

## Book Reviews

Patricia Crain. *Reading Children: Literacy, Property, and the Dilemmas of Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 280 pp.

Paul B. Ringel. *Commercializing Childhood: Children's Magazines, Urban Gentility, and the Ideal of the Child Consumer in the United States, 1823–1918*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015. 272 pp.

Allison Speicher. *Schooling Readers: Reading Common Schools in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016. 248 pp.

The first decade and a half of the twenty-first century has seen a substantial expansion in scholarship focused on cultures and histories of children and childhood. Patricia Crain's *Reading Children*, Paul Ringel's *Commercializing Childhood*, and Allison Speicher's *Schooling Readers* represent some of the best of this new work that is centered on the nineteenth century. Each of these books is a nuanced and innovative study that offers scholars interested in the history of education new ways of thinking about how the production of materials for children to read and the culture of childhood reading intersect with the history of instructional reading practices in the United States. Read together, these books offer a richly textured view of the development of reading culture for children during the nineteenth century.

Crain's *Reading Children* brings together studies of childhood and scholarship on the history of the book to explore how literacy and book ownership link to ideas about self-possession and property. Crain explores Lockean theories of education and the social contract and their connection to depictions of literacy and self-ownership in children's text. Crain sees book history, literacy practices and their implementation and circulation, and the history of childhood as connected and "mutually constitutive" (p. 18). The first two chapters examine texts from the early history of children's literature, including *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* and "Babes in the Wood," which depict scenes of children learning to read and images of children who are murdered by adults before they come of age, as key texts that connect developments in concepts of childhood to changes in ideas about literacy. She argues that miniature illustrated versions of these texts provide records of changes in book history that make book ownership and book reading part of the space and culture of childhood while marking adult conceptions of imagined and remembered childhood experiences.

In chapter three, Crain discusses Joseph Lancaster's educational design, and focuses on its use in schools for Cherokee children. Lancaster's classroom architecture, with its use of slanted floors, and his techniques, which focused on telegraphing abbreviations that large groups of students understood and obeyed instantly, became part of the colonizing project of the missionary schools. Crain examines the renaming of the Cherokee students and offers readings of their letters as examples of what she describes as the "easy enlistment of children as monuments to and memorials and living enactments of adult hopes and desires" (p. 88). At the same time, she argues that the letters do not entirely erase personality or agency, but instead show the persistence of voice and agency in the face of a powerful and supposedly entirely reproducible factory-like system of literacy education.

Chapter four discusses how books for children educate child readers about contracts and about the value of their time, labor, and expertise. Crain offers in-depth readings of Jacob Abbott's books for children and young adults. These are somewhat underexamined texts for children that offer details of children's culture and education in white, Protestant New England. Crain's study of Abbott productively takes up the questions of children's property and the ownership of children in antebellum New England that Abbott's series addresses directly and indirectly. Crain argues that some of Abbott's texts, such as *Rollo Learning to Read*, show reading and book ownership as part of what she terms a "literacy contract" ... through which learning to read emblemizes and enacts self-ownership" (p. 101).

Chapter five examines the ways that child readers add their marks of ownership, commentary, and critique to the spaces of books, including names on book covers, commentary in margins, and humorous additions to captions. Crain reads these marks in the margins as evidence of the interconnectedness of book ownership and childhood. In chapter six, Crain takes up Henry James's explorations of childhood and descriptions of children in what she describes as "literary property" (p. 147). She uses the term *medial child* to describe James's use of children in his narratives. This child has "capacities of receptivity and containment, storage and transmission, of relaying and circulation, of connecting and mediating across space and time" (p. 146). Crain sees James's texts as putting on the page an exploration of the connections between adults' views of children and changes in ideas about memory, reading, and self. Crain's coda returns to the image of the child in the window seat that opens her study, and she explores the emergence of the "bedtime story" (p. 171).

Crain's study makes significant contributions to studies of childhood reading practices and spaces. Her examination of reading in

controlled and regulated schoolroom environments as well as private, familial environments adds to current understandings of how public and private scenes of reading and the material culture of books and the spaces in which to read books shape and define childhood.

Paul Ringel's *Commercializing Childhood* focuses on children's magazines of the nineteenth century, exploring how concepts of gentility intersect with understandings of children as consumers. In eight chapters covering a hundred years of magazines, he traces how the orthodox Protestant tradition associated with magazines such as *The Youth's Companion* and the liberal Protestant tradition associated with magazines such as *The Juvenile Miscellany* approach magazine content, with attention to both instructing children and positioning them as consumers in relation to the developing consumer culture.

Extensively researched, Ringel provides both in-depth background about editors and publishers of key children's magazines of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and close readings of articles and serialized texts that demonstrate how gentility and consumerism worked before and after the Civil War. In meticulous detail, his book describes how understanding child readers as "active consumers" changes the way that didactic or educational texts are framed, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century (p. 135).

Ringel's study begins to address large gaps in scholarship on children's periodicals and their function in entertaining and educating children. The book is a critically significant supplement to the overviews of children's periodicals found in Frank Luther Mott's five-volume series *A History of American Magazines* (1930–1968), which won both the Pulitzer Prize (1939) and the Bancroft Prize (1958), and R. Gordon Kelly's *Children's Periodicals of the United States* (1984). Ringel's nuanced and well-argued text offers ways to read children's periodicals as significant records of ideas about children's education and socialization.

Allison Speicher's *Schooling Readers* examines depictions of common schools in nineteenth-century American fiction, using Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier School-Boy* as a starting point for exploring less well-known depictions of the common school. Throughout, Speicher draws attention to key features of the history of common schools as well as details about their materials and furnishings that are relevant to the portrayals of schools in the fictional texts the study examines. Her analysis highlights how repeated scenes and tropes signal key beliefs and ideologies about common school education, including both representations that have not remained in circulation as well as those that are still familiar to literary scholars. Chapter one, "Pedagogues and Performers," examines representations of school exhibitions and spelling bees in common school narratives. It

discusses scenes in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale*, and Caroline Kirkland's *The Schoolmaster's Progress* as well as studies short stories and narratives in children's periodicals and newspapers. Speicher uses the performative and entertaining qualities of the exhibition and bee as a way of exploring the multiple functions of the common school narrative as a form that responds to and critiques school development and reform in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In chapter two, "Combatants and Collaborators," Speicher explores common school narratives that feature violent and depraved schoolteachers who abuse corporal punishment, along with accounts that showcase teachers who use friendship and affection to manage their schoolrooms. One of the recurring strands Speicher writes about is the teacher "turnout," which is used in stories to resist and punish teachers who abuse their power.

Other chapters, titled "Teachers and Temptresses" and "Patrons and Parents," focus on how common school histories often critique or reveal how issues of gender, sexuality, money, and power play significant roles in the educational practices and culture of nineteenth-century schoolrooms. Speicher's careful research and close readings of common school fiction pinpoint how key moments in fiction highlight patterns, problems, changes, and reforms in common schools. Her book is useful both for the attention it gives to the reading and publication history of the stories she finds but also for the way she contextualizes the fiction in relation to the development of the common school in the United States.

Crain's *Reading Children*, Ringel's *Commercializing Childhood*, and Speicher's *Schooling Readers* significantly expand existing scholarship on the connections between stories and images of book ownership, topics related to gentility and consumerism in children's magazines, and fiction about common schools and children and children's education. All three texts would enhance collections focused on children's literature, the history of childhood and children's culture, and children's education.

LORINDA COHOON  
*University of Memphis*

doi: 10.1017/beq.2019.7