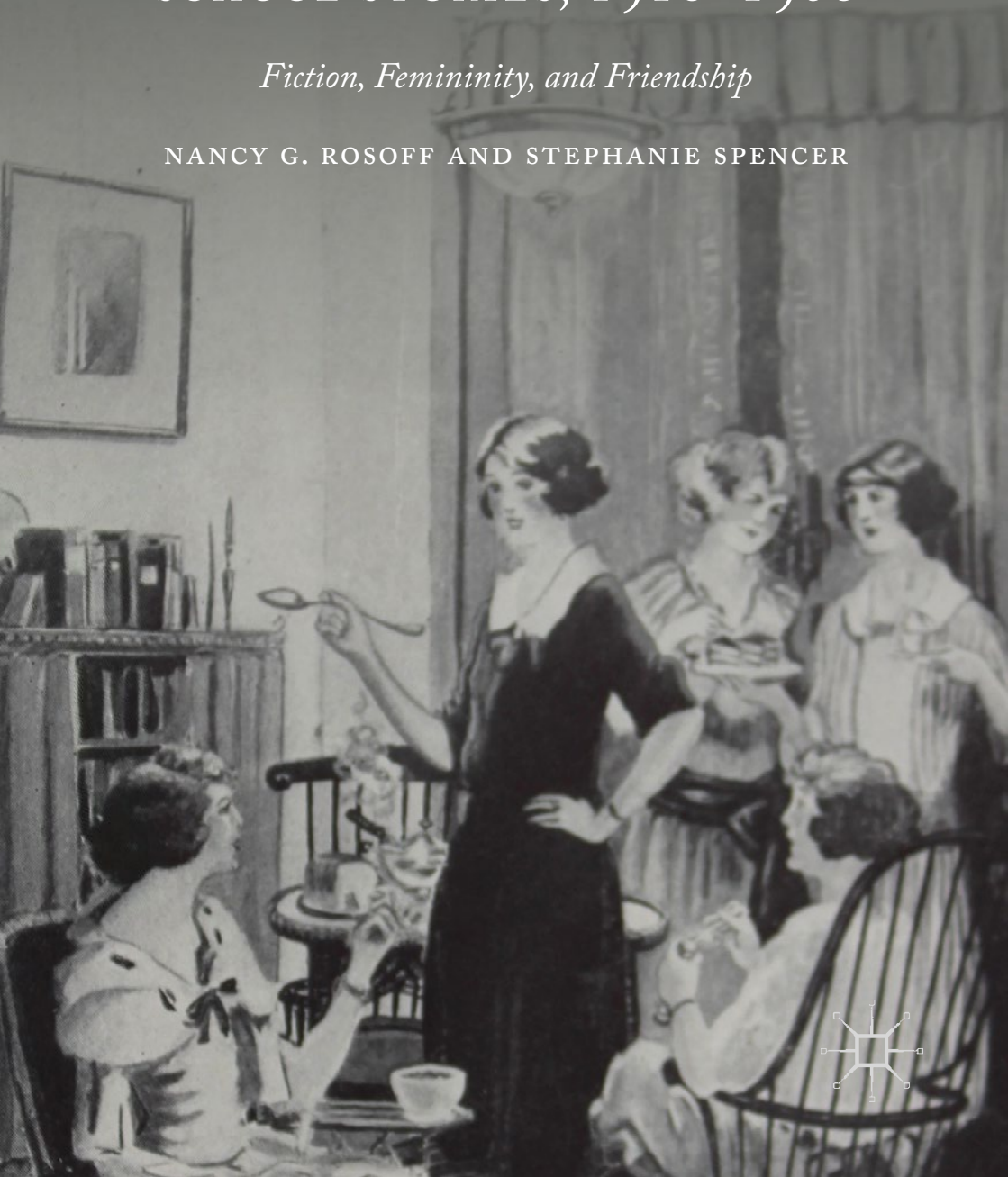
# BRITISH AND AMERICAN SCHOOL STORIES, 1910–1960

## *Fiction, Femininity, and Friendship*

NANCY G. ROSOFF AND STEPHANIE SPENCER



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Cover illustration: 'The next day's recitations hastily prepared, the Lookouts had gathered in Ronny's room for a spread.' Pauline Lester, *Marjorie Dean College Freshman* (A.L. Burt, 1922), frontispiece.

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*For Buddy and Peter*

# Preface

This book is the result of a transnational friendship, which grew from shared scholarly interests. It was written to explore specific elements that stories written for teenage girls in Britain and the United States had in common, centred around the themes of friendship and femininity. Our book is not the first treatment of school stories, but our goal has been to offer a particular perspective on how certain aspects of femininity transcended the national roots of individual stories. Moreover, we have focused on series of books that followed central characters from school through university and into adulthood. The sources on which we draw have frequently been dismissed as frivolous, but we stake a claim that they function as valuable historical sources for an analysis of informal education and girlhood.

The book is intended to appeal to a wide audience in both Britain and the United States: historians of education, of women, of gender, and of children and childhood as well as literary scholars. The enthusiastic Friends of the Chalet School (FOCS) are just one example of the ongoing general interest in these stories by those who have enjoyed them since they were children and those who found the books as adults.

The book begins with an overview of the sources we are using and a discussion of the theoretical framework offered by transnational historical analysis that reads the sources together, rather than seeking comparisons between countries. We then move on to discuss five themes related to aspects of femininity demonstrated in the school and college stories: authority, domesticity, possibility, responsibility, and sociability.

The illustration on the front cover from the Marjorie Dean series written by Pauline Lester shows the heroine in her Hamilton College study. The significance of sociability is immediately apparent. Taken together with the text to which the illustration refers, other themes in the book are also represented. Marjorie and her authority are centre stage, the scene reflects the dominant friendship group's responsibility for the well-being of the less popular girl, and the possibilities that college life provides for their future careers are reflected in the filled bookshelves.

Glenside, PA, USA — Nancy G. Rosoff
Winchester, UK — Stephanie Spencer

# Acknowledgements

A project like this requires support from many people, for which we are deeply grateful. We would like to thank our families, who have provided patient support as the project unfolded. We are both only children (though not, we would like to think, the spoiled obnoxious ones so often portrayed in our sources), so our immediate families are small. This book is dedicated to Stephanie's husband, Peter Spencer, who encouraged us, cheered us on, and put up with disruptions to his home as we wrote, and Nancy's mother, Buddy Rosoff (formally named Rose), who read drafts and proposals, reviewed possible cover images, pushed us to get the book finished, and served as a constant source of support. Sadly, Buddy died as we neared the finish line—she was adored by us both and is deeply missed.

We have had the opportunity to present various iterations of our work at many conferences over the years and the book has benefitted from questions and comments raised by those who took time to come to our papers. We are indebted to those who attended sessions at the History of Education Society (UK), the International Standing Committee on the History of Education, the Australian & New Zealand History of Education Society, Network 17 of the European Education Research Association, the Society for the History of Children and Youth, Women's History Network Conference, Children's History Society, and the American Historical Association. We very much appreciate the anonymous readers who read our book proposal and made valuable suggestions that shaped the manuscript.

The Centre for the History of Women's Education at Winchester has provided the opportunity to present our work in seminars and actively demonstrated the importance of sociability and female friendship that we discuss in Chap. 3.

Working on a project across two countries and time zones has been a challenge, but we have benefitted from the available technologies that made intellectual travel across time and space possible. Nancy is also deeply grateful to Stephanie and her family for allowing her to take up residence from time to time as we worked on the project. That our families have become intertwined is one of the ancillary benefits of the book.

As we have learned to use media like Twitter and have written an occasional blog, we appreciate colleague and friends who have followed us, retweeted our posts, and pointed us to important information. We are especially grateful to @chaletfan, @HistEdSocUK, and @histchild, who have responded to us tweeting as @chwess, @nancyrosoff, and @teenfictions. Our blog can be found at https://teenfictions.wordpress.com/. The project benefitted from the work of student researchers who worked with Nancy at Arcadia University; their attention to detail has been a great help: Madison Dorschutz, Lauren Piccone, and Catherine Hill. The University of Winchester provided some very welcome sabbatical time for Stephanie as we worked on the first draft of the book.

Researchers are always dependent on the professionalism and knowledge of librarians and archivists. We would like to thank the London Library, whose eclectic cataloguing and shelving under the topic of education invited browsing in the stacks and revealed some unusual and helpful contemporary sources, and the British Library, for its extensive collection of school stories on which we drew. Interlibrary loan librarians at Rutgers University—Camden, the University of Winchester, and Arcadia University ensured that we had copies of hard to find books and essential secondary sources. We also found many of our sources through the wonders of modern technology, shopping on Abebooks and eBay. In-person shopping in secondhand bookshops yielded excellent results.

Every project benefits from serendipity and one highlight was the discovery by Catherine Holloway of an exercise book in the archives of a working class technical school in Kent that listed the reading habits of one of its young pupils. School stories, including some of those mentioned here, formed a good proportion of her list. Retrospective thanks are due to all the readers over the space of 50 years who thoughtfully wrote their addresses into their books and allowed us to search neighbourhoods on

Google Earth. These unexpected pieces of evidence confirmed our sense that the stories were read by girls from a range of backgrounds.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to Girls Gone By Publishers, particularly to Revd Clarissa Cridland. Girls Gone By publish quality reprints of many of the titles we used. These reprints include useful essays on the publication history of the books, written by those with extraordinarily detailed knowledge of the stories and their characters. Revd Cridland read a draft of the book and offered valuable corrections and suggestions. Girls Gone By hold the copyright to the Chalet Books and graciously gave us permission to quote extensively from them. The literary heirs of Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dr. Vivien Hornby Northcote and Modwenna Rees-Mogg, kindly gave permission to use quotations from the Dimsie books. Dr. Northcote was generous with her time in an early telephone call and in reading and commenting on a later draft. We spent some time trying to track down copyright holders for the American books published by Henry Altemus, A.L. Burt, and Dodd Mead, but they have proved elusive, and any further information will be welcome. All mistakes are of course ours.

When we began this project, Nancy said to Stephanie that the most important factor was that we would remain friends when it was finished. We have met that goal and our friendship has been deepened by this work.

# Contents

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

For Britain and the United States, the 50 years of social, political, and cultural change between 1910 and 1960 included two World Wars and the subsequent anxiety of the Cold War. In this book, we argue that there were, however, some continuities of expectation as to the gendered role that middle and upper class young women would, and should, play that crossed time and place. In his discussion of the relationship between the family and society in postwar Britain, Chris Harris observed, 'To recognise empirical diversity is not to deny the existence of structural regularities that underlie it and cultural values that inform it.'[1] Similarly, this book explores how we can identify gendered norms that underlie the expectations of femininity within two capitalist societies in the early part of the twentieth century. We suggest that the genre of the school and college story offers one way to explore how girls were informally educated into a performance of femininity that was recognisable on both sides of the Atlantic. The popularity of the school and college story offers a rich source through which to examine prescriptions for femininity that were accepted by the reader (who continued to read these books through many editions) and acceptable to the adults who may have purchased the books as presents and allowed them into the home as suitable reading.

[1] Chris Harris, "The family in post-war Britain," in *Understanding Post-War British Society*, ed. James Obelkevich & Peter Catterall (Routledge: London & New York, 1994), 45.



N. G. Rosoff, S. Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910–1960*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05986-6_1

The genre has attracted a range of scholars who have examined the formation of femininity in fictions focused on a national readership.[2] In this book, we bring together, for a transnational discussion, novels published in two societies that had much in common as well as many differences in their social and political contexts. The stories that we focus on were not intended for a transatlantic audience. Unlike some of the British stories that were widely exported to Australia and New Zealand, they were expected to be read by an audience that was familiar with the school and college structure of their homeland. Although the books were intended for diverse audiences, we argue that we can identify some aspects of femininity that were fundamental to the experience of girls in both geographical regions as they prepared to take their place in adult society. The growing strength of international women's movements across this period may be better understood if we recognise that, despite national differences, there were commonalities between women that were secured in diverse ways during their adolescent years. One of those ways, we argue, was through the fiction that they consumed as their leisure reading. From the thousands of books published that drew on school and college lives, we have selected series books by four popular authors who took their heroines through their early days at school into adult life. The continuity of these series that followed the main characters from adolescence into adulthood offers a focused subset of school and college stories that enables us to examine how readers would be educated into aspects of femininity. Readers could follow their favourite characters' growth to maturity, as they became responsible citizens, wives, and mothers, yet retained the 'essence' of their younger selves. As Rosemary Auchmuty observed, series stories allow us to 'observe the authors' views on a range of topics about women of all ages and at most stages of their lives.'[3] The following introduction briefly sets out the origins of the school and college story before explaining our choice of books and authors for this study. It then highlights the three themes that underpin our analysis of the main chapters: the role of fiction, the construction of femininity, and the significance of female friendship. The chapter closes with a summary of the main chapters

[2] There has been continuous interest in the genre by scholars of girlhood since the 1980s. The British books have been the subject of most research, but as Chap. 2 highlights, this discussion has been taken up by scholars of American girls' literature.

[3] Rosemary Auchmuty, *A World of Girls* (London: The Women's Press, 1992), 5.

that demonstrate the multifaceted and complex nature of girlhood in the first half of the twentieth century.

## The School and College Story

The emergence of the popularity of stories set in educational settings unsurprisingly runs parallel to the development of formal education in Britain and the United States. In 1910, a 15-year-old girl in Britain *might* have been at school. If she were middle or upper class, she might have been at home with a governess; if working class, she could have been at work. By 1960, her granddaughter or great granddaughter was approaching the minimum school-leaving age, having benefitted from the 1944 Education Act that provided free secondary education for all. Very few girls would have been educated at home. In the United States in 1910, a 15-year-old girl would have been more likely to have attended public high school, though the likelihood of doing so could also have depended on social class. By 1960, almost all girls attended compulsory education to the high school level.

In Britain, the publication of *Tom Brown's School Days* by Thomas Hughes in 1857, describing school life at Rugby school for upper class boys, is usually recognised as the first of the school story genre.[4] The stories of L T Meade in the late nineteenth century were the forerunner of the girls' school story. *Sweet Girl Graduate* (1891) tells the story of Priscilla, a girl from a poor background who achieves a place at 'St Benet's,' and *The Rebel of the School*, published in 1902, is set in a large girls' day school.[5] Themes of friendship, and lessons that snobbery is unacceptable, established the genre that was then developed by Angela Brazil. Brazil (1868–1947) was the first of the widely recognised 'Big Four' authors of the girls' school story in Britain. Brazil's stories were self-contained novels set in both day and boarding schools that covered a short time span.[6] She was followed by Elinor Brent-Dyer (1894–1969), Dorita Fairlie Bruce (1885–1970), and Elsie J. Oxenham (Dunkerley) (1880–1960), with the

[4] Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays. By an Old Boy* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1857).

[5] L.T. Meade, *A Sweet Girl Graduate* (London: Cassell & Co., 1891) and L.T. Meade, *The Rebel of the School* (London; Edinburgh, W. & R. Chambers, 1902).

[6] See, for example, *The Leader of the Lower School* (London: Blackie & Son, 1913) and *For the School Colours* (London: Blackie & Son, 1918).

genre reaching a peak of publication in the 1920s and 1930s. Enid Blyton's Malory Towers books, published between 1946 and 1951, focused on a girls' boarding school and the fortunes of Darrell Rivers and her friends as they move up the school and remained popular with readers into the 1960s.[7]

In the United States, the 'growing up' story that established the girls' genre was Louise Alcott's *Little Women* series. *Little Women*, first published in 1868, followed the March sisters into adulthood with Jo, the central character, maturing from a rumbustious teenager into the matriarch of *Little Men*.[8] Josephine March is a very similar character to Josephine Bettany, the heroine of the later *Chalet* series by Elinor Brent-Dyer suggesting that Brent-Dyer was fully conversant with the American stories. A second, much read, American series that included a school setting was the *Katy* books, written by Sarah Chauncey Woolsey, Alcott's contemporary (1835–1905), writing as Susan Coolidge.[9] In the books that are the focus of our discussion, the British characters refer to the school story genre, usually suggesting that their 'real' school is far superior to the fantasies presented to an earlier audience. In the American series that we discuss here, the desirable traits of femininity lauded by Alcott and Coolidge are developed within the context of the twentieth-century American society that offered more alternatives for young women beyond domesticity.

Setting the plot within the boundaries of school or college enabled authors to focus on the children as emerging autonomous individuals, negotiating their way through the expectations of peers and those in authority without the security of, or interference from, their parents. Even if the reader had no personal experience of the institution of school or college, she was aware of its existence and therefore its potential relationship to the real world. School stories in that context were then more grounded in the real world than, for example, a fantasy island, offering the possibility for the reader to identify more readily with the cast of characters. The number of school and college stories advertised in the back pages of such books as the Marjorie Dean series reflect a growing and continuous

[7] Blyton wrote the St. Clare's series, set in another school and published between 1941 and 1945.

[8] Louisa M. Alcott, *Little Women and Good Wives* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1868) and *Little Men, Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1871).

[9] Susan Coolidge, *What Katy Did* and *What Katy Did at School* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873).

consumer demand. The publishers A L Burt suggested further reading of books on their list for 'clean, wholesome stories … if you have enjoyed reading about the adventures of the new friends you have made in this book.'[10] Seth Lerner emphasised the role of the library in his analysis of children's literature, claiming that 'The rise of American children's literature is, to a large degree, inseparable from the rise of the public lending library, and by the 1870s the libraries had become the guardians of children's reading.'[11] Scholars have identified similar growth in the genre in the British press. While this growth establishes a good rationale for an exploration of the construction of femininity in these stories, the sheer numbers pose a problem for the researcher in making decisions about sources. In the next two sections, we explain our rationale for choosing the stories featured in this book and offer short biographies of our chosen authors.

## The Novels

Many school and college stories followed Brazil's formula for setting each book in a different school, over either a school term or academic year. Inevitably, this meant that the characters could not be fully developed and the formulaic new girl, problems, resolution, happy ever after plots, while worthy of note in terms of the seemingly endless demand, do not allow for a more detailed exploration of how the authors saw their heroines developing into responsible adults. In this book, we explore series novels that follow the characters from school into higher education and/or their adult lives. In the United States, these are the Grace Harlowe (1910–1924) and Marjorie Dean (1917–1930) series, both written by Josephine Chase but under different pseudonyms (Jessie Graham Flower and Pauline Lester, respectively), and the Joan Foster series (1944–1952), written by Alice Ross Colver. Specific geographic locations for the schools and colleges attended by the characters are not provided, but suggest the northeastern United States as the novels indicate that the colleges attended by the central characters are a day's train ride from New York City. Grace and Marjorie both attend public high schools, Grace at Oakdale and Marjorie

[10] Pauline Lester, *Marjorie Dean, College Senior* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1922).

[11] Seth Lerner, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 275.

at Sanford. The novels include friendships with the boys of the local boys' high school and careful profiles of each heroine's parents and their role in her upbringing.

Grace and Marjorie as well as some of their friends continue their education in 'the Land of College' in residential institutions that bear much resemblance to the early women's colleges such as Mount Holyoke, founded in 1837. Grace continues on to Overton College and Marjorie to Hamilton. The similarity of some of the plotlines suggests that the success of the Grace Harlowe series encouraged its author to revise and update her plots for a later audience; therefore, analysis of both series provides the opportunity to identify the longevity of some aspects of femininity in the light of changing social context. Joan Foster, Alice Ross Colver's heroine, reflects considerable change in the attitudes and opportunities open to young women of the immediate post World War Two period. A central plotline is the tension between new opportunities for employment and travel available to young women and the more traditional pull of marriage and domesticity for the heroine and her friends.

In Britain, we focus on the Dimsie series (1921–1941) written by Dorita Fairlie Bruce and the Chalet School series (1925–1970) written by Elinor Brent-Dyer. The British writers cover a large geographical area that reflects the regions known to the author. Dimsie Maitland comes from, and returns to, Scotland, but her school is set in the south of England, a setting familiar to readers of the wider genre. Attempts to update the Dimsie series in the 1980s by publisher John Goodchild suggest that the publishers at least felt that school series should have some relevance to their contemporary audience. These reprints are not discussed here, nor are the abridged Armada editions (see below) of the Chalet stories, as our focus is a historical enquiry into the books' informal educative role for girls up to 1960.

The Chalet series focuses on a school that begins in Austria, moves to Guernsey, Herefordshire, and Wales during World War Two then returns to Switzerland. We do not discuss the last ten years of the Chalet series, stopping with *Joey and Co in Tirol* (1960). The exception to this is *The Chalet School Reunion*, the 50th book in the series, published in 1963, as it brings together a range of Chalet alumnae, enabling the reader to learn how their adult lives have developed. Formal education provision in Britain changed substantially in the 1960s; the move to large comprehensive schools would have rendered the Chalet School somewhat of an anachronism, perhaps changing the readers' perception of the novels as

belonging to the past, rather than the present, however distanced from their own experience that might be. Additionally, changes in legislation in the 1960s and the rise of the women's movement marked a turning point in women's lives that is beyond the remit of this book.

The Chalet series re-appeared in an abridged paperback Armada series between 1967 and 1995. Elinor Brent-Dyer welcomed this series in the *Chalet Club News Letter*. Describing it as a 'BIG piece of news,' she explained to readers that they would make the books affordable for everyone. At the same time, she was still publishing full-length hardbacks to continue the original series.[12] Despite its rather peripatetic locations, at its heart, the school is run as a British boarding school. The pupils come from a wide range of countries and continents, which enables Brent-Dyer (and the reader) to observe national characteristics as well as commonalities of femininity. Such diversity is extolled as providing a wide experience for the girls, although race—in terms of colour—is not a feature of the books. From the context of the stories, it might be assumed that the readership itself was expected to be white and middle class, although, as discussed in the next chapter, more recent research suggests that the books had a wider appeal.

In choosing this specifically limited range of books to explore the informal way that the stories educated their readers about the right way to behave, we are able to trace the growth of the characters in depth and to discuss in detail how the authors framed female friendship as central to their journey toward adulthood. We should note that we have not used examples from every book in each series, but have drawn from multiple, representative volumes.

## The Authors

The authors of the books under discussion were professional writers who also wrote a range of other stories for young girls. As professionals, although it is unlikely that they would have created heroines who did not reflect their own expectations of the performance of femininity, they undoubtedly would have taken into account the expectations of their readers and therefore the wider social context in which they were writing.

[12] Elinor Brent-Dyer, editorial letter, in *Chalet Club News Letters,* 16 May 1967, 67 (Radstock: Girls Gone By, 2016).

This is especially true if their books were to be accepted by the public libraries.[13] This book focuses on the text of the novels under consideration. While recognising the significance of aspects of author biographies, the analysis is primarily centred on the development of the characters against their transnational social context, rather than any approach that examines the creation of a story as an extension of the life experience of the author. Biographical information available on the authors varies considerably, as the brief pen portraits below make clear.

### *Jessie Graham Flower and Pauline Lester, Pseudonyms of Josephine Chase (1883–1931)*

Josephine Chase wrote under multiple pseudonyms and authored books published by Henry Altemus and the A L Burt Company. In addition to the Grace Harlowe and Marjorie Dean books, she penned other series, including The Adventure Boys as Ames Thompson and the June Allen books as Grace Gordon. Her death certificate described Josephine Chase as an author and provided her address, a home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that she shared with her sister Edna, as well as indicating heart disease as the cause of death. The obituary that appeared in the *New York Times* noted that the 'author of the Grace Harlowe stories, that have thrilled schoolgirls for two decades, died suddenly.' The obituary included a curious statement from Chase: '"The only time people will ever know I'm an author will be when I die and they write my obituary," she once said.'[14] The editor of a new edition of *Grace Harlowe's Freshman Year of High School* suggests that Chase worked as a secretary at the Altemus publishing house prior to becoming a prolific author.[15] Otherwise, the contours of her life remain a mystery.

[13] See Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) for a discussion of the role that editors and publishers played in directing the authors of the 1950s career novels. Acceptability for the library market was key to the success of teen fiction.

[14] "Certificate of Death – Josephine Chase," City of Philadelphia, File no. 20142, Registered no. 3768, 1931 and "Youths' Author Dies at 46," *New York Times*, 11 February 1931, 22. The date of birth provided here comes from the age indicated on the death certificate (48 years old), in contrast to the age (46 years) indicated in the obituary.

[15] "Who Wrote These Books," *Aunt Claire Presents*, http://auntclairepresents.com/, accessed 13 July 2018. See also the new edition of *Grace Harlowe's Plebe Year at High School*

### *Alice Ross Colver (1892–1988)*

Alice Ross Colver wrote more than 60 books for a variety of audiences. Her earliest books were for children, including editions of fairy tales; she then moved on to writing for the juvenile (young adult) and adult markets. The books aimed at teenagers included career novels, such as *Janet Moore, Physical Therapist* (1965), as well as series featuring title characters Joan Foster and Babs. Her adult novels fell into the romance genre, including such titles as *Passionate Puritan* (1933). Colver went to Wellesley College, graduated in 1913, married, and had three children, including a daughter named Joan. She began publishing her work after the death of her husband in 1915. The entry in *Contemporary Authors* indicated that 'Alice Colver told CA that she feels writers have a responsibility for what they write. Her own writing is based on experiences and she uses authentic backgrounds.'[16]

### *Dorita Fairlie Bruce (1885–1970)*

Dorita Fairlie Bruce was born in Spain of Scottish parents and lived in Scotland until moving to London in 1895. She attended Clarence House boarding school in Roehampton. As she dedicated the first in the Dimsie series to 'Miss Bennington with love from one of her old girls' and included a poem beginning 'O Schoolmates of the long-ago!' to the Old Girls of Clarence House in *Dimsie Moves Up Again*, it appears that she found her single-sex education enjoyable and is likely to have based her stories on her own experience. Fairlie Bruce began her writing career with stories for very young children, before moving on to historical romance, career novels, and school stories. Hilary Clare suggests that Bruce 'was the first major writer to produce a school series.'[17] She was a keen advocate of the Girls' Guildry, a religious youth organisation for girls in Scotland founded

(published as *Grace Harlowe's Freshman Year at High School*), ed. 'Aunt Claire,' (Astoria, NY: Laboratory Books, 2017), followed by *Grace Harlowe's Second Year at High School* (Astoria, NY: Laboratory Books, 2018).

[16] "Colver, Alice Mary (Ross)," *Contemporary Authors*, volumes 69–72 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1978), 142 and "Colver, Alice Mary (Ross) Obituary," *Contemporary Authors*, volume 161 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1978), 82.

[17] Hilary Clare, "Bruce, Dorothy Morris Fairlie [Dorita Fairlie] (1885–1970)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/55196

by William Francis Somerville. This was established in 1900, supported by the Boys' Brigade, whose Presbyterian roots went back to 1883 when it was founded by Alexander Smith.[18] Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright list the Guildry as one of the girls' and women's organisations that promoted active women's citizenship in areas that have come to be recognised as 'welfare feminism,' although they distanced themselves from specifically identifying with 'feminism' as a term.[19] Fairlie Bruce introduces the Guildry into *Dimsie Intervenes.* She also wrote frequently for their publications, becoming president of the West London Centre in the 1930s.[20] *Dimsie Among the Prefects* was dedicated to 'The Girls of the Ealing Guardians' Training Corps Girls' Guildry from their Guardian.' In addition to the *Dimsie* series, she also wrote the Nancy and Springdale series and, toward the end of the 1950s, published the Sally series. Sometimes, as in *Dimsie Carries On*, Fairlie Bruce brought in characters from different series into her plots, suggesting that she had a loyal readership with a good knowledge of the different series.[21]

### *Elinor Brent-Dyer (1894–1969)*

Elinor Brent-Dyer was born in South Shields to a family much lower in the social hierarchy than the pupils of her fictional Chalet School. She attended a small private school and the City of Leeds Teacher Training College from 1915 to 1917. The details of life in the staff room and the sympathetic portraits of her teachers may well have drawn on her time as a teacher in a range of state and private schools. She also worked as a governess before founding her own school, The Margaret Roper School

[18] W. Bruce Leslie, "Creating a Socialist Scout Movement: The Woodcraft Folk, 1924–42," *History of Education* 13, no. 4 (1984): 299, https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760840130404

[19] Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright, "Women as Active Citizens: Glasgow and Edinburgh *c.*1918–1939," *Women's History Review* 23, no. 3 (January 2014): 401–420, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2013.820602

[20] Eva Lofgren, *School Mates of the Long-Ago: Motifs and Archetypes in Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Boarding School Stories* (Stockholm: Symposium Graduale, 1993), 94–100.

[21] Elinor Brent-Dyer also employed the same device; see Ruth Jolly, "A Change for the Better" for a more detailed description in the introduction to the Girls Gone By edition of *The Chalet School and Barbara.*

Elinor Brent-Dyer, *The Chalet School and Barbara* (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1954; Radstock: Girls Gone By, 2014).

(1938–1948) in Hereford.[22] Her biographer suggests that Brent-Dyer's own experience of old-fashioned teaching methods led her to bring her dislike of such methods into her books when she describes the previous educational experience of new girls at the Chalet.[23] As a professional author, she published over 100 books, short stories, poems, a cookery book, and four educational readers. Religion plays a more overt part in Brent-Dyer's *Chalet* series than the underlying role that it plays in the *Dimsie* books. Brent-Dyer was brought up an Anglican but converted to Roman Catholicism in 1930; this may explain the detailed explanation of the arrangements for the Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils of the Chalet School. Again, like Fairlie Bruce, Brent-Dyer set her books in areas with which she was familiar. The original setting of the school in the Austrian Tyrol was inspired by a holiday that she took in Pertisau am Achensee. With the outbreak of war, the setting moved to Guernsey and then to Herefordshire, where Brent-Dyer herself had moved in 1931.[24] The creation of the series books encouraged readers to imagine themselves part of the school community, for some growing up with their heroines, if they read the books as they were published. Helen McClelland also attributes this to the author; 'It does seem clear that Elinor drew some deep satisfaction from bringing real-life places and landscapes into her stories. Perhaps it gave her a feeling of "belonging" in her fantasy world. Whatever the reasons, she was also – and increasingly as time went on – to share personal experiences with her characters.'[25]

## Themes: Fiction, Femininity, and Friendship

This book is situated within a broad disciplinary base that might be described as a feminist history of education that draws on aspects of cultural studies in order to interrogate the value of a genre that has been either dismissed by literary critics or reclaimed by women's studies.[26] Research in cultural studies has confirmed the value of exploring evidence

[22] Helen McClelland, "Dyer, Elinor Mary Brent (1894–1969)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48278

[23] Helen McClelland, *Behind the Chalet School* (Bognor Regis: Anchor, 1986).

[24] Ibid., 128.

[25] Ibid., 131–2.

[26] For example, Isabel Quigley describes girls' school story writers as 'silly, childish and insubstantial'; see Isabel Quigly, *The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story* (London:

that is not from a traditionally acknowledged canon and can incorporate, in this case, a serious approach to a genre that may not be literary but was widely read.[27] Toby Watkins' review of the interplay between history and culture points out the two different approaches to the already wide field of cultural studies that are apparent in American and British traditions.[28] Working together as British and American authors working with British and American texts has made us more aware of the theoretical assumptions that we bring to our analysis. This ultimately led to our use of a transnational framework that brings together evidence from diverse social, political, and cultural backgrounds to explore the significance of female friendship and the formation of femininity. In advocating a transnational reading of the stories that transcends rather than flows between national identities, we seek to historicise the construction of female friendship, not as a universal and unproblematic concept but as one that has not yet been fully explored for the potential in understanding the similarities of expectations for middle class women in the United States and Britain.

## Fiction

The long publication span of the Chalet School series from 1925 to 1970 offers the reader a view of a comparatively unchanging world of girlhood against a backdrop of enormous cultural social and political change. Even if Brent-Dyer's early books could be argued to contain some relation to her experience of teaching, it is tenuous in the extreme to make the same claim nearly half a century later.[29] In this book, we identify constructions of femininity that go beyond temporal and spatial boundaries and recognise that links between fiction and reality in the scenarios presented to the reader are fluid. As with any historical source, they must be considered

Chatto & Windus, 1982), 218. For the feminist perspective, see Rosemary Auchmuty, *A World of Women: Growing up in the Girls' Story* (London: Women's Press, 1999).

[27] By the late 1990s, nearly 100,000 *Chalet* paperbacks were still being bought annually. Helen McClelland, "Dyer, Elinor Mary Brent (1894–1969)."

[28] Toby Watkins, "History and Culture," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature,* ed. Peter Hunt, volume 1 (London: Routledge, 2004), 85.

[29] Claire Lidbury, "Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet School Series: Literature as an Historical Source," *Children's Literature in Education* 44, no. 4 (December 2013): 345–358. Lidbury makes this argument with reference to the presentation of dance and physical education in the Chalet books.

with care and alongside additional evidence to give any insights into the experience of schooling. As noted above, Brent-Dyer included a great deal of minute detail in her storytelling and some of those details provide insights that might have escaped more official records. Brent-Dyer drew on her experience running a school to bring a sense of verisimilitude to the stories.[30] Clare Lidbury examined the way that physical and dance education is presented in the series and suggested that Brent-Dyer quite self-consciously used her real-life experiences.[31] Lidbury also usefully pointed out that authors of fiction can be selective in their use of evidence from real life; 'there seems no way of telling when Brent-Dyer is choosing not to represent something…and when she is simply unaware of it.'[32]

The role that fiction plays as an educative tool has been well documented by writers of children's literature. W E Johns, author of the *Biggles* and for us, more importantly, the *Worrals* stories about a female pilot, was quite clear that fiction enabled him to teach 'under camouflage.'[33] In children's literature, the tension between assumptions of an essential child who becomes the focus for fictions targeted at specific age groups and the child as a product of its environment has been highlighted by David Rudd.[34] The wide appeal of the school story suggests that there is an underlying appeal in stories of girls of a similar age and their construction of identity. This 'hybrid' or border area identified by Rudd has informed our analysis of school and college fictions. As Rudd concluded, it is impossible to 'relegate the child to a discursive effect.'[35] This becomes particularly important when reading some of the rather disparaging critical commentaries on the girls' school story explored in Chap. 2. Rudd used a Foucauldian genealogy to make his point that 'there is no question of the

[30] Helen McClelland's *Behind the Chalet School* discusses the similarities between the Margaret Roper School and the Chalet School, 137–40 and 143–146.

[31] Claire Lidbury, "Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet School Series: Literature as an Historical Source," *Children's Literature in Education* 44, no. 4 (December 2013): 345–358.

[32] Claire Lidbury, 354.

[33] "Johns to Geoffrey Trease," in Geoffrey Trease, *Tales out of School: A Survey of Children's Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1964), 80–81.

[34] David Rudd, "Theorising and Theories: The Conditions and Possibility of Children's Literature," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature,* ed. Peter Hunt, volume 1 (London: Routledge, 2004), 29–43.

[35] Ibid., 33.

social and economic reality' of children's literature and its place in our understanding of the history of childhood and, in this case, girlhood.[36]

The young reader does not become either voiceless or powerless as a reader of these stories. In the school stories, authors usually explain the apparent illogical decisions made by their young characters to their readers, taking them into their confidence as fellow observers to the development of the plot. The reader, allowed insight into both the teachers' and pupils' perspectives, is then able to come to her own evaluation of a story. This may or may not collude with the stated intention or didactic inference by the author and will be dependent upon the readers' own life experience.[37] The American stories announced on their title pages that their target readership was between 12 and 18 years old. Readers within such a wide age range were likely to interpret the relevance of the stories to their own lives in very different ways. Rudd emphasised that the process of fiction is *not* top down and that the reader, with their own subject position constructed from 'peers, books playground folklore, the media,' will decide for themselves how to read a text and what they learn from it.[38] Readers were quite capable of skipping the bits of texts that they saw as irrelevant to their own needs; simply because Brent-Dyer included details of religious practice does not mean that these sections were read with the same attention as accounts of skating and skiing.

Rudd also reminded us of a Freudian approach that highlights how the adult never really leaves their childhood behind and the writer for children sees their audience 'as younger, or idealised versions of themselves.'[39] School and college therefore become the school or college they would have liked to have attended. This point was made by Angela Brazil in her autobiography and may explain why we can find no record of any college attended by Josephine Chase, one of our American writers.[40]

[36] Ibid., 34.

[37] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text. Roland Barthes: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath,* 142–147 (London: Hill & Wang, 1977; London: Flamingo, 1984). Citations are to the 1984 edition.

[38] David Rudd, "Theorising and Theories," 37.

[39] Ibid., 38.

[40] Angela Brazil, *My Own Schooldays* (London: Blackie & Sons, 1925), 149. Brazil explains to her readers that her own experience of school did not include the games, clubs, and acting that were a part of her stories.