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Childhood and Children's Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550–1800, ed.
Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore. New York: Routledge, 2006.

This volume is a collection of essays based on papers delivered at the 2002 conference, “Seen and Heard: The Place of Children in Early Modern Europe 1550–1800.” The fourteen essays in the collection cover topics as varied as the street-life play of children in eighteenth-century Germany to the cultural power of the child actor in Renaissance England. These essays have retained the virtue of a conference paper in that each is written with a clear direction and focus; at the same time, each piece contains a wealth of historical discussion that locates “childhood” within class, gender, socio-political, religious, and literary matrices of meaning. Although the essays in this collection do not introduce new approaches to children’s literature and culture, they do introduce new texts and little-known documents and show how to fit these works into ongoing considerations of literary and social history. Because almost two thirds of the collection covers eighteenth-century works, *Childhood and Children's Books* is of particular value to scholars interested in the Enlightenment.

Few of these essays are about literature in the traditional sense. Rather, they see “childhood” as a Raymond Williams–style cultural keyword, as a term whose history is a record of “a shared body of words and meanings, in our most general discussions . . . of the practices and institutions which we group as *culture* and *society*” (Williams 13). Fittingly, Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore’s introduction overviews changing scholarly conceptions of children’s literature and history. As the editors note, scholars now see “the boundary between subcultures and the wider social environment as fluid,” and are compelled to move beyond “simple oppositions between childhood and adolescence or childhood and adulthood” into more nuanced and historically situated inquiries (4). Children are “liminal beings” who, when recognized as a special category of humanity, have “the potential to reveal deeper truths about the social structure” (5). For purposes of discussion, I will group the essays, which cover 250 years of socio-cultural history,

into four categories: essays about specific children, children's books, pedagogy, and childhood.

Three essays focus on actual children and their texts. These essays use a specific child as the jumping-off point for cultural analyses. Michael Witmore examines a late fifteenth-century witch trial in which several children accused neighbors of being witches. Witmore shows how the child status of the accusers gave the use of bodily evidence a special kind of validity. Michael Mascuch's presentation of the spiritual awakening and ministry of a seventeenth-century adolescent, Sarah Wight, challenges assumptions that Protestantism is a story of reading and writing. In Wight's childlike body and religious ministry, "embodiment and gesture" are more important than text (104). In "Otto's Watch," by Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, a German boy's day book initiates a larger discussion about late eighteenth-century conceptions of time.

Only three essays in *Childhood and Children's Books* cover what is traditionally considered children's literature, i.e., books written for child readers. This fact is a good indication of the collection's orientation toward historical and cultural rather than literary work. Cynthia J. Koepp's delightful essay on Abbé Pluche's children's encyclopedia, *Spectacle de la nature* (1732–51), demonstrates how this fascinating book of dialogues, experiments, illustrations, and other genres champions Enlightenment thinking in that it emphasizes experiential learning. As an example of such hands-on learning, Koepp quotes a vivid if gruesome experiment in which a young reader is encouraged to take the "eye of a sheep or ox freshly killed," trim off its outer covering "down to the final membrane that contains the liquid," and hold a piece of parchment paper behind it. The child will be able to see inverted images through the sheep's eye on the paper; thus, the experiment demonstrates that the human eye sees images inverted (169). The other two essays on children's literature cover the same text, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*. Jan Fergus traces booksellers' records and finds that, out of a total of 193 titles purchased by Rugby school boys in the late eighteenth century, *Goody Two-Shoes* was the seventeenth most popular title. Fergus suggests that *Goody Two-Shoes*' popularity proves that the book was not just a didactic work foisted off on children by their parents; it appealed to boys on its own merits, perhaps because the text's multiple voices and embedded genres allowed readers to project themselves into the text. Patricia Crain's superb interpretation of *Goody Two-Shoes* argues that the text presents literacy as a form of portable capital. Marjory Meanwell's

family loses their land and property (the old style of capital), and in compensation Marjory gains portable capital in the form of two shoes and literacy. These three essays are among the strongest in the collection, and the work on Pluche's encyclopedia—an eighteenth-century international bestseller that is seldom examined at any length—is especially welcome.

The two essays about pedagogy introduce actual individuals who developed, disseminated, or adopted eighteenth-century education innovations. William McCarthy contrasts three prominent figures, Thrale, Barbauld, and Itard, who variously represent a high-culture conservative approach to education (memorization of an important body of works and facts) or a more child-centered, whole-language approach. Either mode of education has its practitioners today. McCarthy argues that the roots of today's political debates about education are in the eighteenth century. Jill Shefrin suggests that there was a network of aristocratic women who were influenced by the teachings of Madame de Beaumont (best known today as the author of the popular version of "Beauty and the Beast"). In effect, Shefrin's discoveries disprove a standard assumption that aristocratic women were not involved in the day-to-day education of children.

The last group of essays is about childhood as a practice, a special cultural space, or a concept. These essays explore how late sixteenth-century debates about how to classify a child as human led to an analysis of the nature of reason, innate sin, self-control, and, ultimately, animal versus human laughter. As Erica Fudge notes, learning to laugh was serious business for early modern philosophers who were wrestling with the Aristotelian truism that "man is the only creature who laughs" and a second truism, that a human is a "rational animal." The infant—who neither laughs nor reasons—must be taught to do both. Two essays focus on the child in English Renaissance theater. Marianne Novy studies the portrayal of children in Shakespeare's late romances, and Claire M. Buse explores the child actor on the early modern stage. Buse begins by contrasting Ben Jonson's three poems on the death of children in order to show how the child actor differs from the non-public child. The poems show the status of children as owned by God, parents, or a theater company, but the child actor is in a special relation to the author. The child actor, though a possession of the theater, can be unruly and uncontrollable. Kristina Straub's "In the Posture of Children" notes that eighteenth-century servants, whether children or not, were presented as children—a representation that obscured the economic

element in the power-relations between servant and master and that had pedagogical, disciplinary, and domestic consequences. Servants were to be taught middle-class values, and they were to be as unthinkingly loyal to their employers as children are to their fathers. Jürgen Schlumbohm's investigation of German childhood in the eighteenth century attempts to uncover the daily lives of children in different social classes, "the socialization process as it happened outside of the schools" (306). Schlumbohm gives a very useful depiction of the life of working-class children, a topic that is less familiar to today's scholars than that of middle-class children.

With its historical breadth and international focus, *Childhood and Children's Books* is a welcome addition to the growing body of recent work on children's literature and culture before the so-called "golden age" of nineteenth-century children's publishing. There are, however, some structural drawbacks to this book. One unfortunate aspect of the collection is that it is very difficult to navigate. The table of contents lists chapters by partial titles and thus omits the important information in the subtitles. In a work as heterogeneous as *Childhood and Children's Books*, this omission means that the scholarly reader who picks up the book to peruse a particular essay is unlikely to browse through other selections. Who, for example, would know the topic or even the century covered in the essays "Spectral Literacy" and "Otto's Watch" without their respective subtitles: "The Case of *Goody Two-Shoes*" and "Enlightenment, Virtue, and Time in the Eighteenth Century"? The confusion caused by the lack of subtitles is exacerbated by the book's organization. The fourteen essays are printed in chronological order, but there are no subsections to assist the reader by bringing the essays into smaller, more manageable groups. Another problem for researchers is that the book's index is frustratingly inconsistent. In any given page of the collection, various authors are indexed while others are mysteriously omitted. Michael Behaim, Pierre Bourdieu, Gertrud Lenzer, Hugh Cunningham, Carolyn Steedman, Mitzi Myers, and Carlo Ginzburg are all mentioned by name and discussed to some extent in the introduction, but they—unlike Michel Foucault and Philippe Ariès—are left out of the index. In chapter two, the seventeenth-century author Daniel Widdowes makes the index, but Artemidorus, whose 1606 edition of *The Judgement* is quoted at length on the same page, does not (20–21). This sort of inconsistency does a disservice to the scholars whose work is included in this collection, and makes this collection less useful than it should be. That being said, *Childhood and Children's Books* is an excel-

lent work that adds to our scholarly knowledge of early childhood and children's literature.

Work Cited

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.