OPENING THE NURSERY DOOR

Reading, writing and childhood 1600–1900

Edited by Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Watson

London and New York 1997

CHILD'S PLAY OR FINDING THE EPHEMERA OF HOME

Shirley Brice Heath

Philosopher Gaston Bachelard[1] wrote in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) about the primacy of home in adult memories of childhood. He wanted readers to acknowledge that this 'corner of the world' we remember as home becomes in many ways every individual's first universe. Throughout life, in memory and deed, we follow the old saying 'We bring our *lares* with us.' In our memories, we comfort ourselves by reliving a sense of protection, play, and discovery that so often comes to be linked with home and its secrets kept since childhood.

To adults, no scene appears more peaceful than that of the sleeping child tucked away in the nursery, kept company by favourite stuffed animals, books, and toys and covered with a blanket that even by day accompanies the child as a source of comfort. The scattered items about the nursery that have given pleasure in daytime play now seem woven into the fabric of the peaceful nursery. Memories contrast this quiet evening scene with lively events of the child's day – the games played, the choice of playmates, the improvised items necessary to the drama of imagination. Persistent in such recollections lie the ephemera of childhood – the bits and pieces of temporary use, the sets of items that over the years lost some of their original pieces, and the scattered small scraps of handmade materials easily left behind as children grew older.

These ephemera creep into memories of childhood and houses far more freely than students of childhood can acknowledge, for traces of such ephemera reside almost entirely in memory. Blocks, card sets, small chips and game parts, and pictures torn or cut from magazines, unlike expensive sets of books, favourite toys and dolls, and special family board-games, lose their value and are thrown out. But what might such ephemera tell us of what went on in the nursery, before the hearth, or in the corner of rooms where children were sent to be entertained or to entertain themselves with sets of cards or building blocks?

A partial answer to this question comes from a remarkable 'manuscript nursery library'[2] created in the early eighteenth century by a vicar's wife

who lived in Lincolnshire, England. Jane Johnson (1706–59), mother of one daughter and three sons, created hundreds of items arranged in card sets, crib mobiles, and little books. These materials reflect numerous themes aside from the expected learning of the ABC's, and they open a door of interpretation on play with children and early literacy expectations several decades before the publication of children's books began to flourish in the mid-eighteenth century. Jane Johnson and, no doubt, other women of the period, created ephemera for reading and playing with and for their children. They drew on the few books and materials of their youth, intuitions and common sense about the young, as well as on the writings of eminent figures such as John Locke. Jane Johnson's letters to her children and to female friends suggest that these women played out their sense of fashion, design, colour, and texture, as well as some of their reflections on contemporary life, in artistic creations made for their children's delight and instruction.

JANE JOHNSON AND HER CHILDREN

The early history of Jane Johnson is somewhat shrouded in mystery, but we know that she was coheiress with her sister, Lucy, of Richard Russell, Esquire of Warwick, who had married a woman descended from the family of a Lord Chief Justice in Warwickshire. When she died, Richard raised the girls and at his death willed his estate to them. The girls maintained themselves, most probably primarily in London after their father's death until 1727, when they sold the estate to Sir Horace Mann. We know almost nothing of Jane Johnson's life for the next ten years, until she married Woolsey Johnson in 1737 in Olney, Buckinghamshire. He had been educated at Clare Hall, Cambridge, receiving his BA in 1717 and his MA in 1721. In addition to being vicar, he was the patron and impropriator of his inherited estate Witham-on-the-Hill in Lincolnshire, for which he built the manor house and enclosed the Park in 1752. In the cemetery of Witham-on-the-Hill lie both Jane and her husband under a white marble pyramidal tablet set against the north wall of the chancel with the inscription:

> Sacred to the memory of the Revd Woolsey Johnson clerk who died April 21 1756 in the sixtieth year of his age, and Jane his wife daughter of Richard Russell esq. of Warwick, who died February 9 1759 in the fifty second year of her age. Also of George William Johnson, esq. eldest son of the above Woolsey Johnson and Jane his wife who died February 8, 1814, in the seventy fourth year of his age. Through life beloved.

Nearby in the same cemetery is buried George's brother, the Rev. Robert Augustus Johnson (1745–99), who became rector of a nearby

parish and was the only child of Jane's who had children of his own. The remaining son Charles became vicar of the village church in Witham-on-the-Hill.

Barbara (1738–1825) was the eldest child in the family. She never married but remained close to childhood family friends of Lincolnshire and London. She became a member of moderately prominent social circles in London and often visited Witham-on-the-Hill, as well as the family homes of her brothers, especially Robert, with whom she maintained a frequent correspondence until his death in 1799. It is from her letters and memorabilia that we can draw many inferences about the kind of mother Jane Johnson must have been. Barbara kept throughout her life an album of her own fashions and occasions for acquiring and wearing many pieces of her apparel. She also tucked into her album pages and plates she had torn from various Pocket Books, leather-covered calendar books popular with women in the second half of the eighteenth century. Barbara's complete album, along with brief quotes from letters recalling moments of her childhood, is reproduced in *A Lady of Fashion: Barbara Johnson's Album of Styles and Fabrics* (1987).[3]

We may safely assume that Barbara's mother was educated primarily at home, but perhaps also at some nearby girls' school in music, reading and in manners befitting a lady of a country manor similar to that of females portrayed later in the century by novelist Jane Austen. *Emma*[4] (published in 1815) in particular gives considerable insight into the education of such women three-quarters of a century later: 'light' but considerable reading, facility with the piano and needlework, 'elegant, agreeable manners', and a range of knowledge about how to run a household and estate, and to entertain guests. We may assume that Jane Johnson was perhaps not quite so wealthy and comfortable as Jane Austen's heroine Emma Woodhouse, but she was certainly not so dependent on a vicar's salary as Mr Elton in the same novel. Emma reports conversations, thoughts, and perceptions of the characters of her countryside society. She also lets her readers in on their leisure reading of books and letters and pastimes of playing games with handmade alphabet cards created by women of the household for word games.

We know from the letters of Barbara and Jane that the Johnson children and their friends must have had much in common with Jane Austen's Emma. They too had books, wrote and received letters, played alphabet games, and had sets of cards and small handmade books created for their pleasure and for occasional use in the pastime of adults. As children, Barbara and her brothers were expected to be performers, listeners, reading audience, and reading and writing partners. The children wrote, did paper cuttings, painted, told stories, sang, and created a range of types of written and artistic records of their lives, many of which have been

lost but receive mention in letters written by Jane[5] to her children as well as being recalled by Barbara in her letters years later to her nieces and nephews, children of her brother Robert. The family kept a memorandum book to which Barbara refers, and Barbara herself noted on scraps of paper bits and pieces of knowledge about social events of her life and her fashions. In addition, her sense of continuity of the family's art of collecting, illustrating, and documenting must have been at work when she acquired years later the account book kept by a young merchant, George Thomson, between 1738 and 1748 of fashions and styles, as well as the occasion for which they were created. Barbara's album incorporates this account book (simultaneous with the first decade of her own life) and includes as well scraps of her gowns, pinned to album pages with brief notes and plates from various Pocket Books. Fashion illustrations, along with announcements of the 'fashions of the year', receive notice from Barbara who often adds to her album mention of special events in the life of her family and friends as well as well-known figures of the day. These accounts, notes, and illustrations add depth and a sense of continued habits of the home to the next generation from the handmade nursery library of Jane Johnson.

THE NURSERY LIBRARY

Discovered in 1986 in the private collection of Elisabeth Ball, children's book collector, of Muncie, Indiana, the nursery library that Jane Johnson created for her children is now in the possession of the Lilly Library of Indiana University. The collection tells much about expectations of literacy for children, types of activities in the home that revolved around written materials, and ways in which the production of these materials served as literary outlet for their producers – mother and children together. These fragile and tiny materials made by hand from bits of paper, cuttings from newspapers and magazines, and glued together with paste made from flour and water, suggest certain long-running patterns and values of literacy for children of families with upwardly mobile aspirations much like the Johnsons.

Included in the collection are ten series of alphabet cards, two handmade books, six sets of religious lesson cards, and six sets of social commentary cards; the remaining assortment is of word and verse cards organized around syllables, parts of speech and categories of common items from daily life. Most of the cards are approximately 8.5 × 5.3 cm with a backing of Dutch flowered gilt paper; many have woven hangers on one side, suggesting their use as replaceable adornments in the household nursery. Also included in the collection is a handmade square box (4.5 × 4.5 cm) that holds seventy-eight word chips, all of which are about 1.2 cm in height. One side of each of these chips contains a playing-card

symbol cut from brown, orange, and green Dutch gilt paper; the other side contains a single word, mostly from categories of food products, common household furnishings and animate beings about the house and farm (e.g., ale, almonds, bacon, bread; basket, chair, fork, knife, spoon; boy, dog, horse).

Of the two little handmade books in the collection, one gives the primary bit of information in all the materials that identifies Jane Johnson as their creator. This little book (8.5 × 5.3 cm) includes a page on which is inscribed: 'George William Johnson his Book. Printed and Bound by his Mamma 1745', followed by the signature of Jane Johnson. This book contains thirty-six numbered leaves; the words are in black on recto, the lessons are in a now-faded red ink on verso. The lessons are of a religious nature, for example: 'Whoso feareth the Lord it shall go well with him; he shall find favour with God and men.' The lists of words that face each page of lesson fall into categories according to syllabic regularity with each line often, but not always, in alphabetical order with no punctuation marks between them: Beam cream dream.

On the opening pages are pasted exquisitely intricate cut-outs of figures from tear sheets then available from booksellers in London. The cut-outs on these pages are of an elegantly dressed woman with calipers; and on the facing page is a peasant woman with a sheep. The page that is opposite the title page portrays a man holding a large book in his hand. On various pages of the book, apparently at random, are cut-outs of single items, such as a red flower (p. 16) and a yellow fish (p. 17). By about the end of the first third of the book, some lessons are prefaced by 'My son', and these are not of Biblical derivation, but of what we might think of as common sense or daily rules of living: 'My Son, if you value health, drink very little wine or strong Drink of any sort'. A series of lessons on wealth ends the book (pp. 32–6):

> Health is better than Riches, but to be good is better than both.
>
> In the first place, take care to be good; and in the next take care to be Rich.
>
> Never part with one half-penny without a very good reason.
>
> A Fool and his Money are soon parted.
>
> He that will not take care of two pence, will never be worth a groat.

The final pages, unnumbered, include the words: 'The end of this Book', with a picture on the facing page of a woman seated beside a child in the cradle, and another woman standing nearby. The final two pages of the book include the following message, spread across both pages:

My son, so long
as you live,
never forget
the following
Rule,
Always do
unto every
One, as You
would they
should do
Unto You.
Remember
this when I
am dead and
gone.

A second book, entitled 'A New Play Thing', is covered with the same Dutch gilt paper used as backing for most of the lesson cards of the collection. This book includes primarily letters of the alphabet in upper and lower case, with a single word on the left page (A Arm a), and on the right, a collection of consonant and vowel combinations (ba, be, bi, bo, bu). It bears no indication of author or the name of the child for whom the book was made.

Numerous series of cards in the collection bear little relation to alphabet cards, in that each of these cards contains commentary on the social life of the times. Some of these refer to distant events and places; most take in the sweep of everyday life that might have been seen from the window of a country home. For example, one set of cards includes such a description on one side of the card with an appropriate picture cut-out, delicately painted, on the other side. One such example is:

> An Oxford Scholar in his Study, sitting by a Table with Mathematical Instruments before him, and a Globe of the World standing on the ground by him.

Other descriptions of distant scenes ring with a much more personal touch and suggest a rendering of news items referring to men of local renown in a simple country scene:

> Two tame Swans swimming in the River they are the property of George Wrighte Esquire, Member of Parliament of Gothenurst, or Gay-Hurst near Newport Pagnel in the County of Bucks.

The backing picture is of two swans swimming together in a body of water with no identifying landmarks nearby. Yet another of this type refers to George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, who advocated the curative powers of tarwater.

> Doctor Berkley the good Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland, advising Mrs Wilson who has got a Cancer in her Breast to drink Tarwater, and he is likewise sending Patrick Norway his Servant with a Pitcher of Tarwater to a poor woman in Schoolhouse-bae that has got an Ague and Fever.

Backing this card are two pictures: one of an older man giving advice to a woman and another of a man carrying a pitcher.

Others of this series appear to be scenes from a carriage window on rides to nearby shires:

> David Morris, one Farmer Nicholas Bagshaw's Shepherd, with two Sheep, in Orton Field in the County of Westmoreland; he is driving one of them along, with his Hat, to Burton market to sell it.

The picture on the back is of a shepherd tipping his hat, accompanied by two sheep. Still other scenes within this series and several others could be of views from the window of Jane Johnson's own home. Others may come from travels she and her children made to take part in countryside events portrayed in pictures the children and their mother later cut from tear sheets and glued to the cards.

WINDOWS ON THE NURSERY WORLD

The nursery library that Jane Johnson made for her children stands in considerable contrast to the few remaining commercial materials made for children in the same period. These materials consist primarily of battledores (early versions of Hornbooks), ABC tracts or primers, and a few books of fables. Characteristic of all of these was a listing of letters of the alphabet in upper and lower case, with portions of a syllabarium (ba, be, bi, bo, bu, etc.). Portions of Bible verses, didactic sayings, and occasionally a quote from a fable were interspersed with these letters. Some listings of the letters of the alphabet included words that began with each letter, and some of these were internally meaningful ('A apple pastry, B bak'd it, C cut it, D divided it, E eat it, F fought for it, G got it', etc.), though most simply listed words.

The Johnson collection shares with the commercial children's literature available at the time three primary characteristics. The first of these is its use of the alphabet in various forms of representation (capital and small letters, in association with single words or opening words of phrases, and in combinations of consonant plus vowel to create syllables arranged alphabetically). The second is its use of Biblical admonitions to good behaviour and warnings of the evil results of bad behaviour, though Jane Johnson never used direct quotations from the Bible as did many of the battledores and hornbooks of the time. She also selected admonishments that might pertain to children (honouring parents, refraining from stealing and lying, and holding thrift, hard work, and honesty in high value) and omitted any that could refer only to the sins of adults (fornication and murder). The third similarity is in the use of maxims or brief sayings advising ways to achieve a good life.

Several features of Johnson's collection seem to foreshadow character-

istics that were to come in commercial children's literature only much later in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Of these, four deserve particular mention: observations of daily life, observations on the role of women in society, observations of social critique, and categories created by both semantic and grammatical criteria.

Observations of daily life

Many of the writings on the cards were sentences that might have been uttered in ordinary conversation about daily life. These compare in several ways to the conversation among familiar neighbours portrayed in Austen's novels. Individuals mentioned are identified by either occupation or kin ties. Descriptions of places or inanimate beings are also located by ownership or connection with particular estates. Specifics of dress, especially of women, come in details of colour and particular styles of fashion.

> Lady Margaret Mordaunt, Daughter to the Earl of Peterborow, in a Red Lutestring Coat.
>
> Simon Frankland, a Butcher of Enfield in Middlesex, carrying a Sheep before him upon a horse nam'd Ball.
>
> A pretty dark grey Doe, in a Park belonging to William Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire.

In addition to these simple conversational statements, numerous cards contain verses referring to scenes of daily life. These show an empathetic association with both animals and peasants and other non-landholding figures of the time. Each of these is accompanied by a picture that matches the verse.

> A Cow and a Bull one day for their good,
> Would try change of Air, and walk to the Woods:
> But when they came there, they found little ease,
> Their feet were so hurt, with the stumps of the Trees.
>
> Give some Bread to my children I beg and I pray
> Or they will be starved having had none today.

This latter verse is accompanied by two pictures, pasted separately: one of a woman dressed in fine attire and displaying a haughty manner, and another of a poor woman with two children reaching out in the direction of their hoped-for benefactress. This selection comes from a set of cards based on London street cries, several of which feature women.

Observations on the role of women in society

Women throughout the series of lesson cards are portrayed primarily as attempting to live good lives, restraining the forces of evil in society, and doing the work given to them with diligence and care. All of the listings based on categories of humans illustrating letters of the alphabet include references to women. Many of the verses call attention to women as individuals and to their various kinds of work.

> At a house by a Gate,
> Did live without state
> A little old woman
> and man.
> They did work for
> their bread, and were
> very well fed, and the
> old woman's name, it was
> Nan.

The accompanying picture is of a woman and man, each with a garden tool, against a scene of a farm.

> How wicked these
> men are to Quarrel
> and Fight:
> They surely forget
> that they are in
> God's sight.

Accompanying this verse is a picture of a woman attempting to stop two men who are in a fight.

> Good Girl Make
> haste and have
> done with your broom
> Of all things I hate
> such a dust in the
> Room.

The commentary on this verse comes in large part through the picture which is of a haughty disdainful mistress and a young pretty peasant girl with a broom. The two pictures are cut separately, indicating Jane Johnson's choice of the countenance and social bearing of each of the characters.

Certain verses related to women must be included also among those bearing the next feature.

Observations of social critique

Satire and irony mark a small percentage of the verses, as well as the particular combinations of pictures and verses. Many closely resemble the humorous and descriptive captions that accompany family photograph albums of today. For example, several verses and pictures show men looking like fools in pursuit of their pastimes of drinking, hunting, and entertaining women.

> The Man with his Dogs
> went out to kill Game,
> His Gun it went off,
> and shot the Dogs
> lame.
>
> It is wicked to get
> drunk, to swear, lye, or
> steal.
> And those that do such
> things will Hell's
> Torments feel.

Accompanying each of these verses is an appropriate picture of males; the second contains both a young boy and an older man who have obviously enjoyed much drinking.

But men are not the only ones captured with the wit of Jane Johnson: the French, and particularly French women, come in for particular criticism.

> Such short Gowns as these, are much used in France,
> And the Men and the Women cup capers and dance.
> The Ladys they Paint, and their backsides they show,
> The Men hop, and skip, and each one is a Beau
> Would you see men like monkeys; to France you must go.

The picture accompanying this verse is of a gentleman between two ladies in long full hoop skirts. All are finely dressed and their gestures exaggerated.

Categories created by both semantic and grammatical criteria

Most presentations of the alphabet used in hornbooks and the few books available for children before 1745 listed items only according to their first letters and their membership in a particular semantic category: animals, foods, birds, etc. Jane Johnson, however, created semantic categories of more abstract relationships. For example, several of the square card sets she designed with small hangers attached so that they could be hung

from one corner bore themes that were by no means immediately obvious. For example, one contained words such as flea, bee, fly, gnat, worm, leech, lice, snake, and was presumably organized around a theme such as 'unpleasant critters about the house and lands'. Others included only function words, such as *in*, *of*, *for*, mixed in with pronouns. Still others mixed categories, but grouped words of the same category together (colours on one side of a card ending with the words *light* and *dark* and on the other side utensils for eating plus the words *cup*, *mug*, and *glass*. Throughout the sets, Jane Johnson displays her keen attention to matters of grammatical structure, building blocks of language, and possible segmentation and arrangement of words. Some were listed in what might be described as a chiasmic relationship; for example, *where*, *there* was followed by *their*, and *were*, with *where* and *were* resembling each other in spelling but differing in pronunciation, and *there* and *their* having their similarity in pronunciation but not in spelling.

READING AND UPWARD MOBILITY

Jane Johnson's desires for the role of reading in her children's lives come through in several ways in this nursery manuscript. Though these artefacts do not allow us to reconstruct the precise ways in which she might have used these with her children or the talk that might have accompanied any recitation from them or reading by her, we can infer some expectations she associated with reading. Those most clearly stated come in the book that bears George William Johnson's name. Jane Johnson, like others of her time and station, linked the ability to read with increases in judgement, rationality, will-power, and knowledge. These qualities of character derived from access to accumulated wisdom from the past as well as from the sharpened insight gained through reading and writing. The morals, as well as the observations, offer so little in narrative and context, that we must imagine some kind of talk surrounding them. The children would have known some of the names, many of the scenes, and most of the listed items and could have easily giggled over members of their card sets that mentioned their friends and neighbours.

A few move the children themselves into the literate frame. For example, one card's observation refers to Barbara Johnson, George's older sister:

> Lord Mountjoy, and Miss Barbara Johnson. Dancing a Menuet together at a Redotto in the Hay Market.

The accompanying picture is made of two separate cut-outs, one of a man and the other of a young woman, facing each other. Presumably, with any one of the children, this card would have provoked comment. Others mention family friends, and one card that contains nouns also

includes the proper name *George*. It is easy to assume that these cards were prompts to which the children responded with sentences that used as many words from the cards as possible.

We cannot know the extent to which the 438 extant pieces represent all the sets Jane Johnson created for her children during their childhoods. But we can judge from the range of types and gradations of complexity of pictures and verses presented that she constructed them with a continuing use in mind. It seems highly unlikely that this mother viewed most of the sets as merely beginning reading materials. Their flexibility for use in learning skills from sound and letter matching to word recognition to sentence and story creation is evident. In addition, many contain what must have been family jokes and bits of retold family tales that would have a life far beyond the early reading days of only one young child. For example, the mention and picture of young Barbara dancing may well have occurred when she was in her early teens, but her younger brothers would surely have enjoyed joining in the creation of this card and the accompanying pieces of its set, all of which bear some strong reference to ladies' fashions. It may be that Barbara herself created this set, which bears clear linkages to the notes and pictures she later included in her album of styles and fabrics.

Numerous cards reflect the view that maintaining a good life becomes possible through the leisure that riches provide. But this leisure, like money, must be well spent. The close association between the alphabet – and by strong implication literacy – and moral well-being could not have escaped any child exposed to these materials. But neither could a child have failed to see the many ways in which a visual scene could be read. The tight coordination of picture and words on the vast majority of the lesson cards calls for the same integration of reading pictures and words that published children's literature came to suggest by the end of the eighteenth century and still insists upon today in materials created for young children. The tiny details of facial expression, style of dress, and body posture portrayed in the small pictures Jane Johnson cut and glued for her lesson cards carried many points of emphasis for her verses and statements. She reinforced concepts of social class, occupational differentiation, separation of roles of men and women, and quirks of national character through her juxtapositioning of pictures and words. The tradition of including social critique within literature prepared for children has received much scholarly attention, and this home-made collection indicates that Jane Johnson was no exception as an author. Politics, fashion, gender habits, weaknesses of character and individual quirks of personality bear the brunt of Jane Johnson's wit.

It seems also clear, given the number of scenes, verses, and statements that reflect problem situations, that she expected some attention to ways of getting out of these dilemmas to emerge either from talk with her

children about these lesson cards or from their own thinking about the scene or situation revealed. Animals, men, women, and children encounter problems in her cards, and many of the morals offer advice on ways both to solve and to avoid problems.

THE PLAY OF WORDS FOR CHILDREN

Jane Johnson's materials allow children to come through as active, mindful, imaginative, and artistic conversationalists and performers. This early eighteenth-century collection of literacy materials from a countryside home gives us more than a glimpse into the shadowy origins of expectations about literacy, children's roles in their current households and in the future, and the merits of observing and recording with an eye for detail, category, and artistry.

Literacy is linked with goodness, the good life, well-spent leisure, and a sense of humour and wittiness. Patterns more specific to the content of children's literature itself include: close interrelationship of illustration and text, portrayal of adult life for satiric comment, and connection of children's literature with problem-solving. Insistent connections between reading and being good and also rational indicate that the experience of reading children's literature is intended to extend far beyond the actual moment of reading to character building, tenacious problem-solving, and observational acuity. Imagination and empathy as qualities essential to sustain vitality in and for life also come through in many of the card sets.

Following one's interest, curiosity, and reading into illustrations as well as events comes through as a prized quality for children. Ambiguity, not certainty, except in some religious matters, lies submerged in the tricks of word play in several verses of some card sets. Jane Johnson often gives notice of the importance of intertextuality – the need to know one text in order to use another well. Rather than the usual stratagem of simplifying materials for children, she sometimes buries in the cards complex ways to turn the cards into games that might include mathematics, design rearrangements, and puzzles or riddles. She rarely simplifies conditions of life or contradictions between appearing to be of one character while becoming another through submission to drink or negative personal influence. Though some sets tell her children what to think, most include opportunities to consider alternative ways to construct scenes and draw conclusions. Many texts are completely open-ended. Several sets celebrate individuality and difference within various textual communities – those of family first and foremost, but with strong foreshadowing of other textual communities to come for her children: those of the state and the church. She calls her children to reading and to reading early so that they might collect their shared experiences and unite around common goals and social responsibilities. She embodies in many of her materials the

short step from textual communities to rituals of everyday life and the rhythms of an oral society.

For Jane Johnson's children, the hearth and home of 250 years ago created images of their universes to come, but embedded these in strong visual and verbal representations of the familiars of childhood and home. These ephemeral bits that somehow miraculously escaped the ravages of fire, vermin, water, and careless disregard that usually come to such handmade paper items open up for us the rituals and routines of literate identities and literary value-building. They suggest the power of ephemera to carry some of the most valued habits and deepest strengths for managing everyday living. Jane Johnson's nursery library, along with the fashion album of her daughter Barbara, foreshadow in illustration and text what Jane Austen wrote half a century later of similar textual ephemera:

> These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game . . .
>
> (*Emma*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgement is here given to the Lilly Library of Indiana University for permission to quote from the Jane Johnson Manuscripts, Elisabeth Ball Collection.

NOTES

1 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).
2 This 'manuscript nursery library' is housed at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, USA.
3 Natalie Rothstein (ed.), *A Lady of Fashion: Barbara Johnson's Album of Styles and Fabrics* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987).
4 Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
5 Some letters of Jane Johnson were in the hands of family descendants Mr and Mrs Blois Johnson who graciously allowed exhibition of selected portions of this material at Homerton College, Cambridge University, in April 1995 for the conference 'Scrapbooks and Chapbooks'; they are now housed in the Bodleian.

2

JANE JOHNSON: A VERY PRETTY STORY TO TELL CHILDREN

Victor Watson

Jane Johnson is central to *Opening the Nursery Door*. Her handmade teaching materials, her poetry for children, and the recently discovered story she wrote for her own two children, add significantly to our understanding of the ways in which mothers in the eighteenth century involved themselves in their children's 'nursery learning'. This chapter focuses on the unpublished story written by Jane Johnson in 1744, the manuscript of which was in private hands for a number of years until it was recently acquired by the Bodleian Library. Also in private hands are some of her letters, poems and notes, and a book of extracts which enables us to form some idea of what Jane Johnson read, and how she regarded her children and their education.

At first sight, her story's significance lies chiefly in its date. However, the more we discover about her, the further we are led into broader questions concerning the history of children's books, children's literacy, education, and – in particular – the role of mothers in their children's learning.

*

For anyone interested in children's books in the first half of the eighteenth century, there are two key dates. In 1693, John Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*,[1] offering some advice on ways of teaching a young child to read, recommended the provision of 'some easy pleasant book suited to his capacity'. This sensible suggestion seems to have provided a blueprint for the development of children's literature, a view apparently confirmed by the fact that, in 1744, John Newbery (see Chapter 5) published what came to be thought of as the first children's book, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*. Furthermore – to establish his credentials – Newbery made explicit his indebtedness to Locke and transformed with some precision the philosopher's recommendation into a realistic publishing venture.

But Harvey Darton was not satisfied with the notion of a direct con-