

Children's literature, the home, and the debate on public versus private education, c.1760–1845

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In Britain in the period 1760–1845 the debate on the relative merits of public (school) versus private (home) education remained unresolved and was vigorously debated in many media. It was in this same period that children's literature began to flourish: a much wider variety of books were published in much greater numbers. The new children's literature generally took domestic life for its subject; its authors often claimed that their books had emerged from domestic practice; and the books were often marketed as being for domestic use. It can seem, therefore, that the new children's literature was, in essence, a materialisation in print of domestic pedagogy, a product developed to supply a growing demand for didactic materials to use in the home. This essay will test the hypothesis, considering some real-life pedagogical practices and examining a wide range of later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century children's texts (both print and manuscript). This evidence will show in fact that the boundaries between private and public education were blurred. Moreover, some children's books were themselves interventions into the debate on private versus public schooling. They presented a utopian, if still practical, vision of how the advantages of both models could be combined.

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In 1806, the painter Joseph Farington praised in his diary Jane Harley, Countess of Oxford, for showing 'the greatest attention to the education of Her children', being 'constantly with them from ten o'clock in the morning till one, during which time they receive instructions'. Particularly commended was that she directly supervised their reading, 'never allow[ing] a book of any kind except such as she may have read and approved, to lay in a room to which the Children have access' (Farington, 1924, vol. 4, p. 31). Farington may have been surprised at this, for Lady Harley was by no means regarded as a paragon of domesticity (indeed, the reverse).

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Certainly it was no idle observation. Rather it was Farington's private reflection on a debate raging in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century on the virtues of private versus public education. Diaries, journals and letters are full of individual opinions on the topic. School prospectuses and lengthy treatises give the views of teachers and theorists. Parents expressed their preferences in the schooling choices they made. Novelists, and children's novelists in particular, discussed the issue as a perennially unsettled question. As late as 1874, Henry William Pullen could fill almost half of his *The Ground Ash: A Public School Story* with a debate between a squire and a rector on the relative merits of domestic versus public school education. 'Innumerable', wrote the philosopher William Godwin in 1797, 'are the discussions that have originated in the comparative advantages of public and private education' (Godwin, 1797, p. 56). He then proceeded to set out his own ideas on the question.

The relative merits that people assigned to home and school education were dependent on many factors: the age, gender, class and religion of the children in question, as well as where in Britain they lived and the different types of schooling available. Michèle Cohen contends that, by the end of the eighteenth century, public education 'became associated with masculinity, and "private" with femininity and effeminacy' (Cohen, 2004, p. 29). But if, as a whole, domestic and school pedagogies were increasingly differentiated by gender, the debate, in its detail, resists attempts to impose on it a single, simple trajectory. Individuals were certainly still advocating public education for middle- and upper-class girls at the end of the eighteenth century and after: Erasmus Darwin, for instance, whose *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools* (1797) was emphatic about the superiority of school to domestic education, and later Frances Broadhurst's 'A Word in Favour of Female Schools' (1827) and Harriet Martineau's *Household Education* (1849). Indeed, the number of commercially-run girls' schools in the years around 1800 (many of them run by women) seems to have increased rather than declined (Skedd, 1997). Equally, domestic education for boys continued to be widely advocated right across the period. When the Rev. John Bennett amassed his many arguments demonstrating that 'a *mother* should be the *preceptress* of her children', he made no distinction between boys' and girls' education (Bennett, 1787, pp. 151–152). In many cases, a father's domestic education of his sons was evidently a matter of great pride. In his *Autobiography*, for example, John Stuart Mill (born 1806) recalled that his father employed 'a considerable part of almost every day ... in the instruction of his [nine] children', exerting 'an amount of labour, care, and perseverance rarely, if ever, employed for a similar purpose, in endeavouring to give, according to his own conception, the highest order of intellectual education'. It was an education that encompassed Latin, Greek (beginning when Mill was three) and history (tested on daily father-and-son walks in the lanes around their home), while arithmetic 'was the task of the evenings' (Mill, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 7–12). Evidently, domestic education might be no less rigorous, extensive or demanding than what was provided by schools.

In short, in the period 1760–1845, although the landscape of educational provision changed significantly, the debate over the advantages of domestic or institutional pedagogy remained unsettled and among the middle classes and the elites ‘private’ or home education was by no means in retreat. Indeed, whether for boys or girls, what we now call ‘home-schooling’ was often upheld as optimal. Moreover, as Sophia Woodley has shown, the choice of private or public education was seldom a matter of indifference or merely a question of practicality. Rather, parents’ decisions were generally informed, the result of sustained engagement with works of educational philosophy, or ideological, made on the basis of religious creed or political convictions (Woodley, 2009).

What this essay will explore is the links between domestic education and the children’s literature of the period. Young people had been reading before the later eighteenth century of course, but the number and range of books published specifically for them in Britain expanded markedly from the 1740s, and exponentially from the 1780s. At first sight, many of these books seem to be focussed on the domestic. Whether moral tales or travel writing, fairy stories or conduct literature, poetry or instructional works, publishers and authors presented children’s books as having derived from the home and as fit to be used there. The book titles themselves repeatedly enforce this point: John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s *Evenings at Home* (1792–1796); *The Happy Family at Eason House, Exhibited in the Amiable Conduct of the Little Nelsons and Their Parents* (1799); *Domestic Pleasures; or, the Happy Fire-Side* (1816) by Frances Bowyer Vaux. So too do advertisements and illustrations, and the many authorial prefaces that diffidently explain how the text that follows had been written for use in the author’s family and published only with reluctance. Given the public debate around domestic education, it is tempting to speculate that this new children’s literature emerged to fill a need for books to use in educational schemes in household settings. Certainly, the children’s author and critic Sarah Trimmer seemed to acknowledge this in 1782, enthusing that ‘those parents who chuse to educate their own children, may meet with a variety of books to assist them in the pleasing task’ (Trimmer, 1782–1785, preface). It is the validity of this hypothesis that the essay will investigate. Was the new children’s literature conceived and promoted for use in the home? Was it an intervention in the debate on private versus public education, specifically endorsing the former? Was the new children’s literature, in short, the printed manifestation of domestic pedagogy?

1. Children’s literature and domesticity

From its inception, the implied users of the new children’s literature were parents, not teachers, who were encouraged to use the books in the home, not the school. *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (c. 1744), published by John Newbery and one of the very earliest of the new children’s books, exhibits this clearly. Its dedication is ‘To the parents, guardians, and nurses, in Great-Britain and Ireland’, and the introduction urges mothers and fathers, not tutors or teachers, to play an active part in their children’s education (Anon, 1760, pp. 4, 7–8).

Over the next decades the association between children's literature and domestic education became entrenched, particularly as publishers like the Newberys ceded their position as the innovators of children's literature to the 'Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers' who, Mitzi Myers has shown, 'found in children's books not just an outlet available to their sex, but a genuine vocation' (Myers, 1986, p. 33). In the debate on public versus private education, these authors can seem strongly to have favoured the latter. Sarah Trimmer, for instance, children's author and the first serious critic of children's literature, educated her six sons and six daughters at home (only sending the boys to a local clergyman for tuition in classical languages). The children's books she published from 1780 with much trepidation were written for her children and were, she said, attempts to supply a need that her domestic pedagogy had identified (1780, p. viii; 1786, pp. ix–x). Regardless of politics and denomination, the same concerns and hopes activated other pioneering and popular children's writers, including Lady Ellenor Fenn, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth for instance, after unhappy experiences of her own when sent away to school, educated her 13 younger half-siblings at home, experimenting with new pedagogical techniques and documenting their progress. She was careful to explain that the principles she set out in the treatise *Practical Education* (published under her own and her father's name in 1798) applied to both public and private pedagogy. But when considering children's literature she announced that her thoughts chiefly concerned 'children who are to be brought up in a private family' (Edgeworth & Edgeworth, 1798, vol. 1, p. 324). Notably, she praised Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778–1779) for its homeliness: 'Mrs Barbauld has judiciously chosen to introduce a little boy's daily history in these books' which will make 'all children ... extremely interested' because 'they are very apt to expect that every thing which happens to him [the book's protagonist] is to happen to them' (Edgeworth & Edgeworth, 1798, vol. 1, pp. 318–319). Edgeworth's own writing for children, beginning in 1796 with *The Parent's Assistant*, naturally followed suit.

Fenn, in her *Rational Sports, In Dialogues Passing Among the Children of a Family* (1783a) claimed that 'It is the father's province to attend to the school education; I design to treat of that which belongs to the mother' (Fenn, 1783a, p. xi). But in fact domestic education did not belong exclusively to mothers, for many of the men who wrote for children in the later eighteenth century also claimed that their work had begun in a programme of domestic education. Thomas Day, for instance, begins his *Sandford and Merton* by noting that 'All, who have been conversant in the education of very young children, have complained of the total want of proper books to be put into their hands, while they are taught the elements of reading', insisting 'I have felt this want in common with others, and have been very much embarrassed how to supply it' (Day, 1783–1789, vol. 1, pp. iii–iv). The bestselling *Sandford and Merton* was his solution. It is a novel which vilifies the education on offer at any 'public school', at which 'every vice and folly ... is commonly taught', and which the squirearchy are shown to prefer merely because they allow boys to 'make genteel connections' (Day, 1783–1789, vol. 2, pp. 241, 234). Day recommended instead a

thoroughly independent and egalitarian pedagogy, provided in homes and gardens by the local clergyman Mr Barlow to his two eponymous heroes, one rich, the other poor.

Overall it is clear, then, that the new children's literature, whether schoolbook or pleasure-reading, was presented as having emerged from actual domestic practice. John Ash, for example, tells us that he only ventured to publish his celebrated and long-lasting *Grammatical Institutes: or Grammar, Adapted to the Genius of the English Tongue* (1760), because of his success in using it with his five-year-old daughter (Navest, 2011, p. 29). John Carey (dubbed a 'Classical Teacher' on his title-page) maintained that his *Learning Better than House and Land* (1808) was 'not originally written with a view to publication, but solely intended for the amusement and instruction of an amiable and interesting youth, a private pupil of mine' (Carey, n.d. [1808], p. i). Many of Fenn's prefaces give precise details about how the books she made at home for her nieces' and nephews' use came to be published (see Delaney, 2012, p. 58ff). As Edgeworth put it in *The Parent's Assistant* (1796): 'It seems a very easy task to write for children' but 'Those only who have been interested in the education of a family ... can feel the dangers and difficulties of such an undertaking' (Edgeworth, 1796, p. iv).¹

Second, the new children's literature was being presented not simply as something for children to read, but as a tool for home-schooling parents. Explicit in setting this out is the sub-title of Fenn's *Rational Sports* (c.1783) which explains that the book is 'Designed as a hint to mothers how they may inform the minds of their little people Respecting The Objects With Which They Are Surrounded'. Wollstonecraft's translation of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's *Elements of Morality* (1790) took this further, prefacing the narrative itself with an 'Introductory Address to Parents'. 'I now present this book to you', writes the author, 'earnestly wishing that it may have a proper effect on your children ... But I must say a few words to you concerning the right use of it' (Salzmann, 1790, vol. 1, p. xiii). What follows is a set of lessons in the proprieties of book use: do not let children read the book themselves but read it to them in short bursts, sometimes breaking off suddenly; read it 'after dinner, during a walk, or when the children themselves beg you to tell them something'; assume the voice and manner of the personages in the story; draw attention to the illustrations; fit the extract being read to the present behaviour of the child; question the children on what they have heard (vol. 1, pp. xiv–xvii). Similarly, speaking of 'books of science and general knowledge', Maria Budden advised mothers 'to read the book herself, and give her children the information it contains in her own words' (Budden, 1826, pp. 33–34). The same principles applied even to fiction, and many children's novels begin with frontispieces that clearly show the book in the hands of a parent to whom children raptly attend. Such modes of use were the norm, at least in terms of prescription if not actual practice (Grenby, 2011, pp. 242–247). They applied not only to very young children, nor only to boys.

Third, if the new children's literature was *of* and *for* the domestic household, it was also almost always *about* the home. This familial *mise-en-scène* was frequently

recorded even in book titles, and authors of the new children's literature made a virtue of the smallness of their canvases. As the preface to the English translation of Arnaud Berquin's *L'Ami des enfans* (1782 [translated version 1786]) put it, contrasting the new children's literature with what had gone before, 'Instead of those wild fictions of the Wonderful, in which their understanding is too commonly bewilder'd, they [child readers] will here see only what occurs or may occur within the limits of their families'. Children reading his book, Berquin continued, would be 'accompanied by none, except their parents, the companions of their pastimes' (Berquin, 1786, vol. 1, pp. 16–17). Texts that might have opened up the world to children were methodically constricted. Thus in *The New Robinson Crusoe* (a 1788 translation of Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere*) the story of Defoe's adventurous and independent castaway was re-framed as an account given to his children, his wife and occasional visiting friends by Mr Billingsley, an archetypal educating father, around the parlour fire over a series of 31 evenings. The children write letters to Crusoe (one wonders how the original Crusoe, notorious for filial disobedience, would have received their advice to 'Take pains to be industrious and good' for 'that will please every body, and especially your father and mother' (Campe, 1788, vol. 2, p. 22)). But the furthest away from home they get is a field trip to Margate. What Myers calls 'domestic realism' was the prevailing form of the new children's literature: 'colloquial dialogues and conversations, homely natural and household detail, anecdotes of meaningful moral choice drawn from the everyday world' (Myers, 1986, p. 38).

Indeed, in the majority of children's moral tales the outside world was presented as a dangerous place. The world was full of swindlers and assailants, rivers in which one might drown and 'gipseys' plotting abduction. The furthest from home that most fictional children were allowed to go without mishap was the garden, and children's fictions were frequently set in arbours, bowers or summer houses, a 'transitional zone', as Elise L. Smith notes, 'set apart from the wildness of nature but more flexible, both spatially and socially, than the confined rooms of the home', and where adult observation could unobtrusively continue (Smith, 2008, pp. 45, 24). In particular, although the new children's literature did include school stories, school was presented as full of perils. In Edgeworth's 'The Barring-Out; or, Party Spirit' (1796) the school is riven by factions and the boys become progressively more depraved, finally seizing control of their classroom and shutting out their teacher. In George Walker's *The Adventures of Timothy Thoughtless: or, the Misfortunes of a Little Boy who ran away from Boarding-School* (1813), 10-year-old Timothy, having been sent away to Greengrove House school in Northamptonshire, falls in with his 'evil-disposed' schoolfellow Will Grumble, who persuades him to run away rather than face the school's harsh discipline. Following their escape, Grumble dies and Thoughtless is robbed, becomes a beggar, poorhouse inmate, and chimney-sweep, before being tearfully reunited with his family. Indeed, school was a watchword for vice. In Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* (1786), written to encourage children 'to shew compassion to the *Animal Creation*', the children are divided neatly into two groups, those who are home-schooled who are kind to animals, and

those sent to school, who are not (Trimmer, 1786, p. vii). Selfish, even callous parents, send their children to schools, like Trimmer's Mrs Addis who, too fond of animals, lavishes all her love on her pets, and remarks 'I am obliged to keep the boy [her son] almost continually at school, for he is so cruel to my *dear little precious creatures*, that there is no bearing him *at home*' (p. 102). Or school can be a punishment, as in Lucy Watkins' *The History and Adventures of Little James and Mary* (1813), where, because she is 'obstinate and sullen' at home, Mary's parents hope that 'a poor parish school ... will teach her industry'. The humbling experience works, and her mother welcomes her back. 'Pleased to hear she is to stay at home, she resolves not to neglect her book' (Watkins, 1813, p. 27).

In fact, one might argue that the whole genre of the school story, emerging around the turn of the nineteenth century, was founded not on enthusiasm for public schooling but on scepticism. Dorothy Kilner's *Anecdotes of a Boarding-School* (c.1790) conceded that schooling outside the home could sometimes be necessary ('Were your mamma's time at her own disposal, I doubt not but she would gladly dedicate every moment to your improvement; and, by her assiduity, amply supply the place of all other instructions'), but the 'attendant evils ... which await a boarding-school education, are such, as ... counter-balance the advantages that arise from it'. Kilner explains that she wrote the book, one of the earliest school stories, as (oxymoronically) 'an Antidote to the *vices* of those *useful* seminaries' (Kilner, c.1790, vol. 1, pp. vi–vi; emphasis added). A domestic education, on the other hand, was the ideal, as practised, for instance, by Mr Billingsley in *The New Robinson Crusoe*:

having a pretty large family, and but a moderate fortune, [he] determined to undertake himself the care of his children's education. He proposed, by this plan, on the one hand, to avoid the enormous expence of keeping them at what are called genteel boarding-schools, and, on the other, to enjoy the pleasing observation of their improvement in learning, sense, and good behaviour. To remark, with silent but attentive eyes, the gradual advance of his children towards the perfection of reason and virtue; to assist, with his advice and instruction, their endeavours to become more learned, honest, and wise; and to have the happy consciousness, that he should one day be considered, what all parents ought, as the instrument and cause of his children's eternal welfare; all this, he thought, would be more than sufficient reward for whatever cares and fatigue he should undergo in the course of their education. (Campe, 1788, pp. 23–24)

The logic of Mr Billingsley's educational decision, and its sentimental appeal, was designed to be difficult to resist.

Likewise, Edgeworth's 'The Good Aunt' (from *Moral Tales*, 1801 in Edgeworth, 2013) offers a dramatised intervention into the debate on public and private education. The eponymous aunt had systematically 'educated herself, that she might be able to fulfil the important duty of educating a child' (Edgeworth, 2013, p. 100). Her instruction of her orphaned nephew, Charles, is exemplary, and notably domestic, not only in that it happens at home, but also because her tools of instruction are both books and 'The conversation of the sensible, well-informed people who visited Mrs. Howard', for 'A child may learn as much from

conversation as from books; not so many historic facts, but as much instruction' (p. 101). Only the Latin and Greek is outsourced, to a private tutor. However, when Charles is 'about thirteen' (p. 107) his aunt loses her wealth and she is forced to send Charles to Westminster School, she herself setting up a boarding house there for a number of pupils. In contrast to the serene and enlightened learning environment of Mrs Howard's home, the school is a brutal and deeply unscholarly place, where snobbishness and bullying are endemic. Edgeworth's preference seems clear. To favour public education would be to align oneself with the foolish Mrs Holloway, one of Mrs Howard's visitors, who bases her preference for public schooling on the experience of her son Augustus (one of the school's worst bullies as it turns out). She boasts of Augustus' proficiency in Latin but adds (condemning herself out of her own mouth) 'to be sure, it was flogged into him well at first, at a public school, which, I understand, is the best way of making good scholars' (p. 105).

We will return to Mrs Holloway, an imprudent and unsympathetic mother who, like Trimmer's Mrs Addis, sends her son away to school because she is unwilling to curtail her own pleasures by educating him herself. For now, though, we should note that Edgeworth's apparent repugnance to public schooling fits into a larger picture. The prevailing view on education adopted by the new children's literature seems set: the parent is the proper teacher, the home the proper schoolroom, and (unless warning against the dangers of leaving it) the household the proper subject for a children's book. These initial conclusions, however, need to be subjected to further scrutiny.

2. Continuity not dichotomy

We should be cautious about reading the new children's literature purely as a product developed for the domestic market or as a textual manifestation of arguments being made in favour of domestic education.

First, the line between home and school education was often very blurred. Public schooling, particularly in rural areas, was often extremely informal, sourced on an *ad hoc* and intermittent basis to supplement, not replace, home-schooling. 'Groups of parents ... banded together to find teachers for their children', Susan Whyman concludes from her reading of family letters, hiring 'local residents, often women, who charged by the week and might be paid with local produce' who would set up school in 'makeshift places of instruction' like 'parlours and porches' that 'do not appear in lists of licensed schools' (Whyman, 2009, pp. 87, 107). The small schools that began to proliferate in the late eighteenth century, especially for girls, also 'often fall into a gap between formal definitions of public and private education' because they were often established by a single 'master' or 'governess', lasted only until that single teacher retired, and often 'advertised themselves as offering a familial, affectionate and *domestic* environment' (Hilton & Shefrin, 2009, pp. 10–11). Even at the major boys' boarding schools the line between public and private education could be indistinct, the pupils generally living in 'houses' (like that established by Edgeworth's Good Aunt) and almost always having their

classroom instruction supplemented by private tuition. Further, parental supervision often did not diminish for those away at boarding schools. As Whyman and Clare Brant both note, letters flowed between parents and children, often providing quite formal instruction alongside the general advice and family news, and, argues Brant, acting as a tool of surveillance (Brant, 2006, pp. 65, 76–77; Whyman, 2009, pp. 37–41). In Fenn’s early school story *School Occurrences*, Miss Worthy’s mother establishes an outpost of home in the potentially hostile territory of school by annotating her daughter’s books to show her which passages she may read and which she may not. Miss Pert, a schoolfellow, is scornful: ‘I wonder that you have not strings to your eye-lids, and the ends kept in your Mamma’s hands’ (Fenn, 1783b, pp. 88–94). Those strings are supposed to show that home and school need not be, nor should not be, entirely separate worlds.

Moreover, the debate on public versus private education was not always as polarised as we might imagine. Edgeworth’s starting position in *Practical Education* was that ‘A father, who has time, talents, and temper, to educate his family, is certainly the best possibly preceptor, and his rewards will be the highest degree of domestic facility’. Yet when pushed to confront the realities of middle-class child-care in the late eighteenth century, Edgeworth acknowledged that such an ideal education would not always be possible, for ‘how are men in business or in trade, artists or manufacturers, to educate their families, when they have not time to attend to them’ or ‘may not think themselves perfectly prepared to undertake the classical instruction, and entire education of boys?’ (Edgeworth & Edgeworth, 1798, vol. 2, p. 502). Her solution (for boys, implicitly) was therefore a continuum that mixed public and private: ‘In his father’s house the first important lessons, those which decide his future abilities and character, must be learned’, she wrote, recommending a system in which ‘parents educated their children well for the first eight or nine years of their lives, and then sent them all to public seminaries’ (vol. 2, p. 505). Naturally, *Moral Tales*, the volume of stories ‘written to illustrate the opinions delivered in *Practical Education*’ (and in which ‘The Good Aunt’ appeared), supported this opinion. In its preface, Richard Lovell Edgeworth conceded that public schools can form character and develop potential, but argues that the ‘solid advantages’ of school education must be ‘secured by previous domestic instruction’ (Edgeworth, 2003, vol. 10, p. 170). In this light, the apparent critiques of public schooling presented in Edgeworth’s and Trimmer’s children’s fiction become less attacks on public schooling *per se* than on inadequate parenthood (especially motherhood) as embodied by Mrs Holloway and Mrs Addis. It is these parents’ failure to prepare their sons for school that leads to the children’s scholastic shortcomings and moral collapse once there—their bullying and cruelty—not the institutions themselves.

If Edgeworth’s writing on education proposed a pragmatic supersession model that linked private and public pedagogy sequentially, others thought that home and school should be thoroughly interfused. In his 1797 essay discussing ‘Public and Private Education’, Godwin concluded that ‘The objections to both the modes of education here discussed are of great magnitude’ so that ‘It is unavoidable to

enquire, whether a middle way might not be selected, neither entirely public, or entirely private, avoiding the mischiefs of each, and embracing the advantages of both' (Godwin, 1797, p. 64). Wollstonecraft had written against public schooling ('hot-beds of vice and folly') but in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she wrote that 'further experience has led me to view the subject in a different light' and she worried that schooling at home meant that children 'there acquire too high an opinion of their own importance' (Wollstonecraft, 1792, pp. 363–364). Children learn best, she concluded, among other children, and her solution, as Alan Richardson summarises, was to call for 'a middle ground between the inadequate pedagogy and supervision of boarding-schools and the confinement of an adult-dominated "private" education ... where children can learn together while enjoying the domestic comforts—and maintaining the domestic ties—of home' (Richardson, 2002, p. 34). Interestingly, Thomas Arnold, the celebrated headmaster of Rugby School from 1827 and of course the inspiration for 'the Doctor' in Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), thought very similarly. He deplored 'the effect of the public schools of England to lower and weaken the connexion between parent and child', and strongly recommended that boys continue to live at home while attending his school, 'being at once at school and at home'. Thus they would have all the advantages of a professional education and the company of their peers but would also be 'keeping up all their home affections' and 'never losing that lively interest in all that is said and done under their father's roof' (Arnold, 1833, pp. 93 and 96).

The home in which, following Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin brought up five children (two of whom were Wollstonecraft's daughters, three of whom were the children of his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont) was a real-life example of the 'middle ground' between public and private that Wollstonecraft had sought. As if following Edgeworth's advice about the continuum of education, having educated them at home initially, Godwin sent his two boys to the Charterhouse school as day boys, Charles probably in 1806 aged 11, and his half-brother William in 1811 aged eight. The girls too enjoyed a hybrid private–public education: biographers have recovered a patchwork of paternal tuition, visiting tutors, dame schools and boarding schools. But what is more striking is that the Godwin's private household itself functioned as a semi-public schoolroom, what Julie Carlson characterises as 'a public house or coffeehouse where ideas are read, discussed, composed, diffused', and where children were active participants (Carlson, 2007, p. 82). The diary that Godwin fastidiously kept makes clear that many visitors crossed his threshold, took tea or stayed to supper, or simply joined in the family's educational practices. One such caller, when he was in London from 1808, was Aaron Burr (formerly Thomas Jefferson's vice-president). His journal records that he socialised and engaged in educational activities not only with Godwin himself but with the whole family. He gives some wonderful vignettes of the conduct, and effects, of this private–public education, as for instance in his entry for 15 February 1812:

In the evening, William, the only son of W. Godwin, a lad of about 9 years old, gave his weekly lecture; having heard how Coleridge and others lectured, he would also lecture;

and one of his sisters (Mary, I think) writes a lecture, which he reads from a little pulpit which they have erected for him. He went through it with great gravity and decorum. The subject was, 'The Influence of Governments on the Character of the People.' After the lecture we had tea, and the girls sang and danced an hour (Burr, 1838, vol. 2, p. 307)

This was an echo of Godwin's memories of his own childhood sermonising: 'in the kitchen every Sunday afternoon, and at other times, mounted in a child's high chair, indifferent as to the number of persons present at my exhibitions, and undisturbed at their coming and going' (Godwin, 1992, p. 17). Godwin understood 'family', Carlson says, 'as a public-oriented relation' and 'home as a sphere of enquiry among familiars', and 'no one at home, not even the children, [was to] be treated as a child or be allowed to act like one' (Carlson, 2007, pp. 84, 86).

The new children's literature could represent exactly this kind of public, pedagogical family. The best known example is probably John Aikin and Anna Lætitia Barbauld's successful *Evenings at Home* (1809 [1792–1796]), set in the exemplary Fairborne household: 'The house was seldom unprovided with visitors ... intimate friends or relations of the owners, who were entertained with cheerfulness and hospitality, free from ceremony and parade'. These visitors make an active contribution to the education of the 'numerous progeny of children of both sexes' by writing the short texts that are read on the eponymous evenings to the assembled company, and which fill the six volumes. What is notable is that these reading and discussion sessions take place only when 'all the children were assembled in the holidays', both those 'sent out to school' and those 'educated at home under their parents' care' (Aikin & Barbauld, 1809 [1792–1796], vol. 1, pp. 1–2). 'Evenings at home' are in addition to 'days at school', not an alternative.

In fact, it is probably truer to say that the new children's literature served a hybrid private–public educational model than it did domestic education alone. Titles and paratexts are often careful to stress that no divide existed (perhaps to maximise their market). *A Present for Children*, a miscellany containing catechisms, dialogues, songs, prayers, riddles and fables published in Edinburgh in 1761, was, according to its full title, 'For the use of children, either at home, or at school'. William Butler hoped that his *Geographical and Biographical Exercises, Designed for the Use of Young Ladies* (1799) would add to a growing collection of books 'which have made their way into almost every school and private family' (Butler, 1799, p. v). *Easter Holidays, or Domestic Conversations* (1797), by Althea Fanshawe, builds a bridge between home from school in its very title, and then presents an idealised portrait of the pedagogic mother whose 'eldest son was at a public school' while the instruction of her younger, 'scarcely seven years old', was her 'constant occupation' and 'the most interesting undertaking' (p. 2). She teaches French and Italian to her daughters too, employing masters for their other lessons, although (apparently being in agreement with Wollstonecraft's contention that children learn best among other children) 'by the Masters coming regularly together on the same day, and meeting several more of the neighbours children ... they enjoyed the advantages of

emulation, and all learned better then [*sic*] could have been the case had each had her lesson singly' (Fanshawe, 1797, p. 2).

Even as the school story became a mature genre in the mid-nineteenth century, it continued to make a case for a blended public–private education in which parents, peers and teachers all contribute to a successful education. A classic example is Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1841). The hero, Hugh, longs to be sent to the boarding school his older brother attends and, finding that the preparatory education he is receiving at home is not profiting him, his parents concede. Initially, he finds the school harsh. He is told that 'To prosper at Crofton, you must put off home' (Martineau, 1841, p. 164). Home and school seem at this stage to be presented as opposites and, as in Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, it is as if the self that had been created at home must be systemically deconstructed so that he can be renewed in the image of the school. Gradually Hugh begins to fit in and prosper, but a boisterous game causes an accident which leads to the amputation of his foot. He returns home where he is nursed back to health by his family. The novel has been described as 'a tale of home values triumphing over school' (Holt, 2008, p. 42) and as containing 'a covert rhetoric of domesticity' (Gargano, 2007, p. 107). But, as Judy Bainbridge argues, it is the joint influence of home and school that enables him to heal: his mother's care but also his schoolmates' determination that he should not wallow in self-pity or become unduly dependent on his family (Bainbridge, 2015, p. 74). Ultimately, he is able to integrate the values and virtues of home and school. Strikingly, his mother even connives in the schoolboy code of honour that precludes him from revealing the identity of the boy who had caused his accident, giving a further demonstration of Martineau's conviction that the ethos of the home and the school need not be in competition. Other early Victorian school stories make the same kind of intervention in the debate on public and private education, showing how the two practices might be reconciled: Elizabeth Missing Sewell's *Laneton Parsonage* (1846–1848), for example, and Emily May's *Louis' Schooldays* (1851) (Bainbridge, 2015, pp. 60 and 78–85).

The limited evidence we have of actual practice also suggests that the new children's literature was used in both school and home environments. A copy of Elizabeth Semple's moral tales *Gertrude, Agnes and Melite, and Amelia Douglas* (1804) bears inscriptions giving both a home and a school address. A highly-coloured harlequinade (an early variety of moveable book) entitled *Mother Goose* (1809) is inscribed with a boy's name and where he could be found: '5th Class, / No. 15 Third Desk'. A copy of *Midsummer Holydays* (1790) was apparently taken from home to school, since it was inscribed with the reminder 'to be brought home at Xmas' (Grenby, 2011, p. 205). Books owned by schools seem to have travelled in the other direction too, judging by a printed label pasted into a copy held in the Cotsen Children's Library of John Huddleston Wynne's *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral, and Divine ... For the Use of Schools* (1784). The label identifies the book as the property of 'Ware-School', gives the date 'Christmas, 1785' and records 'This was delivered, whole, neat, covered, and named, to —', with a blank space for a name to be inserted, and then the note 'N.B. Every injury

done to this book is to be laid before Mr. French' (Wynne, 1784). Jan Fergus' revealing work on the number of Newbery books bought by the boys attending Rugby School shows clearly how central non-school books were to school life (Fergus, 2006, appendix 3). Interestingly, Fergus' conclusions about why 'works associated with the feminine'—titles such as *Goody Two-Shoes*—should appeal to the boys, enduring such a 'harsh educational and social regime at Rugby' is that these books 'allowed boys to create an alternative home, a child's space, where they could be children in a different way than a hostile, exacting school culture permitted' (p. 241).

Moreover, in its content, the new children's literature habitually blurs the boundary between private and public education. The home was often depicted in very similar terms to school, and schools, as depicted in children's books, were very often distinctly domestic. The tone had been set by Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (1749), usually accounted the first school story, in which Mrs Teachum's nine pupils are presented as a surrogate family, replacing the husband and children who have died before the opening of the book. Mrs Teachum's maternal qualities are given far more emphasis than her professional qualifications; or rather her professional qualifications *are* her maternal qualities. 'Forty Years old, tall and genteel in her Person, tho' somewhat inclined to Fat ... she had something perfectly kind and tender in her Manner' (Fielding, 1749, p. 3). This same emphasis that domesticity was essential to a good public education endured into the nineteenth century, and not only for girls' schools. Elizabeth Sandham's *The Boys' School* (1821) is even more explicit in figuring Mr Morton's school as, fundamentally, a home:

His school was a private one for a limited number of boys; and, as he did not permit any person to assist him in the arduous task of their education, his whole time and attention were devoted to his pupils. He narrowly observed their different dispositions and tempers; and, while he slackened not his attention to their improvement in learning, he endeavoured to regulate their minds, to teach them to govern their passions, instead of allowing themselves to be governed by them; and guarded each boy from those errors to which his predominant inclination might lead him. ... Mrs Morton did her part towards making them happy: she attended to their most trifling wants with maternal solicitude. ... Having no children of their own, Mr and Mrs Morton considered their scholars as their family, and acted towards them as affectionate parents. Equal attention was paid to all; and, whatever private opinion Mr Morton might form of his pupils, he discovered no partiality, but reproved and commended each as their conduct deserved. (Sandham, 1821, p. 102)

The word 'each' carries substantial weight. The most important advantage of domestic education was that a parent or tutor would know the individual talents, and needs, of each pupil. Thus Edgeworth, holding in her hands, she says, a book used by an exemplary domestic educator, applauded the fact that 'different stories have been marked with the initials of different names by this cautious mother, who considered the temper and habits of her children, as well as their ages' (Edgeworth & Edgeworth, 1798, vol. 1, p. 322). The fear was that this individualised education

would be lost at school. But Sandham's *Boys' School* promises that, if run on domestic lines, a school can still provide such personalised tuition.

Among the Abinger Papers in the Bodleian Library may be found an intriguing and entirely neglected example of the school story that further blurs the divide between public and private education. It is an incomplete manuscript apparently intended for publication by the 'Juvenile Library', the publishing firm established by Godwin and his second wife Mary Jane in 1805. It is undated and, save for a title, 'Salt Hill', written by Godwin, is in an unknown hand and its authorship remains obscure.² The full title reads 'Juvenile Accomplishments, or the Amusements of Salt Hill. For the Use of ~~Children~~ Schools', the deletion already betraying a certain confusion about the proper place for children's book use, or perhaps a wish for greater precision. After a 'Preface' which talks about the admirable books that have been produced 'for the perusal of children from five to ten years of age' but the lack of available material for 'boys of an age somewhat farther advanced', the text proper begins with a description of a 'little school ... the like of which you see in the neighbourhood of town, with an inscription in large letters where *Young Gentlemen are boarded & taught till they are fit for Masters*', or, to be more precise, for boys 'from the age of four or five years to the age of eleven, when they were transplanted to Eton, Westminster or Harrow' (Anon, n.d., f. 1^v). One of the pupils at this school is Richard Acheson. His father 'felt an extreme anxiety for the progress of his son, & his interest in this consideration was heightened by the talents & dispositions that already discovered themselves in the mind of the boy.' It is this parental concern to fit tuition to the boy's individual aptitudes that leads him to propose a scheme for the father and son to meet periodically, along with several of his son's school friends, at the Salt Hill inn, near the school. At these meetings Mr Acheson would 'propose a question to them upon which they were to communicate their sentiments in a free & unrestrained manner' (ff. 2^r–3^r). Discussion ranges across a variety of subjects, but the manuscript gives out after a few pages.

'Salt Hill' is interesting for many reasons. It is a conduct or courtesy book for boys—and adults—that sets out the advantages of conversation flowing freely between parents and children which will 'develop their talents, their humours, their inclinations & their character' (Anon, n.d., f. 2^v–3^r). In the present context though, what is striking is its representation of Mr Acheson's good practice in refusing to relinquish the duty, and advantages, of private education even once his son has gone away to school. Here is a textual manifestation of the 'middle way' that Godwin hoped for his *Enquirer* essay, 'neither entirely public, or entirely private, avoiding the mischiefs of each, and embracing the advantages of both' (Godwin, 1797, p. 64).

3. Conclusions

There are good reasons for thinking of the children's literature of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a product that developed to serve the

demands of a growing home education market. The subjects of many of these children's books were domestic, and so was their prevailing ethos. However, what has become clear is that this new children's literature actually endorsed a more mixed economy of education. Indeed, in some instances children's books can be read as interventions in the debate on the advantages of public and private education, making the case for a pragmatic amalgam of the two. Sandham's *Boys' School*, for instance, present a model of blended public-private instruction that offers a utopian vision of the benefits of domesticated model of public schooling. Certainly, such books answered one of the chief objections to public schooling, that it could not provide the kind of personalised, needs-led education that home-schooling promised. Further, some titles represented how well a *continuum* of public and private education could function: not a supersession merely, in which children, chiefly boys, graduated from home to school as they grew older, but rather—as in *Evenings at Home* or 'Salt Hill'—an interweaving of public and private, with children able simultaneously to benefit from both parental and professional instruction. What the children's literature of this period shows us then is that the boundaries between domestic and public education were porous, and that rigid demarcation was something that was often resisted.

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Notes

1. By 1826 this tenet had become so dominant that even Edgeworth's credentials were being questioned, since she had not herself been a mother. Had she been 'Mrs Edgeworth', 'a man of sound judgment and considerable experience' told the children's writer and educationalist Maria Budden, her books would have been worth reading. That not being the case, Budden herself 'immediately commenced her memoranda of all she tried and all she effected' in her own family, allowing her in time to produce a book that was 'the result of *twenty years*' experience in a family of six children, three sons and three daughters' (Budden, 1826, pp. v–vi).
2. It is possible Godwin was the author, employing an amanuensis, although no mention of the book is to be found in his diary or letters. It may be significant that the main text is prefaced by a letter addressed 'My dear Charles'. Godwin's step-son was Charles Clairmont, who began at Charterhouse school aged 11 in 1806. In the manuscript, Salt Hill school is for boys up to the age of 11.

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