powers of growth. Even when charged with the thankless task of reading first drafts, Dr. Marah Gubar has been ever at the ready with constructive criticism (tactfully delivered) and encouragement. From lunches to last-minute letters, I feel embarrassingly grateful to have had such a dedicated committee chair and dissertation advisor. Dr. Stephen Carr has also miraculously found time for me, my early drafts, and the larger ambitions that lay beyond them, providing insights to the grand arc of the process as well as invaluable and voluminous knowledge of book history (graciously shared). Dr. Troy Boone has been an unfailing source of clarity about how the micro relates to the macro, and has generously paid much closer attention to my prose than it deserves. And finally, my readers from outside the English department, Dr. Ronald Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, have gone above and beyond the call of duty to provide tactical support of all kinds ever since I had the pleasure of taking their seminar in media studies.

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE ALPHABET AND LITERACIES

Just as Queen Victoria was beginning her famous reign, Charles Dickens's inimitable Sam Weller delivered a rather sardonic take on the current state of literacy education: "vether it's worth while goin' through so much, to learn so little, as the charity-boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste" (*Pickwick Club* 268). Although literacy never was simply "a matter o'taste" in nineteenth-century England, the alphabet remained a sticking point in the years to come. In an 1877 article addressing London School Board debates over methods of reading instruction, James Spedding identified the "orthodox" alphabet as "irrational": both a first step and a nearly-insurmountable barrier on the road toward literacy (638). At the same time, he warned that it could not be subjected to too much tinkering, lest the public rebel: "If an attempt be made to introduce any change which would cause inconvenience, trouble, or offence to the multitudes who can read and write already, it will certainly fail… reading and writing are accomplishments too hardly acquired and too constantly in demand to be interfered with" (637). He melodramatically insists that "To make the *Times* a little more difficult to read for a single day would be to raise a storm which the *Times* itself would hardly survive" (637). History was on his side. Not only did the "orthodox or irrational" twenty-six letter alphabet prevail, but numerous failed attempts to reform English spelling during the latter half of the nineteenth century probably helped secure the alphabet's primary position in beginning reading instruction. Far from marking a "complete rout" of turn-of-the-century approaches to early education, as Isobel Spencer has suggested, Victorian picture books included huge numbers of abecedarian works (45). In the process, they preserved a fundamental piece of the rationalist legacy alongside the revitalized "fantasy and folklore" that had previously been attacked by the "cursed Barbauld crew" – a group of rationalist educators like Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Maria

Edgeworth that Charles Lamb cruelly collectivized in 1802 (*Letters* 81-82). Throughout the nineteenth century, the search for some means of making it easier to acquire knowledge of the alphabet continued and the alphabet book genre flourished concurrently. In the estimation of Susan Steinfirst, perhaps the only scholar to date to have attempted a comprehensive history of the *ABC Book in English,* "Literally thousands of them were printed either in book form or in periodicals" during the nineteenth century (302).

The matter was fodder for discussion among the general public as well as those more directly concerned with education, as manifested by the abundance of articles appearing in popular periodicals. Over the course of the nineteenth century, it became common knowledge that "various means have been tried to lessen the early difficulties of the task, and to render the alphabet and lessons attractive to the pupil." As a *Saturday Magazine* article on "The Art of Reading" noted: "Pictures were early resorted to, and have always remained in favour, since they are found to engage the attention of children in a remarkable degree" ("Art of Reading" 116). Whether pictures merely "engage[d] the attention of children" or actively advanced instructional goals remained an open question, despite assurances of their *potential* to serve a pedagogical function. For instance, in a *London Magazine* article of 1820, one reviewer of "literature of the nursery" affirmed the use of "brief illustrations" alongside the letters of the alphabet as an "excellent manner of enforcing the knowledge of the letters to a child's mind, by identifying them with familiar objects of a visible tangible description." Even as the domestic and nostalgic pleasures of the rhyming or illustrated alphabet were giving rise to a codified alphabet book form in the early nineteenth century, alphabetical illustration was being at least officially joined with generic goals: imparting and "enforcing the knowledge" of the alphabet to pre-literate children. Around 1820, the illustrated alphabet format was clearly "familiar" enough to correspond with a known set of references, but its absorption into the realm of "literature" and the purview of *London Magazine* readers was also novel enough to merit comment and justification. These doubts about how illustration relates to utility perhaps explain why one contemporary writer felt compelled to justify his own affection for the cheaply-printed books deployed by his Nurse "when she put on her spectacles, and took such desperate pains in leading us onwards from great A and little a, and bouncing B, even down to *Empesand and Izzard*" ("Fairy Tales" 91).

Although neither the *London Magazine* nor other contemporary writers about abecedarian picture books use the label, the illustrated texts they describe are recognizable to modern readers as "alphabet books" (or perhaps proto-alphabet books) thanks to their high ratio of image to text, and their purposeful use of the alphabet as the primary structuring principle. In twenty-first- century usage, an alphabet book can be further characterized as a book that draws attention to the order and shape of the letters of the alphabet, although it need not treat both elements as equally important.[1] Letter-forms may constitute the visual emphasis, and merge illustration with typography; conversely, alphabetic order may take on proportionally greater force when representational illustrations supersede the letter-forms. We may even need to preserve some leeway with the label of "book" in order to accommodate unconventional (i.e., non-codex) bindings and layouts, and alterations to a text over the course of subsequent editions.[2] Whatever the physical form, my own focus in this project is on texts that depend on the English 24- or 26-letter alphabet (according to the time period and creators' inclinations) for its primary organizational structure, as "abecedarian texts" like dictionaries do. As an extension of this, alphabet books also characteristically position the alphabet as the primary stimulus for illustration. An alphabet book is usually so formally dominated by illustrations to qualify as a "picture book."[3] However, I hesitate to use the term "picture book" here to describe either the umbrella heading of my subject, or the ratio of illustration to text in an alphabet book, because it strongly implies a predominantly child audience. In

[1] See, for instance, Becca Zerkin's review of four alphabet books that was included under the heading of "Children's Books" in the *New York Times* Sunday Book Review Fall 2008 Special Issue. She describes Marion Bataille's alphabet book as "more about style and paper engineering than it is about the alphabet itself" ("Alphabet City").

[2] Here, even the notion of "edition" is a bit limiting, since it presumes a text-based progression – and thus marginalizes or excludes the ways in which oral traditions may carry "texts" between literal texts, as is the case for nursery rhymes.

[3] This is characteristic of its usage as seen in the work of Nodelman, Bader, David Lewis, and William Moebius, all of whom have conducted have conducted semiotic explorations of narrative images.

fact, these terminological difficulties both reflect and perpetuate precisely the cultural conventions I wish to unpack.

In the pages that follow, I argue that the alphabet book format has survived into the twenty-first century because it is an effective means of organizing competing aspects and constructions of literacy – and, by extension, it is a visible site for attempting to *re*-organize those elements. To be sure, alphabet books *may* help inculcate textual literacy, or "letter" the "literally 'unlettered,' children" as critics like Cynthia Rostankowski have suggested. But, as I will demonstrate, textual literacy instruction is not alphabet books' only or even their primary function as texts– although assumptions about the character of the alphabet itself naturally lead to the rationale that "if a child already knew how to read, he or she would not need to learn the alphabet" (Rostankowski 121-122). Rather, I argue that the tripartite word-picture-letter format of alphabet books organize the inherent plurality of literacy. They characterize the act of reading as a complex negotiation, requiring and teaching readers to navigate the page's potentially (and typically) uneven reliance on the visual, the oral, *and* the verbal as factors in printed communication. I thus approach literacy as a cultural formation that is most visibly constructed by the texts (nominally) used for its inculcation. While alphabet books may pretend to deliver literacy, neatly wrapped up like a package from the postman, they actually work to shape its form. I will argue, then, that alphabet books function primarily as a means of *hierarchizing* competing literacies, which usually does mean giving textual literacy pride of place over oral and visual modes. But at the same time, they represent and perpetuate literacy as internally multiple. Indeed, representations of the alphabet provide a space for acknowledging and grappling with the plurality of codes that come to bear on any printed page.

In turning our focus to nineteenth-century British print culture, we find a particularly fraught set of social and economic conditions for alphabet books and their readers to navigate – especially with respect to the relative status of words and images. Victorian illustration temporarily gained at least some kind of parity with text, if not priority over it, as evidenced by (among other things) the great success of *The London Illustrated News.* That publication declared in its introductory number of 1842 that wood-engraved "Art… has, in fact, become the bride of literature; genius has taken her as its handmaid" ("Our

Address" 379). As David Skilton has noted, in 1846 William Wordsworth reacted with "dismay" to the periodical's launch, seeing it as retrograde thanks to his sympathy with the rationalist hierarchy of literacies ("Centrality"). The flood of mass-produced images struck the poet as "A backward movement... From manhood – back to childhood" ("Illustrated Books and Newspapers" 75). Eventually, shifts in technology and taste helped re-reverse the trend, and towards the end of the nineteenth century illustration had "failed," as Curtis puts it (38). Despite the best efforts of the Arts and Crafts movement in the last quarter of the century, the fine artists refused to drop their own modifier and claim solidarity with "decorative artists." Illustration without a fine art provenance, like a Royal-Academy-credentialed designer, had gradually been demoted to "light literature and children's books," in the slightly kinder views of Victorian scholars like Judith Fisher (60) and Richard Maxwell.[4] The shifting shapes of the alphabet book provide a key to the social and technological forces feeding into this twentieth-century outcome, not to mention shed considerable light on the origins of some twenty-first-century schemes of literacy. The prominent illustrations in alphabet books, the alphabet's conventional position as the starting place for beginning reading instruction, and the long-established associations between elementary literacy education and childhood – especially as distinct from class status – has produced a narrow conception of the alphabet book as a generic form. However, as Steinfirst pointed out in her historical survey, "the alphabet book as we know it is a nineteenth-century phenomenon" (2). The format is not an inevitable response to inherent, timeless qualities of either childhood or alphabetic literacy. Empirical observations of pupils, not to mention satirical representations of the alphabet from the first decades of the nineteenth century, suggest that a preoccupation with "internalizing" the alphabet is not the wisest or even the likeliest "first step in literacy training," as Patricia Crain called it (4). Instead, the social and historical circumstances surrounding how the alphabet is represented, and alphabet books' evolving position within a wider landscape of technological possibilities and representations of childhood, lead us to a more important story about how conceptions of literacy evolve, compete, and co-exist within a culture. They

[4] Richard Maxwell refers to "the realm of children's publishing – to which illustration was increasingly relegated" (395).

allow us a unique perspective on an ideological battle waged in Great Britain throughout the nineteenth century, but especially during the middle decades when educational movements and technological developments in the reproduction of images combined with individual talents and taste to produce ambiguity in how literacy – or, more accurately, literacies – mapped onto demographics including age and class.

Images of childhood were an important weapon in these ideological battles, destabilizing constructions and applications of literacy during the Victorian era as pedagogues, artists, advertisers, religious authorities, and politicians wielded them in turn. The prevailing images of childhood were shaped primarily by currents present in Romantic literary texts around the turn of the nineteenth century, and became dramatically influential after legal and technological duels played out in the history of publishing and book access, and enabled those texts' increased availability in mid-century.[5] But philosophical models of human development had a complementary role to play after they were inherited, revised, and passed on by rationalist pedagogues around the turn of the nineteenth century. I trace these developments, as well as significant variations in the form and content of alphabet books throughout the Victorian era – from George Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet* to Hilaire Belloc's *Moral Alphabet* – in order to refine our sense of how representations of the alphabet *and* constructions of childhood intersect with the history of printing technology and illustration in nineteenth-century England. We will be able to see why alphabet books have become *de facto* the province of children's literature even though the form has been used to construct texts that are distinctly adult-oriented, or that simultaneously address a spectrum of audience that would be more accurately divided on the basis of educational experience than age. Recovery work is interesting in its own right, since satirical Victorian alphabets staunchly resist categorization under "pedagogical" and/or "child-oriented" rubrics. But more importantly, by exposing the tenuous authority of *formal* conventions, my critical history of alphabet books reveals the historical contingency of audience formations and literacy itself. By describing my project as a "critical history" I mean to convey my assumption that close reading of a series of artifacts and their historical contexts,

[5] See especially St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*.

including the constellation of material factors that Jerome McGann has dubbed "bibliographic codes,"[6] will yield a picture of subtextual ideological investments. More specifically, I will be assessing how images of childhood are deployed in order to map distinct forms of literacy (or illiteracy) onto specific subsets of the population. I follow W. J. T. Mitchell in concluding that the most important question to ask about inter- and multimedia texts like alphabet books is not "what is the difference (or similarity) between the words and the images?" but "what difference do the differences (and similarities) make?" (*Picture Theory* 91). I would argue that, precisely because it brings all of these elements into uneasy tension, representations of the alphabet offer an excellent place to begin reconstructing how powerful Victorian adults came to view *visual* literacy as a social liability, and how they removed the taint from themselves by displacing it onto children.

In the study to follow, I will be indirectly tracing how alphabet books reflect evolving conceptions of literacy, since that phenomena is implicit in both the pedagogical context and the conjunction of text and image in children's books. However, I will be *directly* tracing what I will term "literography," by which I intend to suggest etymological links with literacy, orthography, and – most of all – cartography. Literography describes, generally in spatial terms, the dynamic interrelationship(s) constructed by the textual, contextual, and paratextual elements of a piece of printed matter.[7] Page layout is perhaps the most obvious means of articulating this relationship. So in some ways, my notion of literography is a synchronic complement to the diachronic "morphology of the page" described by Nicolas Barker, whose brief historical overview of shifts in typography and page layout conspicuously omits a discussion of texts whose explicit subject is the representation of textuality itself – e.g., typography catalogues as well as primers and other abecedarian ("The morphology of the page"). But more importantly, I embed the figure of the page-as-map in the "map" of sociocultural context, locating particular representations of the alphabet as they routinely articulate, interrogate, and promote a

[6] He lists as examples "typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to… 'the text as such'" (McGann 13).

[7] In referring the "paratextual" I am of course borrowing a term from a pioneer in the analysis of the textual periphery, G r ard Genette. See his *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation.*

configuration of relationships between and among media forms.[8] Alphabet books clearly emerge as an example of what Paul Bouissac calls "meta-cultural" phenomena, meaning that these books offer an implicit commentary on the ways that a culture chooses to distinguish some of its activities – that is, the "cultural" – from what is "natural" ("Meaning" 202). Indeed, we can discern implicit distinctions between sub-cultures defined by demographics, as well as those arbitrarily and ideologically erected between nature and culture. Self-consciousness about textuality is in fact a primary feature of the "representational program" of the alphabet book, a challenge posed to illustrators and pedagogues alike during the late eighteenth century and beyond (Stewart *On Longing* 341).[9] All writers inevitably reflect social and individual perceptions of inscription and of reading, as they negotiate the interfaces between human minds, texts, and materials. But alphabet book designers must do this while also grappling with the hybrid visual/verbal character of textual inscription. As Jerome McGann notes, it has become increasingly obvious to historians of the book that readers/viewers process a great deal of additional information about the materiality of a book, periodical, or print in order to situate the text with respect to the image (and vice versa), all of which has inevitable interpretive effects "*whether we are aware of such matters when we make our meanings or whether we are not.*" Moreover, these phenomena also produce feedback interactions with audience conventions that complicate scholarly and interpretive conclusions (McGann 12, italics in original). Through a combination of close reading and historical contextualization, I attempt to describe the operation of literographic cues at both levels of signification, but also offer a series of case studies in lieu of a futile attempt at comprehensiveness.

Alphabet books remain a viable site of literographic articulation and instruction in the twenty-first century, largely because their role as such evolved throughout the nineteenth century in concert with constructions of childhood and technological developments in the means of print production.

[8] To again acknowledge my debt to the Bourdieusian figure: "the social space described here… is an abstract representation, deliberately constructed, like a map, to give a bird's-eye view… the agents have points of view on this objective space which depend on their position within it and in which their will to transform or conserve it is often expressed" (*Distinction* 169).

[9] This is in fact a feature that Garrett Stewart ascribes to modernism: "the representational program will be further attenuated by an insistence on the graphic and phonic materiality of language itself" (361).

Consequently, in addition to "mapping" a relationship between text and image in their pages for the edification of their (often youthful) consumers,[10] alphabet books operate literographically by presenting a semiotic framework for locating certain configurations of text/image with respect to the real world. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the world(s) of print represented within alphabet books are variously located as contiguous with the real world (in railway- and London-themed illustrated alphabets); as symbolic systems extended from it (with alphabets focusing on the pseudo-pictographic qualities of the letters); and even as separate from real-world operations (as in the nonsense alphabets of Edward Lear and the "fantasias" of Walter Crane). This approach has some sympathies with Wolfgang Iser's construction of an "implied reader," embedded in the text and addressed by it.[11] But it replaces the notion of a "prestructured" reader response with an attempt to trace a constellation of cues, which retains the theoretical possibility of varying reader responses, and the mobility of the text, whether physical or culturally. By unpacking the layered literographic effects of alphabet books, I will be able to reconceptualize print culture in a way that takes account of its internal plurality and its shifting cultural valence throughout the nineteenth century in England. In the process, I will be primarily focused on complicating the existing "map" relating child audiences to constructions of literacy and the books that inculcate them.

According to the paradigmatic understanding of British alphabet books – one that predates our anonymous writer of 1820, and survives into the twenty-first century – illustrations are called into service as a supportive apparatus particularly attuned to the unique characteristics of a specific audience. That paradigm rests on inherited perceptions that are fundamentally conventional, but often taken as givens: 1) that illustrated books are for child audiences, and 2) pedagogical texts – especially, but not only, those concerned with literacy – are for child audiences. But these entangled conventions remain silent about

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[10] I prefer the market-driven overtones of this term, not to mention it is more efficient than repeating "readers/viewers."

[11] Here, I am of course invoking Wolfgang Iser's formulation of a term that "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (xii).

adjacent realities that shift with the passage of time and/or sociocultural context, including illiterate adults, the appeal of illustrations for adult audiences, and even the pedagogical limitations of illustrated alphabets. In a much-quoted modern study, psychologist S. Jay Samuels found that children's interest is attracted by pictures, as was reasonably suspected – so effectually, in fact, that young readers never do get around to seeing the information *beside* the picture, and which occasioned the illustration in the first place: "when pictures and words are presented together, the pictures would function as distracting stimuli and interfere with the acquisition of reading responses" (337). As Perry Nodelman points out, this finding contrasts sharply with one of the usual explanations for the presence of illustrations in children's books, especially those for pre-literate readers: "we believe that pictures themselves can teach – offer clarification" (*Words* 3-4). Indeed, challenges to the "illustration as child-oriented pedagogical tool" paradigm may reveal wrongheaded assumptions about how pictures actually work, or about the nature and needs of the child audience. Perhaps the rules for *pedagogical* texts and *illustrated* ones are audience-specific in ways that have substituted "Custom" for "Reason," as John Locke lamented over 300 years ago in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* – or as one writer put it in *Saturday Magazine* in 1844, "the old method of teaching reading has custom on its side, but everything else against it" ("The Art of Reading" 116). The humbly familiar environments where we find alphabet books in use – the school or, even more frequently, the family/home – both enable and mask their profoundly important function as sites for naturalizing ideological investments.[12]

If we can clear our field of view of received wisdom and look more closely at the historical origins of the alphabet book format, and its evolution in changing contexts, we can see *second* nature masquerading as nature in these assumptions about illustration and pedagogical functions. The alphabet

[12] Thus, Bourdieu points out that "The family and the school function as sites in which the [cultural] competences deemed necessary at a given time are constituted by usage itself, and, simultaneously, as sites in which the *price* of those competences is determined… the term 'investment'… must be understood in the dual sense of economic investment – which it objectively always is, though misrecognized – and the sense of affective investment" (*Distinction* 85-86). As a result, I share with Mitchell "the conviction that the tensions between visual and verbal representations are inseparable from struggles in cultural politics and political culture," although my concerns are *directly* focused on nineteenth-century "tensions," which reach into the twenty-first century indirectly or by extension (*Picture Theory* 3).

book's potential as a starting point for wide-ranging and interdisciplinary study of nineteenth-century British book history, literature, visual communication, and culture has so far been barely conceived, much less realized. The form's emergence in England around the first decades of the nineteenth century coincides with post-revolutionary period in Europe, a time of considerable anxiety about who could read and who couldn't, how they came to that knowledge, and what they were reading when/if they could. However, the history of literacy in Great Britain is distinct from the nation's history of reading, and even the history of learning *how* to read, in subtle and important ways. Those histories are clearly intertwined, but they are not isomorphic, and the decades just adjacent to 1800 present us with a particularly tangled set of historical threads to follow. During the beginning of "the long nineteenth century," we can see that important developments germane to any discussion of the histories of literacy, reading, and education, intersect in turn with the history of class politics. As the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* recently observed, "to be literate, to be able to read and write, is to possess a kind of power. The history of literacy education is, in part, the history of democracy" (76). Nor is this is a new revelation – as Andrew O'Malley documents, the rising middle class in the mid-to-late eighteenth century perceived textual literacy as a means of socioeconomic advancement, and deployed pedagogical texts in the service of a radical program of self-empowerment.[13] Their efforts produced class-based "trajectories of social change" that, as Alan Richardson concludes, "by the 1830s" had successfully shifted the image of the child into increasingly-close (and now-entrenched) association with formalized schooling (*Literature* 3). John Newbery's *Royal Primer* (ca. 1770) exemplifies this exhortatory character, as it plies children with rhymes like "he who to his Book's inclin'd / Will soon a golden Treasure find."

But as Perry Nodelman has argued – most famously in "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature" – the history of literacy education is also in part a history of oppression and internal colonization, as the "unlettered" are molded, sometimes quite explicitly against their will, into adults for whom access to opportunities as basic as a livelihood requires a certain form of literacy. The

[13] See "Chapter 1: The Coach and Six: Chapbook Residue in Late Eighteenth-Century Children's Literature" in O'Malley 17-38.

rationalist view of book-based literacy as fundamentally empowering has been challenged on numerous fronts, most famously by Paolo Freire.[14] And thanks in part to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, awareness has grown about how education (broadly construed) is "both liberatory and conservative, an instrument of both social change and social reproduction" (Kramsch 45). Thus, the qualities attached to early children's books – alphabet books among them – and their role in book-based education are bound up in the history of childhood itself. As Mitzi Myers has pointed out, "Notions of 'the child,' 'childhood,' and 'children's literature' are contingent, not essentialist, embodying the social constructions of a particular historical context" ("Socializing" 52). In sympathy with Crain, I will argue that the history of reading instruction is not only central to the history of education, but is also bound up in the "invention" and history of childhood (and its books). By alluding to the "invention" of childhood, I am of course acknowledging my conceptual debt to the work of Philippe Aries. I am also, by some lights, elaborating on his foundational work. Although his methodologies have since been roundly critiqued,[15] he did (for my purposes) helpfully link the emergence of a standardized system of education with the appearance of a distinct construction of childhood among European people. And speaking more generally, he introduced the now-orthodox view that conceptions of childhood are rooted in historical circumstances.[16] For instance, an image of childhood as innocent, imaginative, and close to Nature does not inevitably derive from observations of children themselves. Rather, that image is a response to the ideas about childhood exemplified by the work of the Lake Poets and others during the late-eighteen and early-nineteenth centuries.[17] The conventions of children's books, and their separability from a child *audience*, are much more dependent on material print culture than has been previously considered. Recognizing this is a

[14] Paolo Freire has most famously articulated the position that literacy education can be oppressive as well as liberating, and the support for such a stance is evident within nineteenth-century British literature as readily as his native Brazil. See, for instance, his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

[15] See especially Linda Pollock's *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child relations from 1500 to 1900.*

[16] Thus, Hugh Cunningham borrowed this term for his recent historical survey of British constructions of childhood: *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC, 2006).

[17] See Plotz 1-40 for a helpful overview of Romantic childhood and its sources.

crucial first step in allowing those formal conventions to be abstracted into a synecdoche for a particular construction of childhood as imaginative, innocent, and pre-literate rather than illiterate. Recognizing this also allows us to significantly improve our understanding of aspects of print culture, and visual/verbal inter-relations, that have not factored in the culturally-symbolic function of the figure of the Child.

Beyond the lack of attention to how conceptions of childhood co-evolve with education and literacy, perhaps the greatest failing of much historical work in those areas is that it tends to treat print culture as monolithically textual, and sidesteps the interactions between images and text that contribute to constructions of literacy. That is to say, the utility of alphabet books for tracing literacy's evolving constructions has been masked by a historical preoccupation with "rates." Literacy itself should be understood less as an end goal accessed or inculcated by way of a dedicated body of texts, than a term with shifting, highly-contingent cultural valences of its own. Those valences are not only reflected, but constructed (at least in part) by the very texts that are nominally designed to transmit it. It is only comparatively recently that the emergence of literacy studies has allowed us to conceive of literacy as a fluid term, or of "alphabetical literacy" as one literacy among many, rather than an example of a redundant modifier. I must establish at the outset my sympathy with the view that literacy is not a binary quality, available for simple diagnosis, but a set of practices tied directly to sociohistorical circumstances. Around 1985, we in American academia saw the emergence of the field of literacy studies in response to scholars who were calling for "critical examination of the *conceptualization of literacy* itself" (Graff 127). The term "literacy" may simply describe the capacity to read – that is, to correlate marks on a page to spoken words – but it almost universally assumes the ability to write as well. Indeed, the historical diagnosis of "literate" depends on the ability to write as a proxy for the ability to read, which would otherwise leave no physical trace at all, except as described by another literate person. Although the most basic understanding of textual literacy is as competence or mastery of a code, that definition underpins more-commonly-accepted and more elaborate understandings of literacy as including secondary capacities: the ability to comprehend, interpret meanings, and communicate in textual modes. Since experiences like "comprehension" and "communication" occur on a continuum rather than a binary of success and failure, the social character of what constitutes actual "comprehension" and "communication" can be folded into a fundamentally social or convention-oriented understanding of literacy. Liberties are taken with the etymological boundaries of the "literal." This produces definitions like those of UNESCO, which states that

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a *continuum of learning* in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. (UNESCO 13, italics mine).

In this scenario, literacy is defined, tautologically perhaps, as simply the ability to exercise what is recognized as literacy within the relevant society. It also suggests that printed *texts* are not the only kind of printed "materials" that can be deployed as modes of understanding, interpretation, and communication.

As James Collins and Richard Bolt point out, " 'literacy,' as a key word in our culture, has a status in the current era rather like that of 'science' in the nineteenth: it refers loosely to any body of systematic useful knowledge" (3). But "literacy" was a key word in the nineteenth century as well, as evidenced by its emergence as well as the evolution of its forms. The etymology of the term "literacy" actually provides a precursor for the current state of affairs, since a coherent notion of the term appeared in the nineteenth century only to describe a vacuum, a newly-perceptible and class-based charge of inadequacy. That is to say, the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the identification of "literate" appeared after the fact, as a retroactive justification for criticisms of the "illiterate." For instance, in *The Tatler* in the early eighteenth century, Sir Richard Steele scoffed that "There is no manner of Competition between a Man of Liberal Education and an Illiterate," and half a century later, Lord Chesterfield could confidently declare that "The word *illiterate*, in its common acceptation, means a man who is ignorant of those two languages [Greek and Latin]." Both definitions highlight the rarefied social environments of such usage, and also demonstrate that earlier constructions of literacy encompassed writing as well as reading, since neither Steele nor Chesterfield distinguish among various degrees of "knowledge" of a language. The ability to *speak* as well as read and write two dead languages may even have been included in this description.

About a hundred years later in England, though, the term "literate" still comes into view in connection with education, but also – significantly – in its relation to politics, as in the debate over "qualification for electoral rights." A back-formation of "illiteracy" (an increasingly problematic state of being where liberal political ideals were concerned), "literacy" finally emerged in the later nineteenth century as a term denoting the capacity to participate in government and the marketplace. Its codification required a larger cultural recognition that a critical mass of individuals were striving to attain this capacity in order to gain the privileges attendant on both spheres. And according to the *OED,* the first recorded instance of the *noun* form does not occur until 1883. But when it does, its printed location is illustrative: published in the *New England Journal of Education*, we find the boast that "Massachusetts is the first state in the Union in literacy in its native population." Both bureaucracy, and the companion terms corralling literacy-related skills into categories and credentials, emerged as a response to the growing number of "literate" citizens in America.[18] Patricia Crain notes that by the late eighteenth century, "the vast majority of New England children and adults" were responding to "the newly-perceived necessity of reading" (88). But even with (and perhaps in part because of) the literacy "crisis" of the 1790s described by Robert Altick, well into the nineteenth century in Great Britain textual literacy remained an ancillary feature of a recognized social position, part of a constellation of markers that consistently traveled together with power.[19] A mere four years before the Elementary Education Act of 1870, a writer for *All the Year Round* reiterated the need for a national system of childhood education when he invited his literate, adult audience to join him in appreciating their privilege:

[18] In her landmark study *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America,* Patricia Crain has documented a strong shift toward embracing the "technology" of the alphabet as a "primary structuring of subjectivity" in America "by the beginning of nineteenth century" (4). Her focus on American culture and society naturally leads her to different conclusions, and a comparative study of representations of the alphabet on either side of the Atlantic would be a full-scale project on its own.

[19] See "The Time of Crisis, 1791-1800" in Altick *Common Reader* 67-77.

> It is a pleasant thing for most of us that we do not remember having learnt to read; that the act of swallowing the alphabet is as utterly effaced from our memories as our birthday dose of castor-oil, our vaccination, or the cutting of our first teeth… Learning to read must be, for youths and adults, a particularly painful process. The difficulties attending this acquirement after childhood seem to be prodigious. ("Reading Made Easy" 176).

Access to education was both a conduit of that power and a marker of enjoying it. When literacy itself was separated from qualifications, however, with increasing and ultimately state-mandated access to schooling, education also came to seem potentially separable from the social complex in which it had been imbricated through most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the revolutionary political shifts in America may have had more apparent consequences in the economic sphere, late-eighteenth-century England experienced its own share of upheaval in the economic landscape, with concomitant effects on the cultural valence and formations of literacy. One must limit one's subject somehow, and in this book, I focus on extending our knowledge through time rather than across space. Thus, I attempt to trace how England's constructions of literacy have evolved through time rather than attempting an unwieldy trans-Atlantic study.

In an analogous project of recovery and analysis, modifiers or alternatives to "literacy" (like the "cultural," "computer," and "moral" literacies listed by Collins and Blot[20]) are now continually emerging as part of the growing recognition that knowing how to read is not a discrete skill set, but part of a complex of skill sets. For instance, exercising alphabetical literacy, or decoding a message inscribed in the alphabet, involves a series of tasks and skills that merge in difficult but fascinating ways with the visual. For the pupils and for the educators, the borders of knowledge acquisition and knowledge application are yet to be mapped, while the hierarchies of various knowledge formations are in continuously-shifting and highly-contextualized realignment. And illustrated alphabets have emerged as one of a number of publishing formats that encourage alphabetical or textual literacy by exploiting the pre-reader's (presumed) possession of at least some *visual* literacy – a term that has arisen to describe the

[20] They also identify others in their introduction; see Collins and Blot 2-3.

skill set concerned exclusively with images and their signifying inter-relationships. Like the word "literacy" itself, the complex of skills known as "visual literacy" is a terminological backformation, a cultural construction recognized in the rearview mirror of an individual's education and Western history at large.

We can look to the past to see people grappling with the alphabet as a visual/verbal complex, but it is also our cultural present. In a 2006 review of alphabet books in *The New York Times*, Jenkins pointed out their continued, needless proliferation: "Teachers and parents are well supplied with books that teach the alphabet effectively… yet every year there are more." Alphabet books, with their uniquely intermedial form, require us to re-encounter (and therefore to probe) our assumptions about how texts and images are consumed, and how their interactions *have been* and/or *can be* mapped. Michel Foucault's prefatory allusion to "heterotopias" in *The Order of Things* concisely articulates what is "disturbing" as well as compelling about the alphabet book as a site of cultural negotiation: "because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'" (xviii). In representations of the alphabet, where "letterforms" figure simultaneously as both an image and (a piece of) text, we confront the fundamental-but-fuzzy distinction between words and image. W. J. T. Mitchell echoes others before him in observing that "the skill of reading is already a visual skill, since it involves the recognition of the distinct letters of the alphabet" ("Visual Literacy" 13). Words' traditional status as linguistic signs, from Ferdinand de Saussure's denotation onward, implies that individual letters do need to be discerned in order to derive that meaning from the word. But as Mitchell points out, this requires a skill of discernment that toggles between the visual and verbal, a form of visual competence that subtends textual comprehension (i.e., is beyond "textual decoding"). The "commonplace distinction" between "word and image" is, as Mitchell also points out, "a shorthand way of dividing, mapping, and organizing the field of representation," a "kind of basic cultural trope" rather than an empirically-rigorous description (*Picture Theory* 3).[21] Even the distinction between "images" and "pictures" is frequently problematic, as the former can be used to describe figures within a variety of modes of representation, while the latter more strongly connotes an (empirically) visual experience – and the difference lies in practice, not denotation.[22] Mitchell ultimately defers to the "dialectic between word and image as an unsurpassable figure or fold in the fabric of representation, but one which is always 'widening' or being 'overcome' in the practical use of signs and symbols at any given time. So words and images have always 'converged' in the phenomenology of writing as a visible, graphic notational scheme that unites eye and ear" (Mitchell "Visual Literacy" 28). His notion of "convergence" helpfully emphasizes the cooperation between word and the image rather than potential competition, but must also be modified with considerations of contingency, and the subjectivity of perception that lurks in structuralist descriptions of these dynamic interactions.

Precisely because there is such dynamism inherent in the interaction between different forms of printed communication, I am tempted to agree with David Skilton that "the formation of a methodology and a vocabulary for the analysis of literary illustration is the next big challenge facing students of the subject" ("Centrality"). Analyses of "literary illustration" and its associated forms in book design have generated a rash of terms attempting to pin down the character of such representation. None erase the "unsurpassable figure or fold in the fabric of representation" presented by the alphabet itself, although they do offer some guideposts for picking our way into and through the form of the alphabet *book*. For instance, the term "iconotext," coined by Michael Nerlich to describe twentieth-century collage art, has gained some limited traction as a label for works that unify text and image within a given framework. In its refusal to demote images to a literally "illustrative" or subordinate role, the term overlaps in some ways with the more familiar term "picture book," which I will attempt to resituate within Victorian

[21] Mitchell helpfully elaborates the difficulties with what he terms the "comparative method"; see *Picture Theory* 87.

[22] For an extended discussion of historical and theoretical issues related to the distinction between "images" and "pictures" see Mitchell *Iconology* Chapter 1, especially his examination of Wittgenstein (26-28) and "The Tyranny of the Picture" (37).

horizons of expectation.[23] After the 1880s, "picture book" strongly implies a predominantly child audience[24] and, more discouragingly, shifts emphasis to the visual aspects rather than insisting upon iconotextual unity and interpenetration. Moreover, far from acknowledging and undermining a conventional hierarchy, championing the "literary illustration" or the "picture book" is simply an unsatisfying reversal of what Peter Wagner has aptly lamented as the "victory of the verbal over the other media" (18)[25] – despite his own perpetuation of this "victory" in the title of his *Reading Iconotexts.* Continuing in this direction, we may unhelpfully alight on 360-degree metaphors like that offered by Garrett Stewart when he counterposed ekphrasis, defined as "the verbal evocation of visual art," with "inverted ekphrasis" (346, "Reading Figures" in *Victorian Visual Imagination*).

His titular compromises aside, Wagner has usefully elaborated on the concept of "intermediality" as a subset of intertextuality that blurs the borders between media as well as texts, and deploys discourse analysis to grapple with hermeneutic porosity.[26] "Iconotext" has the distinct advantage, within literary studies at any rate, of adopting a Derridean notion of "text" as the fundamental unit of representation while also efficiently acknowledging the potential heterogeneity of a single piece of printed matter. This includes *implied* as well as apparent intermediality in a given piece of print, as in the case of graphic allusions to printed narratives.[27] In that respect, Nerlich's term goes beyond stiff competition from Joseph Schwarz's "composite text" (13-14), which also incorporates internal dynamism. But Schwarz too tends to treat the visual and verbal elements of books – and his study significantly focuses on children's picture

[23] I am here following Anne Lundin and others in borrowing Hans Robert Jauss's term for the frame that informs, constrains, and guides a reader's experience of reading and understanding a text. See Jauss "The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding."

[24] Although Nodelman, Bader, and D. Lewis have conducted semiotic explorations of narrative images (see n.3), their relevance to the present discussion is limited by this assumption.

[25] For further discussion in this vein, see Mitchell's *Iconology* and Gilman.

[26] Or as Wagner puts it, "a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient entity, and hence cannot function as a closed system" (11). I am particularly grateful for Wagner's term "intermedial" for which he is reliant on the work of Norman Bryson (see Wagner Chapter 1, particularly 12).

[27] This is elaborated in Wagner's follow-up to *Reading Iconotexts,* an introductory essay to the collection *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996).

books – as cooperative or parallel phenomena rather than unified. Even if we narrow the field to illustrated books, we confront potentially-specious distinctions between different forms of illustration, like the iconographic (that is, images as signifiers) and the pictorial (images as indexical, non-figurative representations). Within the gaps between these labels lurk the letterforms, which may pop up to stymie us even in non-alphabet books. Herbert Tucker, for, instance, has proposed the term "literal illustration" for "the graphic depiction of alphabetic textuality" seen in illustrations of signposts and tombstones (166).

Thus Skilton misdiagnoses the problem, which currently has more to do with excess than lack of vocabulary. Each critic introduces or defines their own terms and thus individual analyses, however illuminating, tend to remain tied to the particular works that generated them. Although labels like "iconotext" clearly indicate that some "intermedial" interactions have been set in motion by juxtaposing heterogeneous elements, the nature of those interactions remains as stubbornly empirical, as resistant to generalization, as do studies of reader response.[28] In many ways, we have so far failed to truly improve on the nineteenth-century term "sister arts," which acknowledged the dynamic exchange between words and images by invoking the vague figure of family resemblance and gathering them under the larger grouping of the "arts."[29] That accomplished, critics were generally satisfied with the "correspondence-of-the-arts approach" that Wagner criticizes, and that was generated by twentieth-century critics approaching eighteenth-century forms of intermedial art.[30] We may be unable to improve on a general level. Mitchell reaches the paradoxical conclusion that "from the *semantic* point of view, from the standpoint of referring, expressing intentions and producing effects in a viewer/listener, there is no essential difference between texts and images," even as contingency and context, "differences between visual and verbal

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[28] Thus we end up with collections like *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media,* edited by Ulla Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) that fail to produce a general articulation of an "interart poetics" – instead printing case study after case study.

[29] Significantly, Mitchell also deployed this figure in his groundbreaking work on *Iconology*; see Mitchell *Iconology* 7-14. For a discussion of that "joining" which also privileges the verbal, see particularly Jean H. Hagstrum.

[30] Wagner takes his hyphenated target from the title of Peter Jan de Voogd's *Henry Fielding and William Hogarth: The Correspondence of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981). See Wager 18, n.51.

media at the level of sign-types, forms, materials of presentation, and institutional traditions" imbue each and every instance of text-image interaction with a unique dynamism (*Picture Theory* 160-161). The critics who witnessed the technological joining of the sister arts declined to specify more about how the Muses were functionally – as well as familiarly – related, leaving that to be worked out *in situ.* Even more importantly, however effectively these labels may describe the *contents* of a book, they contribute very little to a more general discussion of how meaning is generated by intermedial interactions, and how the materiality of an "iconotext" may also contribute to that meaning.

However, there is at least one clear tendency worth noticing: that of analogizing the act of *looking* and "decoding" an image to the act of "reading." Hence elaborate analogies of a visual "grammar" to describe the dynamics of the total page.[31] With his invocation of "syntax," even Foucault relies on analogizing the act of looking – at things and words, opposed and juxtaposed – to the act of reading. This is also what the phrase "visual literacy" suggests, a simultaneous backformation and hierarchization in which the consumption of text is taken as more fundamentally communicative than the consumption of images. Pedagogues as well as literacy critics take this progression for granted. Thus does John Berger open his well-known work on *Ways of Seeing*, "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak" (7). However, I would rather not reinforce the monolithic view of print culture wherein text occupies center stage while layout, illustration, materiality of the book, etc. are figured as "extra" (as in G rard Genette's literal marginalization of the non-text as "paratext"). Joanna Drucker has also attempted to circumvent the institutionalized approach, and proposed a scheme of "graphic devices" like page numbers and borders that allow the consumers of text to "navigate" the page, and that inevitably affect their experience and interpretation of the narrative thus presented ("Graphic Devices." Her allusion to mapping helpfully resists the linearity of reading, wherein sense is derived from decoding in series. But it is still limited by its investment in narrative. Alphabet books, which often

[31] Mitchell takes Nelson Goodman has his primary example of how "modern discussions of the relation between texts and images have tended to reduce this question to a problem of grammar" (53); see his "Pictures and Paragraphs: Nelson Goodman and the Grammar of Difference," Chapter 2 in *Iconology* (53-74). For more recent examples see, for instance, Moebius and Christian Leborg. Far from originating the term, the latter's book summarizes, distills, and elaborates on its application.

have no narrative or serial structure except that imposed by the (quite arbitrary) one of "alphabetical order," expose the patent absurdity of the looking-as-reading analogy. Their organizing structure hovers on the border between text and image, nominally building a bridge or facilitating "convergence," but also potentially masking what Mitchell identified as an "unsurpassable figure or fold in the fabric of representation."[32]

We might usefully reverse the analogy and think of a word as a verbal/visual "composition," applying the language of looking to that of reading. The field of paleography, and the abundance of available fonts, testify to the inescapable visuality of the alphabet. But when the term "visual literacy" is applied, it simultaneously denotes as well as analogizes; the act of viewing an image (even of "decoding" it) is figured as an act akin to reading text. This approach is certainly inherited: as I discuss in Chapter 2, the satirist William Hogarth and his successors were praised for elevating the graphic arts to the level of reading rather than the other way around. Nor were the pioneers of literacy studies the first to acknowledge, implicitly or explicitly, this hierarchy. The privileging of reading over "mere" looking is clearly visible in eighteenth-century representations of reading instruction and its materials, including of course the letters themselves in alphabet books and other abecedarian texts. However, what Mitchell referred to as "convergence" is interrogated concretely in the world of the alphabet book, which emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century in England. The format registered that century's obsessive struggles with mapping the interaction between word and image in a manner that justifies the scope of my study. I have chosen to focus on nineteenth-century British representations of the alphabet because the relatively narrow formal parameters nonetheless allow me to touch upon a broad range of technological developments, material choices, and –most importantly – implied audiences. It also provides an effective means of telescoping literary history: many forms of print in nineteenth-century England are noteworthy for their revivalist character. Publishers continuously partnered writers with illustrators in idiosyncratic ways, but at the same time new printing technologies were deployed to evoke older graphic forms, such

[32] Or as Foucault points out, order itself is both the form and the mask of that convergence (*Order of Things* xx).

as Hogarthian satire, which drew much of its own intermedial vocabulary from Renaissance emblems. The contemporary constructions of visual and/or textual literacy evolved as well, sometimes producing class confusions or social complications as forces interacted dynamically within a broad field of cultural production (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term) rather than following a conveniently linear trajectory (*Distinction* 107).

As my modifiers should have already suggested, the recent advent of literacy studies offers us a helpful way of reconceptualizing the "spread" of literacy in the English-speaking world. Circumscribing the borders of "the literate world," and tracking literacy "rates," requires an initial, problematic dichotomization of "oral culture" and "print culture": even if the "shift" between them is characterized as gradual and uneven, the onward march of the latter seems to inevitably require the eclipse of the former. But the so-called "spread" of literacy is also bound up in the conceptualization of it as a static and coherent skill set: that of knowing how to read and comprehend printed text. This construction of "literacy" as discrete, and therefore susceptible to binary consumption or transmission, is not a self-evident one. In some ways, my project can be seen as a triangulation of the oral-culture/print-culture dichotomy, as I resist viewing *print culture* as monolithic. Alphabet books offer an excellent place to demonstrate the permeability of those borders, since they not only grapple with the fuzzy distinctions between "literate" and "pre-literate" (or "illiterate"), but also document the effort to integrate and hierarchize a complex web of coexistent, competitive, and cooperative forms of communication: the visual, alphabetical, oral, verbal, etc. The tripartite format of the illustrated alphabet can easily construct and reinforce an educational environment in which pre-literacy is holistically configured as oral, visual, and a step along the evolutionary road to textual literacy.

But through their component parts, illustrated alphabet texts also undermine the idealized linear account of the "task" (to borrow John Locke's term) of learning how to read. Instead, the interactions between compositional elements on a given page as well as those between pages and letters within the text as a whole expose the "task" as a recursive *process* wrapped up in metaphor and the materiality of the text as well as political and social consequences. Patricia Crain suggests that the picture of literacy that alphabet books offer is one that "must fit in with the current status of literacy – both its desired and its real range – in that culture" (97). It is also one that can be clarified by introducing flexibility and multiplicity to our notion of "literacy" itself.

So in the pages that follow, I reconstruct the co-evolution of literacy formations and audience categories in nineteenth-century England, focusing particularly on the various ways that alphabet books mediate the relationship between text and image. Before proceeding to the alphabet book's meeting with satire around the time of Victoria's accession, I set the scene with the form's emergence at the turn of the century. Chapter 1, "The Problem with the Alphabet: The Edgeworths, Rational Reading Instruction, and the Issue of Illustration," explains how rationalist pedagogues in the earliest part of the nineteenth century imposed their anxieties about class onto the forms of British education, including the printed apparatus of literacy. I argue that the alphabet book format that emerged during the first decades of the nineteenth century deliberately situated visual and oral modes of communication as a developmental stepping stone to the "maturity" of textual literacy. Treatises and primers by writers like Richard Lovell Edgeworth (or "R. L.") and his daughter Maria popularized a version of educational philosophy, derived primarily from the writings of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that promoted literacy among the middle class as a means of inter-generational social advancement. However, they significantly resisted illustrating the alphabet in order to distinguish their works from cheap, low-culture chapbooks. They thus provide a telling example of how the alphabet book format, and by extension pedagogical theory, can produce reciprocal constructions of childhood and literacy as those terms intersect with views on class and education.

In Chapter 2, "'For the Amusement of Children Six Feet High': Alphabet Books and Satire in Early Victorian England," I demonstrate how satirical representations of the alphabet functioned as a site of resistance to the rationalist privileging of words over images, particularly during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. I focus on the *Comic Alphabet* (1836) by George Cruikshank, the leading graphic artist of the first half of the nineteenth century, and a homemade alphabet (circa 1833) by William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* author and *Punch* editor. Both works reflect the enduring viability of eighteenth-century modes of "emblematic" representation – that is, modes inherited from William Hogarth, wherein visual signs invoked conventionalized verbal signs and texts – within satirical illustration. These texts' materiality also "codes" their orientation toward a middle- or upper-class audience. So when they invoke childhood as a site of education *apart* from Romantic inflections, Cruikshank and Thackeray are also reproducing a rationalist model of human development, albeit modified by a plea for middle-class visual literacy to have a place alongside or in cooperation with textual literacy. I conclude that these works, which routinely played with the boundaries between text and image by focusing on the letters *as* images, promoted visual literacy among adults as well as children.

When mid-century writers and illustrators inherited new opportunities for affordable illustration, they continued to use alphabet books to address mixed adult-child audiences while also exploring the limits of alphabet books as teaching tools, and even the limits of printed text as a communications technology. Chapter 3, "Edward Lear's 'Nonsenses': the Perils and Pleasures of Pronunciation and Perspective," describes how Edward Lear's "nonsense" alphabets books resists the rationalist hierarchy of media by insisting upon the orality embedded in print culture. I focus on the half-dozen nonsense alphabets that Lear published during the 1870s, since their public appearance significantly coincides with the implementation of the Elementary Education Act of 1870. In the aftermath of that decree, book publishers struggled to produce textbooks equal to the task of inculcating universal literacy, and I argue that Lear's nonsense alphabets offered *inverted* reflections of the emerging priorities in primary education. Thus, I conclude that Lear's representation of alphabetical literacy as oral, extemporaneous, and – above all – playful reveals how his contemporaries were working to construct alphabetical literacy as silent, deliberate, and oriented toward social productivity. In the process of resisting conventional education, he claims illustrated books as a potential site of language and intermedial play for adults as well as children.

Lear's work both capitalized on and contributed to widespread instability in the conventional associations between audiences, and how words and images were arranged in print, during the second half of the century in England. The emblematic satirical effects that Cruikshank had deployed; that Thackeray had incorporated into the composition of illustrated novels and *Punch*; and that Lear had parodied, continued to drift from the visual realm to the verbal. The rationalists seemed to be regaining ground they had lost. However, advances in printing technology opened up new commercial opportunities for popular illustration as a whole at the same time that government-mandated access to elementary education rooted literacy instruction in childhood. In Chapter 4, "Walter Crane, the Alphabet, and the Value of 'so-called children's books'," I show how artists associated with the Arts and Crafts movement strove to recover a form of literacy that elevated the visual by using materials, price, and rhetoric to maintain distinctions between high culture and low. I focus particularly on the career of Walter Crane – it spanned over fifty years and included the production of a dozen alphabet books – in order to document how the increasing availability of high-quality, heavily-illustrated "literature for the nursery" during the 1860s-1870s reinforced a growing link between childhood and the visual at the same time that notions of the "childlike" could be decoupled from actual children. Thus, Crane was able to deploy alphabet books as a vehicle of aesthetic education for both children and adults by designing books that emphasized the visual rather than the verbal characteristics of script, and exploiting a rising tide of nostalgia by invoking childhood through visually-oriented forms of education.

Soon, however, visual and nostalgic representations of childhood emerged in alphabet books that binarized words and images. These competed with those that, like Crane's, were consciously embedded in literacy instruction, and succeeded better in the marketplace. In Chapter 5, "Reading the Marketplace: The Alphabet in the Hands of Brand-Name Illustrators," I document how the emergence of branding during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, coupled with advancements in publishing technologies and expanded access to primary education, allowed representations of the alphabet to substitute purely commercial appeals for pedagogical utility. I focus on abecedarian illustrations designed by Kate Greenaway, such as her best-selling and nostalgic *A Apple Pie* (1883), and the *Funny Alphabet* (1886) designed by Hablot Knight Browne, better known as "Phiz" and as Charles Dickens's most frequent collaborator. Both designers reject modes of emblematic association that had long been used to transform letterforms from mere compositional elements, into vehicles of signification. For Kate Greenaway and

Phiz, the alphabet is less a point of convergence between the visual and the verbal than a promiscuous commercial platform. I conclude that neither Greenaway nor Phiz articulate a coherent relationship between the textual and the graphic, because literacy education is an incidental goal in the face of their appeals to the heartstrings and the pocketbooks of nostalgic adults.

Finally, in Chapter 6, "Inevitable Literacy: The Alphabet at the Fin de siècle," I argue that *fin de siècle* representations of the alphabet by Hilaire Belloc and Rudyard Kipling situate both alphabetical literacy and its bureaucratic functions as an evolutionary-cum-industrial inevitability that threatens individual social agency. By 1900 in England, photographic modes of representation and reproduction saturated print culture, and universal education had been nominally instituted; as a result, the "alphabetical array" format came to dominate abecedarian picture books for children and negotiations over constructions of literacy were often ceded to the pedagogues in the classrooms. However, representations of the alphabet like those in Kipling's *Just So* stories (1902), "How the First Letter Was Written" and "How the Alphabet was Made;" and Belloc's *Moral Alphabet* (1899) ironically exploit the relative ease of contemporary publication to criticize the post-Industrial Revolution modes of education. On one hand, they bear witness to the now-naturalized associations between children and the alphabet. But on the other hand, they continue to interrogate the social character of literacy by criticizing the homogenizing effects of conflating childhood with schooling. In their appeals to adult or mixed audiences, they exploit illustrations and children's synecdochal relationship with education in order to argue for the continuing necessity of manual inscription alongside mechanical modes.

II. CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM WITH THE ALPHABET: THE EDGEWORTHS, RATIONAL READING INSTRUCTION, AND THE ISSUE OF ILLUSTRATION

In a story from her 1801 collection *Early Lessons*, Maria Edgeworth's famous protagonist Rosamond – better known from the didactic tale "The Purple Jar" – asks her mother to explain something she'd overheard during a visit to a factory: "something about a girl's mistaking a bee for a cow?" (104). As Rosamond's parents account for the girl's titular confusion over "The Bee and the Cow," Edgeworth also presents us with a useful turn-of-the-nineteenth-century British perspective on alphabet books. Rosamond's brother Godfrey immediately (and characteristically) assumes that this girl "must have been an idiot," but their mother patiently excuses the mistake given the girl's circumstances: "A lady was teaching a poor little girl, who had been constantly employed in a manufactory, to read… The child read badly, and as if she did not in the least understand what she was reading" (104). The particularly damning point of confusion arrived when the girl read about someone "being stung by a bee." After affirming that she had indeed seen a bee before, the girl still strangely declares that "It is like a cow" (104-105). Rosamond speculates that the girl "might have seen a bee without having been told the name of it." And at this point, Rosamond's father chimes in with a more reasonable and more intriguing answer to the puzzle:

> Some children, particularly some of the poorer class, are taught their letters in *picture books*, as they call them, where, to each letter of the alphabet, a little *picture*, or, properly speaking, some print, is joined, and the thing represented usually begins with the letter to be taught: as A, for *apple*; *C,* for *cat.* Now, I remember to have seen, in some of these little books, B, for *bull*; and the letter B stands at the foot of the picture *of a bull.* It is a vulgar saying, meant to express that a

> person is ignorant, *such a one does not know the letter B from a bull's foot*. This saying led me to think of the cause of the child's mistake. And it appears to me that the sound of the letter, which is pronounced like the name of the insect, *bee,* was joined in the child's mind with the idea, or picture, of a bull or cow. Therefore, when she was asked what a *bee* was like, the recollection of a cow came into her head. (*Early Lessons,* "The Bee and the Cow," 105-106).

With this scene, Maria Edgeworth gives us the opportunity to reflect on the unpredictability of interactions between text and image in the concrete form of the printed page. She is obviously aware that a person, especially a poorer person, might reach adulthood without acquiring literacy – and not for lack of access to a printed primer, either. The "poor little girl's" need for a tutor who would demonstrate the relationship between printed text and speech was addressed technologically, and in a manner still familiar to us from twentieth and twenty-first century alphabet books: through the addition of illustrations. Yet, despite the pupil's apparent desire and ability to learn (a hard-to-secure ingredient of instruction that often plagues pedagogues), knowledge of the alphabet does not necessarily constitute progress toward functional literacy. Instead, the primer itself promotes confusion at a fundamental level of communication; the distinctions among image, word, and letterform are sunk by the homophonic overlap of "B" and "bee." She needs a tutor to show her how to read the page itself as well as the letters.

Maria Edgeworth's unflattering allusion to these "picture books, as they call them, where, to each letter of the alphabet, a little *picture*… is joined" pointedly coincides with the alphabet book's increasing visibility. During the years just prior to and following 1800 it emerged as a codified literary form with formal rules and audience conventions, many of which are visible in the story's portrayal of this "poor little girl" and the educational plight of working-class children. Edgeworth implicitly points us toward the interlocking histories of literacy and print culture in the nineteenth century, especially the latter's plural character; both of these were also affected by shifts in class structure and British representations of childhood occurring during the same time period. The printed alphabet, with its uniquely intermedial character, sits at the center of this web of text and subtext. Indeed, during the decades when Edgeworth was writing her moral tales about Rosamond, the printed alphabet was variously positioned as a key and a barrier to textual literacy for individuals on both sides of the pupil-teacher relationship. This was even more the case during the early years of the nineteenth century when, as "The Bee and the Cow" makes clear, British working-class access to reading instruction often the chancy result of upper-class pity and time off from being "constantly employed in the manufactory." If they could actually get it, textual literacy offered lower-class individuals the opportunity of upward social mobility. Meanwhile, to those who perceived its destabilizing effects on a stratified pre-industrial class structure, spreading literacy rates appeared as a gathering storm cloud on the horizon. Altick has gone so far as to call it a "time of crisis" when, in 1791 Thomas Paine's incendiary pamphlet on *The Rights of Man* sold in huge numbers: coupled with the bloody events of the French Revolution, and the highly-plausible prediction that violent upheaval would follow upon mass access to Enlightenment and secular education, literacy was exposed as a terrible liability for the status quo.[33]

Political ramifications aside, aspirants to literacy like this "poor little girl" – and the pedagogues who wished to foster increased lower-class access, or simply secure it for middle-class pupils – confronted the practical realities of literacy acquisition. Text was and remains an imperfect representation of speech; it is not for nothing that James Spedding complained, in *Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review,* of the "irrational alphabet," teeming with "exceptions or irregularities to perplex [the pupil's] mind and burden his memory" (639). As past, contemporary, and future "spelling reformers" would complain, English orthography failed to seamlessly merge the oral and the visual into the textual. Although the application of memory could usually fill the gap, this was a solution with constraints of its own. Pedagogues who attempted to devise a program of beginning reading instruction invariably found the task resistant to analysis. Literacy instruction is hampered by its indivisibility into a set of discrete skills/tasks, its recursive and situated enactment, and its status as a point of convergence between the visual, the verbal, and the oral. As Edgeworth's story also demonstrates, the world of *print* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was far from purely textual. Chapbooks – small, cheaply-printed books of tales and songs that routinely included at least one woodcut illustration – broadsides, and other

[33] See Altick *Common Reader* 67-77, and Richardson *Literature* 44.

image-heavy printed media were already more accessible than text in the sense of being "legible" or comprehensible to viewers with minimal or no textual literacy skills.[34] But from about the mid-eighteenth century onward in England, printed images were increasingly accessible in the sense of being produced in higher numbers, and sold at lower prices and/or at more locations, especially in urban environments like London. "The Bee and the Cow" not only demonstrates the challenges posed by the alphabet itself as a "strange and potent technology" of communication (Abram 95), but it also alludes to the technological solutions that arose in response to the alphabet's extremely useful strangeness, and the unexpected results sometimes produced by tinkering with the pedagogical apparatus of print.

Edgeworth's representation of an alphabet book implicitly acknowledges a prevailing counter-assumption: namely, that illustrations *are* a useful means of "enforcing the knowledge of the letters" to a pupil's mind ("Literature of the Nursery 477). Her skepticism on that head implicitly reflects Maria's own long-ranging and long-suffering efforts to publish a genuinely instructive printed alphabet. Nor is this scene in "The Bee and the Cow" a uniquely-dense moment of sociocultural significance within the larger body of work produced by Maria Edgeworth and her father, Richard Lovell.[35] They also articulated the theoretical underpinning of their pedagogical advice to an extent that betrays internal contradictions and hermeneutic blind spots. However, they shared those blindspots with many of their peers, and so in this chapter, I will be using their pedagogically-inflected oeuvre as a window onto their wider sociocultural landscape. Works like their popular *Practical Education* (1798) – hereafter abbreviated *PE* – effectively illustrate the concerns that circulated among British writers for and about children around

[34] The term "chapbook" often functions as a catchall term for cheaply-produced popular literature, and these "small books" were consumed by a wide and unpredictable group of audiences. Victor Neuberg's *Popular Literature: A History and Guide from the Beginning of Printing to the Year 1897* provides the most useful overview of these materials as they appeared in the nineteenth century. For a close look at their earlier history, see Spufford and Muir *Victorian Illustrated Books* 12-24.

[35] The pair sometimes worked independently, and often in collaboration. The Edgeworths' contributions to the field of literacy education are noteworthy for both volume and scope: multiple treatises, many volumes of fictional stories, and memoirs. While they were inspired by Anna Letitia Barbauld's forays into graded reading levels, particularly her *Lessons for Children from Two to Three Years Old* (1787) and *from Three to Four Years Old* (1788), they sought to supplement it with texts suitable for readers both more and less literate than those addressed by Barbauld's self-consciously simple prose. See Butler *Maria Edgeworth* 61-63 and below.

1800. This includes those inherited from educational philosophers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; those prompted by the developing children's book publishing industry; those spurred by politics, including anxieties over the French and American Revolutions and the ambitions of the coalescing radical middle class; [36] and, much more than has been previously acknowledged, those enabled by innovations in printing technology like Thomas Bewick's resuscitation of wood engraving and industrialization of the craft.[37]

The Edgeworths' preoccupation with the relationship between the visual and the verbal aspects of the printed page was shared by the other pedagogues and publishers who witnessed or even presided over the emergence of the alphabet book in early nineteenth-century England. Thus, in the chapter to follow, I will draw on the Edgeworths as a touchstone for tracing how early illustrated alphabets operated literographically – that is to say, how they mapped a relationship among visual, verbal, and graphic elements. By further extending our attention to the materiality of the book, we can also see how these texts signaled their own intended location in the real world, whether in the middle-class nursery, the study, or the manufactory. Mapping the Edgeworths' representations of the alphabet reveals that they offer us a paradigmatic example of a progressive rationalist literography focused on defining separate spheres for text and illustration. And more importantly, their priorities stand in sharp contrast with those evinced by the rising tide of children's books, which exploited the cruder visual appeal of populist

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[36] Alan Richardson has stated that "*Practical Education* can be taken as exemplary of the progressive educational thought of its day; it assimilates many of the suggestions not only of Locke and Rousseau, but of the liberal-radical group of educational writers inspired by them as well" (*Literature* 54). Marilyn Butler, Alice Paterson, Susan Manly and Tony Lyons have also produced more comprehensive looks at the educational philosophers and works which appear in and influenced the Edgeworths' work. See Butler *Maria Edgeworth* 29-65 and Paterson 4-7, plus Paterson's second chapter "Educational Influences" 20-26. Manly notes that "the many allusions to radical writers and thinkers in the pages of *Practical Education*: references to Joseph Priestly, Erasmus Darwin, Beddoes, David Williams and even Wollstonecraft would have signaled that the universe of ideas in which its author moved was far from conservative" ("Introductory Note" x-xi). See also Lyons's chapter on "Educational Ideas," 13-31. I will focus on Locke and Rousseau because, not only are they the most oft-cited philosophers in the work as a whole (both explicitly and implicitly), but their thinking is most visible in the particular aspects of the Edgeworths' work that concerns me. For consideration of the Edgeworths' "ambivalence" with regard to Rousseau's *Emile,* see Douthwaite 37.

[37] For an overview of these developments in the history of printing technologies, see Mosley 164-188.

chapbooks with woodcut illustrations, but also targeted the middle class with decent bindings and gilt paper.[38] The Edgeworths' responses to earlier and emergent forms of the alphabet book reveal that, during a period of upheaval in politics and the material conditions of industry, constructions of literacy offered both a potent and an unreliable means of maintaining meaningful class distinctions. As Bewick's innovations with wood-engraving had yet to benefit from either steam-powered presses or machine-made paper,[39] technological limitations preserved high-quality combinations of text and image from the masses even though the sale of cheap illustrated broadsides and pamphlets manifested the demand. In chapbooks, illustration could be as perfunctory as it was marketable. Far from reproducing the hierarchy of text over image that alphabet books promoted, chapbook printers would routinely reuse woodcuts blocks, apparently unconcerned about whether the images bore any relationship to the texts they "illustrated."[40] I conclude that the Edgeworths' dogmatic resistance to pedagogical illustration reflects late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century middle-class anxieties about the social mobility of textual literacy, and its blurry contiguity with visual and oral modes of communication. Ultimately, the "poor little girl" of "The Bee and the Cow" figures much more prominently in Maria's critique of existing methods of literacy instruction than in the methods she and her father advocate, which presume and naturalize a text-oriented middle class domestic environment.

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[38] Andrea Immel has convincingly argued that William Hogarth's fine prints inspired some of the humor in Newbery's children's books, and thus leavened the populism of chapbook formats partly with middle-class satirical forms. See Immel "Didacticism" 146-166. However, since Newbery's illustrations were consistently crude, the Hogarth's "influence" on Newbery could only have taken the diffuse form of visual humor; they operate on quite different registers of eighteenth-century visual culture.

[39] As Mosley points out, the adoption of these two forms of printing technology are generally identified as marking "the decisive shift from craft to industry" (164); steam-powered presses became available around 1811 but capitalizing on them took decades longer (Mosley 188).

[40] Summerfield claims that "It was perfectly characteristic of the jobbing printers in the back streets of provincial towns who knocked these out by the hundred or the thousand and then sold them at half price to the chapmen to carry off to sell to simply borrow prints, wood blocks for printing, from whomever happened to be passing by" (188). For a more extended (and illustrated) account of re-used wood blocks in chapbooks, see Gretton. See also Clayton for an overview of the prevailing conditions, which he sums up as follows: "Although the variety of such cheap imagery [chapbooks and penny royal sheets] increased after 1800, it was not until after 1803 that the working class could possess the sort of imagery that middling people consumed in the eighteenth century" (247).

Given the somewhat schizophrenic nature of historical influence and context on the Edgeworths' representation of the alphabet, a preliminary note about the organization of this chapter may be helpful. I begin by demonstrating that the primacy of the alphabet in beginning reading instruction, which the Edgeworths actively supported and promoted, is pedagogically problematic rather than logically inevitable. Then, I proceed to argue that the child-oriented discourse surrounding late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century representations of the alphabet is part of a larger ideological program associated with the emerging middle-class, with rational education as its linchpin.[41] Rationalizing education in general, and textual literacy in particular, institutionalizes a politically and socially radical "child-centered pedagogy" rooted in the highly-influential theories of the philosopher John Locke and the cognitive model of the *tabula rasa*.[42] Thus, contemporary representations of the alphabet produced by the middle-class Rationalists reflect their aspirations to the socioeconomic advantages of the literate upper class, while also positioning the visual and oral components of the alphabet as simultaneously pre-literate and lower-class. However, I conclude this chapter by demonstrating how their text-heavy alphabetical works, which came to define the conventional pedagogical *function* of alphabet books in terms of child of audience, contrast sharply with the cross-written[43] chapbook tradition that defined alphabet books' *form*. John Newbery's works for children offer a different perspective on the educational philosophy of John Locke, one that is less committed to the *tabula rasa* and the formative power of education. But, as John Rowe Townsend points out, Newbery's preface acknowledges that his target audience of the actual and aspiring middle class wanted to make their children "Strong, Hardy, Healthy, Virtuous, Wise, and Happy," and that "these good Purposes are not to be obtained without some Care and Management in

[41] For an articulation of what, precisely, is meant by the "middle-class ideology" of the eighteenth-century, see O'Malley. See also Kramnick 11-44.

[42] See O'Malley and Richardson *Literature* for articulation of this term. See also Myers for discussion of how pedagogical theory is "inherently political" ("Anecdotes" 241).

[43] I am here borrowing a term from U. C. Knoepflmacher and Mitzi Myers, who have suggested that the representation of varying voices *within* a text might constitute an attempt to embed multiple implied readers. They describe the "interplay and cross-fertilization" of varying readerships' voices that may be offered in a single text, and attempt to expose the "dialogic mix of older and younger voices occurs in texts too often read as univocal" (vii).

their Infancy" (*Pocket-book* 5, Townsend 4-5). Of course, Newbery knew that it was the adults, not the children, who would be doing the purchasing.[44] Taking this less radical and more entrepreneurial stance leads him to emphasize instructional materials' capacity to amuse, rather than the susceptibility of play to pedagogy. The *Little Pretty Pocket-book* of 1744, which John Morgenstern has fairly characterized as "essentially an extended alphabet book," (70) stands as one of the earliest and most visible examples of the tradition that the Edgeworths were trying to distance themselves from. In particular, they rejected its haphazard literography, featuring plenty of images and instruction "dragged in only by the scruff," as Harvey Darton memorably put it: "most of the book is taken up with pictures of children playing games and little rhymes not very securely relevant to them" (2).[45] Through literographic cues like these, the *Pocket-book* constructs alphabetical literacy as a redundant or bonus feature of play rather than a hard-won and necessary life skill, a direct contradiction of the progressive Rationalist position.

These divergent strands of publishing history are distinguished in large part by different points of emphasis in their orientation toward children, with the philosophical and political feeding into the formal. Pedagogical theorists and writers for children at the turn of the nineteenth century were necessarily participating in a construction of childhood as they reflected contemporary understandings of the term, including those woven through educational philosophy. In their earlier writings, theorists like Rousseau – specifically in his influential *Emile: On Education* – and Locke assume that there is a magical, undetectable moment when children attain "Reason" and may be "treated as Rational Creatures" (Locke *Some Thoughts* 142). Although it may occur "sooner than is imagined," as Locke cautioned, the effort to locate that moment itself presumes a nascent conception of developmental stages and psychology – a then-radical perspective, adopted by the emerging middle class throughout the eighteenth century, that

[44] As J. H. Plumb puts it, "The new children's literature was aimed at the young, but only through the refraction of the parental eye" (xix).

[45] Andrea Immel rightly points out that "Fifty years of private and institutional collecting of Georgian juveniles has confirmed the Newbery form's pre-eminence, but the effort has established the existence of several other equally innovative competitors" like Thomas Boreman, who "devised the appealing package Newbery perfected: a small volume generously illustrated, distinctively bound, and priced competitively with sermons and pamphlets at 6*d.* or less" ("Children's Books and school-books" 741). I also address the work of M. Cooper below.

strove to normalize upward social mobility through individual agency.[46] The rationalizing of education (as well as other fields of "science") naturally went along with this self-empowering ethos. Thus, for Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, "upbringing and education appear indivisible" (Simon and Simon qtd in Myers "Socializing Rosamond," 55). The rationalists' constructions of intellectual development and knowledge acquisition are typically conflated with those of psychological development, which dictates a reciprocal relationship between pedagogical texts and youthful audiences.

But at the same time, in turning to the period that saw the emergence of the alphabet book, we are entering the extended period during which there was some debate about whether "children are distinguished from [adults] less by an *inferiority* than by a *difference* in capacity – that the barriers between manhood and childhood are marked less by the process of every power than by the exchange of many," as Eleanor Rigby wrote in 1844 (16).[47] The contemporary understanding of childhood and its books is strongly marked by the uncertainty Rigby describes, and the purportedly-high stakes of advocating one course of action over another. Susan Steinfirst situates the entire history of the abecedarian form within the "larger" history of children's literature, primarily because she has also preliminarily categorized *pedagogical* texts under that rubric. However, such a move uncritically reflects the inherited ideology of the rationalists. It is a case of, as Locke described it, a pedagogue's concluding that "those Opinions, which were taught them, before their Memory began to keep a Register of their Actions… were certainly the impress of God and Nature upon their minds… having been always so educated, and having no remembrance of the beginning of this Respect, they think it is natural" (*Essay* 82). In other words, *second* nature is taken for Nature. I would agree with we can denote "primers and ABC books" as "the ways in which the alphabet is presented to beginners" (Crain 8), regardless of

[46] See O'Malley.

[47] See particularly Richardson for "Some Versions of Childhood" relevant to this time period (*Literature* 8-25).

whether that introduction effectively constitutes the first step on the long road to textual literacy.[48] But while most literacy "beginners" are indeed children, a correspondingly-linear model of intellectual development is due to historical accident as well as biological order. The energy required to institutionalize "children" as "beginners" in reading instruction, and a corresponding prioritization of text over image-based modes of communication becomes apparent through analysis of the late-18th and early-19th-century representations of the alphabet, like those of the Edgeworths and Newbery. Collectively, they not only reinforce and perpetuate this hierarchization, but actively help establish and legitimize it.

A. THE EDGEWORTHS: *PRACTICAL EDUCATION* AT HOME

Writing on the cusp of and into the nineteenth century, trailing the threads of the Enlightenment in their wake, the Edgeworths sit at a critical point of intersection between domestic education and institutionalized schooling. This is the historical moment that Philippe Ariès, in his seminal work on childhood studies, identified as that where childhood becomes distinguished from adulthood due to the physical and temporal separations corresponding with a standardized graded system of education in Europe.[49] Alan Richardson also singles out this period around 1800 as one in which, in Great Britain, "the notion of childhood [was] increasingly defined in relation to schooling" (*Literature* 44). It was a time when theorists, practitioners, and recipients – or victims? – of education were bickering about the litany of pedagogical choices, and particular individuals could be just as plagued by indecision as the nation. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, at the same time that his name circulated on a treatise comparing public education to "a general infirmary for mental disease" to which "all desperate subjects are sent, as the last resource" (*PE* 285), Richard Lovell Edgeworth joined the Irish Board of Education

[48] We should accept such a characterization with a caveat hinted at by Patricia Crain, and required by her claim that the printed alphabet has progressed from serving as (merely) the substrate of written communication to providing "a primary structuring of subjectivity" in the Anglophonic and alphabetically-literate Western world (Crain 5).

[49] See Ariès's concluding chapter on "School and the Duration of Childhood" (329-336).

and, in 1816, set up a boys' school of his own under his son Lovell's aegis. The debate over individual versus collective educational environments was part of a larger discussion that extended from the "practical" in the title of the Edgeworths' best-known treatise, to the more abstract difficulty of how to model the human mind and its "stages" of development.[50] The proper position of the alphabet was a frequent topic in this critical conversation, variously serving as a foundation and as a point of interrogation. Whether learned on a parent's lap or in a formal educational setting, the alphabet eventually became figured as central to a set of skills on which students found their institutionalized education, proceeding in lockstep with their peers through a course of grade levels that also tracks their progress through a normalized series of landmarks in psychological and physiological development.

Just before the turn of the nineteenth century, the Edgeworths began publishing co-authored books about education as a coda to R.L.'s long investment in the subject – and, as a contemporary review of their treatise *Practical Education* (1798) pointed out, "There are few terms in the English language that convey so different an idea to different minds as that of *education.*" I can here usefully defer to the abundance of work completed by Mitzi Myers and others on the Edgeworths' considerable contributions to "teaching a child to open his eyes to the circumstances by which he is surrounded – to distinguish virtue from vice" (A. N. C. 19). The Edgeworths' and their contemporaries called this "the education of the heart" (*PE* 6), and Maria's many didactic tales – or what Myers has dubbed "socialization stories" ("Socializing" 52) in place of the much-maligned Moral Tale ("Romancing" 96-98) – have become iconic examples of women's writing designed to carry out that didactic intent.[51] I will concentrate instead on their specific interventions in "imparting to their children the usual acquirements of reading [and] writing" (A. N. C. 19), an equally significant aspect of their larger pedagogical project. They participated in the debate about and search for the "perfect" method of beginning reading instruction as avidly as any other aspect of education, but struggled to produce a primer that would correspond with

[50] For a useful overview of Edgeworth's role in and contribution to a larger set of social concerns, see Woodley.

[51] For Maria's success as a children's literature writer see particularly Myers "Socializing" 53 and Myers "Romancing."

their fundamental conviction that "Forcing children to learn any art or science by rote, without permitting the exercise of the understanding, must materially injure their powers both of reasoning and of invention" (*PE* 233). This attempt to reconcile their own past experience as educators of children, and as children themselves, with their goals for future generations of English readers, produced a program of beginning reading instruction in which their omissions and self-contradictions are even more significant than their recommendations.

As he was for many of their contemporaries in the field of education, Jean-Jacque Rousseau was an important scholastic influence on the Edgeworths. Indeed, he loomed so large in their field of view that Catherine Toal has suggested that the title of *Practical Education* was a jab at Rousseau's complaint in the preface of *Emile*: "People are always telling me to make *practicable* suggestions. You might as well tell me to suggest what people are doing already" (Toal 212; Rousseau 2). Given this declaration, it is not surprising that Rousseau's instructions for beginning reading instruction are minimal. He acknowledges that "People make a great fuss about discovering the best way to teach children to read. They invent 'bureaux' and cards, they turn the nursery into a printer's shop" (81). However, he dodges the question by affirming that "there is a better way than any of those… it consists in the desire to learn." Almost immediately thereafter, he declares the issue beneath him: "I am ashamed to toy with these trifles in a treatise on education" (81). Clearly, the Edgeworths disagreed with his estimation of these "trifles," but R. L. does appear to have been in agreement with Rousseau's more general prefatory criticism that "we know nothing of childhood… Begin thus by making a more careful study of your scholars" (1). *Practical Education*'s debt to Rousseau is, as Toal has pointed out, inconsistent and even "paradoxical" rather than straightforward (212) – a balancing act we would do well to remember while evaluating the consistency of the Edgeworth's own pedagogical theory.[52] So it may have been either despite, or because of, Rousseau's failure to follow his own recommended solution that R. L. was receptive when his second wife revealed notebooks in which she had been doing precisely that: seeking to replace "the philosophy of

[52] Toal offers a useful summary of critical debate over the "radicalism or traditionalism" of *Practical Education* (212-219), although the essay itself is concerned with Maria's novel *Belinda* as a test case.

the study" with "that of experience" (Rousseau 128), even down to the use of anecdotes and dialogues like those sprinkled throughout *Emile.*

The Edgeworths generally implied that their authority to comment on pedagogical methods was derived primarily from observation of and experience teaching the many children raised wholly or in part on the Edgeworthtown family estate in the Irish countryside: offspring from R. L.'s four marriages totaled twenty-two children, including Maria; eighteen survived infancy. Maria herself was educated at boarding schools and recalled home upon the death of her first stepmother, Honora Sneyd Edgeworth, in 1780. In this she was unlike most of her half-brothers and -sisters, who received an entirely domestic education under her own, her stepmother's, and her father's direction. In her conclusion to her father's memoirs, Maria describes a method of education in which younger children were effectively "assigned" to older Edgeworths, with the latter in charge of educating their younger siblings.[53] This may sound like an in-house variation on the schoolroom monitorial system of peer tutelage later standardized by the Birmingham Lancastrian schools in England.[54] But Maria's memoirs reveal that, thanks to age gaps between the children, the pupils generally enjoyed primary attention from accomplished adult (or nearly-adult) tutors.[55] In this busy environment, there was ample opportunity to observe children undertaking that all-important work of education (both emotional and intellectual), and the adult Edgeworths – Maria, and Richard Lovell and his second wife Honora – seized the opportunity to collect, record, and preserve what amounted to primitive fieldnotes.[56] Based on a perusal of the notebooks themselves, Susan Manly

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[53] See Butler *Maria Edgeworth* 98-99.

[54] See Michael 20-21 and Stephens 39.

[55] Maria writes that "Only one child…. was, during the early years of his life, entrusted to my care. My Charlotte was under the excellent and successful care of my sister Emmeline (now Mrs. King). Another sister, Honora… was, from the time she was six years old, under the care of Mrs. Charlotte Sneyd, her aunt" (*Memoirs* Vol. 2, 106).

[56] In so doing, they were in fact participating in a vogue for such activities stimulated partly by Rousseau's injunction in *Emile* to "take time to observe nature" (58). Much of the Edgeworths' material later reappeared in "Notes: Containing Conversations and Anecdotes of Children," an appendix to *Practical Education*. The children's anonymity was largely preserved through the use of initials, although they were often identified by those terms in Honora's notebooks as well. Comparisons between

has argued that "it was Honora Sneyd Edgeworth (m. 1773; d. 1780), not RLE, who first determined to rethink established ideas about educating children using her observations of her own family" ("Introductory Note" viii).[57] Honora's input certainly affected his interpretation of his own childhood experiences and run-ins with contemporary French educational philosophy, even if the degree to which it did so must remain an open question.[58]

Despite Honora's enduring investment in empirical observation, educational philosophy made the most visibly significant contribution to Richard Lovell's educational theory, with an inevitable trickledown effect on Maria since he guided her reading choices as she continued her studies at Edgeworthtown.[59] Besides Rousseau, R. L. pointed directly to John Locke's essays – particularly the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) – as a formative influence on his pedagogical theory, which he in turn passed on to Maria. Locke crops up repeatedly and explicitly in *Practical Education,*[60] as in their express debt to him for suggesting that

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Maria's subsequently-published letters, as well as birthdates (the children's ages are routinely provided) and the anecdotes reproduced in *Practical Education*, reveal that the work might also be read as a family history of sorts.

57 Facsimiles of the original notebooks, currently held at the Bodleian Library, are now available online through the "Defining Gender" database. Indeed, Honora's investment in her children's and step-children's education was considerable, if the extent of her note-taking is any indication; the notebooks reveal meticulous observation of their behavior and development – often recorded in the form of dialogues and reproduced that way in the published "Notes" – and interspersed with general remarks upon the proper means of raising them. Even on her deathbed she was vocally concerned about their education (*Memoirs* Vol. 1 168), lending support to those who to speculate upon her responsibility for a "scientific" turn in R. L.'s pedagogical theory, and about how much she directly molded Maria's interest in the subject.

58 Myers has made some attempt to untangle this knot, but without conclusive results – see Myers "Anecdotes" n. 6, 231-232, and n. 24.

59 See Butler *Maria Edgeworth* 66-67, 91-92.

60 See, for instance, their concurrence with Locke's opinions about the need to resistant taxing children's attention spans (*PE* 61), the value of "mechanical employment" (*PE* 72), and, more explicitly, his recommendation of "the study of mathematics to improve the acuteness and precision of the reasoning faculty" in his *Essay on the Conduct of the Human Understanding* (*PE* 383).

learning be framed and conducted as an extension of play rather than as a hated "task"[61] (*PE* 30-31). Following Locke, the Edgeworths single out learning how to read as a task susceptible to being recast as play. Beyond the explicit and overt references I will explore in detail below, we have autobiographical evidence that R. L.'s own ideas about teaching beginning reading have a likely precedent in the work of the renowned French philosopher. In addition to reading Locke's own writing,[62] R. L. encountered his ideas much earlier in John Newbery's works for children, as many residents of middle and upper-middle class households might have done. Although he describes an experiment with Rousseauean education that used his own eldest song as the test subject,[63] R. L. returned to a less theoretical approach centered in the home, one that he had himself tried at a neighbor's house during his youth and found to be of lasting benefit:

> as they sat round a table every evening intent upon their books, my young friend and I, from imitation, employed ourselves in perusing certain little volumes, which were then printed by New-bery, for children... or we deciphered anagrams, which Mrs. Dewes and her friends gave us

[61] He suggests in *Thoughts Concerning Education* that "I have always had a Fancy, that *Learning* might be made a Play and Recreation to Children; and they might be brought to desire to be taught, if it were propos'd to them as a thing of Honour, Credit, Delight and Recreation" (Locke 208).

[62] R. L. recalled in his *Memoirs* that his mother "had read every thing that had been written on the subject of education, and preferred with sound judgment the opinions of Locke. To these, with modifications suggested by her own good sense, she steadily adhered; and to the influence of her instructions and authority I owe the happiness of my life" (Vol. 1 46).

[63] R. L. had made a notoriously failed attempt to raise his first son, Richard, born in 1764 in Oxfordshire, according to the model provided by Rousseau in *Emile; On Education* (1762). In his *Memoirs*, R. L. described how in 1765, Rousseau's work "had then all the power of novelty, as well as all the charms of eloquence… and I determined to make a fair trial of Rousseau's system… the body and mind of my son were to be left as much as possible to the education of nature and of accident" (Vol. 1 77). The result was, according to R. L., that "He had all the virtues of a child bred in the hut of a savage, … [but] of books he had less knowledge at four or five years old, than most children have at that age" (Vol. 1 78). R. L. even submitted the boy to Rousseau for inspection during a trip to France in 1771 (*Memoirs* Vol. 1, 116) and received mild approbation. But amidst growing concern about young Richard's overdeveloped sense of independence – for "he was not disposed to obey" (*Memoirs* Vol. 1, 78) – and his inability to read and write, R. L. finally engaged a tutor and declared himself to have been unfortunately "dazzled by the eloquence of Rousseau" (*Memoirs* Vol. 1, 123). He may have been more relieved than bereaved when his marred son finally died in 1798 at the age of 24 – the incident is passed over in his *Memoirs*, and in a private letter he concluded that "his way of life had become such as promised no happiness to himself or his family – it is therefore better for both that he has retired from the scene" (qtd in Butler *Maria Edgeworth* 107).

> for our amusement. To this occupation we were much encouraged by the attention, which the elder part of the company gave to the subject, when a difficult combination of letters fell in their way. (*Memoirs* Vol. 1, 22-23)

This description echoes scenes recounted by Maria in her letters, in which a roomful of children effectively pursued their own educations under prudently-distant adult supervision. In Maria's account, as in R. L's, the adults implicitly promoted the pupils' activities by refraining from directing them.[64] The similarities also suggest that, far from testing novelty, Richard Lovell was more inclined to nostalgia and family tradition when he designed a mode of domestic education to establish at Edgeworthtown.

We are promised early in *Practical Education* that within its pages, "a new mode is pointed out of instructing children to read," as one reviewer put it in the *New London Review* (A. N.C. 22). That "new" program of instruction, ostensibly based on extremely familiar sources of experience and observation, was expanded with supporting material in their *Rational Primer*[65] (1799) the following year, although the promised supplemental practice texts were never published. As its impressive length and ambitious scope would suggest, *Practical Education* was not the duo's first entry into the public debate about appropriate methods of education. Maria was already known for authoring *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) and *The Parents' Assistant* (First Part 1796); the latter was a collection of stories originally devised to entertain her many younger siblings. Their real contribution to pedagogical theory begins, though, with *Practical Education*, the text which education historian Brian Simon once called the "most significant

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[64] In a letter to her cousin Sophy Ruxton dated July 2, 1794, Maria declares,

> I will tell you what is going on, that you may see whether you like your daily bill of fare. There are, an' please you, ma'am, a great many good things here. There is a balloon hanging up, and another going to be put on the stocks; there is soap made, and making from a receipt in *Nicholson's Chemistry*; there is excellent ink made and to be made by the same book; there is a cake of roses just squeezed in a vice, by my father, according to the advice of Madame de Lagaraye, the woman in the black cloak and ruffles, who weighs with unwearied scales, in the frontispiece of a book, which perhaps my aunt remembers, entitled *Chemie du gout et de l'odorat.* There are a set of accurate weights, just completed by the ingenious Messrs. Lovell and Henry Edgeworth, partners; for Henry is now a junior partner, and grown an inch and a half upon the strength of it in two months. (*Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth* 34).

[65] Hereafter abbreviated *RP*.

contemporary work on pedagogy" (25), while Alice Paterson claimed that it was the "most important work on general pedagogy to appear in [England] between the publication of Locke's *Thoughts* in 1693 and that of Herbert Spencer's *Essay on Education* in 1861" (v-vi). These elaborate claims are not without justification, although the *British Critic*'s 1820 allusion to *Practical Education* "mania" is certainly overstating the case (qtd in Lyons 9). The book went through several English editions: the second in 1801,[66] and a third in 1808, this time under the title *Essays on Practical Education.* The change was an attempt, largely ignored, to reject responsibility for a comprehensive "system" after they were roundly criticized by figures like Sarah Trimmer for refusing to discuss matters of religion.[67] Their empirical approach, perhaps even more than the advice it produced, was responsible for the text's popularity. Myers notes that the Edgeworths' "record of child-talk started a fad for parent diaries in nineteenth-century England and America," with Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Darwin among the imitators ("Anecdotes" 236). *Practical Education* was also well-known on the Continent after translation into French the following year.[68] An American edition was published in New York by George Hopkins in 1801,[69] and in the same year an English reviewer of Maria's subsequent work could complacently begin by noting that "The name of Edgeworth is already well known in the literary world. The work on practical education contained some valuable observations on the nature and improvement of the human mind" ("Book Review: *Moral Tales"* 98). However true that may be about pedagogy *in general*, though, there remains some doubt about their influence on methods of teaching beginning reading, despite efforts extending to the publication of a primer.

[66] Published by J. Johnson in London.

[67] A fourth edition appeared in 1811 (again in London by J. Johnson), and a newly revised edition in 1815 (London: R. Hunter, Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, successors to J. Johnson).

[68] See Manly "Introductory Note" xiv-xviii, and Butler *Maria Edgeworth* 172-174 for the reception of *Practical Education*.

[69] In fact the text caught fire across the Atlantic just as interest was fading in Great Britain. After about 1815, *Practical Education* went through a dozen editions in New York and several other large American cities over the next two decades.

The Edgeworths begin, as so many eighteenth-century pedagogues do, by insisting that the difficulties of reading begin with the alphabet: "As it is usually managed, it is a dreadful task indeed to learn, and if possible a more dreadful task to teach to read: with the help of counters, and coaxing, and gingerbread, or by dint of reiterated pain and terror, the names of the four and twenty letters of the alphabet are perhaps in the course of some weeks fixed in the pupil's memory" (*PE* 32). To be sure, the difficulties of memorizing by rote meaningless subunits of words – whether letters or syllables – was well-documented, as we saw hinted at by Rousseau above. It was also a matter that drew the attention of John Locke in his *Thoughts Concerning Education*. That text is well-known for issuing a blanket condemnation, based on Locke's skeptical horror of pupils mindlessly consuming knowledge. He advocated the exercise of their Reason rather than (or in contradistinction to) the obedient repetition that dominated contemporary modes of elementary education. However, when it came to beginning reading instruction, Locke offered a familiar solution to lightening the burden of learning the alphabet: "an *Ivory-Ball*" with letters pasted on it (209). Repeating Locke's description of similar alphabet games is merely the simplest and most concrete way that the Edgeworths echoed or expanded on his ideas. Like many of their contemporaries, they were indebted to him for an entire theoretical substratum, with its inconsistencies and gaps as well as its insights.

B. LOCKE: BRINGING CHILDREN TO TEXTS

Locke's late-seventeenth-century notions of psychology informed subsequent notions of beginning education in general, and reading instruction in particular, in both direct and indirect ways. In his definitive book on the subject, Pickering goes so far as to declare that "In eighteenth-century England, the educational writings of 'the great Mr. Locke' [as Newbery called him] were practically biblical" (9).[70] Similarly, Geoffrey Summerfield suggests that by the end of the eighteenth century, "Locke's influence… was taken for granted – it has become part of the air" (189). Locke is probably most often quoted by

[70] See Pickering 9-10 for bibliographic description of Locke's importance.

children's literature scholars for his suggestion that "I have always had a Fancy, that Learning might be made a Play and Recreation to Children; and that they might be brought to desire to be taught, if it were propos'd to them as a thing of Honour, Credit, Delight, and Recreation" (*Thoughts* 208). This general advice to conjoin "instruction with delight," as the cover of John Newbery's *Little Pretty Pocket-book* advertised, translated more specifically to beginning reading instruction in his suggestion that "if *Play-things* were fitted to this purpose, as they are usually to none, Contrivances might be made *to teach Children to Read*, whilst they thought they were only Playing" (*Thoughts* 209). He then offered a number of not-so-novel suggestions for turning the "task" of beginning reading instruction into a game, including dice-based games and the game of "dibstones" or "squares." The latter game is described in the *Pocket-Book* as the "Great Q play," and a primer that predates Newbery's, *The Child's New Play-thing* published by M. Cooper in 1742, was accurately subtitled "Being a Spelling-Book." It included an extra copy of the alphabet for cutting apart and using in spelling games, a commercial gimmick that Brian Alderson suggests Newbery copied in 1745 with his *Directions for Playing with a Set of Squares* (186-188). These examples may be supplemented in turn, and Locke's influence confirmed, by even a cursory look at children's literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century. There, one is quickly awash in descriptions of and advertisements for games, machines, and products to turn the effort into play or pleasure.[71] As Jill Shefrin points out, "in table games alone, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, virtually every genre of children's literature and every subject of the curriculum were available." She also notes they were often finely crafted, with engraved illustrations or study materials, and thus commanded high prices (Shefrin "Educational Games" 252-253), although printed "lotteries" for children could be had for comparatively little money (Clayton 235).

Beyond their attempts to introduce an element of "play" to the "task" of reading instruction, Locke's influence also implicitly extends to the Edgeworths' investment in a synthetic method of reading

[71] For instance, the opening story of the second volume of Mrs. Lovechild's (Eleanor Fenn's) *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* is titled "The Useful Play" and describes children learning how to read letters and form words through the use of dice-like game pieces (4-12). For more on the prevalence of didactic playthings see Alderson "New Playthings" and Shefrin, "Educational Games," especially 262-263 for alphabet games.

instruction that relied on the progressive combination of either letters or phonemes.[72] Locke himself reserved concrete directions about reading instruction for later in *Some Thoughts*, and thus they are situated almost as obligatory afterthoughts to his primary interests, or as a particularization of his broader insistence that "None of the things [children] are to learn should ever be made a Burthen to them, or imposed on them as a *Task*" (134). Characteristically, he sums up his own list of toys and games for teaching the alphabet as follows: "Thus much for *learning to read,* which let him never be driven to, nor chid for: cheat him into it if you can, but make it not a Business for him. 'Tis better it be a Year later *before he can read*, than that he should this way get an aversion to Learning" (211). As I will explore in greater detail below, John Newbery's advertising copy and the commercial success of works like the *Little Pretty Pocket-Book* suggest that such declarations had considerable currency in the mid-eighteenth century. Moreover, they survived well beyond that time, albeit in adapted forms like those of the Edgeworths.

Locke's suggestions about combining beginning reading instruction with amusement (or its semblance) are partly the fruits of his specific ideas about education, but also the philosophical writings that immediately preceded them. His famous characterization of the infant mind as a *tabula rasa* had an even greater impact on subsequent pedagogues than his insistence on the importance of presenting Learning - and indeed, "all that [children] have to do" – as "Sport and Play" (120). The *tabula rasa*

[72] Well into the nineteenth century, this model remained firmly entrenched as the dominant method of teaching reading throughout Great Britain, at least in the primers and grammar most commonly used in schools and homes. Phonics, wherein the division of words into sub-units is guided by sounds and pronunciation rather than the letters and their names, gradually gained a foothold alongside the alphabetic method, although phonics was often presented in print with the alphabetic method in a haphazard way. By obvious analogy, both methods can be loosely categorized as synthetic, at least in contrast to the "analytic" methods. As the label would suggest, in the latter approaches the pupil is charged with analytically discerning patterns between and among words, and deriving his own systems of pronunciation, spelling, and deciphering. The more-pedagogically-explicit synthetic approach actually persisted in a variety of divergent forms that, however irregularly or accidentally, drew on analytic methods along the way – as Ian Michael points out, "the early stages of both [reading and spelling] were taught in such close relationship that they cannot be distinguished" (14). But as he also points out with frustration, the specific forms of such analytic learning are largely invisible to print history. Extant pedagogical texts explicitly outlined synthetic approaches, and the pedagogues' or peers' real-time interventions are not even recorded in teaching manuals during the years before widespread formalized schooling warranted such publications. For fuller treatments of the history of reading instruction, see Lamport, Mathews, and Reeder.

metaphor in Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was already centuries old even when he published it in 1693. Nonetheless, it is the apparent rationale for two crucial conventions of British alphabet books, each with their own constellation of ideological investments: the privileging of text over image as a form of printed communication, and the conflation of cognitive development with a movement from pre-literacy to literacy. Both conventions naturalize child-centered pedagogy, and a "progression" from a primitive, pre-Rational stage to one of literate Reason. This is the version of Locke that survived well into the nineteenth century, shaped in its turn by the rationalist pedagogical movement and its investment in praxis. However, Locke's own body of work presents a slightly different, or a least a more complicated version of cognitive development. It is worth looking even more closely at precisely how Locke *did* model cognitive development because the discrepancies are quite visible in later texts designed (at least ostensibly) to support beginning reading instruction, which in turn constrain notions of literacy itself. More specifically, a widely-circulated rationalist interpretation of his model, which did situate maturation as a movement from pre-literacy to literacy, also misinterpreted– and therefore *overvalued* – the role of *text* in his definition of "literacy." The results of this are concretely visible in representations of the alphabet that explicitly drew upon his theories. And this is true whether they were illustrated like Newbery's or rationalized like that of the Edgeworths' in *Practical Education*.

Locke originally introduces the *tabula rasa* metaphor as a way of clarifying his more abstract argument that humans are born without the benefit of "innate ideas," and that "Children… get no more, nor no other, [Ideas] than what Experience, and the Observation of things, that come in their way, furnish them with; which might be enough to satisfy us, that they are not Original Characters, stamped on the Mind" (*Essay* 85). This image of the child as a "blank slate" leads Locke into a discussion of the complementary means by which sensations are gathered and translated into complex ideas: 1) by the combination of one or more "Simple Ideas"; and 2) by the abstraction of general principles from examples or particulars. As subsequent pedagogical theory (and the nominal primacy of the alphabet) suggests, beginning reading instructors foresaw much greater opportunity to intervene in the former operation than the latter, which remained an obscure and sometimes intractable process of analysis. Thus, when it comes to beginning reading instruction, we see Locke's influence extended beyond attempts to introduce an element of "play" to the "task" of reading instruction. His observations about basic learning – which were reiterated in even more distinct terms in his posthumously-published *On the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706) – also naturally extend into a synthetic method of reading instruction. Locke first observes that "It is easie to take notice how [children's] Thoughts enlarge themselves only as they come to be acquainted with a greater variety of sensible Objects, to retain the *Ideas* of them in their memories; and to get the skill to compound and enlarge them, and several ways put them together" (*Essay* 92). Then, in *Some Thoughts,* he offers the basic scheme propounded by the Edgeworths and anyone else who started with the alphabet: "when by this means he knows the Letters, by changing them into Syllables, he may *learn to Read*" (*Thoughts* 210). As far as Locke is concerned, learning the alphabet is both the beginning and effectively the end of learning how to read; immediately thereafter, "some easy pleasant Book suited to his Capacity" should be put in the pupil's hands, and off he may go (*Thoughts* 211).

Locke seems unconcerned about the alphabet's imperfections as a communications technology. The Edgeworths, on the other hand, are loathe to congratulate a pupil for having managed to cram the alphabet into his brain: "So much the worse; all these names will disturb him if he have common sense, and at every step must stop his progress" (*PE* 32). They point to the confusion between the *names* of the letters and the *sounds* they denote, the former devised according to an irrational conjunction of vowel and consonants, and the latter varying dramatically according to context within a given word, and further deviating from pronunciation due to a host of additional contextual factors like geography. They lament, as Spedding would several decades later, that "There are many carefully worded rules in the spelling books… but unfortunately these rules are difficult to be learned by heart, and still more difficult to understand" (*PE* 33). The preface to the *Rational Primer* argues for the necessity of their system by dramatizing a child's attempt to read a sentence strewn with pronunciation pitfalls:

> As for the silent *u* at the end of the word *you,* he knows not what to make of it; for the letter *u* has no less than five separate sounds… besides the privilege of remaining, in certain situations, and in certain company, absolutely silent.

> This capricious silence of our letters, sometimes at the head, sometimes in the middle, and sometimes at the foot of the company, is unaccountable to the young observer; he hesitates with prudent anxiety whenever he meets with these doubtful characters. (Edgeworth *RP* 3-4)

Here, it might initially appear that they are railing against one of the villains pilloried throughout *Practical Education*: rote memorization at the expense of independent investigation.[73] But I would suggest that they are criticizing the printed alphabet itself.

The Edgeworths are hardly alone in their complaints; in fact, they are sounding a rather tired refrain. As early as the 1740s Thomas Dilworth, whose enormously popular *New Guide to the English Tongue* proceeds via catechistic dialogues, was prompting his pupils to ask the question "What letters are those which do not always keep their own natural sound?" and providing a list in response. Clearly, all was not well with Locke's rosy view of this synthetic system. It needed to be supplemented, and irregularities grappled with, since the organic evolution of language is notoriously semi-rational. This can be immediately demonstrated by the rules of grammar, and the long and inevitable lists of "exceptions" that follow, or are folded into, the lists of "Rules" in eighteenth and nineteenth-century grammars. Thus, Dilworth's *Guide* also included questions like "What is the first [and second, and third…] exception to this rule?" (85-86). Similarly, William Cobbett's charming *Grammar of the English Language in a Series of Letters* (1818) occasionally falls back on assured exposure to English speakers as a substitute for listing exceptions. He does this when he observes that some nouns referring to market goods, "and others which are irregular in a similar way, are of such common use that you will hardly ever make a mistake in applying them." Grammarians' repeated efforts to impose order on human verbal communication has naturally dovetailed or merged with the concerns of those seeking the best methods of reading instruction.

Richard Lovell's strange solution to this problem was a "new" alphabet – or, more accurately, the Roman alphabet supplemented and amended with various diacritical marks. In the *Rational Primer* R. L.

[73] The Edgeworths' resistance to rote memorization is overt and well-recognized by critics – see for instance Manly "Light of Nature" 142-145. M. O. Grenby also argues that they were unusual in their resistance to this practice ("Delightful Instruction" 195-196). But to my knowledge, no one has identified the Edgeworths' singular failure to find or describe an alternative to memorization of the alphabet.

downplays the extent of his adaptations: "I have left our alphabet and our orthography unchanged; I have added nothing but a few slight points or dots to the respective letters which require discrimination" (*RP* 10). Once children have learned this phonetic alphabet, we are assured, they have no difficulties adapting to the prevailing methods of inscription: "Nothing more is necessary, than to give children the same books without marks, which they can read fluently with them" (*PE* 36). Moreover, their ability to comprehend what they read will far outclass those who have struggled through learning pronunciation, and the endless exceptions and variations on the rules, by rote, since "these laws, however positive, are not found to be of universal application, or at least a child has not always wit or time to apply them upon the spur of the occasion" (*PE* 35). This system, we are assured, will enable "Reading really made easy" (*PE* 20), in contrast to existing primers, one – not coincidentally – titled "Reading Made Easy."[74]

But the phonetic "solution" to the "problem" of the alphabet is far from perfect. Firstly, R. L. has retained the detested step of memorization, although it is consistently euphemized or elided: "All these sounds, and each of the characters which denote them, should be distinctly known by a child before we begin to teach him to read" (*PE* 34). It is never clear how they *would* "know" them without this preliminary step, although presumably the appearance of "play" would be preserved where possible. Secondly, similar phonetic alphabets and systems had already been published, as even the preface to the *Rational Primer* makes clear: "Many have attempted to accommodate these purposes by altering the forms of the letters of the alphabet, by retrenching some and adding others; and several of these schemes may be seen in the preface to Johnson's dictionary" (8). Although R. L. did insist on "the originality of the invention" (*RP* 11) to his knowledge, he was part of a much larger effort, sprung up nearly in concert with the development of a children's literature market after mid-eighteenth-century publishing experiments in that vein, to supply a demand for texts that would facilitate the transition between pre-literate and literate. In addition to Johnson's dictionary, Edgeworth notes that "Figures have been employed… by Sheridan, Kenrick, and Walker" (*RP* 10) to comprise a phonetic alphabet, referring to

[74] More accurately, a number of primers employed this and similar titles, after the first – probably Dyke's *Reading Made Perfectly Easy; or, an introduction to the reading of the Holy Bible* (London: W. Lane, 1746) met with considerable success. For bibliography see Michael 553-554.

Thomas Sheridan's *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1747), John Walker's *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) and William Kendrick's *A New Dictionary of the English Language* (1773).[75] To give Edgeworth his proper due, these texts were not packaged as didactic or instructional tools in the same way that his was in both *Practical Education* and the follow-up *Rational Primer*, including an address to the tutor (assumed to be a parent) about how to guide her pupil through the various steps of learning the alphabet and transferring those reading skills to conventionally-printed texts. Nor were they concerned with the alphabet, or with sounds, so much as they considered syllables to be the basic unit of concern. Dilworth's *A New Guide to the English Tongue,* which rapidly passed into many subsequent editions after the first in 1740, came considerably closer than these dictionaries to the expected scope of a primer, starting with the alphabet and working up to passages of text. But it too made use of page after page of nonsense syllables as intermediary steps, in contrast to Edgeworth's system of diacritical marks and immediate jump to lists of whole (albeit simple) words.

The Edgeworths are thus but one example among many teachers and educational theorists who attempted to introduce "new" methods of reading instruction, but who found the printed alphabet to be both the constituent element and a nearly-insurmountable barrier to literacy instruction. Almost all of them directed their efforts toward overcoming the specific difficulty of learning the alphabet in a manner that actually effected some progress toward reading. The method of reading instruction advocated by the Edgeworths was really just a way of bringing English orthography back in line with that of the ancient Greeks, and their alphabet: "every letter should have a precise single sound annexed to its figure; this should never vary" (*PE* 34). However elaborate or rational the window dressing applied, rote memorization still served as the beginning step. Until Jacotot's whole-word (or "Look and Say") method entered the British scene via translation decades later, most pedagogues remained committed to a

[75] Harold Lamport's account of the history of the phonetic method lists quite a few more texts that may have presented systems in competition with Edgeworth's phonetic alphabet: Nathan Bailey's *The Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (London: E. Bell *et al,* 1721), Thomas Dilworth's *A New Guide to the English Tongue* (London: H. Kent, 1740), James Buchanan's *A New English Dictionary* (London: G. Kent, 1757), and William Perry's *The Royal Standard English Dictionary* (Edinburgh: J. Stockdale, 1775) – see Lamport 25-26.

basically synthetic method of reading instruction. Inevitably, there would be occasional allusions to the necessity of whole-word methods for "the most irregular words of the language" (Chadwick 81).[76]

Confronted by the alphabet as the necessary and irrational unit of synthesis in textual literacy, we can return, as eighteenth-century pedagogues might reasonably have done, to the foundational wisdom of Locke. While he did not address pronunciation irregularities in his advice for beginning reading instruction, he did implicitly supplement it in his model of cognitive development. He augmented his assertion that "Complex Ideas" were formed by the combination of multiple "Simple" ideas, with the description of a complementary process: "This is called ABSTRACTION, whereby *Ideas* taken from particular Beings, become general Representatives of all the same kind" (159). He later insisted in *Some Thoughts* that children should be amply furnished with "particulars," because "of all the Ways whereby Children are to be instructed… the plainest, easiest, and most efficacious is, to set before their eyes the *Examples*" (143). This alternative route to understanding is reflected in the Edgeworths' repeated characterization of children as naturally inclined to explore their own world, testing it for themselves and drawing their own conclusions, like adults:

> We first observe particulars, then form some general idea of classification, then descend again to new particulars, to observe whether they correspond with our principle… Children acquire knowledge, and their attention alternates from particular to general ideas, exactly in the same manner. (*PE* 74)

The Lockean precept clearly apparently found some purchase in the Edgeworths' pedagogical schemes.

The theoretical utility of abstraction does appear in the Edgeworths' literacy-specific pedagogical endeavors. However, it does so only on the *other* side of the barrier of the printed alphabet. Subsequent

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[76] Moreover, among the competing phonetic alphabets at the time, Edgeworth's never garnered lasting attention in Great Britain, although it received favorable notice in America: for instance, the John Parkhurst-edited journal *Teachers' Guide and Parents' Assistant* reproduced the relevant section from *Practical Education*. Whether the failure of Edgeworth's phonetic alphabet was due to lack of publicity for the *Rational Primer;* backlash against the "authors of *Practical Education*" for their refusal to introduce matters of religion into their *Essays*; its futile claim to originality among a bounty of pre-existing similar methods; or even the larger trends in reading instruction and the slow, meandering evolutionary course of reading instruction in Anglophonic countries, must remain a matter of speculation. The *Rational Primer* never went into a second edition, and there was no demand for the spelling books he offered to produce "if the public should seem to require it" (*RP* 39).

texts by the Edgeworths address the next "problem" of reading, namely that of comprehension, in this vein. Eighteen years after *Practical Education*, they produced another co-authored educational textbook, focused more generally on improving children's reading comprehension skills rather than their first attempts at clearing the hurdle between illiteracy and literacy. However, the apparent result of their continued exposure to pre- and barely-literate pupils was still more doubt about the prevailing methods of beginning reading instruction. Now, instead of simply worrying about how to begin, teachers needed to worry about when their work was concluded. In *Readings on Poetry*[77] the Edgeworths declare in the preface, "we are inclined to believe that upon a fair examination it would be found, that among the hundreds of lines of poetry which young people generally have learned by rote, not one half of the number is perfectly, or even imperfectly understood by the fluent little reciters (vii-viii).

Indeed, the difficulties of knowing when "decoding" has given way to actual literacy and "understanding" had been noted by Newbery in his *Pocket-Book* decades earlier, when he instructed parents that they should "Let [your son] read, and make him understand what he reads. No Sentence should be passed over without a strict Examination of the Truth of it" (7-8). Similarly, the Edgeworths' response was not to "reduce" poetry to its component parts, for independent instruction and subsequent synthesis, but to begin with the poems themselves – a collection of "particulars" from William Enfield's popular anthology *The Speaker* – and invite children to "form some general idea of classification, then descend again to new particulars." This approach supposedly came with the additional advantage that "when general habits of voluntary exertion and patient perseverance have been acquired, it will be easy either for the pupil himself, or for his friends, to direct his abilities to whatever is necessary for his happiness" (*PE* 28) – or as an appreciative reviewer put it, "of incalculably more value is one voluntary act of acquirement, combination, or conclusion, than hundreds of passively accepted facts" (Rigby 3). In *Readings on Poetry* they were attempting to correct Anna Letitia Barbauld's response to doubts about "whether poetry *ought* to be lowered to the capacities of children, or whether they should not be kept from reading verse" (3). Whereas, in a typically synthesis-oriented move, Barbauld wrote *Hymns in Prose*, the Edgeworths on the

[77] Hereafter abbreviated *RoP*.

other hand chose to *raise* "the capacities of children" to the level of the poetry they'd already seen, by providing them with a printed tool to teach themselves about allusion, nuance, irony, connotation, difficult words, etc. Only the relevant lines of the poems were reprinted in the *Readings* on the assumption that the wholes were already to hand. Their identification of difficulties was based, both implicitly and explicitly, on direct observations of real children and their struggles. Like Scott in the preface to his *Tales of a Grandfather,* the Edgeworths seemed, in *Readings on Poetry* at least, to believe that "There is no harm, but, on the contrary, there is benefit in presenting a child with ideas beyond his easy and immediate comprehension. The difficulties thus offered, if not too great or too frequent, stimulate curiosity and encourage exertion" (2). *Readings on Poetry* prompts us to look both forward and backward: back toward Locke, and the theories that inform a broad range of pedagogical options, and toward more a modern view of literacy acquisition as irreducibly embedded in process.

Readings on Poetry usefully demonstrates that the Edgeworths are open to Lockean abstraction, at least some of the time. This pedagogical work is unusual in its broad conceptualization of textual literacy as well as its faith that, in the inculcation of that textual comprehension, individuals can be relied upon to abstract principles from a series of examples. This mode of analysis is at least as important to Locke's model of cognitive development, and to effectively inculcating literacy as a full range of skills, as is that of synthesis. In keeping with their Lockean and explicit condemnation of learning by rote, found outside *Practical Education* as well as within, the Edgeworths nominally refused to admit that memorizing the alphabet should be the first step. In the absence of reliable rules of pronunciation, there is no logical end to the task of memorizing how words are spelled, and analysis seems to offer a way out of the impasse. But a sharp contradiction remains between the Edgeworths' determination to discern discrete "steps" in the development of literacy and reading comprehension and their insistence that children are natural scientists who will draw conclusions about their own environment if properly encouraged to do so. Their tolerance for memorization of an alphabet (however diacritically-elaborated), or their conspicuous omission of describing this preliminary step, is part of a critical fracture in the Edgeworths' whole pedagogical scheme. The Look and Say method actually corresponds much more closely to their articulations of the principles of observation and experimentation, than does the phonetic method of beginning reading instruction. A whole word approach seemed to be in excellent accord with the autodidacticism that they were so eager to encourage in children, as well as an informal and inevitable aspect of the actual experience for pupils. But despite their efforts to extend the pedagogue's responsibility, and (presciently) extending their conception of literacy to encompass something like Formalist close reading, the Edgeworths remained caught in a binary distinction between the pre-literate and the literate. Alphabet-based reading instruction is the fault line where rational synthesis and analysis cannot be reconciled. This duality becomes apparent when we juxtapose the analytic *Readings on Poetry* with the synthetic modes of *The Rational Primer*. And, most important for our purposes, this rigid preference for the synthetic in *beginning* reading instruction undergirds pedagogues' focus on the alphabet as the central concern for pre-literates.

For all its failings, the printed alphabet and/or the synthetic modes of reading instruction clearly remained far too useful to them to reconsider. On behalf of the Edgeworths, and their contemporaries with a similar fixation on consistent grammar and the alphabet, we could offer a simple explanation for the persistence of synthetic instructional methods for beginning reading in Great Britain throughout the nineteenth century. No one was doing educational research – and meeting Rousseau's call for a database of observations of children – until decades later. There was no *Reading Teacher* then as there is now, and the aptly-named journal *Practical Teacher*, edited and published by Joseph Hughes in London, was not established until 1881. That journal's foundation bears witness to a significant and increasing effort to gather and disseminate information about experiments in educational practice. No doubt in part because they were pioneering, the Edgeworths' own work reveals an uneasy negotiation between the established authorities and their influence on the subsequent generation(s) of pedagogues. Despite their apparent willingness to portray children as budding scientists, the Edgeworths are uneven in their adherence to Lockean precepts, and they are, of course, free to interrogate and adapt a hundred-years-old model of cognitive development to the demands of 1798. But I would argue that the specific way that they adapted and described the process of going from *tabula rasa* to textual literacy has at least as much to do with class-based ideological positioning as with a failure of empiricism.

C. CHILD-CENTERED PEDAGOGY AND MIDDLE-CLASS CHILDREN AS TEXTS

Since pedagogical precedents and goals cannot logically explain the Edgeworths' commitment to the printed alphabet, I return now to the episode from Maria's fiction with which I opened, in which we confronted her doubts about the utility of illustrated primers. This story might simply be read as an advertisement for *Practical Education* and the *Rational Primer*, with its brand-name method of reading instruction.[78] But I would also suggest that this story reveals deeper methodological and class-based difficulties. The Edgeworths' attempt to advocate a method of reading instruction is officially based on sound experimental principles, and a Lockean conviction that "the difference to be found in the Manners and Abilities of Men, is owing more to their *Education* than to any thing else" (*Thoughts* 103). But their conception of the potential pre-reader is quite limited: young children of at least middle-class parentage.[79] That class background is suppressed by a universalizing view of the child-pupil that is quintessentially Lockean in its reliance on linear modes of progression, and in the character of the figure that grounds it: that of the *tabula rasa*, without even "Original Characters stamped on the Mind" (*Essay* 85). The Edgeworths are able to avoid recognizing or articulating this assumption by focusing on the printed alphabet itself as a technological problem. Or put another way, by taking as given the alphabet's primacy in beginning reading instruction – a stance which has the endorsement of "Custom" rather than Nature or empiricism – they obscure concrete ideological investments in how the developing child/human mind is modeled. Moreover, in "The Bee and the Cow," which expresses sympathy for the plight of a "poor little

[78] John Newbery was notoriously fond or promoting his own other publications and products in the pages of his books; see Charles Welsh 109-110 for examples.

[79] I discuss below how this perspective is at least partly inherited from Locke as well. Darton suggests that Locke's educational philosophy proceeds from his knowledge of English domestic life rather than being imposed upon it: "If [middle-class mothers] followed Locke, it was, as likely as not, without knowing it… because Locke knew their long-established habits beforehand" (112).

girl" but offers her no solutions, we see the terms shifted in a way that, again, justify the alphabet. The illustrations are implicitly criticized, and perhaps the alphabet's imperfection acknowledged. But the primer is inadequate rather than the tutor, who seems to have done little more than hand the child the book. Her plight, being "constantly employed in a manufactory," seems only incidentally related to the fact that "she read badly."

I suggested at the outset that the Edgeworths' pedagogical advice merits closer inspection because they are situated at, and actively participate in, a pivotal moment in the history of British education. In the years leading up toward 1800, some movement had been made toward institutionalizing and standardizing literacy education – a true social "movement" in the case of Sarah Trimmer's Sunday Schools. But particularly in rural areas, the availability of such schooling remained scattershot, a product of chancy access to resources like money, time, and the teachers themselves.[80] All three variables exerted pressure on the choice of method for beginning reading instruction. By the end of the nineteenth century, a wide variety of textbooks were available for instruction in various methods and combinations thereof. When William Chadwick, the Head Master of the Lancastrian Schools in Wakefield described the methods available in 1881, he included both synthetic and analytic options and concluded, "Good reading may be taught by any one of these methods, but as they differ from each other very widely, it is a matter of importance to ascertain which of them effects its object best and in the least time" (80).[81] Efficiency is

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[80] As Alan Richardson points out, the 1780s "saw the effective beginning of mass education with: the Sunday Schools movement, the first attempt to legislate schooling for lower-class children, the rise of a children's literature geared for instructional use at home and in the schools, the first experiments in didactic 'popular' fiction, the practical working out of Locke's educational methods for use in the middle-class home, the popularization in England of Rousseau's educational theories, the publication of the first major feminist critiques of education, and the adumbration of a Romantic response to a number of these developments in poems by Blake and Wordsworth" (*Literature* 3). See also Richardson *Literature* 11, and for a useful overview the situation at this period see Richardson *Literature* 44-47.

[81] Mathews points out that the primacy of the alphabet in teaching beginning reading instruction in English went largely unchallenged until the eighteenth century, when Friedrich Gedike discovered what is now known as the "whole word" method in 1779. I say "discovered" rather than "invented" because in truth, he merely codified the method of reading instruction that predated and coexisted with primers and other instructional texts. The descendants of that method have been variously dubbed "Look-and-Say" or "the Jacotot method" (after the French teacher who expanded and more successfully marketed it), as well as "whole word." It gradually made its way to England from the Continent; in 1881 Chadwick positively

a concern for the Edgeworths too, albeit with a difference. They too base their advocacy of their own method in part on its avowed efficiency: "we may with some reasonable hopes of success, venture to propose this simple improvement in the laborious, the tedious art of learning to read; an improvement which may save many weary hours" (*RP* 19). They echo Locke's evaluation of the preciousness of time in education – "a Child will learn three times as much when he is *in tune*, as he will with double the Time and Pains, when he goes awkwardly, or is drag'd unwillingly to it" (*Thoughts* 135) – in their assertion that "A pupil, who is properly instructed, with the same quantity of attention will learn, perhaps, a hundred times as much in the same time, as he could acquire under the tuition of a learned preceptor ignorant in the art of teaching" (*PE* 74). But, it is imperative to notice, that pupil is always assumed to be a child with access to, if not one-on-one instruction, then at least considerable interaction with a literate tutor or parent. It is never clear how *The Rational Primer* or Edgeworth's phonetic and diacritically-amended alphabet could be useful without a supplemental oral aid.

Indeed, the Edgeworths' solution to the "problem" of the alphabet costs so little of the pupil's time precisely because it requires so much of the parent/tutor's. In the *Rational Primer* R. L. speaks of a student who "was taught [the phonetic alphabet] from two to five minutes" daily from "June 12th 1797" to "the 12th of October," at which point he could read a simple sentence. The punchline: "The minutes, added together from the time he began to learn his letters, till he made out the… sentence, were about eight hours" (16-17). To be sure, progressing from no knowledge of the alphabet to reading an entire sentence is a solid day's work for any pupil… except that it technically required *ten months* of the tutor's time, spent watching for the ripe and/or faltering moments of her student's attention. It was not for nothing that Alan Richardson described the "character of parental surveillance" recommended by the Edgeworths as "relentless" (*Literature* 55). Later, Edgeworth declares, without repeating the disclaimer, that "I offer this system as the result of twenty years experience, and I have asserted, that my last pupil was taught to read in a few hours" (*RP* 22). In *Practical Education,* similarly, we are assured that "Our

declared that "There are then four known methods of teaching to read; namely, the Alphabetic method, the system of Jacotot, or the Look and Say method, and the Phonetic and Phonic methods" (80).

readers need not be alarmed at the apparent slowness of this method: six months, at the rate of four or five minutes each day, will render all these combinations perfectly familiar" (35). Their entire chapter on attention, with its rather bizarre understanding of "leisure," is essentially directed toward "A private preceptor, who undertakes the instruction of several pupils in the same family… [he] will examine with care the different tempers and habits of his pupils; and he will have full leisure to adapt his instructions peculiarly to each" (*PE* 53). R. L.'s phonetic alphabet is a technological solution, and it is severely hampered by limitations acknowledged only glibly or briefly. They do note "the difficulties with which the public preceptor has to contend," but conclude that "perhaps nothing can immediately be done" (*PE* 229). Instead they focus attention on the choice of domestic or public education, and elide the discussion of "resources" for beginning reading instruction with the assurance that "Parental care and anxiety, the hours devoted to the instruction of a family, will not be thrown away" (*PE* 406). Mitzi Myers suggests that this is precisely why the Edgeworths' work has been eclipsed by methodologies focusing on the institutional schooling that later predominated ("Anecdotes" 236). Their own experience and the advice of "the great Mr. Locke" supported this approach as well. To be sure, Locke did not go so far as R. L. in calling schools "a general infirmary for mental disease." But he did assume that "I am sure, he who is able to be at the Charge of a Tutor at Home, may there give his Son a more genteel Carriage, more manly Thoughts, and a Sense of what is worthy and becoming, with a greater Proficiency in Learning into the Bargain, and ripen him up sooner into a Man, than any at School can do" (*Thoughts* 128). And more importantly, by situating their point of departure for literacy education within a larger project of private moral-cum-intellectual education, the Edgeworths obscure the assumptions about class inherent in their technological/ alphabetical solution to pre-reading difficulties.

By delving into the middle-class preoccupation with resources, we can see the more material repercussions of a child-centered pedagogy - namely, how it erases *older* pre-readers by conflating the child with the pupil, and vice versa. There is a yawning gap between the Edgeworths' local claims to authority (observing a number of children learning how to read) and their larger claims: firstly, that *pupils* will benefit from their tutors' adoption of this method, and secondly, that

> Though we have been principally attentive to all the circumstances which can be essential to the management of young people during the first nine or ten years of their lives, we have by no means confined our observations to this period alone; but we have endeavored to lay before parents *a general view of the human mind*… of proper methods of teaching, and of the objects of rational instruction. (*PE* 283, my emphasis)[82]

As Susan Manly has pointed out, the Edgeworths' attempt to move from philosophical inquiry to empirical was inspired by Rousseau and Locke, of course, but also in part by Thomas Reid's variations on the theme found in *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1764) ("Introductory Note" x). Maria Edgeworth quotes Reid in the introductory material to *The Parents' Assistant* (1796) and explicitly refers to the same passage again in *Practical Education* (*PE* 409): "If we could obtain a distinct and full history of all that hath passed in the mind of a child from the beginning of life and sensation till it grows up to the use of reason… this would be a treasure of natural history which would probably give more light into the human faculties, than all the systems of philosophers about them" (Reid 11).[83] While Reid despairs of "what nature has not put within our power" and, like Locke, turns to "reflection, the only instrument by which we can discern the powers of the mind" (11), the Edgeworths promoted their view that "the art of education should be considered as an experimental science, and that many authors of great abilities had mistaken their road by following theory instead of practice" (*PE* 409).[84] With their insistence on the quantity and scientific (that is, "rational") value of their "observations," the Edgeworths encourage us to notice how metaphors – primarily the product of Locke's "reflection" – have previously substituted for actual investigations of how children (both in general and of varying natural abilities) fare under various

[82] It continues – damning them further – "So that they may extend the principles which we have laid down through all the succeeding periods of education" (*PE* 283).

[83] For Reid's influence on *Practical Education* as a whole, see Pritchard 198. Mitzi Myers rightly points out that Maria quotes Reid's *Inquiry*, but mistakenly attributes the passage to his later book, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* ("Ancedotes" 230).

[84] As Alice Paterson has succinctly explained, that their eighteenth-century references to "experimental science… may be paraphrased as, to found educational theory and practice on observation of the child" (4).

systems. But their praxis continues to defer to models that promote middle-class ideology through "rational" education.

Although the synthetic methods of reading instruction were, as we noted above, in keeping with the proposition that "In learning anything, as little as possible should be proposed to the mind at once; and the being understood and fully mastered, to proceed to the next adjoining part yet unknown" (Locke *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* Sec. 39). In *Some Thoughts,* Locke concludes by reiterating that he could figure the Mind as "white Paper, or Wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" (265) a model which encourages figuring the child's mind as a "natural" repository of printed text. At the initial introduction of the metaphor in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Locke already had recourse to figuring human development as a(n im)printing process, partly because the image has been borrowed from Plato's *Theaetetus*.[85] It is reiterated by his subsequent suggestion that "Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters without any Ideas" (*Essay* 104). In *Some Thoughts,* he deploys a similar metaphor, again drawing on Plato's discussion, but this time as an explanation for individual variation in the capacity for memory: "An impression made on Bees-wax or Lead will not last so long as on Brass or Steel" (232). This link between the character of the material and the "natural strength of retention" has, as Raphael Woolf has argued, led to a widespread conviction that Locke intended this metaphor to be taken quite literally, especially when it is taken out of context.

Locke is able to describe the educational process as work upon a *tabula rasa* only because his recommendations are aimed at a pupil whose educational program can be begun when he is "very little" (*Thoughts* 265). This disclaimer very clearly establishes how Locke himself views the *ideal* educational program as, in some ways, conflating cognitive development with instructional progress. However, I must re-emphasize that this is an ideal program largely because it is "designed for a Gentleman's Son," and there are resources – educational because financial – available to support it (Locke *Thoughts* 265). The Edgeworths occasionally implicitly acknowledge that a *tabula rasa* model, and the rigidly-synthetic method of beginning reading instruction that proceeds from it, is problematic. For instance, they admit

[85] For more on this "borrowing," see Woolf.

that "It should be observed that all people, before they can read fluently, have acquired a knowledge of the general appearance of most of the words in the language" (*PE* 36). But this knowledge is never incorporated into their instructional program. On the whole, they plunge forward without regard for the child's prior experience with language. They are apparently too concerned with preventing *future* difficulties to recognize the advantages of their circumstances, or to capitalize on existing knowledge in a manner that incorporates the much-vaunted power of scientific investigation and abstraction. They never reconcile their assumption that a pre-reader has little or no understanding of how speech corresponds to text, with their assertion that "the acquisition of language is one of the most earnest occupations of childhood" (*PE* 233). There is little admission that the pupil's environment – in their case, a home filled with books and various levels of instruction proceeding simultaneously – provides a wealth of exposure to language that would effectively, if inadvertently, provide a Look and Say introduction or analytic supplement to reading.

The twinned pedagogic obsessions with pronunciation and orthography would seem to suggest that a pupil's (typically-pre-existing) capacity for oral language not only can, but *should* be used as a bridge into the world of printed text. Locke himself omits the presumption that verbal skills would be learned directly from print, and prescribes a course of action more in line with the Edgeworths' own observations. "When he can talk, 'tis time he should begin to *learn to read*" (*Thoughts* 208). But this recommendation does not necessarily establish a hierarchized progression from speech to print (or, by extension, from the oral to the textual) as systems of communication. It could just as easily and simply reflect the need for empirically-observable evidence of processes occurring within a human mind. Historians trying to trace literacy rates confront an analogous difficulty, forcing them to rely on registers of signatures and assumptions about how book production mirrored demand; as Roger Chartier points out, "for some, instruction in writing never went beyond learning how to sign their names," while "some people who could read never learned to sign their names" (119).[86] Deploying similar logic, Locke

[86] For a helpful overview of these difficulties with tracing literacy "rates" see Chartier and Graff. For a discussion as it relates specifically to children's literature, see Morgenstern 68.

cautions us that children like to be thought "Rational Creatures sooner than is imagined" (*Thoughts* 142) – that is, before they are able to communicate that rationality with speech. He significantly went on to claim that semiotic expression *testifies* to the presence of Reason, and the absorption of Sensation: "When Children have, by repeated Sensations, got *Ideas* fixed in their Memories, they begin, by degrees, to learn the use of Signs… And when they have got the skill to apply the Organs of Speech to the framing of articulate Sounds, they begin to make Use of Words, to signifie their *Ideas* to others" (*Essay* 158-159)." But that does not mean that the use of Words, much less the ability to decode printed ones, actually *constitutes* Reason. Rather, those skills enable its expression. Thus he provides the example of "Men, who through some defect in the Organs, want words, yet fail not to express their universal Ideas by signs" (*Essay* 160). Even under the banner of rationalized education, we are obviously not limited to the *tabula rasa* model associated with Locke. Elsewhere, we encounter competing metaphors: for instance, the assertion that "a child's head is a measure, holding only a given quantity at a time, and, if overfilled, liable not to be carried steadily" (Rigby 2), or allusions to the mind as a "Cabinet" to be "furnished" with Ideas (Locke, *Essay*, 55). These images of banking or accumulation reflect the interface between socioeconomic position and learning even more clearly than do the *tabula rasa*. But the paradigmatic view of the child mind for the Edgeworths, and rationalist pedagogues seeking the "perfect" method of beginning reading instruction, is folded into a larger program of constructing and inculcating textual literacy as a natural extension of development.

There are concrete repercussions of mistaking the metaphor for the model. Those effects are most impactful with respect to how the image of the *tabula rasa* figures the developing human subjectivity as an alphabetically-ordered text, as Patricia Crain has argued (5), and the psyche as a site for inscribing or impressing letters. Locke's famous comparison of a child to "Travellers newly arrived in a strange country, of which they know nothing" (*Thoughts* 184) has too often been taken to be an extension of Locke's claim that, like children, all *pre-literate* individuals also "know nothing" when they embark upon their educational program.[87] The Edgeworths' anxiety over preventing mistaken associations between spoken words, and their textual representation, was itself clearly derived from Locke's description of how Ideas were combined and connected into more complex formations. This process was, he noted, usually marked or encouraged by Reason, but also always subject to unpredictable and arbitrary juxtapositions, "wholly owing to Chance or Custom." This would lead to "Ideas that in themselves are not at all of kin," yet "come to be so united in some Mens Minds, that 'tis very hard to separate them" (*Essay* 395). Either way, he implied, impressions exercised a particularly strong effect upon emptier and more malleable minds, still closer in form to that original *tabula rasa*: "those who have Children, or the charge of their Education, would think it worth their while diligently to watch, and carefully to prevent the undue Connexion of Ideas in the Minds of young People. This is the time most susceptible of lasting Impressions" (*Essay* 397). By taking infants and children as the paradigmatic pre-literates, it becomes far easier to assume that the task of learning to read is being undertaken by a pupil whose mind is "void of all Characters," and that mispronunciation may be *prevented* rather than laboriously refined via analysis of examples. Locke's prefatory warnings about infantile impressions are echoed in the Edgeworths' own opening sally: "Practical education begins very early," they agree, "even in the nursery… We may simply observe, that parents would save themselves a great deal of trouble, and their children some pain, if they would pay some attention to their early education" (*PE* 15). This perspective actively naturalizes a rationalist education by obscuring the other (socioeconomic) advantages that enable purely rationalized reading instruction. The mirrored effect on materials– that is to say, the pupil's twinned need for a primer *and* a tutor – is suppressed in the Edgeworths' complementary promotion of a phonetic alphabet, and criticism of illustrated alphabets, as the first step in reading instruction. What is most important for us,

[87] See n. 48 regarding Crain's claims in this regard. In her historical model, the alphabet – the atomic unit of that printed world – becomes the basis of perceived reality. In a similar fashion, Martha Dana Rust argues that the medieval abecedarium – in particular a fifteenth-century example known as "Aristotle's ABC" – enabled " 'lettered' children and adults" to "know their place in the world (64). However, in both cases, the scope of *text-based* print is portrayed as all-encompassing, which I believe mischaracterizes print culture itself, as well as its central role in individual human development.

and the history of reading instruction, is to notice how the rationalist construction of literacy is dependent more on philosophy, and that original metaphor of the *tabula rasa*, than on natural history.

D. THE CHAPBOOK AND IMAGES IN PRINT

The rationalist interpretation of "Original Characters" as referring to textual characters is significant in its own right, and may be illustrated by returning to Locke's analogy of tourists in Japan. In that passage, Locke goes on to compare infants' situation to that of *adults* in a foreign country where they don't speak the language or know the appropriate categories of description: "If you or I now should be set down in *Japan*, with all our Prudence and Knowledge about us… we should, no doubt (if we would inform our selves of what is there to be known) ask a thousand Questions, which to a supercilious or inconsiderate Japaner, would seem very idle and impertinent" (*Thoughts* 184). Significantly, his point is less that children know *nothing*, than that children do not know the *language* for what is around them: "When any new thing comes in their way, Children usually ask, the common Question of a Stranger: *What is it*? Whereby they ordinarily mean nothing but the Name; and therefore to tell them how it is call'd, is usually the proper Answer to that Demand" (*Thoughts* 184). The distinction between "knowing nothing" and "not knowing the language" or "not knowing the names of things" is subtly rendered here, but important nonetheless. Drawing attention to it not only corrects a common misunderstanding of Locke's cognitive model and the metaphors used to describe it, but also illuminates some of the difficulties with translating his recommendations into practical instructions for beginning reading instruction. The rationalists' orientation toward printed text, and the primacy of the alphabet that is goes along with it – and is reflected in the materials for beginning reading instruction – elides a significant amount of contextual information about the pupil's environment.

The Edgeworths' dedication to the printed alphabet reflects their recognition that pedagogical materials circulated within a larger print culture; they struggled to provide literographic cues that would effectively position *their* alphabet, and *the* alphabet, relative to other forms of print. For instance, the short story "The Bee and the Cow" obviously manifests the Edgeworths' concern about unwanted "associations" in pre-literate child-pupils, and the potency of images in creating those "associations." In "The Bee and the Cow," Maria Edgeworth represents illustration as a compelling but unstable communications technology. The visual apparently creates memorable sensational effects, but its translation into speech (or, more specifically, into Words) is portrayed as unacceptably unpredictable. In so doing, she manifests both a harsh opinion of illustration's pedagogical utility, and the middle-class privilege of bending education to the pupil's attention, rather than needing to bring the pupil to the educational materials. Autodidacticism and its inadequacies are attached to "the poorer class" by way of the little girl's resulting mistakes in pronunciation. Being young does not appear to excuse her mistake; the "poor little girl," is, after all, promptly dubbed an "idiot" by Rosamond's brother. She might actually merit some of the sympathy bestowed by a writer half-a-century later in *All the Year Round*, who observed that "Learning to read must be, for youths and adults, a particularly painful process… little children and infants being left the happiness of learning the genuine ABC from mother or nurse" ("Reading Made Easy 176). Not to know a "B from a bull's foot" is to experience the entangled misfortunes of being poor *and* uneducated. But those conditions apparently do not preclude access to alphabet books. As Jill Shefrin has demonstrated, growing numbers of infant schools and related philanthropic endeavors around the turn of the century – like Trimmer's Sunday School movement, mentioned above – prompted booksellers to target a less-prosperous educational market. They routinely included pictorial elements in their cheap publications, which might be scaled for classroom display as well as for books ("Adapted" 165-166). This shift in the form of some chapbooks allowed Edgeworth ideological room to maneuver with her fictional representation of them as instructional aids. In "The Bee and the Cow," the implicitly-suggested solutions to the poorer class's literacy problem are either an improved primer, or improved access to a tutor. Declining to advocate the latter, Maria's primary subtext insists upon the superiority of rational, text-based modes of communication over the image-based modes of the "picture book" or chapbook. She seems determined to judge alphabet-stimulated illustration strictly on the basis of its communicative ability. I read Maria's focus on the inadequacies of alphabetic illustration, rather than the failures of society or pedagogical procedure, as a reflected discomfort with its chapbook provenance. She implicitly demonstrates her awareness that print takes other forms than text, that printed images are compelling modes of signification, and also that there are class-based evaluative distinctions among them corresponding to educational accomplishment.

The Edgeworths' rigidly-textual efforts to streamline and codify beginning reading instruction offer us an illustrative point of comparison with the alphabet book form that was just then beginning to emerge. That form is often situated as an offshoot of the illustrated primers and grammars to which it was already often appended, a trajectory delineated in Steinfirst's history of the "ABC Book." The emergent form is visible in texts like John Newbery's *Little Pretty Pocket-book,* which the Edgeworths recognized and spurned as competition in the publishing marketplace. By the end of the 1700s, John Newbery, his successor in the marketplace John Marshall, and Isaac Watts had become primary figures in a thriving children's publishing industry; John Harris inherited their tradition (and their market) early in the nineteenth century.[88] As Hannah More documented in the *Guardian of Education* in 1802, they had also made fundamental contributions to popularizing an understanding of literacy steeped in John Locke's philosophy on human development and its cultivation.[89] Richard Lovell Edgeworth acknowledged his own youthful exposure to these publishing ventures as a factor in his subsequent choice of related philosophical positions. These precedents in the representation of the alphabet obviously shaped the Edgeworths' own construction of literacy, and their own formal choices when they decided to wrestle with the printed alphabet. Just as their insistent failure to fully "rationalize" the alphabet and beginning reading instruction revealed much about their ideological investments in childhood, points of contrast with competing or preceding representations of the alphabet reveal even more than their imitations or adherence to traditions.

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[88] For overviews of the state of affairs in children's book publishing at this time, see Whalley and Chester; Muir *Children's Books*; and Alderson and de Marez Oyens.

[89] See Pickering 7 for useful summary of these ideas.

John Newbery also follows Locke and promotes a certain set of values visible in later pedagogical theory, but combines them with the obvious self-interest of a printer. This hierarchy of priorities is made abundantly clear by Newbery and the others like him who reiterate the need for a young reader to "learn your book" (14, 18), as he repeats in his *Little Pretty Pocket-book.* In that 1744 publication, we can already see the elements that would go into making up the modern alphabet book, including a philosophical underpinning derived from the writing of John Locke. Perhaps most importantly, it included a label designating both its audience and its purpose: "Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy, and Pretty Miss Polly." Ostensibly, it is simply the act of recommending itself to the "Little" ones that makes it a children's book. As Perry Nodelman has pointed out, certain books are "included in this category by virtue of what the category implies, not so much about the text itself as about its intended audience. This in itself makes the term highly unusual as a category of literature" (*Hidden Adult* 3). But moving beyond this concrete act of self-identification, we arrive quickly at the purported *function* of the book, which betrays its direct debt to Locke. Nor was Newbery laying claim to novelty on that front, either, as he duly and explicitly acknowledges his debt to the "great Mr. Locke" in his prefatory letter to parents (6). Indeed, that acknowledgement might be more accurately characterized as advertising, since as we've noted, by the middle of the eighteenth century, Locke was already well-established as an authority in this field. Newbery's coupling of "instruction" with "amusement," and issues of cooperation and competition between the two primary functions of children's books, have been a factor in almost every discussion of reader response thereafter. Betraying the profoundly-enduring influence of both Locke and Newbery, the first few "Whiggish" histories of children's literature (Darton's and M. F. Thwaite's among them) suggested that children's books consist of almost nothing more than varying proportions of "instruction" and "delight."[90]

[90] The descriptive term "Whiggish" has been used by Mitzi Myers ("Impeccable Governesses" 31). See, for instance, Darton's opening definition of children's books as "printed works printed ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure, and not primarily to teach them" (1). The title of Mary Florence Thwaite's history, *From Primer to Pleasure: an Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England, from the Invention of Printing to 1900, with a Chapter on Some Developments Abroad* is similarly revealing.

These twinned concerns have a particularly interesting bearing on the Edgeworths' formal choices, and the cultural valence of alphabet books as a genre. From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, "instruction" and "delight" have variously figured as either the *dual* functions of illustration in texts, or the *supplementary* functions of word and image (respectively). As has already been hinted at by "The Bee and the Cow," in the days before truly empirical research in education, the purported function(s) of illustration depended more on the pedagogue's predilections, cultural preoccupations, and/or political allegiances, than on their measured pedagogical effects and utility. *Little Pretty Pocket-book* has been repeatedly pegged as the text that incarnated children's books as a form of English literature through the adoption and popularization of several formal features, and it presents a very different view of how illustration relates to text than that presented by the Edgeworths. While the latter rejected illustrations as frivolous (at best)[91] or confusing (at worst), Newbery was clearly preoccupied with appealing to children as a heretofore-barely-exploited market niche rather than as the targets of an actual pedagogical agenda. His lack of coherent pedagogical intention, and by extension, the role of illustration in the book's pluralized effect, is apparent in the content of the *Pocket-Book* itself. Rather than being cut from whole cloth, the *Pocket-Book* is transparently and unapologetically cobbled together from a number of pre-existing oral and printed sources dressed up with woodcuts. The variety and density of material suggests that the primary purpose is simply that of achieving broad commercial appeal, more along the lines of a chapbook than an instructional text. It must make an argument for itself as a form of entertainment – that is, as a splurge purchase. And its status as a vehicle for illustrations constitutes the primary difference between the printed book, including the chapbook, and the folklore, games, and oral tradition from which it takes its materials.

Summerfield observes that "With the proliferation of books for children, the chapbook gradually disappeared" (189), which implies that the children's book market effectively absorbed the chapbook market. However, tracing such a linear progression positions chapbooks as a kind of "proto" children's

[91] Similarly, Anne Lundin points out that "in the earlier tradition of the moral tales… illustration was perceived as incompatible with earnest content" (*Victorian Horizons* 43).

literature, which is misleading on several counts. For starters, as M. O. Grenby points out, the chapbook appealed to a wide range of audiences characterized more by geography and level of education than by age.[92] The notion of a "proto" children's literature obscures the satiric and bawdy narrative content that often appeared in chapbooks, and the process of "purging" it from what Richardson has called "official" children's literature ("Ambivalent Reader"). Such elements (with their obvious popular appeal) were not dispersed into the ether, but shifted elsewhere or temporarily submerged, destined to reappear later in slightly different forms. The notion of a "proto" children's literature also confers a "Whiggish" inevitability to the Romantically-inflected form(s) that children's books *did* start to take after the middle of the eighteenth century, one that has assumed the character of nature, rather than second Nature, because it has been inculcated in generation after generation of British readers. As Summerfield more helpfully continues, "don't underestimate the chapbook," nor the "extraordinary debt that so many of these [Romantic] writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries owed to the influence of the chapbook tradition" (189). Underestimating the chapbook tradition would significantly obscure the place of illustration in the subsequent codification of children's literature, and how the figure of the Child allows individuals like Hannah More to shift the contemporary conversation about literacy away from the unsavory terms of class (and simple discrimination against the poor), to the more-socially-acceptable social markers of age.

As we saw in the work of the Edgeworths, the instructional text distinguishes itself from the chapbook by its claims to facilitate an instructional program *better* than the available domestic texts that could, would, and already did serve by default. In the *Pocket-Book,* we get little advice about instructional utility beyond a prefatory letter "To the Parents, Guardians, and Nurses." This is followed by "Two Letters from Jack the Giant-Killer," and each of the next 32 pages features a description of a game, a "moral," and a woodcut image, as well as a running head identifying the "great" and "little" letters of

[92] Grenby's work on chapbooks is particularly effective at highlighting the slipperiness of the term. See Grenby "Before Children's Literature" 27-33.

the alphabet in order (Figure 1). This tripartite format gives way to a repetition of the alphabet,[93] and then, when the alphabetical header concludes, in the last third of the *Pocket-Book* we wallow into an increasingly disorganized mass of proverbs, brief tales, additional letters from Jack, and poems with broad charm, accompanied by woodcuts with tenuous or obscure connections to the text. The final product is, like biological offspring, a robust hybrid derived from (re)combination rather than invention. It has no pretence to radical novelty, as it quite shrewdly deploys figures and tropes with proven cultural currency – such as Jack the Giant-killer – as a way of engaging prospective buyers and readers. Almost


The little d *Play.*

BLINDMAN'S BUFF.

BEreft of all Light,
I ſtumble alone;
But, if I catch you,
My Doom is your own.

MORAL.

How blind is that Man,
Who ſcorns the Advice
Of Friends, who intend
To make him more wiſe!

SHUT-

Figure 1. "little d Play" from Newbery's *Little Pretty Pocket-book*

[93] Repetition itself being a holdover from the "copiousness of oral performance," as Crain points out (41).

any given page bears witness to the crude but determined way that "instruction" and "amusement" have been combined, and the way that these duties have been formally allotted: text accomplishes the former, and illustration the latter.[94] And it is most important to acknowledge here that despite the gap in their publication dates, children's books by both Newbery *and* the Edgeworths, like Maria's *Parent's Assistant*, are essentially contemporary in terms of the available printing technologies. The Edgeworths were no doubt reminded of the alphabets' visual character by the hybrid mode of reproduction for *Practical Education*: their diacritically-enhanced alphabet had to be printed separately on copper plates (i.e., like an illustration), and folded in with the letterpress describing its use. The difficulty of mass-producing high-quality images restricted Newbery to the use of relatively crude woodcuts and metal plates since he wanted to publish for the increasingly-numerous middle or lower-middle class. No matter the pedagogical intentions brought to the table, materials constrained the use of illustrations as a form of communication.

Precisely because materials carried such a heavy weight of cultural meaning, in a very real way, the chapbook form provides an important point of literographic contrast for the Edgeworths' designs on the printed alphabet. As its form is appropriated by and *continues to co-exist with* the children's book market, the relationship between chapbooks and their higher-class versions gives rise to modern alphabet books. It does so primarily by duplicating their most recognizable formal qualities: the "tropic" or cataloguing form that Crain has described, and the emphasis upon illustration. As Steinfirst observes, "the earliest separate alphabet books were merely copies of chapbooks" (270). But the materiality of the

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[94] The provenance of Newbery's own content provides a useful picture of what went before on both sides of the "amusement" and "instruction" divide, with chapbooks included in the former category. One of Newbery's most significant predecessors, the pedagogically-oriented and heavily-illustrated *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, also strove to combine "instruction" with "amusement" by combining two media rather than asking text *or* images to perform dual functions. Johann Amos Comenius published his famous *Orbis Sensualium Pictus,* or *Visible World Depicted,* in the mid-seventeenth century, and it appeared in print in English translation in 1659, translated from the Czech by Charles Hoole. That ambitious and encyclopedic text was quite explicit about the function of its many illustrations, which was not so much to perform their own pedagogical work, but "to entice witty children to it, that they may not conceit a torment to be in the School, but dainty fare. For it is apparent that children (even from their Infancy almost) are delighted with pictures, and willingly please their eyes with these sights." See Seth Lerer and Morgenstern for helpful surveys of this "unofficial" children's literature.

"copy" introduced important distinctions in the function of the texts. Where a pedagogical orientation toward textual literacy – what the Edgeworths promoted so intensely that *any* kind of illustration was viewed with suspicion – forms the background, the dynamic exchange between form, content, and material shifts the meaning of the alphabet toward its functions and renders redundant the illustrations that accompany it. When, on the other hand, an illustrated alphabetic text circulates in a less-rigidly codified sphere – that is to say, in chapbook fashion, the illustrations function more as amusement than pedagogic tool. They may even, as the Edgeworths feared, undermine a rigidly verbal orientation that they saw the designers of illustrated alphabets – like the one described in "The Bee and the Cow" – attempting to impose on the irreducibly visual-cum-verbal (i.e., intermedial) form of the printed alphabet itself.

We have an excellent example of this to hand in Newbery's *Pretty Pocket-Book.* From a point near the beginning of the text, the alphabet is simultaneously presented as a marginal piece of content – since it is literally confined to the margins of the page and has no apparent relationship with the image, the game described, or the moral conveyed on each page – as well as an integral tool of organization and structure. In terms of initial organization, the alphabet is instrumentalized like page numbers, and in fact, the series of "plays" ordering the alphabetical letters substitutes for page numbers for 48 pages of the book. However, even the running head of the alphabet "play" series constrains the book's structure. The "little z play" signals the conclusion of a section in which each page stands as an independent narrative unit, but is also linked to the adjacent pages by a stable page composition: an image conjoined to a consistently-sized allotment of text. The alphabet's "marginal" status, as well as the tripartite image-game-moral format breaks down at the letter "R," following hard upon the heels of a restatement of the entire book's philosophy: "This well-invented Game's design'd / To strike the Eye and form the Mind. / And he most doubtless aims aright, / Who joins Instruction with Delight" (43). Thereafter, the descriptions of games and morals give way to another run-through of the alphabet. But this time it is at the center of the page and the narrative progression, as the letters are personified in the text; for instance, W and X are individuals whom "Good Friends do not vex" (Figure 2) while both Q and R "are both come from far." These figures are also implicitly depicted in the accompanying woodcuts, as each passage begins with the caption-like announcement: "Here's…" However, each image in this series of "Here's…" depicts only humans and domestic animals, although the number of individuals and their represented activities seem to suggest that each letter corresponds to a person as a label. This interaction between word and image challenges the label – and denoted function – of "illustration" except to suggest that a given person (or anthropomorphized cat) is *named* by a single "great" letter. The letters themselves are thereby positioned as independent semiotic units rather than as subunits that "stand for" the names of objects and people, in the synecdochic alphabet format that came to dominate after the mid-nineteenth


The great W.

HEre's W and X,
Good Friends do not vex,
All Things will go well
Dear W and X.

W X

Figure 2. "W and X" from Newbery's *Little Pretty Pocket-book*

century.[95] Illustrations are attached to the letters not to emphasize letterforms, but apparently for the sheer pleasure of visual spectacle – that is, "amusement." As Crain observed, the alphabet's functions are extended so that it becomes a socially-sanctioned opportunity for that spectacle or festivity (85-86). Even at the middle of the nineteenth century, a writer for *The Saturday* Magazine still remained in doubt about the pedagogical utility of illustrated texts. He complained that, "pictures, as generally employed, merely enable the child to learn the *names* of the letters of the alphabet, a species of knowledge which is of no real use to him in reading" ("Art of Reading" 116). He echoes the Edgeworths' fears that a driving thrust toward textual literacy would be diluted by visual literacy, or the juxtaposition of image-as-picture and image-as-word.

The *Pretty Little Pocket-Book's* representations of the alphabet seem idiosyncratic today, simply because the running head and personification forms disappeared during subsequent codification of the alphabet book as the "conventional" means of representing the alphabet to pre-literates. I have lingered on the artifact, though, because it provides an illustration of Lockean principles that were, apparently, particularly difficult for his followers to accept or absorb into their own ideas about beginning reading instruction and appropriate texts for the job. As Locke asserts, there is only one thing that children love more than Liberty, "and that is Dominion" (*Thoughts* 164). And their primary means of gaining a (literally) nominal power over the world in which they live is to gain access to and thereby possess it through words. Hence, he concludes, their constant quest for the Names of things, a "natural" impulse which Newbery's representation of the alphabet supports via its strange fusion of the alphabet with a non-alphabet appeal to the visual. The Edgeworths' representation of the alphabet, by contrast, focuses on the alphabet's textuality to the near-suppression of its visuality. The rationalists privileged the printed word, merely tolerated the oral bridge, and minimized the visual component of textual literacy. But Locke's own use of examples definitively resists that very hierarchy of word over image. For he continues his

[95] As documented by Crain (90-95). This in some ways echoes Crain's claim that "the verbal and visual tropes that surround the alphabet cloak the fact that the unit of textual meaning – the letter – lacks meaning itself" (18). However, I would suggest that there's not much *cloaking* going here so much as *reifying* the alphabet – by figuring it as a series of names, it becomes a unit of meaning unto itself.

description of his "white Paper" model by asking "Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has *painted* on it with an almost endless variety?" (*Essay* 104, italics mine). Elaborations on the *tabula rasa* model of cognitive development can certainly figure empirical experience, and cognitive development, as more than simply a process of accumulating text/impressions of language. But recognizing this theoretical freedom to figure experience as text, and/or as image, reveals the Edgeworths' apparent rejection of that freedom. We thereby recover our view of the energy expended to create a subsequent hierarchy of pedagogical theories, cognitive models, and modes of communication or literacies.

The rationalist problem with the "readable" image is that it is even more resistant to analysis than poetry. An image cannot be reduced to discrete semiotic units and subunits – like the alphabet – and assembled for progressive synthesis in a manner analogous to that of reading text. Middle-class disdain for these "low" modes is amply demonstrated by Rosamond's father. He not only explains that a "vulgar saying" had arisen, "meant to express that a person is ignorant," but links that ignorance to a specific indictment of alphabet books as tools for autodidacticism. Two formal features of the illustrated primer, which interweaves modes of oral and visual communication in an attempt to analogize the act of translating printed words into speech, are available for critique in this story: the company of illustrations, and the primacy of the alphabet in reading instruction. Only the former comes under fire, however, and we confront Maria's insistence that illustrations in a pedagogical text should be *pedagogically functional*, rather than simply to "attract" the attention of the reader – that is, to fold a bit of "delight" into a text that would otherwise be wholly dedicated to "instruction." By contrast, her predecessors, including Locke himself, suggested that when a book "has *Pictures* in it, it will entertain [the pupil] much the better." Moreover, those images may serve a *dual* purpose: to "encourage him to read, when it carries the Increase of Knowledge with it: For such visible Objects Children hear talked of in vain and without any Satisfaction whilst they have no Ideas of them; those Ideas being not to be had from Sounds, but from the Things themselves or their Pictures" (Locke *Some Thoughts* 212). Maria resists the pedagogical function of illustration – e.g., providing "clarification" as Nodelman puts it (*Words* 3) – even to the point of dramatizing its dangers to literacy: “the sound of the letter, which is pronounced like the name of the insect, *bee,* was joined in the child’s mind with the idea, or picture, of a bull or cow. Therefore, when she was asked what a *bee* was like, the recollection of a cow came into her head.” Maria’s resistance to illustration as a mode of communication is demonstrated even more clearly by its absence from her own collections of fiction.[96] But here in this particular story, in textual description, she more directly points to the incommensurability of images and words as vehicles of communication. The linkage between a visually-represented idea (or object) and its name is here presented as being just as arbitrary, or as unreliable, as the association at the foundation of textual literacy: that between *letters* and their sounds. She still promotes what Crain has characterized as “a bond between book and child, which exceeds or even bypasses the master-student relationship” (38). But representations of the alphabet appeared in the company of illustrations with increasing frequency after 1800, heightening the potential pitfalls of mistaken “association,” and the danger of the visual to the textual.

E. CONCLUSION

So we find ourselves around the turn of the nineteenth century confronting the radical rationalists’ anxieties about whether illustration should be understood as a pedagogical support, simply a source of “delight,” or an actual hazard to the practice of textual literacy. The answer to this question not only has important consequences for what is later denoted “children’s literature,” but is clearly heavily-dependent upon context. As some of the alphabetical texts already discussed indicate, their literacy functions, or even the proportions of functionality, vary according to how literographic cues situates the text with respect to images, and the book with respect to its social atmosphere. The alphabet is as socially mobile as its readers, as we learn in the tale of “a little Boy, who learned his Book to that surprizing Degree, that his Master could scarce teach him fast enough.” Included in the *Pocket-Book*, the story makes clear the material rewards of such industry: “His Learning and Behaviour purchased him the Esteem of the greatest

[96] The first editions of her *Moral Tales,* for instance, include only frontispieces.

People, and raised him from a mean State of Life to a Coach and Six" (71). The harsh flip side appears later, on the opening page of Newbery's *Royal Primer*: "He who ne'er learns his A, B, C, / For ever will be a Blockhead be."[97] As Andrew O'Malley has thoroughly documented, Newbery and others expanded on this theme in subsequent books,[98] most notably in Newbery's *Goody Two-Shoes*, the entire fairy-tale-like plot of which hangs on the title character's dedication to learning/reading. But at the turn of the nineteenth century, for the Edgeworths at least, only *textual literacy* counts in the attempt to emulate higher classes, and thus only the pre-textually-literate are addressed by pedagogical materials cued to members of the middle class – even though this means suppressing the pupil's previous exposure to both oral and visual modes of language.

The process of "rationalizing" education, and thus standardizing developmental stages across class boundaries in a manner reflecting the absorption of Lockean principles, took quite a long time in Great Britain, and public access to literacy education was obviously a significant factor in the evolution of the alphabet book form. Well into the nineteenth century, access to literacy education in England was expanding rapidly but remained unreliable. Prospective pupils were dependent upon dame schools, charity schools, and similar institutions with little assurance of pedagogical competence; this state of affairs was complemented by low wages and long work hours that interfered with working-class attempts to become literate or purchase reading materials. Up until mid-century, within the lower classes children's access to formal literacy education was actually bound up in their status as legal laborers: for instance, the Health and Morals of Apprenticeship Act of 1801 required that child apprentices receive rudimentary education (the "3 R's") before the age of seven. Thereafter, those children's access to formal schooling increased in inverse proportion to the hours they could legally work, but they were still pupil-employees: the Factory Act of 1833 mandated education for employed preadolescents, and later the Factory Act of 1844 expanded the requisite number of hours of schooling for those older children. The *tabula rasa*-

[97] *The Royal Primer* was sold at a price of only three pence, according to Townsend 128.

[98] See "Chapter 1: The Coach and Six: Chapbook Residue in Late Eighteenth-Century Children's Literature" in O'Malley 17-38.

based pedagogical model of reading instruction that prioritizes the alphabet, with or without images, simply does not reflect either the needs or the realities of pre-literate individuals *in toto* in nineteenth-century England. Instead, it nominally restricts that site of potential educational success to the middle-class child.

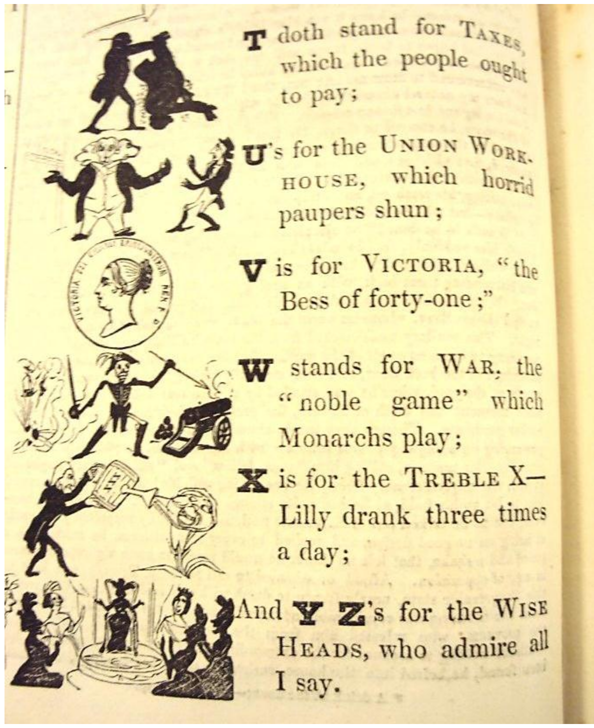
My purpose here has been to demonstrate that the primacy of the alphabet in beginning reading instruction is rooted in a historically-contingent view of childhood and literacy. It also reflects a deep investment in the radical, rationalized potential of textual literacy, which required subordinating the oral and visual aspects of the alphabet to its textuality. The historical coincidence of those influences dramatically affected our present conceptions of illustrated books, children's literature, and the relationship(s) between the two genres – so much so that it is difficult to escape from the naturalized assumptions corresponding to the illustrated alphabet's position. After 1800, changes and opportunities in printed texts, reproducible images, and publishing markets repeatedly and gradually (although not always consistently) come to bear upon the alphabet with ever greater force. Alongside that site of visual and verbal "convergence," the figure of the Child emerges as a powerful force for shifting literacy's cultural valences and constructions.

III. CHAPTER 2. “FOR THE AMUSEMENT OF CHILDREN SIX FEET HIGH”: ALPHABET BOOKS AND SATIRE AT THE DAWN OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND

If we take for granted that illustrated alphabet rhymes have their true home in the nursery, it might be surprising to find one in the second issue of *Punch* magazine, that venerable institution of nineteenth-century print culture. However, the issue from the week of 7 August 1841 included the second installment of a running series of “Nursery Education Reports,” proving that the form had become both a recognizable fixture in contemporary print culture, and a promising contribution to the brand of visual-cum-verbal satire that developed into *Punch*’s trademark. Richard Altick suggests that producing this “Nursery” series was a calculatedly timely move, designed “to exploit the new serious interest in children’s literature that was part of the backlash against the previous domination of the genre by such ‘improvers’ as Hannah More, Laetitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth and Sarah Trimmer” (*Punch* 94). In suggesting this, Altick indirectly testifies to those middle-class improvers’ success at institutionalizing the child-centered pedagogy discussed in Chapter 1, and nominally constraining pedagogical literature to the nursery. Where other installments of the “Nursery Education Reports” satirized nursery rhymes, No. 2 was “the Royal Rhythmical Alphabet,” with instructions “to be said or sung by the Infant Princess” Royal, named Victoria after her mother (Figures 3 and 4).

Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 3. "Royal Rhythmical Alphabet" from *Punch; or, the London Charivari* (7 August 1841), 62.


T doth stand for TAXES, which the people ought to pay;

U's for the UNION WORK-HOUSE, which horrid paupers shun;

V is for VICTORIA, "the Bess of forty-one;"

W stands for WAR, the "noble game" which Monarchs play;

X is for the TREBLE X—Lilly drank three times a day;

And Y Z's for the WISE HEADS, who admire all I say.

Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 4. "T" through "Z" from "Royal Rhythmical Alphabet" (detail of Figure 3)

An illustrated series of couplets follows, one half-couplet per letter, with many cooperating to provide intermedial criticisms of a profligate government. For instance, "B stands for Bishop, who is clothed in soft attire," and the image shows a mitred bishop preparing to dig into a roast pig, while "T doth stand for Taxes, which the people ought to pay" – apparently by being held up by their ankles and shaken, if the accompanying illustration is any indication. The attack is even stronger at "W", which "stands for War, the 'noble game' which Monarchs play." The adjacent image plays on the well-known *Dance of Death* trope, with a leering skeleton on the battlefield (Figure 3). This particular letter also provides us with a succinct demonstration of how satire actively plays with the formal conventions of children's books. In this single line, we have a "dialogic mix" of voices (Knoepflmacher and Myers vii): the rhyme itself is nominally speaking in the voice of the "Infant Princess," including the occasional first-person. For instance, "R" is for the court nurse "Mrs. Ratsey, who taught me this pretty song." That voice apparently *quotes* an adult voice in describing war as a “noble game,” a euphemism exposed by the grim illustration. The specious comparison between children’s games and war is heightened by the parody’s ventriloquism, as it speaks in the voice of a child who is herself echoing adult speech. And yet, even with the presence of a child’s voice so clearly invoked, I would venture that this particular child’s voice is addressing other adults – that is, other potential actors on a political scene – more directly than any children who may happen across it.

As the “Royal Rhythmical Alphabet” shows, play with material and form can loosen the constraints on how audience conventions dictate the contents of an illustrated text. Hence Marcus Wood’s observation that “Parody emerges as a great leveler” in illustrated texts from the 1820s and 30s in England, “knocking away continually and uncontrollably at the notion that language reflected class and social position” (12-13). Only by accounting fully for material and social *context* as well as content can we recognize the illustrated alphabet format as a signifier of a certain kind of childish innocence that had emerged from the Romantic era, one that construes pre-literacy as a lack of knowledge *excused* by a lack of media exposure, rather than a lack of ability or will. By contrast, this parody suggests that an adult who was “innocent” about his sovereigns’ lamentable behavior would be just as culpable of lamentable, shameful ignorance, as if he were illiterate – that is, “innocent” about the alphabet. However, I contend that these conventions gloss over the fact that socioeconomic conditions, rather than age, would have been the fairer basis for distinctions between “innocent” pre-literacy, and “ignorant” illiteracy. In order to address its target audience of middle-class adults without introducing an uncomfortable reflection on the implicit link between class and education level, this parody operates intermedially: the rhymes are often damning enough, but the harshest criticisms regarding Taxes and War require the dynamic interplay of text, image AND the alphabetical letter, which euphemistically links it to the social context of a privileged young pupil. In my brief analysis of the “Royal Rhythmical Alphabet” I have distinguished between layers of convention and content, but – crucially – in the piece itself they operate simultaneously, producing an effect that is synergistic rather than redundant.

This parody has much in common with two other illustrated satirical alphabets produced during the same period of transition from turn-of-the-century publishing and educational practices, to Victorian industrialization: an alphabet book homemade around 1833 by William Makepeace Thackeray, future novelist, illustrator, and editor of *Punch*; and the 1836 *Comic Alphabet* by the leading graphic artist of the nineteenth century, George Cruikshank. Not only do all three texts invoke the domestic child-centered pedagogy and middle-class environment of the alphabet book form then emerging on the middle-class publishing market, but they also invoke a tradition of "emblematic" visual satire. This tradition, I argue, offered these designers of alphabetical illustration a way to preserve visual literacy in concert with the textual, and even advocate for its incorporation into elementary education, without sacrificing the rationalists' self-empowering ethos of literacy education. Thanks to a chronological headstart on the younger Thackeray, Cruikshank was particularly aware that literacy education in the 1830s was a sign of economic privilege, reinforced and reflected by access to different kinds of illustrated texts. By the mid-1830s Cruikshank had illustrated texts for a broad range of audiences, and was thus unusually familiar with publishing practices that not only recognized, but perpetuated class divisions in illustrated reading material. This was most clear in the periodical press, where high rates of taxation after 1815 complemented the effects of the costs of manufacturing. The Stamp Act generated protests during the early 1830s against this "tax on knowledge," as the publishers of *The Examiner* called it,[99]and kept most newspapers out of the hands of the working class until a substantial tax reduction in 1836 – around the same time that Cruikshank was designing the *Comic Alphabet.*[100] Below, I outline how this background

[99] John and Leigh Hunt started printing *The Examiner* in 1808, and famously blamed the government for doubling its price by "that act which restrains the sale of CHEAP PUBLICATIONS, by fixing the minimum of price at which they may be sold, and the smallest number of square inches of paper on which the writer may circulate his ideas." Reiterating their point in 1826, they called it "nothing less than a tax on the knowledge of the poor," and declared that "its injustices and iniquity can only be equalled by that which taxes the bread they eat for the support of an over-grown aristocracy" (Hunt and Hunt 748).

[100] Most of the work that's been done in this area focuses on the periodical press, as in Patricia Anderson's *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture*. But William St. Clair's work on copyright in the Romantic era complements Altick's (*Common Reader*) and sheds some light on the situation with illustrated texts even though they mostly focus on literature. See his *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period.*

informs Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet,* which addressed itself to a middle- or upper-class audience via both textual and material cues, including designs exploiting the enduring influence of the famous satirist William Hogarth, and etched illustrations printed in limited editions. Ultimately, his *Comic Alphabet* demonstrates that a satirical alphabet can manipulate publishing practices and formal conventions in order to *evoke* a child audience while primarily addressing an *adult* audience.

Thackeray's homemade alphabet, on the other hand, offers a valuable complement to the material context of Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet,* and the dynamic interaction between content and context, even though they obviously share a fundamentally similar tripartite form (alphabetical letter/image/text). Thackeray's illustrated alphabet of rhyming couplets was eventually reprinted under an eponymous title.[101] But according to an apocryphal account, it was first casually and rapidly produced for a friend's small son "when the author was still a young man" around 1833. Like Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet,* Thackeray's *Alphabet* draws on an emblematic mode of visual satire that presumably suits the audience he's addressing. But for Thackeray, "audience" means a privileged child instead of privileged adults. Thus, the *Thackeray Alphabet* demonstrates how the alphabet book format dovetails with a middle- or upper-class pedagogical context *even when* the materiality of the text – here, some looseleaf pages and hasty sketches – sidesteps the stratifying effects of contemporary publishing practices. It decisively incorporates an emblematic form of visual literacy, legitimated by tradition, into a site for inculcating textual literacy. Juxtaposing Thackeray's representations of the alphabet with Cruikshank's reveals that the alphabet's ties to the nursery in the early-Victorian era were, as the rationalists realized, more dependent on class than on age.

At the same time, though, there were signs that the advantages of textual literacy were subject to appropriation. The rationalist ethos became vulnerable to losing its radical power as there was growing

[101] To date, no one has seriously challenged Thackeray's authorship, although a book titled *Funny Alphabet* appeared in 1836 listing Thackeray as the author. Its editor, H. S. Van Duzer, noted that "This has been attributed to Thackeray, but on what authority I have been unable to learn." I have not yet been able to view the book myself, and thus have not ascertained whether it is simply the *Thackeray Alphabet* under a different title. At any rate, attaching an alphabet to Thackeray's famous name reinforces my own supposition that he was particularly well-known for a contemporary interest in "literal" representations of the alphabet.

participation in processes of alphabetization,[102] and more and more pupils were prompted to "learn their book" like Goody Two-Shoes in order to reap the promised socioeconomic benefits. One proof that the rationalist program was gradually achieving institutionalization – and thus losing its power to manipulate class stratification – was the Factory Act of 1833, which limited child-employees' workdays to nine hours and mandated education for them on Sundays. This decree concretely conflated pre-literacy with childhood on a massive public scale, so that children's ignorance of certain forms of knowledge was, at least among the middle and upper classes, recast as a temporary condition that distinguished it from the adult hierarchy of knowledge. That is to say, pre-literacy increasingly enjoyed a social sanction that illiteracy did not. But as I documented in my previous chapter, the movement that obsessively promoted textual literacy as part of its child-centered pedagogy had legitimated the alphabet's primacy, without producing an effective printed solution to literacy's instructional challenges. For awhile, middle- and upper-class pupils continued to be privileged by their domestic and educational environments while those in the working class continued to struggle with inadequate substitutes for a tutor's attention, like the cheap pictorial alphabets described in Edgeworth's story "The Bee and the Cow."[103] Precisely because the rationalists' own program depended on inter-generational social advancement, there was a lag in its trickle-down effects during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. This was also a period of explosive development on the manufacturing side of print culture, as Thomas Bewick's innovations in wood engraving finally started to migrate from Newcastle, merging with steam presses and machine-made paper. By mid-century those innovations would provide London with an industrial basis for mass-produced, superior-quality illustrated texts at middle- and working-class price points – but not before.[104]

So although Thackeray's career would ultimately reflect these evolving technological and social circumstances, in the 1830s and early 1840s the rationalists' developmental model retained at least some

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[102] I use this term in a less comprehensive manner than that of Patricia Crain, suggesting a more superficial inculcation with alphabetical literacy rather than a totalizing submission.

[103] Ian Michael most clearly demonstrates the gap between the page and the pedagogue here (14).

[104] See Muir *Victorian Illustrated Books.*

of its power to stratify classes on the basis of textual literacy. And this is the background against which he and Cruikshank produced their satirical alphabets. After the turn of the nineteenth century, the tripartite alphabet book format marched with rigid predictability through an arbitrary order, continually accruing semiotic power through repetition. Middle-class readers were probably familiar with the formal conventions of the alphabet book by the 1820s, and *Punch* clearly assumed that the genre was ripe for parody by the 1840s. The need for prior exposure has, as Robert Altick observes, become "a truism" about parody (*Punch* 93). But the materiality of Cruikshank's and Thackeray's alphabet books reflected their socially-signifying function in a manner that was basically consistent with the Edgeworths' anxieties, albeit with less paranoia about the mere presence of illustration. Their alphabet books mimicked the chapbook's undiscriminating affection for both the contemporary and the folkloric, and drew on emblem books' lingering cach wh ile diluting their classicism.[105] The illustrated alphabet book form enabled them to preserve "legitimate"[106] higher-class visual modes of communication alongside or in cooperation with the textual, even though prevailing pedagogical convention implied a hierarchical and ideologically-loaded progression toward the verbal. What emerges from comparison of these two alphabets is very much in line with what is suggested by the satirical "Royal Rhythmical Alphabet" in *Punch*: in early-Victorian England, illustrated alphabets are particularly attractive sites for staging synergistic and ironic interactions between words and images for presentation to a rising *middle-class* audience. They are capable of operating in this capacity precisely because they are *also* associated with elementary education, which that same audience was more likely to have enjoyed as children in the domestic space of the nursery, rather than as the result of being employed or farmed out to charity

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[105] The downmarket chapbooks and rigidly classicized emblem books continued to be printed and distributed as well. As Wood notes, "the publications of Marshall, Benjamin Tabart, and Dean and Monday took elements from the popular chapbook but were up-market compared to the genuine article, which was still being produced" (222), while "by the end of the 18th century emblem books still flourished but in simplified popular forms with a special emphasis on the children's book market" (253).

[106] I use this term in the sense deployed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*; that is to say, as a way of describing cultural objects recognized by a particular socioeconomic subset as belonging to them, with that process of recognition emerging from "an enchanted experience of culture which implies forgetting the acquisition" (3).

schools, dame schools, or potentially dodgy sites of elementary instruction. In fact, as much as they promoted a visual/verbal view of literacy education, parodies of ABC books at this time also highlighted the power of the press as a fulcrum of power (albeit an increasingly unstable one) between the better-educated and better-read upper-class, and the disgruntled working-class long deprived: deprived of reading instruction, of reading material, even time for reading and light by which to do it, as Altick eloquently documented in *The English Common Reader* (92). Thackeray's and Cruikshank's alphabet books ultimately reinscribe literacy as a mark of class difference even though they nominally expand it by incorporating the visual.

A. TWO ALPHABETS, ONE VIEW OF THE PRICE OF LITERACY

Early in Thackeray's little book, we encounter a sketchy portrait of a pudgy, still-in-petticoats little boy (Figure 5), accompanied by an explanatory rhyme: "E stands for Eddy, & for him I took / Pains to compose this entertaining book" (235). The alphabetization of this privileged little Eddy called for a degree of personalization, attention and effort that would have thrilled the Edgeworths, even if Thackeray's impulse to resort to illustrations – to make it an "entertaining book" – would have raised their hackles. Thackeray was known not only for having a "'marvelous affection' for all little boys and girls," as Aridane Gilbert put it in *St. Nicholas Magazine,* but also for having a particular investment in representing the alphabet to them. In memorializing the "Greatheart" author, Gilbert particularly chose to imagine him "holding [his daughter] Annie on his broad lap, and teaching her to read from the funny alphabet-pictures he had made" (213). Nor did Thackeray have to wait for his own children to arrive before indulging in this pleasure. In a letter to the philosopher George Henry Lewes written in 1855, Thackeray fondly recalled his wanderings in Weimar during the 1830s, and the hospitality he enjoyed from a succession of friends and their families. He declared that "my delight in those days was to make caricatures for children. I was touched to find that they were remembered, and some even kept until the present time" ("Goethe" 641).

Figure 5. "E" from Thackeray's *Alphabet*

Thackeray's nostalgic musings dovetail nicely with the introduction for the 1929 facsimile edition of the *Thackeray Alphabet.* Purportedly written by a son of Edward Frederick Chadwick – also known as the *Alphabet's* primary audience – that introduction provides a charming and probably semi-fictional description of the little book's provenance:

> One day, when Mr Thackeray was calling on my grandparents [Major James Chadwick and his wife], he was ushered in on a scene of woe – a small boy sobbing in a corner, with a stern mother in attendance. Kind Mr. Thackeray inquired the cause of the child's grief, and was informed that Eddy would not learn his alphabet. "No wonder," said Mr. Thackeray; "it is such a very dull thing to learn." Then he asked for some notepaper, folded it carefully, and then and there composed and illustrated the following "entertaining book." (*Thackeray Alphabet* n. pag.)

That Thackeray would produce such a book is clearly not out of the realm of possibility, nor was its preservation, especially once the author achieved renown in the English literary scene in the 1840s.

Eddy's may have been among those survivals noted in Thackeray's letter to Lewes. That may be one of the only places it is noted, too, since Thackeray's representations of the alphabet are woefully and surprisingly understudied given their wide circulation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although considerable attention has been paid to Thackeray's work as an illustrator of his own novels,[107] and to the "pictorial capitals" included in *Punch* magazine under his aegis,[108] I have found comparatively little discussion of how his own pictorial capitals are distinct from the other illustrations produced for his novels, and I have found almost no critical acknowledgement of the *Alphabet*'s presence in his oeuvre.[109] Scarcity is not the problem, at least for current critics; after being maintained in the private family collection of "Eddy" for the first hundred years of its existence, the *Alphabet* was reproduced in facsimile in London in 1929 by the well-known publisher John Murray. In 1940 the "Nelson Classics" series reprinted it as a companion to Thackeray's pantomime *The Rose and the Ring.* Although the *Alphabet* has since fallen out of print again, copies are widely available. However, *The Rose and the Ring* may be a particularly suitable comparison for the *Alphabet* because it is also held in comparatively low critical esteem (for a Thackeray production, that is). This suggests a larger distinction between Thackeray's work for children, and his work for adults – one that reflects post-Victorian critical conventions, after illustration "dwindled into mere decoration" (Fisher 60) or "incidental," as the Riverside editors described Thackeray's illustrations for *Vanity Fair* (xxxix). This is in direct contrast with perspectives contemporary to the *Alphabet*'s production, where children and adult audiences overlapped more habitually, children's books were given much more attention by reviewers, and illustration enjoyed a correspondingly higher degree of regard. As Anne Lundin has put it, after the Victorian era, reviewers no longer "legitimated children's books by their intense gaze" (*Victorian Horizon* 240).

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[107] There is ample literature on this, but the best starting point is John Buchanan-Brown, *The Illustrations of William Makepeace Thackeray*. See also Joan Stevens, "Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*"; Kennedy; Sweeney; and Weitenkampf.

[108] See particularly Tucker 169-174 and Joan Stevens, "Thackeray's Pictorial Capitals."

[109] Even Steinfirst only notes it as a "real breakthrough in attitude," from the moral tone that dominated the turn-of-the-century texts, but does not comment on individual couplets or images (287).

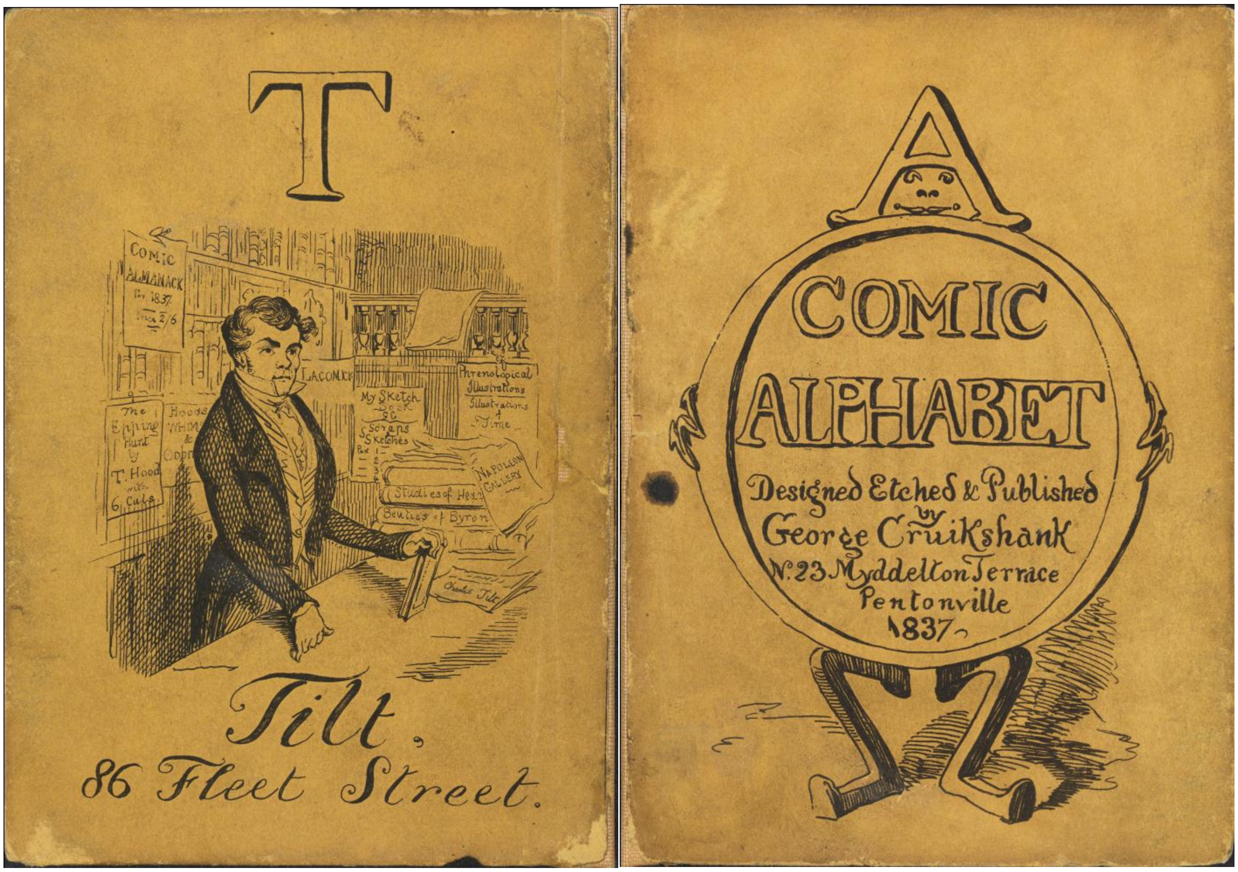
Only Herbert Tucker has identified Thackeray as a standout practitioner of "literal illustration," the term he helpfully suggests as a descriptor for "the graphic depiction of alphabetic textuality" (166). But he too limits his attentions to Thackeray's printed designs for *Punch* and his novels. *Punch*'s distinctive pictorial capitals, which served as entry points to discrete sections of text, were echoed in the 1840s in Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* and subsequent novel-length works, while the magazine itself occasionally parodied rhyming alphabets from its earliest issues. The *Alphabet* that Thackeray produced for Eddy was published posthumously, and he never again returned to the alphabet book form, even though the publication of alphabet books reached "flood level" in the ensuing decades (Tucker 204, n. 15). This is not as surprising as it might be, though, because despite their apparently-similar preoccupation with letterforms, Thackeray's printed representations of the alphabet offer at least as many formal points of contrast with his *Alphabet,* and Cruikshank's, as points of comparison. As richly functional as pictorial capitals are, they do *not* necessarily comment on the alphabet as a pedagogical object, while this is something that alphabet books cannot *help* doing.

For in fact, Thackeray's *Alphabet* is inevitably associated with pedagogy by its total design and the apocryphal packaging quoted above. Like Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet,* Thackeray's rapidly-sketched alphabet book offers a series of illustrations at a rate of one per letter. On the whole, this comparatively early example of an alphabet book – that is, an illustrated alphabet presented as a book *in toto* – bears a striking resemblance to the rigidly-codified twentieth- and twenty-first century versions of the genre. On each page, the letter is centered at the top in uppercase and lowercase forms. The illustration occupies the central bulk of the page, and a rhymed couplet accompanies each letter/image pairing in a caption-like position. As might be expected from the future novelist, though, Thackeray's text-to-illustration ratio is slightly higher than Cruikshank's. And with only a couple of exceptions, Thackeray's alphabet is clearly an example of what Patricia Crain calls the "tropic alphabet," with its synecdochic "A is for…" format (96-98). (I will discuss the most significant exception, the letter "X" at greater length below; it is particularly germane to the book's implicit construction of literacy as plural.) Thackeray begins with "Great A, it is an Animal & called an Alligator" (231) before settling into a more conventional construction with “B is a BED and in it, a young gentleman doth lie” (232). The lettered synecdoche ultimately concludes with “Z is a Zebra” (256). This verbal trope had already been well-established by this time in illustrated and un-illustrated versions, frequently re-appearing as variations of the rhyming “Tom Thumb’s Alphabet,” also known by its stable opening line, “A was an Archer.”[110] In its repetitive formal layout, we can already begin to see evidence of Thackeray’s many and miscellaneous sources for his *Alphabet*. They include, of course, contemporaneous illustrated alphabets, but also the sources of the emerging alphabet book form itself: emblem books, eighteenth-century children’s books by publishers like John Newbery and his most prominent successor John Harris, contemporary and earlier satirical prints, chapbooks, and hornbooks. In fact, during this time, the children’s book and chapbook markets were being flooded with publications cobbled together from repurposed materials – traditional, oral, *and* visual, in the form of previously-published woodblocks illustrating texts that were newly-composited in the printshop if not newly-composed.[111] These particular markets were populous but not prosperous, and the cost-conscious nineteenth-century printshop was not likely to produce an alphabet book from whole cloth for public sale, much less for an audience of one. Thackeray’s domestic writing impulse, freed from the economic considerations of reproduction, thus provides a (literally) rich opportunity for variation on a familiar form.

In a similar fashion, Cruikshank’s *Alphabet* carries with it the history of its production. It was at Cruikshank’s behest – not the publisher’s – that Charles Tilt offered “Cruikshank’s Comic Alphabet” for sale alongside other publications illustrated by the prolific satiric printmaker. Tilt himself was portrayed by Cruikshank on the back cover of the *Alphabet*, ensconced within his shop at 86 Fleet Street, where it would appear that everything for sale had been touched by the flagship artist’s pen: advertisements for the Napoleon Gallery, an installment of the *Comic Almanack*, and Thomas Hood’s *Epping Hunt* – with “6 cuts” by Cruikshank – paper the walls (Figure 6).

[110] Darton reports that this rhyme first appeared in print in 1712 in T. W.’s *Little Book for Little People* (60-61). It is probably much older in oral form.

[111] See Muir *English Children’s Books* and Whalley *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*.



From the Collection of The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Figure 6. Back and front covers of George Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet*

The *Comic Alphabet* consists of a series of 24 small etchings (3.5 inches by 5 inches) printed on one side of a single accordion-folded sheet, and was not the only publication in an unusual format that Cruikshank brought out this time. He also offered about half a dozen series of prints "in oblong folios… usually with several cuts to the page and without supporting text" (Johnson 14). These included *Phrenological Illustrations* (1826), *Illustrations of Time* (1827), *Scraps and Sketches* (1828-1832) and *My Sketch Book* (1834). The first and last of these can also be picked out from among the titles represented in Tilt's back-cover shop portrait. At a cost of "2s. 6d. [plain]; 4s [coloured]" ("List of New Books" 30 January 1836) the *Alphabet* garnered enough attention to warrant several editions. One (probably speciously) advertised as "new" was advertised at the same price less than three months later in 1836 ("List of New

Books" 5 March 1836), and the following year "Cruikshank's Comic Alphabet," featuring "24 amusing Sketches, done up in a novel and ingenious plan" was offered in a 1837 edition (*Comic Almanack* advertisement).

Cruikshank had justifiable confidence in the success of a venture into uncommissioned illustration at this time. After making a splash as a prolific satiric printmaker in London in the second decade of the nineteenth century, he achieved further prominence as the usual illustrator for William Hone's wildly-successful radical pamphlets.[112] *The Political House that Jack Built,* written by Hone and illustrated by Cruikshank, is reputed to have sold an astonishing 100,000 copies upon its release in 1820 – and even if the sales numbers are somewhat inflated, it indisputably inspired a great number of copies and imitations that indirectly testify to its success.[113] Cruikshank went on to gentler social satire and fame as a book illustrator in the 1820s and 1830s, although Cruikshank's brief collaboration with Charles Dickens on the illustrations for *Oliver Twist* and *Sketches by Boz* strangely dominates contemporary attention to his oeuvre.[114] Even among his work on book illustrations, his designs for *Popular Tales from Grimm* (1823) were probably his most famous during his lifetime, and were highly praised by John Ruskin.[115] The illustrator's art historical reputation, a recent surge in scholarly interest in nineteenth-century illustration, and the *Comic Alphabet's* obvious relevance to currently-expanding critical fields like children's literature and visual studies, all make it hard to believe that this work has received little more

[112] For biographical information on Cruikshank, see Patten *passim* and Cohen "Chapter 1: George Cruikshank."

[113] For reported sales figures see Wood 215, n.1. For the influence of the pamphlet on subsequent political parodies and radical pamphlets see Wood 215-217.

[114] As Vogler points out, "According to Albert M. Cohn, Cruikshank's definitive cataloguer, the artist did illustrations for 863 books and produced over 700 caricatures. Of the 863 books, Dickens wrote only two and edited only two. Obviously, the 'central concern' of any competent historian of Cruikshank's 75-year working career could hardly be his brief working association with Dickens, any more than the central concern of a Dickens biographer could be that association" ("Reassessment" 90).

[115] Ruskin provided the introduction for the 1868 reprint of the tales.

critical attention than mention in a footnote or bibliography.[116] Richard Vogler's essay on "The Genius of Cruikshank's Comic Alphabet" is available only in the second volume of a miniature facsimile limited edition from Leadenhall Press, while Bertha Mahony Miller alludes only briefly to "a panorama of twenty-four little colored etchings in which Cruikshank indulged his sense of fun to the full" (57). Although it might simply be lost among the sheer volume of Cruikshank's work over a 75-year career, I suspect that the *Comic Alphabet* hampers its scholarly appeal by proffering an embarrassment of riches: its tapestry of allusions and its formal resistance to established critical categories.

By inevitable extension, Cruikshank's attention to the illustrated alphabet tradition draws upon that tradition's source material.[117] As was clearly the case for Thackeray, those many and miscellaneous sources include emblem books, children's books, and chapbooks independently and by way of other alphabet books, as well as contemporary and earlier satirical prints. Marcus Wood has also argued persuasively that contemporary advertising made a significant contribution to Cruikshank's visual vocabulary.[118] However, the contemporaneous forms of children's books are a particularly fraught source of comparison where Cruikshank's *Alphabet* is concerned. Publishers like John Newbery and John Harris devised the conventions we now recognize as markers that a book is intended for a child audience, including small size, simple narratives, and a strong emphasis on the appeal of illustrations.[119] However, Seth Lerer's "reader's history" of children's literature convincingly demonstrates that the reading of actual children was hardly confined to those works designed for and marketed to them, and that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was much more overlap between the texts consumed by adults, and texts consumed by children, than is conventional today, or perceived as

[116] For a more general consideration of the wax and wane of Cruikshank's critical fortunes, see Knowles.

[117] I should note here that I am far more interested in the possibility of *alternating* between layers of meaning, rather than superimposing them – thus, the figure of the palimpsest has here been discarded as less than apt.

[118] See "Chapter 5: *The Political House that Jack Built:* Children's Publishing and Political Satire" in Wood 215-263.

[119] For an overview of Newbery's impact on the presence of illustrations in children's literature see Whalley and Chester 26-28.

conventional then, particularly when we resist anachronistic approaches to illustration. Modern readers may easily underestimate historical children's access to certain books if the book publishers are given too much credit for knowing the nature of children and what they like to read – especially when their credentials are printed in their advertisements. But what is most crucial to recall here is that Newbery, Marshall, and their cohorts offered two very different explanations for the use of illustrations in children's books, which correspond to their dual functions: "instruction" and "amusement," as Newbery originally put it. Both Cruikshank and Thackeray exploit the potential simultaneity of these functions, with Cruikshank leaning on that possibility for parodic effects.

As Thackeray implicitly confirms and Cruikshank ironically reveals, pedagogical literature is oriented (specifically) toward children as the result of historical trends in education that were designed to reproduce economic advantage. The low status of "popular" literature was passed on to many of the children's books and alphabet books that borrowed its rhymes, and which chapbooks had themselves borrowed from oral traditions. However, this influence deserves its own articulation as a phenomenon affecting *adult* readers as well as children. It affected everyone who read whatever they could find in a print-poor environment (in rural areas, for instance, or among the growing masses in London seeking work in the manufactories), separate from simultaneous codification of children's literature. As Patricia Crain briefly puts it, "As low genres, primers and alphabet books become conservators of the low. Elements from traditional culture that were rapidly being exercised by a new middle-class gentility now drop down into the nursery and the schoolroom" (75). In both Steinfirst's and Crain's accounts of the history of illustrated alphabets, the chapbook's "popular" orientation is rapidly over-simplified and absorbed into the focus on children's books. The elements appealing to lower-class, less-well-educated adults, AND lower-class, mostly-uneducated children, are relabeled as "appeals to the uneducated," permitting more modern notions of education as the province of childhood to slip into the gap. This perspective is, in many ways, a fair reflection of contemporary simplification, and the nineteenth-century conflation of the uneducated adult with the child. Well into the nineteenth century, writers and critics often combined these categories into "class literature" without clarifying their evaluation of which aspects or qualities of a text corresponded to the combined audience, and/or its subsets. For instance, writing in 1869 Charlotte Yonge explicitly defined “class literature” as “books… for children or the poor” (449-450). Whether the writers of “class literature” did ponder issues of audience plurality, or not, they certainly got it wrong sometimes. In the flood of *Cheap Repository Tracts* produced by Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer from just before 1800, the writers insulted uneducated adult readers by disregarding their ability to recognize condescension. Dickens memorably portrayed this anger in *Bleak House*, when Mrs. Pardiggle visits a brickmaker’s impoverished family. Rather than thanking her for the gift of a tract, the slum-dweller retorts, “Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left. There an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn't be suitable to me. It's a book fit for a babby, and I'm not a babby” (94). Perhaps overcompensating for this centuries-old insult, modern critics have uncritically allotted some texts with didactic content, or some chapbooks with lingering traditional appeal, to the nursery, and denied or downplayed their potential pleasures for adults. In the process, though, other texts that share some of those qualities or repackage and recontextualize them – like finely-produced or satirical alphabet books with their basic *textual* literacy level and their low-class chapbook format – are easily left out in the cold. It is a problem of judging a book by its cover.

Thus, we must acknowledge how Cruikshank’s *Comic Alphabet* does reproduce contemporary conventions for a children’s book and/or a pedagogical tool, in order to understand those conventions are radically transformed into parody by other aspects of the text’s form, content, and materiality. The “alphabet book” as an independently-conceived and -executed publication – as a subset of the category “picture book,” that is – had not yet gained much traction in the book market, which was itself awaiting the technological innovations and cultural developments that would coincide with the arrival of picture books.[120] But like Thackeray’s *Alphabet*, the *Comic Alphabet* reflects the extent to which the illustrated alphabet book form had been codified by the mid-1830s. In *The Child and His Book*, Louise Field succinctly describes both the basic evolution of the alphabet book up to about the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and Cruikshank’s notorious intervention in that tradition:

[120] As noted in the Introduction, this is not a self-evident term.

> "Some new Hans Andersen might even find a happy theme in this Decline and Fall of Great A and his merry men. Once this hero was an important, and even a somewhat awful personage. Men treasured him under horn as in a glass house; they bound him up in prayerbooks, and signed themselves with the sacred sign of their faith before beginning to unravel his sacred lore. Later generations dissevered him more and more from these holy associations; he became continually less and less connected with the mysteries of religion, and more with instructive histories of good and bad children. Then they fixed him on square wooden blocks or joined him to gaudy illustrations, that he might represent Ass in an alphabet of animals, of Affability in a series of virtues, or stand for an Archer or an Apple-pie, till, finally, the audacious pencil of Cruikshank fears not to assail him, and he and his henchmen can no longer hope to inspire awe, for they have become *Comic*." (italics in original, Field 117-118).

She helpfully reiterates two central points of disparity between contemporary horizons of expectation, and historical ones: learning the alphabet was not always an "instructive" task allotted strictly to childhood, and somewhere along the way it acquired a conventional, and therefore non-necessary, association with illustration. In Field's fin de siècle view, Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet* merits attention for its historical timing – most significantly, its novelty as a *comic* version of a familiar form. As David Worcester's description of parody cogently suggests, "We do not find a parody printed side by side with its original. It is the reader's part to supply knowledge of the model. He must hold up the model, and the author will furnish him with a distorted reflection of it" (42). Thus, as Field's account suggests, the *Comic Alphabet* was a product of both Cruikshank's inventiveness, and his awareness of a critical mass of readers, a prior generation of "Eddies" capable of holding up the model for comparison with the "distorted reflection" that parody characteristically provides.

Useful as it is for contextualizing Cruikshank's effort, Louise Field's short history of the alphabetical text is marred by its Whiggish progression to the alphabet *book*. This model discards as irrelevant the alphabet's continued importance as a structuring principle for unillustrated texts. As a partial concession to the high cost of illustrations, even well after Bewick's interventions, these picture alphabets coexisted with the unillustrated printed alphabets that were included in primers and grammars, pasted to hornbooks, and folded up into the hornbook's eighteenth-century offshoot, the single-sheet battledore. But despite being over-simplified, it is nonetheless substantially accurate. Susan Steinfirst's history of the form follows essentially the same course, arriving in the same place at the turn of the nineteenth century. We need merely bear in mind that the alphabet book was one form among many for children and adults that benefitted from the growing field of publishing opportunity for illustrators in nineteenth-century England by becoming much more affordable, more accessible, and more culturally significant. As I have already suggested, perhaps the most obvious shift in the horizons of expectation between nineteenth-century viewers of illustrated alphabets, and twentieth- or twenty-first-century viewers of alphabet books, is that prominent illustrations coupled with minimal text are now a highly-conventional signifier for child audiences. This leads to statements like Steinfirst's: "The alphabet book with its full-colored illustrations… legible print, and uncluttered pages is designed primarily for the pre-school child" (1). Cruikshank, however, enjoyed considerable renown as an illustrator and graphic designer among adult audiences during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although he was particularly successful, he was one among many, many visual artists who catered to the intense demand for "full-colored illustrations" in texts for adults, or for mixed audiences of children and adults. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as Altick points out, "much-decorated books were nothing if not respectable" (*Punch* 150-151), and the elaborate illustrations were most likely destined for middle- and upper-class audiences, with age serving as a secondary consideration.

Despite the "respectability" of certain kinds of printed images available in the 1820s and 1830s, within the realm of literacy education pedagogues might reasonably remain anxious about leaving visuals "unanchored," as Roland Barthes would say – that is, by leaving them without a legible label ("Rhetoric of the Image"). This was the danger presented by Maria Edgeworth in "The Bee and the Cow": without the ability to read a label, an image in an alphabet book might be mistranslated into a verbal form and nullify, or even undermine, the text's pedagogical utility. Such an approach situates illustration as a superfluous element, a bonus added to the alphabets already presented to children on hornbooks and in primers. However, I contend that an alternative view, apparent in Cruikshank's and Thackeray's alphabets, accommodates the influence of emblematic expression on British print culture during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. I am using the phrase "emblematic expression" to describe a form derived from the Renaissance emblem, which set up a tripartite association among an image, a motto (usually a single abstract noun, but potentially also a named concept), and the verbal explication of that association, which would be suppressed as often as not. [121] For instance, the graphic relationship between a lion and idealized English character might be made explicit in an emblem book. But an engraving of a lion in a political cartoon does not need to include an explication to still function as a semi-reliable representation of "English power." The intermedial character of the emblem was characterized by Ronald Paulson as "not an illustration that completes a text but an image that offers a visual substitute, with its own more or less materialized implied verbal text" ("Tradition" 39). In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even eighteenth centuries, emblem books targeted an adult audience purely by default, given their reliance on allusion. Considerable funds would be necessary to gain the required access to other texts. At the same time, the emblem book offered itself as a ready source of visual vocabulary for satiric printmakers in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a source that the poor could view only through shop-windows. The prices for prints by that undisputed master of eighteenth-century printmaking, William Hogarth (creator of *The Rake's Progress*, etc.) included countless emblematic details, theatrical postures, and internally coherent *misé en scenes* that invited lengthy perusal and stimulated conversation over the expensive prints. The density of the images justified their high prices.[122] These modes of representation did filter out of their original rarefied environments, and eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century audiences with little or no verbal literacy could obviously still consume the images, as an independent set of codes, without necessarily or fully comprehending their classical emblematic meaning. As visual historians have pointed out, emblems made their way from the socioeconomically-rarefied world of the Renaissance scholar to the wider public via a number of routes, ultimately appearing in public spaces

[121] For a history of the emblematic tradition and its taxonomic challenges, see Manning.

[122] See Harvey 19-21 and Cohen 4.

ranging from churches to coinage.[123] Tradesmen's signs operated on similarly-emblematic – albeit diluted – principles of coding, and even made their way *back* into prints as a complementary and contemporizing form of iconography.[124] But during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the lower-classes' sidewalk access to satirical prints – where the emblematic construction was most clearly and materially invoked – was a limited form of consumption.

More importantly, as. J. R. Harvey and others have repeatedly documented, nineteenth-century reviewers habitually analogized the consumption of satirical prints as a form of "reading." This reflected both the amount of time required to consume them, and a contemporary construction of literacy as multiple. It also implicitly hierarchized literacies: textual/verbal literacy was positioned as the province of education, while visual literacy was a metaphorical backformation. William Hogarth and his contemporaries "elevated" the graphic arts to the level of reading rather than the other way around; his own symbolic education was based in books rather than prints or even paintings (Paulson "Tradition" 36). Charles Lamb famously articulated Hogarth's impact on the hierarchy of literacies in 1811 by praising him in those terms: "His graphic representations are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of words. Other pictures we look at – his prints we read" ("On the Genius" 61). However, in order to facilitate that act of reading/decoding, Hogarth himself was reliant upon his readers' familiarity with the conventions in place for consuming the illustrated emblem book. As Paulson has noted, the emblem was "a transitional form, of great importance to all European artists, but in a peculiarly crucial way to the English," as the satirical prints modeled flexibility in verbal/visual interactions (*Emblem* 14). Via Hogarth, emblematic modes of graphic expression were available to Cruikshank and Thackeray, among others, to revive and continue deploying, in alphabet books as well as in *Punch* (Paulson "Tradition" 56). Tangled threads of association with social, economic, and corresponding educational conditions trail in their wake.

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[123] See particularly David Manning, but also Freeman.

[124] For the interaction between Hogarthian emblematic expression and more commercial forms, see Wood 41-48. See also Paulson's *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times* regarding "Hogarth's complicated relationship with print technology" (Wood 41).

The emblem book has been only superficially recognized as a formal antecedent of the alphabet book, perhaps because it does not fit neatly into the category of children's books.[125] Indeed, as a product of the late-medieval imagination, the form predates the formalization of conventions for "children's books" by a couple centuries. However, children's literature scholars have often reasonably suggested that heavily-illustrated emblem books served as *de facto* children's books before books were intentionally written, designed, and published for substantial child audiences, and several emblem books extant from that period are explicitly labeled, and ostensibly designed, for the use of particular aristocratic youths.[126] More specifically, as Crain points out, for the eighteenth-century writers of *The New England Primer* – and presumably for British composers of illustrated primers as well – the emblem book offered an inspiring format for verbal/visual equivalence, the naturalization of associations through print (44). Thus, the emblem codified and promoted a fluid conception of literacy as simultaneously visual and textual. Its importance to the history of the British alphabet book, and the plural constructions of literacy it reflects, is likely downplayed because the emblem book evolved out of a preoccupation with empowering and codifying *visual* representation rather than *textual* (or alphabetical) representation.

Although book history has not yet made much of the fact, for pedagogues attempting to represent alphabetical textuality in print, the emblem book offered very concrete assistance with significant semiotic effects. By substituting a letter for the emblematic "motto," the alphabet book suffuses that letter with arbitrary meaning, effectively nullifying the role of the emblematic image: to "stand for" something. Where emblem books offered "moral translations" that would seem arbitrary to those have not "cracked the basic code," as David Manning puts it (144), alphabet book illustrations "translate" into another code. The alphabet book's "emblems" construct and then provide access to a semiotic world instead of a spiritual one. And so unillustrated alphabets like "Tom Thumb's" might be said to operate in a pseudo-emblematic fashion, with the letter/form operating in a dual capacity. It is both a "motto" and an

[125] Steinfirst does not mention it at all, no doubt due to her preliminary assumption that alphabet books *are* "children's books" and reflect their historical trends.

[126] Manning mentions this, as do Lerer and Darton.

image, with the rhyme implicitly explicating the letterform – which is to say, it naturalizes an arbitrary association, like that between "A" and an "Archer," through repetition. *Illustrated* alphabets can also paradoxically emphasize the alphabetical letter's textual status. "A" becomes *more* like a verbal subunit, and less like a visual representation of "A"-ness, if it stands in contrast with a recognizable and labeled depiction of an "Alligator." However, as I will discuss in further detail below, both Cruikshank's and Thackeray's alphabet books include satirical illustrations as well as *intermedial* satire; they deploy the visual/verbal equivalence characteristic of emblems *within* each illustration as well as within the tripartite composition of each page. This compensates for the loss of emphasis on the letterform that they sustain by using the alphabet book format to promote visual literacy as a complement to the verbal-textual. And it also reinforces our picture of their audiences as rarefied, since, once again, thanks to contemporary limitations on publishing technologies, emblem *books* and the emblem's classical, redundant, tripartite, and fully-explicated form are almost entirely restricted to privileged domestic environments. Their roots in aristocratic classical education were typically complemented by high production values, since the audience for non-narrative illustrated texts steeped in classical allusion was already class-stratified. Because age-based considerations for those texts are superseded by class-based ones, the former have far less relevance to how Thackeray constructed his emblematic and satirical alphabet *for a child audience* than do the latter. For this reason, the history of "official" children's books has proven to be more of a roadblock than a key to locating Thackeray's *Alphabet* within a sociohistorical framework, despite its unusually-reliable link to a child audience. Obviously, we can see in Thackeray's *Alphabet* the "minimal text, the tiny pocket size, and the whimsical illustrations" that Donelle Ruwe has listed as characteristic of "early children's literature" from the first decade of the nineteenth century (116). But where pedagogical and illustrated nineteenth-century texts are concerned, markers of a "common reader" audience, as Altick put it, can be mistaken for attempts to target *child* implied readers because those markets are so closely tied to education.

Alphabet books provide an excellent place to draw out these points of confusion – that is, the conflation of the child and the uneducated – because competing constructions of literacy are so closely bound up in constructions of childhood, and in the materiality of texts. Especially at this time, visual literacy was up for re-location within the social hierarchy as publishers became capable of distributing different forms of illustration at lower price points. Chapbooks (and woodcuts) fell into sharp disfavor among middle-class adult audiences as those publishers began to be able to incorporate finer wood-engraved images into their periodicals. In a recovery project for chapbooks complementary to my discussion of emblem books, M. O. Grenby has pointed out that "the term 'chapbook' has always been used loosely, designating an amorphous and fluid literary form" ("Before Children's Literature" 28). As a result, taxonomic lists similar to Ruwe's could just as easily describe some kinds of literature for adults (29). Here, we can usefully to our earlier insights (see previous chapter) about the chapbook tradition as an important precursor to and, later, a commercial competitor with the alphabet book. The more "evolved" alphabet books like Harris's or Cruikshank's differ from chapbooks primarily on the basis of class markers: the cost of production, the cultural references, and sometimes a linguistic, textual, and/or iconotextual appeal that depends on access to formal education and an educated society. Material considerations and social context fundamentally alter the signifying role played by the alphabet in the *Comic Alphabet* text. Whereas the materiality of the chapbook dovetails with other aspects of "class literature" that infantilize the representation of the alphabet, in Cruikshank's (con)text the alphabet refers to that act of infantilization as part of its satirical thrust. In the *Comic Alphabet,* the alphabet "stands for" childhood rather than for itself, since the book is otherwise "coded" for an adult audience. The reader's own child self was alphabetized and so he now consumes the alphabet book with that knowledge as a reference point. The satire ridicules the "innocence" of childhood and its lack of exposure to harsh social realities. Such realities included persistent unequal access to *textual* literacy education that retarded the idealistic ambitions associated with institutions like the London Mechanics' Institute founded in 1823, or Henry Brougham's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and their much-parodied "March of Intellect."[127] At the same time, though, Cruikshank's small book enjoys the regard then accorded to visual

[127] Michael Hancher has usefully pointed out that the trope of the "March of Intellect," the "grandiloquent slogan" attached to the "intellectual aspirations of the lower classes" originated as a parody, rather than a

satire, thanks to a mainstream respect for eighteenth-century satirical modes inherited from William Hogarth and his contemporaries, albeit in softened "comic" forms.[128] Those modes legitimate a construction of literacy as *multiple* rather than simply *textual.* And part of the *material* joke is that, in childhood, a hierarchy of the verbal-textual over the visual was established. So Cruikshank's satirical modes can be enjoyed as a kind of educational slumming without the medium of the joke compromising the quality or respectability of the joke itself.

B. THACKERAY'S *ALPHABET*

As his use of the familiar layout and tropic "B is…" construction would suggest, existing conventions clearly provided Thackeray with both a visual framework and a verbal starting point. But precisely because we can readily perceive his sources of formal inspiration, the way that Thackeray plays with existing conventions is primarily what makes his *Alphabet* worthy of our attention. For instance, in Thackeray's *Alphabet,* "Y is a Youth," which includes an illustration of a young man strumming a lute and lacks overt satirical inflection – perhaps reproducing a stock representation of "youth" in contemporary drama (Figure 7). This suggests a significant deviation from previous illustrated alphabets, where the assertion that "y is a youth" was often used as an opportunity to address the purported youth reading the book, and to exhort him to learn his lesson well. In M. Cooper's printed version of the classic "Tom Thumb's Alphabet" from 1742, "Y was a Youngster that did not love School," which presumably leads into "Z was a Zany, and talk'd like a Fool." By contrast, Thackeray's representation of "youth" seems to avoid, at least in this instance, the lecturing tone commonly found in pedagogical texts. However, I still use that ominous descriptor because, even with this playful image buried deep in the text,

sincere description (93).

[128] These forms were increasingly subject to absorption by the novel, most famously by Dickens, during the middle of the nineteenth century. For a description of this shift see particularly Palmieri.

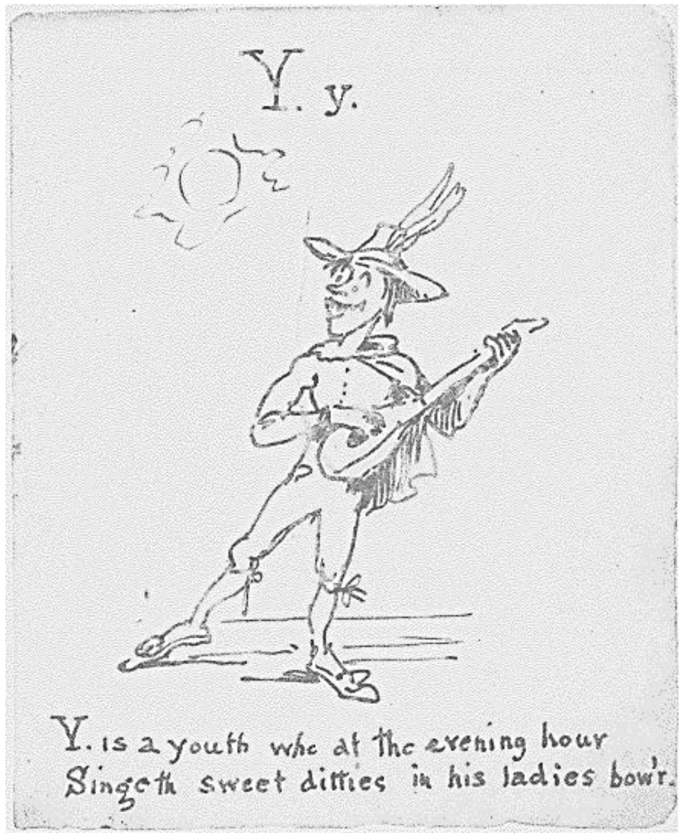

Figure 7. "Y is a Youth" from Thackeray's *Alphabet*

Thackeray's *Alphabet* often falls into line with its purported pedagogical purpose. Thackeray, with his sympathetic book-making, clearly embraces the legacy of child-centered pedagogy that backgrounds this focus on the alphabet. Nor does he wholly resist the typical urge to intimidate a youthful pre-reader. We've already observed the implicit cajoling at E, where we were reminded that "Eddy" is enjoying special tutorial attention, and thus implicitly owes it to Thackeray to complete his task and submit to alphabetization. But more overtly and conventionally, corporal punishment is threatened for a failure to complete assigned tasks, including the specifically educational: "D is a Dunce / He's been whipped more than once" (234) and "I Idler had some slaps upon his bottom / And sorely he repented when he got 'em" (239). Visual cues might excuse Eddy for the moment, since the illustrations of the "dunce" and the "idler" are cartoons of male figures that are clearly older than the representation of Eddy at "E" (Figures 5 and 8). They also further reinforce my initial claim: both when he conforms, and when he doesn't,

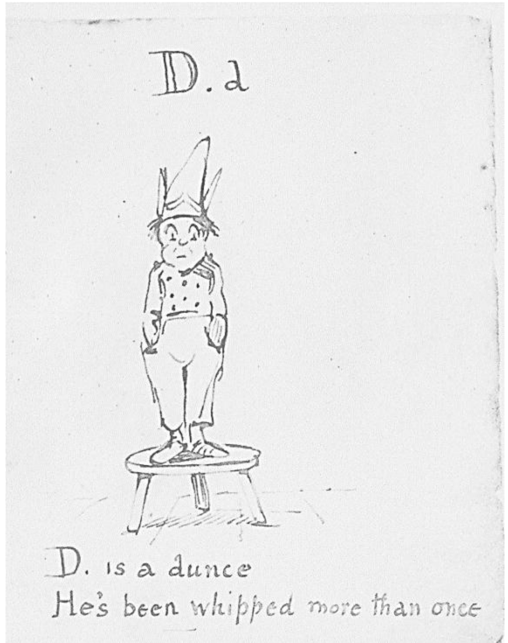

Figure 8. "D is a dunce" from Thackeray's *Alphabet*

Thackeray's response to existing illustrated-alphabet models immediately forces us to confront the ways that categories reverberate into an already-coded audience defined by age, *because* the alphabet is preliminary defined as a pedagogical target.

Along with content, formal elements of the alphabet book were sufficiently encoded by this point in time to be available to reproduction, modulation, or rejection – that is to say, to allusion. The tropic format itself was often deployed as part of a specific, and hugely-successful, alphabetic subgenre. Patricia Crain, in her morphology of alphabet book, dubbed this form an "alphabetic array": an alphabetized list of examples selected from a broader class (91).[129] In the "alphabetic array" a theme provides the excuse for an exercise in cataloguing, which in turn functions as both a mnemonic device for the letters of the alphabet and an iteration of their order. Usually, the titles of books in this category signal the theme; alphabets of trades, for instance, were quite common from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This might imply that Thackeray's book is generically aligned with the "alphabet array" by virtue of its

[129] She identifies other general forms as well, such as rhyming couplets and narrative. But since Cruikshank's alphabet clearly is most sympathetic to the alphabetic array type, I have here omitted any substantial discussion on that head.

tropic alphabet form. But Thackeray overtly deviates from the alphabetical array by presenting an apparently-random assortment of nouns rather than a coherent catalogue. Although some preoccupations do emerge from the whole, they overlap in idiosyncratic ways that suggest a haphazard imitation of existing alphabet book types. For instance, illustrated alphabets of animals were widely available by this time, and Thackeray dutifully begins and ends with a nod to that subtype: "A is for Alligator," while "Z is for Zebra," with "C is for Cow," "L is for Lion," "S is for Sow," "T is for Trout" and "O is for Oyster" rounding out the menagerie. In what is probably a similar nod to alphabets of trades, there is also a thread of sociological typology run through the whole, as we encounter a "Grenadier" at "G," and "H is a Huntsman." The illustrations for these latter "types" are stylized in a manner that seems reasonable given their purportedly-hasty production, but they hardly merit the label of caricatural (Thackeray's recollections notwithstanding) without a more clearly-identifiable reference to an individual. Nor are the couplets particularly interesting, much less allusive. For "H," "the fox is in view, / so [the Huntsman] follows & hollows his lusty halloo" while "G" might be downright lazy: "Who comes here? / G. Grenadier!" (237).

The case with the animals is quite different, though, and gives us an opening for probing further into Thackeray's sources. Indeed, the very first letter may offer a pointed commentary on the book's contents: "Great A, it is an Animal & called an Alligator / It's [sic] countenance will shew you that it's of a cruel Natur" (231). Are we directed to look at the "countenance" of the "Great A" or the "Alligator"? The accompanying illustration (Figure 9) portrays a cartoonish alligator, toothy jaws open wide, just on the heels of a fleeing male figure. The man's flight is rendered both comical and urgent by his wide-eyed, open-mouthed look back at the advancing predator. It is a moment fraught with silly suspense. Thackeray's "A" significantly situates a human as the prospective meal, and perhaps offers a warning to Eddy about his own plight: he's already tried resisting the "cruel Natur" of the alphabet. But he will have to accept the inevitable in just a few letters, when he will see his name and his person represented on the page, fully incorporated into the book's – the alphabet's – intermedial mechanisms.

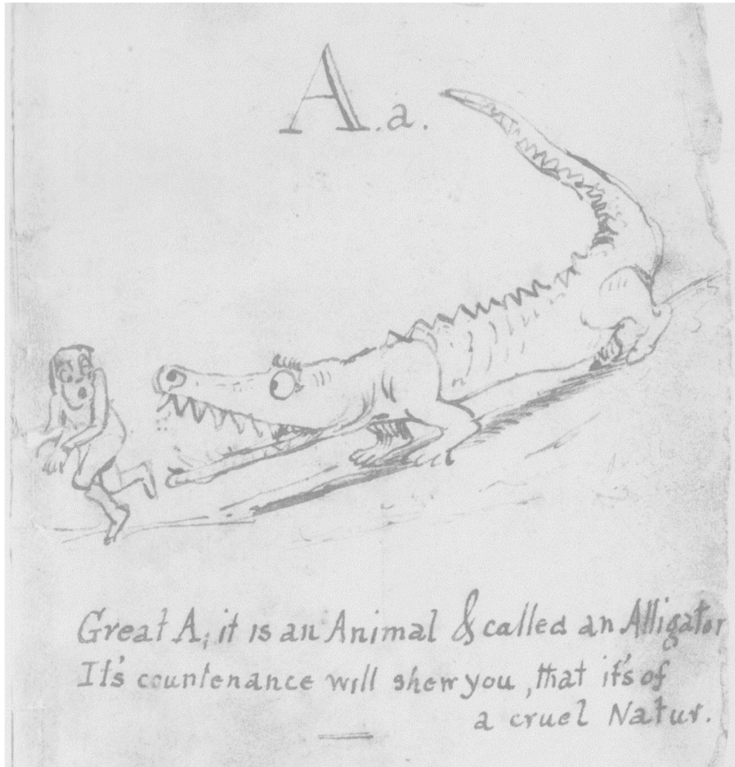

Figure 9. "Great A" from Thackeray's *Alphabet*

With Cruikshank's alphabet, I will be better able to explore in detail the literal costs of intermedial literacy training in 1830s England. But Thackeray's *Alphabet* testifies to some of the psychic costs of literacy, as he implicitly expresses sympathy for the child's sense of the process as threatening or oppressive. For this privileged child, literacy acquisition is not the liberating experience advertised by Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More via the Sunday School Movement and charity schools. For Eddy, it may be like being hunted by an alligator, or like taking medicine, which is featured at the letter "M," along with the book's only other appearance of Eddy's name. On that page, we encounter the hope that "M is a Med'cine nasty foul & black / May Eddy ne'er have cause such stuff to take" (243) – suppressing the disclaimer that if Eddy *does* have "cause such stuff to take," he'd better submit. Since the alphabet is "such a very dull thing to learn," as Thackeray reportedly acknowledged, he is simply following in the footsteps of centuries of pedagogues who struggled with pupils' resistance, as Eddy's "stern mother" did with him. Thackeray also takes the tack popularized by Locke in Romantic-era England: designing books so as to promote children's desire to consume the alphabet. His homemade book is participating in long-established tradition when it replicates countless prior representations of the alphabetical letters as food. The letters were made into gingerbread, both figuratively and literally, in an attempt to avoid the necessity of force-feeding it to pupils. The chapbook rhyme "A Apple Pie" (also often found printed under the longer title, *The Tragical History of the Death of A Apple Pie*) narrates personified letters consuming the eponymous pie "B Bit it, C Cut it," etc. – and is probably the most well-known printed version of this type. So common are these tropes that Crain identifies "swallow" alphabets as a subset of a general preoccupation with consumption in illustrated alphabets in America around 1800 (86-88). Along these lines, the dulcet tones of persuasion reappear elsewhere in Thackeray's text, where the letters are figured as animals that exist primarily to be consumed with pleasure. The text is quite explicit about this: "O is an Oyster, open, fat & sweet / Scalloped or raw they're very good to eat" (245). The accompanying illustration of an oyster offers no additional narrative, perhaps because oysters don't have faces. The situation is different with the "Sow" of "S" who stands mildly outside a barn, apparently alive even though the rhyme focuses on his death: "when his life is taken / Happy the farmer who shall have his bacon" (249). "T" for "Trout" calls forth a similarly grim prophecy: "When living handsome but when dead delicious" (250). Kerry William Purcell has noted this ironic interaction between text and image, and suggests that a "comic-macabre quality can… be seen at work in 'S is a sow' and 'T is a trout', where a pig and a fish are blissfully unaware of their impending doom." We might see a similar "blissful" ignorance in the representation of Eddy, also pictured in his domesticated habitat: on the grass beside a sidewalk in a field of rolling parkland, presumably a space where he can play with the toy clutched in his hand. Thackeray's representations of consumption are tellingly unstable, with both humans and animals presented as potential food, and both visual and verbal modes deployed to communicate that status.

Purcell presumably sees comedy in the dramatic irony produced by the *visual* representation of the animals, and their *verbal* representation as future food. By this I mean that he describes an intermedial effect largely separate from the alphabet itself. However, that description of image/text interaction cannot be applied to the human-threatening Alligator of "Great A," wherein the "comic-macabre" quality is situated entirely within the illustration rather than in the ironic contrast between different pieces of information being provided by different modes of representation. We can see Thackeray's general hostility to modal consistency elsewhere in the *Alphabet,* as our provisional sub-categories (e.g., animals, trades) break down even more quickly in the face of ambiguous caricature and potential proper nouns. For instance, perhaps as an extension of the sociological bent noted above, several national types are accompanied by descriptions that might strike the modern ear as simply xenophobic: "W is a Welshman" who "stole a Marrowbone" (253), and "F is a Frenchman he looks wondrous eager / To swallow his frogs & to sup his Soup meagre" (236). (It is probably a traditional xenophobia, at least, since the Welsh thief appears in other nursery rhyme collections.[130]) Similarly, the representations of royalty suggest satirical designs on those august public figures. Specific names are not given, but perhaps don't need to be, since there's only one individual practicing that particular "trade" in England at a given moment. In both cases the visual comedy is unflattering, but generically so; facial features are stylized rather than exaggerated in the manner of truly time-sensitive political caricature. "K is a king" (Figure 10) denotatively described and depicted in a manner so that, Purcell suggests, "the nervous looking monarch resembles the then current ruler, William IV" who was described in the *Spectator* as "a weak, ignorant, commonplace sort of person" (qtd in Purcell). Whether little Eddy would recognize William IV, and the implicit criticism of him, must remain a matter of speculation.[131] The criticism is more explicit, because the accompanying text is harsher, in the case of "Q" (Figure 11), who "from her crown you'll guess to be a Queen / Though

[130] For instance, Walter Crane's *Alphabet of Old Friends* (1874) includes the following rhyme for the letter "T":
Taffy was a Welshman, / Taffy was a thief,
Taffy came to my house, / And stole a leg of beef.

I went to Taffy's house, / Taffy was not at home;
Taffy came to my house / and stole a marrow-bone.

I went to Taffy's house, / Taffy was in bed;
I took the marrow-bone / And broke Taffy's head.

[131] At any rate, Purcell may be wrongly focused on the *Spectator's* view of William IV, whose "commonplace" mien could also have been appreciated as a lack of pretension.

Figure 10. “K is a King” from Thackeray’s *Alphabet*

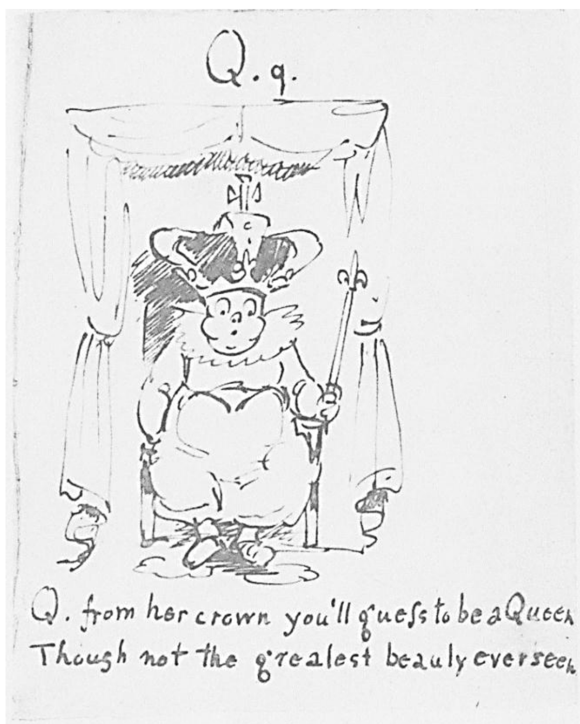

Figure 11. “Q from her crown” from Thackeray’s *Alphabet*

not the greatest beauty ever seen" (247). But it is also more puzzling, because the Queen Consort at the time, the German-born Adelaide of Saxe-Coburg, was known more for piety and political interference than her appearance. More importantly, as with the characterization of the king, Thackeray's representation of the Queen prompts us to consider how he positioned his prospective audience. Presumably, he would include allusions or satirical statements only if he considered Eddy to be capable of "reading" or decoding them, or because he wanted to *teach* Eddy how to decode them.

The diffuse satiric quality of these particular image/text pairings points up the fraught and historically contingent nature of audience conventions based on age. Even though a strict notion of caricature is clearly not in play in these pages, comic verse may be enhancing the satiric quality of the illustrations. And a diagnosis of satire has interesting implications with regard to this text's identity as a "children's book." In the history of children's literature, the genre has often been construed in opposition to adult concerns – a characterization "inherited from eighteenth-century reformers and nineteenth-century moralists alike," according to Alan Richardson ("Ambivalent Reader" 123). He has argued that satire (or "overt political content") was purposely exorcised from children's literature by these historical actors, so that it could fit with a new understanding of childhood characterized by "sincerity" and "innocence" rather simple literal ignorance (*Romanticism* 149) – that is, the construction of the Child at the center of the "child-centered pedagogy" discussed in the previous chapter. Richardson also observes that within the present-day critical conversation, "celebrated children's texts" that are too overtly satirically-inflected to fit this model have been reductively framed as an "ambivalent" appeal to dual readerships: "the innocent child and the experienced adult" ("Ambivalent Reader" 123). Thackeray's alphabet, with its satirical appeal to a child audience, prompts us to acknowledge limits or resistance to Romantic assertions about "the innocent child and the experienced adult" during the 1830s.

In a more recent example of the approach Richardson rightly criticizes, U. C. Knoepflmacher and Mitzi Myers have supplied the term "cross-writing" to describe textual mechanisms that appeal to two audiences simultaneously. In their formulation, cross-written texts offer a "dialogic mix of older and younger voices" that address a "mix of older and younger" readers, respectively (vii). Thus, they presume that adult writers effectively ventriloquize children in order to address them through texts. In the case of Thackeray's *Alphabet,* we have established *a priori* a child readership, and so the presence of satire troubles a post-Romantic approach to this children's book. Even if we choose not to recognize a specifically satirical thrust in Thackeray's portrayals of the king and queen, we may glimpse it at "J," where we meet "a judge" who is "in a fury / Most likely with the Gemmen of the Jury" (240), offering a commentary on contemporary court proceedings and their predictable excitement. And we cannot avoid the ugliness of the portrait bust at P (Figure 12), "which "is a pimple – 'tis a thing which grows / Sometimes upon a luckless parson's nose" (246). It *may* be a caricature of a specific parson (an archival challenge for a braver Thackeray scholar), but it *certainly* is an apt demonstration of caricatural mechanisms: to make the target's moral failures visible in his physiognomy. "To make caricatures for children" was, after all, Thackeray's "delight in those days." Like the Romantic writers of the late - eighteenth century, whom Marilyn Butler famously noted "did not know at the time that they were supposed to do without satire," Thackeray missed out a similar memo regarding children's books ("Satire" 209).

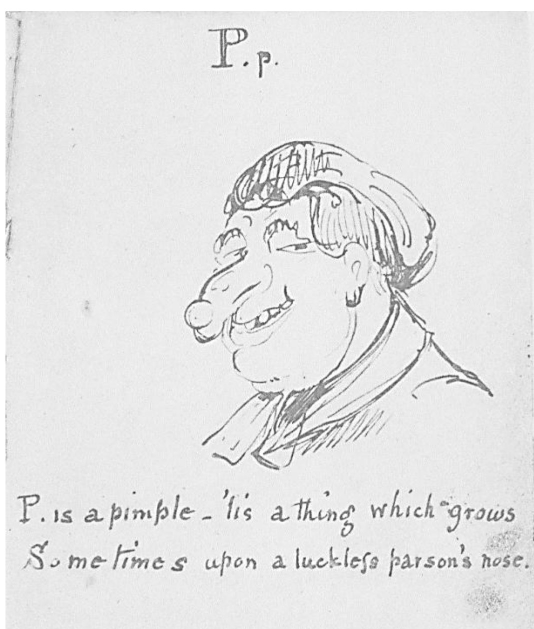

Figure 12. "P is a pimple" from Thackeray's *Alphabet*

More importantly, Thackeray's willingness to pepper his *Alphabet* with satire is one piece of the larger puzzle we're solving about how he constructed his audience for this text. At least, it now appears to be a puzzle because it so frequently fails to conform to the conventions inherited from the late nineteenth century. In the early 1830s, the alphabet book format clearly falls into Thackeray's sense of what is appropriate for pedagogical texts, *and* texts for children, or at least one particular child. The visuals may be actively part of the pedagogy, simply a means of leavening the unpleasantness of consuming the alphabet, or some combination thereof. In any of those cases, Thackeray's satiric/comic representation of the alphabet implicitly constructs literacy as intermedial, and inculcates it in Eddy via corresponding mechanisms. The case of the letter U is particularly illustrative here. It reiterates the obliqueness of visual allusions already discussed, but helpfully leads us more directly into addressing how this particular alphabet invokes the alphabet book *form* in relating the visual to the verbal. To wit: "U. unicorn was beat about the town / When fighting with the Lion for the crown" (251). The text, despite its clumsy rhythm, clearly refers to a specific nursery rhyme: "The lion and the unicorn / Were fighting for the crown / The lion beat the unicorn / All around the town. / Some gave them white bread, / And some gave them brown / Some gave them plum cake / and drummed them out of town."[132] The rhyme's opening image derives from the Royal Coat of arms created in 1603, when King James of Scotland acceded to the English throne and joined the two countries' heraldic animals on a single shield. Thus, the nursery rhyme dates from the seventeenth century, and was presumably well-known to Eddy even if the allusion to the Coat of Arms and the political implications of fighting over the crown were less recognizable. But more importantly, this particular text/image pairing demonstrates some of the convoluted chains of association made possible by intermediality. Here, we have a *textual-verbal* allusion (the text of Thackeray's "U") to an *oral-verbal* utterance (the nursery rhyme) which is itself an allusion to a *visual* image (the Coat of Arms). And the meaning of that image is fundamentally ambiguous: it can be "read" (or decoded) in two opposing ways equally well: as a representation of national unity, *or* as a sign of its absence. The former reading was the presumptive, propagandistic message devised by King James as he consolidated national

[132] For documentation of this rhyme see Opie and Opie 442-3.

powers. But the latter, against-the-grain reading is precisely what's presented by the nursery rhyme, which notes the conspicuous omission of Scottish resistance and the suppression of Scottish independence. The degree to which Eddy perceives all of these links is, once again, a matter of speculation. But what's really important is what this representation of "U" suggests about Thackeray's sense of contemporary literacy: it is fundamentally and inescapably intermedial, *even in a context* that is explicitly directed at the inculcation of *textual* literacy. Going one step further, I would suggest that Thackeray's own intermedial modes of communication, satire among them, are designed to highlight the ambiguities inherent in the alphabetization endeavor. In this way, he balances the form's thrust toward textual literacy with a counter-emphasis on the importance of visual literacy.

Framed by the tale of its limited primary audience, *Thackeray's* alphabet book becomes an illustrative case study in the unstable conventions linking form and audience. Taking as (basically) true the story of its provenance, we can reasonably deduce some of Thackeray's ideas about what constituted a children's book. That's what he set out to make for a child named Eddy, and ultimately, the book reveals Eddy's upper-class destiny to him: "E stands for Eddy" because he has already been absorbed by the alphabet. He just needs to recognize himself and his name on the page to see his place in a wider media culture. Authorial intention is less apparent or reliable in published texts that circulate more widely, and thus more unpredictably. The intermedial or even emblematic character of Thackeray's alphabet provides an important socioeconomic context that is here not provided by the materiality of the text itself. However, having considered a unique and unpublished alphabet book that mirrored forms available in the world of print, and therefore revealed something about how the individual use of such a text might intersect with those available mass-produced forms, we are hopefully now in a better position to approach a text that introduced its specifically-satirical variations to a commonly mass-produced form.

C. CRUIKSHANK'S *COMIC ALPHABET*

While Thackeray's *Alphabet* largely confined its satire to the *content* of the illustrations and their captions, the *Comic Alphabet* pokes fun at the alphabet book format itself. He seems determined to showcase just how much energy must be expended to create and maintain formal and pedagogical conventions in literacy instruction, and in the process he also evokes the economic contingency of audience conventions as well. For instance, the very first letter, "A Á la mode," introduces potential confusion by introducing the letter "A" as both a letter, and as an independent word that is part of an idiomatic expression – and a foreign one, at that (Figure 13). An immediate complication like this is surely meant to be a joke upon the so-called "simplicity" of actually using the alphabet once one has learned it. It is not for nothing that, as I noted in the previous chapter, contemporary primers and grammars are rife with complaints about the irregularity of Angolophonic spelling and pronunciation. Similarly, Cruikshank's use of script for the caption-words in this book highlights how font is a potential complication of focusing on a printed alphabet to teach literacy. In "Q Quadrille," for instance, the script "Q" is quite different from the block-letter Q, and we must be struck with the realization that not only may letters' appearance vary widely in different fonts, but that letters' appearance is also closely tied to the class of their audience (Figure 14). Even as textual literacy was spreading into and throughout the

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Figure 13. “A Alamode” from Cruikshank’s *Comic Alphabet*

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Figure 14. “Q Quadrille” from Cruikshank’s *Comic Alphabet*

nineteenth century, the ability to read wasn't necessarily accompanied by the ability to *write*, and so the use of script here suggests a middle-to-upper-class audience presumably acquainted with the aptly-named "copperplate" script, which necessitates education beyond the bare minimum of dame school literacy, and thus a certain minimum income. As I will discuss further below, the script also recalls the captions for satirical etched prints, which offers a similar cue to intended audience. The contrast between the script of Cruikshank's captions, and the block letters above them, reiterates the strange isolation of the latter, and its definitive association with the unnaturalness of educational processes. Letters are rarely seen in isolation, except while they are being formally learned. Partly by severely limiting the number of words on each page, Cruikshank has exposed the sheer weirdness of alphabet book form, and its tendency to isolate both letters and illustrated objects from the physical and textual environments they more typically inhabit.

After all, it is usually words, rather than alphabetic letters, that are seen alongside journalistic captions, as titles for illustrations in serialized novels, and even as environmental print like tavern signs, rather than the clinically-sanitized setting of the alphabet book. It is only when approaching the relationship between text and image in an alphabet book that we see how much (or, more accurately, how little) the emphasis within that complex is placed on the *word* in comparison with the letter. This is not to say that lower-class individuals would never have the opportunity to see the alphabet in an isolated or pedagogical context, although the lack of such texts, even within the *ad hoc* school environments that predated and/or co-existed with Sunday Schools, was absolutely a factor in working-class pupils' difficulty in becoming literate. However, the high level of education and literacy required to "read" the emblematic iconotext, just like the Hogarthian satiric print, marks a crucial class distinction among different kinds of illustrated texts available in the nineteenth century.

Collaboration with that newly-enlarged audience would have been integral to the satirists' success, as David Worcester's description of parody's mechanics suggests. And as I have already suggested, in appropriating the one-image-per-letter format that he did, Cruikshank could be quite confident that a large number of people would recognize the *Comic Alphabet* as a tributary from the stream of pedagogical literature that flowed from the eighteenth century. More importantly, Cruikshank does not rely entirely on the title, and the alphabet's role as an organizational principle, to establish the alphabet's central importance within the text (relative to other thematic elements like satirical commentary). The block letters of the alphabet are just as prominent in his text as was usually the case in picture alphabets at the time and after, and so the pedagogical utility of this text is comparable. Cruikshank captions each image with both a bold capital letter and a full word, thus making it apparent that the *most* important part of each word is its first letter, as per convention. They also must be viewed in series, like any other alphabetical array. Richard Vogler has suggested that at "V U" – for Very Unpleasant" (Figure 15) – "the artist has reversed the order of the letters to accommodate his verbal tag" ("Genius" 28). But in fact Great Britain only settled into the modern alphabetical order that year, with Charles Richardson's *New Dictionary of the English Language* (Sacks 327). At the time there were still dictionaries in circulation, including Samuel Johnson's (1755), that treated the letters as variations on a single letter and listed modern "V" words before "U."[133] At any rate, in Cruikshank's alphabet the single-sided accordion-fold format makes it even more difficult, visually and physically, to "skip" a letter than would be the case in a codex, where one could theoretically choose to view a single spread out of sequence and/or separately from the rest of the alphabet (Figure 16). The represented class of things from which Cruikshank chose his examples appears to be "comic scenes," suggesting that the title denotes an "Alphabet of the comic" rather than an alphabet that is, itself, comical.

[133] Cruikshank's reversal may have been an allusion to certain reference texts' continued circulation among those who could not afford updates – and the social or economic consequences of such educational obsolescence.

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Figure 15. “V U Very Unpleasant” from Cruikshank’s *Comic Alphabet*

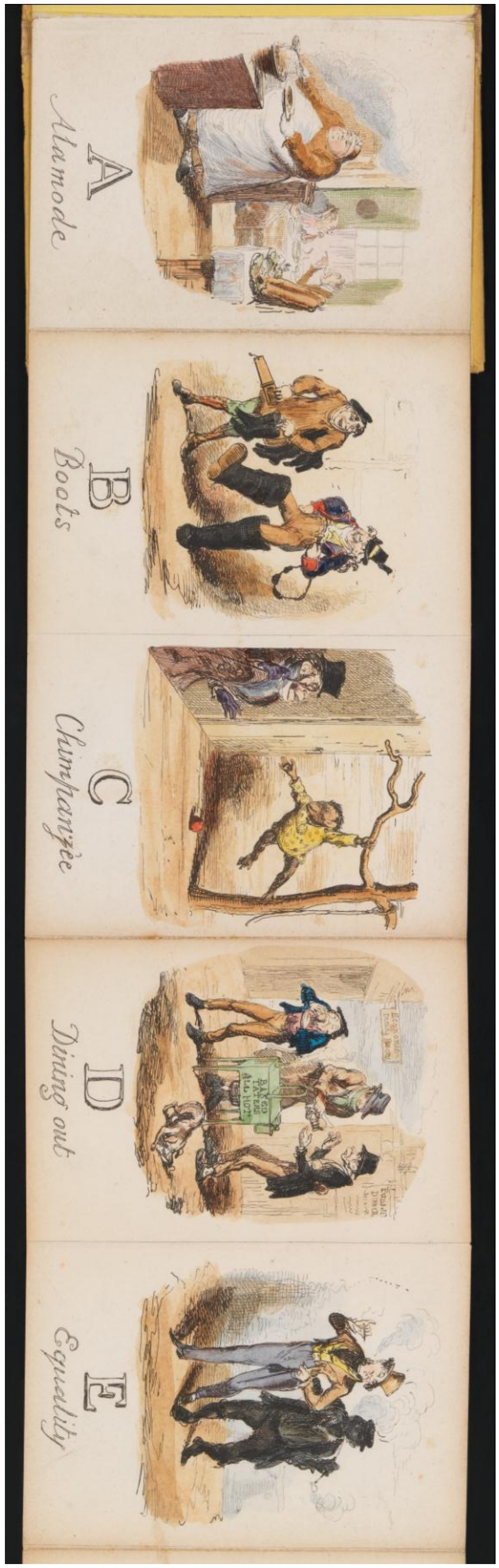

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Figure 16. "A" through "E" from Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet*

With this slight twist on titles for arrays, we can begin to see how, in spite of Cruikshank's clear investment in making this text recognizable as a picture alphabet, he has incorporated some important points of formal contrast between more typical alphabet books, and his own. For instance, we have already encountered a pure form of the "tropic alphabet" in Thackeray's homemade version. Cruikshank's text *implies* this tropic connection, but relies on the reader's familiarity with preceding alphabet books to make that connection visible. More importantly, like Thackeray's, Cruikshank's alphabet "array" does not take the typical form of a catalogue, like the alphabets of animals or virtues to which Field alluded. Cruikshank instead chooses to illustrate a wide range of subjects (Figures 16-18):

Concrete nouns	("B Boots," "Z Zoophyte"),
Abstract nouns	("F Fashion," "E Equality,")
Subjective experiences	("T Tantalizing," "V U Very Unpleasant")
Scenarios	("D Dining Out," "G Going," "S Singing")
Proper nouns	("N Nightmare" obviously references previous parodies of Fuseli's painting *Nightmare*, which had been displayed at the Royal Academy in 1782. "W Waistcoat" includes a background poster depicting "Bright of Malden," which signals that it is a portrayal of the enormous waistcoat of Edward "Bright of Malden" – the so-called "Fat Man of Malden" renowned for his freakish obesity)

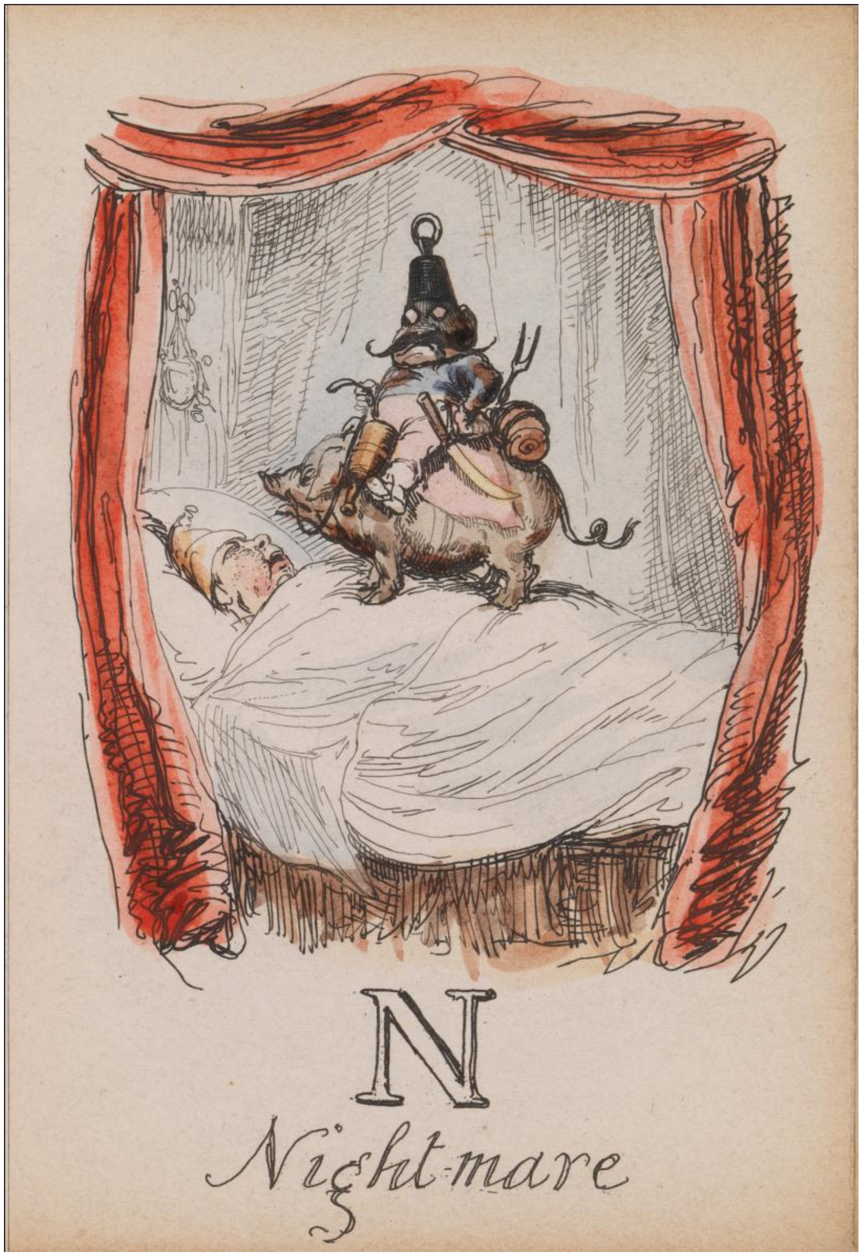

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Figure 17. “N Nightmare” from Cruikshank’s *Comic Alphabet*

From the Collection of The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Figure 18. "W Waistcoat" from Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet*

There is, to be sure, a certain thematic unity among the images – the comicality suggested by the title – as well as discernible sub-themes. The choice of "Á la mode" for the opening sally prepares the viewer to encounter a series of scenes of contemporary life, an expectation which is mostly fulfilled by the representations of "Fashion," the popular dance the "Quadrille," and current news items that follow. Otherwise-anomalous representations of historical figures can thus be better understood as contemporary allusions. For instance, in Cruikshank's representation of Orpheus at "O," we can see a satirical representation of Niccolo Paganini, the violinist who had been hailed as the "Modern Orpheus" in the press, and in a lithograph of that title by Richard James Lane in June of 1831, upon the occasion of Paganini's first London appearance at the London Opera House a week earlier. Paganini is identifiable by his long hair, and while his effeminate posture is satirized so are the effulgent responses of his audience (Figure 19).[134] Similarly, the frequency with which images of pointedly overweight people, eating, and food recur ("A la mode," "Holidays," "Kitchen Stuff," "Dining Out," "Tantalizing," "Zoophyte,") suggests a satiric preoccupation with consumption, both literal and figurative.[135] However, the sense of a theme, and indeed its atypical vagueness, derives less from the content of the images than from the combined effect of the abecedarian frame, the title and the *series* – the images' simple juxtaposition, and their status as part of a collection. The *Comic Alphabet* is a grouping of related items rather than a selection from a pre- established class, and this is a significant deviation from the conventions of the alphabet book, and the alphabetical array in particular.

[134] The lithograph is in the possession of the Foyle Menuhin Archive, made available online by the Royal Academy of Music. See item record at http://www.ram.ac.uk. Vogler notes that "contemporary writers believe that the violinist depicted was Paganini. This assumption explains the anachronistic use of violin instead of lyre" ("Genius" 25).

[135] This may also an allusion to alphabet books' frequent preoccupation with eating; Patricia Crain dubs these "swallow alphabets" and notes that they "appear to be the most prominent alphabets before 1800" (85).

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Figure 19. "O Orpheus" from Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet*

These deviations are couched within a material context that significantly inflects the content. Cruikshank's particular version of the illustrated alphabet book telegraphs its orientation to a fairly educated audience in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is its cost. At 2 shillings, 6 pence plain and 4 shillings coloured, the *Comic Alphabet* was more affordable than many contemporary periodical numbers, but more than twice as expensive as the going rate for the large satirical prints popular in London during the early nineteenth century (Hunt 8). Indeed, for reasons I will explore further below, and because it appealed to a similar economic demographic, Cruikshank's so-called "book" might be more accurately classed as a formally-unusual satirical print. If this price was required to recoup the initial investment, the print run for the *Comic Alphabet* would probably have been comparatively small – about 500 copies or fewer – and the audience would certainly have been restricted to the upper-middle and higher classes.[136] Regardless of the subject represented, the use of etching to produce them immediately suggests their fine quality, their high price, and their higher-class intended audience. Moreover, when it was purchased in color, the higher-cost enhancements to these prints were, at this point in time and for this price, probably achieved with such refinement via hand-coloring rather than via some more automated process (Vogler "Genius" 5). Although hand-lithography had been invented right at the end of the nineteenth century, it did not come into wide use in England for decades, due partly to the skilled and extensive labor it required. High-quality and cost-effective colored printing was not available until mid-century. When it was, Edmund Evans and his stable of famous illustrators – Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, and Kate Greenaway – were quick to exploit it for commercial success.[137] Even for a small edition, as the *Comic Alphabet* probably was, hand-coloring by working-class children would have been a reasonable compromise between time and production costs. The audience would likely have been reasonably well-educated because they were well-off – *not* just because they were adults, as twentieth-century experiences of education would dictate.

This surmise is reinforced by the *Comic Alphabet*'s concrete points of resemblance to a series of satiric prints. At least one image probably quotes a former Cruikshank production: "Q Quadrille" (Figure 14) may be a riff on Cruikshank's own 1817 print "Moulinet – the Elegances of Quadrille Dancing" (Vogler "Genius" 25-26). As was suggested above, "O Orpheus" and "W Waistcoat" make reference to current events and visual representations in the art world and periodicals, while "N Nightmare" relies on an even more attenuated thread of knowledge disseminated through visual satire in periodicals. Fuseli's *Nightmare* was the subject of a number of visual parodies shortly after its debut at the National Gallery,

[136] For price comparisons with literature see "Chapter 11: Selling, prices and access" in St. Clair 186-209. For prices of satirical prints, see Tamara Hunt 7-9.

[137] For instance, a writer for *The Times* in 1878 unfavorably compares the colored productions from another publisher to those of Edmund Evans (3).

putting Cruikshank's parody in good, if belated, company.[138] "C Chimpanzee," in which the resemblance between a well-dressed visitor to the zoo and the chimpanzee he is examining through his glass is very clearly highlighted to comic effect, is perhaps the most overt satirical portrayal of human behavior (Figure 20). But examples from the *Alphabet* might easily be multiplied. The illustrations themselves, with one

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Figure 20. "C Chimpanzee" from Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet*

[138] Allentuck catalogues some of the many caricatures of this painting that appeared after its Royal Academy debut.

allotted to a page, are conspicuously abundant and elaborately detailed for reproduction in book format. The designs for *Comic Alphabet* may appear comparatively simple, with only one or two figures rather than crowds, and only about 3.5 inches wide by 5 inches high rather than the folio-like size meant for a printseller's shop window. They certainly *are* comparatively simple, by the standards of many of Cruikshank's larger satirical prints. But even the mode of production suggests that they might be viewed as parts of a larger scene. Richard Vogler reports having seen a "so-called proof sheet of the 24 letters printed in 3 rows of 8 designs each… so the rows could be cut apart in 3 even strips and pasted together to form one long strip before being folded into an accordion book " ("Genius" 4-5). That a book written and illustrated by a successful graphic satirist should resemble a series of miniature graphic satires is hardly surprising. But it does reiterate the direct link between this book's illustrations, and a form of contemporary illustration firmly established as the province of wealthy adults. Cruikshank has simply reduced the scale of the prints and multiplied their potential meanings through juxtaposition, and of course contextualization within an alphabet book format.

As suggested above, Cruikshank's use of copperplate script for the text reinforces our inference that his audience has a presumed familiarity with etched prints. Since letterpress (a relief printing process) could not be combined with engravings or etchings (intaglio printing processes) in the same print run, titles and/or captions would often be inscribed directly on the image plate to spare the considerable expense of a double run through the press. Serialized novels like those of Charles Dickens would routinely include illustrations that were titled in script on a single plate, printed separately from the letterpress, and folded in with the letterpress text at the beginning (where it might provide a "preview" of the action promised to the reader) rather than folded in with it or in close proximity to the events depicted. Even when such cost-saving measures were employed, though, shilling numbers of serialized novels, and magazines were out of the individual reach of many a London reader, which spurred the development of lending libraries, and the practice of reading such texts aloud in groups.[139] More importantly, we see the combination of a script title with an elaborately-etched comic scenario in extremely popular works like *The Tours of Dr. Syntax* (written by William Combe, illustrated by Thomas Rowlandson, and published from 1812 to 1821) and *Life in London*, written by Pierce Egan and illustrated by Cruikshank himself starting in 1821 and continuing through the decade. As Richard Altick points out, these texts were essentially serialized picture books for adults: "a picture book in parts, with just enough letterpress to give continuity to the entertaining illustrations" and maintain a nominal narrative thread (*Common Reader* 279). Combe would actually produce the text to accompany Rowlandson's illustrations *after* they had been designed, as was the case for the other travel books and sporting books in vogue during the 1830s (Paulson "Tradition" 56). Along those lines, and returning to where we started (or, more accurately, to where Cruikshank apparently wants to us end up), we see represented on the back cover of the *Alphabet* itself the titles of other illustrations and prints by Cruikshank that were peddled to predominantly adult audiences. William Thackeray, in his "Essay on the Genius of George Cruikshank" originally published in *Westminster Review*, declined to wax rhapsodic about *Illustrations of Phrenology* and *Scraps and Sketches* because "it is very difficult to find new terms of praise, as find them one must, when reviewing Mr Cruikshank's publications" (120-121). Although Thackeray is often quoted in his declaration that Cruikshank is "the children's friend" (75), his statement is remarkable precisely for its singularity: by recalling his own enjoyment of Cruikshank in his youth, Thackeray is trying to expand on Cruikshank's acknowledged and enduring popularity with adult audiences during the first third of the nineteenth century. In short, when these prints and illustrations feature the high-end production values seen in Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet,* they are clearly designed for consumption by the same sorts of educated and adult individuals who previously enjoyed the expensive satiric prints of William Hogarth.

In terms of material context and audience conventions, the satirical descendants of the meaning-suffused emblem relied on other printed forms for crucial contrast. As Marcus Wood points out, the use

[139] For a discussion of circulating libraries and their limitations, see Altick *Common Reader,* particularly 218-219, 233-235 and 259; for periodical consumption and reading aloud see Altick *Common Reader* 330 – 332.

of emblematic allusions in the work of Cruikshank and his contemporaries was indirectly spurred by the explosion of heavily-illustrated printed advertising in London in the 1820s, which disseminated an iconographic vocabulary against which the revival of "high art" modes, signaled by material context as well as by content, could be contrasted.[140] More accurately, those aggressive forms of publishing offered a shallower form of public visual literacy, as compared to the private "reading" of satirical prints. The chapbook forms of alphabet books bore a strong resemblance to the vocabulary of tavern signs, sometimes because their images were literally plagiarized – any image was better than none, but the relationship between image and alphabetical letter was thus left enigmatic, the meaning underdetermined and/or highly idiosyncratic. The evolving form of the alphabet book (as exploited by Thackeray and Cruikshank), on the other hand, more frequently invoked the emblem simply by offering an array of *abstract* nouns – e.g., "equality" – or *proper* ones – e.g., "Paganini" where verbs and familiar concrete nouns would suggest humbler source materials. So, the word-and-image patterning of this particular alphabet book allows for it to be historically associated with the expensive emblem book from two opposite directions: Hogarth and his descendants, and the emblem's parallel degradation into pedagogical texts and children's books. But the materiality of Cruikshank's book tips another kind of balance altogether, and practically guarantees that all of those sets of readers are almost certainly higher-class. Marcus Wood has explored an analogous scenario in *The Political House that Jack Built,* and fallen prey to a common tendency to conflate class with youth. He first draws attention to Hone's inflated reputation for originality in producing satirical versions of nursery rhymes, which "became part of the currency of popular satire" by the nineteenth century (Wood 215). Hone and Cruikshank's radical publications, like *The Political House* and the *Specimen of a Banknote* of 1819, were uniquely successful as a result of the deft interweaving of various discourses and social strata – a combination made possible by the collaborators' different skill sets, which could in combination parody an entire book in word, image, and format (Wood 224, 235). Wood argues that the more general use of nursery rhymes in radical political publications was meant, at least in part, to suggest that the ruling classes viewed the working class they

[140] See particularly his second chapter, "Advertising, Politics, and Parody, 1710-1780" (Wood 18-56).

were oppressing as ignorant and foolish – as "childlike," and thus naïve. This process of infantilization could swing both ways, as in the many representations of Napoleon that ridiculed and undermined him by portraying him as a petulant, impotent child. However Wood, like those who are stymied by certain alphabet books, seems to believe that the children's book market of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries actually dictated the bounds of children's *literature*. When Wood points to the conventions of the nursery rhyme, the children's book, and/or chapbook traditions that appeared in Hone's brilliant pamphlets, it is not clear how and when he wants to separate the conventional audiences for those texts – which may themselves be subject to debate – from the audience for their parodied form. The slippage occurs precisely when he is referring to the qualities of children's books that Hone supposedly invoked: formal ones like the small size of the pamphlet and the inclusion of crude illustrations, the sheer brevity of the text (also seen when "abridged" is shorthand for "children's version"); textual qualities like rhyme, words with limited syllables, and repetition; and some even more abstract qualities like "the elements of extravagant fantasy at the heart of this rhyme" (228). My point, of course, is that many of these conventional markers simultaneously offer themselves to be read as markers of a child audience, a poorly-educated audience, AND/OR an adult, literate and politically-engaged audience that compares this alphabet book with others they've seen, assembling the satire from the deviations. With satire, materiality becomes a particularly dense site of literographic cues. For instance, the rather bizarre accordion-fold layout of Cruikshank's alphabet may point to his unwillingness to adopt wholesale either the chapbook or children's book form. With its illustrated cardboard covers and blank verso, it seems to be a compromise between two other higher-class, adult-oriented formats for which Cruikshank had designed many an illustration: a codex and a satiric print. Fully folded and closed, it resembles an octavo-sized book with uncut pages; fully extended, it evokes a printed banner. In either case, the material form of the *Comic Alphabet* reveals how Cruikshank's own ideal audience deviated from the lower-class (potentially adult) audiences for the chapbook, and those of the children's book as well.

Extending the irony even further, Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet* might be seen as a reply to the "improvers" who touted textual literacy as a form of social liberation. Cruikshank had already satirized idealistic visions of the future and education reform in 1828, in a folio-sized print in his *Scraps and Sketches* titled "The Grand March of Intellect" (Rpt in *Comic Cruikshank* 147). A similarly potent example of this reappears in his *Alphabet* at the letter "E," which here stands for "Equality." The brief motto directs our attention to the economic asymmetry of the accompanying illustration: a squat, soot-covered laborer strolling arm-in-arm with a lithe top-hatted dandy (Figure 21). Richard Vogler also

From the Collection of The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Figure 21. "E Equality" from Cruikshank's *Comic Alphabet*

recognizes this image as another satirical variation on the contemporary trope of the "March of Intellect." If so, Cruikshank's portrayal of the unlikely pair clearly reveals his doubts – shared with others who had already produced similar visual and verbal lampoons[141] – about the widespread hope that "through education class lines would be erased" (Vogler "Genius" 19). Thus, I have argued that Cruikshank has organized the *Comic Alphabet* so that in addition to functioning like a series of satiric prints, as a whole it offers a picture of socially-stratified publishing and educational practices. Significantly, the parodic effect is primarily *diachronic* in origin: it derives from the contrast between the "knowing" reader's present state, and his own (former) child self, who encountered alphabet books as an "innocent," and within the context of a journey from pre-literate childhood to literate, text-oriented maturity. And in order to reach this "knowing" adult audience, Cruikshank must rely upon the materiality of the book – that is, its high production values – as well as its content and formal attributes.

D. CONCLUSION

If we continue to follow representations of the alphabet into the future of Victorian print culture, we will find Thackeray again, this time operating in his capacities as novelist and editor. We will also find Cruikshank again: Cruikshank's influence on Thackeray took the form of both youthful exposure (as recounted in the *Westminster Review*) and collaboration, since Thackeray eventually wrote for Cruikshank's *Comic Almanack* in 1839 and 1840.[142] However, I noted above that there are important distinctions between Thackeray's work as a designer of "literal illustration" and "pictorial capitals," and his emblematic work in the *Alphabet.* While the former rode a rising tide of fascination with all things medieval, including illuminated manuscripts (see Chapter 4), the latter based its appeal to a middle-class audience on a history of visual satire and radical pedagogy. That Georgian stronghold of satire, the

[141] See, for instance, Moncrieff's *The March of Intellect: A Comic Poem* (1830). Hancher provides a useful overview of this trope as a comic device from the 1820s onward.

[142] For more on their collaborations and mutual influence, see Palmieri 761-762 and Anthony Burton 144, 148.

printed illustration, grappled increasingly desperately with the rise of the novel over the course of the nineteenth century. Thanks to *Vanity Fair* and similar successes, Thackeray was one of the primary figures responsible for *absorbing* into the novel the former function of the satirical print. Geoff Dyer suggests that after about 1830, "writers were increasingly forced by market considerations and other cultural factors to channel their satirical impulses into forms were satire merely exists alongside other strands, to which it is usually subordinate" (14). In alphabet books of the 1830s, then, we are seeing the last gasp of satire, which would be largely extracted while leaving its residue of emblematic expression. However, this is not to say that Judith Fisher is wrong to suggest that, "As illustrator of his own works, Thackeray saw the relation between image and text as a self-conscious dialogue, emphasized in the subtitle of *Vanity Fair*; 'Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society' " (61). The primary point, rather, is that the drawings in the *Alphabet* are self-consciously intermedial, *not* simply the result of yet another "dialogue" between visual and verbal elements. Thus, I will close with a final example wherein Thackeray actually makes an intermedial joke about the intermedial character of textuality with the letter "X" (Figure 22) in his *Alphabet*. There, a serif-uppercase letter occupies the same space occupied by an illustration on every other page of the book. Before reading the text, we can reasonably draw on our previous exposure to 22 formally-similar pages, and expect that the image will represent an object identified in the text. Instead, we read: "He who a picture on this Sheet expects / Is disappointed X is only X" (254). Not an object, and thus not a picture. Almost one hundred years later, Rene Magritte would make a similar commentary on the nature of signification with his painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928-1929). Where Magritte declared of his painting of a pipe, "This is not a pipe," Thackeray winks, "This X is not a picture of an X." Far from denying the visual character of the alphabet, Thackeray explicitly distinguishes its visual function from that of illustration. Intermedial jokes are made possible by dynamic interaction *between* visual and verbal – the sow of "S," who does not know that he is also bacon. However, this is not possible with text itself, which does not represent anything but itself – one cannot make a "picture" of X because it is already bound up in the verbal nature of text. It is particularly appropriate for this joke to be made at "X" because that is, of course, the letter that has most frequently

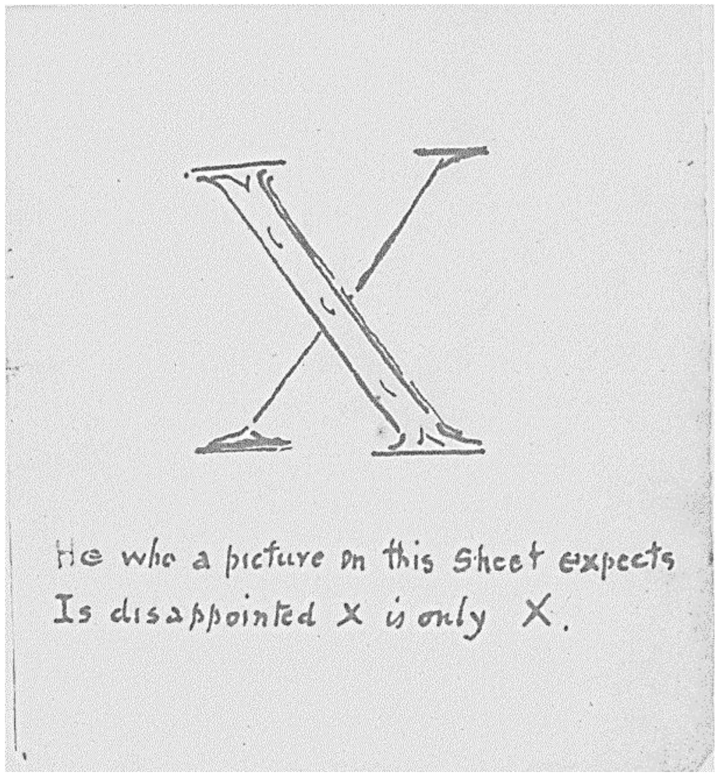


Figure 22. “X” from Thackeray’s *Alphabet*

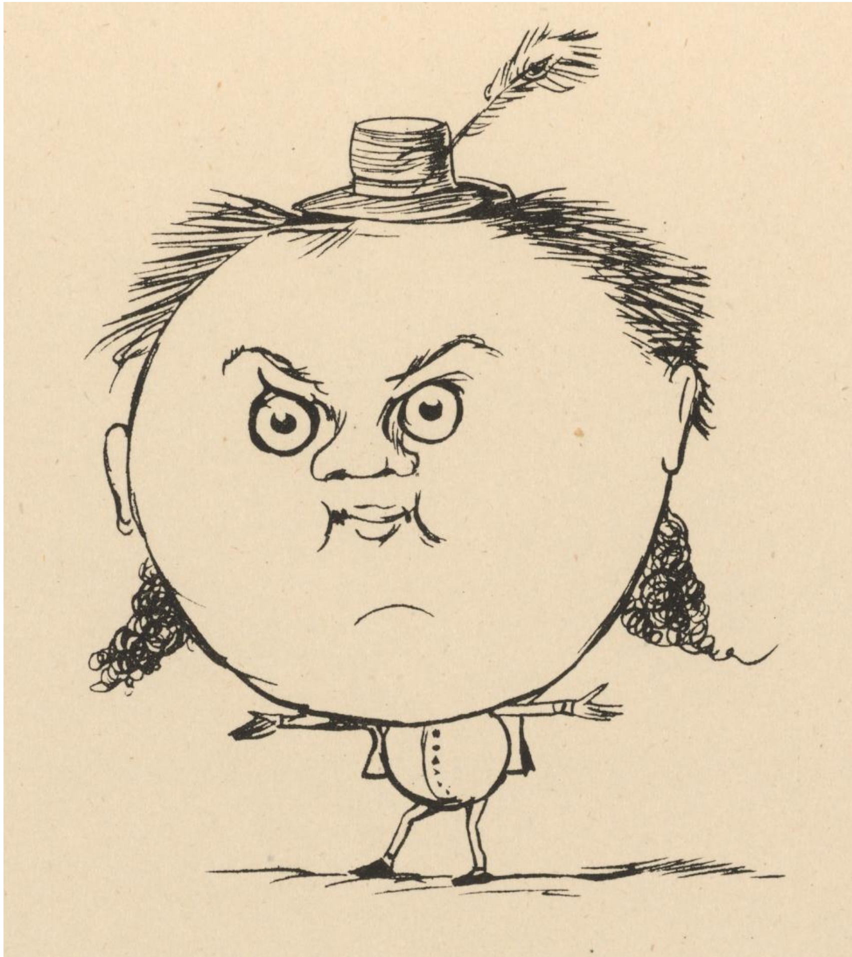
stymied the composers of rhyming alphabets. Its rarity as the first letter of a word undermines the façade of rational regularity that the alphabet book format presents: each letter gets one page, thereby speciously implying that they are all of similar orthographic value, and in some meaningful order.

Many previous alphabets had grappled with this by unearthing the name “Xerxes.” Many others resorted to doing precisely what Thackeray refuses to do: pointing to an iconographic use of X in non-alphabetic semiotic systems. Thus, a popular option was depicting ten objects and translating the letter into a Roman numeral. Alphabets of trades would cite the brewer’s use of “X” to indicate the strength of ale, as the *Punch* parody does. Returning to the illustrated *Punch* alphabet with which I opened, we can see a similarly-satirical thrust, and play on a child’s perspective, in the reference to Queen Victoria’s nurse Mrs. Lilly, who “officiated” at the births of all of her royal children. Lilly accomplished this despite an apparent reputation for drunkenness which is indicted at X: “for the Treble X – Lilly drank three times a day.” In the illustration, Lilly herself is punningly represented as a flower/lily being watered with a barrel of beer. The ironic "from the mouths of babes" effect is dependent partly on the instances of first-person usage. It is also evoked by the rhyming alphabet form. But most importantly, as we saw with Cruikshank's *Alphabet*, Thackeray exposes as artificial the whole notion of reliable orthography, including its systemic distinctions between the visual and the verbal. As an extension of the rationalizing impulse, the tripartite alphabet book format smoothed out orthographic difficulties, ignoring ambiguous pronunciation as well as the variable utility of different letters – the fact that "E" is pressed into service far more often than "Q," for instance. And with a similar failure of social mimesis, the "March of Intellect" projected equality into the school room, the lecture hall, and the presses full of pedagogical apparatus, while feigning ignorance about the more material sites of social distinction. However, Thackeray's illustration of X disappoints "He who a picture on this Sheet expects" because a typographical letter cannot sustain the distinctions suggested by "Image *versus* Text" or "Pen *and* Pencil Sketches" or even "the sister arts." All of these phrases usefully reflect the representation of Victorian print culture as plural rather than monolithically textual. But the real "ground zero of reading and writing" (Tucker 176) is representation of the alphabet *as* the alphabet, and Thackeray tellingly deploys the traditional "sign" of textual *il*literacy to point this out.

IV. CHAPTER 3. EDWARD LEAR'S "NONSENSES":

THE PERILS AND PLEASURES OF PRONUNCIATION AND PERSPECTIVE

Edward Lear was notoriously friendly with children as well as spontaneously creative, and an American woman named Margaret Ward Chanler helped establish both features of his reputation. In a book of memoirs published by Chanler in 1934, she recalls spotting a funny visage around the hotel where she was staying with her parents and younger brother on a trip to Rome. At eight years old, she was quite familiar with Lear's "The Owl and the Pussycat," and was delighted to realize that the "rosy, gray-bearded, bald-headed, gold-spectacled little old gentleman" across the breakfast room was the poem's author (29). Margaret's mother brokered a friendship that bore creative fruit in the form of a nonsense alphabet, which Lear presented to Margaret and her brother Arthur one page at a time: each day for almost a month, they found an illustration, "delicately tinted in watercolours" and captioned in rhythmic prose, waiting on their luncheon plates. A title page concluded the stream of gift-pictures, and just two years later the Wards' alphabet was published in Lear's *More Nonsense Pictures, Rhymes, Botany* (1872) under the title "Twenty-six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures." Amongst a series of anthropomorphized animals, this particular alphabet included at least one inside joke that would become very familiar to a wide audience: the comi-tragic figure of the "Yonghy-Bonghy Bo," who was later featured in a long poem about his unsuccessful "Courtship," first appeared on paper as an illustration for the letter "Y" (Figure 23). Lear and his young friend had developed the bouncy name as a secret code for chestnut burrs, but the artist transformed the yonghy-bonghy-bos underfoot into a character "whose Head was ever so much bigger than his / Body, and whose Hat was rather small."



From the collections of the Printing and Graphic Arts Department,
Houghton Library, Harvard University: Typ 805LN3 71 (A).

Figure 23. “Yonghy-Bonghy-bo” from Lear’s “Twenty-six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures”

As it crossed the boundary between private and public, this nonsense alphabet not only redefined words, but it also opened up a space for expanding the audience to include adults alongside the specific children chosen by Lear to enjoy his attentions. Nor were these “Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures” unique in that respect. In fact, they may be taken as a fair demonstration of the collective sociocultural mobility of Lear’s nonsense alphabets. As a group, Lear’s illustrated alphabets simultaneously participate in the long-standing literary tradition I have taken as my subject, and stretch genre associations to their limits by turning the form inside-out.

Aside from the cheap and crudely-illustrated chapbook forms inherited from the eighteenth century, which survived at the lowest price levels, the alphabet books designed and mass-produced for children in England before the middle of the nineteenth century featured proportions of "instruction" and "delight" that typically privileged the former, although they were distinctly more appealing than the unillustrated primers and grammars usually found in schoolrooms. These proto-picture books were the most-widely-available abecedarian models while Thackeray and Cruikshank were working the form, as discussed in the previous chapter. As technological advances permitted, laboriously illustrated primers gave rise in turn to conscientiously educational books for leisure reading like the "Home Treasury series" that Henry Cole published in the 1840s, which included *Alphabets* of *Quadrupeds* and *Royalty*. Much more so than chapbook alphabets, the "Home Treasury" alphabets with their line engravings and corresponding price points reflected the middle-class investment in textual literacy education. At the same time, wood-engraved periodicals were only just beginning to aspire to a mass audience,[143] while the technological foundations were slowly but steadily being laid for an efflorescence of affordable and "entertaining" illustration within children's toy books that could effectively compete with chapbooks in terms of cost. Thus, as Lear was beginning to compose illustrated nonsense alphabets, he had two factors to contend with: a fairly circumscribed, middle- and upper-class audience standing by for them (sometimes literally, as when he was scribbling on the spot for the children and grandchildren of his friends); and an established convention of pedagogical utility, or at least a general expectation that an abecedarian work would bend toward "instruction" even if it "amused" along the way. Play had long been hovering on the margins of rationalist education, but was generally valued more for how it could be exploited educationally than for its own sake. Rationalists following the Edgeworths tended to view children's leisure activities as potential portals into study. As a result, children's books emerging from this philosophical background, which reflected a hierarchy of priorities inherited from the ambitious middle class of the late eighteenth century, often combined aggressive didacticism with a bland notion of

[143] I use the term as Patricia Anderson does in *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860.*

"amusement." However, Lear deployed the "operations of nonsense," as Susan Stewart has dubbed them, and turned these priorities "topsy-turvy." In the process, he laid out the inner workings of the alphabet book as a systemization of literacy with embedded absurdities of its own.

By the 1840s in England, alphabet-based literacy education had long been wrapped in the trappings of rationality, and alphabet books formed a part of the cultural campaign to deny linguistic and orthographic irregularity. Lear, however, explored the margins, gaps, and fissures of rigidly-pedagogical texts, the places where linear systems of education break down. In Lear's nonsense alphabets, a wide variety of literographic cues – material, contextual, and internal (textual) markers – distinguish the kind of "serious" educational work that *incorporates* elements of play from Lear's play with printed language *ipso facto*, which subordinates educational goals to those of aesthetic expression. However, those cues are themselves highly contingent. As Susan Stewart has pointed out, the shift to nonsense modes, which is essentially an act of literographic (re)location to the realm of play, requires "the manipulation of the conditions and contexts of messages and not simply a manipulation of the message itself" (*Nonsense* 29). That is to say, at the same time that Lear's abecedarian texts directly represent his conception of alphabetical literacy and related social mores through selective or even distorted imitation of more conventional alphabet books, the subversive operations of nonsense offer meta-representations of those conventions. I argue that we can see how his rationalist contemporaries worked to naturalize alphabetical literacy as silent, deliberate, and oriented toward social productivity by seeing how Lear inverted these values. He represented alphabetical literacy as oral, extemporaneous, and – above all – playful in the sense of lacking a discrete objective or motive, except to produce "a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life," in Johan Huizinga's widely-accepted formulation.[144] In the process, the nonsense-alphabet form also provides Lear with an opportunity to re-categorize audiences: by transforming an "instructive" genre into an "amusing" one, he also transforms

[144] Huizinga's definition in full is "Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having an aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life" (28). For an overview of the definition of play that I have adopted, and its applications to nonsense, see also Susan Stewart *Nonsense* 119-120 and Lisa Ede 58-59.

the associations with education (and, by extension, childhood) that would otherwise bar adults from such textual play. As he scrambles the "sensible" or naturalized relationships between text, image, and letterforms in his alphabet-inspired verses and their accompanying drawings, Lear reveals how his contemporaries scripted pedagogical behaviors and material means of production in order to rationalize the alphabet, spelling, and pronunciation as part of a larger project of rationalizing textual literacy as a social imperative. But Lear also indirectly characterizes their success in this endeavor as merely rhetorical, governed by its own set of language rules. This status achievement is therefore fragile, requiring constant reinforcement through repetition and reproduction (via education).

Recognizing, like Hamlet, that "the play's the thing," Lear produced more than a dozen nonsense alphabets over the course of over four decades,[145] of which six were published in three different volumes in the 1870s. My analysis will focus on these "scripts" for the performance of educational play, and will bring attention to a neglected feature of Lear's oeuvre in the process. Despite the nonsense alphabets' provocative approach to middle-class values, proportionately greater critical attention has been paid to Lear's many limericks than to his nonsense alphabets. Comical limericks formed the bulk of his *Book of Nonsense* in 1846, and were immediately so popular as to give rise to misguided etymological theories crediting him with the form's invention.[146] Backlash even set in: a reviewer for *The Examiner* complained about printed imitators, and wryly decried the phrase "There was an old…" as "the commonest trick of speech in the world." Facetiously, one hopes, "Mr. Lear was denounced as one who had invented a nuisance" ("Nonsense Lyrics" 1302). On a more positive note, in a well-publicized letter to *Pall Mall* in 1886 John Ruskin famously declared the *Book of Nonsense* to be his first choice for leisure reading (reply to "Choice of Books"). However, during the 1870s, when Lear's subsequent volumes of

[145] Philip Hofer, an active Lear collector, concludes that "It would be impossible to discover with any certainty how many alphabets were drawn illustrated, and versified by Edward Lear in the long years of his devotion to his friends' children," but that "probably more than a dozen still exist in collections here in America and abroad" (*A Drawing Book Alphabet* N. pag.).

[146] As Noakes points out, there is no record of Lear himself using the word "limerick": "Lear called these drawings and verses either his 'Nonsenses' or his 'Old Persons'" (*Royal Academy* 167). See also Liebert 17 and Partridge 165-166 for an overview of such claims, as well as their refutation.

nonsense were published, the flood of limericks gave way to prose songs, "botany" and alphabets, and the public became familiar with forms that Lear had already been working in for years or even for decades. Lear's biographers have plumbed his correspondence to discover that as early as the 1840s, Lear was apparently writing and illustrating nonsense alphabets for particular children that he encountered during extended visits with friends, and many elements from these humble productions found their way into print in the 1870s and beyond.[147] Thus, although they did not issue from a deliberate creative program, Lear's nonsense alphabets, which were more often illustrated than not, clearly merited his sustained attention.

To be sure, some of his contemporaries did peg them as "trifles," a minor creative investment or a supplement to his primary business, his "more important work," of writing "nonsenses" in more conventional narrative and verse forms.[148] Indeed, *all* of Lear's published nonsense was typically considered by its creator to be a "sideline" to his career as a painter and illustrator (Jackson ix, xi), despite occasional claims like Vivien Noakes's that "he took [his nonsense-writing] every bit as seriously as he did his painting" (*Wanderer* 227), and more compelling counter-evaluations from his contemporaries. But the sheer volume of nonsense alphabets by Lear prompt us to consider how his representations of the alphabet cross two distinct literary traditions or genres – the illustrated alphabet, and nonsense verse – in a manner that allows the alphabet to move out of its habitually child- and education-dominated textual environments, and even to help readers actively resist the conventional acculturating processes of education. Lear's popular volumes had durable appeal for a demographically diverse audience, leading one commentator to declare toward the end of the nineteenth century, "if there flourishes in the United Kingdom a man or woman of greater age than four years who has no knowledge whatever of the *Book of Nonsense,* that individual is much to be pitied" ("Nonsensical Books" 388). His nonsense alphabets in particular were deemed "very original and good" ("Nonsense Lyrics" 1303). So it is certainly worth asking why the "Father of Nonsense," as G. K. Chesterton dubbed him – he was also known as the "Laureate of Nonsense," in Holbrook Jackson's more august formulation (ix); the "Master of Nonsense,"

[147] See for instance Levi 63 and Noakes *Wanderer* 222.

[148] For nineteenth-century version of this comparative evaluations see "Nonsense Lyrics"1303.

in that of M groz; and the "Lord High Bosh and Nonsense Producer" in his own estimation (qtd in Prickett 11) – repeatedly turned to the alphabet, the crucial technology behind printed communication itself, as a site for interrogating "sense."[149]

A. INVERSION AND THE LEARIAN FORMS OF (ALPHABETICAL) NONSENSE

Nonsense is at once "conservative and revolutionary" (Hark 121), and accordingly, Lear is simultaneously an original or even eccentric writer, and a patently repetitive or derivative one. He is routinely credited as the "originator of a new genre" (M groz 183). But, as the false etymology of limericks described above might suggest, nonsense was hardly a new form when Lear entered the field in the 1840s. As I will explore in greater detail below, the form's most famous practitioners, Lear and Lewis Carroll, were so successful at popularizing nonsense that their contemporaries began to recognize fragments of literary nonsense in older authors ranging from Chaucer to Shakespeare. The genealogy of literary nonsense extends well before Lear's birth in 1812 and links him to figures and texts already addressed in this history, further inflecting his participation in a tradition of self-conscious juxtaposition of word and image. Nor is this surprising given that Lear's own nonsense originally evolved out of his tendency to indulge in parody (Levi 138). But Lear's specious status as the "father of nonsense" points us to the important recognition that, however old the form may be, its character and parameters have remained difficult to describe, even simply when trying to distinguish it from the parody it superficially resembles (Ponterotto 154). In 1925, Emile Cammaerts noted that "it is far easier to say what is *not* nonsense than to say what it is" (18). Fifty years later Wim Tigges admitted that "the question whether one ought to conceive of [nonsense] as a device, a mode, or even a genre has thus far remained unanswered" ("Preface" 1), although he was comfortable calling it a "literary medium" ("Anatomy" 23). Lear himself used the plural form of the word, "nonsenses," as though to reiterate the multifarious nature

[149] His own insights prompt my use of quotation marks here, as a way of recalling that the "nonsensical" is hardly opposed to that world available to the five senses. Lear's clear investment in rhythm and verbal music suggests that his work unites the aural with the visual.

of his own output (qtd in Colley *Critics* xi), and Cammaerts concurred that "there are as many nonsenses as there are individual opinions" (1). Since the nineteenth century, scholars of nonsense, and especially those of its most famous practitioners, have worked to correct what they see as misperceptions about the literary form. Their most immediate concern is the label itself. Although the term "nonsense" itself suggests chaos or anarchy, Susan Stewart actually begins her landmark study with a critique of etymological insights. Critics have routinely discovered patterns and structures that reveal an internal logic to the enterprise and its effects, a form of "sense" that belies its negating name. As Elizabeth Sewell put it repeatedly in her own foundational study, "Nonsense[150] is a game" (*Field* 163). Far from lacking structure, nonsense writing boasts of fewer masters than does "sensical" writing because it requires a deft touch that recognizes "its own sense of order" (Colley *Critics* 33), or what Stephen Prickett has called an "alternative aesthetic" (136).

I am particularly sympathetic to the view, propounded most thoroughly by Susan Stewart, that nonsense writing functions as an "inversion" of the "rules" of sense, rather than a rejection or even a criticism of them.[151] Nonsense can hardly be seen as refusing or negating "sense" *as* communication because it is so clearly embedded in the social, conducting its manipulations from within those parameters (Colley *Critics* 33). Rather, I concur with Susan Stewart in her insistence that the nonsense world is not completely separate, but is a "topsy-turvy" version of the "social universe" that also produces sense. Fittingly, the image of reversal was popularized by that other towering master of Victorian nonsense, Lewis Carroll, a.k.a. the Oxford logician Charles Dodgson in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). According to Stewart the "everyday world" actually deploys the category of nonsense as a "container" for the inevitable disorder that arises in imperfect human systems, especially of communication and language

[150] Several of the critics with whom I am in conversation capitalize "Nonsense" in order to distinguish (intentional) literary or poetic nonsense from (accidental) failure to convey a message; they tend to be the earlier, more polemic codifiers like Strachey and Sewell. I preserve their indicators when quoting, but indicate my own doubts about the form's coherence (shared with more recent theorists like Susan Stewart, Tigges and Colley) by preferring the lower-case form of the word.

[151] Prickett also asserts that "Nonsense is… the true inversion or underside of [Victorian] culture in that, so far from being *free* or formless, it is the most highly organized, in many ways, the most rigidly controlled of all forms of fantasy" (120).

(202-203). Sewell, too, notes that "the Nonsense world is otherwise ordered than that of everyday" (*Field* 46). Nonsense requires "sense" as a background or point of comparison *against which* "nonsense" operates as a legible signifying system, due to (not despite) its imbrication in an overtly divergent interpretive scheme. But the cues that initiate this shift in context are highly-specific and contingent upon potentially-minor variations. In fact, the challenge of distinguishing sense from nonsense is similar to that of distinguishing the "task" of learning to read from the many forms of play that merge with or lead into that endeavor. Rationalists like the Edgeworths were acutely sensitive to the slightness and the significance of the difference, and advised educators to maintain a hawk-like vigilance in order to exploit it. So, too, does our investigation of nonsense alphabets require close attention to the details that make nonsense out of the "sensible" alphabet.

One of the advantages of understanding nonsense as an inversion, or a shift in context that requires realigned interpretive procedures, is that it allows us to acknowledge Lear's inevitable debt to previous alphabet books without insisting that he merely parody the form. By this I mean that Lear does not render the alphabet book formally ridiculous as George Cruikshank had done in his *Comic Alphabet* (1836), although the caricatures of both George and Robert Cruikshank (George's similarly-successful brother) certainly inform Lear's approach to nonsense illustration.[152] The system Lear upends includes rules of spelling and pronunciation, of course, but it is broader than orthography, encompassing the general systems of signification, and the relationships among oral, visual, and verbal modes of

[152] His biographers have convincingly argued that the most important *published* antecedent to Lear's volume of *Nonsense* – any number of oral influences are apparent, ranging from folk ballads to nursery rhymes – was an 1821-1822 collection of limericks written by Richard S. Sharpe and illustrated by Robert Cruikshank, George's also-successful brother. It was titled *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen*, and apparently set both the stage and tone for illustrated limericks in London. Davidson has discovered an allusion in Lear's letters to a specific limerick that appears in the *15 Gentlemen*, and Noakes has catalogued Lear's own illustrations for the limericks (Noakes *Royal Academy* 167).

Levi has suggested that this antecedent may have prompted Lear's first engravers to adapt his drawings to a pre-existing style (54). However, Robert Cruikshank's satirical drawings, though produced on a similar scale, feature much more detail and background as well as hand-colouring in at least some copies. They are less polished than Cruikshank's expensive fine prints, and in the copy I examined at the Harvard Houghton Library, the garish colouring was clearly accomplished via the assembly-line (and sometimes sloppy) poup e process. But more importantly, while Cruikshank's limericks partake of the comic spirit that animates much of Lear's nonsense, they maintain a visual, verbal and tonal connection to the real world that the latter was often distinctly lacking.

communication, that alphabet books inevitably construct and comment upon even if they purport to transparently reflect or inculcate them. Where pedagogical representations of the alphabet typically strive to smooth out the irregularities of pronunciation, as we saw in Chapter 1, the nonsense alphabets approach that futile endeavor with a reversed set of priorities. The rules of literary nonsense privilege the cooperation of phonetics and pleasure, subordinating meaning to performance. Indeed, they turn our focus to form and procedure rather than content, even “the preservation of form at the expense of content” (Stewart *Nonsense* 76). As Lear apparently realized, nonsense operations become particularly potent when applied to the illustrated alphabet form, since it is *already* focused on form and procedure – the letterforms, their combination and recombination, their rhetorical separation from other forms of visual representation – and all of the content is, in some sense, semantically identical. The *relationships* among the letters and between the letters and words matters more than any of the letters' or words' or images' specific character. Thus, Stewart's focus on “nonsense operations” suits our own focus on form. Instead of providing rules for how to turn (meaning-free) alphabetical letters into meaningful sounds and a tapestry of text, nonsense alphabets turn those same letters into emotionally or aesthetically meaningful sound, with far less regard for narrative or other sources of intratextual connection.

Established conventions of language thus offer an important structuring of “sense” on which to found “nonsense” itself, and spelling is one among many available for Lear to play with. Holbrook Jackson observed that Lear trafficked in puns, “Wellerisms” (so dubbed for the linguistic errors of Dickens's famous *Pickwick Papers* protagonist quoted in my introduction) and “phonetic spelling” (xxiv-xxv), while Eric Partridge has catalogued his many neologisms (171-179). In fact, Lear's nonsense alphabets were published – perhaps consciously, given their long cellaring times – to coincide with a growing interest in “spelling reform” among middle-class Victorian readers, and of course their representatives on local and regional School Boards. Spelling is, after all, simply a set of rules that govern the graphic representation of words, but, as we saw in Chapter 1, in English those rules are notoriously riddled with exceptions and inconsistencies. Isaac Pitman was among the most famous of those who tried to follow in the Edgeworths' footsteps and devise a new system of writing, producing his phonetic alphabet in 1847.[153] The Elementary Education Act of 1870 had set in motion a renewed concern with the difficulties of orthography, as the task of educating every young person in England overwhelmed their resources, and called for compensatory technologies like improved textbooks. The intractability of orthography was lamented again and again in the popular press, as when James Spedding described the "orthodox" alphabet as "irrational" in an 1877 article (638), as well as in more professional reports. Max Müller began a lecture "On Spelling" by declaring that "It is, I believe, hardly necessary that I should prove how corrupted, effete, and utterly irrational the present system of spelling is, for no one seems inclined to deny all that" (560). By the latter half of the decade, the printed contributions to the debate had swelled enough to warrant dedicated volumes, as in Henry Sweet's *Handbook of Phonetics, including a Popular Exposition of the Principles of Spelling Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878) and J. H. Gladstone's *Spelling Reform, from an Educational Point of View* (Macmillan & Co., 1878), which went into multiple editions. These difficulties were registered in speculative fiction as well; a recent study by Jenifer Gundry has revealed that contemporary visions of utopia routinely featured "reformed" systems for inscription ("Print Culture in Utopia"), which suggests that this was one of the failings of contemporary society uppermost in writers' minds.

However, at some level, "the idea of a reform of spelling is entirely Quixotic… a mere waste of time to try to influence a whole nation to surrender its historical orthography (Müller 557)." The decisions for how to proceed to address these difficulties were ultimately made on the ground: in the schoolrooms, by the instructors, and (indirectly) by the book publishers. Among the latter, those with large backlists obviously had a vested interest in maintaining the value of stock manufactured in accord with the previous lines of orthography. And for a critical mass of pedagogues and para-educators, literacy had been so hard-won that, as Spedding also pointed out, hazing the next generation proved far more attractive than submitting to retraining (637) – or as Müller put it, "Are we ourselves to unlearn what we have learnt with so much trouble, and what we have taught to our children with greater trouble still?"

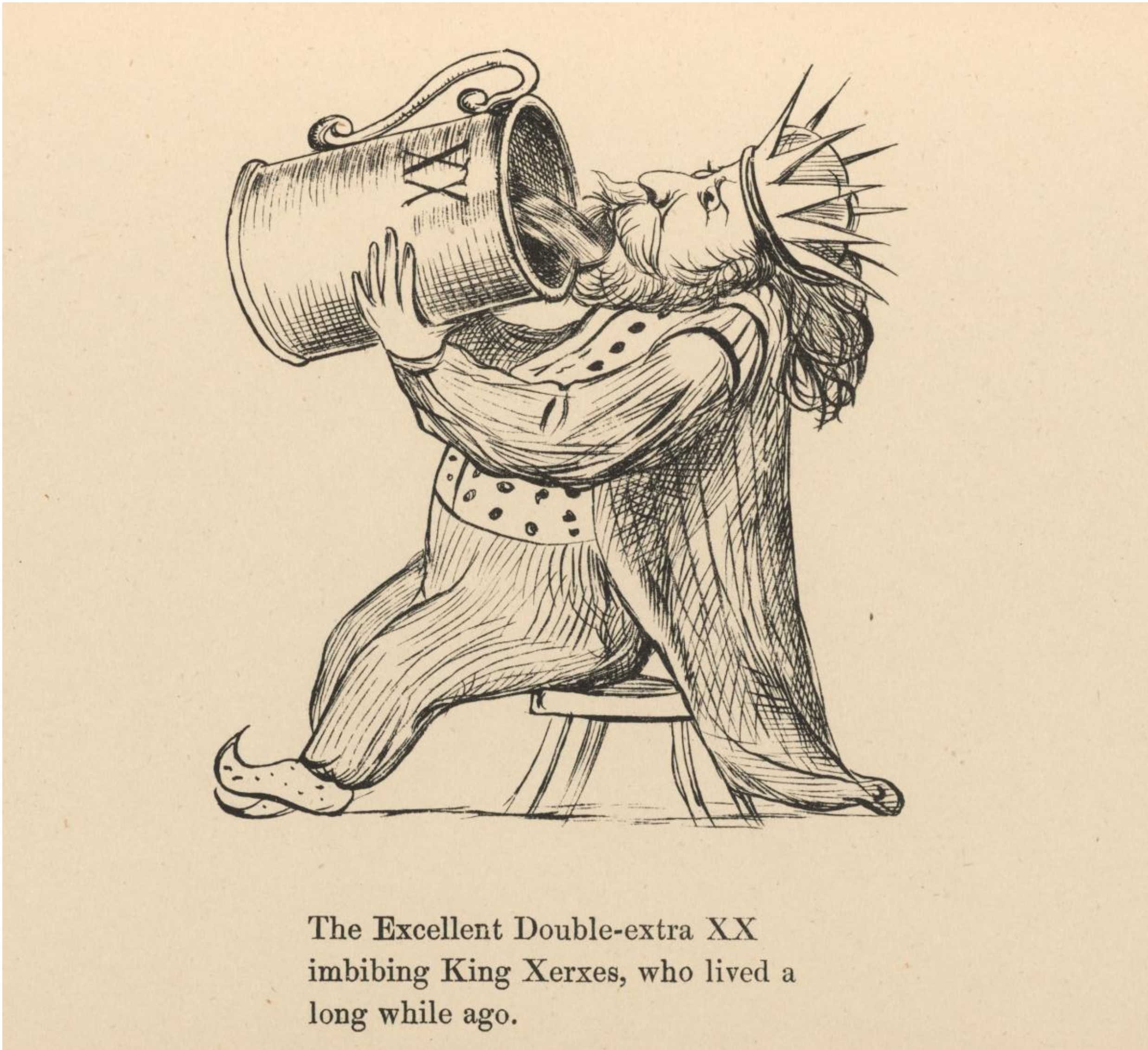
[153] For more on Pitman's and other phonetic alphabets of the nineteenth century, see Drucker *Alphabetic Labyrinth* 252-255. See also Pitman's *Isaac Pitman: His Life and Labors*. Later, George Bernard Shaw also invented a new system along these lines; see Kingsley Read.

even though “Everything [young minds] have to learn in reading (or pronunciation) and spelling is irrational” (560, 562). The already-literate overpowered both the spelling reformers and those who aspired to literacy by the easiest route possible, especially when – as in the case of recalcitrant youths – they were acquiring it against their wills. But against this background, texts like Lear’s simultaneously reinforced the reformers’ position, by playfully demonstrating the conservatives’ devotion to an irrational system, and devalued the entire debate by displaying the instability of language itself, including its printed forms.

I have so far suggested that alphabet books and beginning reading instruction were a prime site for confrontation between the rules of speech and the rules of print, as alphabet books attempted to “rationalize” the “irrational” alphabet. But Lear’s nonsense verse inherently posed similar opportunities for interrogating orthography. Nonsense verse took the competing poetic priorities of sound, narrative coherence, emotional impact, and aesthetic effect (the latter particularly contingent on social expectations) and shuffled them, promoting sound to a more elevated position than it had previously enjoyed in abecedaria, while narrative coherence came lagging behind whatever delight (or ancillary emotional effect) it could support. As Noakes rather baldly points out, “Lear was unusually aware of the sounds words make and he would analyse them phonetically” (*Wanderer* 22), and in his influential essay on “The Uses of Victorian Laughter,” Donald Gray singled out “delight in the sound of words” as a primary function of Lear’s nonsense (168). Lear’s simultaneous investment in music and nonsense has been not only noted repeatedly but also shared with his audience(s): “Lear sometimes set his own verses to music, and others have done the same” (Colley *Critics* 71); Mrs. Winthrop Chanler recalled Lear singing “The Owl and the Pussycat” to her when she was little Margaret Ward, setting the poem “to a funny little crooning tune of his own composition” (29). Ruskin testified to the musicality of Lear’s nonsense poetry when he described his limericks as “carols” (reply to “The Choice of Books”). Thus, Lear might have reasonably considered alphabetical nonsense to be a formal amplification of nonsense poetry, and even poetry in general, since verse routinely grappled with the challenges of visually representing sound.

However, representations of the alphabet, especially conscientiously-pedagogical ones, easily merge with spelling instruction as well as pronunciation, so it may be most useful to begin our approach to Lear's nonsense alphabets by distinguishing nonsense in general, and alphabetical nonsense in particular, from one of nonsense literature's common features: "tricks with established spelling" (Jackson xxiv). Susan Stewart's investigation of nonsense includes many examples of such "tricks" with orthography and pronunciation, including children's stories and rhymes that "us[e] gibberish to hide the aural content" of a statement. For instance, Howard L. Chace's "Ladle Rat Rotten Hut, Ridden end anguish languish" requires homophonic translation to be understood as "Little Red Riding Hood, written in English language" (Stewart *Nonsense* 98-99). Lear's own correspondence often included similar moments of phonetic spelling, so that the recipient was forced to read the text aloud in order to "make sense" of it. For example, he described viewing "vorx of hart" in galleries and complained of "mental and fizzicle maladies" (qtd in Lehmann 33), or wrote to a friend about "my felly creatures who will hereafter peeroase my jurnles, and admyer my pigchers" (qtd in Noakes *Wanderer* 147). His nonsense alphabets, however, explored the relationship between printed text and oral speech in qualitatively different ways.[154] The example of "Xerxes" in Lear's "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes" alphabet amply demonstrates the difference, which is admittedly more one of degree than of kind, between "tricks with spelling" and nonsensical allusions to the rules of literacy and printed communication. Here we meet "The Excellent Double-extra XX imbibing King Xerxes, who lived a long while ago," and who is depicted in a rather inglorious posture, perched on a stool and guzzling from an oversized tankard labeled "XX" (Figure 24). Each of the illustrative uses of the letter "X" functions differently, with only the name of the king fulfilling the formal mandate for a word that starts with the pertinent letter. Lear's use of "King Xerxes" here echoes many earlier alphabets, including several of his own published the previous year in *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets*: all three of those 1871 nonsense alphabets declare that "X was King Xerxes" or "great king Xerxes." Philip Hofer has also noticed Lear's conviction that "X *must* be

[154] Partridge has also noticed that "In his published work Lear avoids those humorous spellings with which he bespangles his private letters" (170).



From the collections of the Printing and Graphic Arts Department,
Houghton Library, Harvard University: Typ 805LN3 71 (A).

Figure 24. “imbibing King Xerxes” from Lear’s “Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures”

'Xerxes'" in order to get past this notoriously difficult letter (*Rhymes of Nonsense* 7), and the extent of the difficulty was documented in an 1850 essay in *Household Words*: "He was a good many things in his time, was A, and so were most of his friends, except X, who had so little versatility, that I never knew him to get beyond Xerxes or Xantippe" ("Christmas Tree" 290). However, unless one knows the name of this particular king, perhaps from other alphabets, getting to the word by way of the object's label would probably be difficult. It would also be unhelpful as a means of demonstrating pronunciation: Xerxes' Turkish origins mean that his name offers an unorthodox use of the letter X in an Anglophonic context. For just this reason, both "excellent" and "extra" were also popular examples in alphabet books of the nineteenth century. Composers were routinely stumped for a word starting with the letter X, and both of these familiar words apparently came close enough (although they did have the drawback of not being a noun or object, and thus were more difficult to illustrate – an issue which will be addressed at greater length below). The best combination of familiarity, and coincidence between spelling and pronunciation, may well have been that provided by the inscriptions of "X" as an indicator of ale strength, which I also discussed in the previous chapter. However, an abbreviated mark clearly isn't a word, and thus provides no cues of its own for pronunciation. Through redundancy (identifying the drink as both "Double-extra" and "XX"), Lear avoids the hybridization that some alphabet books resorted to, by spelling "extra" or "excellent" without the initial "e." With so many examples, Lear may be seen as making a valiant effort to bring the troublesome letter X in line with the rest of the "Nonsense Rhymes," which generally offer a singular demonstration of each letter in action. But his redoubled efforts also highlight the lack of a purely rational solution: that is to say, the lack of sense in the alphabet-book approach to describing the mechanics of printed language, and the nonsense buried in its heart. This performance requires no "tricks with spelling" except those perpetrated by orthography itself. By contrast, in his second alphabet in *Nonsense Songs* Lear plays a minor "trick with spelling" when he elaborates on "great King Xerxes" with the nonsense series "Turxy / Xerxy," playing on the *sound* of "Turks" and "Turkey" with the *spelling* of "Xerxes." In the later alphabet, however, nonsense also emerges in the absurd conjunction of ancient King Xerxes and modern British ale, and even in the gratuitous declaration of his "excellence." None of these elements have any real relationship with each other, much less with the other objects and their descriptors in the adjacent nonsense rhymes. Indeed, they don't even live up to the promise of the title, since they don't rhyme. But the ruthless predictability of alphabetical order serves as an important binding agent for what would otherwise be a jumble of *literal* nonsense, rather than literary nonsense that tips the pedagogical over into the playful.

The illustrated alphabet form thus offered the illustrator and versifier alike – especially when both were contained in a single personage – a format that was flexible in some respects and firm in others, not to mention conveniently sanctioned by nominal educational utility. Lear's devotion to verbal patterning and the "alphabet array," as Crain has dubbed a catalogue-like format (91), reflected his appreciation for enabling constraints.   The alphabetical array form offered both Lear and other alphabet designers a means of narrowing the infinite – because arbitrary – possibilities of association with the letterforms. For Lear in particular, one of the most important features of abecedarian forms was an embedded sanction for absurd juxtapositions.[155] Indeed, Stewart has characterized alphabetical order as "the convention of conventions" (*Nonsense* 190). However arbitrary the choice of theme – birds, quadrupeds, royalty, flowers, trades etc. – may have been, or the choice of individuals within that scheme, the nominal organization of a theme offered a crucial point of difference between a disordered display of illustrated objects, and the rationalized series of letters-with-illustrations in the book. Themes also helped marshal the disorder of visual/verbal modes of communication in public, and bring it onto the ordered page. For instance, shop signs were formally and thematically plagiarized by many alphabet book designers (Crain 48), which accounts for some otherwise-inexplicable imagery in nursery rhymes (e.g., the "cat and the fiddle"). And offering a final advantage to Lear, the array format accommodated extremely repetitive wording, as was most apparent in the first batch of nonsense alphabets (Nos. 1, 2, and 3) that Lear published in the *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets* of 1871. They were uniformly

[155] Or as Crain puts it, "Objects, animals, people, body parts, virtues and vices, tools, clothing – the alphabet array displays them all side by side, at its pleasure, in an aesthetics of accumulation and accretion." However, her focus is on alphabets illustrating objects "isolated… quite often from any kind of verbal play" (93).

synecdochal, in Crain's sense of the term; each letter "was" an object, a slight variation on the more-familiar formulation of "is for" or "stands for." A reliable pattern is established from their beginnings: "A was an Ant"; "A was once an apple-pie"; and "A was an Ape." In the "A is for" format, the nature of each letter is narrowly defined by its role at the beginning of a *printed* word, and by its serial relationship with all of the other letters. The onward march of seriality clearly trumps further explanation of each letter's many possible uses in pronunciation or spelling: only *one* word unfolds all the possibilities of a given letter, all that each letter "is." The sequence trumps the individual, as abecedarian and nonsense forms dovetail in their mutual focus on form and process rather than content *per se*.

Printing multiple nonsense alphabets, and printing them in a volume in sequence (as Lear did repeatedly), brings to the surface some over-arching rhetorical effects of representing the alphabet with an alphabetical array. As misleading as it is to allot each letter one object, one word, one form of pronunciation, this reductive approach is implicitly sanctioned by the repetitive form of the alphabet rhyme itself. If what worked for "A" also works for "B," then it does implicitly convey something true about how letters operate; the synecdochal approach asserts, indirectly and by example, that letters as a category must all have *something* in common if they are amenable to the same kind of elaboration. This effect becomes stronger in a sequence of different *kinds* of alphabet rhymes, which permits comparisons between them – as happens in *Laughable Lyrics,* wherein Lear's synecdochal "A was an Arch" alphabet is immediately followed by a narrative abecedarian rhyme. This kind of repetition-with-a-difference re-emphasizes the stability of alphabetical sequencing. However, it also simultaneously highlights the arbitrary and fungible utility of the letters, as they can quickly be repurposed and redefined – and the sequence re-initiated – without limit. When the operations of nonsense intervene (as they do in Lear's alphabets) they relocate such representations of the alphabet to a place where communication itself can seem "nonsensical." But typically, alphabetical order (itself) becomes the primary pedagogical object in such situations, since the equation between the letter, and a word or words beginning with it, is blatantly reductive at best and misleading about the representation of pronunciation at worst. In the *series* of "nonsense alphabets" that Lear presents, then, the letters' arrangement and rearrangement in parallel with an array of words (and usually illustrations) reinforces the apparent importance of alphabetical order even as it subverts the significance of any one repetition.

Not that there's anything wrong with teaching alphabetical order, since – however arbitrary it may be – it was already serving bureaucratic functions in the nineteenth century and organizing dictionaries, those quintessentially English triumphs of order over the disorder of language. But alphabetical order doesn't have any necessary relationship to the letters' orthographic functions, which is the alphabet book's *ostensible* pedagogical object. More to the point, in the synecdochal format both the sound(s) and the name of each letter must hover in the dialectical space between silent text and speech, a space which sometimes can only be filled by social demonstration, as when a teacher reads aloud to a pupil. Lear capitalizes on the hypocrisy of this situation, and its susceptibility to nonsensical inversions, by staging oral interventions. Examples abound in the alphabets included in his 1871 collection, of which two, the first and third in the *Nonsense Songs,* consist of a series of illustrated objects paired with quatrains. (The second in the series, on the other hand, resembles a game of Doublets,[156] wherein Lear constructs a series of nonsense words by substituting a succession of letters.) The two quatrain-based alphabets begin "A was an Ant" and "A was an Ape," and after each quatrain the pertinent alphabetical letter is repeated with an emphatic exclamation point: "a! Nice little Ant!" and "a! Funny old Ape!"[157] That concluding statement operates almost as a parody of enthusiasm, which signals an important contextual shift from the task of reading instruction to the play of a nonsense alphabet. But more importantly, this implicit vocalization has no apparent motivation – beyond play, of course – except

[156] Also known as Word-Links or Word Ladders, Doublets was actually invented by Lewis Carroll and a series was published in *Vanity Fair* starting in the issue published on March 29, 1879. The game involves transforming a starting word into a goal word by producing a series of words, changing only one letter at a time. Martin Gardner provides the following example: "Carroll… evolved MAN from APE in six steps: APE ARE ERE ERR EAR MAR MAN" (196). For more on "Doublets," see Martin Gardner, "Word Ladders: Lewis Carroll's Doublets."

[157] The published versions of these alphabets may well have drawn on at least one nonsense alphabet apparently written around 1862. Later published in facsimile by Bertram Rota, the "Rhymes of Nonsense" composed for "R. C. Blencowe" includes many of the same objects as illustrated examples, with similar accompanying rhymes, and also anticipates the arrangement of "a capital letter, the drawing, the verse, another (script) capital letter or lower-case letter, followed by a final 'punch' line" (Hofer *Rhymes* 7).

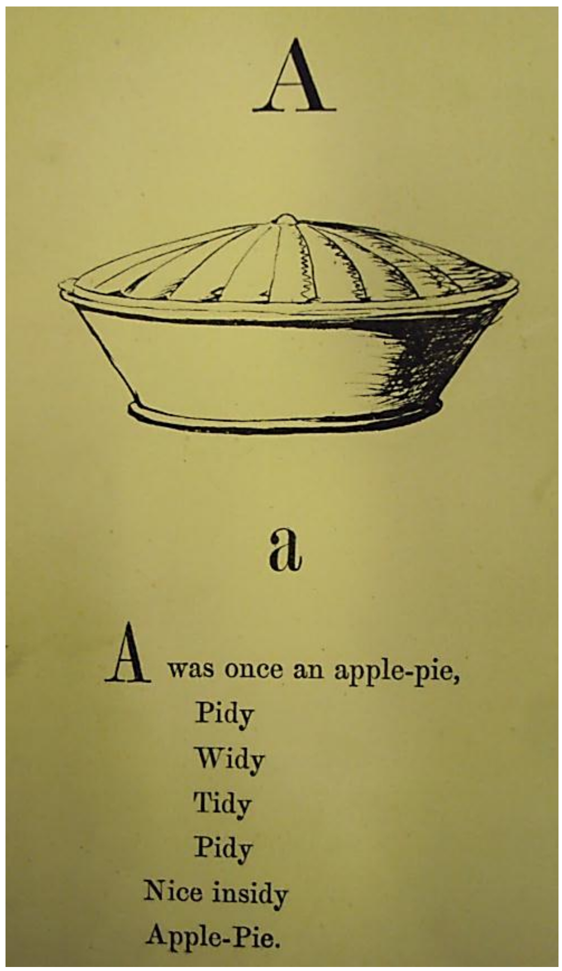
perhaps to highlight the impossibility of using printed text, which is silent, to demonstrate how to speak the *name* of a letter, rather than one of its phonetic uses. One can simply look at the conclusion of any of these rhymes and realize how unhelpful the example word is for setting up a pre-reader to vocalize the two concluding lines, although some are worse than others. For instance, where "Z was some zinc / So shiny and bright, / Which caused you to wink / In the sun's merry light," we might think of how differently Americans and British folk denote the letter "Z," and reasonably expect stumbles over "z! / Beautiful zinc!" The closing line of the quatrain at "U" in that same alphabet creates confusion in a different way, but with similar efficiency: "u! / Useful old urn!" The line includes three different pronunciations for the letter "u," as well as an invitation to speak the letter's name. Demonstration takes on a self-defeating cast when examples merely accumulate without being, like the urn, "useful."

By revolving around such demonstrations, however, the alphabet book format structurally reinforces the general sense that printed language, and alphabet-based communication is a well-ordered system – a façade which Lear explodes through the operations of nonsense. However, thus far, I have addressed comparatively little of what marks his alphabets as nonsense, and this is largely because he typically adheres to the generic formal constraints of *non*-nonsense alphabet verse. For instance, very few non-words spring out of his three quatrain-based alphabets – a third beginning "A was an Arch" appeared in *Laughable Lyrics* in 1877, supplementing the two in his 1871 collection of *Nonsense*. By contrast, his correspondence is peppered with such coinages, including entire letters written in incoherent gibberish (Lehmann 33-34). When nonsense words do appear within these otherwise well-ordered systems, they can seem like clumsy solutions to the challenges of sustained rhyming. For instance, Lear's invention seems to have failed him at an "S," so "S was the sugar-tongs / Nippity-nee, / To take up the sugar / To put in our tea. / S! / Nippity Nee!"[158] This rhyme's singular status as the only one (within this particular alphabet) to include a nonsense word frames it as a kind of failure. This is in contrast with the purposeful mistake, identifiable as such *because* it is repeated, and which Susan Stewart identifies as a

[158] I interpret the nonsense words as the *aural* equivalent for the *visual* action of "nipping" or selecting sugar cubes with the tongs, a sort of variation on onomatopoeia.

common feature of nonsense (*Nonsense* 206).[159] Overtly intentional incompetence is a cue that signals "This is play," and shifts the context of the entire work from the serious domain of education, to that of the playground, where no justifications for activity are needed.

The effect of the "purposeful mistake" is perhaps most apparent in the Doublets-like alphabet that begins "A was once an apple-pie," and which was published as "Nonsense Alphabet No. 2" in *Nonsense Songs* in 1871 (Figure 25). Even this nonsense alphabet, which features many more nonsense



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 25. "A was once an apple pie" from "Nonsense Alphabet No. 2"in *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets*

[159] Cammaerts makes the same point with regard to Lear's nonsense drawings: "No artist or connoisseur will question the intentional character of [Lear's] mistakes" (67).

words than any of Lear's other published nonsense alphabets, reflects a commitment to repetition (or repetition with a difference) and to reliable formal patterns that positions "errors" as alternative or experimental uses of printed text. The opening line sets up expectations for a very familiar reading experience, since an alphabet song beginning "A apple pie" had been in circulation in print since at least 1743 – that year, M. Cooper included the piece of oral tradition, also known as the "Tragical Death of Apple Pie," in an illustrated chapbook primer titled *The Child's New Play-thing.* After the familiar opening line, however, Lear immediately introduces a completely new repetitive form for the rest of the piece, by veering into nonsense words: "A was once an apple-pie, / Pidy / Widy / Tidy / Pidy / Nice insidy / Apple-Pie." The neologisms closely resemble "real" or accepted words; unlike the use of "gibberish to hide the aural content" of a statement, Lear's nonsense words function as lexemes that might theoretically make their way into general circulation, if a critical mass of people could agree on the meaning. For instance, the phrase "Nice insidy" seems clearly derived from "nice inside," a plausible description of a treat like apple pie, and the Doublets-like series of letter substitutions begins with a nonsense word that was clearly created by changing the ending of the word "pie," to form "Pidy." The "nonsense operations" on display here, that is, the act of generating nonsense from sense, are not only apparently spontaneous, but they are also readily *apparent*: as in Doublets, the base form for the newly-generated word is so visible that we have a complete inversion of the rationalists' efforts to hide the considerable work of regularizing printed language.

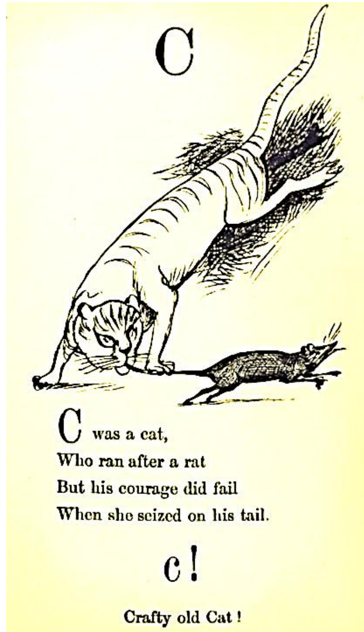
Nonsense words' resemblance to sense, and the apparently willful move *away* from real words, reveals the text's socially-transgressive priorities buried within a socially-conservative abecedarian format: rhythm, rhyme, sound, and play over real-world utility. More alarmingly (or more nonsensically!) these operations destabilize the distinction between sensical and nonsensical words: after two nonsense words, even a real word like "Tidy" becomes tainted by association, because it is generated by the momentum of rhyming rather than by the rational construction of a linguistic sign with a real referent. The rest of the alphabet follows this same pattern of nonsense-making: "C was once a little cake, / Caky, / Baky / Maky / Caky, / Taky Caky, / Little Cake!" and "P was once a little pump, / Pumpy /

Slumpy / Flumpy / Pumpy / Dumpy, Thrumpy / Little Pump!" are both representative selections. Even X gets this treatment: "X was once a great king Xerxes, / Xerxy / Perxy / Turxy / Xerxy / Linxy Lurxy / Great King Xerxes!" By embracing non-words so enthusiastically, Lear rejects the convention that encourages alphabet books to incorporate established and especially familiar words, a practice which embeds the letters' usage in similarly familiar and established forms of print. As part of that scripted pedagogical process, the use of letters to *repeat* or *reproduce* established patterns, especially in printed forms of language, is hierarchized over their ability to create a bridge between speech and text.[160] In this most oral of his printed alphabets, Lear implicitly inverts that hierarchy, and reasserts letters' ability to be combined on the fly in new and unexpected ways, to be used for play that ends where it began.

Formal play with language is complemented in most of Lear's alphabets by absurd content, and especially by personification. Whether verbal or visual, that personification is a crucial gesture toward absurdity, in a format that already accommodated arbitrary groupings without necessarily earning the label of nonsense. Only the rhyming text reveals the nonsensical personification that he deploys in his three quatrain alphabets and the nonsense-word-laden "A was once an apple-pie." In every case, the illustrations are unrefined but more naturalistic than stylized,[161] while the text clearly imbues animals with human characteristics. For instance, "C was… a Crafty old cat!" whose "courage did fail" when she finally caught her rat (Figure 26); the Ape we meet at the beginning of one alphabet "stole some white tape / And tied up his toes / In four beautiful bows" (Figure 27); one "E was an elephant, / Stately and wise"; another "P was a pig" whose "tail was too curly, / And that made him surly."

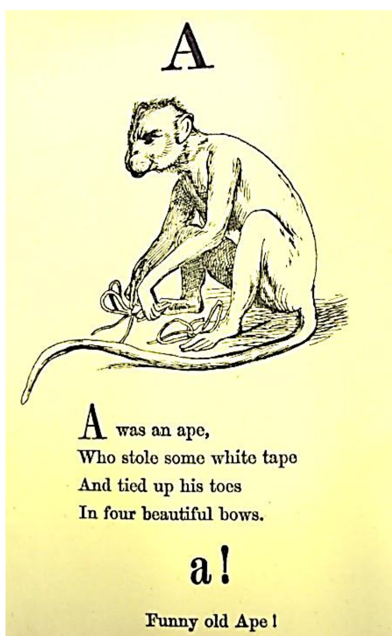
[160] The latter function is nominally prioritized by pairing letters with words that begin with that letter. But the procedure simplifies letters' usage to the point of misrepresentation.

[161] The Kite at "K," which has eyes, may be an exception. But it may also be a feature of real kites rather than a Learian intervention.



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 26. "C was a… Crafty old Cat!" from Lear's "Nonsense Alphabet No. 1"
in *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets*



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 27. "A was an Ape" from Lear's "Nonsense Alphabet No. 3"
in *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets*

These operations of nonsense are conveyed both visually and verbally in his “Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes,” with its many anthropomorphized animals. Featuring a series of brief prose poems instead of quatrains, the “Twenty-six Nonsense Pictures and Rhymes” are populated with anthropomorphized animals, except for a few significant deviations like the Yongy-bonghy-bo. It was in this alphabet that “Daisy” Ward and her brother first met, but only in passing, the “Dolomphious Duck, / who caught Spotted Frogs for her dinner / with a Runcible Spoon” (Figure 28) and “the Lively Learned Lobster, who mended his own Clothes with a Needle and Thread.” Levi has also noticed the consistent strain of anthropomorphization in “Twenty-Six Rhymes,” and reminds us that this particular nonsense alphabet arose, not from any deliberate pedagogical intervention, but gradually, and as a semi-spontaneous series of compositions for a child whom Lear met “by chance” while staying in a hotel (Levi 66). Nonetheless, the alphabet proved to be a strong binding agent, especially once it was transferred from “spontaneous drawings” to print culture.

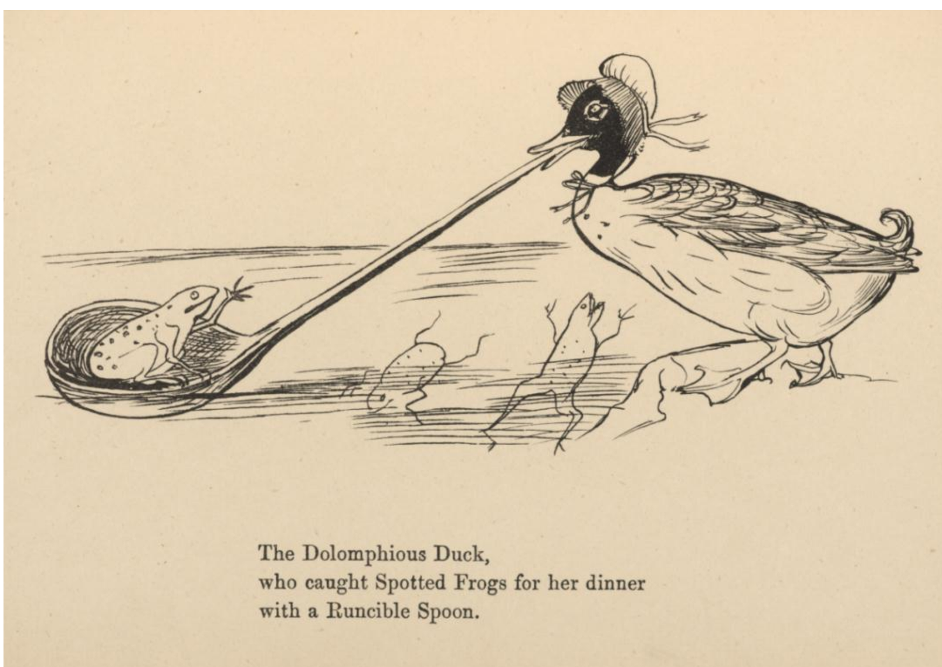


Figure 28. “The Dolomphious Duck” from Lear’s “Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures”

As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the alphabet is robustly promiscuous, capable of flourishing in a wide variety of printed, social, and commercial environments. By the 1860s, shortly before Lear's nonsense alphabets made their way from private hands to the public, a flood of toy books issued by publishers like Routledge and Warne had exploited the alphabetical array format as an occasion for spectacle, sometimes burying the letterforms in a flood of visual and verbal ornament, in keeping with the alphabet's aspirational status as an occasion for "festivity" (Crain 86). Following this "more is more" approach, and given the diffuse nature of the genre, illustrated abecedarian nonsense might take many and varied forms, even when combined with the regularizing force of alphabetical order. Lear's commitment to multimedia forms of expression is manifested elsewhere by the more than half a dozen illustrated travel journals that he published,[162] and his nonsense alphabets would seem poised to call forth a similarly integrated approach. As Ann Colley put it, "To talk about Lear without displaying his… nonsense drawings… is unfair because for Lear words and images are always inseparable" (*Critics* xii). However, Lear clearly found language rules to be more susceptible to the "operations of nonsense" than visual rules, at least at the level of the alphabet. Sewell, along with other theorists of the field, has often concluded that "nonsense is largely a verbal matter" (*Field* 3) or even that "Nonsense is a game with words" (*Field* 128).[163] The illustrations for his limericks offered more sites for Lear to deploy those operations than his nonsense alphabets and verses did, since illustrations for his nonsense alphabets are often fairly straightforward representations of the nouns described, rendered in sketchy outline. Indeed, rather than serving as enticements to reluctant pupils, they seem to pass that traditional role back to the playful verses, inverting the hierarchy of "serious text" over "playful" (and developmentally prior) visual modes

[162] According to Noakes's bibliography, he published seven during his lifetime over the course of almost thirty years: *Views in Rome and its Environs* (London: Thomas McLean, 1841); *Illustrated Excursions in Italy* (London: Thomas McLean, 1846); *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851); *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria &c.* (London: Richard Bentley, 1852); *Views in the Seven Ionian Islands* (London: Edward Lear, 1863) and *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Corsica* (London: Robert John Bush, 1870); see Noakes *Wanderer* 343-344 and "Lear's Travels" in Noakes *Royal Academy* 105-122.

[163] The question of non-verbal "nonsense" is addressed and typically dismissed by theorists of the field. Hendrik van Leeuwen notes the possibility for "liaison" between the two forms, but more helpfully points out that satire seems to occupy the space where "visual nonsense" might plausibly flourish (73-74).

of communication. Even the “nonsense drawings” accompanying his abecedarian writings may be seen as “inversions” of a sort: while Lear’s nonsense alphabets are inversions of the relationship between play and instruction, the drawings are inversions of Lear’s own “serious” art with its commitment to precise and accurate documentation of nature (Liebert 22). He had absorbed this approach to representing the physical world from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as part of his tutelage under William Holman Hunt.[164] Or as Hofer put it, the “nonsense drawings are the very antithesis” of his natural history and topographical works (*Teapots* 12).[165] Lear implicitly excises perspective (Colley “Reversals” 289-290),[166] and with it, some of the references to the real world that typically anchor an alphabet book’s educational functions. Alphabet books are particularly effective at demonstrating how scale operates as a highly-conventionalized feature of iconic representation – and how play or error with perspective can undermine the efficacy of those conventions. The catalogue “array” format brings together disparate objects and demands that their visual representations fit into a regularized space, regardless of their true relative sizes – for instance, King Xerxes becomes as large as the whale at “W” in two of Lear’s alphabets in *Nonsense Songs* (1871) (Figures 29 and 30), and none of the alphabetical illustrations include a background, completing the effect of “inversion” when they are juxtaposed with his topographical works.

[164] For an account of Lear’s engagement with the Brotherhood, see particularly “Chapter 8: Pre-Raphaelite” in Noakes *Wanderer* 103-120.

[165] Ann Colley makes a similar assertion: “oppositions and inversions [are] suggested by the labor of the serious work, on the one hand, and the casualness and spontaneity of the humorous pieces, on the other” (“Reversals” 287).

[166] Liebert produces a similar description: “His nonsense drawings are totally antithetical [‘to Lear’s serious drawings and paintings”] – loose, free, imaginative, unconfined by perspective” (22).

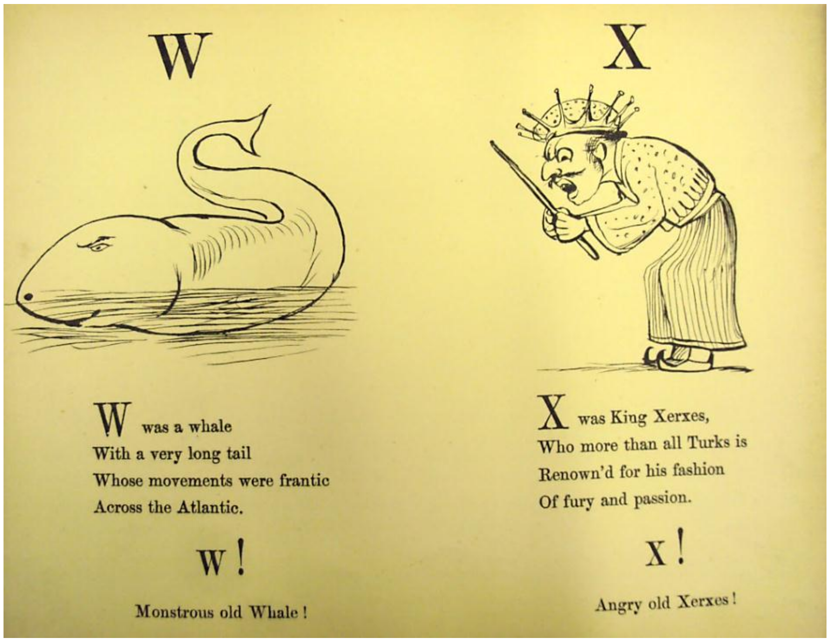


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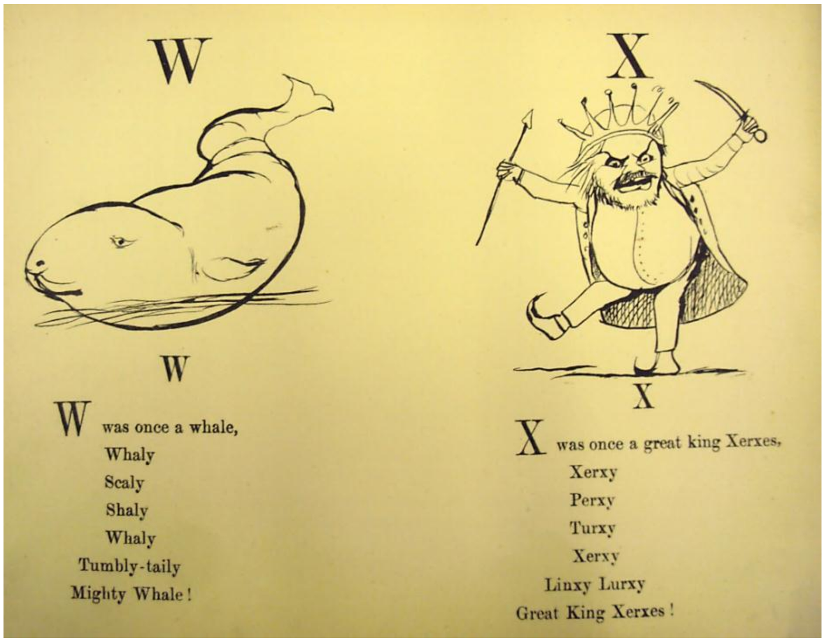
Figure 29. a whale and King Xerxes from Lear's "Nonsense Alphabet No. 1"



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 30. a whale and King Xerxes from Lear's "Nonsense Alphabet No. 3"

All but one of the *illustrated* nonsense alphabets that Lear published were arrays, and he significantly preserved this structuring effect by very rarely illustrating nonsense words within that context. As a result, the operations of nonsense work upon learned conventions of artistic practice, and the evaluation of artistic accomplishment, rather than interrogating the limits of visual representation. Eric Partridge's survey of nonsense neologisms suggest that there was already a bias in the nonsense system toward nouns (173), and many alphabet book composers avoided the need to convey motion, to or to indirectly represent states of being, by restricting themselves to arrays of nouns. Objects were simply much easier to depict in a recognizable fashion. This bias persisted despite distortions in scale that left objects, as Crain puts it, "atomized, adrift on the page, unmodulated by any assessment or evaluation beyond their association to a letter of the alphabet" (93). But Lear very rarely exploited the shared disposition of nonsense and alphabet books toward representing nouns. Even if nonsense words are impossible to depict according to naturalistic standards, he often did so in his nonsense verse songs – drawing, for instance, the "Pobble who has no toes" as well as the "Jumblies." To borrow Charles Peirce's semiotic distinctions, the symbolic linguistic sign "Pobble" for instance, has no ready iconic equivalent.[167] And in a similar fashion, no one can judge the resemblance between Lear's drawing and a "real" Yonghy-bonghy-bo (Figure 23), which is to my knowledge the sole example of a nonsense word being illustrated in his alphabets. Not coincidentally, this figure eventually found a (more appropriate?) home in melancholy narrative verse. The one piece of abecedarian narrative nonsense that Lear published was actually left unillustrated, perhaps waiting for another artist to take on the difficult task of plucking words from the story. So these alphabet books decline to critique the iconic presumptions of "illustration" in the sense of visually duplicating a verbal image – an issue especially tantalizing when representing the imaginary. Instead, we find Lear playing with the supposed superiority of (his own) artistic training in photorealist representation of the sensuous world. And once again, at the level of forms and procedures nonsense has its way (Stewart *Nonsense* 89).

[167] For an overview of Peirceian semiotics, see Atkin.

However, Lear was *never* the kind of illustrator who extracted a telling moment from a narrative and held it up for elaboration and further perusal. He was a master of forms of illustration that were singularly resistant to merging with narrative: the zoological and the topographical. His travel journals represented a potential point of intersection between landscape and narrative; that is for "literal" illustration as Victorians understood it, and as they had often seen it in novels. But Lear resisted that expectation, as his journals routinely illustrated "sights" and "views" rather than "scenes" of city life, much less the actual scenes that Lear had witnessed, experienced, and/or described in the very journal text printed alongside the images. Thus, Rowena Fowler has characterized the travel journals as presenting a dichotomous text-image relationship, a discrete and complementary set of functions on the page (*Cretan Journal*). Alphabet books, on the other hand, trafficked in visual/verbal redundancy. And for Lear, that redundancy – the conventional equation between a word and a static image – must remain basically intact in order for him to reorganize educational priorities, and call attention to the way that the oral, performative component of literacy education has been subordinated to silence and utility in the educational push toward textual literacy. It is thus ironic that Lear's 1877 "Nonsense Alphabet" (in *Laughable Lyrics*) drew praise for his having "carri[ed] out the true idea of the exquisite and supreme simplicity required to be illustrated by an 'Alphabet.' One idea, and one only, occurs, as it should do, in these instances" ("Gift Books" 664). Lear's "supreme simplicity" is deceptive, however, as even slight variations from convention can pull on a loose thread in the fabric of alphabetical literacy, and unravel the whole delicate weave of printed language. Rather than an act of destruction, however, Lear's act was one of literographic relocation, taking the serious work of literacy inculcation to the potential pleasures of nonsense and oral performance.

B. THE PLAYFUL END(S) OF LEAR'S NONSENSE

I suggested at the outset that Lear was simultaneously an inventive writer/illustrator, and an imitative one. The effects upon his audience were similarly contradictory, as he was praised for bringing joy to adults, and even elevating nonsense to the level of "Fine Art," at the same time that his books were assumed to be trivial overtures to children from a writer "who loved to see little folks merry," as the poem on his first *Book of Nonsense* described the author. Both audiences routinely consumed the same material, leading Ruskin to recommend Lear's *Book of Nonsense* for "the amusement of families" without distinguishing between the children and adults of the household (reply to "Choice of Books"). Another contemporary critic passionately praised a Lear's "immortal *Book of Nonsense* and its supplements" for the "enormous mass of merriment and wisdom" that they "added to the gaiety of these islands" ("Nonsensical Books," 388) and there were other, similar expressions of gratitude for the "universal delight" provided by Lear's works (Strachey 335). But some critics saw fit to make different distinctions, according to their judgment of Lear's intentions as well as the actual content of the published material. This sometimes led them to conclude that the *Nonsense* books were aimed squarely at a child audience, regardless of whether they knew that many of the verses, and the nonsense alphabets in particular, had originally been written for particular children. For instance, Lear's obituary writer in the *Saturday Review* recalled that Lear's "delightful *Books of Nonsense*…. have amused successive generations of children" ("Edward Lear" 130).

Lear's biographers have also generally assumed that because many of his nonsenses – and especially the alphabets – were originally drawn for specific children, then the published versions were *also* intended for children. Typically, Noakes speculates that "Perhaps his friends persuaded him to publish them so that other people's children could share their enjoyment" (*Wanderer* 70). Both contingent and formal cues clearly fed into these critical conclusions. Among the former, we should not forget the structuring effect of the commercial environment. Lear's publishers tended to be children's book specialists (Routledge, Warne, and Bush), and thus reviewers would have had some paratextual encouragement to approach his works as being intended a for a child audience.

But such devices are, and were, insufficient to limit the prospective wider audience to children. At the very least, we should take note of the simple fact that Lear *also* wrote a great deal of nonsense to his *adult* friends in letters.[168] Contemporary critics – Ruskin prominent among them – owned up to their own enjoyment of nonsense, and declared their affection or even admiration for Lear's skill in producing material that appealed to adults as well as children. For instance, one reviewer of *Nonsense Songs*¸ which was published in 1871 and included three illustrated alphabets, judged that "it ought to be most welcome among all young folk, almost down to the baby"; moments later, he suggested that the childlike perspective could be read as parody, declaring Lear's "Nonsense botany" to be "a great improvement on serious botany," and fit for "the Senate of the University of London, as a subject of their matriculation examination" ("Nonsense Songs" 814). Edmund Strachey took a more serious tack in his lengthy review of "Nonsense as a Fine Art" in the *Quarterly Review,* and attempted to rehabilitate the status of nonsense by recovering an exalted genealogy. He cited examples of literary geniuses who had worked in the medium, including Chaucer, Swift, Butler, Milton, and even Shakespeare: "in Nonsense, as in everything else… our greatest artist" (346). This was not the first time that Lear's name was used in such exalted company, as another review of *Laughable Lyrics* linked him to "Milton, Scott, and Aeschylus."[169] Whether one accepted Strachey's high evaluation of Lear as "the creator of a new and important kind of that Nonsense for the honours of which the pen and the pencil contend," (357-358), or not, reviews alone suggested that the texts circulated among mixed or parallel audiences, even if they don't explain the mechanisms of that appeal.

Comments about Lear's illustrations, as well as the entire texts, even more clearly reflect the arbitrary, contradictory, and highly-contextualized character of age-based audience conventions. As Ann Colley points out, his nonsense drawings have been variously interpreted as childish and stylized,

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[168] For example, one letter that Lear wrote to his friend Evelyn Baring, who was then in his thirties, consists entirely of nonsense words: it opens with "Thrippy Pilliwinx, - Inkly tinksy pobblebookle abblesquabs?" ends with "Flinkywisty pomm, Slushypipp" and declares "beebul trimble flosky!" in the middle (qtd in Noakes *Wanderer* 189).

[169] This reviewer was specifically praising his skill in evoking the exoticism of distant lands. See "Christmas Books" *The Saturday Review* 734.

depending on the critics' context and the stakes of his/her evaluation. Hofer's characterizations exemplify the social mobility of Lear's illustrations. He claimed that Lear "directed his nonsense drawings… from the start at children… But it was no time before his contemporaries fell under the spell of Lear's charm" (*Teapots* 12). Hofer also describes them as displaying "the unspoiled, unconscious simplicity of a small child," while insisting (rather grandiosely) that "only long training… in every kind of drawing… gave Lear the ability, as it did Rembrandt, to express himself also in the simplest terms" (*Teapots* 11, 12). Similarly, M groz describes them as "marvellously child-like in manner (though much better drawn than anything done by a child)," so that "the non-human forms constantly reveal a highly sophisticated technique subdued to the nonsensical *élan*" (178). Strachey almost immediately came to Lear's defense as well, scoffing that "only an artist could have given with such a free hand all the grotesque forms in which he pretends to emulate the awkward scrawls of the school-boy on his slate" (359). Lear's nonsense drawings certainly reject conventional notions of beauty and form, and I use the term "reject" advisedly here, since Lear had proven himself capable of precise draftsmanship in his previous zoological drawings, and in his subsequent topographical studies and landscape paintings – although his landscapes could be, as one reviewer put it, "unequal in technical perfection" ("Edward Lear" 130). Thus, evaluations of Lear's nonsense drawings hinged on perceptions of intention, of Lear's purposeful failure to render human figures in a natural way – a feature of the context rather than the texts. In this respect, then, the operations of visual nonsense match those of literary nonsense that, as Stewart pointed out, "often involves a kind of flaunted, a *skilled*, incompetence" (*Nonsense* 206).

To some extent, the vagaries of reproduction may have been responsible for the low esteem accorded his nonsense drawings. He preferred to work with lithography throughout his career because it did not require an engraver to interpret his drawings; at one point he confessed his belief that "there is some quality in my drawings untransferable to wood engraving" (qtd in Noakes *Royal Academy* 164). But the later books of nonsense were more affordable thanks to such interventions. Mrs. Chanler insisted that in her holographic copy of "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures," "the drawing is much finer, more masterly than would appear in the rough reproductions in the published copies of his work" (30).

My own examination of the originals, now in the Houghton Library at Harvard, substantiates her claim; the pen lines are literally finer and less blunt, which allows for more graceful outlines and subtle articulation. No doubt the publishers inevitably intervened in the reproduction processes in ways that would be lost to most modern readers. However, the "masterly" effects and details that Lear's illustrations lost through reproduction were compensated, at least in part, by the gains on the commercial and critical fronts that depended upon increased circulation. Circulation was gradually expanded in succeeding editions, from the (now extremely rare) lithographic first edition, to the wood-engraved third edition of the *Nonsense Book* in 1861. The shifting terms of economic exclusivity created cross-currents with audience conventions, as original and specific child audiences were supplanted or supplemented by adult audiences for the published versions.[170]

Knowing something of the material circumstances surrounding Lear's topsy-turvy pseudo-pedagogical aids, we are now in a particularly strong position to understand how Lear's "rule-breaking" approach (Ponterotto 154) to the alphabet book liberates the form from both educational imperatives and the audience conventions associated with them. This liberation is paradoxically effected by recalling childhood's increasingly institutionalized associations with education (especially literacy instruction); and, by invoking specifically Romantic childhood through its prerogative for creativity and play. As Gray rightly points out, "Nonsense has… been compared to poetry… more often than it has been related to other kinds of Victorian humor" (175). But play emerges from Lear's nonsense alphabets from two complementary directions: as the ironic byproduct of inverting conventional literacy instruction, and as an independent feature of nonsense verse. Elizabeth Sewell explored the latter effect in her essay on "Nonsense Verse and the Child," but did not address the nonsense alphabets as a specific subset. Those

[170] In his account of Lear's publishing history, John Lehmann identifies meaningful differences between Lear's original drawings for the *Book of Nonsense* and the published versions, claiming that the version that reached the public – via publishers who specialized in children's books – tended to have had their rougher, more violent edges smoothed away by the processes of engraving (56). Lear's favorite mode of reproduction was lithography, despite its cost, because he could manipulate most of its steps himself. Especially before drawings were routinely copied onto wood with photographic methods, illustrators frequently found themselves pitted against their engravers in the effort to reproduce a creative vision – and engravers, in turn, criticized illustrators for failing to appreciate the limits of the medium.

particular texts' *inversion* of acculturating processes was widely (if only implicitly) recognized, by the resistance to reviewing *any* nonsense as a pedagogical tool. Angus Davidson includes in his biography of Lear an excerpt from a letter in which Lear complains about a "Madame de Bunsen" who actually deemed the nonsense books unsuitable for her children to view, since they might have misdirected their vulnerable "sense of the beautiful." Lear also described himself as being liable, quite unapologetically so, for his "perversion" of children's grammar and spelling with his nonsense words, phonetic approaches, and other irregularities with printed language (Davidson 231). Nor did he necessarily need to apologize, since the alphabet books need not to be pedagogically useful (or even consistent) to be valuable to adults as well as children. A playful representation of the alphabet held out the possibility of uniting "the children [Lear] loved" and "the child he awoke in the adults who loved him," as Jackson blithely put it (xiii). Nonsense verse attracts both condemnation and celebration because it allows readers to occupy the position of pre-literate child – in the case of adult readers, a particularly Romantic devolution. In fact, these nonsense alphabets could be understood as a script for verbal play available to both children and adults because reading them is an act or performance of *non*-education, according to a rationalist developmental model that subordinated orality to print, and play to study.

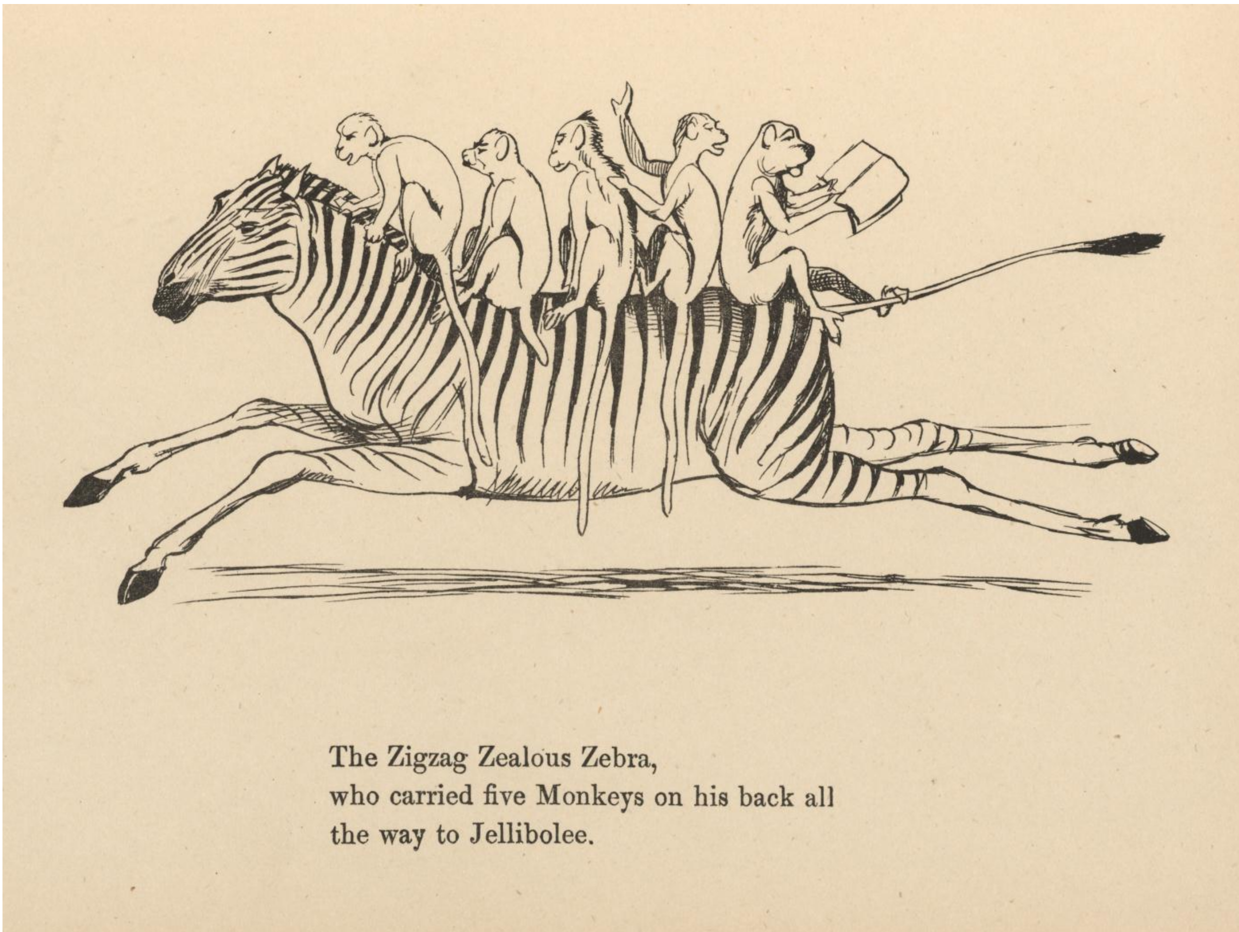
In previous chapters I have articulated how educational practices reflecting contemporary conceptions of literacy, and middle-class ambitions for literacy, were mutually interactive with conceptions of children and childhood; this feedback loop generated specific trends in representing the alphabet as well associations between the alphabet and children or childhood. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century in England, cognitive development and literacy acquisition were increasingly conflated, so that alphabetical literacy was increasingly "naturalized" as a task appropriate for young learners. This nostalgic mode of viewing childhood, or the past in general, as a lost semi-paradise superior to the present, is closely associated with the work of the Romantic poets Williams Wordsworth and Blake. As C. M. Bowra has most thoroughly documented in his work on *The Romantic Imagination*, numerous features of nonsense writing accord with Romantic perspectives, including emphasis on oral modes or aspects of verbal expression; investment in concrete and visual images rather than linguistic abstractions; and associations with the primitive, pre-rational, and/or childlike (literal romanticization of those states). At the extreme, ahistorical end of this theoretical perspective, Emile Cammaerts located innate illogic and even basic opposition to reason within the Child; thus, in his estimation, nonsense that refuses logic – or even just convention rooted in the "logic" of common sense – is part of an attempt to recover this child-perspective (17). Elizabeth Sewell also draws (somewhat tautologically) upon a Romantic view of childhood in her declaration "that there is a child in each one of us, and that Nonsense is what appeals to that audience" ("Child" 135) – her claim effectively a rephrasing of Wordsworth's "The Child is father of the Man." However, writing in the late 1880s, Edmund Strachey claimed that "the Lake Poets showed that they could at least recognize Nonsense-writing as a Fine Art" (355), and that "grown men and women, if they have not quite lost in worldliness the hearts of children, delight in [the books of *Nonsense*] no less than these" (358). Lear himself had implied in letters that he saw education as hostile to an understanding of nonsense, and viewed acculturation through education as a significant personal (and artistic) loss.[171] He also referred to himself as a child in diaries and letters, clearly identifying with some aspect of that perspective in his creative work (Sewell *Field* 135-136).

More importantly for our purposes, in Lear's nonsense alphabets the Romantic view of childhood as repository of personal and cultural history dovetailed with a crucial hermeneutic opposition between the *work* of education – including the "task" of learning how to read – and the Child's "natural" right to play. One of the most significant Romantic privileges accorded to childhood was that of play, with adults condemned to responsibility, productivity, and general "seriousness." (Of course, during a time of Factory Acts and education reform that gradually squeezed child workers out of the manufactories and into schoolrooms, the privilege of play was a largely *rhetorical* one. As Judith Plotz observes, "Romanticism uncouples the link between schooling and childhood; the more schooling, the less childhood" (31). In Chapter 5 I discuss how the tensions between Romantic visions of childhood, and Industrial-era schooling, registered in alphabet books composed after the Education Act of 1870.) As the nursery

[171] For instance, he declared in writing that "I am always thanking God that I was never educated, for it seems to me that 99% of those who are so, expensively and laboriously, have lost all before they arrived at my age" (Lear qtd in Jackson xiv).

became the conventional environment for representations of the alphabet, it also became a place for adults to access childhood and its associated concepts, objects, and experiences. Thus, rather than quarantining the alphabet to the nursery, nonsense and children's books remained available to adults as long as they adopted the role of visitors into the past, a space belonging to "others." In such instances, á la Sewell's formulation, children purportedly approached nonsense as a form assigned to their social location by nature while adults mentally traveled through time to access it. Lear formally reinforced these self-consciously archaic (that is, nostalgic) effects, evoking the eighteenth century through the woodcut character of his published lines, and through the use of eighteenth-century oral tradition (Mégroz 185), which includes at least one alphabet rhyme ("The Tragical Death of Apple Pie") as well the limerick form. Lear's alphabet-based nonsense appealed to adults precisely by presenting itself as play *in the past* in opposition to work *in the present* – that is, by advertising its status as spontaneous, ludic, and an end in itself rather than rational and productive

I will elucidate several examples of these dynamics at greater length, but we can most clearly see how educative work can be turned back upon itself in Lear's "Twenty-Six Nonsense Pictures and Rhymes." The rhyme's relative lack of ingenuity initially suggests that it will simply participate in a popular form of social reproduction at the level of literacy. The disproportionate body and *sui generis* originality of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo stand out so sharply because they offer a counterweight to Lear's aggressively familiar solution to the concluding letters – in addition to lamenting the plight of "X" in *Household Words*, our essayist had also observed that "Y… was always confined to a Yacht or a Yew Tree; and Z condemned for ever to be a Zebra or a Zany" ("Christmas Tree" 290). The animals' surprisingly uneventful experiments with human behavior have a similar leavening effect. Their concerns and activities would be almost boring if not for the unpredictable anthropomorphic factor, as these animals with alliterative descriptions go about the business of dressing, feeding, and entertaining themselves. As Liebert points out, "the drawings of animals dressed as humans is rather unimaginative compared drawings of the same genre by other artists, such as Grandville" (214). It is difficult to rouse *sustained* interest in the doings of "The Bountiful Beetle, who always carried a Green Umbrella when it didn't rain, and left it at home when it did"; "The Kicking Kangaroo, who wore a Pale Pink Muslin dress with Blue spots,"; or the "The Perpendicular Purple Polly, who read the Newspaper and ate Parsnip Pie with his Spectacles." This is no doubt why Lear wisely gives us such brief accountings of them. Once the charming shock of the appearance of the anthropomorphized animal has passed, the anticlimaxes of their activities throw the reader back into the "everyday"-ness of the alphabet book, and its pedagogical agenda. That return does not effect a realignment with that agenda, though, because the absurdity of the anthropomorphization functions as an important literographic cue, shifting both the context and, by extension, the appropriate modes of interpretation – this is how we know that we're engaged in play, not the "task" of reading instruction. Indeed, the worlds of humans, animals, nonsense, and literacy converge most clearly, and most absurdly, in the conclusion of his menagerie tour in "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes," where we encounter the "Zigzag Zealous Zebra, / who carried five Monkeys on his back all / the way to Jellibolee" (Figure 31) (221). This page frames the whole endeavor as a commentary on the illustrated alphabet, and its (specious) relationship to a straightforward understanding of literacy. Not only does nonsense literally have the last word, but a representation of a monkey reading a book functions as a "tailpiece." That final, most-human monkey grabs the Zealous Zebra's tufted tail, which points our attention toward the end of Lear's book and the end of the alphabet, and on beyond monkey-reading into the world of human reading. At the same time, however, the Zebra himself rushes to the left, back into the absurd world of animals and nonsense, where this reading business is treated with much less gravity.



From the collections of the Printing and Graphic Arts Department,
Houghton Library, Harvard University: Typ 805LN3 71 (A).

Figure 31. "The Zigzag Zealous Zebra" from Lear's "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures"

As relevant as the topsy-turvy mode of anthropomorphization is to transforming the "sense" of conventional alphabet books into a Learian "nonsense alphabet," the fact remains that such uses of metaphor were (and are) common enough within *non*-nonsense forms of literature, including fables and related forms of children's literature. The personification of alphabetical letters themselves was, as we saw in Chapter 1, a routine feature of alphabet books after the mid-eighteenth century. Similarly, the act of coining words, while rarely undertaken in such profusion as in Lear's "A was once an apple-pie," can simply produce new words as well as nonsense. So, still following Stewart's analysis of "nonsense operations," I read Lear's anthropomorphization and word-invention as cues that his texts are scripting "play" (*Nonsense* 199), rather than study. In an alphabet book, play operates in contradistinction with the goal-oriented work of literacy instruction, which situates alphabet-based reading as a skill with social and commercial purposes, a means rather than an end in itself. In this respect, they resemble many of Lear's limericks, which conspicuously deviated from the traditional use of a "punch line" as the final line (Prickett 116) – or, as one contemporary reviewer put it, "a sting in its tail" ("Nonsense Lyrics" 1302) – and did not incorporate the mid-nineteenth-century form that introduced a new rhyme at the conclusion. Instead of moving toward wit at the conclusion of his limericks, Lear often simply repeated the first line.[172] This circularity reappears in his nonsense alphabets which, as discussed above, routinely repeated each letter – with emphasis! – at the conclusion of its accompanying rhyme. Lear's nonsense alphabets deserve their status as "nonsense" and as "play" because the content, as well as the form, so often lacks any apparent motivation, including narrative momentum. Thus, in the snapshots of surreal animal life in the "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes," fragments of narrative drop in and out of view without carrying significant emotional freight, without developing descriptions into actual characterizations or events – in short, without implying real-life reference or relevance, or the need for it. However, it does so with the attendant freight of educational context, which is lacking in the "continual stream" of so-called "light literature" that was available to adults during the Victorian era.[173] By extension, we find a Lear casting a dubious eye on the utility of textual literacy.

Similarly isolated "snapshots" of objects and events bound in Lear's earlier alphabets. We are told that "Q was a quail, / With a very short tail / And he fed upon corn / In the evening and morn"; that "V was a villa / Which stood on a hill / By the side of a river / And close to a mill"; and that "J was a Jug, / So pretty and white / With fresh water in it / At morning and night." With such banal literary events, Lear highlights the gap between actual narrative and the pseudo-narrative of alphabet rhymes. Many of these brief statements operate as closed circles of narrative that either imply their own conclusions at the

[172] Mégroz also notes this effect (185).

[173] Donald Gray documents this at length in "The Uses of Victorian Laughter." For the definition of "light literature" see Grey 151.

outset, or negate the beginning by the end. For instance, drawing almost at random from two of the alphabets from 1871, we find the following *faits accomplis*:

a) “O was an oyster / Who lived in his shell / If you let him alone / He felt perfectly well”;

b) “I was some ice / So white and so nice / But which nobody tasted, / And so it was wasted”;

c) “O was an orange / So yellow and round; / When it fell off the tree, / It fell down on the ground”;

d) “F was a fish, / Who was caught in a net, / But he got out again / And is quite alive yet.”

and perhaps the most detached of all,

e) “Q was a Quill / Made into a pen, / But I do not know where / And I cannot say when.”

Each of these letter-based verses are capsules of information in isolation, divorcing the world of the alphabet book from that of the reader and curtailing the alphabet rhyme’s educational utility. A related effect of belatedly-stunted verbalization is created by Lear’s use of “was” instead of “is” for all three of the synecdochal alphabets in his 1871 *Nonsense* collection. As slight as a change in tense may appear, it has a significant effect on how he locates the alphabet, and the literacy it purports to enable, with respect to both the reader and the real world. By declaring that “L was a Lily, / So white and so sweet / To see it and smell it / Was quite a nice treat!” Lear thrusts these experiences, and the letters to which they correspond, into the past and out of the reach of the reader. That reader gets the pleasure of experiencing the rhyme and its illustration, but in terms of literacy skills, he emerges with a (limited) grasp on what the letters *were,* and no guide for what they *are.* By using this construction, Lear exposes the self-defeating semantics of present-tense synecdoche: where the form seems to be promoting pronunciation, with the letters ostensibly pointing *out* of the book to objects and sounds in the real world (“L was a Lily”), they can just as easily reinforce separation between oral and printed forms of communication by withholding instructions for translating the latter into the former.

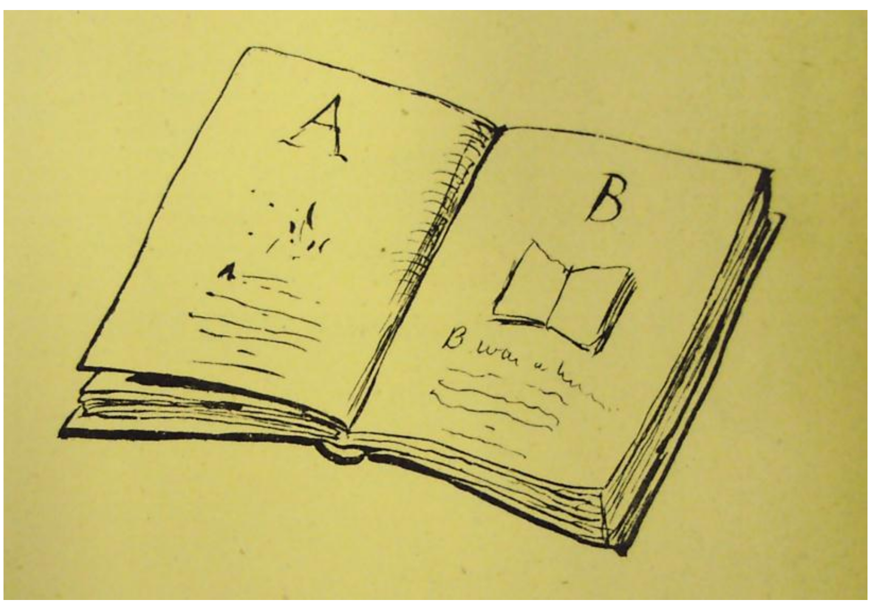
Far from promoting literacy as a tool of commerce or social interaction, Lear’s nonsense alphabets promote little except their own reading. “Nonsense Alphabet No. 2” offers an even more potent example of this, as nonsense words quite literally substitute for narrative: “I was once a bottle of ink, / Inky / Dinky / Thinky / Inky, / Blacky Minky / Bottle of Ink!” As I have suggested above by describing the visible "operations of nonsense," one might, with effort, extract a description of a particular bottle of ink from this, by drawing associations between ink and other words – e.g. "black mink" and "think" – that might have given rise to Lear's neologisms. But narrative momentum is scarce at best, and it is rhythm and rhyme that provides the impetus to keep moving along the lines of text, as each nonsense word partly echoes and partly deviates from the one that went before: "Shrimpy" becomes "Nimpy" becomes "Flimpy," with linguistic change and variation at its *most basic level,* apparently indiscriminate changes in beginning letters, serving in the stead of deliberate use of language. Alphabet rhymes, including Lear's own, suggest that the first letter of a word is by far the most important one, the one that should be used to explain how this technology of printed communication works in the first place. But Lear simultaneously undercuts that implication, by producing a series of nonsense words simply by repeatedly altering the first letter of the word.

His last two published nonsense alphabets demonstrate this even more clearly than those which appeared in the 1871 *Nonsense* collection because they incorporate even more narrative organizational structure, but nonetheless still refuse to describe actual change or development. In the unimaginatively-titled "Nonsense Alphabet" published in *Laughable Lyrics* (the only one to feature illustrations *not* by Lear himself), we proceed through the alphabet by reading a series of quatrains describing common objects, some of which would be familiar from Lear's other quatrain-based alphabets, published in 1871. But we have something new here in the narratorial voice that refers to "Papa" at least once in each couplet (Levi 66). The repetition constructs a semi-coherent narrative voice that frames twenty-six objects – here catalogued in an "alphabetical array" – through the lens of this relationship, and effectively ventriloquizes a child who is describing only one "Papa." We may even assemble a patchy portrait of this Papa, as each quatrain describes some object belonging to him or his life. Thus we have twenty-six opportunities to witness his activities ("B was a Bottle blue, / Which was not very small; / Papa he filled it full of beer, / And then he drank it all"); imagine what he looks like ("H was Papa's new Hat; / He wore it on his head; / Outside it was completely black, / But inside it was red"); and hear his opinions: "L was a fine new Lamp; / But when the wick was lit, / Papa he said, 'This light ain't good! / I cannot read a bit!'"

As these particular extracts would suggest, though, what we can glean about Papa from this motley selection of details casts him as an irrational, not-particularly educated individual, given to gustatory indulgence. In addition to the beer at “B,” the letters “E,” “F,” “G,” “J,” “M,” “N,” “P,” “Q,” and “T” all describe Papa in the act of acquiring or consuming food and drink, and at “V” a “Villain” who “stole a piece of beef” prompts him to cry out “O! dreadful man!” His particular propensity for consuming alcohol – a bottle of beer “Which was not very small” and “a Tumbler full / of Punch all hot and good” may account for some of Papa’s more head-scratching decisions, like that described at G: “G was Papa’s new Gun; / He put it in a box; / And then he went and bought a bun / And walked about the docks.” (One reviewer identified the quatrain at “G” as the *non sequitur par excellence*.) (“Gift Books” 664). But I alluded to his apparent lack of education above, because the rhyme at “L” suggests that the problem with Papa’s reading is illiteracy, not light – after all, the “Lamp” is a “fine new” one. This inference is reinforced by his bad grammar at “P”: “P was a little Pig, / Went out to take a walk; / Papa he said, ‘If Piggy dead, / He’d all turn into Pork!” Furthermore, he is apparently ignorant of a popular solution (Lear’s preferred one in fact) to the problem of X in illustrated alphabets: “X was King Xerxes, whom / Papa much wished to know; / But this he could not do, because / Xerxes died long ago.” At the end of this poem, Papa shows no signs of change or prospects for it, perhaps because he is committed to nonsense, and thus to play, rather than to work, which literacy acquisition would require. He performs actions, but he does not grow or change, and the entire poem remains an entertaining *performance* of description in isolation, a picaresque accumulation of details and small anecdotes that, however briefly compelling, never coalesce into purpose, like characterization in a novel or even a narrative poem. Far from arguing for the functionality of alphabetical literacy, this “Nonsense Alphabet” makes the suggestion that an illiterate individual is an entertaining one, but paradoxically requires literacy to make that claim. As a result, printed communication emerges as a neutral skill that apparently can’t manufacture a human purpose except that of (pleasantly) passing the time.

Lear’s final published nonsense alphabet, which is also the only one that takes the form of a narrative, makes this point most aggressively. It begins “A tumbled down, and hurt his Arm, against a bit of wood." The rest of the poem actually consists of dialogue, as it reports the letters' suggestions for how to best treat the letter A's infirmity: "D said, 'A Doctor should be fetched, and he would cure the arm,'"; "I said, 'Some Ice upon his head will make him better soon'"; and Y declares that "Some Yeast mixed up with salt would make a perfect plaster!" The litany of suggestions leads nowhere, since apparently none of them are tried. However, some alternatives to A's physical problem are significantly suggested: P proposes that "Some Poetry might be read aloud, to make him think" (270), while "S said, 'A Song should now be sung, in hopes to make him laugh!'" Although these moments might simply be seen as distractions from the task at hand, both S and P offer a meta-commentary on the function of the "Alphabet" itself. As important and valued as health is to the voices in this poem, thinking and even laughing are presented as equally appropriate responses to injury, perhaps even as a different *means* of promoting healing. More importantly, the benefits of poetry and song are manifested by the experience of the work, and are commensurate with its recitation, while the narrative it describes is ultimately a futile one. No physical improvement or healing for poor "A" is reported, except perhaps that of bringing the act of recitation to a close: at the end, the poem turn in upon itself by ventriloquizing the same schoolmaster who silences pupils at the close of their recitation of the alphabet: "Z said, 'Here is a box of Zinc! Get in, my little master! / We'll shut you up! We'll nail you down! We will, my little master! / We think we've all heard quite enough of this your sad disaster!" The difference between language play and literacy work appears here in the representation of cause and effect – or, more accurately, in the lack thereof. On one hand, many potential causes, the "work" of effecting improvement or a cure, are described without any action being taken or any health registering. Each suggestion only prompts another suggestion, so that work AND effects are forestalled without any necessary conclusion; in short, seriality trumps resolution. And on the other hand, this Nonsense "Alphabet" paradoxically refuses to *cause* thinking and/or laughing so much as it explicitly identifies itself as *performing* play: its only reason for being is to provide a script for the "little master" to resist the threat of being "shut up" and "nailed down" by recounting his "sad disaster." Communication becomes a means without an end except its own perpetuation.

As we will continue to see in subsequent chapters, the rising tide of alphabetical literacy in England spurred a growing familiarity with and interest in the forms of its reproduction and transmission. Alphabet books clearly operated in this capacity. Designers' self-consciousness about the collective need to represent the alphabet, both to rising generations and to those who determined their social priorities, repeatedly registered in alphabet books themselves as *illustrations of alphabet books* – often at the letter "B," which very frequently stood for "Book" and had done since the mid-eighteenth century in Cooper's *Child's New Plaything.* In Lear's "Nonsense Alphabet No. 1," he particularizes the familiar line of "B was a Book" through the illustration (Figure 32). Although the accompanying verse might describe a wide variety of books – "With a binding of blue / And pictures and stories / For me and for you. / b! / Nice little book" – the illustration clearly identifies this "Nice little book" as an alphabet book already familiar to its readers: he represents the *More Nonsense* book itself, turned open to the pages showing "A" and "B," with blurry ant aligned under the A, and, on the opposing page, yet another book turned open under this smaller "B." An infinite regress is threatened in two respects: firstly, only the limits of resolution



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 32. "nice little book" from Lear's "Nonsense Alphabet No. 1" in
Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets

stop us from pursuing an ever-shrinking series of "Nice little books" into the pages of still-smaller representations of the splayed Lear volume containing this very nonsense alphabet. Far from opening out onto a larger world of text, Lear here represents the alphabet as a vortex of interiority "for me and for you," pulling both the narrator and the reader into its apparently-endless depths, a space that paradoxically unfolds upon a perspective-free surface. And even as he transfixes the reader with a kind of visual "trick," Lear entraps him further by drawing attention to the endless dialectic between the visual and the verbal. He renders "literal illustration"[174] as extremely literal in this representation of an alphabet book, but not necessarily educative, since it is turned into itself rather than turned out toward social application. That is to say, Lear once again inverts the priorities of literacy instruction by declaring it an end in itself, and this message seems a potentially explosive one to give to the pre-literate.

Adults, however, may have very much enjoyed a nonsense alphabet as an end in itself for the same reasons that they enjoyed other aesthetic experiences. Contra Sewell's insistence that "Like a game, and unlike art, [Nonsense's] accent is on doing rather than making" (*Field* 192), I would argue that art, games, and nonsense are all potentially justified by ephemeral creativity. Ideally partaking of both art and play, nonsense is Stewart puts it, "a performance for performance's sake" (*Nonsense* 91). The representation of textual and visual skill or play as an end in itself finds a surprising ally in the world of contemporary fine art, which was just then witnessing the rise of Aestheticism – the movement that would popularize the phrase "art for art's sake." Noakes points out that Lear would have been familiar with these developments if only because he was living in London at the time, applying for admission to the Royal Academy (*Wanderer* 103). Walter Pater used the much-maligned slogan in print in 1868,[175] and went on to play a central role in theorizing and popularizing Aestheticism in England.[176] By the 1870s –

[174] See previous chapter for a description of Herbert Tucker's term "literal illustration."

[175] Perhaps most definitively, at the conclusion of his review of "The Poems of William Morris" for the *Westminster Review* (October 1868).

[176] See Aslin, and Calloway and Orr.

the period when Lear published most of his nonsense verses, and all of his nonsense alphabets – the phrase was in wide-enough circulation to become fodder for parody in English periodicals.[177] As a reaction to the Victorian insistence on "morality" in artworks, the principles of Aestheticism help us to recognize another significant contrast between Lear's works on zoology and topography, and his perspective-free nonsense drawings. His landscape paintings and his early renderings of animals appeared to show the influence of Ruskin in their vigorous insistence on anatomical accuracy. Lear may well have been following Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843), which Lear's letters reveal he had "dutifully digested" (Maas 18), in viewing accurate representations of Nature as a window into Truth. Certainly his fascination with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood would have encouraged Lear to adopt this morally-inflected understanding of rendering Nature directly from the life. But more importantly, his refusal to represent "Nature" in his nonsense implies a corresponding lack of interest in embedding similar subtexts within the nonsense. Indeed, he had publically described his unwillingness to sustain such "fancies," after "noticing," as Strachey puts it, "the suggestion that his books and illustrations had a symbolical meaning" (358-359). Thus, Lear declared in 1872, in the preface of *More Nonsense*: " 'Nonsense' pure and absolute has been my aim throughout." At least one reviewer in *The Spectator* followed his lead, and positively proclaimed "the nonsense verses and stories [to be] 'incapable of being made to harbor any symbolical meanings'" (qtd in Colley *Critics* 5). The Learian nonsense alphabets might draw the sharpest line separating those who perceive Lear's verses as "symbolic" or satirical and requiring allegorical interpretation, from those who insist on those same verses' ultimate *lack* of signifying power.[178] The

[177] See "Chapter 6: Satire and Comment" in Aslin 112-27.

[178] Lear's contemporaries seemed most focused on satirical references, prompting him to issue a disclaimer in the introduction to *More Nonsense*: "in no portion of these Nonsense drawings have I ever allowed any caricature of private or public persons to appear, and throughout, more care than might be supposed has been given to make the subjects incapable of misinterpretation" (N. pag.).

Modern critics, on the other hand, seem equally fixated on identifying biographical "symbolical meanings." For instance, Ina Rae Hark alludes to "the irrefutable evidence of autobiographical influence on the poems" before declaring that Lear's poetry "expresses in a highly abstract form the fluctuations of this man's life" (113), while Prickett confidently asserts that Lear's poetry is "intimately bound up with his private guilt, fears, and obsessions" (119). In particular, many critics have been unable to resist illustrated alphabet book of the mid-nineteenth-century represented a heroic attempt to suture meaning onto marks, as part of a larger moral project: promoting middle-class values of self-improvement, and inter-generational social advancement, through literacy education. Lear's nonsense alphabets, with their non-naturalistic visuals and self-conscious lack of purpose, invert and even refute the moral truth so painstakingly embedded within conventional illustrated alphabets.

Not coincidentally, G. K. Chesterton identified Lear's nonsenses a form of "art for art's sake" in his own essay on the "Defence of Nonsense" published in 1902. He specifically contrasted Lear's nonsense with the earlier literary nonsense that Edmund Strachey, for instance, used to construct a genealogical defense of Lear. While Chesterton agreed that "some of the greatest writers the world has seen—Aristophanes, Rabelais and Sterne—have written nonsense," it was different from Lear's precisely in its attempt to present truth in disguise: "the nonsense of these men was satiric—that is to say, symbolic; it was a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth" ("Defence" 3). Lear, on the other hand, offered a "simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial definitions." Buried beneath Strachey's own – rather weak – bid for promotion-by-proxy, he also evinces the clear conviction that the work is worthwhile on its own terms, as play – as "nonsense for its own sake" (355). Shakespeare is "our greatest Artist" precisely thanks to "his appreciation and love of fun for its own sake" (Strachey 346), and Milton is wise for producing "laughter for its own sake" (350). Certainly, adults can enjoy nonsense like Lear's over the shoulders of children, especially when the discourse of the Romantic poets located childhood as a refuge from adult concerns, and even sanctified the subordination of instruction to amusement. But finally, Strachey concurs with "a living man of letters… when he says, 'I think the day is lost in which a man does not have a good laugh'" (350). Indeed, Donald Gray identifies nonsense, as an extreme version of "light literature" designed to generate "the laughter of release" (176). And we might well believe that Lear thought so too when he composed the illustrated alphabets that inverted rationalist discourse. However, by turning the alphabet –

interpreting "The Courtship of the Yonghy-bonghy-bo" as "a commentary on Lear's abortive romance with Augusta Bethell" (Hark 119).

the lodestone of education and of publishing practice – toward purely playful ends, these particular "nonsenses" offer an ironic and singularly complete release from "the spread of writing and printing, folly which, perhaps better deserves to be styled madness" as one reviewer put it in 1889 ("Nonsensical Books" 388) – that is to say, a release from the page itself.

C. CONCLUSION

R. L. Mégroz describes the declining public consumption of Nonsense after the turn of the nineteenth century by observing the growing critical interest in it as a historical artifact. As a result, he points out, "Edward Lear's public to-day does not consist entirely, and probably even mainly, of children. Adults have kept appreciation alive while nurseries have been distracted" (175). It is a singular "artifact" in the way that it combines formal models with pure invention. Here, we once again run up the strange relationship of nonsense to parody, since Lear does not draw on any particular texts as "models" for his nonsense, except perhaps the collectively-produced *ur*-text of language itself – or, in the case of the nonsense alphabets, the *ur*-text of the arbitrarily-arranged "text" of the alphabet, which is so fragile a cultural product that it needs constant reinforcement through nominally-pedagogical texts like, of course, alphabet books. Thus, Lear's nonsense alphabets are organized by the substrate of language – the material that nonsense most often uses for its play – as well as language itself. As overlooked aspects of Lear's oeuvre, they merit further investigation in themselves while furthering my larger project of "mapping" representations of the alphabet in the nineteenth century in England. Abecedarian nonsense crossed multiple streams of social class, as the young-at-heart met the literally youthful; the innocent met the satirical; and the pre-literate met the purposeful annihilation of meaning.

And yet however much nostalgia may have rehabilitated childhood and its (temporary) ludic freedom from certain social constraints, the trade-off for children's books and their contents was a degraded and subordinate or, in Bourdieuian terms, "dominated"[179] status. As one reviewer put it, "serious-minded members of every family publicly sneered at these picturesque little quintains" but "they were invariably discovered laughing in private over what they openly mocked at" ("Nonsense Lyrics" 1302). Prickett suggests that Victorian Nonsense writers themselves, including Lear, Carroll, and Thomas Hood, evinced similarly ambivalent attitudes toward their own work (136). Lower literal/economic value was perhaps the most compelling means of establishing and reinforcing this hierarchy in social practice, and Lear's illustrated nonsense occupied an insistently second-tier position on the economic landscape, comfortably distinguished from middle-class mediocrity, and yet ultimately functioning as an anchor dragging down his aspirations to Royal Academy status as a painter and lithographic illustrator. He may have concealed his name on the first few editions of the *Book of Nonsense* – until the third edition of 1861, the works were attributed to "Old Derry down Derry"– in order to cordon that work off from his more "serious" output as a painter and zoological and topographic illustrator. In 1879, with money matters troubling his sleep, he even publically complained of being "ill-treated" as an artist (qtd. in Levi 306). He was always approaching comfort without ever quite achieving it, thanks in part to raw deals with publishers, as when Routledge managed to extract the copyright for his second *Book of Nonsense* for a mere 125 pounds; it was worth thousands and went into nineteen editions during his lifetime.

Against the background of Lear's strange mix of critical and commercial success, his nonsense alphabets constitute an even stranger special case within the larger category of "nonsense verse." Like all alphabet books, they re-enact the irreducibly social drama of constructing communicative signs, a fraught negotiation between the verbal and the visual. The form tended toward repetition and rigidity *within* individual texts, even as commerce encouraged ongoing variations *between* them, precisely because pedagogical representations of the alphabet stood as a particularly freighted bulwark against a great deal of anxiety about how to impose, encourage, and maintain social order during a period when education

[179] See Bourdieu *Distinction* for a description of how the members of socially "dominated" classes attempt to resituate themselves.

was constantly threatening to be a destabilizing variable. The illustrated alphabet format thus provides Lear with a way of interrogating the role of alphabetical text as a pivot between verbal and visual forms of representation, which in turn reflect the wider sociocultural enterprise of communication, or "making sense" of their interactions, narratives, and world. For just these reasons, Paul Bouissac has identified nonsense as a prototypical "meta-cultural" phenomenon, an example of a cultural formation which identifies "fundamental categories and relations" that dichotomize culture and nature ("Meaning" 202).[180] That is to say, nonsense reveals what Lear's culture expended a great deal of energy trying to hide or minimize into irrelevance: however well language works as a communication technology it is, at some level, a byproduct of human cooperation rather than an eternal fact of nature.

I have argued from the beginning that alphabet books are also "meta-cultural" phenomena, as they use visual representations of language to communicate about how such representations work. They are also "meta-cultural" in the sense that they accomplish longitudinal cultural work, like reinscribing alphabetical order. But paradoxically, given the encompassing scope of the "meta-cultural," Lear's the nonsense alphabets are in a fairly literal sense products of the home and hearth, since they often trace their origins back to particular children and/or particular evenings of inspiration.[181] These private works are drawn into the public realm, among the mixed-age audiences of the late-Victorian era, by an almost gravitational force as literacy education was relocated by shifts in education, from the domestic realm to institutionalized schooling. By absorbing the promiscuous alphabet into nonsense, Lear generated another order of the meta-cultural. Bringing these forms together allows Lear, and us, to map these contingencies by way of their "inversions"; that is, to use the products of nineteenth-century British culture to look at what would otherwise elude our gaze, the embedded structures that organized and re-organized childhood, adulthood, play, education, and multifarious forms of visual/verbal communication.

[180] Bouissac's works on nonsense grew out of his previous work on clowns and the circus; see his *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach*. For more of his specific work on Nonsense, see also his "Decoding Limericks: A Structuralist Approach."

[181] See Levi 179 and 245; see also Reade.

V. CHAPTER 4. WALTER CRANE, THE ALPHABET, AND THE VALUE OF "SO-CALLED CHILDREN'S BOOKS"

I would like to begin near the end: the end of Walter Crane's design career, that is, which spanned nearly five decades and concluded with his death in 1914. In 1913 he was invited to contribute to a special "children's books" issue of *The Imprint*, a periodical dedicated to technical and artistic exchange among printers and designers. Despite the recognition conferred by this singular invitation, in his "Notes on My Own Books for Children" Crane began with a curiously defensive stance, observing that

> Nothing is dearer to the heart of a commercial age than a label, both for persons and things, and one man in his time may gather many labels - like a travelled portmanteau … I was labelled designer of children's books long ago – although designs for children's books, strictly speaking, have only formed a comparatively small part of my work. (81)

This disclaimer was not the first of its kind for him. In 1905 he made a similar complaint about labels in a letter to the *Westminister Gazette*, regretting that he "has been strictly labelled 'Decorative. With care' – or 'For use in the Nursery only' … All goods should be marked in plain figures, or how is it possible to expect discriminating critics to know your true artist from any other one in these days when genius is so thin upon the ground?'" (qtd in Stalker 67).[182] Indignation was a typical theme in Crane's extensive writings on his work and working philosophy, especially as the nineteenth century turned over to the

[182] And again in his *Reminiscences,* published in 1907: "it is preposterous for man to expect to be recognized without his usual label - besides, it disturbs the commercial order of things" (431)

twentieth. With embarrassing frequency, they reveal his ambivalence about having been dubbed the "Academician of the Nursery" when he came to public prominence in the late 1860s.[183]

P. G. Konody had exacerbated this state of affairs in 1902, declaring his agreement with the label and going one better: "Nothing could be more appropriate, and one could go even further and speak of [Crane] as the founder of the Nursery Academy" (29). This somewhat back-handed compliment from Konody, who was one of Crane's harsher critics[184] but also the first to publish a monograph on his work, nonetheless reflected a widespread and lopsided perception of Crane's output. It also directly contradicts Crane's own position, as Konody goes on to reiterate: “"The artist himself seems to regard his toy-book designs more in the light of a pleasant pastime or, at the most, of useful practice, than as an important – perhaps the *most* important – phase of his artistic production" (39-40). Konody's book initially appears to have spurred Crane into a spree of commenting on his own work, lest others have the last unsatisfactory word.

Although any number of shifts in historical context might explain how Crane ultimately found himself chafing at a label he originally embraced,[185] the books themselves reveal his particular investment in the mass-produced book as a means of promoting Arts and Crafts ideals – that is, as a means of democratizing aesthetic education, and more specifically as a means of promoting a more visually-oriented construction of literacy. Against the background of the Education Act of 1870, Crane's alphabet books of the 1870s and 1880s increasingly took textual literacy as a developmental "given," and both

[183] Hutton strongly implies that Paul Konody was the first to pin this label on Crane (30), but he clearly lacked firsthand access to Konody's *The Art of Walter Crane.* In fact, Konody's usage and even the quotation marks surrounding the term in that monograph suggests that the label had already been in circulation for some time. I have been unable to identify an earlier instance, however.

[184] Konody wrote, rather crushingly, that "Even the designs for his children's books, which have spread his fame all over the world… his long-necked and microcephalic fairy princes and youthful heroes appear to have been treated by nature with little consideration. A further effect of the early stagnation in his artistic development is the continual, almost mechanical repetition of certain types, once human and original, but finally losing the character of living beings and degenerating, so to say, into mere symbols" (27).

[185] Perhaps the best evidence that Crane was originally proud of his position as the lead provider of "Art for the Nursery" was his outrage when Kate Greenaway trespassed on his territory. See particularly *Reminiscences* 180.

childhood and the textuality of the alphabet are subordinated to their viability as elements of artistic expression. But these books also betray a growing anxiety about the supplementary and waning social status of visual literacy. For more than a decade, Crane expended considerable energy exploiting book design at every level in order to re-constitute consumption of the printed alphabet as a predominantly visual skill set that resists audience categories based on age. And he continued to be concerned with "the education of the eye," throughout his life, declaring that it "is second to none in importance if we consider it fully in all its bearings… as the first avenue of human intelligence" (*William Morris to Whistler* Crane 242). However, he ultimately abandoned the mass-marketed illustrated book as a site of critical pedagogical intervention, conceding that particular field to mechanical reproduction, and to childhood, rather than continue pleading for a wider understanding of the "childlike." In this respect, the story of Crane's work on alphabet books and his writings about them reflects, in miniature, the story of the decline and fall of visually-oriented – as opposed to text-oriented – constructions of literacy in books in England during that period. More importantly, it does so in a manner that demonstrates how changing printing technologies and access to institutional education were bound up with print culture as a whole. Thus, I must insistently disagree with Ruari McLean's declaration that, among a number of mid-nineteenth-century alphabets under her surveillance, one by Walter Crane "may be "beautifully drawn," but also "utterly without anything to say of life, either in particular or in general" (*Pictorial Alphabets* 3, 5). Tracing his literographic morphology re-situates Crane's plight from that of being a "mere" illustrator of children's books, to that of being a vocal advocate for affordable and beautiful printed design during a period when educational standards, constructions of literacy, relations between artistic labor and the consuming public, and indeed the entire landscape of Victorian publishing were shifting in response to the English Education Acts and the rise of photography.

In this chapter, I follow two intertwined threads of development in Crane's alphabet books and his attitudes toward them: how they construe their audience(s), and how they construe literacy education. Early-twentieth-century biographers Marion Spielmann and George Layard could speak with the confidence of recent memory that what Crane "had greatly in mind was a special appeal to the eyes and artistic taste of the little ones: his purpose was in a measure educative" (72). As I will demonstrate, his representations of the alphabet in a dozen different books support their claim that his intentions were "educative," and that he was concerned with how "architects, sculptors, painters, and designers… by the forms, the colours, and the patterns we put out, we are insensibly forming the tastes, by association, of present and future generations" (Crane *Claims* 3).[186] Crane's representations of himself reinforce this characterization. On more than one occasion, he dressed in scholars' garb the human figure or anthropomorphic crane that served as his visual alter ego. And despite his obvious frustration with the hierarchy of the arts in the twenty-first century, Crane had previously manifested his professional and personal faith in the potential value of children's books in a variety of ways. Beyond publishing them with his name emblazoned on the cover, his methods ranged from writing about children's books, to chiding his publishers for failing to recognize "the efforts we were making to get more artistic colour and treatment in these books," to producing them for his own children.[187] He repeatedly articulated concrete ideas about what books for children *should* look like – or, more accurately, how they should always function simultaneously as objects of amusement, and of instruction, writing that "in fact children can learn definite ideas from good pictures long before they can read or write, and much could be done educationally in this way… We seem lately to have entered a period of goggle eyes, golliwogs and other monstrosities in children's books, which we may well hope is but a passing phase" (*Imprint* Crane 85-86). His alphabet books repeatedly represented *other* toy books (including abecedarian ones), and called attention to their status as meticulously designed objects. This was Crane's way of insisting on their participation in larger efforts to educate the public, albeit with his concerns about aesthetic education elaborating the standard investment in textual literacy.

But his target audience was not, I argue, always restricted to "the little ones." Indeed, Crane's lavishly-illustrated alphabet books of the 1870s reflect the instability of audience conventions during a

[186] O'Neill notes that the opening essay of this book was originally published in 1881 (47).

[187] Crane's complaints about the publishers' slow "conversion" to his and Edmund Evans's "efforts" are described in his *Reminiscences* 156. The so-called "black books" that he produced for his own children are mostly currently housed at Harvard.

period when the relative cultural values for children's books and the graphic arts were being actively negotiated, so that children's books and their various creators were variously located and relocated within the field of cultural production during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[188] A crucial factor in the success of Crane's project, temporary as that success may have been, was a contemporary willingness to decouple valued features of children and childhood from actual young people. A construction of childhood steeped in the pastoral and the imaginative – in short, the Romantic – signified values that could readily re-attach to images and objects associated with childhood or representing it. Crane himself argued that children did not have a monopoly on the childlike, writing that "It appears to me that there is a certain receptive impressionable quality of mind, whether in young or old, which we call child-like. A fresh direct vision, a quickly stimulated imagination, a love of symbolic and typical form… these are some of the characteristics of the child, whether grown up or not" (*Easter Art Annual* 5). Crane's critics echoed him, and often described his audience in dual terms, using phrases like "children of a larger growth" (White "Children's Books" 35) – perhaps echoing John Newbery's titular address to "Children Six Feet High" over a century earlier.[189] In Crane's illustrated alphabet books, we can see that Crane exploited the pedagogic and the aesthetic, two aspects of Victorian print culture that intersect in their use of childhood to figure social distinctions, in order to create an affordable portal to art. I argue that alphabet books proved a uniquely suitable medium for Crane's efforts to foster artistic experience as he understood it: intuitive responses to Beauty unbounded by the viewer's age.

Crane produced about a dozen alphabet books over the course of three decades, starting with the cheap mass-market "toy books" of the mid-1860s and concluding with the elaborate lithograph illustrations of *The Romance of the Three R's* in the 1880s. Crane justifiably claims that something "like a new departure in treatment is observable in my work of this kind" (*Easter Art Annual* 3) starting around

[188] Bourdieu asserts that "the mere fact that the social space described here can be presented as a diagram indicates that it is an abstract representation, deliberately constructed, like a map, to give a bird's-eye view, a point of view on the whole set of points from which ordinary agents… see the social world" (*Distinction* 169). See also Bourdieu *Distinction* 469 and *The Field of Cultural Production.*

[189] The latter phrase was part of the title of a book brought out by John Newbery in 1757: *A Collection of Pretty Poems for the Amusement of Children Six Feet High*. See Wood 218-219.

the mid-to-late 1860s. After that point, Crane routinely turned to toy books to promote constructions of literacy that insisted on the irreducible visuality of text. He began designing page layouts that combined words and letters with images in a manner that highlighted their shared visual character rather than insisting on dichotomous distinctions. Addressing both child and adult consumers, Crane's books were designed to support and promote a plural construction of literacy that integrated beautiful design into daily life, as he recognized that books offered commercial advantages over easel paintings, murals, and sculpture when it came to providing individuals with a means of practicing and extending their perceptual skills. Thus, Crane's later alphabet books are pedagogically radical as well as commercially revolutionary. Those same books reveal how his understanding of the medium evolved over the course of several decades. As he worked up to his "new departure" in page composition, Crane made a living in piecemeal fashion, designing rather unimaginative Toy Books for mass-marketed series brought out by the firms of Frederick Warne & Co, Ward Lock & Co., and George Routledge. These early alphabet books stand in sharp contrast with the series of shilling Toy Books, including *The Absurd ABC* (1874); *The Alphabet of Old Friends* (1874); and *Baby's Own Alphabet* (1875), that Routledge published under Crane's explicit aegis. *The Romance of the Three R's* rounds out his experiments with the abecedarian format by revealing his growing interest in neo-Gothic page decoration that imitated medieval manuscripts, with its attendant compromise on costs of production.

Although each of these alphabet books has unique features, there are clear visual themes linking those of the 1870s to each other, while the three *Romance* books were originally conceived as a series and rapidly collected into a single volume. Thus, for our purposes, the two literographic threads of development in Crane's alphabet books can be usefully divided according to three relatively discrete artistic "periods" (loosely identified as such by Crane himself) during which he produced several examples of relevant texts: the "pre-departure" books of 1863-1872; the "revolutionary" books of the mid-1870s, and finally *The Romance of the Three R's* published by Marcus Ward in 1885-1886. These categories, for which I have partly adopted Crane's notion of a "departure" in style and printing methods, will also organize the discussion to follow, since each "new departure in treatment" effectively presents a new literographic map as well as a new relationship with reproduction technology.[190] Crane also provided illustrations and/or illustrated alphabets for several primers and readers during that same period, most notably Professor Meiklejohn's *Golden Primer, Parts I & II* (1884-1885).[191] This work typically required collaboration with pedagogues, and helpfully provides a means of illustrating how Crane's conceptions of literacy, and of the alphabet as a site of verbal and visual convergence, contrasted with and resisted those of individuals who were formally invested in text-oriented elementary education.

A. "SO-CALLED CHILDREN'S BOOKS" AND THE SHELF LIFE OF LABELS

Historical context was a crucial factor in Crane's ability to direct his representations of the alphabet to both child and adult audiences. On one hand, with the alphabet book format Crane invokes rationalist forms of education, and especially literacy education, that were popularized by the rising middle classes from the turn of the century. As I have discussed in previous chapters, these developments had fostered an increasingly institutionalized association between pre-literacy and childhood, conflating literacy acquisition with cognitive development. To be sure, the ABCs came to signify elementary knowledge long before universal access to literacy was assured, and illiteracy was stigmatized as childish even before the Education Acts wrote it into law. But on the other hand, among the middle classes as well as their socioeconomic superiors, during the middle of the nineteenth century and continuing into the final decades of the Victorian era there was a renewed investment in representations of the alphabet that correlated to adult realms and/or cultural sophistication.

[190] Konody divides these periods differently, more on the basis of how they relate to Crane's publishers and public profile than in terms of stylistic variation: "the Sixpenny and Shilling Toy-Books, designed between 1864 and 1876, engraved by Edmund Evans and published partly by Warne and Co., partly by Routledge; the 'Triplets… 1877 to 1886, also published by Routledge; and the later series of toy-books [including *Pothooks and Perseverance*] published by Marcus Ward and Co. in 1885" (Konody 33-34).

[191] His work on Nellie Dale's *Readers* was less invested in representing or illustrating the alphabet, since this particular primer focused on whole-word methods. Crane's contributions consist primarily of naturalistic illustrations of nouns printed on the recto, facing the pages of color-coded text.

Most conspicuously, new forms of typography appeared after the middle of the nineteenth century in conjunction with the rise of printed advertising, which Crane later identified as "a popular education of the eye" (*William Morris to Whistler* 252).[192] That commercial investment in the visual character of text dovetailed with scholastic work by the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who revived popular interest in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Jean-Francois Champollion had generated the initial wave by deciphering the Rosetta Stone in 1799, but in 1858 Spencer brought the fascination home by declaring that the mysterious ancient script provided "the germs out of which alphabetic writing grew" (18) – an assertion later popularized by, for instance, Isaac Taylor's *The Alphabet: An Account of the Origin and Development of Letters* (1883).[193] And most importantly, complementing the communion with history that hieroglyphics offered, mid-Victorian England was fascinated with medieval and neo-medieval forms of page decoration as well as architecture. The official "descriptive and illustrated" catalogue volumes for the Great Exhibition of 1851, for instance, ornamented its pages with Gothic fretwork, while Augustus Pugin's medieval court display was impressive, if not immediately popular (Leapman 136-137). More overtly commercial appeals followed. Pictorial capitals in novels and the periodical press were part of a revived middle-class interest in medieval visual modes spurred by periodicals themselves, which exploited the new industrial reproduction technologies to bring views of distant cathedrals and other medieval marvels before their readers' eyes.[194] William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement picked up the thread later in the century, channeling neo-Gothic fervor into high production values that promoted a Socialist agenda. John Ruskin was a major inspiration to Crane and other members of the Arts and Crafts movement with works of art criticism like *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853).

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[192] For an efficient overview of these developments, and particularly William Morris's role in them, see Craig 31-34.

[193] See "Chapter 19: The Alphabet in the 19th Century: Advertising, Visible Speech, and Narratives of History" in Drucker *Alphabetic Labyrinth,* (especially 239- 245 and 262-278) for an overview of "the period which witnessed the fullscale adoption of the theory of the pictorial origins of the alphabetic forms" (Drucker *Alphabetic Labyrinth* 239), including its industrial responses to that theory .

[194] Both Altick and Tucker comment on the intersection between "pictorial capitals" and the medieval revival. See Altick *Punch* 162-166 for the "pseudomedieval" capitals in *Punch,* and Tucker for a more general view.

After meeting William Morris in 1870, Crane became an ever-more dedicated advocate of the nationwide investment in industrial design, the "missionary" arm of Aestheticism, as Elizabeth Aslin has characterized it (175). For him, the alphabet book was a prime place where book design could be radicalized in the service of popular aesthetic education, and these ambitions eventually merged with those of the Arts and Crafts movement as it cohered in the mid-1880s. Arts and Crafts-influenced book design, like the works from Morris's famous Kelmscott Press (founded in 1891), typically featured a literal investment in textual materiality that was obviously quite a departure from the "low culture" chapbook tradition from which alphabet books had emerged early in the nineteenth century. However, Crane's much cheaper alphabet books bridged this gap between the popular, and the high-culture ethos of the later guild-like Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. His insistence on a high standard of design, integrating words and images into a unified composition, was so influential and – in a word – "revolutionary" that a recent exhibition of his works at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London describes his work in just that way: as "A Revolution in Nursery Picture Books."[195]

In particular, the alphabet books of the 1870s constitute Crane's effort to seize a fleeting opportunity to participate in the nascent Arts and Crafts movement at a competitive level of pricing. With William Morris at the helm, the Arts and Crafts movement was committed to remedying the degraded state of English industrial design by intervening in the production of furnishings and other consumer goods, especially those related to interior decoration. They famously tried to raise the socioeconomic profile of the designer, and of the "decorative arts,"[196] by utilizing and promoting the work of his skilled

[195] A description of this small exhibition, which "brings together original artwork and first editions of Crane's innovative picture books to offer a fascinating insight into his radical approach to early education," is available on the website of the Victorian and Albert Museum: http://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/index.html.

[196] O'Neill provides a useful overview of this "highly contested" term with regard to Crane's work and usage (7-9).

partner, the fine craftsman.[197] The participants' insistence on fine materials would inevitably rarify the audience. Crane himself explained in the Arts and Crafts Society Exhibition Catalogue of 1890, "cheapness in art and handicraft is well nigh impossible, save in some forms of more or less mechanical reproduction," and defended the Society's principles on Socialist grounds: "In fact, cheapness as a rule, in the sense of low-priced productions, can only be obtained at the cost of… the cheapening of human life" (9). As these words portend, after publishing *The Romance of the Three R's,* Crane turned his primary attentions away from book illustration, and toward more overtly political projects and large-scale art. Morna O'Neill has most thoroughly documented how Crane devoted the last quarter-century of his working life to promoting a Socialist agenda through public artistic forums, focusing particularly on the "utopian" possibilities of decorative art as a democratic mode of communication based on images rather than text (14).[198] But this grew out of the first half of his career, when he provided lower- and middle-class audiences with access to an emerging movement striving to bring beauty to design. His alphabet books were a site for promoting or inculcating a form of literacy that insisted upon the visual aspects of text, and reclaimed the alphabet as an aesthetic object while allowing it to remain a pedagogical one. Precisely because it was embedded in the nursery during a time when adults turned a nostalgic and Romantic gaze upon that site of childhood, the abecedarian format fostered Crane's genuine as well as professed attempt to produce "art which," as Konody described it, "appeals to the child and to the grown-up person with equal power" (5).

[197] O'Neill notes their debt to Ruskin, who "rehabilitated the decorative" in part by "locating it within a preindustrial vision of labor," and concludes that "both Morris and Crane imagined an idealized past of decorative art produced by free craftsmen" (10).

[198] O'Neill argues that "Crane practiced painting as a decorative art… in order to recover a public function for painting that had, at certain key moments in history, been given to that medium" as it "held the highest status and engaged with social, political, and ethical issues of the greatest significance" (2). But O'Neill admits, the order of events is important: it was "aesthetics [that] generated Crane's politics," not the other way around (1). As "the integration of fine art and decorative art explored the role of art in everyday life," Crane was eventually "motivated… to make art for the socialist cause" (O'Neill 7). In this, Crane followed Morris: "As he said himself, it was art led him to Socialism, not economics, though he confirmed his convictions by economic study… "As an artist, no doubt at first he saw the uglification of the world going on" (Crane, *William Morris to Whistler,* 38).

So J. Hutton is both right, and misleading, to suggest that the lack of attention to Walter Crane from the community of children's literature scholars is not only "unfortunate", but surprising given his profound impact upon the conventions for children's picture books (27).[199] His early and fruitful collaboration with the innovative printer Edmund Evans were crucial to the development of heavily illustrated picture books steeped in the Gothic revivalist and Romantic pastoral modes; the latter was eventually normalized as the form for children's picture books produced in England after the mid-1870s.[200] Furthermore, Crane's low profile in the twentieth-century is all the more surprising because, as Hutton again points out, Crane is unusual among illustrators for his volubility, and his eagerness to articulate the rationale and approach to drawing that underpins his published work for children as well as for adults (Hutton 27). However, Crane's first polemic tome, on *The Claims of Decorative Art* (1892), was published at around the same time that he effectively resigned from mass-market children's book publishing.[201] At that point, he reoriented his design work toward Socialism, implicitly where he did not do so overtly: he would become a card-carrying member of the party in 1893. When he took an appointment in teaching and school administration in Manchester a year later, university-level education superseded the elementary. Literacy was less of a concern for him in this context where, despite his own conspicuous lack of formal artistic training, he was given even more opportunity to formally arrange his approach and its rationale. His public and school lectures were later published as books: *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New* (1896), *The Bases of Design* (1898), and *Line and Form* (1900). He also produced a remarkable quantity of "notes" and essays, including a lengthy set of *Reminiscences* (1907), and a valedictory collection in 1911, cogently titled *From William Morris to*

[199] Anne Lundin provides a helpful summary of children's literature scholarship on Crane (*Victorian Horizons* 104-109).

[200] John R. McNair's "Chromolithography and Color Woodblock: Handmaidens to Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature" provides an excellent overview of this.

[201] According to the bibliography compiled by Isobel Spencer, his last new toy book (as opposed to re-issued collections) appeared in 1876 (203). The only children's book illustrations that Crane designed after 1890 were those for Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls* (1892), one of his very few American publications (Spencer 204).

Whistler: Papers and Addresses on Art and Craft and the Commonweal, reprinted pieces that had originally appeared in various magazines. So Crane's own comments on his work come to us through the filter of hindsight. But Crane's relentless work ethic drew repeated comment from his contemporaries,[202] and his astonishingly large oeuvre now offers us a sweeping view of the cultural landscape in which he worked for so many years.

As the opening litany of complaints should suggest, the label of "children's book" became increasingly fraught for Crane in the twentieth century. But he first made the distinction between "children's books" and "so-called children's books" in *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books* in 1896. Both books occupy, as he put it, "a peculiar position," because their differences lie more in the tenuous link between artistic intention and audience, than in the content: "in a sober and matter-of-fact age they afford perhaps the only outlet for unrestricted flights of fancy open to the modern illustrator" (158). Later, he admitted that "The attempt to specialise certain kinds of work for children is not always successful, and it frequently happens that entertainment in the shape of books and pictures intended for them have an attraction for their elders or vice versa" (*Easter Art Annual* 5). Nonetheless, he was quick to provide clarification when a book of his own ran the risk of being mistakenly categorized – as when he insisted that the "fantasia" of *Flora's Feast* was "Not a children's book proper" (*Imprint* 85), and thereby implicitly acknowledged counter-identifications. Nor was he entirely alone in this crusade, and reviewers often commented on the public's confusion about how to categorize his works. The *British Quarterly Review* admired his work but concluded that "now children are suckled in art, and almost puzzled by its fantasies" ("Contemporary Literature" 240). Similarly, in 1878 *The Times* observed that a collection of popular songs assembled and illustrated by Walter Crane was "wisely dedicated to the 'Friends of Babies,' by whom it will be more appreciated than by the babies themselves" ("Christmas Books" *The Times* 13 December 1878) – and at a cost of five shillings, it certainly overstepped prevailing notions

[202] For instance, the painter Sir William Rothenstein noted in his memoirs that "he poured out designs," and lists the many media that drew his attention (qtd in O'Neill 4). See also Helen Stalker: "A list of published books containing any design input by Crane from a tiny embellishment to the lavishly illustrated volumes of the *Faerie Queene* (1894-96), would number around 500 publications even with the omission of re-issues or his frequent contributions to illustrated periodicals" (62).

among “the Trade” about appropriate prices and formats for children’s books. A critic for *Belgravia* magazine may well have had the best-selling Crane in mind as he suggested that this phenomenon was widespread among finely-illustrated picture books: “We find certain kinds of this ‘high art’ class of juvenile literature selling largely, but principally appreciated by the elders of the family, who are not unfrequently sorely disappointed to see the solemn little face of the child to whom they have made the costly book a present” (Strange-Butson 223). Beyond highlighting the difficulty of matching a label with a positive reception, such comments implicitly testify to the dual nature of the audience for even a “children’s book proper.” Consumption was necessarily split into two stages – buying and reading – and children could usually only participate in the latter.

These issues with nomenclature also demonstrate the high stakes of shifts in high/low cultural status, or what Bourdieu would characterize as shifts in cultural, as opposed to simply economic, capital.[203] By the grace of time and place, this fuzziness in the categorical boundaries can be seen as a virtue, or a more subjective point of contention, as well as a structural defect. As Anne Lundin has pointed out specifically with regard to the reception of Crane’s work, the boundaries between works for children and works for adults were much more fluid in the 1870s and 1880s than they typically are now – or as she puts it in phrasing borrowed from Jauss, within Victorian “horizons of expectation,” the label of “children’s books” was more descriptive of content than proscriptive of audience. Despite the “Nursery” epithet, there is ample evidence of nineteenth-century adults who, like a commentator in *Scribner’s Monthly,* found that “We are all his debtors for a substantial good – for beautiful art brought to our every-day enjoyment” (qtd in Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 77).[204] Lundin’s survey of contemporary critical opinion suggests that Crane’s views on this point were widely held, most obviously by participants (knowing or *de facto*) in the social phenomenon that both contemporary and subsequent critics describe as

[203] For an overview of this notion and the way different varieties of figurative capital organize a symbolic, social hierarchy, see Pierre Bourdieu *The Field of Cultural Production* 27-73.

[204] For more examples see Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 70-80.

a veritable “Cult of the Child,” in Ernest Dowson’s famous essay title from 1889.[205] Corresponding evolutions in circulating constructions of childhood, following on the heels of the publication of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and a general Romantic revival, had elevated the image of the Child to nearly the status of a “Cult” object among those privileged socioeconomic groups. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books and their commercial success offer a convenient indicator of the timing of these developments. Echoing Dowson’s comprehensive claim that “There is no more distinctive feature of the age than the enormous importance which children have assumed” (434), Jackie Wullschlager and others have more recently documented that "men such as Carroll, Ruskin, Dickens and Kilvert took the Victorian romance with childhood to an extreme, but everywhere in nineteenth-century society and art a fascination with childhood is apparent” (12). Indeed, in the 1860s, Crane was enthusiastic about being a pivotal figure in a publishing trend: the “decorative colored picture book” offered the visually-oriented complement to the text-based “Golden Age of Children’s Literature” that blossomed in Victorian England before fading with the Edwardians.[206]

However, Crane’s dedication to “educative” endeavors disqualifies him as a “Cultist.” Far from deploring the acculturation of children, in the characteristic *Cult of Childhood* mode famously outlined by George Boas, Crane was in fact dedicated to managing acculturation for children *and* adults through printed media. Part of his pride in his book design work lay in the fact that, for Crane as for Thackeray, children were not merely objects for fetishistic worship, but “fellow-inhabitants of contemporary culture”

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[205] I have adopted the usage of the term “Cult of the Child” suggested by Marah Gubar, denoting individuals who “as a group… shared a tendency to set up the child as the epitome of attractiveness for a *variety* of reasons, often while pondering the question of what the implications of this radical shift in regard were for both children and adults” (ix). The “Cult of Childhood,” on the other hand, more generally focuses on youth as the site of “cultural primitivism” and denotes a transhistorical phenomenon, of which the Victorian “Cult of the Child” *may* be seen as a specific instantiation, or (more accurately) a variation on the theme (Gubar 9).

[206] Thanks in large part to this focus on contemporary design aesthetics and even pedagogical inflections, I would not characterize Crane’s sympathies with the Cult of the Child as partaking of the strand of cultural primitivism some of the cultists promoted, and which paired a nominal investment in children’s “innocence” with resistance to their acculturation. A large literature on this subject exists, but since Crane was not a “Cultist,” I have omitted further discussion. For more on recent discussions of the nineteenth-century “Cult of the Child,” see Gubar 9 and 212, n. 8.

(Gubar 10), *including* its nostalgic tendencies and its deployment of childhood as a vehicle for that nostalgia. Consequently, "children's books shared a public literary culture of young and old" as Lundin puts it (*Victorian Horizons* 21), with adults approaching the genre as a refuge from contemporary anxieties, especially about the pervasive sociocultural effects of the Industrial Revolution. For Crane, the most valuable discursive effect of representing young people was cemented by the Education Acts: they were embedded in an educational substratum that oriented all of their activities toward learning, whether self-guided or institutionally supervised. For those adults who had already finished their schooling, a book's pedagogical orientation simply operated as a kind of portal to the past, a cue to revisit their personal experience of a widely-shared feature of social life. In short, even educational "children's books" were potentially "so-called children's books." Crane's subsequent resistance to "labels" was surely linked to his shifting ideological convictions as well as the changing tides of taste. But however Crane justified it later, children's books were an artistically-legitimate repository of pastoral nostalgia among the middle and upper classes for at least a couple of decades in the second half of the nineteenth-century.

This cultural picture can be further complicated by acknowledging the widespread investment in publishing visual narratives during the 1850s and 1860s in England, as enabled by the growing technological possibilities. Wood engraving was being perfected, lithography (although far from operating on a mass scale in England) had become available, and these and other forms of printing were encouraged by the growing availability of machine-made paper, rotary presses, and stereotyping. As Ruari McLean points out, in the mid-nineteenth century a separate designation was needed to distinguish "picture books" for adults, like keepsakes and annuals, from those specifically intended for children: hence, "toy" books.[207] This label's status as a backformation is now uncommon knowledge, but it is significantly rooted in the prior existence of a body of heavily-illustrated books for adults, and thus suggests a certain continuity of the value of visual literacy across age groups. More importantly for Crane, his children's books were recognized as a repository of good design. They appealed to adults invested in the aesthetic for both personal and professional reasons. Lundin suggests that middle- and

[207] For a discussion of the characteristics of the toy book, see McLean *Victorian Alphabet Books* 2.

upper-class women's confinement to the domestic sphere spurred them to demand "more appealing and artistically educative settings" in nursery books (*Victorian Horizons* 6); these texts might have provided an aesthetic education for the notorious "Angel in the House" as well her young charges.[208] Gleeson White advanced a similar theory towards the end of the nineteenth century, and additionally noted Crane's status as a kind of "artists' artist" specifically with respect to his children's books from the 1870s: "one fancies that the real educational power of the picture-book is upon the elders, and thus, that it undoubtedly helps to raise the standard of domestic taste in art… the famous toy books still retain their well-merited position as the most delightful books for the nursery and the studio, equally beloved by babies and artists" ("Children's Books" 5, 34). Crane himself claimed that architects and manufacturers approached him for collaboration and designs after viewing these books in just that way. As he put it, "The book designs led to decorative work and the decorative work reacted upon the books" (Crane, *The Imprint,* 85).[209] Even William Morris plumbed his illustrations for design ideas, and asked him to produce a tapestry cartoon from his representation of "The Goose Girl" in the designs for Lucy Crane's edition of *Household Stories from the Collection of the Brothers Grimm* (1882).[210] Given this state of affairs in the 1870s and 1880s, we should read Crane's later preoccupation with labels as an indicator of shifting horizons of expectation, a shift that moved children's books from a respected or even privileged position on the cultural map to a more degraded one. The status of book and periodical illustration in mid-to-late nineteenth-century England generally enjoyed greater artistic resources and much higher regard

[208] Here, I am of course referring to Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House" (published 1854-1862), which has since become a paradigmatic example of idealized domesticity and feminine subordination to its demands.

[209] See also his *Artist's Reminiscences:* "This element, indeed, in the books soon began to be discovered by architects and others interested in or directly connected with house decoration, and this brought me some occasional commissions for actual work in that way in the form of friezes or frieze panels" (156). And later he recalls how he first began designing wallpapers: "Mr. Metford Warner... called upon me and commissioned me to design a nursery wallpaper - no doubt in consequence of seeing my children's books" (Crane *Reminiscences* 158).

[210] Crane recounts this with evident satisfaction in his *Reminiscences,* not failing – of course – to mention that the tapestry ended up in the collection of the South Kensington Museum, later the Victoria and Albert Museum (214).

than is the case in the twenty-first century, when "picture books" might even be deemed "too easy" for children whose parents want them to read (Bosman).

B. "PRE-DEPARTURE" TOY BOOKS AND THE 1860S

Looking back from 1913, Crane reflected that "Great changes in methods of production had been taking place since I began" (*The Imprint* 84). In designing his earliest alphabet books, Crane may not yet have developed his ambitions for book design. But even if he had, he certainly would have found himself constrained by material conditions as well as social ones. Cost considerations associated with contemporary reproduction technologies, traditional formal imperatives, and a simple lack of leverage with his employers, colluded to prevent him from pursuing the educational program that appeared in his children's books the following decade. For instance, in his *Reminiscences,* Crane blames the publishers at least as much as the public for the slow improvement in a dismal state of affairs, since they "thought the raw coarse colours and vulgar designs usually current appealed to a larger public, and therefore paid better, and it was some time before the taste for the newer treatment made itself felt (76). Confronted with these working conditions in the 1860s, Crane did not venture to break new ground in page layouts, and generally reproduced the binary distinction between words *and* images that his later designs would resist. He simply focused on constructing an "illustrative" – that is to say, redundant – relationship between text and image that respected the limits of the media. Crane declined even to make a gesture toward the emblematic or iconographic modes that characterized many earlier illustrated books derived from the traditions of visual satire, although he was certainly familiar with work in that vein by John Tenniel and Hablot Knight Browne.[211] While the illustrations of the earliest abecedarian toy books by Walter Crane might give pleasure in their own right, they offer a telling point of contrast with his later attempts to promote an educational program in aesthetics, as well as the role that reproduction technologies played in his ability to do so. Ruari McLean has also convincingly argued that Crane's talents and investment in

[211] See Crane *Reminiscences* 31-32.

book design dovetailed with contemporary developments in the available means of production, particularly improvements in printing with color from wood engravings (*Victorian Book Design* 136-137). A critical mass of trained wood engravers were needed, as well as technical solutions to problems like registration and ink viscosity. As I will demonstrate in the pages to follow, these material improvements eventually enabled Walter Crane and Edmund Evans to intervene in the established mode of children's book publishing. In the 1870s, they joined text and image in cooperation on the page while remaining self-conscious about the status of printed matter as an object of beauty or of study rather than simply a neutral vehicle or slave to educational imperatives.

Looking back upon his own childhood, and secure in the knowledge that he was past master of the field, Crane has harsh words for the state of color picture books when he left his apprenticeship and joined the ranks of book designers in 1863. He described the earlier days of children's book illustration as characterized by "generally careless and unimaginative woodcuts, very casually coloured by hand, dabs of pink and emerald green being laid across faces and frocks with a somewhat reckless aim. There was practically no choice between such as these and cheap German highly coloured lithographs" (*Decorative Illustration,* 156). Even Konody agrees that "his children's books have to be measured by the standard of the crude and tasteless productions by which they were preceded" (116). Although Crane did have the good fortune to connect with Evans early in his career, and enjoyed higher-quality standards of printing than most of his compatriots, he betrays some shame about his first few toy book designs, "which were really done to order, and almost to a given pattern" (*Easter Art Annual* 3). These toy books, as they were often explicitly labeled in advertisements included on the backs of the books themselves, were priced at sixpence or a shilling, with the price generally doubled for "indestructible" versions printed on linen. There was little room for personal style in such small standardized formats, and the habitual sharing of printers and wood-engravers helped submerge design personalities into a collective house style – a state of affairs that no doubt contributed to Crane's later sympathies with "alienated labor."[212] Crane's own works were generally unsigned into the early 1870s, leading to occasional attribution attempts in the twentieth century.[213] Crane himself admitted that "I began to make children's books on the same lines, followed in the wake of other designs. My first baby-book was just like other people's" ("A word about," 23). The first series to which Crane both contributed alphabet books and lays explicit claim[214] was pseudonymously titled the "Aunt Mavor's Series," and its conventionality generally extended to theme and content as well as style. In addition to alphabet books, the series of 16-page toy books included newly-illustrated versions of Bible stories, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and the other forms of traditional fare that had previously provided the substrate for chapbooks.

Crane's abecedarian contributions to the Aunt Mavor's series, published by Routledge in the mid-1860s, exemplify the kind of page composition that his mid-1870s books implicitly repudiate, one in which literacy is an insistently utilitarian skill. These alphabet books situate visual forms of communication as a kind of stepping-stone to the "maturity" of textual communication and do little to exploit the letterforms as aesthetic objects. Thus, in Crane's *Farm-yard Alphabet* and *Railroad Alphabet,* the alphabetical letters are presented in big red block capitals, alongside illustrated scenes from everyday

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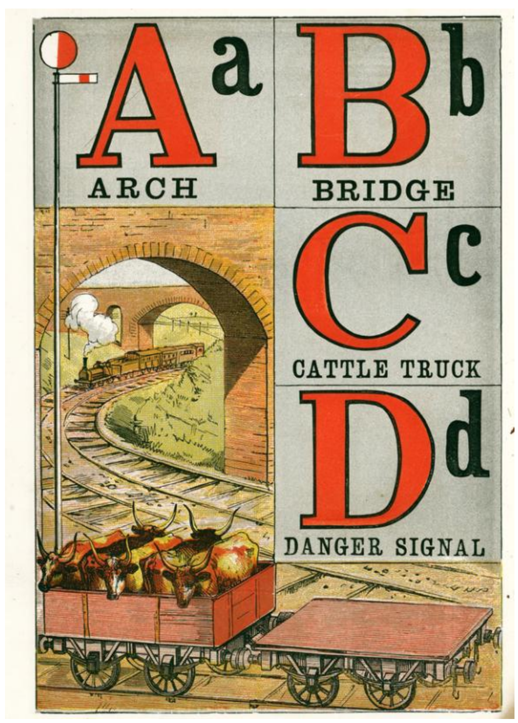
[212] Although Crane was obviously not in a position to use this term, his descriptions of craftsmen and other laborers clearly resonates with the tenor of Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844).

[213] Isobel Spencer has identified three unsigned and uninspired alphabet books published by Frederick Warne & Co. - *The London Alphabet, The Country Alphabet*, and *The Alphabet of Sports and Games* - as works of Walter Crane, and this attribution has not been disputed or confirmed by a catalogue raisonne. Crane's own son commented on this conspicuous omission in 1956 (Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 94-95). At any rate, the stakes of Spencer's attribution are low because except for these alphabets' unusual horizontal orientation, they would constitute neither assets nor liabilities to Crane's reputation.

[214] Crane describes the start of his career in designing children's books as follows:
"The first, however, were done for Messrs. Warne. They were a *History of Cock Robin and Jenny Wren, Dame Trot and her Comical Cat,* and *The House that Jack Built.* They were designed with solid black or blue backgrounds, the figures being relieved against them in bright colours. The series for Messrs. Routledge commenced with a *Farmyard Alphabet* and a *Railway Alphabet*, printed in two colours only, in addition to the key block… gradually more colours were used as the designs became more elaborate, until a few years later they had developed, under various influences, among which that of Japanese colour prints must be counted as an important factor" (*Reminiscences* 76). He never mentions *The London Alphabet, The Country Alphabet,* or *The Alphabet of Sports and Games.*

life. Each scene provides an object that is labeled according to the demands of each letter – e.g., "A Ash Tree" or "A Arch," respectively – in much smaller black text (Figure 33). Significantly, the words and letters are separated by both distance on the page, and grid-like lines. Sharp corners and a regular typeface suggest that letterpress was used to print the text *and* the letters at the same time as the wood-engraved image, which might have concretely limited Crane's options for page composition. In any event, the final effect is one of semiotic redundancy on the page: the printed word, and the appropriate element from the picture, become equivalent (but hierarchized) means of representing a thing in the world, since it is almost entirely "things" that are represented: Barn, Calves, Donkey, Geese, Turkeys, etc. in the first instance and Bridge, Engine, Luggage, in the second. As usual, the letter "X" presents difficulties, so that the writer (who may or may not have been Crane) must resort to cheats like "X Xcursion" in the *Railroad Alphabet* and "X, like a Turnstile" in the *Farmyard.* But verbs are clearly off-limits, suggesting a limit to both



Courtesy of Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00035153/00001/

Figure 33. first page from Crane's unsigned *Railroad Alphabet*, as reprinted in *Routledge's Book of Alphabets* (1877)

textual and visual representation. By choosing only to identify nouns in the scene, rather than to narrate or label actions, these illustrations construct the world as a collection of objects, undistinguished by experiences – perhaps the seed of Crane's later call for aesthetic discrimination among objects as consumer goods (especially between those mass produced, and those hand-crafted). Narrative has been exorcised, and except for the orderly procession of alphabetical order, each page's literography is a microcosm of the book's.

I noted Isobel Spencer's efforts to identify unsigned Crane productions above, and I would like to make one of my own attempts at attribution that concerns how Crane's alphabet books comment on and promote a construction of literacy corresponding to what's most valued in a mode of representation. I contend that sometime in the mid-to-late 1860s Crane designed, but left unsigned, *The Ark Alphabet* published by Frederick Warne & Co. as part of its "Excelsior" series. Although I have yet to see this text included in a Crane bibliography, it so closely resembles the *Noah's Ark Alphabet* more securely attributed to him (and subsequently published by Routledge) as to suggest the reuse of old designs.[215] The animals chosen to represent the given animals are often the same in both books – including the choice of "Xiphias" at "X," which I have not seen anywhere else – as are their postures, relative positions, and even the backgrounds of the layouts (Figures 34-37). Isobel Spencer has noted that *Noah's Ark ABC,* the very last of the original sixpenny toys is a puzzling book stylistically" (56), while Ruari McLean has more helpfully observed that *Walter Crane's Noah's Ark's A.B.C.* "is simpler in style than much of Crane's work and looks earlier than its published date; it may have been based on earlier drawings" (*Victorian Alphabets* 4). In that case, she was contrasting the *Noah's Ark A.B.C.* with those books I have termed his "revolutionary" ones and will discuss below, but comparison seems more useful here. In fact, the *Noah's Ark A. B.C.* looks very much like Crane's "pre-departure" Routledge books in the quarto-sized Sixpenny Toy Book Series that included *The Railroad Alphabet* and *The Farmyard Alphabet*. Beyond

[215] The *Noah's Ark Alphabet* is included in Routledge's Archives of publishing records held at University College London Special Collections, and attributed to Crane. But these records are incomplete in their own right, and detached from correspondence; I was unable to examine the latter because it is held at Reading University rather than UCL.

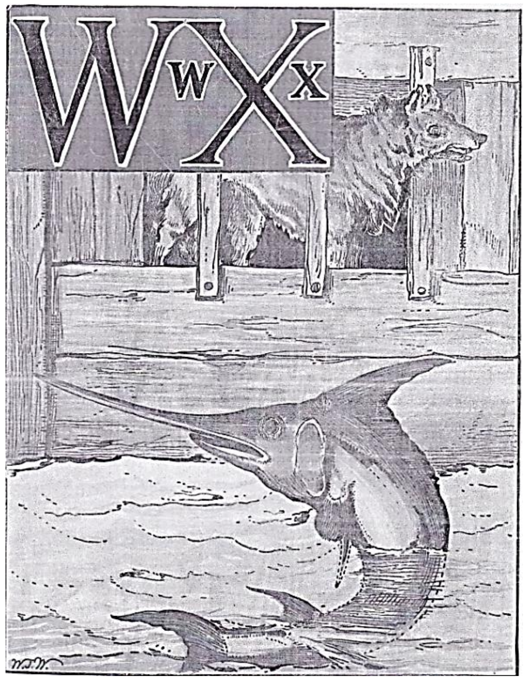
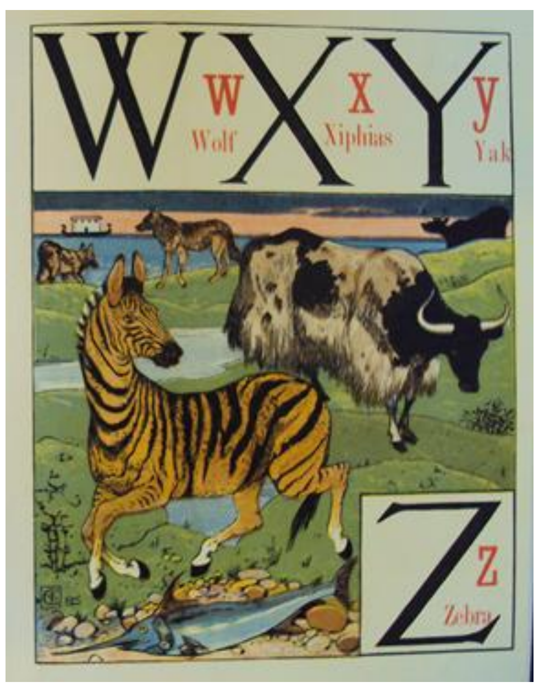


Figure 34. the “Xiphias” in Crane’s unsigned *Ark Alphabet*



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 35. the “Xiphias” in Crane’s *Noah’s Ark ABC*

Figure 36. “K” through “R” in Crane’s unsigned *Ark Alphabet*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 37. “K” through “P” from Crane’s *Noah’s Ark ABC*

the replication of content like animal choices and designs, it also features large block capitals and smaller label-words in red set apart from the scene by hairlines, and a literography characterized by redundancy: in the later *Noah's Ark A.B.C.* there is no attempt to *verbally* reproduce the story of Noah's Ark which suggests an opportunistic approach to the narrative. Biblical respectability was a bonus, to be sure – but primarily, it offered Crane a means of thematically imitating the many alphabets of animals already in circulation at the time without simply reproducing them.

I mention this omission from Crane's oeuvre partly to correct the bibliographic record, but also because it offers a glimpse into how his approach to word-image relationships, and especially representations of the alphabet, were evolving at this time. Indeed, the *Noah's Ark A.B.C.* published by Routledge around 1872 appears to me to suggest Crane's difficulties with breaking from a rigid Warne approach to text and image. I have already noted his use of boxes to graphically separate the alphabetical letters and words from the images also on the page. In the case of the Warne-published *Ark Alphabet,* there is an additional form of separation between text and image that is almost certainly attributable to a combination of cost considerations and technological constraints. In both of these Noah's-Ark-themed books, the alphabetical letters are large black capitals set within more demarcated blocks, which are set in turn into the corners of otherwise-naturalistic scenes. They also both feature enameled-paper covers with garish, eye-catching colors. But other differences are more literally material. In the earlier *Ark Alphabet*, the letters alone are set on the page on a blocked-off field of red, while the entirety of the text – a series of rhyming couplets, one per animal depicted – is confined to the first and final pages of the book (Figure 38). Those "pages" are actually the inside of the paper covers, and this cheap alternative to binding reiterates the toy book's evolutionary affiliation with the cheap popular chapbook.[216] During the actual act of reading, this means that the reader cannot view a word and what it labels at the same time, but instead must play a naming game in order to match the particular letter to the animal for which it "stands" in the conventional tropic equation. It would appear that material circumstances frustrated any attempt to

[216] I discuss the genealogy of the alphabet book form, and the chapbooks' integral role in that formation, in Chapters 1 and 2.

THE "ARK" ALPHABE

[In this Alphabet the child will have to find out the animals nam the letters. Thus some slight acquaintance with Natural History v gained in conjunction with the Alphabet.]

A stands for the Ark—where all things that had life God saved with good Noah, his sons, and his wife.

B stands for the Bear—here a brown one you see, Who's clinging in fear to the bough of a tree.

C for Camel and Cow.—What would poor Baby do, Dear Cow, if good Noah had not cared for you?

D for Dove, who the olive-branch afterwards bore, To let Noah see that the Deluge was o'er.

E stands for the Elephant, mighty and strong, To whom the great trunk, like a hand, does belong.

F stands for the Fox, that the Englishmen chase (His cunning can plainly be seen in his face); And Fowls, for which Noah was glad to find space.

G stands for Giraffe—who must bend down his head, If he means by his friends in the Ark to be fed.

H stands for Ham—Noah's son, as you know; And for Horses, which o'er the turf swiftly can go!

I stands for the Ibex, with elegant horn; On high Eastern mountains this wild goat was born.

J stands for the Jackal, the lion's good friend; And for Japheth, who loves the poor cattle to tend.

K stands for the Kitten, whose gambols and play Amused Noah's wife during many a day.

L stands for the Lion—of forests the king: To Noah he's as tame as a lambkin in Spring.

Figure 38. inside front cover of Crane's unsigned *Ark Alphabet*

present a coherent page-based literography. So Crane is stuck with a super-structure encompassing text/image relationships *between* pages – that is, on the larger scale of the book as a whole. The lack of "labels" on the page creates a textual environment that isolates the alphabetical letters from words and undermines any attempt to toggle fluidly between letterforms and letters as textual subunits.

In the Routledge-published *Noah's Ark,* by contrast, labels are included on every page, making this leap from letter to word, and nominal distinctions between word and image, less sharp. The capitals are black on a field of white, and lowercase letters as well as labels are included in orange around the uppercase letters. Often, there is more than one label/item per letter. These points of contrast highlight the purely and aggressively visual – as opposed to textual – character of the letters in the Warne version. In that earlier *Ark,* several independent steps of connection and even physical manipulation of the book are required in order to tropic-ally connect the letters to the depicted objects. As a result, we see a completely different literography, one that highlights the contortions of alphabet book composers rather than constructing a relationship between letter, text, and image on the page. This is particularly true where some puzzle-solving is required to make the match, as on the central spread for letters K through R. There, eight letters and their accompanying referents are represented without reliable code of connection, like proximity for example (Figure 36). Of the two birds depicted, one is a nightingale for N, and one is a raven (for R), as we learn from flipping to the back cover. The bovine creature must be an "ox" rather than a cow or bull, and the feline one a "kitten" (for K) rather than a cat. Those not well-versed in birds might mistake the smaller one for a mockingbird or swallow before seeing the monkey (for M). In both alphabets Crane depicts at “X” a sword-nosed fish called a “Xiphias,” and there must have been precious few readers who could have recognized the species in either book without resorting to the verbal tag (Figures 34 and 35). But those holding the earlier Warne version must work harder to find it, and flip to a back-page key. More tellingly, this separation of information is justified explicitly within the Warne text's front cover, which presents a pedagogical agenda: "In this Alphabet the child will have to find out the animals named for the letters. Thus some slight acquaintance with Natural History will be gained in conjunction with the Alphabet."[217] The profession of a pedagogical agenda is hardly unusual; in fact, we would reasonably expect such a justification from an alphabet book since that had been the explicit justification for almost fifty years by that point. What *is* striking, though, is that this alphabet book acknowledges that beginning textual literacy can hardly be its pedagogical object, given the lack of a coherent relationship between text and image.

In both Ark-themed alphabet books their functional links between text and image are tested by the contingent pressures of technology, costs of production, and artistic ambition, but the later *Noah’s Ark ABC* obviously offered more possibilities. We can see this most clearly at "U," which apparently gave the

[217] See also Henry Cole's ("Felix Summerly's") *Alphabet of Quadrupeds* (1844), in which there is a similar attempt to instruct, but the use of animals seems strangely split, since the text teaches about the animals, while the illustrations are nominally dedicated toward instructing them in art history, not natural history.

writer (again, probably not Crane), some trouble (Figure 39). In the earlier *Ark,* he must have recourse to translating slang: "U stands for the Urchin, which Hedgehog we call." In the later *Noah's Ark*, this has been modified so that U stands for "unicorn." However, what's actually represented in the picture is a rhinoceros (Figure 40). Crane was already starting to tweak the literographic redundancy of text and image that had been established on previous pages,[218] to undermine the one-to-one mapping between word and image. This relationship is rendered much more comprehensible, and the joke made possible, by the inclusion of labels on the same page. Here we see a loophole in the illustrator's catch-22 in which Crane had found himself caught during the latter half of the 1860s, thanks to prevailing constraints on

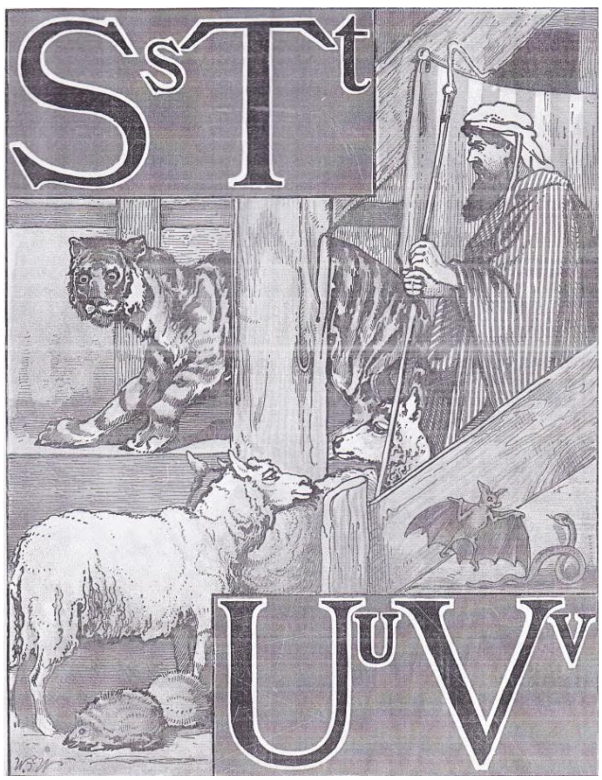
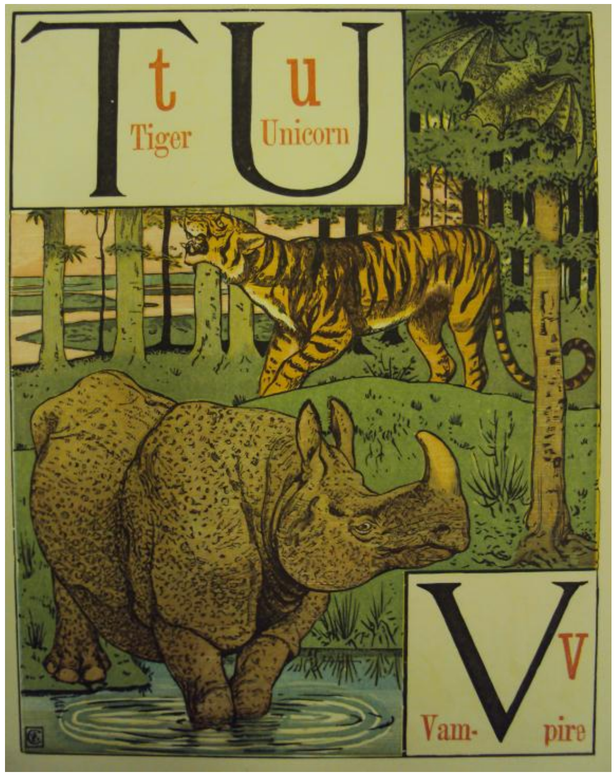


Figure 39. "U" from Crane's unsigned *Ark Alphabet*

[218] This may be an attempt on Crane's part to inject a bit of class into a low-brow project, since he repeatedly expressed his long affection for Gothic prints and, more specifically, the Northern Renaissance engraver Albrecht Durer, whose best-known image may well be his anatomically-incorrect "Rhinoceros." For instance, in his *Reminiscences* he notes that "reproductions of Albrecht Durer's… while among my earliest artistic impressions, have retained and increased their influence in later days" (15).



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 40. "U" from Crane's *Noah's Ark ABC*

cost-effective reproduction technology and visual communication. Without an artistic reputation he was only offered the opportunity to repeat literographies and existing constructions of literacy, but by reproducing those familiar formulas he was doing little to distinguish himself as an illustrator, or to promote his particular understanding of text-image interaction as ideally collaborative. As I have suggested thus far, the most significant differences between Crane's earlier, unsigned work and the texts he later claimed as his own directly concern the variations in relationship between text and image on the page. This is an aspect of book design with which Crane was constantly and vocally preoccupied once he earned the distinction, in the early 1870s, of having his name printed on the cover of the books he designed (*Reminiscences* 156). Thereafter, he was notoriously insistent on “"complete unity of type – or written characters – and page-decoration” (Konody 23). Even if this sometimes required him to hand-letter entire books rather than allow machine type to clash with his borders and other designs,[219] he maintained a steadfast commitment to a construction of literacy that emphasized visual aesthetics on the page. And he particularly seized upon representations of the alphabet as a vehicle for demonstrating those design principles, and his own master-pupil relationship with his audience.

C. A "REVOLUTION" IN THE ALPHABET BOOK

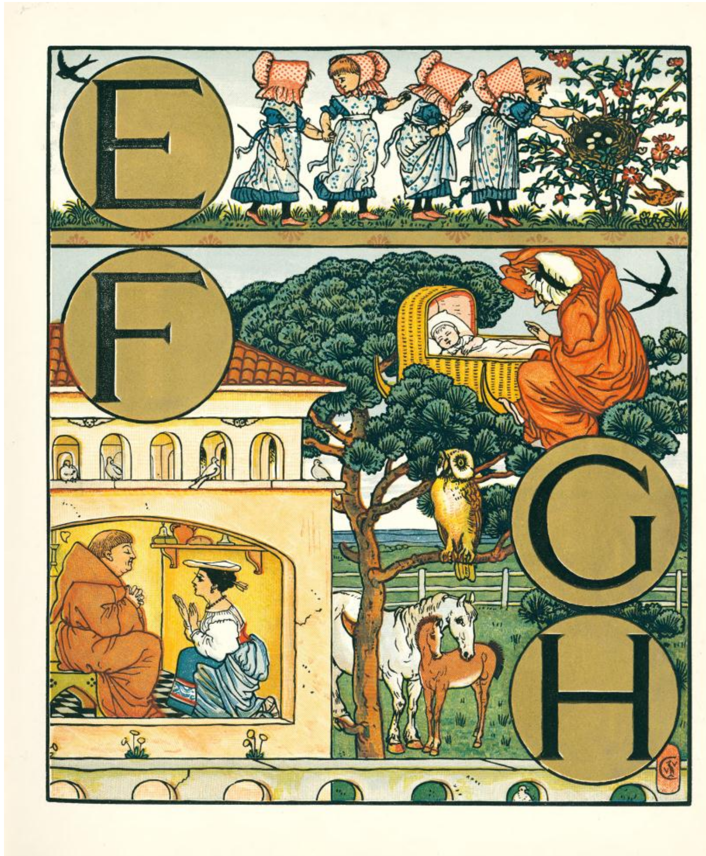
After laboring in obscurity for seven years, Crane's efforts as an illustrator began to bear fruit, and he recalled that "About 1869-70 they [the toy-books] began to show something like a distinct decorative treatment and style, as I endeavoured to adapt them more both to the conceptions of children and to the conditions of colour printing" (*Reminiscences* 107). The most concrete indication that he had distinguished himself from the leagues of nameless designers laboring on similar cheaply-printed and mass-produced books for children *and* adults was that he received the honor of his name on the cover. He recalled that "[books produced] in 1870 made this new departure, and led on to their successors, which shortly became numerous enough to be put out in a separate category and labelled with my name by Messrs. Routledge" (*Reminiscences* 107). His "own" series of books from Routledge, "Walter Crane's Toy Books," began appearing around 1872. Among that series were three revolutionary alphabet books: *The Absurd ABC* (1874); *The Alphabet of Old Friends* (1874); and *Baby's Own Alphabet* (1875). They were revolutionary not because all of their literal contents were new, as even the title of *The Alphabet of Old Friends* admits. Besides the alphabet, the text of all three books largely consists of nursery rhymes, or even just fragments of them. But now that works were actually attached to his name, Crane could begin to build a reputation with the public as well as with publishers, and finally, he could direct his design efforts toward "artistic motive" as well as commercial survival ("A word," 23). Moreover, at a time when the "Golden Age of Children's Literature" was legitimating artistic expression nominally directed at

[219] In 1879 he hand-lettered all of *The First of May, a Fairy Masque* so that the text would be "in harmony with the designs" (*Reminiscences* 203).

children – for instance, with John Tenniel's illustrations for the *Alice* books – Crane may have been shrewd to found his novel designs on the bedrock of familiar and thoroughly-vetted nursery rhymes. On one hand, the book as a whole would be tapping into a growing vogue for nostalgia, and the other hand, he could demonstrate the ease with which his new design aesthetic could be absorbed into existing cultural norms. So at this critical juncture, he chose to construct a series of alphabet books in which the relationship between word and image insists upon the possibility of convergence (in W. J. T. Mitchell's sense of the term[220]) or cooperation between those juxtaposed design elements. In the process, he constructs a literography in which each page of his alphabet books provides access to a larger visual-cum-verbal world of the printed page. It is a world that extends to oral tradition as well as other pages and other books, initiating child-readers into a mode of literacy that is certainly "literary," but far from strictly textual.

In a bold but self-consistent move, Crane sometimes deployed design as rhetoric precisely because he was reacting to a rationalist approach to literacy that situated image-based modes of communication as a developmental stepping-stone to textual literacy. When he composed a polemic page layout, the appearance of the page as a whole took precedence over anything else, including textual legibility and his own labor. Turning to one of the earlier ones, the *Alphabet of Old Friends,* we find that it is awash in gold accents, and each vignette has been lavished with attention, every corner filled with ink (Figure 41). The whole almost threatens to dissolve into an unreadable mass of detail, as though to compensate for the rehashed text; nursery rhymes that start with the called-for letter have been reprinted in standard-issue letterpress on separate pages interleaved with the decorated pages.

[220] For a discussion of Mitchell's notion of visual/verbal "convergence" see my Introduction.



Courtesy of Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00028229/00001

Figure 41. “E” through “H” from Crane’s *Alphabet of Old Friends*

appears to have been standardized separately from the design of individual characters, leading to a number of issues with how the letter-text-image relationship is mapped. There is occasional awkwardness, as when the rhyme for “O” is squeezed into a curiously crowded corner of the central spread (Figure 42). There are dislocations: the text describing “all the good folks” who “watched the dog and the cat” is farther from the scene than is the box describing “L for the Little man, gun and bullets complete.” Even legibility of the alphabet is affected; for example, “C” is considerably obscured by a text box jammed into the layout (Figure 43).

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 42. "K" through "P" from Crane's *Absurd ABC*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 43. “A” through “D” from Crane’s *Absurd ABC*

Similarly, in the *Baby’s Own Alphabet,* it is easy to infer that the illustrations were often designed before the text because at several points the hand-lettering is forced to fit within the spaces allotted by the layout, rather than the other way around. At the letter “W,” Crane squeezes an extra line of text into the vertical because he has run out of room horizontally (Figure 44), and at “D” Crane must actually resort to an asterisk when he runs out of room for the conclusion of the rhyme (Figure 45).

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 44. "W" from Crane's *Baby's Own Alphabet*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 45. "D" from Crane's *Baby's Own Alphabet*

These are the most glaring examples, but his fixation on holistic visual effects is also apparent in the *Absurd ABC*, where the text boxes on the first and last pages – those dealing with A through D and W through Z – have gold-speckled backgrounds that make the hand-lettered text difficult to decipher. Since Crane's toy books clearly reached consumers who enjoyed the pages as visual feasts rather than complaining, textual obscurity or illegibility may well have been perceived as a reorganized hierarchy, rather than self-defeat.

It is paradoxical, perhaps, that Crane relies on text to anchor this book in a known world of the literary, presumably because by doing so he can situate his own visual elaborations as the pedagogical object. In the process, he shifts attention away from the alphabet as textual substrate and reorients attention to the letters' status as visual objects. At the most basic level, the use of familiar nursery rhymes refocuses commercial attention on Crane's designs. The *Alphabet of Old Friends* actually offers nothing "new" *except* for Crane's sumptuous designs. The letters of the alphabet are printed in stately black capitals, but the black is almost swamped by a halo of gilding. The letters are hermetically sealed off from the vignettes in which they are embedded, possibly echoing the verbal/visual redundancy of the earlier, pre-departure books. But the scenes themselves, although naturalistic at one level, are also peopled with strange figures – a baby in a tree-top, a comic king, cupids shaped like love letters. The scenes are too fantastic to support one-to-one "mapping" of representation onto the real world, like those in the farmyard and railway alphabets offered. It is a fairy world offered up for consumption, *visual* interpretation, and perhaps imaginative identification, not the straightforward labeling of the *Farm-yard, Railroad,* and Noah's Ark-themed *Alphabets*. And it is a world complete with meticulously-designed spaces, as the central spread for *The Alphabet of Old Friends* clearly demonstrates (Figure 46). Each blocked-off panel includes design details uncharacteristic of contemporary alphabet books, ranging from wallpaper and pottery designs to fabrics, furniture, and flourishes around the alphabetical letters. The alphabetical letters become decorative elements as well, like wallpapers backgrounding the book-world in which these characters live and carry out the actions described by the tales printed nearby. Indeed, the letters operate

Courtesy of Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00028229/00001

Figure 46. "I" through "R" from Crane's *Alphabet of Old Friends*

more like decorations than signposts, since their role as *linear* navigational devices is undercut by the non-linear organization of visual design. This can be most concretely demonstrated by paying even closer attention to the center spread of *The Alphabet of Old Friends*. In the very center we see continuity across the gutter: the blue background, plants, and shell-shaped corner details continue without a break, suggesting that the page was designed and printed as a folio-width whole, and thus should be "read" as a whole. But if we do this, reading all the way across the page from left to right before moving down, the letters fall out of alphabetical order. This was *not* true in the *Noah's Ark* and *Ark* alphabets, which also featured center spreads that absorbed the gutter. Whether Crane designed *The Alphabet of Old Friends,* without knowledge of how the alphabet letters would be inserted, or put the letters down first and designed without regard for their arrangement, the result is the same: the pedagogical utility and textuality of the alphabet is subordinated to the visual effect of the page, promoting a construction of literacy that privileges the latter. The textual environment absorbs the alphabet as a visually-oriented design element rather than as part of a label.

I noted above that the hand-lettering of the *Baby's Own Alphabet* revealed a similar prioritization on Crane's part, or lack of forethought about the triangulation among letter, image, and text. And the level of detail in the illustrations for that book, as in the *Alphabet of Old Friends,* far exceeds the amount of forethought (or lack thereof) put into the lettering. Each scene is replete with details suggesting a comprehensive miniaturization like that seen in dollhouses – not coincidentally, these finely-crafted toys were simultaneously in vogue in Victorian England, and one appears later in the pages of Crane's *Little Queen Anne and Her Majesty's Letters*. In *Baby's Own Alphabet*, the scene at G is particularly rich with squint-inducing decorative details. Much about this panel reflects Crane's growing familiarity and fascination with the world of industrial interior design (Figure 47). The textiles are represented without much investment in figure-modeling, but instead with a pronounced eye to upscale children's fashions of the day, especially the patterned dress of the girl on the left. The elaborate cabinet panel suggests an early example of Art Nouveau, a twentieth-century artistic movement for which Crane has been cited as a

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 47. "G" from Crane's *Baby's Own Alphabet*

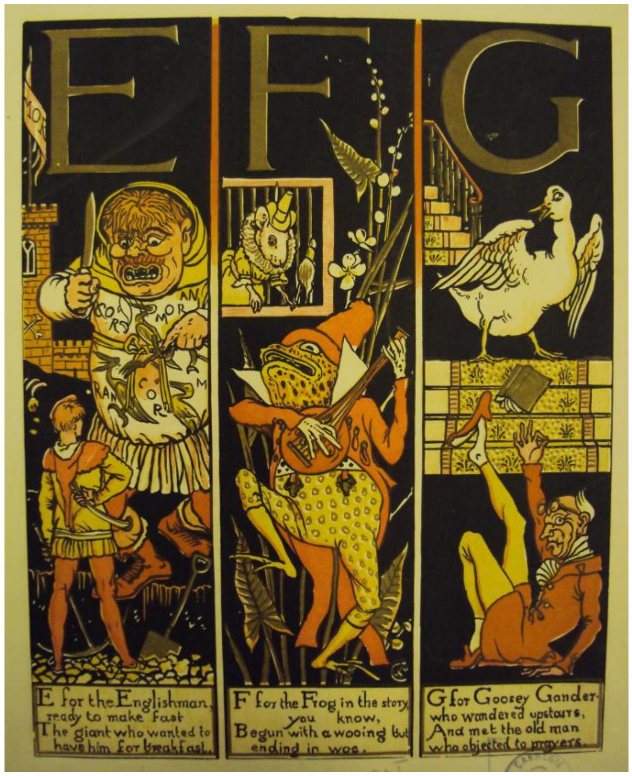
precursor.[221] The fiddle-back chair indicates his familiarity with the "Queen Anne" style and a contemporary move toward simple elegance in furniture design, which of course would reach its apogee with the Arts and Crafts Movement. Even the pattern on the pottery with*in* the cabinet has been painted in trendy Dutch blue with as much care as a real-world vessel might receive at the hands of Wedgewood. Some of Crane's other illustrations from this time show a similar level of attention to detail, and luxuriate in the new possibilities for layering color and visual resolution, as economies of scale meant that books of this large quarto size, with five or six color blocks in addition to the key to be printed, nonetheless cost only a shilling, and were well within the reach of middle-class consumers in England at the time. But he may not have felt that he had much competition in the toy book arena, since this panel also includes a glimpse of a glaringly un-designed alphabet book: in the lower right-hand corner, propped on the tasteful chair, sits an open alphabet book displaying "a A" and "B" but no illustrations at all. That book offers a significant point of contrast with Crane's own book and its abundant opportunity for a self-education in design, even if at the expense of textual clarity. Its presence is justified by the panel's accompanying rhyme: "Great A, little A, Bouncing B; the cat's in the cupboard and she can't see me." These lines dutifully begin with a "G" word, but they also showcase the arbitrary rules of the alphabet book form, and alphabetical order itself, in their quotation of a traditional and oft-recited, as well as oft-reprinted, alphabet rhyme. By implicitly routing the reader to *another* text, and back to the start of the alphabet to boot, the rhyme disrupts the nominal linearity of Crane's own book. But by interrupting from within the confines of the abecedarian structure, it reconciles disruption or non-linearity with other text-based conventions. This combination of visual and verbal self-reflexivity, which reproduces alphabet book conventions at multiple levels simultaneously, reinforces the familiar analogy between textual reading, and the reading of images. However, Crane has revised the relationship between abecedarian text and its illustration in a manner that takes the former for granted while invigorating the latter. With fragments of other texts comprising its text, it assumes much literary or traditional knowledge. In this way, he mobilizes a familiar format to make a new argument: beautiful objects, and the ability to experience a

[221] See Depas, Madsen 148 and Denney 82.

visually-satisfying world with aesthetic appreciation, should be as thoroughly integrated into educational practices as textual decoding.

In a similar fashion, the *Absurd ABC* obviously assumes the reader's fluency with a canon of nursery rhymes, and exploits those rhymes' thorough integration into childhood experience and print culture to argue that textual consumption should be balanced with commensurate visuals. This text argues even more forcefully than *The Baby's Own Alphabet* that non-linear modes of visual "reading" are appropriate for text. Both characters and text are laid out on the page in a way that undermines the linearity of the textual world, the viewer decoupled from even so tenuous a narrative as alphabetical order. Thus, each line identifies the image of "the [character] *who…*" or "that…" performed some action in an implicitly well-known story. We have "C for the Cat that played on the fiddle, / When cows jumped higher than Heigh Diddle Diddle," and, somewhat self-consciously, "For the Frog in the story, / you know, / Begun with a wooing but / ending in woe." The trope sometimes appears to strain the poet's invention, as with the uninspired rhyming of "E for the Englishman, / ready to make fast, / The giant who wanted to have him for breakfast," and the awkward grammar of "N for the numerous children / they who / Were often too much for their mother in Shoe." But the brief rhymes never actually complete or retell the tale, only moving on to another "[character] who..." The full nursery rhyme is implicitly available in a separate body of text, itself available in turn for visual interpretation by another graphic artist. These characters occupy a space separate from that of the reader, with a blank black background that reinforces this by frustrating perspective, but simultaneously manifesting the fact that the designer has addressed himself to every single bit of space on the page.

I would argue that the primary function of many graphic elements in Crane's mid-1870s alphabet books is simply to testify that a designer has given the page sincere attention, thereby implying that the viewer should do so as well. We see this in Crane's visible management of borders on and within the page, as well as in the black background of the *Absurd ABC*. The characters and the alphabetical letters printed in gold (a reversal of the scheme in *Alphabet of Old Friends*) even occupy spaces isolated from each other, never overlapping or even touching. The vignettes associated with letters E through J and Q through V are explicitly set apart from each other in boxes (Figure 48).



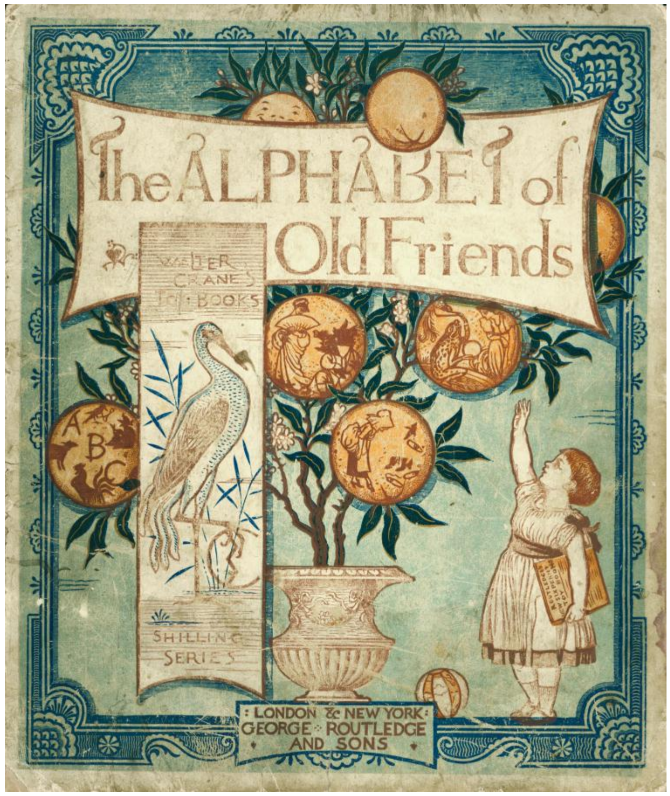
Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 48. “E” through “G” from Crane’s *Absurd ABC*

On the remaining pages, the letters scroll continuously across the top of the page, while the vignettes are spread across a striking field of black. But even if a given vignette deploys internal perspective, no character interacts with one from another nursery rhyme, and they are juxtaposed with those hard-to-read text boxes in a manner that does not respect the typical mode of *textual* reading – from left-to-right and top-to-bottom – any more than the *Alphabet of Old Friends* does. On the very first page of the *Absurd ABC,* reading the text-boxes in alphabetical order would require going from the upper-left to the bottom-right, back up to the upper-right, and then diagonally towards the bottom-left – it is only by then following the text to its referent, the “Dame with her pig at the stile,” and the pig’s orientation toward the right, that one is encouraged to look toward the bottom right and turn the page to "E" (Figure 43). Readers/viewers are thus invited to roam the visual field, to exhaust the page at their own discretion before turning to the next one. Much later, he identified his exposure to Japanese prints by a sailor acquaintance as "no little helpful and suggestive stimulus" in creating this effect: "Their treatment in definite black outline and flat brilliant as well as delicate colours, vivid dramatic and decorative feeling struck me at once" (*Reminiscences* 107). The *Absurd ABC* is certainly unusual in its use of matte black backgrounds, against which nursery rhyme characters are outlined and the alphabetical letters appear more as gilded accents than as focal points. Crane was proud of his willingness, enabled by fruitful collaboration with the masterly printing skill of Edmund Evans, to adapt to improving methods of production, as he "endeavoured to apply these methods to the modern fanciful and humourous subjects of children's toy-books" (*Reminiscences* 107). The result, as the layout of the *Absurd ABC* reveals, was a visual field that was both aesthetically adventurous and educationally radical.

In many respects, *Baby's Own Alphabet* and *Alphabet of Old Friends* are variations on a theme: the text in both consists entirely of nursery rhymes borrowed from both oral and (by this period with its affordable toy books) ample print tradition, with a vignette and a rhyme provided for each letter of the alphabet. Comparing them with *Absurd ABC* not only highlights their similarities with each other but sheds light on one of their design peculiarities by way of contrast: just as the black background of the *Absurd ABC* insistently separates each vignette from every other, in the other alphabets ubiquitous boxes, however gussied up with other decorative elements, cordon off every design subunit from every other. This rigid separation in turn stands in contrast with the labeled "pictorial" illustrations of his earliest alphabet books. The cumulative effect is that of the page as a kind of blueprint organizing and separating discrete spaces – Hutton was correct to suggest that Crane sometimes figured both the book and the page as a building or edifice, as evidenced by his tendency to describe their subunits in architectural terms. Whether architectural or interior, each element is rigorously assigned by Crane to its own space in a layer of relational scaling that comes to sound like *The House that Jack Built* (which Crane also illustrated early in his career): the book has a place within the literary landscape, the page has a place within the book, and each page is subdivided into spaces with a specific visual function. In Crane's revolutionary alphabet books, text might violate those boundaries by refusing to fit within the "box" or by imposing labeling imperatives, but purely visual form never does. There is no set path through the page, even with the alphabet as a guide. Perhaps, by implication, there is no set path through the book as a whole, either, a disrupted relationship *between* those literographic scales that is resistant to linear (that is, textual) navigation. I am inclined to see a description of this situation at the end of the *Baby's Own Alphabet,* which concludes with the only truly original text (i.e., not based on a nursery rhyme) to be found in any of these alphabet books: "Zoological Gardens where you shall go too, / But it's through ABC that we get to the Zoo." This enigmatic juxtaposition between the literary world and the real one has an obvious pedagogical motive – presenting the zoo as a reward for learning the alphabet, offered to children for making their way through the first stage of synthetic textual literacy instruction. But it might also suggest a distinction between the "you" of the reader and the "we" of the characters in the book. It identifies the end of the book as a boundary for both populations.

Although I have suggested that Crane's revolutionary alphabet books frustrate a simple relationship *between* literographic scales, e.g., via linearity or telescoping, he does offer a set path *to* the book – that is, an imperative connection between book and audience. Since textual boundaries are fruitful sites of literographic indicators, it should not be surprising that Crane exploited his recently-acquired control over the covers of his books for similarly-focused ends. Perhaps most importantly, he deployed those covers as a site for locating himself with respect to his (child-)readers and the aesthetically-rich book-world he was actively creating. The cover of the *Alphabet of Old Friends* (Figure 49) actually includes an implicit refutation of his earlier "sixpenny" toy books – or at least their subordination to the new shilling series with his name, monogram *and* a drawing of his namesake bird featured on the cover.



Courtesy of Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00028229/00001

Figure 49. original cover of Crane's *The Alphabet of Old Friends*

Within an elaborately scrolled frame, a large potted fruit tree occupies center stage, albeit obscured by the prominent authorial imprint. And a genderless child in the lower right hand corner is clutching a book labeled "Routledge's New Sixpenny Toy Books" in one hand while reaching up for an orange fruit with the other – a fruit inscribed with a sepia reproduction of one of Crane's illustrations from an earlier book in his Shilling series, *The Frog Prince* (1874). The other fruits include similar reprisals of former works. A scene from his highly-praised *Beauty and the Beast* (1875) is placed most centrally, and a nondescript allusion to "A B C" works appears on the leftmost side. Crane's reputation as a designer is represented here as literally bearing fruit, fruit that's more appealing and nourishing to children than books identifiable by their text.[222] The cover of the first edition of the *Absurd ABC* goes one step farther, however, figuring the child-readers under the tutelage of a large crane, bespectacled, be-collared, and perched boughs in the upper left corner. The pupils are clustered around representations of previous works by Crane, including what is recognizably an open copy of the *Noah's Ark ABC* in the lower right-hand corner. But these child-readers have human heads atop bird bodies, so that the books seem to simultaneously promise both intellectual advancement and physical devolution. This trajectory is clearly an alternative to the rationalists' notion of "progress" as a move from visual forms of communication to textual ones. Furthermore, Crane's powers as a visual or graphic artist are implicitly supernatural, as his books can literally change their consumers into something else, something more like him as he is here represented: a bird equaled in size by the tools of his trade (an artist's brushes and palette) gripped in his claws. In the face of such elaborate visual semiotics, the alphabet book's conventional focus on textual labeling, as carried out with animals in *Noah's Ark ABC,* becomes rather beside the point.

Instead, Crane's alphabet books from the 1870s offer his readers/viewers a layered literography, mapping a fluid relationship between books and audiences through page layouts that map an equally flexible relationship between text and images. On one hand, the amount of sheer effort invested in these designs suggests that the books themselves had sufficient value to warrant the attention lavished on them. Like Anne Lundin, who has argued that reviewers of children's books in the nineteenth century "legitimated" and elevated the form's cultural status with "their intense gaze" (*Victorian Horizons* 240), I am inclined to view Crane's investment in the intricate illustrations of *Baby's Own Alphabet* as a testament to their value in the public eye. Or, if *his* opinion of their educational and artistic value was not yet widely shared, then at least he is making an implicit argument for their value. And as I have already

[222] A similar plug was offered on the cover of *The Alphabet of Old Friends* when it was reprinted by John Lane. It also features a child-pupil holding a book in the lower right-hand corner. This time, the ambitious child is wearing a tasseled scholars' cap while anthropomorphized animals line for inspection – a crow or rook, a sheep, a rooster or cock – wearing sandwich boards featuring large block capitals. The combination of unadorned boards and enthusiastic animals suggests a parody of what a book can also do, and much more conveniently: make the letters interesting to a child-viewer, especially when he is stuck inside a comparatively dull, institutional school environment like this child seems to be.

suggested by exploring the "G" of *Baby's Own Alphabet,* Crane commented on the educative and social position of alphabet books *within* his books as well as without.

In fact, Walter Crane's revolutionary alphabet can be distinguished from his earlier, pre-departure ones partly by the way they refer to themselves. Self-reflexivity is crucial to that literography. Far from retreating into fairy lands and the world of books entirely, these books still find points of connection with the real world and even comment on semiotics by including representations of the alphabet, education, and books in a potentially-ironic way. The borders of the books, like the covers, are particularly rich sources of such images, which is probably not surprising given their disproportionate responsibility for structuring the reader's/viewer's entry into and exit from the book.[223] I have already discussed the conclusion of the *Baby's Own Alphabet*; the beginning of that text includes a thematically-appropriate rhyme about two fashionable people greeting each other. After all, Crane's books *are* fashionable... or at any rate he wants them to be perceived as such. He then enlists the readers' cooperation for the journey through the book with the letter "B": "Boys and girls come out to play / The moon doth shine as bright as day. / Come with a whoop, come with a call / Come with a good will or not at all." Perhaps we get to childhood within the book only by way of these fashionable adults – the ones who control access via the market. The *Absurd ABC* is even more pointed in its self-reflexivity. At A, we find "A for the Apple of Alphabet pie, / Which all get a slice of. Come taste it and try." A clear and familiar invitation to the pedagogical alphabet if ever there was one – the alphabet is even inscribed on the pie illustrated nearby – this obviously alludes to the "A Apple Pie" rhyme that proceeds with "B bit it, C Cut it," etc. and had been in print since 1742, when it appeared in M. Cooper's *A Child's New Play-thing*. After all of the nursery rhymes, characters, and general visual/verbal/textual chaos in between, the final page features "Z" is "for the Zany who looked like a fool, / For when he was young he neglected his school." The Zany himself is a foolish-looking boy scratching his head and being threatened with a dunce cap if he cannot ascend the proverbial ladder or stairway of learning, here represented by a stack of books founded on one labeled "A B C." (Figure 50). "Zany" was a common word for "Z" in alphabet books from the

[223] Hence Genette's subtitle for *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation.*

eighteenth-century onward, but the visual representation of an alphabet book as a founding text here prompts us to revisit all the ways I've described Crane's own alphabet books as re-envisioning pedagogical utility. These moments of self-reflexivity suggest Crane's need to constantly negotiate between the traditional status of the alphabet book, and his obvious recognition of its powers as a vehicle for aesthetic education and visual artistic expression. Crane resists using the alphabet book simply to inculcate textual literacy, and to situate the visual as simply the *pre*-textual. By plunking a dull alphabet book into the corner of the panel for "G" in *Baby's Own Alphabet,* he seems to write that kind of educational endeavor off as ineffectual, unappealing, and trivial.

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 50. "Z" from Crane's *Absurd ABC*

As Konody has pointed out, Crane later attempted to frame these "decorative" details as proof that the children's books could have a concrete commercial interaction with more conventionally-artistic, and exclusively adult-oriented, ventures in industrial design:

> I had been accustomed to introduce into these children's book designs not only pictorial ideas which influenced one at the time, but any passing impression, or whim of fancy and form, as in details of dress, furniture, and decorative pattern; and though the production of these books could hardly be regarded by either designer or printer as exactly lucrative, they led the way to other work, and had considerable indirect effect, besides being an unfailing source of amusement and interest - at least to their designer - and a means of suggestion in details of design in decoration and colour schemes of various kinds. (Crane *Easter Art Annual* 4).[224]

He here recasts them as part of a larger aesthetic project, or even as a *precursor* of the Aesthetic movement, with its interest in Oriental art. However, as I hope my reading of these books and their covers would suggest, Crane was deeply invested in the books' design at the time as a site for articulating a form of literacy that not only acknowledging the visual element of text, but actually resisted the tyranny of textual linearity, and reclaimed the alphabet as an aesthetic object as well as textually pedagogical one. It wasn't until he began to see his store of cultural capital lose its value that he began to see child-readers as a liability. As that moment approached, in his children's books he began to construct a new literography that not only continued to take textual literacy for granted, but elevated his own investment in the visuality of the alphabet to legendary proportions.

[224] This description is near-literal repetition of his statements in his *Reminiscences*: "if [the toy books] did not bring in much money, I had my fun out of them, as in designing I was in the habit of putting in all sorts of subsidiary detail that interested me, and often made them the vehicle for my ideas in furniture and decoration" (Crane 156).

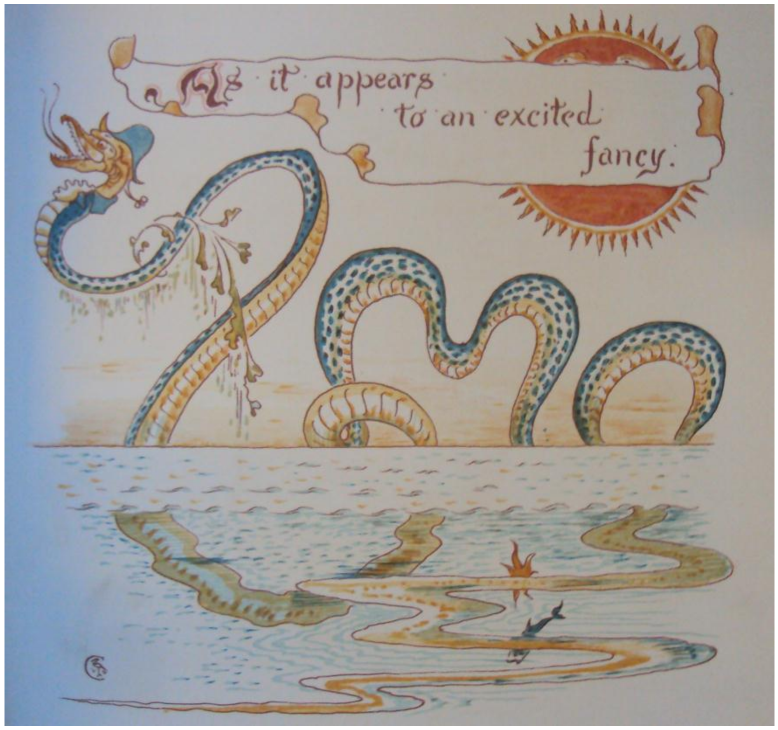
D. ART AND THE ALPHABET IN (AND OUT OF) THE NURSERY

Finally in the mid-1880s, Crane's reputation as an illustrator and book designer was sufficiently established that he could produce a series of books preoccupied with representations of the alphabet in a wholly new mode. His twentieth-century writings suggest that he may have been prompted to act by the realization that the tide was turning on the mainstream cultural valence of children's books. They were losing their viability as vehicles for art, much less as sites for promoting a radical aesthetic education that featured visual literacy alongside the textual. As early as 1896, Crane had started to resign himself to the infantilization of illustration and embraced the spreading opinion that pictures were a primitive form of communication. By that point, he could admit that "The child, like the early races, likes picture stories and stories in pictures" ("A word about," 23). But in the interim, he continued to use the figure of the Child as a way to articulate his ideas about human education and perception. At one point he publically criticized Ruskin for failing to "treat a child's plastic mind – naturally fearless, open, inquiring, and logical – as something living and human." Crane buttressed his authority in this letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* by claiming his understanding of "children's sympathies through the eye – their chief organ for the reception of ideas" ("Mouth of Babes"). And around the same time that he quibbled with Ruskin, he designed several books for the publisher Marcus Ward that suggested his continuing investment in a construction of literacy that recognized the visual continuity between text and image. Many of the illustrations were adapted from homemade books that he had designed for his own children. They are not true alphabet books in the sense of taking the alphabet as their primary structuring principle; instead, the texts comprising Crane's *Romance of the Three R's* were designed to represent "the troubles of the novice in his or her efforts to acquire the usual educational rudiments, as the source of a series of fanciful incidents and adventures" (Crane *Easter Art Annual,* 8). They also cost five times as much as his "toy" alphabet books of the previous decade. However, they clearly acknowledge or gesture toward the alphabet book form in which Walter Crane was so well-versed. These references could be quite literal, as in the second book of the series, *Pothooks and Perseverance.* About halfway through the narrative about

"Percy Vere" and his "battle" with orthography – the titular "pothooks" refer to writing exercises for replicating calligraphic strokes – Crane incorporates full-page designs that replicate the alphabet book format. He dedicates one page to a letter and elaborates on the form as well as the phonics with conventional example-words and illustrations of them (Figure 51). However, Crane does not sustain this structure beyond the letter "D," instead turning to a beautiful but ultimately hostile representation of the alphabet as a whole, as the "ABC Serpent" (Figure 52). Thanks to such significant moments, these books should be seen as extending the self-reflexivity that had already begun to appear in his revolutionary alphabet books. The line between *being* an alphabet book and *representing* one is vanishingly narrow, a matter of perspective and context rather than textual codes. But even more importantly, Crane relocates these representations of the alphabet, pedagogy, and childhood from the textual environment of the nursery rhyme (and, by extension, the nursery itself) to an environment steeped in visual references to

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 51. "Amount" from Crane's *Pothooks and Perseverance*



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 52. "ABC Serpent" from Crane's *Pothooks and Perseverance*

classical mythology and medieval romance. As I will demonstrate below, these gestures paradoxically reinforce his visible effort to break away from the traditional mode of the alphabet book and to produce, first for his own children and later for a larger public of both children and adults, a representation of the alphabet that substantiated the worthiness of text as a *visual* component of the printed page.

By the time Crane was working on his *Romance,* the Education Acts had been in operation for over a decade, and a certain level of textual literacy was, nominally at least, a universally-assured acquirement in England. But *visual* literacy, at least as governed by the illustrator and practiced in the mass media, was starting to suffer a loss of cultural status. As John McNair and other historians of print technology have documented, the novelty of high-quality printed images was wearing off thanks to the incursions of photography as well as the dilution of the market, itself an effect of increasingly mechanized, efficient, and attractive modes of reproducing illustrating texts. Fine art continued to attract adult audiences and corresponding esteem, however, due to its quarantine-like estrangement from the practitioners of fine and industrial craft, even after their collaboration on Great Exhibition successes. Gerard Curtis notes that “the failure of the Royal Academy to recognize the graphic arts and the graphic artist” contributed to a degradation of the engraver’s status declining “from ‘implied’ artist to popular illustrator of mass-market imagery” (36). But he also admits that this apparent “failure” was exacerbated by the appearance of photography in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and its increasing use in commercial or industrial printing as time went on (Curtis 36). Crane’s own production methods included photography after 1871, when Evans began to use cameras to transfer his drawings on paper to wood blocks for engraving (*Reminiscences* 148). But as Richard Maxwell points out, “the invention of the halftone process in 1881” allowed photographic reproductive methods to supplant the skilled engraver and increase the peril to the graphic artist (xxii). Judith Fisher, similarly, focuses on the status of the engraver, but concludes that his star was falling even before photographic reproduction became commercially practical in the mid-1860s, and widely used in the 1870s. Instead, she claims that the “increasing industrialization of book production itself” that I alluded to in my first chapter, such as the transition to steam-powered printing in the years on either side of 1850, or the replacement of handmade paper with machine-made, made it possible to view the engraver on the level of the machine: “the artist disappears into the technician” (Fisher 85, n. 1).[225] Under the leadership of William Morris, the Arts and Crafts Movement that Crane officially joined by the late 1880s had risen as a politically-inflected response to precisely these developments.[226] Together, Crane, Morris, and others were vigorous in resisting the cultural and technological forces that reduced book design to a binary between expensive Kelmscott Press editions and what Fisher dismissively lumps together as “children’s books and light literature” (60). But the *Romance of the Three R’s* reveals the anxiety these developments occasioned specifically for a designer of alphabet books, who was exploiting their educational associations to argue for a pluralized notion of literacy. Crane’s artistic investment in the visuality of the alphabet, and by

[225] For a historical overview of mid-nineteenth-century developments in industrial print, see Twyman.

[226] For a brief history of the movement and its Exhibitions, see Naylor.

extension his reputation as a designer of children's books, was being undermined by the combined pressures of state-mandated textual literacy and the Industrial Revolution.

As I have already noted, Crane's individual response to these developments is most apparent in his increasing commitment to the promotion of the Decorative Arts. J. Hutton also points out that Crane described his efforts in book design as directed toward the "decorative" in a positive sense, in contradistinction with the trivializing usage of the twentieth century (28-29). In 1913, Edward Johnston admitted in a short essay titled "Decoration and its Uses" that "the word decoration has become somewhat artificialized," but he called on etymology to rehabilitate it, especially "the Latin derivation," which emphasized "comeliness and grace" (7). In Crane's case, too, the descriptor was meant to identify good design, which enhanced its bibliographic environment and literally worked, in the sense of functioning or being "useful," *with* the content of the book. As he explained in *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New*, even if the goal was simply to create a more beautiful object, decoration could, and should, help accomplish that justifiable artistic end (216-217). This was favorably contrasted with the merely "pictorial": images that served no purpose but to reproduce a scene in the mechanical manner of a camera. Later, he justified his interventions into art school instruction and administration by condemning contemporary design schools for simply adding to "the overcrowded ranks of the picture producers" (*William Morris to Whistler* 57). Thus, work on behalf of the decorative arts could be framed as both aesthetically and morally superior, because it advocated respect for the craftsman while photographic reproductive techniques steadily encroached on the engravers' territory. Crane was a founding member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1887, and later proudly noted his drop in commercial productivity during "the years 1888, 1889, and 1890, partly owing to other kinds of work, and partly owing to my connection with the Art-workers' Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, over both of which bodies at that time I was chosen to preside" (*Easter Art Annual* 28). Although Crane here distinguishes between his artistic or commercial design work, and "other kinds of work," his overt political actions on behalf of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society might be more appropriately seen as an extension of the educational program in aesthetics that he offered through his toy books of the 1870s.

In fact, the *Romance of the Three R's* marks his transition from affordable, mass-market alphabet books to book design that sacrificed his lower- and middle-class audience to his nascent Socialist principles. These books amplified his investment in the visual character of text, and also clearly manifested his belief that good design should be integral to education, especially literacy education. But he was increasingly aware that mechanized reproduction, while cheaper, required "the cheapening of human life" (*Exhibition* 1890, 8). As Isobel Spencer notes, many of the designs in this trilogy are taken from books that were originally written and designed for his own children; so at first, they were initially relatively unencumbered by the considerations of marketability and reproduction technology. When he decided to produce polished versions of the stories, he turned to the more-expensive and labor-intensive lithographic process rather than the wood engraving that had enabled his initial "departure" from the deplorable standards of the 1850s and early 1860s. The democratic appeal of his sixpenny and alphabet books, with their familiar rhymes and characters and – of course – low price, are replaced by original text and much less rigid page layouts in *Slateandpencilvania: Being the Adventures of Dick on a Desert Island* (1885)*; Pothooks and Perseverance, or the ABC Serpent* (1886); and *Little Queen Anne and Her Majesty's Letters* (1886). All three volumes were published by Marcus Ward, by whom he had previously been employed to design greeting cards, and were almost immediately thereafter collected into a single volume called *The Romance of the Three R's.* The title points directly to one of the preoccupations of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose paintings and book illustrations Crane whole-heartedly and vocally admired. As members of that group, the work of painters John Everett Millais and Edward Burne-Jones represented children and a pseudo-medieval past in atmospheric, idyllic modes informed more by chivalric literature than realism rooted in the contemporary. Although he was never accepted as a Pre-Raphaelite Brother, Crane's *Romance of the Three R's* resonates with the movement insofar as it constituted his attempt to wrestle the alphabet from the confines of the nursery, with its "old friends" and absurdities, and elevate it to the textual environments of gods and heroes. In the process, he strove to put it before a much larger audience that, like his most successful "so-called children's books," appealed to a "public literary culture of young and old," to borrow Lundin's phrase.

The cover of the collected series demonstrates most concretely that the purported children's book designation had not yet – apparently – become toxic to Crane, nor was the classicism rampant in Academy history painting incompatible with it. The two children represented on the cover are astride a winged rocking horse, a whimsical hybrid of nursery banality with the Pegasus of Greek mythology (Figure 53). Crane's crane makes an appearance as well, highlighting a tripod signpost pointing the way toward "Writing," "Reading," and "Arithmetic," although the latter two are obscured by a wing and a hat, respectively. While the children's clothes are contemporary, the figures swirling around them on the

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Figure 53. cover of Crane's *A Romance of the Three R's*

edges of the book wear classical draped gowns and cavort in a manner reminiscent of pre-Raphaelite decoration. Here, we can clearly see what Lundin has called the "self-conscious revivalism" characteristic of books aligned with the Arts and Crafts movement (*Victorian Horizons* 3). In their mythological overtones and allegorical figuration, they gesture toward the tropes of classical education.[227] William Morris was already urging Crane in this direction, and Judith Fisher rightly points out, "Morris's illustrated works, such as the Kelmscott Chaucer, harken back to Blake and illuminated manuscripts, not George Cruikshank" (85 n.2) – the latter another long-lived alphabet-book creator who had watched his craft fall into disrepute.

Crane's amalgamation of the contemporary and the classical continues onto the frontispiece and title page for the *Romance* volume, which together appear to depict an Italianate circus act: a toga-draped female figure stands in as a trick rider, balanced atop the three "R's" figured as steeds, while across the gutter a group of children dressed in nineteenth-century clothing looks on (Figure 54).

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 54. frontispiece and title page of Crane's *A Romance of the Three R's.*

[227] They also foreshadow Crane's subsequent fascination (in the 1890s) with allegory as a mode of visual communication analogous to textual reading. He deployed "mythological figures" in a "pictogrammatical" fashion that required a kind of mythological literacy to be intelligible (O'Neill 15).

This frontispiece was judged by one reviewer to be "sufficient" recommendation for the book as a whole ("Christmas Books" *The Times,* 17 December 1886, 13). The children's attention is directed by another Crane self-portrait – this time a man in a feathered cape with a bird-shaped headdress. Children are here represented as both an audience and as performers themselves, offered up for visual consumption by Crane's alter ego (mustachioed like the real-life designer). Their dual role is sustained throughout the text, as the three children who serve as protagonists for the Romance that follows are also variously positioned as actors and observers, available for either identification or observation (or both) by reader/viewers. This doubling of children's roles reflects the dual audience Crane sought, and the flexibility he found in representations of childhood, which could refer to children's real experiences (especially as pupils), or a more Romantic notion of "the childlike." I noted above that allusion figured heavily in the revolutionary alphabet books, and a similar mechanism of literographic expansion operates here: the textual environment it constructs is really much bigger than those demarcated by the book itself. But, where the revolutionary alphabet books restricted themselves to nursery rhyme, the allusion of the *Romance* is to an entire body of cultural knowledge – of the ancient and medieval world, albeit considerably diluted from university or Academy standards – encompassing the visual (and the historical) *as well as* the textual or literary. Child characters have here been explicitly situated within an environment typically populated and interpreted by adults, and educated ones at that. Their subsequent interactions with the alphabet thus reveal how broadly Crane imagined his audience of prospective or current aesthetes. They also reinforce his understanding of "the childlike" as linked to "creative imaginative power" rather than children *per se.* As he wrote in his essay "The Relation of Art to Education and Social Life," "creative imaginative power… is "the power which can make an organic and harmonious whole out of separate and apparently discordant elements" (9). Crane wanted his mixed audience to acknowledge and appreciate the visual/verbal hybridity of linguistic signs, as well as the aesthetic potential that lay therein. Juxtaposing representations of the alphabet alongside representations of childhood in the *Romance* books offered a way to exploit the Child's semiotic flexibility.

If we focus on the texts of the *Romance* books, we continue to find a striking contrast with Crane's revolutionary alphabet books and their relentless dedication to folkloric content. There, the text was unapologetically unoriginal; here, the text is strongly invested in not only novelty, but also in visual puns and wordplay. Those features can hardly be construed as pedagogical unto themselves, although they could support a non-rationalist agenda in educational priorities and aesthetics. Collectively, they feed into a larger semiotic revelation about the difficulties of denotation: the linguistic sign, like the visual one, can be significantly ambiguous. The published series begins with *Slateandpencilvania: Being the Adventures of Dick on a Desert Island*, but the single-volume *Romance* presents them in reverse order of original publication – perhaps reflecting, *a posteriori,* how Crane's ideas were refined into a more overt ideological program. Thus, we begin with *Little Queen Anne and Her Majesty's Letters,* which presents Crane's most transparent appeal to already-literate consumers, and situates the whole *Romance* as a meditation on education rather than (merely) a pedagogical tool. For instance, *Little Queen Anne and Her Majesty's Letters* is slow to reveal its play on the dual meaning of "letter," but that pun is one among many featured in the book. This book, whose title alludes to "her majesty's letters," begins when "Little Queen Anne, sitting as usual in the sun, gets a letter": an epistle delivered on a silver tray, as the accompanying illustration specifies. Little Queen Anne answers while seated at a desk and wearing a dress designed with all the care for decorative detail that we saw in Crane's revolutionary alphabet books (Figure 55). This letter then finally begins to merge with the titular ones when she orders her "coach… and twenty-six!" in an ironic nod to the "coach and six" which perennially appeared as a reward for diligent students in eighteenth-century chapbooks like *Goody-Two Shoes* – books that, as Andrew O'Malley documents, were deployed over a hundred years earlier to promote textual literacy. In the eighteenth-century version, the coach and six carries the newly-literate away from the conflated drudgery of literacy education and working-class poverty to a middle-class lifestyle. Here, the "twenty six!" units of textual literacy actually convey Little Queen Anne *to* "Pages in waiting" – that is, an education through personified, beautifully-designed books. Indeed, after being "conducted by easy steps of one syllable" Little Queen Anne encounters representatives from one of Crane's own books: nursery rhyme

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Figure 55. Little Queen Anne at her writing desk in *Little Queen Anne and Her Majesty's Letters*, included in Crane's *A Romance of the Three R's*

characters like Little Boy Blue, Puss in Boots, and the Piggie that Went to Market, are identified as "old friends" awaiting her arrival. They are the humbler members of this population, however, as Queen Anne is next "royally received by the Three R's" and truly begins her education.

As she proceeds through subjects, it becomes increasingly clear that the book itself is far more concerned with *representing* textual literacy education than in facilitating it. The puns on letters, pages, and "easy steps" require an acquaintance with homophony and more conventional primers. The book only identifies the three R's by allusion to schoolroom procedures: "the first [Reading] gives her a programme… the second gives her a little [Writing] exercise, and the Third ['rithmetic] some slate refreshment." The book represents an idealized education as an education that has already happened. Little Queen Anne herself seems not to need any of this instruction in textual decoding or encoding, since she is repeatedly portrayed as literate *before* she even calls for her coach: she reads and responds to the letter invitation from the Three R's without adult assistance (none appears in those illustrations and she's the one holding a writing implement at the desk). More interestingly, she is dressed as Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, when she departs. Representing "Little Queen Anne" as not just a queen, but a goddess, is an efficient way for Crane to visually signal her status as a repository of valuable knowledge while also elevating the Child, and her experience of schooling, to heroic or legendary proportions. Her spear is actually a pen, iconographically reinforcing her existing mastery over the textual arts – and perhaps offering an implicit argument on Crane's part for the legitimacy of children's books as a site of education for adults as well as their nominal audience. Before we get very far into the *Romance* volume, the three R's have been variously figured as destinations (on the cover), animal vehicles (on the title page), and human beings. This series collectively suggests incredible flexibility and utility for a set of skills that are purportedly so very "elementary" in education, and yet at the same time clearly associated with royal status – a social elevation attributed to both Queen Anne and "His Majesty's Letters." Having mastered these fundamentals, Little Queen Anne herself would apparently prefer to focus on "Three Sisters who speak in all languages," the Muses of painting, music, and poetry, since she "finds them so interesting that she forgets how time goes." This moment of freedom suggests that a more elevated sense of the arts holds the key to both recapturing history and freeing oneself from its linear imperatives. And far from being available to children as well as adults, a childlike imagination must underpin all of these endeavors – we learn at the end that Little Queen Anne has been dreaming away in a hammock throughout the narrative, the notoriously Romantic garden image enabling a nostalgic response in adults and reinforcing an image of the Child as an adept of the creatively productive idyll. Crane was later explicitly joined by William Morris in his laudatory view of childhood and its survival within adults, when one of the characters in Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890) declared that "It is the child-like part of us that produces works of imagination" (131). Crane's significant twist in *Romance of the Three R's,* however, is to represent a child's journey through textuality as visually-stimulating, creative, *and* educational. That is to say, by approaching the *Romance* as a meta-commentary on Crane's other representations of literacy materials, we can see his increasing prioritization of aesthetic literacy.

An "excited fancy" is explicitly advocated in *Pothooks and Perseverance* as well, which also takes a similarly nostalgic, child-centered view of the page as a historical playground, albeit grounded in materiality of the book as a vehicle for such imaginative flights. Where Little Queen Anne wandered through a space that was half-medieval court – with pages and tutors – and half Academia delle Arte, Percy Vere is at the center of a similarly bifurcated experience. He initially makes his way to a medieval textual environment, but the setting gradually becomes the nineteenth-century version of a quest narrative: setting sail with another "A.B." Given the eponymous preoccupation with writing exercises, the former medieval setting is more conducive to highlighting the proud history of orthography by allusion to medieval illuminated manuscripts, as in the explicitly Gothic-revival orientation of much of the lettering in the Kelmscott Press. Konody had observed this trend in Crane's work and declared that "from his earliest youth," Crane "had manifested a strong leaning towards medieval romance or anything connected with deeds of chivalry" (70). Crane's representation of the central battle – wherein Percy and his able-bodied companion grapple with an orthographic serpent (Figure 56) – visually reveals the continuity between the two historically-disparate textual traditions invoked by the narrative. While sea narratives were the stuff of both late-nineteenth-century imperialism and Captain Marryat's books for boys, the serpent evokes countless early modern paintings of St. George battling the dragon (e.g. Paolo Uccello's in the National Gallery in London[228]) as well as Pre-Raphaelite interpretations, including one by Edward Burne-Jones, an artist much admired by Crane. Significantly, given the visual allusions to the adult-oriented medium of painting, in Crane's book our protagonist arrives at this congenial site by imaginative means akin to Queen Anne's daydreaming: "Percy Vere pensively puts a feather in his cap and fancies himself a knight with a plume." The feather/pen is once again the vehicle for a child's journey into a visually-rarefied past. This evocation of the past encompasses both the historical past, of course, but also the individual reader's past, insofar as this figurative "battle" with the difficulties of orthography

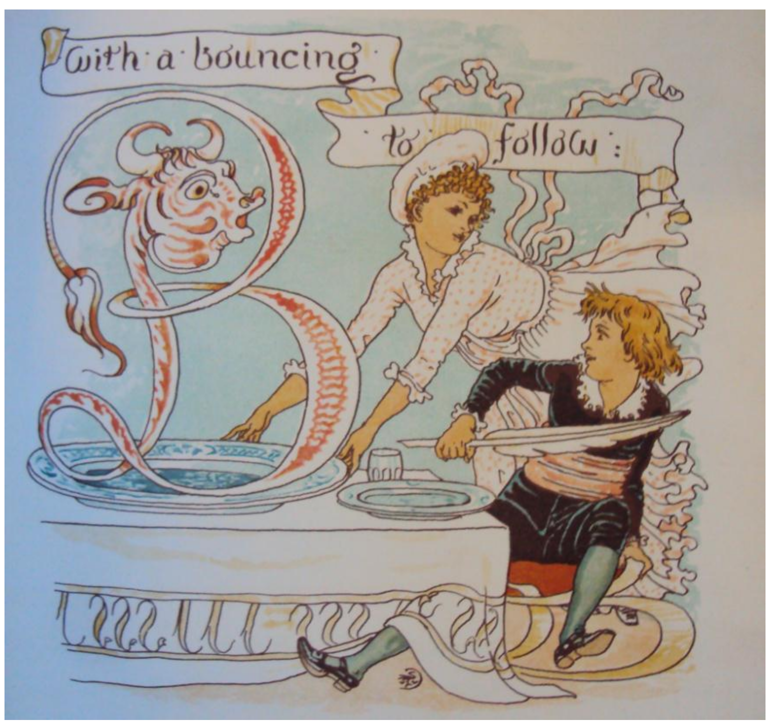
[228] Crane did include Uccello in his list of influences in the *Arts Journal* piece (4).

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 56. Percy grapples with the "ABC Serpent" in Crane's *Pothooks and Perseverance*

evokes a nostalgic response in adults. Even the figuration of learning as a battle dovetails with Crane's attempt to elevate representations of childhood to the level of the epic: the text of the entire book is inscribed on heraldic banners floating over the illustrations, reinforcing the triumphant or questing nature of the literacy educational endeavor while also acknowledging its difficulties. As part of a rite of passage, a representation of the alphabet functions as a narrative pivot here, with Percy Vere setting forth to do battle with the "ABC Serpent" (Figures 52 and 56). Having conquered it, he can join the world of the nineteenth-century literate, with literacy – in Crane's idealized vision – including an appreciation for a "bold hand" and the decorative capacity of the alphabet.

In the fantasy world that Crane creates for Percy to inhabit, "so-called" illustrations of the alphabet begin appearing about halfway through *Pothooks and Perseverance*, when the volume apparently morphs into an alphabet book, albeit with representations of the letters so large and elaborate that they simultaneously command visual attention and obscure or even abrogate their textual functions. The letter "A" is presented in fairly conventional alphabet book mode, with Crane even making use of the form's familiar tropes of "consumption"[229] – here, a play on the educational "course" as a dinner course: "after a long course of pothooks and hangers, [Percy] is transported to find it is dinner-time, feeling ready for any Amount" (Figure 51) Even if one is so perseverant as to locate the conclusion of the word "Amount" on a page filled with visual detail, subsequent pages will make a similar success impossible. After A, there is "a bouncing B to follow," the text so merged with the scene so that the "B" suggests the outline of a bull without needing to inscribe the word itself (Figure 57). I borrow Crane's back-handed distinction between children's books and those "so-called" because the lines between word and image are so (obviously intentionally) vexed on these pages as to frustrate a meaningful distinction. A letter *is* an image, these pages clearly argue, perhaps seeking to reclaim the "hieroglyphic" quality of writing that



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 57. "Bouncing B" from Crane's *Pothooks and Perseverance*

[229] See Crain 85-87 for a discussion of this trope and "swallow alphabets."

Crane had recognized in Herbert Spencer's descriptions, and which Isaac Taylor had recently popularized.[230] He later described his own view of the alphabet's origins in precisely those terms:

> We know that the letters of our alphabet were once pictures, symbols, or abstract signs of entities and actions, and grew more and more abstract until they became arbitrary marks—the familiar characters that we know. Letters formed into words; words increased and multiplied with ideas and their interchange; ideas and words growing more and more abstract until the point is reached when the jaded intellect would fain return again to picture-writing, and welcomes the decorator and the illustrator to relieve the desert wastes of words marshalled in interminable columns on the printed page. (*Decorative Illustration* 5).

In Crane's description of "picture-writing" as a kind of progress through devolution, we can see the entire paradoxical difficulty of the alphabet book, and how notions of literacy actively embed this specious binarization of word and image. And in the alphabetical images that constitute Percy's world *through* inscription, we can see a literal illustration of how Crane's own educational effort is directed toward convergence between aspects of design and thus between audiences.

I suggested above that the ambiguity of punning efficiently accomplishes "convergence" between irreconcilable elements. Not coincidentally, significant puns reappear at this stage of Percy's developmental narrative, reiterating the empowering aspect of literacy instruction: "But he takes a fresh plunge and, / turning over a new leaf, / in the eyes of a fair siren / he soon writes himself." Throughout this "course," the child has resumed his seat and become a consumer rather than an actor or creator – at "A" an enormous hand inexplicably appears on this page, clearly subsuming Percy's prerogative to "write himself" by both drawing and writing *him* (Figure 58). This is the most potent response to an implication running throughout Crane's entire *Romance* project, and extending back to the great Mr. Locke: children struggle against textual literacy education precisely because they may perceive it as oppressive and

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[230] See O'Neill for elaboration on Crane's debt to Herbert Spencer, and his probable familiarity with Taylor (117).

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 58. Percy "writes himself" in Crane's *Pothooks and Perseverance*

repressive, an act of adult society against their free will, or even – in Perry Nodelman's formulation – of colonization.[231] Such objections transfer to adults as well at the level of class oppression, although the case is made much more transparently/frequently for textual literacy than for visual forms of communication, which are typically presumed to be developmentally primitive.[232] In a manner analogous to how literacy may be subjectively framed as liberation or oppression, the letters themselves may be ambivalently and subjectively positioned as complex or simple pedagogical objects. Many descriptions of

[231] See Nodelman's "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature."

[232] As I noted in my introduction, Paolo Freire has most famously articulated the position that literacy education can be oppressive as well as liberating, and the support for such a stance is evident within nineteenth-century British literature as readily as his native Brazil.

early literacy instruction suggest that the preliminary act of consuming the alphabetical letters is grueling – hence the need for the enticements and pedagogical accommodates described by Locke and his successors.[233] But at least as many other pedagogical texts describe the alphabet as so fundamental that it is paradoxically trivial in the face of later intellectual endeavors. The letters are both "easy as ABC" and a significant barrier to "light." Not coincidentally, the final image of Percy clearly alludes to William Blake's famous image of *Albion Rose,* and the corresponding myth's representation of knowledge – literally, Enlightenment – as a dubious gift (Figure 59).[234] Both Crane and Blake were singularly invested in the holistic design of the page, particularly when it required hand-lettering, suggesting that the double-edged character of text might be tempered, even elevated, by effective design.

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 59. final image from Crane's *Pothooks and Perseverance*

233 These "enticements" and Locke's influence on techniques of reading instructions are discussed at length in Chapter 1.

234 The figure of Albion appears in many of Blake's works. His image of "Albion rose" (alternately titled "Glad Day" and "The Dance of Albion") can be readily viewed online at the William Blake Archive.

Percy's eventual acquisition of a "bold hand" in that book's concluding pages not only redeems the subtext of child self-empowerment, but implicitly absorbs mastery over the visual element of the page as well as the textual. Crane's optimistic vision of the power of the book and the literate – to right/write oneself by turning the page/leaf – is again reinforced in *Pothooks* by the concluding image and its play on the meaning of enlightenment: "And so, becoming a full-fledged penman, he makes light of his letters, and brings his tale to… the End" (Figure 59). Crane's use of the word "penman" conspicuously avoids identifying this newly-evolved child as a "writer," presumably in order to preserve the possibility that he has in fact become a graphic artist. Percy's feather-cape and the allusion to "fledging" may tip a hat and the scale toward our bird-like designer, though, who thereby draws attention to an ambiguity inherent in the letterforms themselves. Crane suggests that consuming the alphabet as merely textual substrate denies the letters their full expressive potential, since they are inevitably – albeit subjectively – available to perception as images *or* as textual units. He articulated this very argument a few years later in "The Relation of Art to Education and Social Life": "when the poet has pen, ink, and words at command, is his work considered done?.. if no hearts are touched or no responsive echo awakened, he might has well have been silent. Well, then, with a far more subtle and sensitive language, with all the sensuous delight of form, surface, colour, quality, and material, should the artist be content?" (24). Clearly not, he concludes, and thus educational efforts should be correspondingly comprehensive.

Crane appears not to have embraced beauty's power to redeem text until after completing *Slateandpencilvania,* however, as the tale he tells of *The Adventures of Dick on a Desert Island,* is nearly Rousseauvian in its obvious debt to *Robinson Crusoe,* and its send-up of the trappings of civilization. In contradistinction with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's resistance to books, though, and the ambiguity about sliding scales of power registered by Crane's later narratives about textual literacy, *Slateandpencilvania* is almost exclusively concerned with numeracy. This book reveals Crane's less-nuanced view of that form of education as an oppressive or corrupting influence, if not necessarily a colonizing one in the conventional manner of Victorian adventure stories featuring natives and desert islands. Biography may well be surfacing here, as it is tempting to read Crane's own traumatic childhood struggles with mathematics into an attack that is harsher than anything levied against textual literacy.[235] He seems uninterested in the semiotics of numerals, at least as compared to that of alphabetical letters. In what would have been a nightmarish scenario for Crane, Dick sets out to sea only to "find himself cast up on a strange shore composed principally of slates and pencils." Far from being intrigued or even challenged by this pedagogical playground, "he is about to put down his sad story" when the natives appear and subject Dick to a series of indignities.

The representations of these "strange figures" are unrelentingly negative, deploying racism as a condemnation of capitalism in accord with Crane's political sensibilities. This unsettles the typical evolutionary trajectory, so that "the natives" are more primitive than Dick's textual literacy or the book's visuals, and less civilized than Dick's own brand of (literate) culture. The natives' numeracy and its primitive status are clumsily indicated by numerals on their loincloths (Figure 60). But the natives' apparent investment in capitalism and accounting is curiously represented by their adapted British imperialist garb, including a top hat for the king, who "is engaged with an addition sum in his counting house" (Figure 61) and thus forwards him to a queen reclining under an umbrella of clearly imported design (Figure 62). Dick himself is hardly capable of colonization efforts in this situation, as his attempts at communication are consistently frustrated by the natives' investment in numbers as a form of social exchange. First he is swooped up before appropriating their math-oriented pedagogical tools for *writing* his "sad story." Then Dick and the first group of natives "cannot come to an understanding" since, as the illustration indicates, they expect him to convey his needs on the slates with numbers, not words (Figure 63). Even when he is prompted to "give an account of himself" he is immediately silenced by the king's preoccupation with addition. In *SlateandPencilvania,* Crane seems more preoccupied with rendering the horrors of numeracy, and of the industrial bottom line, than with advancing the aesthetic pedagogical agenda of his subsequent works in this series.

[235] See his *Reminiscences,* wherein he declares "I was hopeless in arithmetic always" (Crane 30).

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 60. the “natives” in Crane’s *Slateandpencilvania*

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 61. the king of the natives in Crane’s *Slateandpencilvania*

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 62. the queen of the natives in Crane's *Slateandpencilvania*

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 63. Dick attempts rapport with the natives in Crane's *Slateandpencilvania*

The plot itself, which does indirectly endorse textual literacy at least by its participation in the adventure story genre, nonetheless hamstrings efforts to provide an education in reading images as objects embedded in a familiar culture. Crane's illustration must – given the desert island setting – be invested in the human body (never a strong suit with him) rather than in fabrics or interior decoration, the trappings of a society invested in their everyday visual environment. But even given this text's disparate concerns, it remains aligned with the rest of the *Romance of the Three R's* in its representation of children as objects of nostalgic contemplation and social elevation. Dick is literally placed "above" the natives by the natives themselves as they carry him off, and it remained for subsequent books in the series for Crane to refine how such elevation corresponded to textual traditions, and to audience – namely, by animadversion to a revivalist aesthetic with cultural capital to spare.

I have argued thus far that Crane's later writings, as well as his children's book designs, suggest that beauty is a social virtue, and that art should be created for the benefit of people of all educational, developmental, and economic levels. Images of children were one means of "democratizing" art since it provided a universal means of emotional access. Despite such professed aims, though, even *Slateandpencilvania,* Crane's least ideologically-coherent *Romance* text, trafficks in allusions that are conventionally the province of the educated. For instance, those with knowledge of *The Aeneid* and its descriptions of Olympian debates are more likely to catch echoes in Crane's representation of how "Wind and weather take counsel together and the result of their conference is" a personified storm threatening Dick in his sailboat, rendered tiny and vulnerable on a vast sea (Figure 64). Given all that I have described as characteristic of the literography in *The Romance of Three R's* (especially *Little Queen Anne*), it is somewhat surprising to read in Crane's *Reminiscences* his claim that his 1875 designs for *Mrs. Mundi at Home* were "in quite a different mode and with quite a different aim from those of the children's books" because they were "fantastic, and allegorical" (158-159). Indeed, Isobel Spencer has already observed that *Mrs. Mundi* shares these general characteristics with an earlier children's book by Crane, *King Luckieboy* (79), and it also seems relevant that both *Mrs. Mundi* and *The Romance* were published

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 64. the "weather gods" in Crane's *Slateandpencilvania*

by Marcus Ward and Co. – a company that was comfortable letting Crane indulge in full control over every design aspect of his books. They also allowed him to make use of labor-intensive and expensive lithographic reproduction, which preserved his characteristically-fluid pen lines and ink washes much better than wood engraving ever could have done. So, too, in the *Romance* books, do we see that a distinction between children's books and books for adults on the basis of "fantastic, and allegorical" themes would be a specious one. However, this difficulty with labels reinforces the *visual* argument of the series: a textual environment that is visually fantastic and allegorical elevates even so mundane a design consideration as letter formation to the level of heroes and gods. And it does so without limiting its subjects, or its audience appeal, to either children *or* adults, even if it does so by class.

E. CONCLUSION

If we turn to his self-portrait in the early pages of Pr. Meiklejohn's *Golden Primer*, we can find a representation of the artist alongside the academician that resonates with Crane's career-long concerns about the hierachization of different varieties of literacy, and simultaneously attempts to bring the two professional figures onto the same level (Figure 65). Crane is identifiable by both his namesake bird costume, and his artist's palette, while the professor's authorial status is signaled by his academic robe and glasses. Just as both of their names occupy a central position on the cover of the book, here they are portrayed as being joined in a collaborative endeavor. The figures are of identical sizes, and the Professor raises his hat over them both, perhaps partly to compensate for the height advantage Crane gains from his bird-shaped headdress. Their respective tools interlock to form an arrow pointing to the rest of the book:

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 65. portraits of Meiklejohn and Crane in *The Golden Primer*

we have worked together on what follows, it semiotically suggests – even if the Professor is technically in the lead, the artist has the last word (as it were). But it is not entirely clear whether Crane is raising himself, as the artist, to the level of the professor, or simply taking the professor down a peg. Both figures are rendered in a small size and semi-comic mode that flattens their features, contrasting sharply with the dignified, full-page frontispiece portrait generally that graced other, more socially-elevated books of the time. Instead, these figures are represented as being dwarfed by their writing and painting implements, which they struggle to wield in a sort of parody of the maxim that the "pen is mightier than the sword." The Professor's eyes are hidden by his opaque spectacles, suggesting that – unlike the artist – he is in some sense blinkered, unable to truly "see" the very subject of which he is nominally a master.

The status of the alphabet within this primer offers a final object lesson for Walter Crane, and his response offers one for us. The *Golden Primer* was a self-conscious departure from the alphabet-based approach to textual literacy, as Crane noted in his *Reminiscences*: "Professor J. M. D. Meiklejohn of St. Andrews University… had a scheme for a primer embodying a method of teaching to read by associating words with the objects they signify, and without forcing a child to learn the series of misleading and cumbrous sounds which represent the letters of the alphabet" (198). Upper- and lowercase printed alphabets were supplied on separate pages (Figure 66), and the rest of the text proceeded via a variation on the whole-word method of instruction first introduced to England by Jacotot in mid-nineteenth-century translation. Thus, the primer effectively redrew the map of pedagogical literature concerned with representing the alphabet. Crucially, Meiklejohn staked his claims without giving more than minimal attention to the visual aspects of the letters. Typography and illustrations were cast as simply supplementary, neutral vehicles for reproducing the textual message rather than as significant features in their own right. This move must have chafed Crane considerably, since it implicitly rejected his "revolutionary" work on representing the alphabet-as-image. In Meiklejohn's pedagogical scheme, text devolved to the label-like function that we observed in his earliest alphabet books, the *Farmyard* and *Railroad Alphabets*. What had been at least partly legitimated by pedagogical utility, and aspired to the

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 66. opening alphabet in *The Golden Primer*

status of actual art, became more like a bonus, as the primer presented a dichotomous appeal to the sensory and the intellectual. The alphabet was not really an object of aesthetic concern for the *Golden Primer* even though it incorporated illustration. This left only the alphabet's ancillary environment available for classification and status as "educative" or instructive. But Crane has his own means of linking the professor's cultural status with his own. In this prefatory dual portrait, both the professor and the designer are shown bowing to their audience: an explicitly-identified audience of children. Whether the pedagogue is humbled or the illustrator elevated by this act of literographic signification, Crane seems determined to fix a relative sociocultural position for himself and his books if he cannot fix a permanent one.

Evans and Crane were initially so successful in this endeavor that, as Nodelman has pointed out, the historical effects of these origins have become transparent, naturalized through exposure early and often, with a vague sense of educational value continuing to serve as an important "justification" for the pleasure of pictures (*Words* 2-3). However, the decline of engraved illustration, especially as the mid-century vogue for wood-engraved illustration gave way to lithography and photographic reproduction, would take some illustrators' fortunes down with it, as Crane's and Cruikshank's *fin-de-siecle* complaints amply indicate.[236] Crucially, Crane and Evans undertook work in affordable, widely-distributed children's books long before the Arts and Crafts movement rarefied the audience by focusing on production. And at least one critic thanked his pocket book for the result: "Twenty years ago each of these books must have cost at least a guinea, even if they had been produced at all. Here they are, in ample choice, for a shilling, and some others quite as good even for sixpence." His evaluation of their aesthetics suffered not a whit as a result: "Mr. Walter Crane's Toy Books especially are splendid alike in drawing and in colour."[237]

[236] As Gleeson White lamented, "the introduction first of lithography, and later of photographic processes, has killed the [colored engraving] industry, and even the most fanatical apostle of the old crafts cannot wish the 'hand-painter' back again" (*The Sixties* 17-18).

[237] This quotation from the *Morning Advertiser* was included on the back cover of the *Catalogue of Books Illustrated by Walter Crane* issued by his publisher sometime in the latter half of the 1870s (London & New York: George Routledge and Sons).

VI. CHAPTER 5. READING THE MARKETPLACE:
THE ALPHABET IN THE HANDS OF BRAND-NAME ILLUSTRATORS

In an article published in *Chambers's Journal* towards the end of November in 1889, we find listed some of the most common reasons for an author's decision to "adopt a *nome de plume*": fear of public failure and enhanced market appeal top the list. Although we might expect an anonymous commentator to be more sympathetic to authors who "use a fictitious name to prevent his or her whereabouts being discovered," this particular writer demonstrates his disdain for such concerns by taking clear pleasure in unmasking dozens of "Disguised Authors" (763-764). Buried in the list of poets, novelists and even a few songwriters is the name of "Phiz," rightly identified as one of "the names which occur most frequently in one's reading" because it was used by the illustrator Hablot Knight Browne to sign most of the illustrations he designed for novels by Charles Dickens, as well as other works that appeared in British periodicals during the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. However, Browne is the only illustrator included in an article that is otherwise wholly dedicated to "authors writing under fictitious names." This circumstance obviously manifests his status as a well-known illustrator, even well after his period of peak production. When the *Chambers* article was published he had been dead for over seven years and effectively retired from illustrating for two decades. But more importantly, it highlights the singular fame of his pseudonym, which caught the public's eye at a time when many illustrators did not sign their designs at all, or competed with the engraver for the right to do so.

Frederic Kitton testified to the possibility that a name could take on a life of its own when he observed in his memoir of "Phiz" that "Occasionally, whether by accident or design, the subject of this memoir would affix his real name to his illustrations; and the public were consequently under the impression that the two signatures were those of different artists" (7). In Browne's case, a single style could apparently support two artistic reputations. Nor was this doubling entirely unusual; as Kitton explains,

> At the time Hablot Knight Browne first used this quaint *soubriquet*, it was customary to look upon book-illustrators as second, or even third-rate artists – mere hacks in fact… for this reason they usually suppressed their real names, in order to give themselves the opportunity of earning the title of *artist*, when producing more ambitious results as painters. (7)

Whether that was part of Browne's rationale must remain speculation. However, his original choice of *nom de crayon* – "N.E.M.O." – translates to "no one" in Latin, and such self-erasure suggests that regardless of his ambitions as a painter, he was cautious about founding his career on the prospective success of Charles Dickens, pleased as he was to replace Richard Seymour as the illustrator of *The Pickwick Papers.* However, Browne's lifelong efforts to exhibit paintings were only very occasionally successful.[238] They would never have rivaled the fame of his design and illustration work, which was such that "Phiz" even survived Browne in the world of publishing. Apart from having died in 1882, he was too ill for long beforehand to have had any significant role in designing *Phiz's Funny Alphabet,* which was published in 1883. As *Punch* rather ironically put it in Browne's obituary, "He is not dead! There in the picture-book / He lives with men and women that he drew;… There is no death for such a man – he is / The spirit of an unclosed book! Immortal PHIZ!" ("Phiz" 34).

To some extent, Browne's attempt at dual or successive careers mirrors the experience of Walter Crane, and – even more closely – of Kate Greenaway. Her contemporaries debated whether Kate Greenaway's illustrations rose to the level of art, but her gallery-size paintings barely registered on the public radar, as they merely rehashed the themes of her illustration on a more "awkward" scale (Engen 183). More pertinently, critics wondered whether she had "found[ed] a school or did she only start a

[238] For a description of Browne's efforts as a painter, and posthumous success with the "Phiz Gallery" organized by his son, see Lester 209-211.

fashion?"[239] This was a genteel way of acknowledging that Kate Greenaway's reputation as an illustrator financially supported multiple artists via rampant imitation and piracy. Some illustrators operating under Greenaway's name ultimately "did her reputation harm," as her biographers pointed out after her death. On one occasion, Kate Greenaway herself watched a bookseller assure a customer that the row of books on the counter were "all by Kate Greenaway" even though "not one was her work" (Spielmann and Layard 59). The reclusive illustrator's name was indisputably famous even though her face never was.[240]

For our purposes, these anecdotes are most valuable as proofs that the commercial appeal of an illustrator's name could effectively extend beyond his/her recognizable style to function as an independent sign of value in the semiotics of the marketplace – a phenomenon that was conceptually codified as a "brand name" during the 1990s (Moor 5).[241] Although branding has truly flourished in America in the last half of the twentieth century, and surfaced in cultural consciousness only recently, historians of advertising have clearly established that the practices associated with branding have their roots in Europe in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and perhaps even earlier in particular areas.[242] The Victorian periodical press and a lively culture of reviewing fostered consumers' growing familiarity with illustrators' names, even if that knowledge did not always keep precise pace with the number of illustrators. For as the cases of Kate Greenaway and Hablot Knight Browne demonstrate, an illustrator's signature was not securely attached to the hand that designed a given image. By the 1880s, commercial

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[239] This oft-quoted question can be attributed to Lionel Robinson, since it opened the essay he wrote for the catalogue accompanying Kate Greenaway's exhibition of drawings at the Fine Arts Society in 1891: "It will be found as difficult in the future, as it is delicate in the present, to assign to Miss Kate Greenaway her rightful place among contemporary artists. Has she founded a school, or only started a fashion – Are those who with more or less success tread in her footsteps disciples or imitators?" (3).

[240] On another, less-frustrating occasion, Kate Greenaway received a letter from a Dutch fan asking for her autograph on an enclosed photograph "of a good-looking young man with a black moustache" (Spielmann and Layard xxix)

[241] See also Panić, "Brand Names: How They Are Made and What They Are Made For."

[242] For an overview of the emergence of branding in history up through the early twentieth century, see Liz Moor 16-21. For a discussion of advertising in Victorian England specifically, see Thomas Richards.

forces were more important to consumer evaluations than the product itself was, as manifested by the consumer who insisted on buying books "by Kate Greenaway" despite reservations about their appearance. As a further reflection of these pressures, the alphabet book format naturally attracted illustrators who were in palpable need of a textual excuse to draw, but wanted some distance from actual text and the authors necessary to produce it; indeed, the production of illustrated alphabet books "rose to flood level in Victorian decades" as Herbert Tucker has observed (204, n. 15). Here, I focus particularly on representations of the alphabet by Kate Greenaway and Hablot Knight Browne, because the format clearly provided them with a much-needed textual framework. She was notoriously "hampered by having to express other people's ideas pictorially," (Spielmann and Layard 64)[243] while the posthumous publication of *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* in 1883 obviously survived the illustrator's lack of input. But more importantly, these circumstances help explain why neither Greenaway nor Phiz undertook other work that the form implied. They were not burdened by the task of reconciling the textual with the graphic, much less theorizing the relationship as Crane does, because literacy education is an incidental goal in the face of appeals to the heartstrings and the pocketbook.

In this chapter I show how the emergence of name-brand illustrators during this period, coupled with developments in publishing technologies that rendered designers more independent of reproduction processes, papered over a lack of coherent or unifying purpose behind Phiz's and Greenaway's book designs. *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet,* her *A Apple Pie,* and *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* page layouts are relatively crude; the visual effect of text on the page is considered minimally, if at all, while the alphabetic letterforms operate merely as visual anchors or navigational devices. However, I argue that the books' pedagogical incoherence is not the result of mere laziness, but rather is symptomatic of larger contradictions in contemporary attitudes toward children and childhood. The name-brand illustrator of children's books could flourish in the 1880s thanks partly the increasing availability of cost-efficient and high-quality printing with wood-engravings. But the alphabet book format more specifically, with its

[243] This was not simply Greenaway's preference; at least one critic suggested, in the course of reviewing the one book she both wrote and illustrated, that she "would do better to… choose some of the famous nursery legends for illustration" (1612). See the lengthy review "A Child's Book."

traditional ties to literacy instruction, is uniquely suited to helping us unravel how the name-brand illustrator phenomenon operates in "so-called" children's books. As Anne Higonnet and others have argued, Greenaway was the most successful among a crowd of cultural mediators who re-situated (especially visual) images of childhood as a commodified channel for nostalgia[244] – a position that was ironically enabled and reinforced by the institutionalization of childhood as a time of education, universalized by the Education Acts. During the 1870s and later, adults in England increasingly sought access to "the beauty and charm of childhood" (Spielmann and Layard 62) through Romantic representations of it, and through interaction with actual children. So children were nominally entitled to special admiration and protection as they enjoyed a privileged phase of life, and even objects associated with them benefitted from special treatment, thus rationalizing the production of beautiful children's books that appealed strongly to adults: "those who bought the picture books 'for the little ones,' (as they said) but enjoyed them so much themselves" (Spielmann and Layard xxiii). But formal schooling was very rarely considered part of "the beauty and charm of childhood," or was even portrayed as antithetical to it. Indeed, as Dickens argued in *Hard Times* (1854), schooling could shade ominously into the factory, with both environments featuring rigid schedules and goals and cramped confinement to indoor spaces. Schooling was potentially even worse thanks to threats of corporal punishment meted out by strict masters. So although alphabet books invoked pedagogical utility as a selling point, their designers confronted commercial disincentives to actually foster or represent formal education. Lured by the potential of a large middle-class market for children's books, name-brand illustrators of the 1880s could find themselves caught between two irreconcilable domains: the fantasy of pastoral Romanticism, and the reality of Industrial-Revolution-era schooling.

We can see these competing pressures, and their ultimate subordination to the ambient demands of shifting retail conditions, quite clearly in the alphabet books published by brand-name illustrators in the 1880s. By "name-brand" illustrator I specifically mean to denote those like Phiz and – even more so – Kate Greenaway or Walter Crane, whose *reputation* translated quite directly into sales. That selling power

[244] See Higonnet *Pictures of Innocence* 9 and 51-55.

is manifested in the archive partly by sales figures, but even more concretely by reviews, advertisements, anecdotes about consumers requesting illustrators by name. Piracy and plagiarism are also a symptom of these developments. In fact, as Andrew Wernick pointed out in his landmark study *Promotional Culture,* the notion of a "brand name" is historically rooted in patent applications and other efforts to secure and protect copyright (33). A brand name assures quality by identifying the point of origin, but the dual function of this very assurance was exploited "from the start… as an element of publicity" (Wernick 34). In the process of highlighting the pivotal role of the designer *as* producer, the brand name obscures engineers or manufacturers who execute "merely" mechanical functions –or, as in the cases of Phiz and Greenaway, it imbues an incoherent design with an aura of artistic intention. Brand-name illustration as best cooperated with the need for text on the page, but at worst competed with or even denied how the visual character of text contributed to the printed page. This effect is naturally highlighted in alphabet books, where the hybrid letterforms are formally positioned as a pivot-point between the visual and verbal. But for Kate Greenaway and Phiz – or, more accurately, the designers hired by his estate – the alphabet is less a point of convergence between the visual and the verbal than a promiscuous commercial platform, one that reveals how *adult* Victorian England told itself, and its children, two different stories about childhood.

A. THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME: THE BRANDING OF KATE GREENAWAY

There is considerable ongoing debate about what, precisely, constitutes a "brand" or the work of "branding," since promotional activity is constantly extending itself into new media and cultural spheres, and therefore demanding a variety of forms in evolving commercial contexts (Moor 7). However, J. M. Murphy's early formulation emphasizes the elements of the brand most cogent to its emergent form around the last quarter of the nineteenth century in England: firstly, the brand is "the unique property of a specific owner," and secondly, it can "meaningfully and appropriately differentiate products which are otherwise very similar" (2). Thus, it differs from advertising in its "much more strategic, programmatic, and totalizing approach," as Liz Moor puts it, affecting a publisher's "productive activity" at the level of design, well before advertising can even be developed (8). The designer's role in this enterprise is magnified, and can potentially merge with the brand itself, if their artistic mark is sufficiently recognizable – and Kate Greenaway's certainly was. As Patricia Dooley put it, she "had a genius for creating what would today be called a 'look'," a fully-articulated and individualized stylistic statement (64).

Up through the middle of the century, relatively few illustrators had managed to literally capitalize on their names without turning away from the more literal work of illustrating fiction or periodical news, and concentrating on satire – which was the course pursued by John Leech, John Tenniel, and Richard Doyle of *Punch* – or bringing the prestige of a primary fine art career to the reproducible work, as some Pre-Raphaelite painters had done. At the end of the century, the influential critic Gleeson White, in his survey of mid-century illustration, admitted that while the most successful in this group were well-compensated for their efforts – "many critics of their own day praised them; their names were fairly well known to educated people, their works sold largely, they obtained good prices, and commissions, as the published results bear witness, were showered upon them" – they still did not enjoy a certain social cache bestowed upon "the painter of Academy pictures" (White *The Sixties* 4). More importantly, he is almost certainly wrong to assume that because illustrators' names "were fairly well known" and "their works sold largely" or prompted many commissions, they must be financially comfortable. Both Browne and Greenaway struggled to make ends meet after the tide of their popularity had crested because income from the press was unreliable, and book publishers were notoriously shrewd in their dealings with content-producers.[245] The situation was particularly rough for illustrators of children's books, and there may be a touch of irony in Martin Hardie's observation that Greenaway, Crane, and Caldecott appear to "work as if they could not help it" (271). Birket Foster, who benefitted from his association with Sir Henry Cole long after having illustrated the latter's *Home Treasury,* and

[245] Crane complained of having been "poorly paid" when he began illustrating children's books, and assisted Caldecott in his negotiations with Routledge (qtd in Spielmann and Layard 71).

Walter Crane, who collaborated with Edmund Evans to push back the limitations of color printing, are standout examples in an expansive and mostly-forgotten field of illustrators who published most of their best-known designs in children's books.

When Crane appeared on the scene, most children's book illustrators had been laboring in relative obscurity, struggling to transcend contemporary trends in book printing that allowed the aesthetic (and thus one aspect of the pedagogic) potential of books printed in color to lie fallow. That state of affairs in the late 1850s and 1860s can be effectively represented by the boldly-colored covers of railway "yellowbacks," and the garish tints of chromolithographic images like those printed by the Leighton Brothers and the Kronheim Company in Germany (I. Spencer 46-47). Crane railed particularly against the assumption that the public – both children and adults – preferred gaudy illustration and book design, when in fact they had been given little opportunity to choose otherwise. Throughout the late 1860s and 1870s, the more ambitious book illustrators introduced and popularized a new visual vocabulary that partook of the burgeoning Aesthetic Movement, fostered in large part by the excellent and innovative engraving and printing of Edmund Evans. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, then, developments in printing technology produced concomitant changes in illustration as a business. By the mid-1870s, the market for illustrated books and periodicals enjoyed the auspicious assistance of both economies of scale and advances in manufacturing, which encouraged prosperous middle-class audiences to spend money on illustrated books as well as an ever-growing range of products, like fabrics and furnishings, also capitalizing on the appeal of the "Art" or "Aesthetic" movement. As Elizabeth Aslin points out, "by 1880 the movement had snowballed to such an extent that any successful retailer or maker of household goods included the word 'art' somewhere in the description of his business" (128), even if there was a rapid move away from its high standards of production (144). For this reason, individual illustrators' investment in branding, and in the alphabet in particular, might also be seen as the culmination of proto-branding attempts by children's book publishers that used the conceit of an over-arching storytelling figure, like the "Aunt Mavor" and "Aunt Louisa" series of illustrated toy books published by George Routledge and Frederick Warne, or the "Cousin Honeycomb" series published by

Dean and Sons in the middle of the century. Both Phiz and Walter Crane contributed designs to the "Aunt Mavor" and "Aunt Louisa" series, respectively.[246] Typically featuring unsigned and unattributed illustrations sometimes conforming to a house style, and anonymous copy often derived from oral tradition, these books were technologically-advanced heirs to John Newbery's toy books. But rather than accruing cultural capital to the creators, the identities of those earlier jobbing illustrators were submerged in that of a fictional maternal figure who, in the latter-day case of Aunt Louisa at least, evoked the fast-disappearing world of private domestic education. Children's books benefitted particularly from the newly-available resources of the printing and publishing industry, partly because they served as a relatively low-stakes testing or proving ground for efforts to commodify Aestheticism, and partly because many schools needed to be stocked with textbooks after the passage of the Education Acts of 1870.

The institutionalization of mandatory education fostered and reflected dramatic and important developments in the history of childhood itself, of which the most wide-reaching and significant changes was at least a superficial normalization of childhood across class boundaries (Hendrick 54). As Sara Danger puts it, "whether one was the son of an actress or a milliner or the daughter of a barrister or stable hand, the work of every British child became school" (317). This shift in the cultural valence of childhood, if not always of actual children, issued from historical trends that have been widely documented by both book historians and scholars of childhood studies. On one hand, throughout the middle of the nineteenth century in England there was a growing and ultimately successful movement to provide universal (or state-mandated and guaranteed) access to elementary education. This was itself a compensatory or ameliorative response to Great Britain's desire to advertise itself as a site of industrial

[246] They did so under sporadic cover of anonymity, with some illustrations signed but rarely any credit on the covers, and the occasional name-dropping in anticipatory advertisements. This was at least the case for Crane's many designs for the "Aunt Louisa" toy books series; see I. Spencer 50-51. I cannot speak with confidence to Browne's contributions as "Phiz" since I have not examined *Aunt Mavor's Third Book of Nursery Rhymes* firsthand, and Valerie Browne Lester's Appendix does not specify whether his designs for that volume were signed, or his name included in production information.

production.[247] At the height of anxieties about Britain's loss of international status on this front, Prince Albert and Henry Cole staged the Great Exhibition of 1851, which partly "backfired" by showcasing Great Britain's tendency to recycle design styles alongside its strengths in heavy manufacturing (Pevsner 52).[248] A reciprocal "child protection" movement, of which Charles Dickens was an influential member, dovetailed with the goals of British industrialists seeking to regain top-dog status by cultivating human resources (Danger 317).[249] Thus, efforts and proceeds from the profitable Exhibition were funneled into conventional basic schooling, like that institutionalized by a series of Factory and Education Acts, as well as the vocational or specialized like the National Course of Art Instruction fomented by Cole. And on the other hand, ideas about children's right to healthful living and working conditions had found resonant imagery available in the Romantic poets, as revived interest was fostered by literary events like the publication of Wordsworth's *Prelude* in 1851. As Humphrey Carpenter documented in *Secret Gardens,* a nostalgic view of childhood embedded in the "child of Nature" image most closely associated with the work of Wordsworth, prevailed in the latter half of the Victorian era. Pastoral poetry was an aesthetic antidote for urban sprawl and the rapidly-expanding railroad system, and idyllic representations of young people conflated the histories of a person and of a people. Never mind that the demands of educating the nation's *entire* youth stretched the nation's resources far beyond its ability to provide conscientious, well-trained tutors and comfortable school environments. Romantic fantasies about the past positioned childhood as a time both prior to and apart from adult concerns, a potential place of refuge and retreat from the grimy horrors of the Industrial Revolution.

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[247] For an overview of critical responses to the Great Exhibition as "a point of departure for historical accounts of European design and art, French and American literature, English society, British politics, British imperialism, Victorian culture and patterns of consumption," see Louise Purbrick's introduction to *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (1-25). See also the Royal Institute of British Architects' overview, "The Great Exhibition of 1851 and Its Legacy." For case studies and analyses of how imperial concerns about industrial progress were reflected in the Great Exhibition efforts, see particularly Auerbach and Hoffenberg.

[248] See also Purbrick 9-11 and Auerbach *The Great Exhibition.*

[249] For the history of the child protection movement, see Finlayson and Behlmer. For a consideration of the literary arm of this movement, see Cunningham, and Brice and Fielding.

We would naturally expect to see such dramatic changes in the cultural valence of childhood registered in books mass-produced for children. But a shift that *did* occur in the publishing industry, as marked by historians of the *art de livre* in particular, can initially seem paradoxical. In the 1870s and beyond, as the skills for reading *text* were becoming more available to poorer children, middle-class children were bombarded with the opportunity to enjoy books recommended on the basis of *visual* rather than literary beauty; as Rodney Engen notes, "many publishers" responded to the Act's passage "with stacks of gaudy, over-produced coloured children's books with elaborate bindings" (60). And as I have suggested above and in previous chapters, they routinely shared this bounty with adults. Contemporary reviewers evaluated whether children's books would "delight people of maturer growth" as well as whether they would be "popular in the nursery" ("Christmas Books" *Athenaeum* 766). Indeed, the 1880s offered an embarrassment of riches when it came to children's books, as the "Golden Age" of children's literature –much of which included illustration – was complemented by a Golden Age of children's picture books. The latter were characterized less by narrative engagement than by visual appeals eventually rising to the level of decadence. The industrial groundwork had been laid in preceding decades, when an army of craftsmen were trained for the explosion of illustrated periodicals that began in the 1840s, when publications like the *Illustrated London News* and *Punch* had their start. Throughout the middle of the century, printers' and publishers' working techniques improved in capability and efficiency, especially colored printing with wood engravings. These developments almost seem to have been timed to produce the fully-formed picture book as a response to the Education Acts, but in fact, during the second half of the Victorian era, pictures were demanded at the rate permitted by prosperity, and supplied at the rate dictated by technology – not by prevailing, available constructions of literacy. After all, visual literacy or art appreciation was hardly a subject taught to students whose education was only mandated to their eleventh year.

When we turn our attention to alphabet books, then, we may find a new irony in the reliance on a textual sign – the illustrator's name – to indicate quality illustration, apart from the fact that this mark of quality was unintelligible to the purportedly-illiterate child audience. Obviously, adults were seeking out the “best” illustrated books and choosing them for the child audience; as White concluded, “As a rule it is the ‘grown-ups’ who buy… those who work for [children] win neither much gold nor great fame” (“Children’s Books” 5). But during a period of increased consumption and manufacture, the brand could function well as a substitute for defunct pedagogy, and guide consumers through an otherwise-bewildering morass of choices. And so I would argue that brand names became an increasingly useful means of promoting illustration, at the same time they reflect the general loss of interest in deploying those texts as pedagogical aids for textual *or* visual literacy.

There is one final consideration of the brand name that begs our attention here, since I am suggesting that a promotional entity is essentially being founded upon a single creative figure, whose name bears the criticism and reaps the rewards of that entity’s success (or lack thereof). Although there are obvious similarities, this phenomenon is quite distinct from that of literary celebrity, which has enjoyed increasing attention from scholars of Romantic-era, Victorian and modern culture in recent years.[250] Critical attention to the emergence of Victorian celebrities has produced fascinating studies of writers like Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and Oscar Wilde, all of whom cultivated public personas that substantially informed their work and its reception.[251] As in the case of illustrators, evolving reproduction technologies helped literary figures to facilitate their fame, especially photography, which extended the “authenticity” and aura of the author’s portrait, and the author’s signature.[252] Photographic cartes-de-

[250] Much of this scholarship locates the start of literary celebrity in Romantic-era writing; see, for instance, Ghislaine McDayter’s *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* and the collection edited by Tom Moles, *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*.

[251] See, for example, Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens And His Performing Selves* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006); Joe Moran, “Chapter II: Mark Twain Absurdity: Literature and Publicity in America” in *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London: Pluto Press, 2000) 15-34; Larzer Ziff, “Chapter 1: Celebrity” in *Mark Twain* (Lives and Legacies, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 1-29; Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde’s Profession: Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

[252] Regarding the contemporary interest in autographs, see Burke.

visite, for instance, were central to the emergence of a celebrity culture in the Victorian era,[253] which disseminated an author's image and promoted the development of what David Horton and Richard Wohl have dubbed "parasocial" relationships between readers and writers." In parasocial relationships, mass media provides a "simulacrum" of the "give and take" of conventional social interactions, despite being fundamentally "one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development." The media performer provides a "framework" of social interaction, including access to such pseudo-personal artefacts as photographs and autographs, which the spectator can imaginatively supplement" ("Mass Communication"). While writers can certainly construct such a framework strictly through printed mass media, forms of public performance like readings – for which Dickens was particularly famous – allow the performer to mount a better simulacrum of "give and take" with his audience. Such events, coupled with the visual representation of writers in their books, and in the periodical press, as in *Punch* caricatures, were necessary in order to expand mere fame into "true" celebrity: a fascination with the individual as distinct from their creative output.[254] Without a naturalized forum for public performance, illustrators were playing a different game. The courtroom antics of James McNeill Whistler provide one example of how aspiring celebrity artists, caught in a similar bind, managed to engage in a public performance of their identity *as* artists. George Cruikshank's hard right turn into the temperance movement suggests an alternative, and less financially-productive, route to a raised public profile. But in general, illustrators did not follow Whistler into the celebrity fray, even if they did aspire to the status of artists. Instead, they continued to develop their names in the galleries, perhaps in the press, and most of all through branding, waiting for the public to vote with their shillings.

Kate Greenaway's contemporaries were more likely than modern critics to affirm the "universal appeal" of her work[255] while her initial commercial success and influence has subsequently tended to

[253] See Rojek 126-127 and Wichard and Wichard 33-43.

[254] For an overview of this growing field of sociological, historical, and cultural inquiry, see Turner.

[255] Her first biographers assert this repeatedly, deferring to "the universal appeal she made, almost unconsciously, to the universal heart" (xxii); declaring that "it was not only the critics but the public who

serve as a proxy for sweeping evaluations of subjective response. Greenaway's "success" can be (and conventionally has been) fairly represented by noting her numerous bestselling books, and the way that her images saturated contemporary popular culture by moving out of her books and into the industrial manufacture of items ranging from decorative tiles to children's clothing to tea towels. As the legend goes, she "dressed the children of two continents" (Spielmann and Layard xxiv) with clothes patterned after those of the children in her books, and French clothing designers generated a whole trend known as *Greenawisme.* Even her design competitor, Walter Crane, noted (rather begrudgingly) that "The grace and charm of her children and young girls were quickly recognised, and… captivated the public in a remarkable way" (qtd in Spielmann and Layard, 71). As we have already noted, this same commercial success engendered a plague of plagiarism and piracy during her most productive years in the 1880s. Her greatest commercial asset, her stylistic reliability, was also her greatest liability. As White pointed out, "few artists made so great a reputation in so small a field" ("Children's Books" 36).

Many of her books, and particularly those focused on representing the alphabet, have continued to "captivate the public." In a 1946 pamphlet celebrating *A Century of Kate Greenaway,* the influential children's librarian Anne Carroll Moore declared that "Of the many ABC books published in recent years 'A Apple Pie' is by far the most popular with the children of the libraries" (13). Greenaway's particular association with illustrations of the alphabet offer us a useful point of entry into a potentially stale story of the market and its subjective corruptions, since in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries her work has generally been discussed, and occasionally defended, strictly in terms of its popularity. Her status as an artist, rather than a "mere" illustrator, has only declined since Ruskin prominently discussed her work in one of his 1883 Oxford lectures on *The Art of England.* Prior to publishing her illustrated version of the classic rhyme *A Apple Pie* in 1886*,* which Moore aptly identifies as one of her more enduring legacies,

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acclaimed her, for she had got at the secret of the beauty and charm of childhood, and the appeal was universal" (62); and concluding that "the scores of tributes that filled the press of Europe and America at the time of Kate Greenaway's death, and are sufficient to prove the international appeal she made, triumphing over the differences of race, fashion, and custom which usually are an insuperable bar to universal appreciation" (269).

Greenaway provided illustrations for William Mavor's *English Spelling-Book* in 1884, and the alphabet portion of that project had a life of its own. When sales of the *Spelling-Book* lagged, the alphabet was published separately as a colored miniature book titled *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* and provided a commercial argument for the production of *A Apple Pie* the following year. I'd like to offer up this simple act of physically separating the alphabet from a textbook, and adding the illustrator's name in the possessive form, as a capsule demonstration of how Greenaway's representations of the alphabet were literally and symbolically pulled from traditional contexts like alphabet books and primers, into her particular corner of late-nineteenth-century British print culture. Her forays into illustrating the alphabet are an early example of a phenomenon described by Jane Pavitt, wherein the brand itself becomes a commodity: "rather than brands existing to sell more of a product, products are developed as a means of extending and consolidating the brand" (39). But a crucial precondition of this workflow is the decoupling of the designer from the manufacture of the product.

For reasons that should become clearer as I unfold Greenaway's road to success – and which are crucial to understanding how Greenaway's celebrity reconfigured her representations of the alphabet – Crane had some basis for envying and/or resenting her commercial appeal. Her first representations of the alphabet were published in 1884, after she had been publishing illustration work for almost 20 years.[256] She had been repeatedly mentioned in *Punch* magazine, fans had written to her asking for her autograph, and booksellers were inflating the prices for her books, as well as passing off others' works as her own. William Mavor's *English Spelling-Book,* and *A Apple Pie* were both presented to a public almost too familiar with her name, which had carried considerable commercial power ever since her triumphant debut as both writer *and* illustrator in the bestselling *Under the Window* (1879). She had even contemplated retiring from book illustration in order to stem the tide of bad imitations, but she had no

[256] Her first publication was the frontispiece for a parent's guide for nursery decoration titled *Infant Amusements, or How to Make a Nursery Happy,* published in 1867 (Engen 40).

other obvious means of self-support.[257] Thus, her alphabet books chart a path through representations of childhood and adult subjectivity that is less about interaction between the reader and the book – that is, framed in terms of pedagogic resistance and responses to it – than with simply moving stock.

As Isobel Spencer points out, "with the printer Edmund Evans's help, Crane had been busy transforming the style and quality of toy books for over ten years before Greenaway and Caldecott became famous for theirs" (8); Greenaway's contemporaries also acknowledged the importance of "the example set by such artists as Walter Crane and R. Caldecott" (Blackburn 571). By Greenaway's book debut in 1879, Crane was already incredibly popular from his shilling "Toy book" series published by Routledge. He won a hard-fought battle to have his name on the cover of his books around 1872, after about ten years of anonymous labor, mostly in the mines of undistinguished illustration for yellowback novels and cheap toy books – that is to say, with printed matter whose design aesthetic was derived from that of the chapbook, where attention-grabbing was the highest priority. It was during those years of drudgery that Crane crossed paths with Greenaway in the Belfast-based publishing house of Marcus Ward, who stimulated and capitalized on an incredible English vogue for greeting cards in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Ward relied on chromolithographic reproductive processes and catered to an intense middle-class demand for elaborate, boldly-colored images for distribution and collection. When Greenaway's and Crane's work was (re)published together in the gift book *Quiver of Love* in 1876, it was a commercial success. Greenaway was a lifelong professed admirer of Crane's,[258] and thus was presumably honored to have her name joined with his on the cover. Each of the designs is unsigned, leaving individual attributions potentially hazy – especially since Greenaway was still in the process of developing a recognizable personal style, and shared Crane's affection for Aesthetic or Pre-Raphaelite

[257] Rodney Engen notes this in his biography of Greenaway, and concludes from the tone of contemporary letters that "Kate now looked upon *Marigold Garden* [her work in progress around 1884], and indeed all future books, and money-making hackwork" (124).

[258] She wrote to Locker-Lampson in the early 1880s and professed herself stricken with envy for Crane's talents (Spielmann and Layard 89).

elements.[259] But the publication was something of an embarrassment for the more ambitious Crane, who later went out of his way to declare that he "had nothing to do with the scheme or arrangement of the book" and "never considered the reproductions of the valentine designs at all satisfactory" (*Reminiscences* 159).

The difference in reaction has everything to do with Crane's sense that he had *earned* his name on the cover, and that Greenaway had ungratefully piggybacked on that hard work. Whereas Crane collaborated with the master printer and engraver Edmund Evans "to get more artistic colour and treatment in these books," – and, in the process, produced what was more truly a "revolution" in nursery picture books[260] – Greenaway's crucial alliance with Edmund Evans was serendipitously fostered by family connections early in her career. Even as Ruskin focused on praising her drawings in his Slade lecture at Oxford and thereby did much to raise Greenaway's profile as an artist,[261] he offered a prefatory acknowledgment that it was "only in our own days—nay, even within the last ten years of those, that the means of illustration by colour-printing have been brought to perfection" (*Art in England* 117-118). And Henry Blackburn rightly noted in that same year that "there is little doubt that without the engraver's sympathetic aid, [Kate Greenaway] would never have received the praise bestowed upon her by… Mr. Ruskin" (571). Reviewers continued to recognize Evans' contribution to Greenaway's "wonderful success" into the twentieth century and even to insist upon it, as when Edith Kellogg Dunton declared in

[259] Greenaway's biographers note that "before [1878] her cards seem never to have been signed and are not easy to identify, as they lack the distinctive characteristics of her later work" as well as "the initials K. G." (Spielmann and Layard 74).

[260] Crane's complaints about the publishers' slow "conversion" to his and Edmund Evans's "efforts" are described in his *Reminiscences* (156). See "A Revolution in Nursery Picture Books."

[261] As Anne Lundin points out, "There is no way to exaggerate the importance that Ruskin's imprimatur held for Greenaway's reputation" (*Victorian Horizons* 197).

The Dial in 1905 that Greenaway's achievements "would have been impossible without Mr. Evans's help."[262]

The mere fact that Greenaway *could* be beholden to Evans in this way reflects her privileged position as a designer in the 1880s, and the vast technological distance that separated her from illustrators working at the beginning of the century. George Cruikshank had been a designer and engraver rolled into one, as had Browne and many other successful illustrators from the 1830s and 40s, a circumstance enabled primarily by the then-standard reliance on metal plates as the printing substrate. As wood-engraving came to dominate the periodical press, and speed pressed upon production, the demand for specialized wood-engravers like Kate's own father – who often worked long hours into the night deliver his engraving in time for it to appear as "news" (Engen 34-35) – grew proportionally, and the division between designers and the art (or, increasingly, the *craft*) of reproduction grew sharper. Walter Crane's apprenticeship in the workshop of Ebenezer Landells had situated him perfectly to observe the interface between design and the arts of reproduction, as he was employed to copy designs from paper onto wood, and to ferry blocks and proofs between the workshop and designers. By contrast, and as though to reiterate the difference a few decades made between her experience and Crane's, Greenaway's extensive training in the National Course of Art Instruction involved no instruction in the mechanisms of *mass* reproduction. Blackburn marvels at this state of affairs in his 1883 overview of "The Art of Illustration" in England, observing that "the majority [of artists] are strangely ignorant… of the simple facsimile processes by which drawing can now be reproduced in books" (566).[263] Indeed, the gap is inexplicable

[262] Her biographers basically concurred, declaring that "it is impossible to estimate even approximately by how much her popularity had been enhanced by [Evans's] excellent engraving and his usually excellent printing" (Spielmann and Layard 211).

[263] Fomented by that Great Exhibition mastermind Henry Cole during the 1840s, this rather rigid approach to art instruction was geared toward training industrial designers who would – as the program's name might suggest – then mass-produce a national style of decoration. Greenaway was extremely successful in her work at the National Art Training School at South Kensington, winning medals at the regional and national levels. Perhaps predictably, she was less successful during her time at the Heatherley School of Fine Art and the Slade School of Fine Art in the early 1870s, since both institutions encouraged her to switch her focus from rigid geometrical composition and outline to developing "a personal style" (Engen 42-43).

given the program's overt orientation toward industrial design, and its primary investment in copying as a form of pedagogy, except for the simple reason that such training was ultimately unnecessary.[264]

Evans relied on his unmatched skill in printing from wood, rather than via the chromolithographic processes that had been used on her greetings cards, to reproduce reproductions of Greenaway's representations of children and the alphabet. Her finely-detailed and delicately-coloured drawings were thus presented, intact, to a public eager for the high-quality color printing which he was uniquely capable of delivering. And he did it without the need for significant technical collaboration with Greenaway. Where Walter Crane tended to view the artistic designer as a grand surveyor over the landscape of reproduction, responsible for coordinating details of line, color, and context from start to finish, Greenaway, on the contrary seemed comfortable being the most prominent cog in an incomprehensible machine, with men like Ruskin or Evans running the show. The one time that she did interfere in printing processes, during the production of *Mother Goose* in 1881, Greenaway received her first disparaging remarks from her friend Frederick Locker about the quality of the colour in her book and, along with the usual critical raves, drew a few unusual (for Evans) complaints about the use of "crude printer's ink" (Spielmann and Layard 100).[265] In the time-honoured fashion of the originators of reproducible art,[266] she blamed the printer, explaining that "There was no time to prove this book, and I never had any proof for

[264] See Denis "Teaching by Example." As Rodney Engen documents, Greenaway struggled to adapt to the exigencies of lithographic reproduction while employed by Marcus Ward. She overcame her tendency to draw unreproducible lines via brutish trial-and-error, and her ignorance of "suitable" colors "proved a major stumbling block" (Engen 45).

[265] This book evidenced occasional difficulties with registration during successive runs through the press (Spielmann and Layard 281). Despite Evans's matter-of-fact conviction that "it is impossible to print in colours on rough paper" (65), Greenaway insisted that this was the best way to achieve a desired "antiqued" effect. Evans came up with an ingenious (and labor-intensive) method of printing on rough paper that involved additional rounds of wetting, rolling, and drying in order to render the paper temporarily smooth. While he declared himself satisfied with the results because "the colours had not suffered by the method," (Evans 65), and *Punch* declared the book "a gem of production," (qtd in Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 178), others indirectly judged his solution to have interfered with the success of the overall process. See Spielmann and Layard 100, and Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 178-179.

[266] As I noted in Chapter 4, even Crane complained about this (*Reminiscences* 60). But the classic complainers were the Pre-Raphaelites, whose fluid lines were a challenge to the medium of wood engraving even in the hands of past masters like the Dalziels. See Suriano, *The British Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators*.

correction at all, for Mr. Evans said it was impossible, it must go; and some of the darker ones suffer in consequence. I know you imagine I'm always having them for correction, and sending them back and back again ; but that is not so. . . ." (Greenaway qtd from a letter in Spielmann and Layard 94). However fair they may be in this particular instance, Greenaway's protests implicitly confirm Blackburn's assertions about the link between the arts of reproduction, and a designer's reputation. While the engraver and/or the printer could not make poor compositions interesting, they could easily reproduce good ones to disadvantage.

To a large extent, Greenaway's success was much more a matter of timing than of genius. Evans and Crane created the commercial and technological conditions for Greenaway to construct a widely-circulated literography – and design representations of the alphabet accordingly– that exploited those developments instead of being constrained by them. Furthermore, even though she had watched her father's labor in the trenches of mid-century wood-engraving, Greenaway does not appear to have pondered the socioeconomic implications of printing methods at great length. For instance, when a wealthy patron insisted on using photo-engraved copper and *a la poupée* printing – a much more labor-intensive process at the level of both the engraving and printing than the "three-colour process" that had become standard for children's books by that year of 1898[267] – for a minor project, Greenaway demonstrated her comparative prior freedom from such concerns when she pondered her future prospects in this vein. "How much I should like to do a book like this," she declares before (accurately and naively) deducing the prohibitive cost of such fine printing methods: "but I suppose it is fearfully expensive" (Greenaway qtd in Spielmann and Layard 227). It was thanks to Evans that Greenaway's friend and mentor, the highly-regarded painter Henry Stacy Marks, wrote to her, "Don't think about painting too much… Think of the large number of people you charm and delight by these designs [in *Under the Window*] compared with those who can afford to buy paintings" (qtd in Spielmann and Layard 81).

[267] For a description of this process, see Evans 55-58 and for its impact, see McLean *Victorian Book Design* 161.

The make-or-break role of the engraver/printer is also bound up in his sometime role as the liaison between the designer and a publisher.[268] In support of Greenaway's effort to develop and promote her brand, and beyond providing the technical means of reproducing her work, Evans significantly exploited his powerful connection with George Routledge, who was one of the leading publishers of illustrated children's books at the time. Lundin concurs that

> Greenaway was indeed fortunate to have Edmund Evans as her mentor, engraver, publisher, and commercial impresario… That Evans was associated with the distributor Routledge was also instrumental in Greenaway's success. Routledge, one of the leading publishers of children's books, frequently promoted her books as the lead juveniles of the season through select listings, advertisements, and color inserts in the catalogues (*Victorian Horizons* 213).

In the 1860s, Crane had helped Evans cultivate the relationship that the latter subsequently exploited in order to give his new protégé's name and products prominence. Indeed, Crane is rather mis-served by Spielmann's claim that "What Kate Greenaway did with her modest pencil was by her example to revolutionise one form of book-illustration – helped by Edmund Evans" (xxiv). Without the proven commercial appeal of an illustrator's name – that is to say, without Walter Crane's success in building his

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[268] As Edmund Evans's dual roles would suggest, in the mid-nineteenth century there was no strict flowchart governing the roles played by a given person or firm in the production of a book. In general, a publisher supplied the capital for printing the books (including securing the copyright and advertising the forthcoming publication), and oversaw the management of printing and engraving. The actual act of printing was typically assigned to a single person or atelier, with another person or – more usually, set of people – responsible for engraving the work. Obviously, an illustrated work involved even more divisions of labor, as individuals like Thackeray, who could provide both the text of a narrative and the design for its illustrations, were atypical. Depending on the designer's skill, the work might be further subdivided so that designers were not actually involved in the process of reproduction; this was generally the case from about the 1840s onward, when wood-engraving and lithographic printing required intermediary craftsmen to transfer the drawing or design on the printing substrate. (Crane's apprenticeship was spent in this way, learning how to render designs suitable for engraving directly on the boxwood.) Earlier in the century, when engraving on metal plates was the standard method of illustration, it was more common for designers to double as engravers. For instance, George Cruikshank designed and engraved his own copper plates for the illustrations of Dickens and Ainsworth.

The publisher typically liaised between the word and the image, but many deviated from this approach; for instance, Evans often suggested or coordinated pairings and brought projects to Routledge rather than the other way around, while Dickens directly managed the illustrators for his novels and only involved his publishers when he wanted to assert his authorial primacy (itself a reversal from his own start providing the text for sporting pictures by Richard Seymour).

brand with the "Walter Crane Shilling Series" – there would have been less reason to emblazon "Illustrated by Kate Greenaway" on the covers of her books. The power of the brand name became most apparent when Crane defied the wisdom of "the Trade," which declared that "the sight of a five-shilling book not decently bound in cloth and without any gold on it was an unheard-of thing" (*Reminiscences* 179). His name on the cover, rather than gilt details, made *The Baby's Opera* an indisputable success in 1876. The power of association clearly helped Greenaway bridge the gap between greeting card work, and book illustration: she went from anonymous card designs and initialed periodical illustrations in the late 1860s, to sharing space on the cover of *The Quiver of Love* (attributed to "Walter Crane and K. Greenaway"), to finally making her debut as both writer and illustrator in 1879 with *Under the Window.* When initial advertisements for the *Under the Window* were issued by Routledge, they misleadingly described the prospective publication as a "companion volume" to "Walter Crane's *Baby's Opera"* (*George Routledge and Sons' Wholesale Catalogue*).[269] Routledge clearly wanted to capitalize on the *Opera's* success, and had more faith in the marketability of Crane's brand than Evans's. Routledge withdrew the advertisement once their cash cow protested, and it is doubtful whether the public even registered the connection strongly enough to propel *Under the Window* to bestseller status – the promised volume's release was delayed by a year so that the verses could be edited.[270] Furthermore, Lundin notes that in British reviews of *Under the Window*, "it was evident from the criticism that Greenaway's style was already known to some extent" (Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 171), presumably from her greeting cards. But Greenaway was undoubtedly the target of Crane's bitter observation that "if I had opened the door with a new class of books," and been lax in following up the success of *Baby's Opera,* "others soon

[269] See Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 170-171 for an overview of this kerfuffle. See Crane's *Reminiscences* 180 for his version of events.

[270] The publication date of *Under the Window* is often misrepresented as 1878, due to the lingering influence of Greenaway's first biographers, Marion Spielmann and Isidore Layard. Although *Under the Window* was originally slated for publication during the Christmas season of 1878, and advertisements to that effect appeared in widely-circulated periodicals, Rodney Engen's biography noted a year-long delay produced by George Routledge's instance that she submit her verses to Frederick Locker (later Locker-Lampson) for editing (54). Lundin concludes that "very few reviewers noted a connection with Walter Crane" (*Victorian Horizons* 171).

pressed in" (*Reminiscences* 180). With her reputation founded on the printing of Edmund Evans, the publicity power of Routledge, and apparent collaboration with the established house of Walter Crane, Greenaway *did* press in, and Ruskin's timely endorsement raised her profile from illustrator to artist not long later.

B. "BY KATE GREENAWAY": THE BRAND, THE ALPHABET, AND CHILDHOOD

This confluence of circumstances and assistance laid the groundwork for Greenaway's strangely proprietary and incoherent treatment of the alphabet in the mid-1880s. Rather than embracing Crane's exhaustive "the medium is the message" approach to font and page design (to borrow Marshall McLuhan's well-known formulation[271]), Greenaway often considered her contribution complete with the drawings, and deferred to the printer on typefaces. Where Crane had been known to hand-letter entire books so that the text would be "in harmony with the designs" (*Reminiscences* 203), Greenaway was once defeated by the minimal lettering of a bookplate.[272] Underlying these disparate approaches, we have already established that Greenaway had a uniquely strong commercial and technological foundation for her work with the alphabet. This constitutes a significant reversal of previous alphabet book designers' plights, as they reached for the alphabet in order to guarantee an audience ever in search of variations on a familiar theme. We can't necessarily infer that Greenaway's alphabets benefitted from the same kind of promotional blitz that vaulted her first few books into public awareness, especially since the Routledge catalogue for 1884 has been lost (Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 186). But her stature as an illustrator during the early 1880s certainly suggests that the alphabet was sucked into Greenaway's orbit rather than the other way around. At the very least, the alphabet and other features of beginning reading instruction were exempt from her "aversion for 'mere illustration'" of another's work. (Spielmann and Layard 51).

[271] The phrase was popularized in McLuhan's most widely-read book, *Understanding Media* (1964).

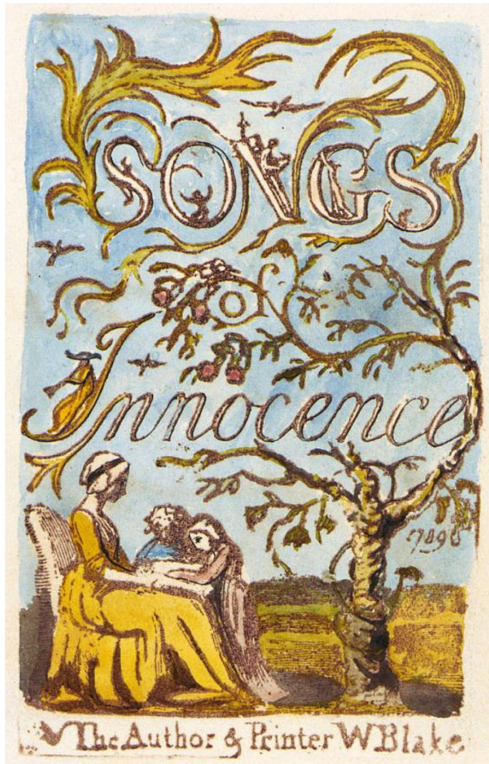
[272] The lettering for Stuart M. Samuel's daughter Vera "proved too much for [Greenaway],… so she agreed to have the words designed for her by a professional letter-draughtsman" (Spielmann and Layard 227).

Narrative-free and authorless, the alphabet was a commodity that belonged to everyone and thus to no one; it laid no constraining hand on her fancy, nor did it require significant innovation.

When Spielmann and Layard describe the resulting *English Spelling-Book* as "one of the most inspiring school-books ever published for children," it is not clear what is so inspiring about it (128), for precisely the reasons that fueled resistance to illustration in didactic works around the turn of the century. I noted in Chapter 1 that although the British rationalists did succeed in establishing a tradition of literacy education that makes "alphabetical literacy" a redundant term, they did not entirely shape pedagogical texts as we know them today because they were dubious about illustrations as a supplemental technology in any kind of "earnest" didactic printed endeavor (Lundin *Victorian Horizons* 43). Instead, they followed John Locke in advocating close tutorial supervision so that instruction could be folded into children's voluntary activities, cajoling children into learning "whilst they thought they were only playing" at opportune moments. Children's book publishers, rather than pedagogues, suggested that illustration could provide the veneer of play in lieu of exhaustive and opportunistic surveillance. Reflecting the potentially idiosyncratic collision of these forces, Greenaway's frontispiece for *The English Spelling-Book* rather ironically evokes the kind of domestic education that the institutional primer was supposed to replace (Figure 67). She depicts a sweetly maternal woman in archaic dress (even including fingerless gloves and ruffled bonnet), seated in a chair with a book on her lap and commanding the attention of two demure children. Her right hand is raised in a theatrical sign for "teaching," and the setting is insistently, even incoherently contrasted with the unappealing confines of a school room. A bowl of fruit at the woman's right hand, a blank background that conspicuously refuses to architecturally define the space, and an elaborate border of flowers all conspire to create a strangely pastoral setting for beginning instruction in reading and grammar. But for the frontal perspective and lack of an overarching tree, we could be looking at the frontispiece for Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (Figure 68). Even more importantly, this image is insistently free of *all* text except for the initial "KG" in the lower left-hand corner: the book on the woman's lap is tilted at an angle that reveals its utterly blank pages. A similar, individualized pantomime of picturesque reading recurs on the title page, where a bonneted girl reclines in a field (the outdoors signaled by clumps of grass and a framing device of spare thistle bushes) with an equally-blank book held open in her hands (Figure 69).

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 67. frontispiece to Mavor's *English Spelling-Book*



Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.
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Figure 68. title-page to Blake's *Songs of Innocence*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 69. detail from title page to *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* [273]

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[273] Due to ease of access, an illustration from *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* has been reproduced; it differs from the corresponding illustration in Mavor's *English Spelling-Book* only in the addition of colors.

This separation of text and image is strange in an era infatuated with illustration, and even stranger given the history of British representations of the alphabet in texts designed for beginning reading instruction, a tradition inevitably invoked here by the paratext. In an issue of *London Magazine* from 1820, the reviewer applauded the use of "brief illustrations" as an "excellent manner of enforcing the knowledge of the letters to a child's mind, by identifying them with familiar objects of a visible tangible description" (479). And as Patricia Crain has established out, the synecdochic "A is for" approach to representing the alphabet became the overwhelmingly favored form in Victorian Anglophonic publishing, so familiar that the tripartite formation is often merely *implied* by juxtaposing the letterform with a label/word and an illustration. Kate Greenaway's representation of the alphabet in Mavor's *English Spelling-Book* deviates from this familiar formula, which I have described as an "emblematic" mode of representing the relationship between text, image, and letterform (see Chapter 2). Greenaway presents the alphabet in the company of human figures rather than "familiar objects," although there is certainly something limp, static and "object-like" about her child-figures.[274] Their activities are sometimes elaborated by interaction with objects, but (again, strangely given the context) never with objects that suggest a recognizable synecdochic relationship to the adjacent letters. Thus, the child-figures at "E," "R," and "U (rather than "C" or "K") are playing with cats or kittens (Figure 70), while the figure bearing an umbrella (a common object-pair for "U") appears circumscribed by the "Q"; similarly, the girl "holding a doll is perched atop the crossbar of the "H" while a boy with a fishing rod and line clambers over the "W" (Figures 71-72). If there is a synecdochal connection between the letters and the activities represented, it is not clarified textually, and in most cases the child-figure appears purposeless except as a decorative element. Its semiotic superfluity is exceeded only by that of the alphabetic letterforms, which are often obscured by the figures. Printed in the sepia tones characteristic of individuals affiliated with the Aesthetic Movement, Greenaway's alphabet opens the primer and ostensibly functions as part of the first step in a carefully calibrated course of synthetic instruction –

[274] Lundin's description of Greenaway's "stylized figures" as being like "dolls created to please adults" succinctly evokes their limpness ("Sensational Designs" 164).

subsequent sections are divided according to words with increasing numbers of syllables, with Greenaway figures representing actions, interacting with labeled objects, etc. But the relationship between the alphabet figures and the alphabet itself has no such topological relationship: the letters do not "map" onto the figures (or vice versa). All of which is simply to say that the child-figures reflect an institutionalized link between the alphabet and children, rather than explicating the alphabet's role in constructing textual

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 70. "E" and "R" from Mavor's *English Spelling-Book*

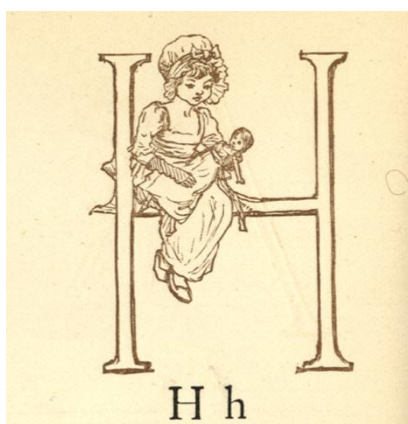

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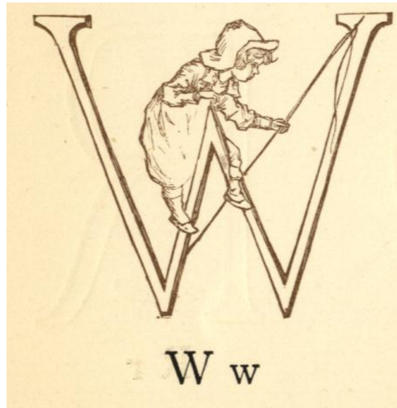
Figure 71. "H" from Mavor's *English Spelling-Book*



From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

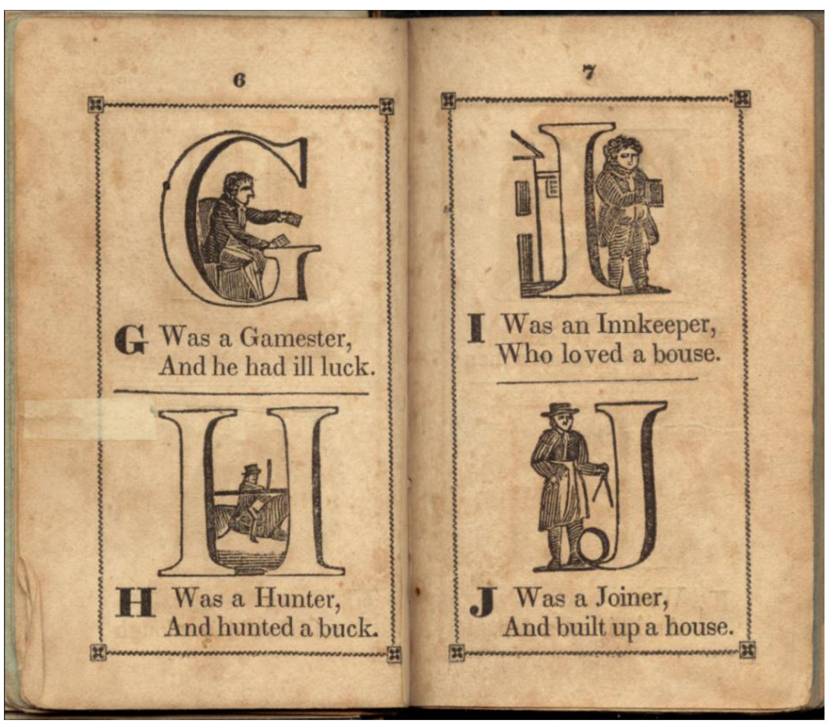
Figure 72. “W” from Mavor’s *English Spelling-Book*

signs. Accordingly, the girl leaning on the letter “Z” is holding yet another book that is – in keeping with the pattern established by the earliest pages of the *Spelling-Book*, and their lack of represented inscription – apparently full of blank pages (Figure 73). For perhaps this reason, each illustration is accompanied by upper- and lowercase examples of each letter in a small, clear, and unremarkable font. These elements, rather than Greenaway’s, represent the functional form of the alphabet, and are in visual lockstep with the primer’s subsequent representations of the alphabet as textual substrate (i.e., as part of words).

From the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio

Figure 73. “Z” from Mavor’s *English Spelling-Book*

Greenaway's illustrations for this primer-opening alphabet are a curious mix of earlier alphabet book tropes and conspicuous disregard for them. On the one hand, her grouping of miniature figures with super-sized letters echoes earlier approaches to representing the alphabet as an element of the human environment, with visual magnification signaling social importance. But on the other hand, they deny the cataloguing, emblematic, and synecdochic modes of representation that have conventionally been used to attach meaning to these compositional elements – elements that signify through verbal, not visual, indexicality. A particular intertextual comparison should help illuminate the novelty of this vacuum of significance in representing the alphabet. A most generous way of viewing these figures – and one with the nominal philosophical support of Locke, accepted for generations by this point – would be to situate them as enticements to learn by inviting child-pupils to identify with them, to place them*selves* "among the letters" in the manner of a classic alphabet book discussed by Crain, *The Men Among the Letters* (Figure 74). In Crain's thoughtful analysis of this 1824 text, which originated in Boston but kept company



Courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library/Rare Books

Figure 74. "G" through ""J" from *Men Among the Letters*

with similarly-structured alphabet books readily available in the UK in the nineteenth century, she argues that the "tableau format" of "men among" communicates a subtext of hierarchical relations along with its text. In the case of *Men Among the Letters,* that text is an oft-reprinted (and oft-re-illustrated) alphabet rhyme derived from oral tradition, the "Tom Thumb's alphabet" that usually begins "A was an Archer that shot at a frog."[275] And the text might as well be reiterated because repetition naturalizes the *visual* "subtext": "the letters are arranged as though they are integral parts of the human habitat; the human figures are scaled in a consistent manner to the big-as-life (and bigger-than-life) letters" (Crain 112). Crain goes on to discuss how these "tableau" representations of the alphabet function as a literal, child-absorbing "republic of letters" in early-to-mid-nineteenth-century America. Indeed, she uses the metaphor of a "tableau" because she sees the letters functioning as the site of miniaturized drama, which the pre-reader is supposed to take in along with the letterform (Crain 118). However, it is important to note that in Crain's analysis, these figures are not simply idly existing "among the letters." They bring drama to the letters by *doing* things described by the rhyme, whether it is to be an archer who shoots at a frog or, as at Z, a "zany" who "looked like a fool" thanks to his pointed hat. And more importantly, the figures' identities are conveyed by what the semiotician Charles Peirce would call "iconic" modes of visual signification, or representation based on resemblance. These fairly direct connections between a real world and its representation on the page are exploited in turn via the associational and *symbolic* modes of the adjacent text, so that the final effect of place "men among the letters" is one of pedagogically-productive redundancy.

Greenaway's alphabet figures, however, operate in a different semiotic vein. Her economy of scale excludes any iconic allusions to the real-world environment, and thereby reverses the effects described by Crain in *Men Among the Letters.* That is to say, instead of magnifying the letters, she has miniaturized the children. This move engages the paradoxical effects that Susan Stewart describes in *On Longing,* of "exaggerat[ing] the divergent relation between the abstract and the material nature of the

[275] It first appeared in print around 1783, in M. Cooper's text with the telling title *A Child's New Plaything.*

sign" (43). On one hand, the miniature is easy to overlook or ignore, which implies that its absence would not be missed; to make something smaller is literally to minimize it, and thus to downplay its importance. This diminishing effect is accomplished in part by minimizing the resources consumed by producing a small object, and telegraphing value on several levels at once. Thus, the tendency to produce miniature books for children can be read as a marker of their relatively low social status.[276] But on the other hand, the miniature represents expended energy, because "there are no miniatures in nature," only "a cultural product" resulting from the superimposition of signifying scalar relationships (Stewart *On Longing* 55). At the most concrete level, the miniature can represent "a celebration of new technology," as has indeed been particularly true in the publishing industry (Stewart *On Longing* 39). Thus, "a reduction in dimensions does not produce a corresponding reduction in significance" (Stewart *On Longing* 43). Rather, such a reduction ironically and paradoxically produces an *increase* in significance, derived from either the implicit (energy-consuming) act of miniaturization, or the significant contrast between the miniature and the "full" or normal size. Smaller typefaces were simply more difficult to produce, and early printed books were often quite large even though the prospect of reduced consumption (of lead as well as paper and ink) incentivized their production. Greenaway's "children among the letters" are less dramatic, in the sense that Crain characterizes the "Men Among the Letters," than they are conspicuously consumable. And they certainly are not inviting child readers to join them in an environment, whether the schoolroom or the marketplace, that would require literacy.

This effect was heightened by the materiality of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet,* even though the illustrations were efficiently (and economically) printed with the wood engravings produced for *The English Spelling-Book.* In the earlier schoolbook version of Greenaway's alphabet, the letters of the alphabet are printed as isolated capital letters, six to a page in three rows (as opposed two columns, as was sometimes the order in earlier alphabet books – in the *Spelling-Book,* horizontal dividing lines reinforce the "proper" order of reading). This layout is echoed by the series of undecorated alphabets that

[276] Stewart alludes to the historical sympathy between miniature books and children (*On Longing* 44), which is documented by Brian Alderson ("New Playthings and Gigantick Histories") as well. See also Doris Welsh.

immediately follow Greenaway's, and elaborate on potential variations in letterforms: italic, upper and lower case with vowels and consonants distinguished; "Old English" or Gothic script in "Capitals" and "small"; Arabic numbers, and Roman numbers. The entire experience of the paratext is transformed by separating the illustrated alphabet from the rest of the primer. The figures' small size always evokes the intimacy of the handheld, but even more so when *the book* is miniature, as well as the figure. In the miniature *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet,* the letters are printed one per page, and the book itself is smaller than the adult palm, so that strong, youthful vision and small fingers are more adept at experiencing the book. It belongs to childhood partly because (larger) adults confront more physical challenges in their attempts to interact with it, and thus are reminded throughout of their physical as well as intellectual and emotional distance from the book's "ideal readers." Adult readers must, however unwillingly, occupy a "transcendent viewpoint" with respect to the book as well as the childhood experience it evokes; they must "perceive the miniature as [an] object" rather than subjectively – that is, as a subject experiencing childhood (Stewart *On Longing* 54).

However, adults' physical alienation from the book is compensated for by its evocation of (idealized) memories and fantasies of childhood. The book's insistent and inescapable lack of physical presence reinforces this effect; indeed, idealization is enabled precisely by objectification. The book can literally be encompassed by the hand, and thus controlled, suggesting a correspondence between the book and the image of childhood that it presents/contains. As Susan Stewart points out, the physical form of the book provides physical closure to the otherwise-disembodied world of the literary; the covers of a book function as artificial boundaries to literary experience, which – because it instantiates through language – structures much of human experience (at least in a literature or language-oriented culture, as Derrida and others have characterized ours). The act of opening and closing a book actually effects entry and exit from an all-encompassing language cloud, and doing so with a *miniature* book goes the additional step of "containing" that sphere of experience on a scale assimilable to that of the human body (Stewart *On Longing* 40). This effective "containment," through miniaturization, lies at the heart of Kate Greenaway's notoriously "charming" representation of childhood. Since the miniature cannot act or function in the real world, it becomes disconnected from time's passage. The miniaturized children "among the letters" of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* are removed from the utility of literacy, the training-ground of the schoolroom, "into the infinite time of reverie" (Stewart *On Longing* 65). Furthermore, as Susan Stewart has pointed out, "the gemlike properties of the miniature book… makes these forms especially suitable 'containers' of aphoristic and didactic thought" (*On Longing* 43). In a similar fashion, ideal children might be seen as "especially suitable 'containers' " of the alphabet with its arbitrary order, and its conventional (rather than rational) role as the site of beginning reading instruction.

The materiality of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* reproduces the paradoxical significance of commodified childhood that she also represents in miniature. Nor was Greenaway alone in pursuing this thread, although she was the most successful person to do so with images of children; Stewart notes that "after the advent of romanticism, the miniature book frequently served as a realm of the cultural other" (*On Longing* 43). Small nineteenth-century books invoke two divergent strands of development and discursive significance, which together offer complementary views of how print technology compares with manuscript reproduction:

1) the miniature as "high" culture and valuable, derived first from the expenditure of effort enabled by abundant resources, and later by its perch at the limits of evolving technology, and;

2) the miniature as "low" and cheap, derived from the pressure to husband resources when the need for effort has been technologically reduced. Diminution thus represents both a loss and a gain of power, depending on whether reproduction technology is understood as a move toward a more dilute (because accessible) literate culture, or as an achievement that situates the physical form of the book as a site of potential cultural sophistication. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, children experienced a similarly paradoxical gain/loss of cultural significance, as innocence became a defining feature that elevated their social standing while also excluding their participation in potentially-empowering forms of adult intercourse. Greenaway's miniaturized representations of children can be understood as objects of contemplation and (unfulfillable) desire, while their juxtaposition with representations of the alphabet

reinforce the pivotal role of print culture in the construction of children as "innocent" *after* their absorption into the powerful institutions of acculturation like textual literacy and schooling.

The title of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* book transforms the semiotics of the illustrations as well, undermining their potential as enticements for reluctant pupils. Here, the alphabet belongs to childhood, but it also belongs to Kate Greenaway, whose illustrations implicitly subordinate the alphabet. That hierarchy is a 180-degree reversal of the literography apparent in pedagogically-oriented illustrated alphabets, which situate the visual as the pre-verbal, and graphic communication as a primitive antecedent to the textual. In the process, she also effaces the alphabet's traditionally primal position in beginning reading instruction. Greenaway herself doesn't record any experience of learning the alphabet as part of her textual literacy instruction, and Ruskin actually expressed doubt about whether *any* child had such an experience. In response to her contribution to the classic *Spelling-Book,* he assured her, "Spelling Book ever so nice – But do children really learn to spell like that? I never did" (qtd in Spielmann and Layard, 128). Nor was he alone in this experience, as contemporary educators were then actively debating the relative merits of the whole-word (or "Jacotot") system, and other approaches to beginning reading instruction that were not based on the alphabet.[277] Whether it is the result (merely) of biography, or because Greenaway is aware of debates about the analytic alternatives to strictly synthetic beginning reading instruction, she approaches Mavor's *Spelling-Book* less as a pedagogue would, and more as a decorative artist espying an already-popular platform. Indeed, this combination of inflation (of the letters) and miniaturization (of children) highlights how the alphabet, an element in a visual field, presents special compositional challenges. However, because Greenaway refuses to meet or embrace these challenges, the children of "her" *Alphabet* do not "illustrate" much of anything (in the late-nineteenth-century sense), and certainly they cannot unravel the convergence of the verbal and the visual into textuality.

The following year, after the minimal success of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet,* Greenway's need to publish was again an occasion to promote the alphabet. Although her proprietary status is not so strongly indicated without the use of the possessive, the book's cover does rather misleadingly suggest

[277] See, for instance, Chadwick 81. See also Lamport and Mathews.

that she also "owns" the oft-reprinted alphabet rhyme. The cover promises "A Apple Pie By Kate Greenaway," rather than "illustrated by" her as had been the case on previous books, like *Mother Goose,* where she was responsible for the images but not the text. This small but significant aspect of the attribution can be read as a testament to her success as a "brand," so that the book was clearly being sold as a set of Greenaway illustrations rather than as a representation of the alphabet. This hierarchy is also apparent in the text itself, which treats the letterforms as superfluous. Even at the time, Ruskin noted – and attacked Kate for – the apparent lack of attention to a page layout that brought text and figures together on a vacant white field. As Patricia Dooley points out, in *A Apple Pie* (and most of her other illustrations) Greenaway almost entirely eschews "backgrounds" to her pictures. Instead, she places figures on a flat white plane with "props" to indicate whether a setting is nominally exterior or interior; horizons are replaced by scattered architectural and landscape elements (Dooley 64).[278] At "B," for instance, a doghouse is set off from the central tableau as an isolated vignette, and even the marginal perspective of a receding fence line rapidly merges with the flat white background (Figure 75); so too, at "L Longed for It" distant figures are given only enough ground to stand on (Figures 76). At "H Had It," a child surreptitiously sneaks a piece of pie by the light of the moon while some rats observe from a corner, but the interior space is actually rendered impossible by competitive cues: an apparent girder delineates a ceiling too low for the window. If we reinterpret that corner-piece as the suggestion of a shelf, then the rats' corner should be hidden behind a wall (Figure 77). Perhaps most egregiously, at "K Knelt for It" and "J Jumped for It," the pie appears to be hovering in midair (Figures 78 and 79). Where a horizon is suggested, as at "J," that horizon "has no vanishing point" – only empty white space beyond (Dooley 65).

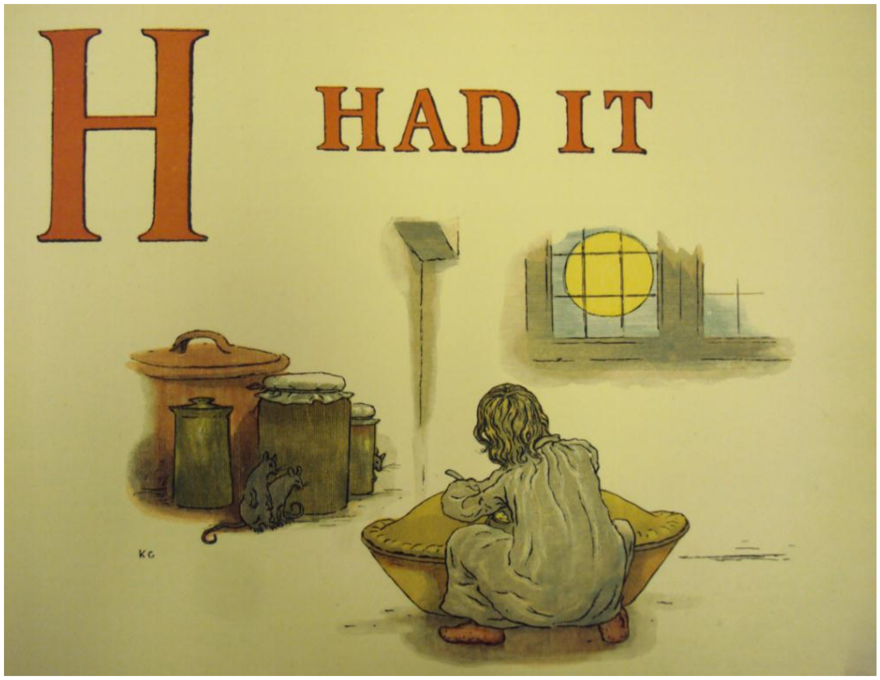
[278] This choice may be due to a lack of training as well as intention; she never did master perspective, as Ruskin and other critics repeatedly observe. Prompted by the anecdote of a gallery-goer describing "five distinct lines of sight!" in a single picture, he repeatedly set her exercises to help overcome her default background of "trees stuck in at intervals"(Ruskin qtd in Spielmann and Layard 167). Spielmann and Layard concurred: "To tell the truth, the perspective in her drawings is often very deficient, and the calm violation of its laws in some of her earlier wok was due, not to quaintness as people thought, but to real inability to master it" (177).

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 75. "B" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 76. "L" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

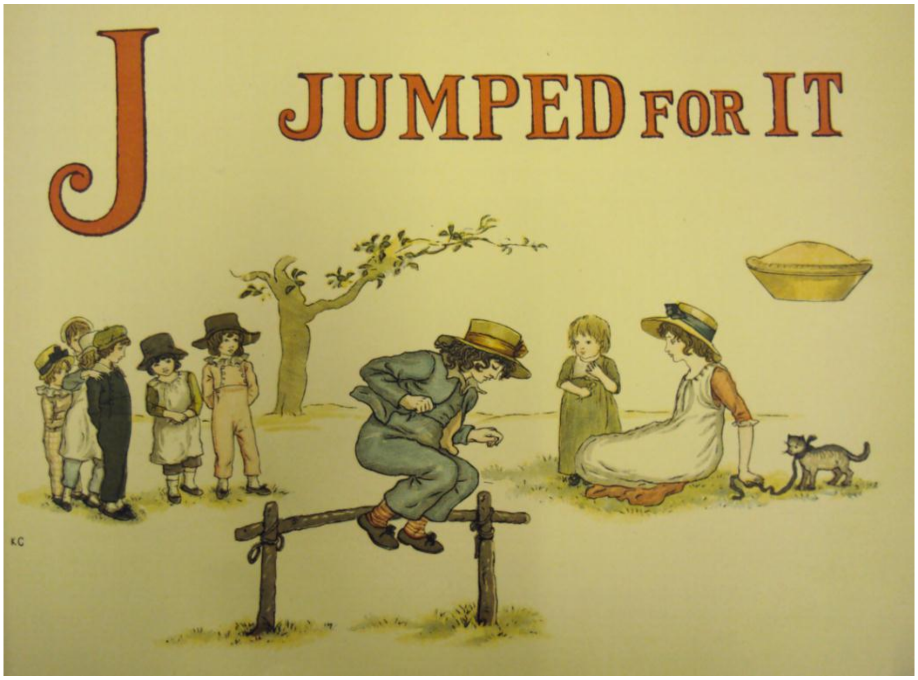


Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 77. "H" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 78. "K" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

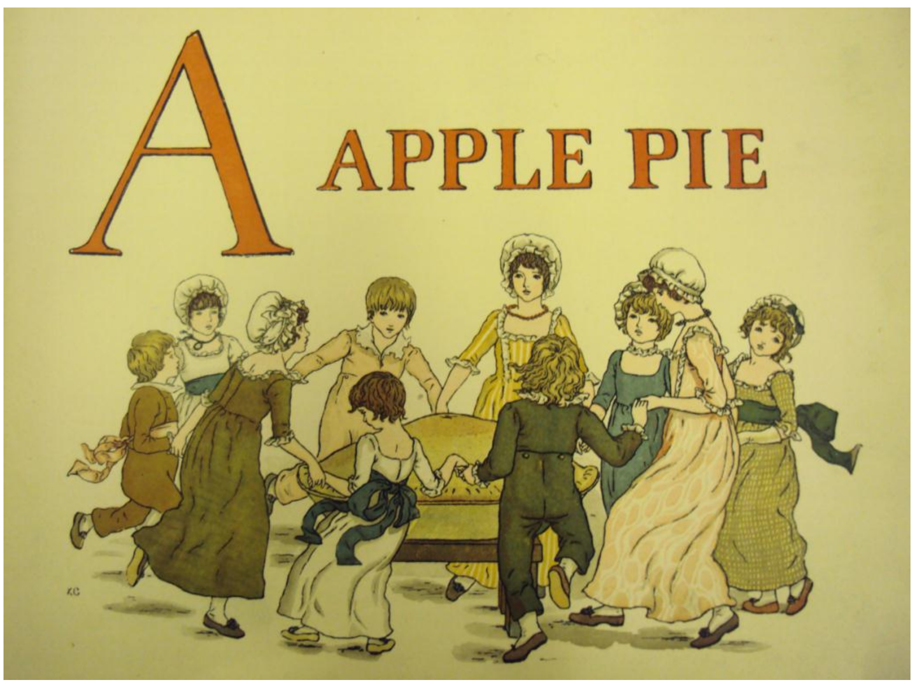


Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 79. "K" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

As Greenaway admitted defensively in a letter to Ruskin "Perhaps I don't trouble about the reality in the drawings. I put things just where I want them, not, possibly, as they ought to go" (Spielmann and Layard 238). Her failings extended to the child figures as well as their surroundings. Greenaway's critics often complained of her apparent ignorance of anatomy, including too-widely-spaced eyes and misplaced knees (Spielmann and Layard 267); a reviewer in *The Spectator* declared that her "faults of drawing are numerous and grave" ("A Child's Book" 1613). Continuing a long-established thread of criticism, Ruskin declared that the hands of the figures in *Apple Pie* were "becoming literal paddles and flappers," at times in danger of morphing into "real deformities" (qtd in Spielmann and Layard, 156). This unorthodox – which is to say, not technically rigorous – approach to composition has important repercussions for the functionality of Greenaway's figures, and even more so for her adjacent representation of the alphabet.

In *A Apple Pie,* the manipulation of settings and represented scale significantly allows Greenaway to miniaturize her figures as she had done in *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet*, even though she is working on the largest-format book she ever undertook to illustrate; its pages are characteristic of contemporary toy and picture books, and as Engen notes, the compositions look "stretched" by the scale (141). She more clumsily reproduces the earlier book's miniaturizing effect by depicting the titular apple pie as a freakishly large tart: in the illustration for "A," ten children can comfortably ring-dance around it (Figure 80), and it is larger than a roast turkey as a girl (relatively taller and presumably older) enacts the line "C Cut It" (Figure 81). Greenaway's miniaturizing touch is reasserted by oversized cooking implements and apples depicted on the cover of the book for some editions: the children are reduced to the size of storage canisters, and require both arms to clutch the beach-ball-sized fruit.



Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 80. "A" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 81. "C" from Greenaway's *A Apple Pie*

But most importantly, in *A Apple Pie* we again encounter "Children Among the Letters" with a difference, as the child-figures are dwarfed by the giant red letters of the alphabet on facing pages, and by the juxtaposed lines of the rhyme. Ruskin disparaged the use of large red letters to reproduce the familiar "A Apple Pie" rhyme and the nominal narrative in which "B bit it, C cut it, D danced for it" and so on: "when- ever, did you put red letters like the bills of a pantomime – in any of my drawings? and why do it to the public?" (Ruskin qtd in Spielmann and Layard 160) His complaints recalled the pantomime's crude use of text "banners" to overcome awkward moments of contemporary pantomime performance, when paper banners broke the delicate balance between the aural and the visual on the stage. Those supplemental banners appeared uncomfortably like an expressive failure of the form. Thus, Ruskin bemoans Kate's failure to grasp the intermedial potential of the alphabet book, which cannot be skirted in this case as she has skirted it in so many other instances of straightforward "illustration." The explicit subject of the alphabet book is the letterforms, so he is disappointed to see that "The titles are simply bill-sticking of the vulgarest sort, over the drawings – nor is there one of those that has the least melodious charm as a colour design." He concluded that he was "considerably vexed about Apple Pie," scolding that "I really think you ought seriously to consult me before determining on the lettering of things so important" (qtd in Spielmann and Layard, 156).

Although he delivers a confidently-righteous critique, Ruskin may simply have been revealing a competing set of priorities when he insisted on the importance of lettering in Greenaway's alphabet book. As Dooley notes, her general disregard for naturalism, and especially perspective, "frees Greenaway's figures from the limits of place, time, season, and most connections to the adult world" (65), and this freedom significantly includes the perquisites of textual literacy and schooling. Greenaway's representations of childhood have long been recognized as idealized prompts for nostalgic reverie during a time when society imagined happiness as anachronistic *relief* from current living conditions, rather than a realistic *substitution* of them – hence, Ruskin's oft-quoted praise of Greenaway's images focuses on the *absence* of marks of the Industrial Revolution in her pictures, rather than the *presence* of ingredients for a pastoral paradise:

> "There are no railroads in it, to carry the children away with, are there? no tunnel or pit mouths to swallow them up, no leaguelong viaducts – no blinkered iron bridges? There are only winding brooks, wooden footbridges, and grassy hills without any holes cut into them!...
>
> And more wonderful still, - there are no gasworks! no waterworks, no mowing machines, no sewing machines, no telegraph poles, no vestige, in fact, or science, civilization, economical arrangements, or commercial enterprise!" (*Art in England* 152-153)

There are conspicuous gaps, here, although "commercial enterprise" is not one of them. In *A Apple Pie,* Greenaway's lack of attention to the alphabet is striking, or at least it would have been in a text that was dedicated to representing the experience of childhood in the pre-Industrial past, with modern methods of reproducing text and image. Indeed, sociocultural context, specifically the recent advent of schooling and institutionalized textual literacy, crucially inflects Greenaway's conjoined representations of the alphabet and childhood. Dooley notes that the giant pie emerges as "the focus of rituals engaged in entirely by children" (68), and this lack of adult figures shatters the illusion's verisimilitude: children here are associated with their peers in the manner recently normalized by institutional education, and documented by Greenaway herself in an illustrated poem included in *Under the Window*: "School is over / Oh what fun!/ Lesson finished, / Play begun." Her pseudo-nostalgic method of representing her country, which erases the increasing influence of industry, nonetheless offers a vision of childhood isolated with itself. It is a vision that stands in stark opposition to the mixture of adult/child society associated with domestic education and strongly advocated by rationalist pedagogues around the turn of the century – in short, the form of maternal education (ironically) represented by Greenaway in the frontispiece for the *English Spelling-Book,* which was later relocated (in modified form) to the cover of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* (Figure 82).

Courtesy of the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh

Figure 82. cover of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet*

But given how Greenaway has already partly subordinated the pedagogical virtue of a textbook to brand promotion in the *Spelling-Book,* a more frivolous paratextual setting for her frontispiece is entirely in line with her general approach to commodifying childhood. And so, too, the children's focus on the pie, rather than the alphabet, situates them as objects of contemplation for adult consumers, rather than as "children among the letters" serving as aspirational models for child readers. As Alan Richardson has ably demonstrated, Romantic writers around the turn of the century – especially Wordsworth and Coleridge – had been sincerely interested in education, and often represented childhood as a time of life "naturally" dedicated to learning and intellectual development, even if this learning was conducted in the countryside instead of the schoolroom.[279] By contrast, the late-Victorian version of Romantic childhood that Greenaway represented situated nature *in opposition to* education or acculturation. The latter had been officially assigned to the pedagogue and the schoolroom, which shaded ominously into the factory (especially in areas where the Lancastrian system predominated).[280] Thus, Greenaway is hard-pressed to produce a coherent representation of the alphabet as a pedagogical object AND a commercially-appealing one, when associations with childhood evoke both the disciplinary order of schooling, and freedom from adult oversight.

Only a commitment to the primary value of visually-rendered, idealized nostalgia could justify Spielmann and Layard's assertion that in *A Apple Pie,* Greenaway's "subject fitted her mood of fun and fancy exactly" (282). The "subject" is not the alphabet, as the title and form would suggest, nor is it education of a more general kind, as the generic associations would imply. Rather, the "subject" of *A Apple Pie* is the realm of childhood to which the alphabet had long been assigned, but modified according to the influence of latter-day Romanticism on prevailing constructions of childhood. With this investment in the visual at the potential expense of the textual, Greenaway can once again be seen as (literally) capitalizing on what Crane started. Thus, even with respect to representations of the alphabet, she is

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[279] See Richardson, particularly "Some Versions of Childhood" relevant to this time period (*Literature* 8-25).

[280] See Danger 317-318 for an overview of this.

again operating as his popularizer, rather than his fellow-creator, repeating a phenomenon we've seen elsewhere in their respective representations of nostalgically-inflected and generic images of children. Crane was perhaps protesting too much when he noted that Greenaway's "treatment of quaint early nineteenth-century costume, prim gardens, and the child-like spirit of her designs in an old-world atmosphere" were "touched with conscious modern 'aestheticism'" (*Reminiscences* 71). As I have noted, Crane was also a sincere admirer of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and regularly incorporated Aesthetic trademarks like Queen Anne architecture, sunflowers, and Japanese motifs into his own work.[281] But it was Greenaway who was dubbed the "Pre-Raphaelite of the Nursery," as her figures tended to display the flowing hair and limp musculature characteristic of the work of Burne-Jones and Millais, even after she was liberated from the chivalric themes and medieval settings of the Valentine industry.[282] And yet for all of their common ground, Greenaway and Crane clearly parted ways in their understanding of children's books as vehicles for larger social agendas. Spielmann and Layard could speak with the confidence of recent memory that what Crane "had greatly in mind was a special appeal to the eyes and artistic taste of the little ones: his purpose was in a measure educative" (72); Chapter 4 explored how Crane insisted (paradoxically, perhaps) that certain forms of art appreciation were intrinsic to human nature, and/but that books were an eminently suitable vehicle for practicing and extending individuals' perceptual skills. I also noted that at one point, his idealistic stance brought him into conflict with Ruskin, whom he criticized in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for failing to "treat a child's plastic mind – naturally fearless, open, inquiring, and logical – as something living and human," and even more so for failing to recognize that children's eyes were "their chief organ for the reception of ideas" (Crane "Out of the Mouth of Babes"). Triangulating from Crane's critique of Ruskin, the latter's rabid endorsement of Kate Greenaway's illustrations, and in particular her representations of childhood, also comes under fire. The child-figures in

[281] See Aslin for a discussion of Crane's productions "bearing the stamp of the Aesthetic Movement in one way or another" (161).

[282] See, for instance, Spielmann and Layard: "As Mr. Holman Hunt, Millais, and their associates invigorated the art of England by their foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, so Kate Greenaway introduced a Pre-Raphaelite spirit into the art of the nursery" (265).

Kate Greenaway's Alphabet seem particularly susceptible to this charge of having overlooked pedagogical opportunity.

However, children's responses to Greenway's books were beside the point of their commercial appeal, as her works were more often praised for revealing to *adults* a much sought-after world of childhood. The purported "charm" of her books was, time and again, conflated with their role as a site of nostalgic retreat for *adults* of all kinds, or perhaps for children whose lives lacked "all that was sweet and pleasant and charming in children's lives of days gone by in country-side and village," since she sacrificed reality to idealism and "left out all that was ugly wrong, or bad" (Spielmann and Layard, 7).[283] Kate herself admitted that she did not expect her books to appeal to children, since she had found that children "like to know about other things – or what other children did – but not about children in an abstract sort of way. That belongs to older people" (qtd in Spielmann and Layard 124). Childhood in the abstract was her true subject and the source of her success as an illustrator, as it was comparatively rare that she even provided names for the figures who were depicted – and figures they decidedly were, rather than characters deserving of names. With very few exceptions,[284] they corresponded very much with an *idea or image* of Childhood, rather than any specific child, either fictional or real. Greenaway's blank-eyed children are resistant to acting as either models or vehicles of "elementary education" – the "burning question" that prompted Crane's attack on Ruskin – even in texts that are *explicitly* designed to be pedagogical aids.

[283] Although, as Engen points out, the adult experience of the English countryside, which was rife with tedious work and frequent struggles for survival, is no more accurately represented by these well-fed and idle village folk (24).

[284] Perhaps the most significant of these are the representations of babies in the *April Baby's Book of Tunes* (1900) that she completed near the end of her life. Greenaway had uncharacteristically agreed to illustrate another writer's text out of admiration for Elizabeth Von Arnim's previous work, *Elizabeth and her German Garden.* Greenaway had also very recently taken up portrait painting as being more "in vogue" than her played-out style. But since she never saw the babies to draw from life, as a letter from Von Arnim confirms, any resemblance between the original "April babies" and their illustrated likeness must have been pure coincidence, and a testament to people's ability to see children in precisely the ways they *want* to see them (Spielmann and Layard 249).

The buying public, or at least the publishers charged with assessing their taste, were apparently unconcerned about the lack of pedagogical utility that characterized Greenaway's representations of the alphabet in textual environments that were usually seen as the proper domain of pedagogy. Her deviance was excused in textual environments that were literally "textbook" sites of pedagogical endeavor, such as Mavor's *English Spelling-Book*. Although that particular book failed to sell, the modest success of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* exculpated her.[285] In the early 1890s she was even asked to illustrate another school book – a commission to illustrate "Messrs. Longman's Reading books for elementary schools" that, Spielmann and Layard speculate, she refused for health reasons rather than disinclination to the work (198). This effort to introduce a well-known illustrator's work into a school book, despite the fact that children's actual delight was presumably gratuitous in an environment of compulsory education, suggests that her name still carried much sway with adults who admired her highly artificialized picture of childhood, and were content to view it in books even – or perhaps especially – when it clashed so sharply with the environment where children actually consumed her books. As one writer in the *Critic* declared in the late 1880s, "the artist's name upon the cover is doubtless the book's best recommendation" (qtd in Engen 158). Far from exploiting books' potential as a site of inculcating literacy, visual *or* textual, Greenaway's children's books ultimately molded real children under their parents' influence into additional vehicles for her brand of illustration. She transformed "our babies from over-dressed little frights into the quaint miniature pictures that now charm our eyes," as *The Ladies Home Journal* put it (McKenna 3), regardless of whether it educated or amused them.

C. PHIZ: THE BRAND WITH A LIFE OF ITS OWN

Phiz's Funny Alphabet provides independent confirmation that Greenaway reflected shifting priorities and internal conflicts in representations of the alphabet in mass-produced picture books in the 1880s,

[285] Spielmann and Layard declare the sale of 24,500 copies of *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet* to be a "more than respectable total" (129).

since he also struggled to reconcile playful, Romantic images of childhood with the discipline of pedagogy. In 1883, Routledge pushed the limits of the "Phiz" brand even further than Browne himself had done, by issuing *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* nearly 20 years after Browne's first interactions with the Warne and Routledge conglomerate and – even more significantly – over a year after Browne had died in relative isolation, having exited the publishing world by the mid-1870s due to encroaching infirmity.[286] Thus, our purpose here is not to rehash Browne's life and career, but rather to account for the brand founded on his efforts, and how it took on a life of its own when his publisher capitalized on it in the *Funny Alphabet*.[287] As I have already indicated, Browne was certainly best known under the pseudonym of Phiz, which he typically (but not exclusively) used when he worked as the illustrator of nearly a dozen of Charles Dickens's novels. Browne's great-great-granddaughter Valerie Browne Lester, Michael Steig, Jane Cohen, and J. R. Harvey have all memorably contributed to the project of unraveling Phiz's artistic influences, his ratios of debt and resentment on the Dickens front, and his unfortunate afterlife. I am particularly indebted to Steig for his efforts, which build on those of Robert L. Patten, to revise the "article of faith that Dickens ruled his illustrators with a heavy hand" (*Dickens and Phiz* ix). After briefly reviewing how Browne constructed, promoted, and sustained the Phiz brand during his lifetime, we will be in a position to approach the *Funny Alphabet* itself as an exercise in perpetuating that capitalistic enterprise, with its corresponding incoherence about representing childhood, rather than mistaking it for a more conventional educational endeavor.

As Steig notes, earlier critics like Harvey have over-extrapolated from the fact that "the novelist gave his illustrators detailed instructions regarding each place," and situated Phiz as amanuensis-in-chief rather than as a powerful collaborator with significant commercial appeal in his own right (Steig *Dickens*

[286] As Lester puts it, by the 1870s Browne's "career in book-illustrating was all but dead" (202). Reports of his suicide, especially where his distress is supposed to have been instigated by Dickens, are no doubt confusing him with Dickens' very first illustrated, Richard Seymour – who *did* commit suicide halfway through illustrating *Pickwick Papers*. In fact Browne was stricken with a strange paralysis in 1867, from which he never fully recovered.

[287] Unfortunately, the Routledge archive of contracts, with writers, illustrators and printers housed in the Special Collections of University College London is incomplete; there is no contract or line item related to the publication of any works by Browne.

and Phiz 15). There is no doubt some truth in the common assumption that Browne's youth and malleability recommended him to Dickens, who had not enjoyed wrangling with either Robert Seymour or George Cruikshank over the illustrations for his previous books.[288] Although Seymour was indisputably successful when his career merged with Dickens's, Cruikshank outdid him by being the leading graphic artist in England during the first half of the century, with an ego to match.[289] But Browne was not just younger than Cruikshank, he was also his heir-apparent. Dickens, Cruikshank, and Browne were all schooled in the mode of visually-oriented satire that had peaked with the prints of William Hogarth (*The Rake's Progress*, etc.).[290] Those images were, in a sense, meant to be "read" in the sense of being decoded and interpreted, as emblematic details and theatrical postures corresponded to an established code of visual expression. Michael Steig has identified a number of illustrations by Phiz for Dickens that are crammed with significant details, some of which supplemented the text with details and moral or emotional valence in this Hogarthian tradition ("Tradition" 226-228).[291] As eager as Browne may have been to follow Dickens's lead in creating these memorable characters, his ability to do so was certainly facilitated by their sympathetic approaches to representing human figures and narrative, and a shared vocabulary of images.

But this is not to say that Browne found it easy to keep his two artistic identities distinct, nor that it was always clear how he should manage them. *Master Humphrey's Clock* provides us with a telling example of the competing pressures Browne faced when cultivating a brand name alongside a burgeoning

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[288] As Cohen points out, Browne was quite clearly selected by Dickens because he possessed these qualities (5, 62). See also Harvey – "The great advantage of the actual illustrator, Hablot Browne, was his unformedness and transparency: he was ready to let Dickens's imagination work through him" (175) – and Steig *Dickens and Phiz* 24-25.

[289] For an overview of this tense working relationship, see Cohen 15-17.

[290] As Steig put it, "Browne's and Dickens's most obvious mutual influence is the satiric work of William Hogarth, in particular his 'progresses' " (*Dickens and Phiz* 8), although Dickens takes precedence as the cultural emphasis shifted to textual rather than graphic narratives: "In many ways it can be argued that Dickens inherited Hogarth's mantle as the great English comic and satiric artist (Steig *Dickens and Phiz* 12).

[291] At the same time, Dickens's highly-visual prose was explicitly compared to Hogarth's paintings and satirical engravings, with which he was known to be familiar (Harvey 51).

literary celebrity. The relationship between publication format and authorship, which had already started to brand Phiz as "the man who drew Dickens," became fuzzy as early as 1837, when *Master Humphrey's Clock* began as a Dickens-run miscellany, and subsequently morphed into the vehicle for *The Old Curiosity Shop* (published serially 1837-1839). Browne used "Phiz" to sign the first couple of illustrations, which accompanied the miscellany's narrative frame and allowed him to continue developing "Phiz" as an independent illustrator for periodicals as well as sustained (Dickens) narratives. But the shifting format upset the Dickens-Phiz dyad, since Browne almost immediately began to share illustration duties with the rest of the "Clock Works" team that Dickens had assembled, including the Royal Academy painter George Cattermole.[292] When publication of the novel took over the plans for a multi-authored miscellany, Browne switched to signing himself as "HKB" or "HB." Perhaps because his illustrations competed with those of Cattermole, in later illustrations he often "hid" his initials in the lines of the design, in drapery folds or the wood grain of furnishings (Lester 81). What Lester reads as a sign of Browne's "pleasure in revealing his identity," I am much more inclined to read as a compromise (80). On one hand, Browne was reluctant to suspend the growing commercial strength of the Phiz-Dickens partnership – even if only temporarily, although it was not apparent from the novel's outset that Dickens's plan for woodcuts "dropped into the text" would turn out to be a singular endeavor. Perhaps ominously, Browne received second billing on the title page of the first collected volume of the novel, despite his having contributed many more designs and etching some of George Cattermole's designs in addition to his own. But on the other hand Browne was clearly attracted by the prospect of putting "HKB" in the company of a more institutionally-elevated artist, so that he was both promoted and under-represented when the title page of the first volume of *Curiosity Shop* promised "A Tale by Charles Dickens With Illustrations by George Cattermole and Hablot K. Browne." Thus, although Browne was indisputably indebted to Dickens for Phiz's "breakout," that founding collaboration has obscured Browne's additional efforts to make Phiz a compelling brand name, and the difficulties inherent in doing so.

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[292] For an overview of this effort, see Allingham.

But beyond this, there are many published indications that "Phiz" was a brand name consciously – if not consistently – cultivated and exploited by Hablot Knight Browne. The evidence here includes counter-actions like occasionally using his given name, as he did with not just Dickens but also on illustrations for other writers, such as those for two novels by Harriet Myrtle. In fact, his initial reluctance to commit to a pseudonym suggests that he recognized the importance of choosing wisely. It is widely known that although Browne signed his first illustrations for Dickens "N.E.M.O.," he later chose the name "Phiz" partly because it resonated with the already-famous name of "Boz." He may have been imitating Dickens in this appropriation of reflected glory, since Dickens had made his way into public consciousness partly by capitalizing on Seymour's and (even more so) Cruikshank's established appeal. However, as Steig points out, Browne also chose this pseudonym because it reflected his specialization in "phizzes" – that is, "physiognomies" (*Dickens and Phiz* 24). Such a shrewd double-meaning enabled Browne to transfer "Phiz" from the *Pickwick Papers* to innumerable appearances in periodicals, as well as to other authors including W. H. Ainsworth, Henry Fielding, Thomas Hood, and even Daniel Defoe and Sir Walter Scott when their works appeared in new editions. Despite White's assertions that mid-century Victorian illustrators "obtained good prices" for their products, Browne constantly needed to supplement his time-sensitive work for Dickens with a host of other projects in order to support his large family.[293] Not only was he successful in obtaining such commissions, and even in replicating with Charles Lever the mode of sustained, dyadic collaboration he enjoyed with Dickens, but contemporary advertisements for other books clearly use his name in order to advertise books by novelists other than Dickens. Thus, his publishing history features neat reversals of the lopsided publicity for *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *The Old Curiosity Shop.* [294] Even into the 1860s and 70s, after declining commissions suggested that his stock had started to fall, Browne's pseudonym would be prominently displayed in relation to books to which he had contributed a minority of the illustrations, (Steig *Dickens & Phiz* 312), or on new editions of books

[293] See Lester 74-77 for an overview of Browne's early freelance situation, and 172-173 for a consideration of his financial affairs late in life.

[294] For examples see particularly Kitton 33.

that were seeking new markets, as when Phiz is mentioned in an advertisement for a children's "Fairy" version of *Gulliver's Travels* but Swift is not ("Frederick Warne & Co,'s New Publications" 555). Early in his career, the hierarchy of text and image was flexible enough that Phiz could actually command authorial subordination, so that the writer Edward Caswall adopted the pseudonym of "Quiz" when he supplied text for two books, *Sketches of Young Ladies* (1837) and *Morals from the Churchyard* (1838) featuring illustrations "by Phiz."

The wider success of Phiz ultimately had negative repercussions for Browne: when Dickens realized that Phiz's mode of illustration was falling out of fashion, he updated his own product with the stylistic injection of Marcus Stone. As Phiz himself suggested in a letter to a friend, "Dickens probably thinks a new hand would give his old puppets a fresh look" (qtd in Lester 180).[295] And Phiz could fall out of fashion precisely because his brand was so cohesive. *Punch* evokes both the power of the brand and its potential pitfalls when reviewing the posthumous gallery showing of Browne's designs and paintings, after it had moved from Liverpool to London:

> the familiar scrawly signature and unmistakable 'touch' bring back memories of bygone boyish enthusiasms, school-day side-splittings, the happy periodical anticipations of significant 'announcements,' and the pleasant monthly promise of graphic green covers… Who bothered about *technique* in boyhood's breezy hour… MICHAEL ANGELO might be more massive, Mr. BURNE-JONES may be more intense; but this is "PHIZ." *Not* HABLOT KNIGHT BROWNE! That might do for visiting-card, catalogue, or biographical dictionary – not for us…. He drew *Pickwick* , and *Pecksniff,* and *Sam Weller,* and *Micawber,* and *Dick Swiveller,* and *Quilp,* and *Little Nell,* and these were sufficient Art Credentials for the youth of pre-Rossettian Philistia…
>
> "Go and see the Phiz Gallery" is our advice to genial Middle-age with memories and unpriggish Youth without hyperaesthetic prejudices. ("A Browne Study" 217)

As *Punch's* references to "boyish enthusiasms" and "boyhood" would suggest, Phiz's appeal in 1883 is to adults, and it is fundamentally nostalgic. The popularity of his mode of emblematic and visually-oriented

[295] See Lester, Steig, and Allchin.

satire, often verging on caricature, had waned over the decades. As Frank Palmeri documents, starting around the late 1820s, Victorian satire gave way by mid-century to a broader, more family-friendly (or "decent") style of humor that poked at social foibles more than it skewered individuals. The often-sharp moral tone of Hogarthian modes created too much friction, in addition to requiring an emblematic vocabulary. Dickens's "struggle for sovereignty" over George Cruikshank, as Jane Cohen characterized their working relationship (15), epitomizes the ultimately successful struggle of the late-nineteenth-century novelist over the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century graphic satirist. Still later, as the final quarter of the century approached, the rout was completed by the "intense" appeal of the likes of "Mr. BURNE-JONES" and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.[296] In the world of illustration, the passing of the torch also extended to modes of reproduction.[297] Wood engraving surpassed etching in terms of cost, and engraved plates in terms of style, but as Arthur Allchin noted in an 1893 memoriam, to this more-popular method "Browne was never partial, and in it was never so successful (393). When Dickens turned much of his attention to editing and summarily dismissed Browne, the designer was left to fend for himself with a marketable set of skills as an illustrator (including facility with etching and engraving on steel), but a declining stock of cultural capital that led him to, among other less-prestigious projects, the illustration of toy books in the years just *before* they had been "revolutionized" by aspirations to graphic art, and correspondingly elevated in status.

Given how much space I have devoted to documenting Greenaway's debt to Walter Crane, there is a certain ironic circularity in Phiz's final encounter with the Greenaway-dominated style of brand-name illustrating in the 1880s. Crane had been a beneficiary of Phiz early in his own career as an illustrator, and an illustrator of alphabet books in particular. Isobel Spencer has suggested that Walter Crane was responsible for the illustrations of several small "oblong" (that is, books oriented on the horizontal or 'landscape" axis rather than vertically/ 'portrait'-style) alphabet books issued by Frederick Warne in the

[296] For more on Browne's difficulties with passing out of fashion, see "Chapter 13: 1859" and "Chapter 14: "Can You Forgive Him?" in Lester; see also Lester 170-171.

[297] As "wood engraving replaced etching, a quasi-caricatural way of drawing characters became a blander, rather idealized style, and emblem and allusion disappeared almost totally" (Steig *Dickens and Phiz* 11).

mid-1860s, shortly after his secession from the firm of Routledge, Warne & Routledge: the *London Alphabet,* a *Country Alphabet*, and *The Alphabet of Sports and Games* (50). These books had not previously been included in Crane's bibliography, partly because they are unsigned – in keeping with the publishing habits for any number of sixpenny toy books issued around this time by Frederick Warne and George Routledge – and partly because they are wholly undistinguished designs. I suspect they are not Crane's at all, but belong to Phiz *in toto* or in part. An anticipatory *Bookseller* advertisement for these alphabets simply lists the titles, the price of "6*d*," and notes that they come with "Entirely new designs by Crane, Phiz, &c, printed in Colours by Edmund Evans" (*Bookseller* (30 June 1865) 388). At the time, Crane was an unknown designer, and had not yet been credited on a cover for designing a book or its illustrations. Nor did he – or any artist designer/illustrator – receive such a credit on these three alphabet books, which may not even have been printed by Evans in the end: subsequent advertisements in October and December continued to name Crane and Phiz, but not Evans,[298] and the books themselves are only nominally "printed in colours, with handsome covers." They feature dull red and green details added to black and white scenes. It seems unlikely that Evans's name, with its reputation for high-quality printing, would have been dropped from the advertisement *before* the unknown Crane if he was still involved. But the more important point here is that years after Browne had involuntarily retired from illustrating, Phiz's name apparently carried some cachet and commercial power, even if some of his success as an illustrator depended on the quality of his textual source. Furthermore, the retention of Phiz's name in the advertising material for 1860s children's books suggests that the publisher continued to hope to attract fans of the illustrator's earlier work, fans which *necessarily* must be adults, rather than the children to whom "children's books" are nominally directed

Although neither "Phiz" nor Browne are directly credited for any of the illustrations in the three Warne alphabets of the mid-1860s, the figures bear a striking resemblance to those which subsequently appeared in the book titled *Phiz's Funny Alphabet*. The latter actually features an anachronistic separation

[298] See advertisements in *The Bookseller* (31 October 1865), 749; and *The Bookseller* (12 December 1865), 1031.

of text and image, as a letterpress alphabet rhyme is printed in two parts on the first and last pages of the book (A through L inside the front cover, and M through Z inside the back), while full plates of illustrations – featuring what are clearly hand-lettered capitals – comprise the bulk of the book. We saw this dichotomous layout employed by Routledge as a cost-saving measure in toy books printed in the 1860s and early 1870s, like the Crane-designed *Ark Alphabet,* since etchings could not be printed simultaneously with letterpress. The quality of the lines here does suggest that they were more likely etched than engraved, and it is possible that Browne designed this book on speculation in the 1860s, at the same time that he worked on the oblong Warne alphabets. The illustrations could have easily floated between the closely-affiliated publishing houses of Routledge and Warne for years, until Browne's death and the "Phiz Gallery" provided free publicity. However, the layouts of pages with illustrations in *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* manifest incredibly different literographies than those of the mid-1860s Warne alphabets, especially in terms of relating the text and alphabet letterforms to the accompanying objects (Figures 83 and 84). Where the Warne alphabets are characterized by static redundancy and a hyperbolic devotion to regularity, *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* is a riot of disorder.

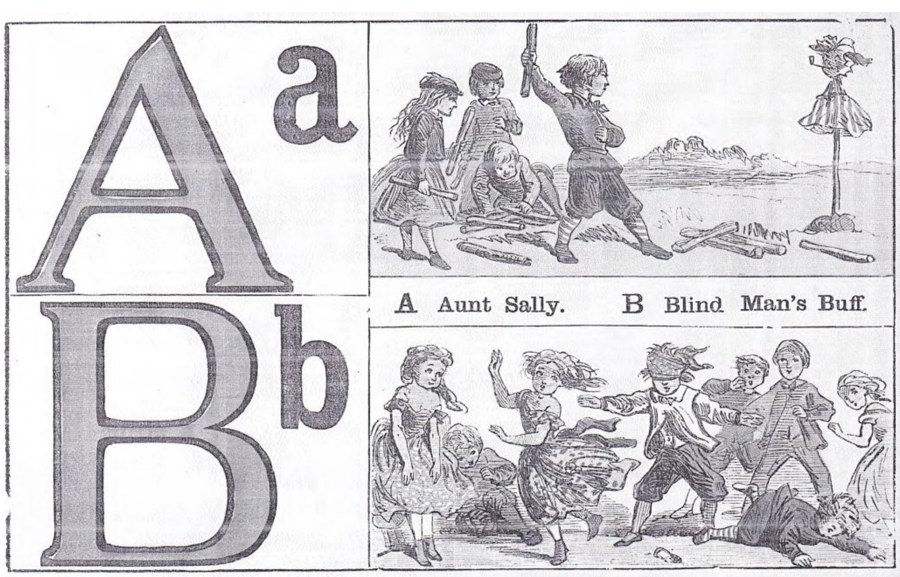

Figure 83. "A" and "B" from Phiz's unsigned "Alphabet of Sports and Games"

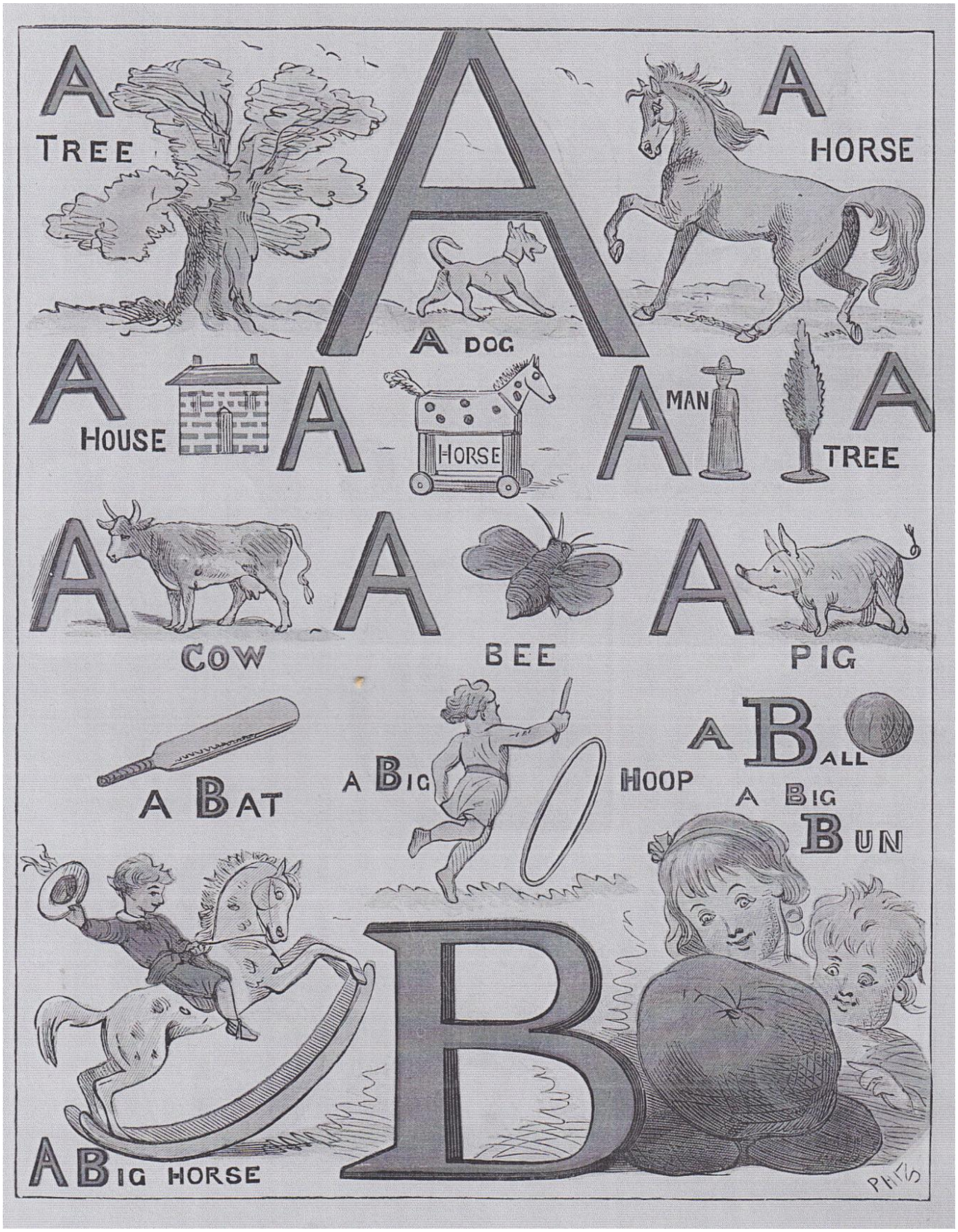

Figure 84. "A"/"B" page from *Phiz's Funny Alphabet*

The rhyme for *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* warns us that "A is only Artless A," inaugurating an inconsistently synecdochal format (in the sense described by Patricia Crain) that disrupts pedagogical fluency at every turn. Rather than objects that start with the letter "A," in the time-honored tradition of the use of "brief illustrations" as an "excellent manner of enforcing the knowledge of the letters to a child's mind, by identifying them with familiar objects of a visible tangible description" ("Literature in the Nursery"), this alphabet insists upon this particular letter's role as an article: "We use it frequently to say, / A horse, A house, A tree." Moreover, the rhyme immediately denies the dual functions of the letter: "For what else could it be?" This seems a strange way to present the letters as textual substrate, especially since the first page of the picture book portion blurs the line between objects illustrating "A", and objects illustrating "B" (Figure 85): labels for the "B" objects are *also* prefaced with the indefinite article "a," as are a number of objects that reappear on subsequent pages – such as "A dog" that we see again on the next page, standing for "D" this time. Jam is similarly repurposed, standing for "Jam," but also making bread "Nice" amongst the labels demonstrating uses of the letter "N" (Figure 86). Perhaps most distractingly, "a horse" stands for "H" as well as appearing in a number of tableaus representing action words. The bounty of horses does reinforce the cover's assertion that this alphabet is "Phiz's": Browne had a professed preference for drawing horses, and Phiz had such a reputation for providing illustrations of them that Allchin declared his "delineation of the horse" to be his "greatest successes" (394). Horses actually appear three times on the very first page for "A"/"B," first with a naturalistic rendering labeled as "A horse" (Figure 87). The page is balanced in the opposite corner by a rocking horse, this time labeled as "A Big horse" (Figure 88), presumably by contrast with the smaller rocking horse stashed in the middle of the page, simply labeled "horse" (Figure 89). To be sure, such *in situ* examples of description have their counterparts in other illustrated alphabet books, and even more so in whole-word approaches to beginning reading instruction. But here they are deviations from a basic catalogue-like format that sometimes labels inconsistently, and sometimes fails to include labels at all. Unlabeled objects are sprinkled throughout the book, like the magnifying glass on the page for "C"/"D" (Figure 90), and there are even inexplicable scenes like that in the center of that same page: what narrative is implied by the words “which little boy” that perch immediately below a giant block “D”? (Figure 91). In these random moments of apparently unmotivated drawing, we can most easily see competition between the formal demands of the alphabet book, and the efforts to evoke the presence of Phiz. The reputation of “Phiz” is founded on Browne’s repeated efforts to negotiate between literary texts and his own visual imagination. However, his irrepressible irony explodes the arbitrariness embedded in textuality, that is, in *symbolic* signification via alphabetical text, as compared to *iconic* signification via visual resemblance. The result is a page layout that is confused about its priorities, and only marginally attentive to the literal difficulties of “illustrating” an abecedarian text with no inherent narrative or associated meanings.

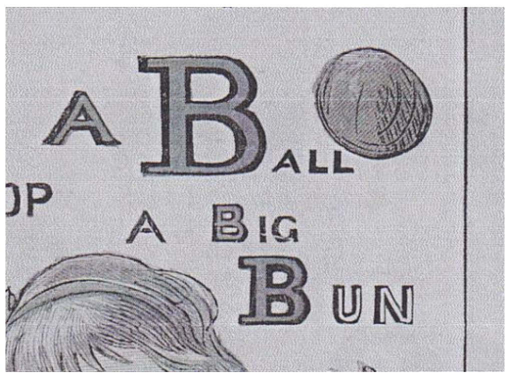

Figure 85. detail of “A” page from *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet*

Figure 86. detail from “M”/ “N” page of *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet*

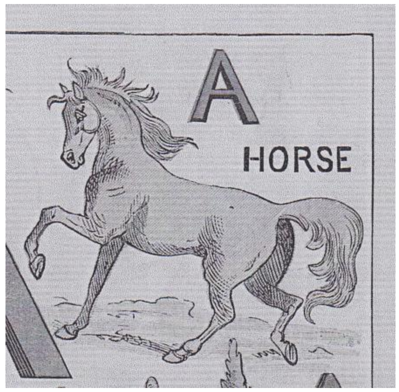

Figure 87. “A horse” detail from Figure 84

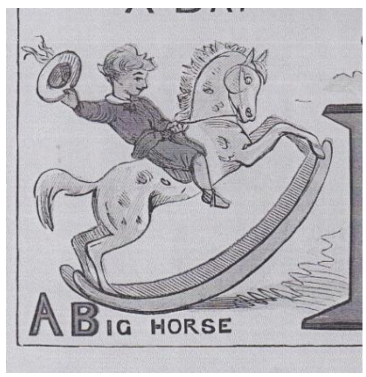

Figure 88. “A Big horse” detail from Figure 84

Figure 89. “horse” detail from Figure 84

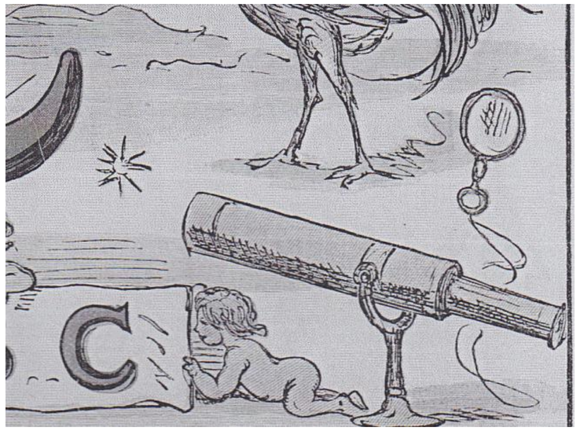

Figure 90. magnifying glass detail from “C”/ “D” page of *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet*

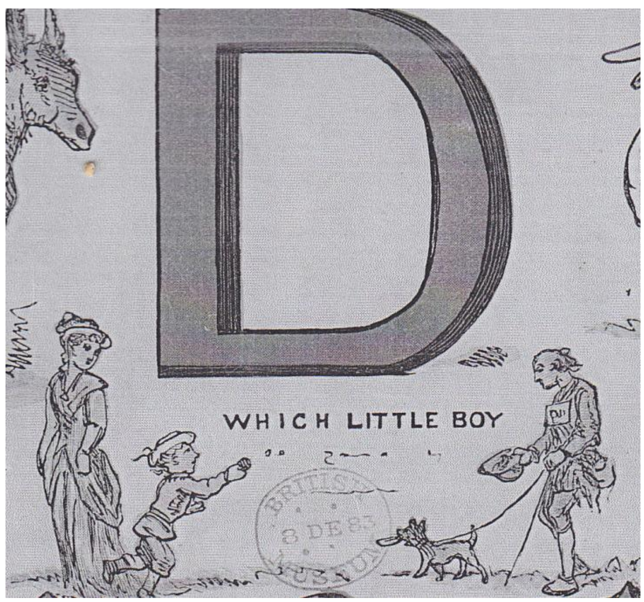

Figure 91. “which little boy” detail from “C”/ “D” page of *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet*

In fact, Phiz’s deviations from the alphabetical catalogue format extend from duplications and superfluities to occasional punning and rebus-like illustrations that actively normalize – or literally “ make fun of” – the phonetic irregularity of alphabetic pronunciation. Thus in *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet* we find a “bee” at the letter “B,” and “a dish of peas” among other “P” words, as well as a lot of onomatopoeia at the letter “O” (Figure 92). The onion-seller’s cry of “Onions! O!” recalls the many toy books from the early part of the nineteenth century, some of them organized by the alphabet, that immersed readers in city environments and reproduced vendors’ vocal advertisements[299]; this allusion to a familiar experience could well be expected to reinforce a connection between the auditory and its textual record. The use of an eye to illustrate the letter “I” (Figure 93) might also seem to fit in with this immersive approach, and to have pedagogical function as well: by withholding the label of “eye,” this juxtaposition provides the *name* of the letter, and demonstrates its most common form of pronunciation, without requiring an already-literate individual to supplement the text. However, spelling and pronunciation as semi-distinct spheres are hopelessly confused on the “U” page with this same illustration, which contrasts “I” with “you” by simply lettering “I not U” and – even more problematically – providing a labeled “Yew tree” as an example object (Figure 94). The textual rhyme on the inside of the

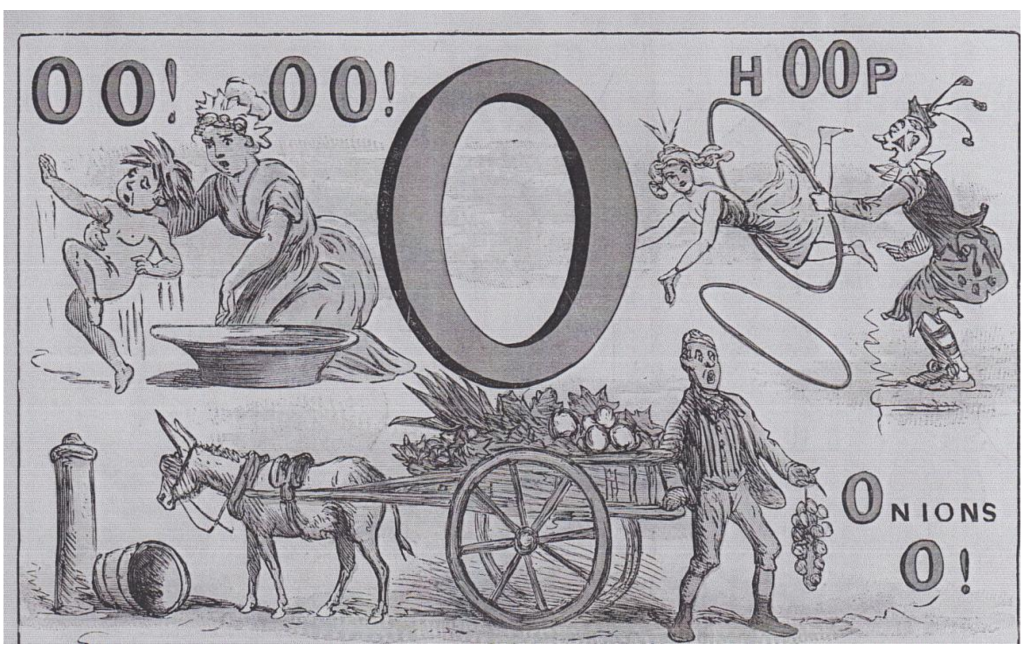

Figure 92. “O” detail from “O”/ “P” page of *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet*

299 See Whalley and Chester 32-33.

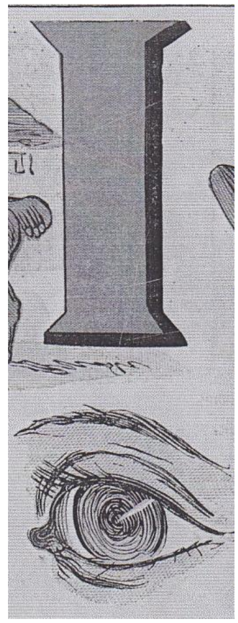

Figure 93. an eye illustrating the letter "I" in *Phiz's Funny Alphabet*

Figure 94. "I not U" and "Yew Tree" details from "U"/ "V" page of *Phiz's Funny Alphabet*

back cover only exacerbates this situation by giving additional examples that *pronounce* “u” without necessarily spelling it: “There’s yew, and hue and cry, ‘ / There’s hew to chop, and hue (like blue).” This was a feature of language that was all-too-familiar to educators, as I have documented in previous chapters. But it was typically submerged in the initial effort to make the alphabet as consumable and appealing as possible for reluctant or proto-rational “little learners.” In *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet,* the imperatives of play overwhelm pedagogical utility, while dovetailing nicely with Phiz’s reputation for illustrating comic scenes and constructing ironic juxtapositions between text and image.

This element of play may reasonably be expected to compensate for the book’s loss of pedagogical utility, especially for any textually-literate individuals perusing the book and contemplating a brand-motivated purchase. However, direct representations of childhood in *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet,* as opposed to the book’s construction of an implied child reader, suggest irreconcilable imperatives in this domain, as had been the case for Kate Greenaway’s *A Apple Pie.* The very same page “I”/”J” page that bridges the pedagogical gap between the illiterate viewer and the text also advertises the “Joy” of ignoring that gap entirely, with its illustration of jubilant schoolboys flinging their books aside (Figure 95). Formal education also comes off quite poorly in Phiz’s representation of it at letter “R”, where a grim-looking schoolmaster threatens mischievous-looking boys with the “Rod,” and they evince no remorse as they “Run” away, again scattering books and slates in the process (Figure 96). Such illustrations may offer meta-commentary on the whole educational endeavor, and certainly refuse to take books too seriously – a view that would only coincide with the book’s representation of the alphabet as a hopelessly slippery pedagogical object. Firmly institutionalized primary education to some extent defused the danger of representing “school-day side-splittings,” as the reviewer of Phiz’s Gallery would have it, in an alphabet book. After 1870, designers could more comfortably reinforce an association between childhood and play in alphabet books and other books that, like *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet,* deploy the trappings of textual literacy instruction as part of a different system of signs embedded in both associations with childhood, and the marketplace.

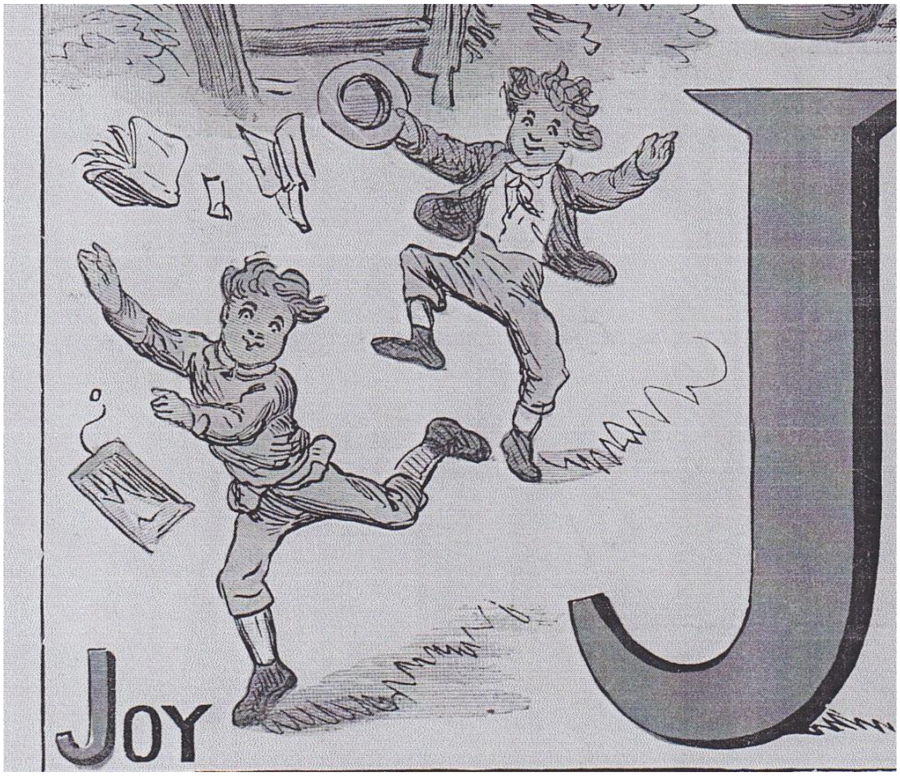

Figure 95. “Joy” detail from “I”/ “J” page of *Phiz’s Funny Alphabet*

Figure 96. schoolroom detail from "R" page of *Phiz's Funny Alphabet*

Finally, *Phiz's Funny* approach to the alphabet is pedagogically dubious at best, and counterproductive at worst, as it ineffectually deploys the letterforms as a pivot between the verbal and the visual. Although Crain has suggested that a synecdochal format is a common means of assigning arbitrary meaning to the alphabetical letters, this text offers the example of "D stands for pence" as a concise rebuttal of that convention. In the end, Phiz's brand name alphabet book stands as a cruel reflection of the iconographic richness that characterized his earliest work. The formal breakdown – that is, a page wherein text, image, and letters are juxtaposed with minimal attention to topography, and even working against basic pedagogic principles – evacuates significance from what been a form deriving its (often-irony-tinged) meaning from both pedagogical intent and emblematic resonance. Furthermore, the publisher's use of a proprietary title, which Kate Greenaway would shortly adopt for her first stand-alone alphabet book, quite concretely reflects the dynamics of branding rather than Browne's personal investment. Although all of the plates for *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* are signed with variations of the "scrawly" Phiz, such was not the case for another book posthumously published by Routledge: the illustrations for *Phiz's Baby Sweethearts* are consistently signed by "HKB."[300] The title for *Baby Sweethearts* more concretely reflects the publisher's efforts to concentrate attention on the more promising band name when peddling cheap (sixpenny) toy books, and to exploit a nostalgic view of childhood as adult-refuge in the process.[301] Even the decision to replicate illustrations for "P" on the toy book's cover (Figure 97) subordinates commercial concerns to pedagogical ones, since it reinforces the *visual* "P" of Phiz, while ignoring issues of pronunciation. The chaos and commercialism of the cover do, however, fairly advertise the contents of a text that attempts – and fails – to reconcile its priorities with its potential audiences.

[300] This may also be true for *Phiz's Merry Hours* and/or *Phiz's Funny Stories,* which were also published in 1883 and sometimes combined with the *Toy Book.* But I have not yet examined either text, in person or in facsimile.

[301] By contrast, when *Phiz's Baby Sweethearts* and *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* were combined with two other toy books (*Phiz's Merry Hours* and *Phiz's Funny Stories*) in a single volume, the colored hard cover was embossed with *A Toy Book By "Phiz" (Hablot K. Browne)* emblazoned on its cover, materiality and attribution combining to justify the higher price tag.

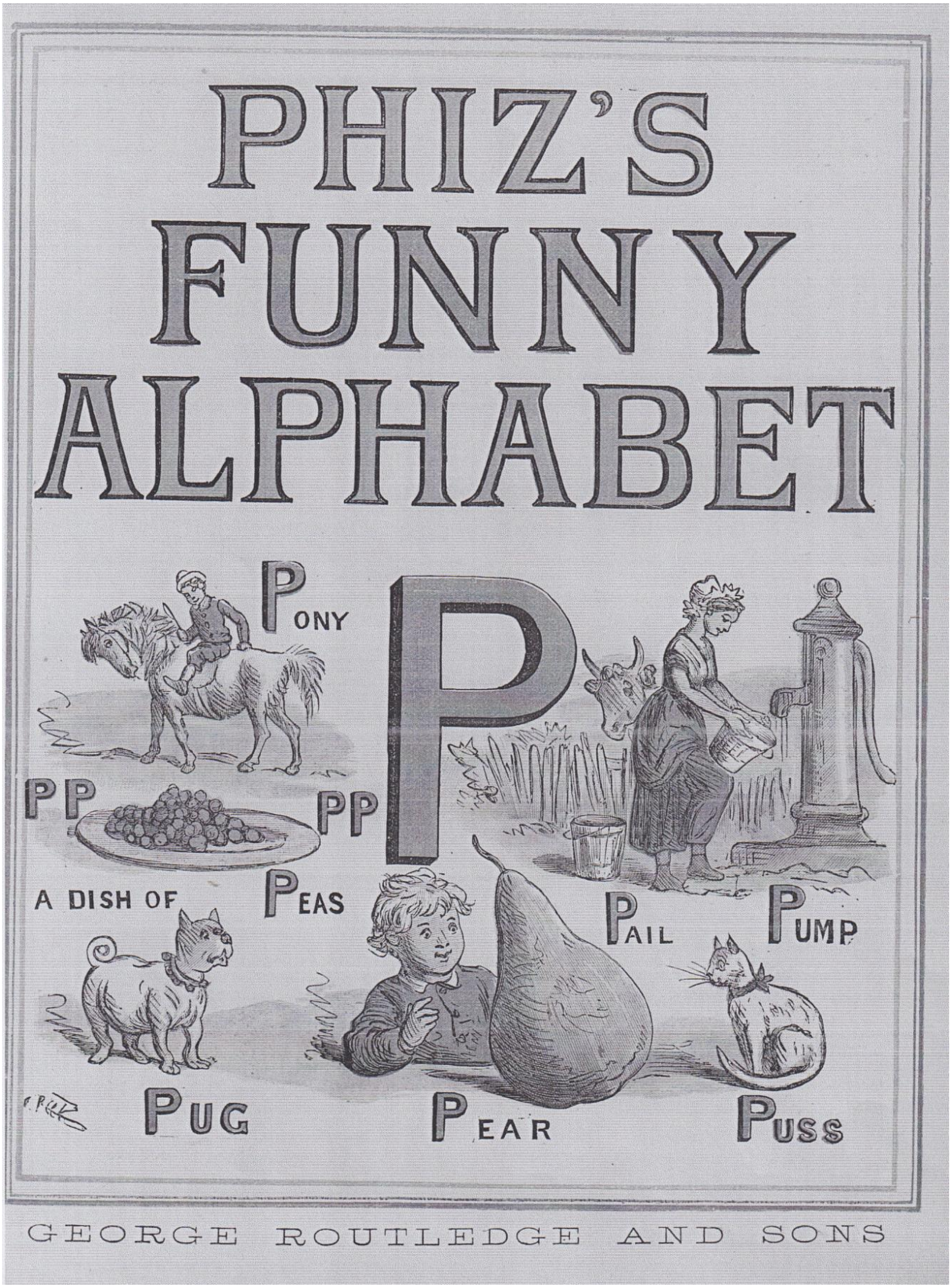

Figure 97. cover of *Phiz's Funny Alphabet*

D. CONCLUSION

In the textual environments I have discussed here, the illustrated alphabet occupies a difficult position derived from the collision between past and present contexts: it is sanctioned as an increasingly institutionalized and normalized aspect of childhood, but is simultaneously opposed to a Romantic childhood in Nature through its increasingly-inevitable associations with formal, regimented education. However, as demonstrated by each of texts I've examined here, the appeal of a brand name could, at least temporarily, substitute commercial viability for a coherent vision of the way words and images might interact on the printed page. The alphabet book thus remained a temptingly-flexible format for an illustrator with an aversion to literally illustrating, in the sense of visually duplicating a textual image,[302] and during the late 1870s and into the 1880s, this temptation produces illustrated alphabets caught in the fraught intersection between domestic and institutional education; between "so-called children's books" and overlapping audience demographics; between Romantic constructions of childhood and the pressures of educating real-life children; between the fine craft of reproduction with wood engravings and the encroaching mechanization of photography. If a brand could take on a life of its own, so could the alphabet book, which emerged as a site for consumerist exploitation despite its susceptibility to merely reproducing these tensions.

As I have tried to demonstrate through contextualization and analysis of representations of the alphabet by "Phiz" and Kate Greenaway, these points of conflict could hardly be resolved within the pages of a single volume. Nor do any of these alphabet books claim to undertake that cultural work. Rather, "the design of the product is actually a vehicle for brand value, rather than the other way around" (Pavitt 39). Indeed, there was an undeniable tinge of faint praise in Spielmann's and Layard's insistence that Greenaway was "a decorative artist" whose images "are presented to us not for their inherent beauty alone, but for their value upon the paper or upon the decorated page" (276). She was incapable of

[302] At work on *The Old Curiosity Shop,* Browne described his struggle to illustrate the chosen text with images that accurately represented the story "without giving it away" (Cohen 8); later, while working on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Luke Fildes complained of Dickens's demands for redundant illustration of pictorial passages (Fildes 15).

representing the world as *other* people saw it, although they were clearly happy to gaze upon the world *as Kate Greenaway saw it*, which was as she was capable of drawing it, and as it was capable of being reproduced for a mass audience. Similarly, with the Edmund Evans reproduction apparatus, Routledge could publish a viable commercial product simply by combining the promiscuous alphabet with a brand name in illustration; Browne, the illustrator himself, was expendable, although "Phiz" was not. In addition to highlighting the flexibility of the alphabet book under Routledge's watch, *Phiz's Funny Alphabet* and Kate Greenaway's reveal how the alphabet itself can become a sign of adult confusion about where commercial, social, and technological developments have led them to situate children and images of childhood in both the real world, and the popular imagination.

VII. CHAPTER 6. INEVITABLE LITERACY:

THE ALPHABET AT THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

As the Victorian Era drew to a close, many legislators and educators congratulated themselves on having brought literacy to the masses by passing and implementing the Education Act of 1870. A reviewer of their work in the *London Quarterly Review* concluded as early as 1887 that "A highly efficient system… of national education has been in operation in this country for many years past…. As a matter of fact the population between 20 and 25 years of age have nearly all passed through the day schools, and left them able to read and write" ("Some Comparative Statistics" 273). But publishers had already confirmed that literacy had been effectually institutionalized in England. Developments in education supported the rising tide of periodical publication from the mid-nineteenth century onward, a phenomenal growth in demand for printed material documented by Richard Altick and other historians.[303] By the end of the century, publishers had seized that opportunity. Novels – some new whole cloth, others reprinted from serializations or stereotypes of classic texts – lined the railway bookshelves and the periodical press finally found secure footing among huge circulations at the daily, weekly, and monthly levels. And in the process, they raised alarms about "the machine-made, mass-produced mentality of the millions" (Eaton 225).

In this final chapter, I consider the fraught position of the alphabet within a print culture where *textual* literacy is nominally assured, and more attention can be paid to its correlative social effects. The relevant conditions at the fin de siècle included the industrial production of reading matter, finer distinctions in the codes of socioeconomic stratification (viable once cruder distinctions between

[303] See Anderson and Altick *Common Reader*.

"literate," "pre-literate," and "illiterate" were less concretely rooted in class position), and of course, shifts in the "sister" visual and performing arts, which routinely engaged the literary as part their original material form and/or narrative continuation.[304] Within formal education, textual decoding was identified as a pre-requisite skill; indeed, this was a rare site of unanimity between the educational critics and the practitioners charged with meeting their demands. When one side insisted that " [Reading] may be regarded as the only subject which is indispensable" to the standard course of study in a grammar school, it was answered that "if a lad can neither read fluently nor with pleasure to himself… who is the better for his having a smattering of a number of 'graphies' and 'ologies' which he will never want?"(Vigilans 503.)

However, the best means of teaching reading continued to be a subject of heated debate. At the end of the nineteenth century the so-called "Alphabetic method" of teaching reading by focusing on the letters' independent sounds was clearly out of favor. Where it survived, it was routinely and explicitly combined with phonic, phonetic, or analytic methods like Look-and-Say, because – as one teacher decisively concluded in 1896 – "It is now generally condemned as being uninteresting, unnatural, and unsuccessful." However, he did not mean that the alphabet did not still assume pride of place in reading instruction, since "The first step in teaching reading is, naturally, to learn the alphabet" (Gunn 347). Instead it floated in and out of sight in the process of "the teaching of reading proper," first enabling pupils to recognize letterforms, and laying a foundation for later use when "one has to consult a dictionary, or some list of words in alphabetical order" (Gunn 348). Alphabet books at the time reflected this institutionalization of text-based literacy by embracing what Patricia Crain has called "the alphabet array, or the worldly alphabet." This catalogue-like form emphasizes "the alphabet's function of ordering and arbitrary arrangement" for the same reasons Lear did, but without the ironic subtext. The alphabet array is, as she points out, the form that "has endured, the one more familiar to the modern reader… the one that has won out in the era of secular reading instruction" (91). The alphabet could take its place as a fundamental technology of bureaucracy after nationalized education produced a citizenry reliably versed

[304] See particularly Miesel's *Realizations* for a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon.

in reading's arbitrary rules. And thanks to the ubiquity of that utilitarian approach to the alphabet, the national population may well have seemed less vulnerable to attempts (by alphabet book designers in particular) to revise the hierarchical relationship between the visual and verbal.

They were certainly either unable or unwilling to resist the capitalist imperatives of production and consumption on a mass scale, as the state of national schooling at the end of the nineteenth century in Great Britain dovetailed with culminating advances in photographic reproduction. As I noted in the previous chapter, lithography and the "process" modes of publication incorporating photographic methods allowed Kate Greenaway and other illustrators to operate basically unfettered by logistical concerns about reproduction. The half-tone engraving in particular helped meet the general demand for high-resolution illustration in periodicals, and by the 1890s journalistic photographs were routinely reproduced in the *London Illustrated News* and other periodicals of repute and wide circulation.[305] Although alphabet books remained a site for visual "festivity," as Crain puts it, printed images were so cheap and so common that it was a rare illustration that rose to the level of "graphic art." Joseph Pennell, the great historian of Victorian illustration, declared in1895 that the photographic revolution rivaled Gutenberg's: "As the invention of printing gave the first great impetus to illustration, so surely has it received its second and more important from the invention of photography… The conditions have entirely altered" (33-34). Photography inexorably encroached upon the territory of beautifully illustrated books and periodicals produced from the mid-1850s to the mid-1870s, which had often featured the wood-engraved designs of Pre-Raphaelites and their sympathizers; independent operators like James McNeill Whistler; and possessors of the coveted "R.A." designation, not to mention the skill of engravers like the Dalziel Brothers. In 1897, Gleeson White documented their attraction for late-Victorian collectors, who recognized (and presumably admired) a dying form of popular art.[306] The imprint of William Morris's Kelmscott Press, and eventually the Art Nouveau stylings of Aubrey Beardsley, proceeded from the

[305] See Chapter 18, "The End of an Epoch" in McLean *Victorian Book Illustration*, especially 160-162.

[306] See White *The Sixties*, particularly Chapter1, "The New Appreciation and the New Collector" 1-8. See also Pennell.

impressive tradition of artistic wood-engraving that coalesced in the 1860s.

But these later examples were noteworthy precisely because they often distinguished themselves – in Bourdieu's sense of "distinction" – from more affordable popular, "journalistic" illustration via high production values, inevitably high prices, and a correspondingly small audience self-styled as "elite."[307] The Aesthetic Movement was actively satirized and derided as "decadent" in the days of the fin de siècle, even though it had helped spark the "design reform" movement that benefitted the Victorian middle class.[308] The Kelmscott Press in particular highlighted its investment in the "handcrafted" character of its products as a politically radical reaction to the new age of *mechanically* produced visual environments. Thus, Ruari McLean points to 1891 – the year the Kelmscott Press issued its first book, *The Glittering Plain* with illustrations by Walter Crane – as "both an end and a beginning": the end of Victorian book design and the beginning of modern forms (*Victorian Book Design* 160). One might also point to 1893 as a watershed, since that was the year that the revered wood-engraving firm of the Dalziel brothers went bankrupt under the strain of competing with photomechanical illustration.[309] At the century's end, printers like Charles T. Jacobi acknowledged the commercial imperative to include some pictorial matter with almost any published book (33), a state of affairs both produced and solved by industrial printing methods that depended upon the new art and tool of photography. Thus, by suggesting that contemporary alphabet books were responding to "industrial print culture" I mean to indicate that they were reflecting a systemic commercial orientation toward mass reproduction via mechanical means. One logical end of industrialization's indifference to – and competition with – book production methods relying on skilled craftsmen was the loss of livelihood that master engravers like George Cruikshank and Phiz struggled to reverse or endure.

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[307] I am here borrowing Kooistra's descriptor to describe reportage-style illustration associated with contemporary periodicals. See "Contextual/Bitextual: aesthetes, socialists, journalists," Kooistra 25-27.

[308] Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr provide an efficient overview of this history in their introductory essays to the exhibition catalogue *Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900.* See Calloway 10-23 and Federle Orr 24-37.

[309] Kooistra points this out, too; see 40-41.

Within the humbler environments of both formal and domestic educational texts, then, there was little space for alphabetical illustration that *emphasized* the similarities between letterforms and images. In the "alphabet array," the alphabetical letters operate as navigational devices, and as subunits of words, but visual/verbal exchanges are precisely that: exchanges, a toggling *between* text and image rather than collaboration, as in the emblematic forms discussed in Chapter 2, or in Crane's holistic approach to the page. The output of popular Victorian alphabets – often beautifully illustrated but formally dichotomous – "rose to flood level," as Herbert Tucker has put it (204 n.15), and have since been catalogued by archivists like Ruth Baldwin and Susan Steinfirst. Both individually and collectively, these alphabet books reinforced the binary embedded in thinking of pictures as either pedagogical crutches, or "treats" jollying pupils into the work of literacy acquisition proper – that is, textual literacy acquisition). Indeed, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra points precisely to this lack of visual/verbal interdependence during production as the primary contrast between illustrated books of the 1890s and those published closer to the middle of the nineteenth century (3).

Against this background, Rudyard Kipling and Hilaire Belloc declined to continue arguing for alternative *forms* of literacy, as the artist and writers I discuss in previous chapters had done. Instead, they acceded to the universalized assumption that visual and oral modes of communication are developmentally *prior* to acquiring literacy. Instead of critiquing educational norms via bibliographic forms, they turned their attention to social effects of print culture *en mass,* as photographic reproduction offered both the means of spreading self-awareness about the state of literacy in Great Britain at the fin de siècle, and the stimulus to do so. In their satirical representations of the alphabet, published in 1899 and 1902 respectively, Hilaire Belloc and Rudyard Kipling exploit the tools of mass reproduction in order to critique the loss of traces of the individual – especially the most literal traces: handwriting and draughtsmanship – in the face of social pressures to produce and to consume the literary like any other manufactured object. Implicitly, they reflect a contemporary print culture (both verbal and visual aspects) saturated by mechanical reproduction. But resignation to illustration's subordinate status paradoxically opens up the radical possibilities of nostalgia in ways that were complementary to and much more affordable than those evidenced by the works of the Kelmscott Press and Aesthetes.

By way of conclusion to this history documenting the co-evolution of literacy in Great Britain, and representations of childhood, then, I offer two case studies that implicitly invoke the image of the Child as Pre-Reader in ways that resist the post-Industrial Revolution state of literary consumption. Both Kipling and Belloc conspicuously reflect a widespread complacency about the dominance of textual literacy over visual forms at the same time that they indulge in nostalgia about a time before floods of print overwhelmed the Victorian cultural marketplace. First, I turn to two of Kipling's stories from *Just So Stories for Little Children*: "How the First Letter was Written" and "How the Alphabet was Made." As Yin Liu has quite recently demonstrated, Kipling's humorous representation of the alphabet's "discovery" as an inevitable evolutionary step up from oral communication, closely resembles contemporary linguists' speculative histories about the invention of writing. "Classic" or "traditional" theories of writing's invention, like that presented in Isaac Taylor's *The Alphabet* (1883), describe human progress from oral cultures to pictographic writing systems to the modern technology of the purely abstracted sign system of the alphabet.[310] We might here recall Taylor and his haphazard influence on Walter Crane's representations of the alphabet, including the artist's attempts to tailor them to broad audiences. As I will demonstrate, Kipling also resists this technological triumphalism. He enlists adult readers in his attempts to preserve manual modes of inscription alongside reproduced ones, and at the same time his tales endorse the institutionalized child-centered pedagogy that privileges the verbal over the visual, and affirms a hierarchy of literacies imbricated in that pseudo-evolutionary distinction between child and adult audiences. In his *Moral Alphabet* Belloc also takes for granted the flood of print and the access to literacy that produced a lively reviewing culture, which he satirically represents as navel gazing. But he comments on the prevailing child-centered pedagogy – and its interactions with industrialized print culture – by subtly pointing up the similarities between exploitative imperialism at home and abroad. He represents schooling as a means of colonizing youth, replacing the pictographic culture of the colonized with that of text for their own good, and yet for their own loss: as print *consumers*, they are locked into

[310] For an overview of "classical" theories, see Harris.

the rigid and hierarchical social structure fostered by industrialization. Together, these writers and their alphabet books offer a view of nineteenth-century British print culture as it culminated in the general cessation of efforts to promote orality and illustration within official education; these both end up as mere developmental stepping stones. Ultimately, universal access to textual literacy helps brings the school and the factory together in an industrial complex that incorporates the figure of the Child as both raw material and product.

A. KIPLING'S TECHNOLOGICAL TELEOLOGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In *Just So Stories for Little Children,* Rudyard Kipling constructs a notoriously vexed relationship between print and oral culture. On one hand, paratexts and some features of the text itself frame these stories as records of past oral performances,[311] and as scripts for future ones.[312] But on the other hand, the sheer materiality of the text betrays its commitment to print. Features of the language and orthography – contra Kipling's prefatory insistence that "They had to be told just so" – have no obvious translation into

[311] For instance, Angela Thirkell's recollections of the scenes wherein "Cousin Ruddy used to try out the *Just So Stories* on a nursery audience" are much quoted (99-100). Most famously, Josephine was "the original listener, the vibrant Effie" who, U. C. Knoeplmacher argues, was so integral to Kipling's writing process that she "must be granted a status that approaches that of a collaborator" ("Partner" 27). For a helpful summary of the stories' oral origins see Lisa Lewis xvi-xxii.

[312] Dieter Petzold has noted that "The one feature that has most frequently been commented upon, and is indeed very prominent, is the extraordinarily intimate relationship between the narrator of these stories and his audience. Kipling continuously invites the reader to join in a game, and his success depends on the latter's willingness, and ability, to do so" (15). Celia Catlett Anderson has gone so far as to compile a table of the features in the *Just So Stories* – such as "incidences of direct address" (34) and "the deliberate use of carefully emphasized, difficult words" (35) – in order to retain what she calls "the oral flavor" of the original storytelling session (Appendix B). The stories' "ritual" quality was actually originally identified in the preface written by Kipling for the first publication of "How the Whale Got His Throat" in the December 1897 issue of *St. Nicholas Magazine* (under the title of "The Just So Stories"). In this preface, Kipling declares that "Some stories are meant to be read quietly and some stories are meant to be read aloud," and what followed was one of a series of "stories meant to put Effie to sleep." In order for the "charms" to work, "you were not allowed to alter those by one single word. They had to be told just so; or Effie would wake up and put back the missing sentence" (89). With some justification, Brian Alderson concludes that "Kipling's introduction confirms… that these stories originated in the living – and private – exchange between a teller and a listener" ("Just-So Pictures" 148).

oral performance.[313] Thus, the *Just So Stories*' nostalgic valorization of oral storytelling might seem to awkwardly co-exist with its form and some of its content. This is particularly true in the central *Just So* stories that are explicitly concerned with people and evolving forms of communication: "How the First Letter was Written" and "How the Alphabet was Made." Misread letters and winking asides about writing's status as "a great invention" (138) clearly indicate that Kipling is at pains to acknowledge the limitations of writing as a technology, whether proto- or fully-developed. However, I prefer to see the dynamic relationship between literacies and pre-literacy that Kipling constructs in these stories as a productive tension rather than a narrative failure or a bit of "sentimental whimsicality" as Angus Wilson had it (229).[314] Significantly, Kipling imagines the process of *acquiring* literacy as a process of *making* literacy. This in turn operates as commentary on literacy's fin de siècle entanglements with technologies of reproduction, perhaps even as an extension of Kipling's oft-acknowledged fascination with machines, with and men's relationship with machines.[315] I argue that Kipling reconciles his apparent promotion of pre-literate (that is, oral and visual) modes of communication with his representation of them *as* "pre-literate" by focusing on the *process* of communicating rather than the success or failure of the attempt. In so doing, he manifests his sincere investment in the character of children's education during a period

[313] For instance, Liu points out that "there is no real equivalent, in oral performance, for the apostrophes in 'the small 'Stute Fish said in a small 'stute voice'… nor for the hyphens of 'the world-so-new-and-all'…or 'more-than-oriental-splendour'… nor for the capital letters" used at various points (230-1). Similar features appear in the stories that specifically concern us, as well as additional examples of those Liu observes. For instance, Taffy originally describes writing as her "secret-surprise-think," while we are told that the central family in "How the First Letter was Written" "lived cavily in a Cave" (123). In "How the First Letter Was Written," Kipling introduces a running joke with the repeated parenthetical "and he was a Tewara": after the first instance, the Stranger-man is described "(*and* he was a Tewara)," with each successive repetition italicizing the next word in the phrase until "(and he was a *Tewara*) finally concludes the series. Although oral emphasis could reflect the typographic emphasis, the phrase's arbitrary evolution in print frames the joke as a visual one, not a rhythmic or aural one.

[314] Lisa Lewis summarizes similar contemporary criticisms of the *Just So Stories* (xxx-xxxi).

[315] For instance, the twentieth-century critic Jack Dunman drew attention to "his deep interest in machinery" (qtd in Green *Heritage* 5) while Stephen Lucius Gwynn described Kipling's "passion for machinery" in *Macmillan's Magazine* at the end of the previous century (215). See also Pinney xxix.

when the utopian goal of universal literacy was confronting the cold realities of a standardized, industrial-era education focused more on ends than means.

As my allusion to "evolving" forms of communication should suggest, I join Liu in seeing these two stories as a mildly satiric version of the "recapitulation" theory of human evolution that gained traction in the Victorian era.[316] This Darwin-inspired developmental model postulated that individual humans "recapitulate" on a small scale the development of Western human civilization; as one public proponent of this theory, M. Taine put it, "the child presents in a passing state the natural characteristics that are found in a fixed state in primitive civilizations" (259).[317] Herbert Spencer explicitly expanded this notion of evolution to include human "progress" from oral culture to ideographic forms of writing to alphabetic letterforms (*First Principles* 349-350). We must note a fine but crucial distinction here: Kipling satirizes teleological theories of how writing developed, rather than civilization's adoption of the technology.[318] Indeed, as someone who makes his living via literary cultural production, he is unsurprisingly disposed to promote the cultural value of writing. But more importantly for our purposes, his sympathy with recapitulation effectively affirms the ideological distinctions between child and adult that, I have argued, underlay the middle class privileging of text in education throughout the nineteenth century.[319] And the Romantic possibilities of these audiences eventually soothe Kipling's simmering anxieties about how cultural production would fare after the Industrial Revolution had turned literacy into a tool for cultural consumption.

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[316] In this respect, Kipling's *Just So Stories* are not simply the "legends" that G. K. Chesterton famously made them out to be (Rev. of *Just So Stories* 273-274).

[317] Ernst Haeckel's famous slogan – "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" – was coined in 1866 and helped popularize this idea in late-Victorian England. See 170, 190-191.

[318] This obviously had social implications related to Great Britain's imperial endeavors as represented in to Kipling's larger *oeuvre,* which I do not have the time or space to explore here. See Walsh *Kipling's* and "Chapter 2: "Kipling's Rules of the Game" in Kutzer 13-46.

[319] I join Liu and J. I. M. Stewart in this respect; Liu's perspective is discussed in more detail below, while Stewart's comment in this vein is more of an uncritical aside: "The *Just So Stories*… have been invented for the satisfaction not of a primitive people but of modern children, who are 'primitive' only in the metaphorical sense that their intellectual development does, to some extent, recapitulate the course of human evolution" (138).

Although recent attention to Kipling's illustrations for the *Just So Stories* clearly indicate that he was invested in "the interplay of image and text" (Liu 234), Kipling's representation of literacy in "How the First Letter was Written" and "How the Alphabet was Made" implicitly reinforces a late-Victorian binarization of text and image. Nor am I alone in seeing a commentary on literacy embedded in the *Just So Stories* that have, until recently, been habitually excluded from critical discussions of Kipling's oeuvre and even from analyses of his "animal stories" in particular.[320] Sue Walsh has similarly argued that, in these stories, the child character Taffy prefers "drawing pictures to what seems to be the text's end – writing." This reiterates her status as "primitive" (Walsh *Kipling's* 125). But I go further in claiming that it does so as a byproduct of interrogating the contemporary modes of reproduction. That is to say, I agree with Liu's conclusion that Kipling occasionally points up the visual character of text while remaining basically complacent about the turn-of-the-century status of textual literacy with respect to the visual: the former is assured by nationalized education, and the latter is taken for granted as a natural acquirement in the course of human cognitive development (247-248).[321] However, I also argue that Kipling still attempts to intervene in contemporary literacy education and practice even if he accepts the status quo with regard to illustration. Indeed, in 1902 Agnes Deans Cameron found Kipling's work to be "a fertile field for paternal and pedagogical research… bristling with maxims for the training of the young" (275). In his representations of the alphabet, Kipling complicates the binary between print culture and oral – and, by extension, that between the progressive and the primitive, respectively – by insisting that *manual* inscription is a necessary complement to *industrial* or mechanical means of cultural production. And as Walsh and Knoepflmacher have pointed out, Taffy operates as a charming image of childhood that

[320] Perhaps most amazingly, Alderson's treatment of Kipling's illustrations for the *Just So Stories* include no substantive discussion of the uniquely-formatted visual incursions of "How the First Letter was Written" and "How the Alphabet was Made."

[321] Walsh interrogates this even further by questioning critics who take it for granted that a direct representation of "the real" is possible with language, which is typically mediated by the (insistently oral) figure of the Child; rather, she sees "How the First Letter was Written" as "problematizing the notion of 'orality' and its supposed privileged relationship to the 'real' since it construes it as always already written" (*Kipling's* 99).

channels nostalgia into Romantic appreciation for the child-primitive and thereby rehabilitates these otherwise regressive moves.[322] Kipling clearly concludes in "The First Letter" – perhaps echoing Alice's argument with the March Hare – the invention of writing hardly means that "we shall always say exactly what we mean without any mistakes" (138). So since no technology of communication is perfectly reliable, space should be reserved for children to simply "draw pictures and play about with their Daddies" (139), to enjoy the human connections created by acts of experimental and attempted communication as well as successful ones.

Publication was the first step in Kipling's program of drawing attention to strategies of literary reproduction, his own and those characterizing his social milieu. Knoepflmacher points out that the publication history of these particular stories seems to suggest that, far from weaving them into the *Just So Stories* collection, "Kiping seems to have gone out of his way to disperse their publication" ("Partner" 57). While other three-part units of stories were published in *St. Nicholas* in 1897, and in the *Ladies Home Home Journal* in 1900, "How the First Letter Was Written" appeared in 1901 as an apparent break with the *Just So* stories that all featured animal protagonists. "How the Alphabet was Made" and "The Tabu Tale" were never published in periodicals: the former first appeared in public in the collection released in 1902, while the latter – the so-called "lost" *Just So* story (Green *Children* 172, 180) – was included in a single American collection in 1903 without ever joining the standard *Just So Stories* rotation.[323] The 1902 collection's arrangement further obscures their belated composition by burying them in the middle of the bound volume. Yet it has been argued that these stories "are in fact the heart of the collection, as they seem to have been closest to Kipling's own heart" (Liu 227): they may reflect his grief over the loss of his American-born daughter Josephine (nicknamed "Effie") who is thinly disguised as Taffy.[324] Beyond such biographical readings, though, these two stories assume their rightful place

[322] Conveniently, the evolutionary model evoked by Kipling helps provide a scientific basis for how the narrative "animates a child-self embedded in all grownup psyches" (Knoepflmacher "Partner" 24).

[323] For a helpful overview of the Taffy stories' publication history see Knoepflmacher "Partner" 36-37.

[324] Sue Walsh summarizes such readings of these stories in her critique of them ("Effigies of Effie").

within a collection of stories pre-occupied with evolutionary "adaptation" by suggesting that the term includes education within its purview.

The relationship Kipling constructs between text and image, and between print culture and oral storytelling, basically endorses a Whiggish progression from the primitive and image-oriented world of children and talking animals embedded in oral tradition, to the contemporary British Empire with its technology and text. The stories themselves seem to follow this path to the public, since they famously originated as domestic oral tales before appearing in print under the name of the nation's then-leading literary light. As Lisa Lewis and others have documented, memoirs and other accounts written by Kipling's children and their friends clearly attest to the humble origins of most of the *Just So Stories*. And in apparent deference to the inevitable superiority of writing over more "primitive" forms of communication, the Taffy stories explicitly illustrate the communicative limitations of speech and gestures. After all, the "Stranger-man" who prompts Taffy to write the eponymous "First Letter" "belonged to a far tribe… and he did not understand one word of Tegumai's language" (126). Nor does symbolic representation work for the Stranger-man: "He got up and twisted a big flat piece of bark off a birch-tree and gave it to Taffy. He did this, Best Beloved, to show that his heart was as white as the birch-bark and that he meant no harm; but Taffy didn't quite understand" (127). We are in much the same position as the Stranger-man, since we do not speak Tegumai's language either, and thus must rely on Kipling's "translations" when language barriers spring up. The conspicuously-oral character of the tales reinscribes this divide; as Rosalind Meyer points out, "eye and ear are consistently appealed to – after the manner of all literature intended at one point for the illiterate" (27). We cannot take the report seriously when confronted with a recitation of the tantalizingly information-dense message communicated by the "Reverberating Tribal Drums" as they "called together all the chiefs of the Tribe of Tegumai, with their Hetmans and Dolmans, all Neguses, Woons, and Akhoonds of the organization, in addition to the Warlocks, Angekoks, Juju-men, Bonzes, and the rest" (133-134). Moreover, during the genesis of the alphabet, the ambiguous meaning of vocal expressions is brought to our attention in the same moment that it leads directly to letterforms. First Tegumai scolds Taffy for being rude when she asks him to “make a noise – any sort of noise” (146); later, his attempt to shush her while he is thinking inspires her to use a snake to represent the “ssh” sound. He explains that “I meant I was thinking, and didn’t want to be disturbed,” but Taffy rightly insists that “It’s a noise just the same” (150). At the end of the day, speech is and merely and barely organized noise.

This text embraces its literate audience and its status as a printed narrative in ways that ultimately frame its oral qualities as homage rather than as a serious attack on the classic evolutionary trajectory. Most concretely, Taffy’s youthful speech patterns are transcribed in an orthographic joke: she draws herself “ ‘splaining” her drawing to the Stranger-Man, and asking him whether her unflattering portrait has “ ‘fended” him” (129). The transcription of accent and usage errors is inevitably a joke *for* the textually literate, *about* illiteracy, since aural idiosyncrasies are usually not transcribed except in order to indicate an individual’s ignorance about rules of communication standardized in print – as when the use of dialect is inconsistently deployed in fiction.[325] Readers are also presented with two explicitly positive declarations about the value of written communication, even before it has been developed, tried, or – most conspicuously, given the potentially youthful audience of *Just So Stories for Children* – been successfully taught to anyone. Firstly, the Head Chief of the Tribe of Tegumai declares the value of Taffy’s first attempt, despite the pain (to the Tewara) and embarrassment (for the entire Tribe) that the resulting miscommunication causes. As the story concludes, “It *is* a great invention, and some day men will call it writing. At present it is only pictures, and as we have seen to-day, pictures are not always properly understood. But a time will come, O Babe of Tegumai, when we shall make letters – all twenty-six of ‘em, – and when we shall be able to read as well as to write” (138). Later, Tegumai actually manages to up the Chief’s ante with his evaluation of writing as “*the* big secret of the world” (151).

However, Kipling is also at pains to show how the “invention” of writing clearly entails problems of reproduction: both reproducing literacy, and reproducing the writing itself. For instance, the Head

[325] Consider, for example, Harold Bloom’s comments on Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*: “the use of dialects by writers had become more and more cumbersome and mechanical; it set up a screen between the language and the meaning. Furthermore, the dialect itself was a mark of condescension. The writer and the reader, proud of superior literacy, looked down on the dialect and the speaker” (65-66).

Chief indirectly points out the uselessness of a letter that can only be read by its writer; he pragmatically advises that "Taffy, dear, the next time you write a picture-letter, you'd better send a man who can talk our language with it, to explain what it means. I don't mind it myself, because I am a Head Chief, but it's very bad for the rest of the Tribe of Tegumai" (139). Tegumai also has an eye on human failings the entire time they are developing the letterforms. He repeatedly amends Taffy's suggestions because they would falter "If we drew that in a hurry" (154), and observes that "If this game of ours is going to be what I think it will, the easier we make our sound-pictures the better for everybody" (158). There is obvious irony in the narrator's satisfaction about the alphabet's evolution from the Primitives' "sound-pictures" to "the fine old easy, understandable Alphabet – A, B, C, D, E, and the rest of 'em," given the state of education at century's end, as well as the periods of heated debate described in previous chapters. Spelling reform had occupied pedagogues during the previous quarter-century and, as I have noted above, education research was finally developing into a field of study with its own methodologies and concerns. This included the codification and identification of reading disabilities: the English physician W. Pringle Morgan began collaborating on efforts to characterize "congenital word-blindness" in children in 1894 (Hallahan). Perhaps in recognition of challenges like these, Kipling's stories take direct observation as the benchmark for successful communication, i.e., the level to which writing aspires. The "test" that Tegumai devises – as he puts it to Taffy, "If you can make out what that means, in the Tegumai language… we've found the Secret" – is simply to tell Taffy that it's about to rain. Tellingly, she actually infers the message from the raindrop on her hand as she rather ambivalently concedes that "I *think* I would have known it in a minute, but that raindrop made me quite sure" (155).

Although the characters occasionally acknowledge the logistical difficulties built into reproducing their semiotic system and its insights (i.e., "the Secret") with others, for the most part those issues are minimized or resolved. More importantly for our purposes, issues of reproduction both come to the surface of the *Stories* and sink below the level of discussion where visual images are concerned. Significantly, there are neither *oral* nor *verbal* equivalents for the visual features that Kipling incorporated into these particular stories when he adapted or wrote them for publication as a group – and these prompt even pre-literate child auditors to remain visually involved in a reading, potentially helping to produce it.[326] They also prompt *literate* readers to become temporary "viewers" or – as Knoeplflmacher puts it, "a reader of a different sort" – since the complicated illustrations are often maps, or similarly combinations of text and image that "encourages both child and adult to decode" ("Partner" 29). As has already been noted, other illustrators provided pictures for the original stories (whether Kipling wanted them or not, and with dwindling attention as the series proceeded).[327] But however belated Kipling's participation may have been, he made a clear effort to join text and image in a single *Just So* reading experience when the stories were adapted into a book collection; in later years, Kipling's surviving daughter recalled that "the illustrating of the stories gave their author immense pleasure, and he worked at them… with meticulous care" (Bambridge 396). And most importantly for our purposes, his interest in this vein extended to a preoccupation with the visual character of text.

As Liu points out, Kipling registers "his interest in the alphabet" throughout the *Just So Stories*, and particularly in features like the initial capitals for each story (235). These capitals occasionally exploit the outline of objects to represent the letters, as when an axe-head and handle form a "T" to open "How the Alphabet Was Made" (Figure 98).[328] She suggests that Kipling's own interest in the visual/verbal hybridity of the alphabetical letters was probably stimulated by his father's interest in calligraphic Indian art. John Lockwood Kipling's *Beast and Man in India* (1891) is a strange combination of sociology,

[326] Lisa Lewis has noted that the pictures prompt children to be visually-cum-verbally involved by inspiring questions (xix), but Alderson more pragmatically observes that the soporific effect Kipling nominally prescribes would render illustrations useless or even counterproductive ("Just-So Pictures" 148).

[327] Oliver Herford provided initial capitals for the original publication of "How the Whale Got his Throat" and "How the Camel Got His Humph." See Alderson "Just-So Pictures" 149-153.

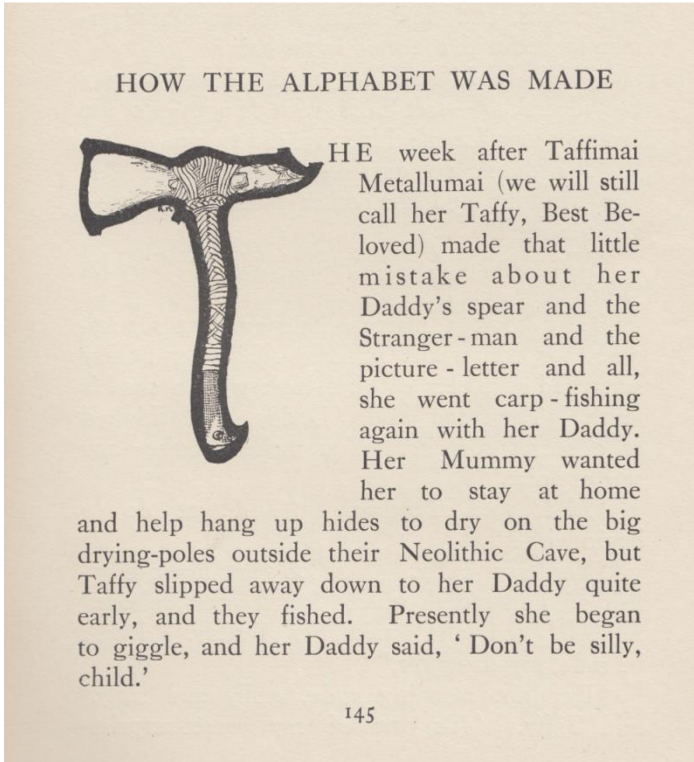
[328] Liu has included a fuller account of these capitals and, I think, overestimates the degree to which "the initials… take on the nature of artefacts, of objects" (235), since less than half clearly fit into this category and several (including the "O" that opens "How the First Letter was Written") very clearly resist it by presenting images within frames whose undecorated and frankly functional outlines operate as the letterforms. Knoepflmacher more helpfully points out that in "How the Alphabet Was Made," the letter "T" assumes special significance as an abstracted representation of the family, and thus adds a subtextual layer to Kipling's use of axes cutting implement to represent initial capitals for two stories ("Partner" 34, 39).

natural history, and imperialist rhetoric, which includes several examples of animals formed from script, drawn by Indian illustrators (Figure 99), as well as graphemic initial capitals where the outline of an animal or its environs are employed as a stand-in for the actual letter.[329] Kipling's daughter Elsie recalled that "he took infinite pleasure in the drawing of the delicate and fantastic letters for 'How the Alphabet was made' " (Bambridge 400). And while he generally shrugged off negative reviews, he was reportedly sensitive about those that "criticised his *drawings*" (italics in original).[330] Kipling's appreciation for the semiotic fluency of images is also apparent in his repeated use of a rebus to "sign" his stories and illustrations: a drawing of an "Ark" – or sometimes an Ark paired with an "A" – phonetically suggests the "R. K." of his monogram.[331] Significantly, the Taffy stories are the only stories in the collection that actively incorporate illustrations into the narrative itself, a possibility that Kipling either created or exploited by choosing to illustrate the collected *Just So Stories* alone of all his published works (L. Lewis xvi). As Taffy and her father work together to generate the forms that we recognize as letters of the alphabet, the narrator repeatedly directs readers' attention to illustrations as an integral part of the narrative. Tegumai tells his daughter, "Look here, Taffy" and the narrator echoes the instruction for the reader: "And he drew this" (148) (Figure 100). This prompts a very clear contrast between the printed letters, and the hand-drawn ones. The former have filtered storytelling through layers of machine-based manufacture and distribution, while the latter, with their graphemic character, create a crucial link (however fictional) between human expressive aims and text.

[329] Liu also notes that Lockwood Kipling provided "decorated initial capitals" throughout F. A. Steel's *Folk Tales of the Punjab* (1894). See Liu 236. However, while Lockwood Kipling's example probably partly inspired Kipling's approach to the text, my previous chapters should indicate that there is no shortage of candidates from earlier in the nineteenth century.

[330] Kipling's wife is the purported source of this information, quoted in an article by the Kiplings' former Private Secretary. See C. L. Nicholson, "Something of Himself," *Kipling Journal* (September 1981): 37.

[331] Green first noticed this detail and advanced this interpretation (*Children* 182). See also Meyer 31 and Alderson "Just-So Pictures" 154.



HOW THE ALPHABET WAS MADE

THE week after Taffimai Metallumai (we will still call her Taffy, Best Beloved) made that little mistake about her Daddy's spear and the Stranger-man and the picture-letter and all, she went carp-fishing again with her Daddy. Her Mummy wanted her to stay at home and help hang up hides to dry on the big drying-poles outside their Neolithic Cave, but Taffy slipped away down to her Daddy quite early, and they fished. Presently she began to giggle, and her Daddy said, 'Don't be silly, child.'

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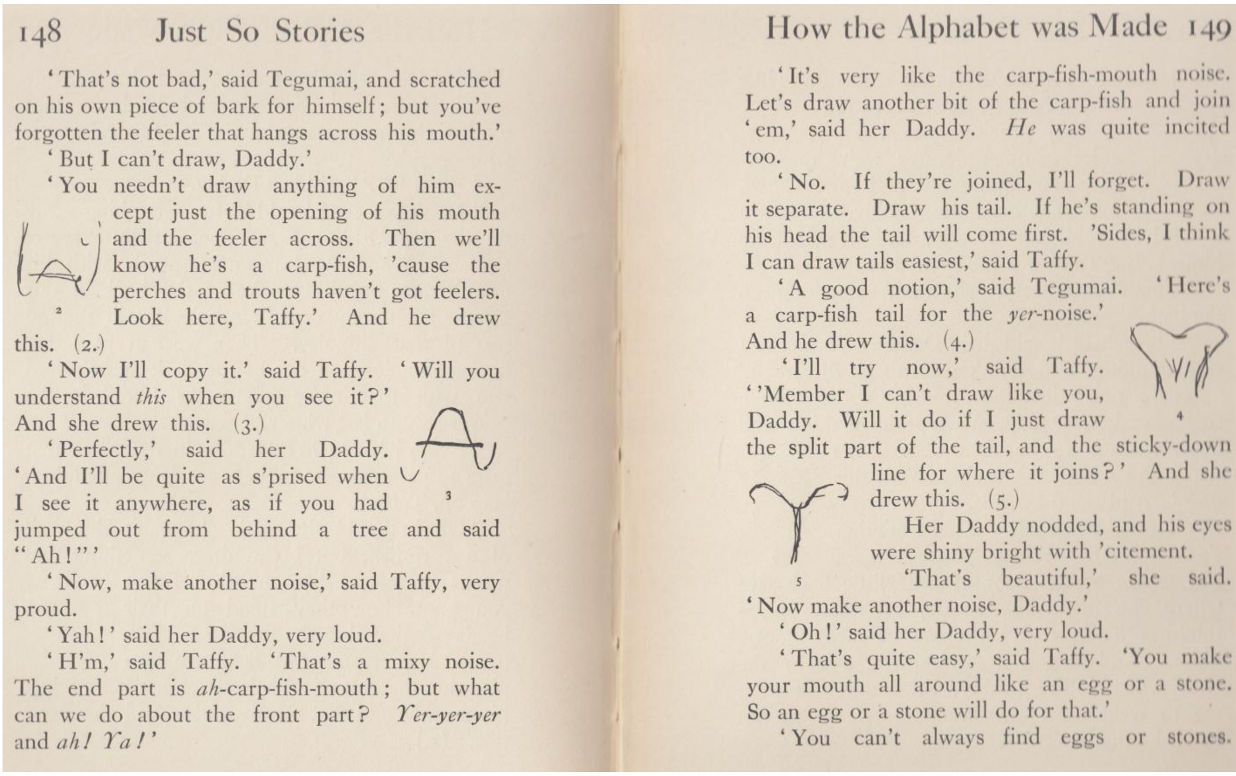
Figure 98. opening letter "T" from Kipling's "How the Alphabet Was Made"(145)

Figure 99. calligraphic picture from John Lockwood Kipling's chapter "Of Animals in Indian Art" in *Beast and Man in India* (325)



148 Just So Stories

'That's not bad,' said Tegumai, and scratched on his own piece of bark for himself; but you've forgotten the feeler that hangs across his mouth.'

'But I can't draw, Daddy.'

'You needn't draw anything of him except just the opening of his mouth and the feeler across. Then we'll know he's a carp-fish, 'cause the perches and trouts haven't got feelers. Look here, Taffy.' And he drew this. (2.)

'Now I'll copy it.' said Taffy. 'Will you understand *this* when you see it?' And she drew this. (3.)

'Perfectly,' said her Daddy. 'And I'll be quite as s'prised when I see it anywhere, as if you had jumped out from behind a tree and said "Ah!"'

'Now, make another noise,' said Taffy, very proud.

'Yah!' said her Daddy, very loud.

'H'm,' said Taffy. 'That's a mixy noise. The end part is *ah*-carp-fish-mouth; but what can we do about the front part? *Yer-yer-yer* and *ah! Ya!*'

How the Alphabet was Made 149

'It's very like the carp-fish-mouth noise. Let's draw another bit of the carp-fish and join 'em,' said her Daddy. *He* was quite incited too.

'No. If they're joined, I'll forget. Draw it separate. Draw his tail. If he's standing on his head the tail will come first. 'Sides, I think I can draw tails easiest,' said Taffy.

'A good notion,' said Tegumai. 'Here's a carp-fish tail for the *yer*-noise.' And he drew this. (4.)

'I'll try now,' said Taffy. ''Member I can't draw like you, Daddy. Will it do if I just draw the split part of the tail, and the sticky-down line for where it joins?' And she drew this. (5.)

Her Daddy nodded, and his eyes were shiny bright with 'citement.

'That's beautiful,' she said. 'Now make another noise, Daddy.'

'Oh!' said her Daddy, very loud.

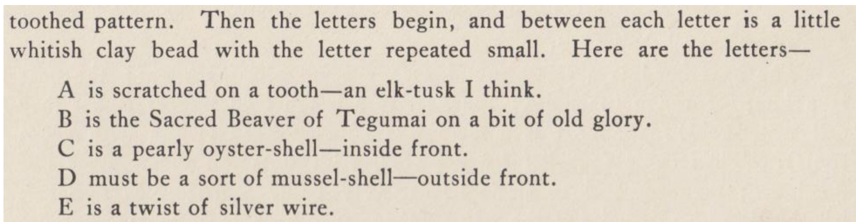
'That's quite easy,' said Taffy. 'You make your mouth all around like an egg or a stone. So an egg or a stone will do for that.'

'You can't always find eggs or stones.

Figure 100. illustrations integrated into Kipling's "How the Alphabet Was Made"

Although Kipling's illustrations have drawn critics' attention, one feature of the illustrations that has, to my knowledge, *not* yet been commented upon is their conspicuously amateur character. At the least, this manifests Kipling's personal investment in them. But more importantly, he draws attention to *his own* act of creation as well as Taffy's. While these stories celebrate the reproducible character of text, they also exploit the possibilities for photographic reproduction of hand-drawn images, even by non-professional illustrators. This is an ironic use of technology on Kipling's part, since he employs the most-advanced processes for the purposes of reiterating the "primitive" nature of imagery, as compared to text. It implies a failure on the part of printed text to offer the writer the pleasure and power inherent in script. In *Something of Myself,* Kipling anecdotally points to handwriting and habits of formatting as a defense against plagiarism (130), and his sister recalled that "the mere physical act of writing was a pleasure to him" ("II" 7)– a sentiment he confirmed almost word-for-word in *Something of Myself* (120). And nowhere is this crude binary more apparent than in the image of the alphabetical necklace that concludes

“How the Alphabet Was Made.” When he declares “here are the letters,” he is ambiguously referring to the descriptive list that immediately follows (Figure 101), and/or to the graphemes formed by representing the charms on the alphabet necklace (Figure 102), which is identified separately on its own: “This is a picture of the magic Alphabet-necklace” (165).


toothed pattern. Then the letters begin, and between each letter is a little whitish clay bead with the letter repeated small. Here are the letters—

A is scratched on a tooth—an elk-tusk I think.
B is the Sacred Beaver of Tegumai on a bit of old glory.
C is a pearly oyster-shell—inside front.
D must be a sort of mussel-shell—outside front.
E is a twist of silver wire.

Figure 101. “here are the letters” and inventory in Kipling’s “How the Alphabet Was Made”(165)

Figure 102. “a picture of the magic Alphabet-necklace”
in Kipling’s “How the Alphabet Was Made” (167)

But in addition to poking fun at the specious distinction between the visual and the verbal, this illustration and its caption value hybrid visual/verbal representation as an artisan, pre-industrial, and embodied act, in contrast with mechanical modes. Throughout *Something of Myself*, Kipling repeatedly expresses interest in learning and *accurately* recounting the details of how a thing is made.[332] This may have been borne partly out of youthful exposure to the work of William Morris, through his uncle Burne-Jones (*Something* 9). And in Kipling's version of the genesis of script, the alphabet is consistently linked to productivity. The first letter was written as a remedy for Tegumai's work interruption; Taffy repeatedly alludes to its usage as such – for instance, when she worries that she might mistake a message from Tegumai and get stuck "helping to hang heavy, hot, hairy hides" to dry (152) – and the day after writing was invented, Taffy's fears are justified: what began as a "play" is immediately used by her father to order her to fill the water jug for her mother (160). But the making of the alphabet itself takes center stage in the narrative and the illustrations, which in turn highlights the conspicuous attention Kipling paid to reproducing both for publication in a manner that preserved the traces of his hands on the work.

In keeping with Kipling's priorities, we are told – at length – about the physical work that goes into making the alphabet. Carrington notes that Kipling was known for writing stories "packed with allusion and technicality… like listening to another man's 'shop,'" (254), and the caption for the "picture of the magic Alphabet-necklace" offers a semi-comic version of such detailed description. "Taffy and Tegumai spent five whole years getting the necklace in order," a duration that becomes nominally explicable as the letters are totted up: "I is the inside part of a long shell ground down by hand. (It took Tegumai three months to grind it down)"; "N is a piece of what is called porphyry with a nose scratched on it. (Tegumai spent five months polishing this stone"); and "W is a twisty piece of mother-of-pearl that they found inside a big mother-of-pearl shell, and sawed off with a wire dipped in sand and water. It took Taffy a month and a half to polish it and drill the holes" (165-166). And yet what is reproduced on the

[332] For instance, he notes that the chief attraction of joining the Athenaeum in 1897 is that "if one wanted to know anything from forging an anchor to forging antiquities one would find the world's ultimate expert in the matter at lunch" (*Something* 84). And later, he admits that "I have had miraculous escapes in technical matters, which make me blush still. Luckily the men of the seas and the engine-room do not write to the Press" (*Something* 124).

page is not the necklace itself, but a hand-drawn *copy* of the necklace. The narrator assures us: “I have copied the necklace very carefully… The black squiggle behind is only put in to make the beads and things look better” (166). The distinction between a reproduced *copy* of a *thing*, and the direct reproduction of handwriting (or the hand-written) is Kipling’s important corrective to mechanized literacy and its erasure of the individual. I noted above that the Taffy stories are the only ones that actually interweave illustrations with narrative, juxtaposing Kipling’s hand-drawn letters and proto-letters with direct cues to look at them *while* reading the text: “And he drew this” (148). He doesn’t draw a figure that can be described with words, or equated with a known symbol, but simply “this.” Kipling repeatedly insists upon technology’s ability to reproduce what Tegumai and Taffy have produced at the same that he denies that printed text can truly transcribe it.

To reiterate the value of manual inscription in a text-oriented print culture, these stories are the only *Just So* stories that are essentially *retold* in graphic form. First at the conclusion of “How the First Letter was Written,” Kipling reverses the “classic” trajectory of proceeding from oral culture, to pictures, to print, by printing a picture of a pseudo-artifact *after* the printed version of the story (Figure 103).

Figure 103. illustration of carved tusk following Kipling's "How the First Letter Was Written" (141)

As his caption notes, “This is the story of Taffimai Metallumai carved on an old tusk a very long time ago by the Ancient Peoples. If you read my story, or have it read to you, you can see how it is all told out on the tusk” (140). This second-person address invites re-reading in a literal sense, so that fragments of the illustration can be matched to the appropriate point in the passage. But it also rather ironically suggests that a reader of 1902 is in very much the same position that the Tribe of Tegumai were: in order to understand the “picture-letter” that Kipling has provided, the reader needs “a man who can talk our language [sent] with it, to explain what it means” (139). This same page also renders the reader functionally illiterate in another way, by including a frame of “Runic magic” letters around the illustration of the tusk. These figures resemble the familiar letterforms with tantalizing/frustrating fidelity, and we are encouraged to view them as legible thanks to Kipling’s assurance that “if you can read them you will find out something rather new” (140).[333] Similarly, the illustration that follows “How the Alphabet was Made” rapidly contradicts itself (Figure 102). We are told that “One of the first things that Tegumai Bopsulai did after Taffy and he had made the Alphabet was to make a magic Alphabet-necklace of all the letters, so that it could be put in the Temple of Tegumai and kept for ever and ever” (165). This noble aspiration clearly didn’t work out, since “P and Q are missing.” And yet he naturally insists that “These are all the letters” because the tally has been proleptically determined by his own familiarity with the twentieth-century alphabet (166).

Through such ironic self-negations, these stories betray Kipling’s skepticism about viewing the alphabet as a transparent or neutral “map” to the world, as indeed Crain has suggested was the goal of alphabet books deploying the “array” format (91). Yet maps were clearly of interest to Kipling, who provides appealing visual guides to imaginary places throughout the *Just So Stories*, using their non-linear mode of organization as a complement and even a potential disruption to the insistently linear mode of

[333] R. L. Green claims that these faux runes “may be worked out fairly easily” to decipher a criticism of the very medium in use: “The reason that I spell so queerli is because there are not enough letters in the Runic alphabet to all the ourds that I ouant” (*Children* 182). However, while the meta-critique seems in line with Kipling’s project, the work of decipherment is perhaps more of a challenge than Green supposes.

reading (Liu 233).[334] Moreover, maps routinely incorporate text alongside images, within a form that is itself usually taken as an image (in that it presents all of its information simultaneously). Several spreads in "How the Alphabet was Made" present a kind of doubled or superimposed text if viewed in this map-like fashion (Figure 100). The illustrations of letters operate as part of the narrative (and are explicitly referenced), but also simultaneously seem – like the Runic letters described above– to communicate an entirely separate message of their own. We need merely connect them without regard for the intervening printed text. Maps and the alphabet letters are united by their visual/verbal hybridity, and offer us a compelling figure for approaching the *Just So Stories* as equally hybrid, a site of "convergence" between the visual and the verbal. But Kipling's alphabet "map" is embedded with*in* the story that describes its genesis, reiterating a linear progression from pre-literacy to literacy, and even through the alphabet itself. Eventually, the ingenious child must give way to the adult who is capable of realizing her scheme for script. Taffy is confronted by "*What* a lot of new sounds!" and concludes that "*I* don't see how we can draw them." However, Tegumai rescues her – and the alphabet itself – by declaring, "But I do – but I do!" (156). Thanks to punning, the very first "letter" that is written IS a map – but it is drawn by a child and is *unreadable* without an oral intervention that identifies her as functionally pre-literate. All of this works to acknowledge the *potential* for viewing "text as image" as Liu puts it, but it also does so while basically endorsing the recapitulation theory of human development in literacy as well as the particular invention of writing (according to the "classic" version).

In this, Kipling is simply echoing contemporary attitudes that reflect the trends I have traced in previous chapters, and which were institutionalized with national schooling. Indeed, as I noted above, acquiring literacy was "normalized" as a fundamental aspect of cognitive development to the extent that a system of pathology developed around children embedded in British print culture who failed to acquire the rudiments. A diagnosed reading disorder could be perceived as a failure of biology rather than of the

[334] Liu goes on to suggest that "a map is a useful model for Kipling's strategies in [*Just So Stories*]… a map presents all its information simultaneously while allowing the user to plot a route – that is, to choose a succession of points on the map, arranged sequentially" (233). Here we part ways, since I believe that Kipling preserves the linearity of narrative in most ways. Lisa Lewis also observed that "Maps and globes were central to [Kipling's] imagination" (xxxv).

individual, and reflected a gap in medical treatment rather than in the basically human system of communication via inscription. But more importantly, the framework of evolutionary recapitulation accommodated a pseudo-scientific stigmatization of populations or classes of people within and without Great Britain. In a practice familiar to twenty-first century theorists of literacy, so-called "primitive" peoples in undeveloped nations, and undeveloped *people* in Great Britain, were marked as such by their literacy level, and/or by their inevitable "progress" from oral culture to print. Kipling's obvious discomfort with this state of affairs, whether stimulated by his own family's fascination with visual modes or by some more noble resistance to imperial condescension, certainly registers itself in his texts' appealing hybridity. It also comes through in the Taffy stories' many satirical references to reading and writing as a foregone conclusion for the human race. Tegumai is anachronistically identified as "not a Jute or an Angle, or even a Dravidian, which be might well have been… He was a Primitive" (123), aware of his status as such centuries before the people who invented the term came into existence. The narrator initially assures us that "he couldn't read and he couldn't write and he didn't want to" (123). But just a few pages later he agrees with his daughter that "it's an awful nuisance that you and I don't know how to write," since "it *would* be a convenience" if they could send a message home to relieve their need for a new spear after the first is broken. Casually dubbing illiteracy "an awful nuisance" reflects contemporary complacency about the inexorable march of democratic education as well as Kipling's reluctance to wholeheartedly endorse its social consequences. It frees him to construct a space where acquiring literacy is a more individualized and fairly low-stakes concern.

In a similar move, at the conclusion of "How the Alphabet was Made," our narrator speeds through time to connect Taffy's and Tegumai's experiments with the present day:

> they drew pictures… and so on and so forth and so following till they had done and drawn all the sound-pictures that they wanted, and there was the Alphabet, all complete.
>
> And after thousands and thousands and thousands of years, and after Hieroglyphics and Demotics, and Nilotics, and Cryptics, and Cufics, and Runics, and Dorics, and Ionics, and all sorts of other ricks and tricks (because the Woons, and the Neguses, and the Akhoonds, and the

Repositories of Tradition would never leave a good thing along when they saw it), the fine old easy, understandable Alphabet – A, B, C, D, E, and the rest of 'em – got back into its proper shape again for all Best Beloveds to learn when they are old enough. (162-163).

Counter to the usual evolutionary trajectory, the "proper" alphabet twentieth century springs forth almost fully formed from the minds of Taffy and Tegumai, only to be subject to vagaries of de- and re-evolution over the course of the succeeding "thousands and thousands and thousands of years." The tendency to idealize ancient civilizations is also ironized here, in allusions to the "Hieroglyphics… and Dorics, and Ionics." Furthermore as Walsh points out, " 'saying what one means' has also already been made problematic… by the presence in the story of different oral languages" (*Kipling's* 102). Throughout the story of "How the Alphabet was Made," Taffy and Tegumai continuously translate their own language into English, ostensibly for each other, but transparently for the benefit of the audience, as when Tegumai asks Taffy "What's water in the Tegumai language?" (151), or "*Yo* is bad water, but *so* is food cooked on the fire, isn't it?" (152). The conspicuous lack of a diegetic excuse for these explanations exposes the story's investment in meta-commentary on how literacy is embedded in cultural practices. But perhaps most ironic of all is wink to the reader described above: the description of the present-day alphabet as "the fine old easy, understandable Alphabet," as so-called universal literacy was repeatedly proving the "understandable Alphabet" to be something other than advertised.

Laudable and useful as literacy education may be, Kipling suggests, it should acknowledge the individual power to put his or her personal stamp upon the fundamentally collaborative effort of interpersonal communication. Even if the alphabet or " 'writing' is always already there" (Walsh *Kipling's* 106), the legend of "How the Alphabet Was Made" finds its own justification in the personal creative act, here undertaken by the reader/writer's Neolithic/child surrogate. Even more than the *Just So Stories* about Lamarckian animals, "How the First Letter was Written" and "How the Alphabet was Made" depicts a "cross-fertilization process that would preserve the vital energies of childhood in surviving adults" (Knoepflmacher "Creatures" 929) without necessitating that adults actually devolve into a more comprehensively childlike state, or refrain from evolving in the first place. Kipling locates such creative powers in Taffy, and assigns their regulation to her collaborator Tegumai; in the process, Kipling redeems the "primitive" aspects of manual inscription by aligning them with the pre-literate freedom of Romantic childhood, albeit with winks and conspiratorial nods at the literate/adult all along the way by means of both formal and compositional choices. The somewhat brain-bending use of photographic technology to reproduce manual inscription alongside a pseudo-oral "legend" about the alphabet's origins could only confirm the current state of text-dominated literacy. It is hemmed in by the constraints of print, but those apparent limits are here redeemed as a means of rehabilitating the alphabet as a technology. The representation of Taffy as simultaneously iconic and individual – Kipling's "personal Best Beloved as well as a universal Everychild" (Knoepflmacher "Partner" 31) – investing her creativity in an act of written communication, provides a saving grace note of counter-Industrial resistance in this sometimes cynical and fundamentally orthodox representation of alphabetical literacy as useful and necessary for civilization.

Critics have noted that Kipling lamented the trauma of his own rough induction into literacy in both fiction and autobiography. [335] In the former, his surrogate "Punch" struggles with the alphabet and learning to read in the short story "Baa-baa Black Sheep," before discovering reading as a portal to imaginative freedom. First Punch pulls up short on the existential imperative of the exercise. "A is a and B is bee. *Why* does A B mean ab?" Then, "hugely against his will, he "stumbled through the brown book not in the least comprehending what it meant" (146). At least one of his biographers believes that this fictional episode reflected how Kipling himself was "abnormally slow to learn to read and write" (Birkenhead 27) and Kipling's sister confirmed as much, recalling that "It was strange, but Ruddy only learned to read with the greatest difficulty" (Fleming "I" 3). And although Kipling's nominally autobiographical *Something of Myself* has been critiqued as something less than truthful,[336] he admits that

[335] John McGivering provides a helpful overview of how Kipling's biographers treated this story as mostly autobiographical, including its account of his difficulties with learning how to read.

[336] "For an overview of critical doubts about the veracity of *Something of Myself* see Walsh "Effigies of Effie" 26-27. R. L. Green concluded in 1865 that "It is difficult now to form any reliable picture of precisely what happened at 'Lorne Lodge' [the site of Kipling's childhood years spent in England]"

"I was made to read without explanation, under the usual fear of punishment" (6). Difficult experiences may account for his own expressed anxiety about teaching his oldest daughter to read too soon (qtd in L. Lewis xix). But more importantly, they help us see a critique of contemporary education when Kipling insists in his original preface to the *Just So Stories* that "little people are not alike" (89).

For the narrative does clearly celebrate individual creativity by shining a loving light on it. Taffy generates a *written* semiotic system whose idiosyncratic richness depends upon its resistance to decryption, even though it is clearly subject to reproducibility via photographic methods: a representation of Taffy's birch-bark letter is inserted into the narrative of "How the First Letter Was Written," (Figure 104) and our attention is directed to it: "Now this is the picture that Taffy had drawn for him!" (131)

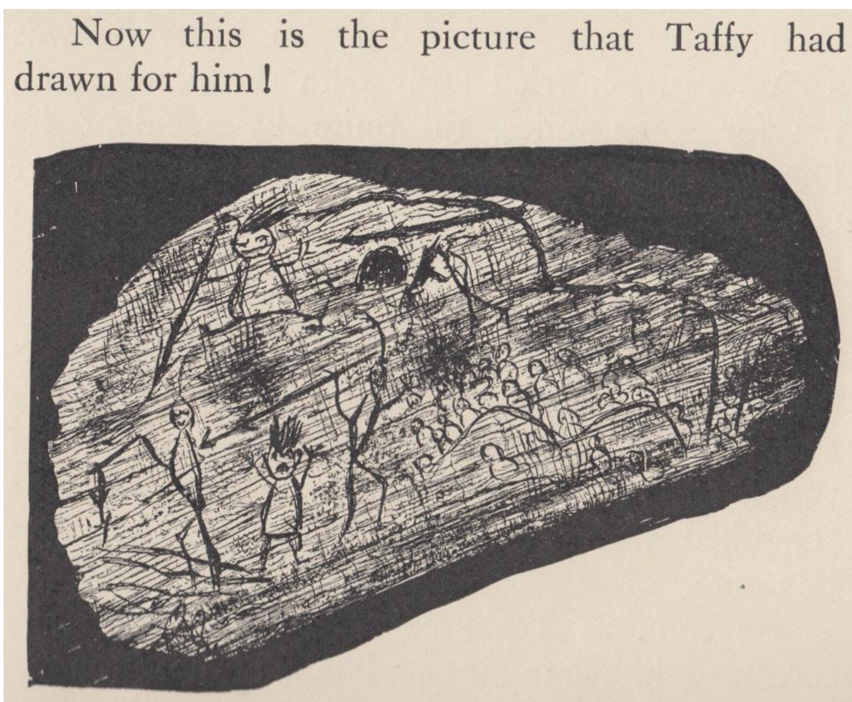


Figure 104. the first letter, written/drawn by Taffy in Kipling's "How the First Letter Was Written" (131)

(*Children* 32); more recently, Thomas Pinney has concluded that "not only was [*Something of Myself*] thin on the facts of Kipling's life, it often had them wrong as well," so that the "two striking characteristics of the book" were "its incompleteness and its unreliability" (vii).

However, the delight of the narrative rests upon her letter's illegibility: her lack of access to an existing semiotic system (iconographic as well as textual) occasions Taffy's amusing monologue to the Stranger-man, the dramatic irony of their interactions, and the misunderstandings that result from it. It is a singular act of writing that, despite its nominal failure, is nonetheless is hailed by Tegumai as "*the* big secret of the world" because he recognizes it as an undisciplined act of individual expression by his daughter – she who "ought-to-be-spanked" in the view of those who perversely insist on translating her name to plain English. Another Kipling child protagonist, the eponymous Kim, deemed writing to be "magic worth anything else" (107). And part of this "magic," which reappears with the "magic Alphabet-necklace," is that it preserves a trace of the creator's efforts at communication. Printed text, on the other hand, loses in magic what it gains in functionality through semiotic standardization. The amusing sense of Taffy's creative freedom is reinforced by our shared, literate lack of concern about her feat's potential replicability. After all, the invention of writing is already a foregone conclusion, evident in our experience of reading the narrative as well as in comments made by the characters and narrator. Thus, Kipling's representations of the alphabet exploit an image of childhood in way that reveals that his real point of contention with contemporary literacy is not the hierarchization of word over image, but the erasure of manual and oral modes of cultural production in the face of mass reproduction.

B. INDUSTRIALIZED PRINT CULTURE AND BELLOC'S DISCONTENT

While Kipling's representation of education in the *Just So Stories* merges subtly with that of evolution and adaptation, Belloc's interest in educational forms around the turn of the twentieth century were publically and infamously signaled by his stubborn resistance to the Education Bill of 1906. It did not satisfy his demands for Catholic pupils' access to instruction in their faith at state-supported schools. However, this was not the first time his conjoined political and moral investments intersected with concerns about education and its broadest functions in structuring society. His provocatively-titled *Moral Alphabet* appeared in 1899 with illustrations by his friend from Oxford, Basil T. Blackwood (or

“B.T.B.”), a relatively early entry in Belloc’s extremely prolific writing career. The *Alphabet* is not well-known even among those who have admired his poetry alongside his work as a historian, journalist, and politician; more of today’s readers are acquainted with his *Cautionary Tales for Children, designed for the admonition of children between the ages of eight and fourteen years,* which appeared eight years later in 1907 and has more recently been re-issued with new illustrations by the American artist Edward Gorey (2002). The *Cautionary Tales* filled the third volume of verse that helped make his reputation as a satirist addressing adults alongside – and perhaps instead of – children by invoking children’s books of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, with *The Bad Child’s Book of Beasts* (1896) inaugurating the series. As my previous analyses of George Cruikshank and others have made clear, Belloc was hardly the first writer or artist to criticize social practices by constructing a child reader for adults to ironically inhabit. Nor was he the first to exploit the familiar tropes of cautionary tales as fodder for parody. After all, Lewis Carroll had already deployed his famous Alice in this capacity:

> she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked "poison", it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later. (23-24).

And from the first, Belloc has been linked with Carroll and with Edward Lear as a fellow practitioner of nonsense verse. However, the “nonsense” character of his work is dubious.[337] His verses illustrate social absurdities without being nonsensical themselves, and it is more useful for our purposes to note that, like

[337] As Speaight points out, the *Academy* and the *Spectator* linked Belloc with Carroll and Lear in their reviews of *The Bad Child’s Book of Beasts*, and Belloc’s verses were included in a very early twentieth-century anthology of nonsense, *A Nonsense Anthology* edited by Carolyn Wells (London: 1902). However, I tend to concur with Wim Tigges, who distinguishes between “light verse” like Belloc’s parodies, and nonsense proper (32). See Tigges “An Anatomy of Nonsense.” Similarly, Markel claims that “Although Belloc is often linked with Lear and Carroll as the third master of nonsense verse, he seems to have been largely indifferent to both of them” and was not “impressed by Carroll’s nonsense verse” (25).

Carroll's snide riffs in *Alice*, Belloc's *Cautionary Tales* point up the uselessness of moral instruction that condescends to the child-reader's understanding. They implicitly represent children as knowing consumers of text, whose capacity to read in a literal sense – e.g., to recognize a "bottle marked 'poison'" – is augmented by their capacity to see patterns in the ways that print is so often used to expand parents' and pedagogues' influence over their behavior. Similarly, the *Bad Child's Book of Beasts* offers a catalogue of images and pieces of advice that trade on this communion between a sage advice-giver and a naïve child recipient, the latter constructed as a satirical surrogate. Markel suggests that though these "light verse collections… appear at first glance to be intended for children," the patent irony and "macabre humor" suggest, on the contrary, "an adult perspective" (26-27).[338] As I have suggested above, Kipling's narrator of the *Just So Stories* assumed a similarly aware (and self-aware) child-reader, whether literally a child or the "child within" an adult reader.

Far from being simply one of Belloc's "exquisite frivolities" (Speaight 124), *The Moral Alphabet* follows his anxieties to their fundamental source, and anticipates his preoccupation with the political economy that has been explored at length by historians like Jay Corrin, and all of Belloc's biographers. It identifies its satirical object in its title, leaving the rest of the text to illustrate the specifically economic implications of Belloc's resistance to contemporary literacy practices based on "the dumb alphabet" (Belloc qtd in Speaight 244). His verses conspicuously locate schooling within a society stratified by class – "the Rich," "the Poor, and "the People in Between"[339] – drawing attention to the ways that fin de siècle literacy was structured by ideological assumptions both masked and perpetuated by the (presumed) naïve vulnerability of child pupils.[340] In this, he can be further distinguished from the Learian nonsense

[338] He also suggests that we may find "An ironic reminder of the extent to which the satirical element in Belloc's comic verse has remained unrecognized" in "the fact that *Cautionary Verses* is generally catalogued among the children's books at the library" (Markel 35). However, I would hope that by this point I have succeeded in unsettling those audience categories via a host of other indicators.

[339] These are the attendees at the titular "Garden Party" described in a verse included in Belloc's last comic collection, *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1932).

[340] His serious poetry included titles like "The Justice of the Peace" and "The Poor of London" that also reflect these preoccupations, and were printed in his collection of *Verses and Sonnets* (1896).

alphabets discussed in Chapter 3. Lear's play with phonetics and orthography contrasts sharply with Belloc's use of the alphabet book format to link a series of loosely-connected satirical statements on social inequality to educational and economic roots. As Markel points out, "Belloc was writing in the tradition of Jonathan Swift and Mark Twain, not Lear and Carroll" (28). Even more so than the children's book-based satires that preceded and followed it, *The Moral Alphabet* represents the school and the printed pedagogical aid as sites of intergenerational indoctrination on a national scale, because they privilege printed text as a route to moral authority through two intertwined forms of consumption: the industrial and the intellectual. From the opening "Dedication to the Gentleman on Page 47" (i.e., the "reviewer reviewing my book") to the concluding comments on "Idolatory" as "highly reprehensible," *The Moral Alphabet* figures its titular subject as a metonymy for lamentably industrialized print culture, and a servant of oligarchical power.

This opening allusion to reviewers seems to echo Belloc's complaints elsewhere about "how valueless Rhythm and English are on the market" and "these Rhymsters and Paragraphists and these would-be thinkers of the Reviews" who exploited the constant demand for print with hack work (qtd in Speaight 37, 39). They were simultaneously undermining the efforts of true artists and degrading the public. On a biographical level, the *Moral Alphabet* reflects Belloc's lifelong resentment over having to scrape out a living by his pen, a necessity that undercut his intellectual ambitions.[341] The financial success of *The Bad Child's Book* clearly directed his energies toward profitable nonsense verse at the expense of "serious" poetry, leading to a sequel: *More Beasts (for Worse Children),* published in 1897. The year prior he noted that his publisher was "very keen for the new Child's book" (qtd in Lowndes 142), and his sister parenthetically admitted that "He was constantly preoccupied about money… His knowledge of business was small, his need of money urgent" (153, 155). Markel explicitly suggests that Belloc churned out the *Moral Alphabet* specifically as a means of recouping financially after stretching

[341] For a helpful overview of Belloc's chronic financial difficulties, and his distaste for journalists in particular, see Markel 4-5 and 80-81. Belloc believed that his situation could be traced to prejudice against Catholics, and that that Oxford dons had denied him a fellowship on the basis of his faith. See Speaight 95-97 and Corrin 21.

himself on his "first serious prose work," an unprofitable biography of the French Revolutionary figure Georges Jacques Danton (31). It was apparently designed for the annual "Christmas book" market, which tended to target adults buying gifts for children.[342] It may well have prompted Belloc's later satirical verse "On the Gift of a Book to a Child," to which I will return.[343]

But at the same time, on an ideological level the *Moral Alphabet* reflects Belloc's radical stance on socioeconomic inequality, which grew increasingly militant over the rest of his writing and political career. Even in his "light verse," this trend is apparent; as Markel points out, "Almost all of the children in [*Cautionary Tales*] who pay so dearly for their misdeeds belong to the upper class" (32). But as early as the late 1890s and early 1900s, he actually fancied himself to be keeping alive the spirit of the French Revolution, longing for "the Great War!" that would "sweep Europe like a broom" and "make Kings jump like coffee beans on the roaster" – a self-fashioning which is more explicable given that he was born in France, had a French father, and avidly studied French history (qtd in Speaight 41). When he visited America in the mid-1890s, he was fascinated by (what he perceived to be) the lack of a "lower class," (qtd in Lowndes 101), and he ran for Parliament in 1906 on the conviction that his "first duty" was to alter "the social condition of England so that the rich of England shall be made less rich and the poor shall be made less poor" (qtd in Speaight 282).

Thus, the form of Belloc's *Moral Alphabet* helps him invoke traditional implications of reading instruction reaching back to the Protestant Reformation – a long-ago event in England's history, but still uppermost in the mind of the reform-minded Catholic historian.[344] Although he was half-French by birth, and retained his French citizenship well into his adult life, his educational experiences had made him "to

[342] Belloc's sister quotes a letter from Belloc's wife, who reported that "He and Lord Basil [T. Blackwood, Belloc's illustrator] are at work on another Christmas book – a rhyming nonsense alphabet. I think it is very funny" (Elodie Logan Belloc qtd in Lowndes 148).

[343] This was included as the prefatory dedication to his comic verse collection *Cautionary Verses*.

[344] The evidence of this can be found in Belloc's four-volume *A History of England* (1925, 1927, 1928, 1931), which ended in 1612 because "in covering the Reformation he considered the essential task complete… The four volumes in effect constitute a history of Catholic England" (Markel 66).

all intents and purposes an Englishman" (Ren M illet qtd in Lowndes 87).[345] In the process, Belloc apparently had ample opportunity to observe the ways that British literacy practices produced concrete effects on social operations. At the end of the nineteenth century in England, literacy continued to play a role in delineating sociocultural strata, including the limits placed on subjects of imperial rule, but formal boundaries between text and image were less important to Belloc (who did not illustrate his own books, after all) than its absorption into the capitalist complex that he went on to explicitly indict, most explicitly in *The Servile State* (1912).[346] The alphabet helps separate the "the Poor Indian, justly called 'The Poor'" (22) for his "untutor'd mind" as Pope had originally put it in his "Essay on Man,"[347] from the graduates of "places where, with decent application, / One gets a good, sound, middle-class education" (39). Belloc construes literacy education as helping to perpetuate a system of class distinctions despite the relatively recent democratic triumph of universal access, and prompts his readers to consider how literacy itself can be caught up in the industrial push toward constant consumption and self-promotion at home and abroad. When presented with "excellent stuff" like the *Moral Alphabet* itself, "No Person… / Will really be content without purchasing three, / While a Parent will send for a dozen or more" (48). With pointed statements like these, Belloc's satire constructs a (young) reader for alphabet books whose moral and civic *responsibility* is for him to consume as much print as possible. He is not to produce it; at the letter "E" the moral "Be terse" is "applicable to the Young," instead of the adults who are caught up in the industrial machine and doing the writing, publishing, and buying (15). Some of Belloc's contemporaries may have blithely observed that the *Moral Alphabet* was one of his "successful books for children, of a great popularity, and may be read with considerable pleasure by elder persons" (Mandell and Shanks). But others noted that "taken as a whole, it is a little heavy. For children, of course, it will have no

[345] At any rate, this was the belief expressed by one of Belloc's relatives when he came of age and decided to honor the state-mandated call to French military service rather than become a naturalized British citizen.

[346] See Corrin 17.

[347] Alexander Pope's philosophical essay was published in expanding versions as letters to Henry St. John L. Bolingbrok over the period 1732-1734. It was never officially completed; the reference to the "poor Indian" did not appear in the original 1732 epistle. See his *Essay* (1733) for the full context.

attraction; but probably it was never intended to have" ("Economical Nonsense-Verse"). From the avaricious writer's point of view that Belloc assumes, the child-reader is "My little victim" (57) who must be trained to accept an arbitrary obsession with economic status, and to participate in the race for economic/political power with a right good will. "Don't ask Questions!" the narrator insists, lest the individual who is both privileged and trapped by his literacy fall prey to the waterbeetle's near-miraculous ability to go "gliding on the water's face": "*if he ever stopped to think / Of how he did it, he would sink*" (italics in original, 58).

In recognition of the fragile state of both audience conventions and social relations suggested by the figure of the waterbeetle, from the beginning of the *Moral Alphabet* we are facetiously invited to take literacy – and the child pupil's moral obligations – for granted. Precisely so that he can occupy a position of (soon-to-be-undercut) social superiority, the consumer of the *Moral Alphabet* presumably does not need to learn how to read, if only because he is addressed with words like "persiflage" (23). The many allusions to previously-published works reinforce this presumption. As noted above, Belloc makes ironic reference to Pope's "Essay on Man," specifically his famous description of "Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutor'd mind /Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind" (l. 95). This section of verse was routinely reprinted in nineteenth-century elocution manuals and anthologies of pieces for recitation.[348] Belloc could have counted on readerly recognition just as Carroll could have done when parodying Isaac Watts's "How doth the little busy bee" as "How doth the little crocodile…" (28). In much the same way, Belloc evokes the image of a child mindlessly mouthing high-minded sentiments at a tutor's behest, with the pressure of

[348] See, for instance, *A Help to Elocution,* designed "for the use of schools" (London: Fielding and Walker, 1780), 397; and Charles Richson's *Figures of Elocution Exemplified* also labeled "for the use of schools" (London: printed for the author, 1828). Most importantly, it was included in William Enfield's popular anthology *The Speaker,* which went through many editions starting in 1774. In his essay, David Vander Meulen notes that "When Mrs. Merdle in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857) refers to the line ("There used to be a poem when I learnt lessons, something about Lo the poor Indian whose something mind!") she… attests that the *Essay* was a standard part of children's education" (126).
Later in the century the poem was popular in America too, having been included in Merritt Caldwell's *A Practical Manual of Elocution: Embracing Voice and Gesture* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1859); William Russell's *Orthophony: Or, the Cultivation of the Voice in Elocution* (Boston: Fields, Osgood and Co., 1870) and S. S. Hamill's *New Science of Elocution: The Elements and Principles of Vocal Expression in Lessons* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886).

performance crowding out absorption of the moral. Belloc assumes the reader's familiarity with Dante as well, "Who always speaks of Youth with proper praise" (60). Rounding out this list are allusions to Belloc's own writings, which Markel also points out (32). And beyond references, the formal apparatus of erudition comes under fire; the alphabet's concluding letter, which stands for "Z bu," includes a footnote that mocks scrupulous academic attention to trivia like spelling: ""Von Kettner writes it 'Zébu'; Wurst 'Ze*bu*'; I split the difference and use the two" (62).[349]

Moreover, at Belloc's very first self-reference, the presumably-literate audience of the *Moral Alphabet* is also called upon to embrace the arbitrary linkage between moral behavior and print consumption (in the sense of acquisition), as "A stands for Archibald who told no lies" (3). He is rewarded with the alphabet itself as his due, and "got this lovely volume for a prize" in keeping with the long-standing public school tradition of issuing books as prizes for either academic achievement or – as in Archibald's case – exemplary behavior. However, instead of an appropriately salutary lesson, we are confronted with an advertisement: for the alphabet in general and, more specifically "this lovely volume… the Noblest Work produced as yet… upon the English Alphabet" (3, 5). As we had seen in the commodified and incoherent representations of alphabetized childhood in Greenaway and Phiz, the alphabet is here instrumentalized as part of a larger program of promotional print culture. "A large and anxious crowd" waits outside the school for the thoroughly indoctrinated "admirable child" to take up his place as a literate member of society (6). This initial introduction to the "justly irritating" (because so wantonly virtuous?) Archibald places the *Moral Alphabet*'s subsequent admonitions to children in a self-consciously self-righteous light. At G, resignation is advised over consolation – "Child, if you have a rummy kind of name, / Remember to be thankful for the same" (19) – and the very demands of the format are denied peremptorily denied at "X": "No reasonable little Child expects / A Grown-up Man to make a rhyme on X" (59).

[349] Later in his para-academic career, Belloc would be notorious for refusing to include footnotes and bibliography in his published works of history. He claimed that his audience – "the general reader" – did not require them, but "the historical establishment" also took this as a criticism, which may well have been the scorned Belloc's intention (Markel 55).

Elsewhere in the *Moral Alphabet,* Belloc turns to the official moral imperatives of England's imperial project, as when "C stands for Cobra" that "bites / An Indian Judge" (10). Through Belloc's critical eyes, we see the Empire's foundation on a bedrock of bureaucratic literacy and an unabashedly pervasive print culture. I noted above that Belloc alludes to "the Poor Indian, justly called 'The Poor'" by Alexander Pope in his famous "Essay on Man" (22). Belloc elides the description of the Indian's "untutor'd mind," but it appears in the book's implicit address to a child reader with a similarly primitive and "untutor'd mind" that must be simultaneously tutored, civilized, and materially enriched by the alphabet. Even as the child (nominally) learns how to read, he gains the means to avoid having "to eat his Dinner off the floor" (22), and is admonished to "Have a care / When, later on you are a Millionaire" (33) – as the truly literate Englishman is apparently bound to be when he occupies his rightfully superior position in Anglo-India. In other realms of imperial incursion, we find that literacy is a potential defense against military might: "G stands for Gnu, whose weapons of Defence" include "a Name so short and strong, / that even Hardy Boers pronounce it wrong" (18). Along with his partner G. K. Chesterton, Belloc was publically sympathetic to the unpopular Boer cause, which he saw as unduly threatened by the overweening imperialist ambitions of the English.[350] Significantly, here the joke suggests concrete outcomes for Britain's investment in the literacy as a "weapon" on par with the "Volunteer" we meet at "V," "Who fills the Armies of the World with fear" (56).[351] Extending the critique of imperialism that appeared in his parable *Modern Traveller* (1898), Belloc frames literacy education as a means of training future colonizers to embrace their privileged positions, as well as a literal tool for maintaining that superiority.

The intersections between cultural position and literacy level, and Belloc's clear conviction of their arbitrariness, are brought home to England, as well, and with even more sharply-focused critique. Early in the *Moral Alphabet* we meet a "Horseman who… talked of the Pads of the fox as his 'feet'" – an

[350] See Markel 12, for instance. G. K. Chesterton later claimed of the "isolated group of 'Pro-Boers'" that "We were a minority in a minority." See Chesterton "Introduction."

[351] It is worth noting here that Belloc himself reported to the French army for service before returning to England.

error that disqualified him from being "Master of Hounds" (20) but – ironically? – revealed his skill at performing "the Part of 'The Old English Squire" (21). Perhaps more significantly, at "F" we find a "Respectable Family" who aspires to gentility with outings "In Arcadia Terrace, no doubt"; with "intelligent talk"; and with a plentiful but low-class tea that includes "a large Pigeon Pie very skilfully made to consist almost wholly of Beef" (17). Their self-consciously correct appearance (like the alphabet's) "contains all the morals that ever there were, / And it sets an example as well" (17). Over and over again, we are told about the importance of keeping up appearances. This requires much skill as well as a blithe self-regard Belloc criticizes at L, with "a Lady, Advancing in Age, / Who drove in her carriage and six." Here, we may again catch echoes of the "coach and six" perennially promised to children in the chapbooks that inspired John Newbery.[352] She responds to dangerous traffic accidents with "legitimate fears" for her own safety rather than those of her more vulnerable employees (29), and assumes that "the most poignant of all their delights / Was to stand in a rapturous Dream / When she spoke to them kindly" (30). In this manner, a text nominally designed for reading instruction become an education in how to read society.

While deriding the socializing effects of didactic children's books, Belloc naturally suggests that educational institutions should also be subject to this kind of criticism. In fact, they are subjected to some of the cruelest pokes, from the mockery of prize books at "A" to the sarcastic description of Oxford as "salubrious seat / Of learning" which "serves to make a kind of Fold or Pen / Wherein to herd a lot of Learned Men" and prompts him to "turn at once to 'P,' which stands for Pig" (37-38). Spleen was being vented here, of course, as Belloc long remained bitter over having been denied a history fellowship at Balliol College at Oxford, which was exacerbated in 1898 when it named another Catholic to that same position. But the *Moral Alphabet* significantly opens with a scathing representation of elementary learning environments as well, as "The Pedagogue, with Pardonable Joy, Bestows the Gift" of alphabetic literacy "upon the Radiant Boy" (5). This high praise –which "drew tears from some and loud applause

[352] This satirical thrust also appears in one of the *Cautionary Tales*, concerning "Charles Augustus Fortescue, who always Did what was Right, and so accumulated an Immense Fortune."

from all – is presented for Archibald's success at following very basic rules: "to brush your Hair and Teeth and tell the Truth" (5-6). So in a double twist of the irony, the moral does indeed "tell the Truth": by the lights of the Education Act, alphabetical literacy *is* a suitable reward for merely being British, as is the right to enjoy the literary fruits of the Industrial Revolution.

Speaking more generally of Belloc's politics as expressed in the writings and lectures that poured forth prodigiously over the decades of his career as both author and politician, Renee Haynes has observed that "Belloc saw and detested as vividly as any Marxist [industrial capitalism's] vast injustices and its advertising-slogan self-justifications" (29). However, Belloc's criticism of the industrial nature of fin de siècle print culture is somewhat blunted by his own obvious complicity in it. The apparent self-consciousness that ironizes lines pressuring readers to buy more copies of "this lovely volume" only partially inoculates him against such charges. As I noted at the outset, Belloc impregnates the entire text with a fairly explicit moral dimension, bracketing it with "Radiant" Archibald – veritable demi-god of moral literacy – and a condemnation of "Idolatory." But he sounds a concluding note of despair: "When we get to Z / Our interest in the Alphabet is dead" (63), because it has been rendered effectively powerless by the larger network of social forces that sacralized it in the first place. As he later complained in a comic verse called "The Garden Party" (collected with the *Beast* books, *Cautionary Tales* and *Moral Alphabet* in the volume *Hilaire Belloc's Cautionary Verses*),

> For the hoary social curse
> Gets hoarier and hoarier,
> And it stinks a trifle worse
> Than in the days of Queen Victoria (364).

Print may be the only place to find a moral society that, despite being endlessly promoted, remains a mere projection of nostalgia. Thus, we are admonished "to be properly vexed / When the newspaper editors say, / That 'The type of society shown in the Text / Is rapidly passing away'" (31). Later, Belloc himself would be hopelessly absorbed into the basically mechanical production of printed words; as he described his daily activities in 1909, "the whole art is just to write and write and write and then offer it for sale, just like butter. The more one writes, the more one gets known. The more enormous one's output the more the publishers get to regard you as a reliable milch cow" (qtd in Speaight 243). And in his *Moral Alphabet* we see one of the earliest expressions of his resistance to the mindless consumption *and* production of print, as it degrades both the producer and the consumer. In the end, Belloc declines to interrogate the *practice* of literacy instruction. Instead, he amplifies his satirical treatment of profit-motivated literary and book production by embedding it in a pedagogical context. His critique takes for granted his post-1870 circumstances: the alphabet book's function as a domestic pedagogical aid text had been rendered unnecessary by the democratic forces that assured universal access to literacy instruction. And the unfortunate outcome he depicts is that the alphabet book becomes a Christmas "gift" book, a perverted version of literacy appropriate for (with apologies to William Blake) these too industrial times.

C. CONCLUSION: THE CHILD AS INVOLUNTARY "HEIR TO ALL THE AGES"

In its nominal focus on the child proto-reader Belloc's *Moral Alphabet* significantly links educational institutions and much-vaunted access to literacy to a less-than-virtuous outcome and its "justly irritating" social effects. The ambivalent power of literacy to liberate and to oppress has reappeared throughout previous chapters; we have seen both the history of democratic triumph over a kind of caste-like class system, and how – as Liu points out with respect to Kipling – "a writing system may also serve as an instrument of coercion" (246). Historians of the book like Michael Clanchy have observed that writing and printing are crucial to the modern state, as indeed they were to the national system of education both Belloc and Kipling would have been familiar with.[353] Kipling revisited the possibility that bureaucratic oppression was potentially embedded in the alphabet itself in a pair of later stories. Published in 1909 and 1917 respectively, "With the Night Mail" and "Easy as A. B.C" are set in a future where technology

[353] See particularly Clanchy 68–70.

facilitates totalitarian powers wielded by the Aerial Board Control, or the "A. B. C."[354] The proleptic vision of the *Just So Stories* treats the technology of writing more optimistically, but suggests a similarly fatalistic view of how civilization "progresses." After the Elementary Education Act of 1870, children were the ones most acutely affected, both confined and embraced, by the alphabet's omnipotence within the textual environment – and by extension, its organizational power within the social world. Far from simply condemning the "most uncultured girl / Who didn't care a pinch of snuff / For any literary stuff" who appeared in Belloc's culminating collection of *New Cautionary Tales*, both Belloc and Kipling seem to have some sympathy with the "young illiterate" who was "confirmed in her instinctive guess / That literature breeds distress" (110). That distress may just as easily be about a lack of access, as it might be about too much access, imposed where it is not wanted.

Ultimately, both authors worry that becoming textually literate could all too easily mean simply submitting to the demands of the social machine; at the *fin de siècle*, the Child threatens to take his place as both the raw material and the product of civilization, with the combined pressure of the school and the printing press functioning as the factory that molds him to the demands of textual literacy and capitalism simultaneously. It was, perhaps, not necessary that national schooling would also fix the Victorian Child within an industrial-capitalist context. So in Belloc and Kipling's representations of just that outcome, both authors also offer a way out of this mess, and – significantly – the route does not require a utopic overall of the system *in toto*. Instead, both find loopholes to exploit: for Kipling, photographic reproduction provides a way to evoke manual inscription in a mass-produced and mass-distributed book. And for Belloc, it is publishing itself that spread a necessary self-awareness: *individual* education and resistance through mass reproduction will paradoxically save everyone from its grasping clutches. Thus, both authors leaven their implicit endorsement of mass-produced text through satirical treatments of the very medium they use to disseminate critique. Belloc wrote much later in his dedication to *Cautionary Verses*, "On the Gift of a Book to a Child":

[354] Liu observes that Kipling went on to use the idiom "A.B.C." in this way in the stories "With the Night Mail" in *Actions and Reactions* (1909) and "As Easy as A. B. C" in *A Diversity of Creatures* (1917) . See Liu 246.

Child! do not throw this book about!

Refrain from the unholy pleasure

Of cutting all the pictures out!

Preserve it as your chiefest treasure.

Child, have you never heard it said

That you are heir to all the ages?

Why, then, your hands were never made

To tear these beautiful thick pages!

"Beautiful thick pages" and the wisdom of "all the ages," are miraculously merged, passed on to the "Child." He is both rightful "heir" in an evolutionary sense, and forbidden by adults, with their eyes on "treasure," to do what apparently comes naturally. We can see the echoes of John Newbery's late-eighteenth-century *Royal Primer*, which plied children with rhymes like "he who to his Book's inclin'd / Will soon a golden Treasure find." However, just as the *Moral Alphabet* decries the capitalist imperatives of constant book production by cajoling parents to purchase "a dozen or more," the mischievous tone of this prefatory poem reframes an act of childish destruction as one of Romantic resistance. And the act of publishing such a satirical view of a child's untenable position (with an irreverent response to its potential gravity) ultimately facilitates both writers' attempt to follow Belloc's commandment at K: "Just you work for Humanity, never you mind / If Humanity seems to have left you behind" (28).

VIII. CONCLUSION: CONVERGENCE

At the beginning of my attempt to trace alphabet books, literacies, and representations of childhood through their co-evolution in nineteenth-century British print culture, the Education Act of 1870 appeared dimly in the distance. But at the culmination of this history we may quite usefully distinguish between pre- and post-1870 contexts for alphabet books, with the caveat that "post-1870" denotes texts registering the delayed actual effects of the *implemented* Education Act. In the seven or so decades prior, representations of childhood circulated more freely in relation to the alphabet, variously deployed for the purposes of romanticization, infantilization, and politicization within pedagogical (and sometimes pseudo-pedagogical) frames that were themselves constrained by material conditions. The access to reading instruction assured by legal mandate was instrumental in fixing a relationship between the figure of the Child and textual literacy in the late-Victorian era, and eventually alphabet books also came to reflect the growing sense that literacy was inevitable, at least in terms of textual decoding. At the same time, after a century of shifting technology for reproducing images, visual literacy had generally descended from the heights of late-eighteenth-century privilege to an educational no-man's land. There, it might receive variable treatment depending on the school and the master, not to mention the attitudes of the home. Words effectively triumphed over images in the bid for social necessity, but in the process textual literacy ceded its power to produce social distinctions. In concert with the post-1870 context, textual literacy was entrenched as a development accomplishment and there was little hope of re-mapping child/adult audience categories on that basis. At the end of the nineteenth century, the high culture/low culture binary between popular illustration on one hand, and the Aesthetic "Book Beautiful" on the other, suggested that the alphabet book would have to await further social and/or technological developments in order to re-assume its pre-eminence as a site for advocating one form of literacy over another.

The stakes of such shifts extend well beyond the classroom or the nursery. I noted in the introduction to this critical history that literacy education in Great Britain and America has consistently revealed – or been deployed as a response to – unequal access to political and social power. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 seemed to have provided a definitive answer to decades-long discussions about how literacy related to individuals' rights and responsibilities, and society's reciprocal obligations. Beyond simple boasts about the scale of the project, pride was often vested in the democratic effects fostered by instituting a national system of education. The Victorian writer William J. Lacey declared that "Books are the true levellers" (99), while the pedagogue J. Gunn insisted that

> Among the subjects which are usually taught in our common schools **Reading claims the first place, on account of its important practical uses in afterlife**…. When a boy has acquired the power of reading, he possesses the key to self-instruction… and many men have reached a high position… whose early education was confined to this one subject of instruction. (bold in original, 347)

But Gunn also went on to acknowledge that access to elementary reading instruction did not assure access to quality teaching: "It is often said that Reading is at once the most important and the worst taught subject in schools" (347-348). And jeremiads about "England's Educational Peril," like that attributed to "Vigilans" in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1902, continued to appear. Anecdotal evidence about persistent illiteracy also circulated, including claims that prospective employers were routinely stymied in their attempts to "get a boy from the board schools who could take down a simple order" (498). Gunn and his fellow contributors to *Practical Teacher* sought to plug such cracks in the system even as they affirmed its past success.

Concerns arose even in response to successful literacy acquisition, particularly audible concerns about the *kinds* of texts making their way into the public sphere at affordable prices. For instance one journalist at *The Saturday Review* worried that "cranks… force themselves upon the world, endangering all the weak minds whose owners may happen to stumble upon their productions, and fanning the flames of their own folly by the seductive process of gibbering in printed books, which, to the corporal eye, look just the same as they would if they were full of profound wisdom and genuine research" ("Nonsensical Books" 388). Observers declared that increased access to text had, instead of raising the general level of cultural discourse and bringing everyone along in the "March of Intellect" so touted by the improving societies of the 1830s, merely diluted its contents. Warnings began to arrive about "the half literacy" which prompted different factions – "according to our political colour," as *Bookman*'s James Eaton noted – to "deplore the Education Act of 1870 or proclaim to high heaven that we need more and better schools" because "Certainly the great problem is – how are the masses to be educated? – and this not mainly for 'practical' but truly cultural ends" (225). Even John Ruskin weighed in: "of all the plagues that afflict mortality, the venom of a bad book to weak people, and the charms of a foolish one to simple people, are without question the deadliest… I would never wish to see a child taught to read at all, unless the other conditions of its education were alike gentle and judicious" (reply to "Choice of Books"). Discernment became the issue once literacy was inevitable.

I have shown that the history of literacy education is hardly one of uncomplicated progress, which in turn suggests that the spread of democracy is characterized by similar hiccups and reconfigurations of the relationships between individuals and their social context. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this can be found in the implicit history of children's resistance that threads its way through this explicit history of adult pedagogues and children's book designers and publishers. Their constant efforts to overcome pupils' reluctance to being alphabetized, in Patricia Crain's totalizing sense of the word as "the process of internalizing the technology of the alphabet" (7), point to a distinction between child and adult audiences that Nodelman famously attempted to clarify by invoking the Saidian notion of Orientalism. Victorian children's status as "Other" was concretized by their assignation to the binarized worlds of Romantic play and schooling. As I have suggested in several of the preceding chapters, study, and especially book-based education, officially became the children's version of adult work; the result of this, beyond keeping Locke's spirit alive, was that some schools bore a disquieting resemblance to a manufactory. And I believe it was disquieting in part because the manufactory-school convergence undermined the purported distinctions between Romantic childhood and (decidedly unromantic) working adulthood that nationalized schooling had, in some unspoken ways, been established to protect. Angela Sorby notes that "To lose 'the child' as a productive laborer was to gain 'childhood' as a productive metaphor," but the exchange was not a wholehearted one (97). Alphabet books struggled to reconcile the economic and political imperatives of a literate population with the equally-pressing social imperatives that childhood serve as a refuge from those concerns. These books were tasked with performing the alchemical trick of turning playful impulses to view some images – especially pictures – toward the study of other "images" like letterforms and catalogues of objects. A reversal, whereby children limited their attention to the pictures and turned study into a form of play, always threatened, as did a collapse of the correlative distinctions between child and adult audiences that had finally been bound to individuals' status as literate.

Indeed, the false dichotomy of child and adult audiences has also repeatedly resurfaced throughout this history. One necessary conclusion that emerges is that our historical imagination must accommodate the coexistence and internal dialogue of multiple implied readers. Settling these questions about intention and audience is far from easy. It may even be undesirable, since maintaining ambiguity and dual meaning preserves dialogic possibilities. Only after acknowledging the limitations and ideological freight of a rigid approach to audience (by considering the embedded assumptions of the Edgeworths' rationalist approach to literacy instruction) could we usefully recover historical context and its influence on the reception of Victorian illustrated alphabet books. At the very least, the specific word choices prominent in Knoepflmacher and Myers's term "cross-written" reveal a prejudice against the relevance of illustration in texts, and the potentially-rich dialogue between word and image. Their model comes up short in the face of texts that focus on the meaningful relationships *between* letters and their frames, or between letters and related forms of representation, as much as they attend to the letters' utility and present words as mere vehicles of meaning. So, rather than conceiving of these alphabetic texts as "cross-written," I have come to think of them as "multilegible" – available to be read by a multiplicity of readers, and with a flexible understanding of both reading and literacy. Images may be "read" as well as text, and literacy may be plotted on a continuous spectrum of fluency or familiarity with letter-forms, and with conventions in society and textual circulation, as well as with texts (visual or literal). This dynamic approach has already proven useful in illuminating the diversity of readerships for alphabet books, a category of texts that had been relegated to footnotes and bibliographies despite their considerable popularity and relevance to historical and contemporary understandings of literacy and audience.

I hope that this history will serve as an argument-by-example for shifting toward a more layered and flexible critical approach to nineteenth-century alphabet books in particular, and illustrated texts in general. They may be viewed as not only internally-dialogic – by which I mean to allow for a dialogue between/among multiple voices within a single text, as well as between word and image– but also subject to uncertain perceptions of that dialogue. I do see the appeal of retreating into conventional paradigms, and have no doubt fallen into that trap myself at times. Even if we reductively pare the possibilities for audience to "child" or "adult," and delimit textual function to the tired and long-dethroned binary of "instruction" or "delight," the patterns of potential consumption and circulation are far too numerous to parse. But it is precisely this operation of "convention" that demands further consideration, especially with regard to historical context and nineteenth-century texts. Shifts in cultural and historical contexts and literary conventions (i.e., the means by which a text signals its ideal audience and its intended function) can produce misreadings, lost readings, and exclusions. In the case of nineteenth-century British alphabet books, both the alphabetical form and the illustrations have led to their ghettoization within either children's literature, or pedagogical literature – and in the cases of books that seem "inappropriate" for either the presumed child audience or a presumed pedagogical function, the result has been their near-total exclusion from critical discussion, and sometimes even disparagement by the creators themselves.

However, satire and parody have opened a singularly valuable route through and into historical context. The metatextual strain I have traced through a series of nineteenth-century satirical alphabet books – from the *Moral Alphabet*'s allusion to "this lovely volume" to Lear's, Crane's, and even Phiz's representations of alphabet books *within* alphabet books – is clearly encouraged by the alphabet book's categorical subject. This route remains open today, in the neo-Victorian works of twentieth- and twenty-first century alphabet book designers. We may look to Edward Gorey with his *Gashlycrumb Tinies* (1963) and a host of other grimly humorous small books, or Neil Gaiman and Gris Grimly with their *Dangerous Alphabet* (2008) that warns with a wink, "U are the reader who shivers with dread." With a cushion of irony, we find ourselves back with the Edgeworths, who turned to this particular letter as the site of stymied education for prudent pupils: "As for the silent *u* at the end of the word *you,* he knows not what to make of it… he hesitates with prudent anxiety whenever he meets with these doubtful characters. (*Rational Primer* 3-4). If the illustrators and designers I have surveyed did not succeed in normalizing visual or oral complements to text-based literacy education, at least they have created a space for doubt about the supposedly natural rationale for how literacies and their constituent elements are hierarchized.

As I noted at the outset, the genre's mandated juxtaposition of letterforms, images, and words requires writers and page designers to accommodate the relationships among these related-but-not-entirely-isomorphic forms of representation. All of these texts may be (and were) read as "maps" outlining the circulating constructions of literacy. But some of them attempted to draw a textual map of a social environment that was more or less comfortable for certain demographic subsets of their contemporaries, or more or less navigable by modern readers. Against a background of recycled illustrations and rhymes, the alphabet book designers and representations of the alphabet that I have chosen to focus on throughout this history have brought such metatextual concerns to the fore more explicitly via puns, paratextual rhetoric, or overt formal interventions. Just as the relationships *between* letters and their frames emerge from the background in satire, the relationships between forms of representation and social context, not to mention those between different forms of representation, have often supplanted the representations themselves as our object of analysis. Especially during the earlier decades of Victoria's reign, these alphabet book writers, illustrators, and designers have highlighted the inevitable dialectic between word and image, at times apparently working to minimize or even deny the formal distinctions required for such dialectical exchange. I have repeatedly found that in alphabet books, letterforms and illustrations can converge in a uniquely fluid act of continuous reading-and-viewing that prompts us to reconsider where and how barriers to convergence are imposed, and the consequences of doing so. And ultimately, the evidence I present of efforts to rewrite the rules governing social status and literacies throughout the Victorian era suggests that balancing educational priorities, whether in pedagogical praxis or on the printed page, is hardly as simple as "A, B, C."

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