

*The Youth of Early Modern Women*. Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves, eds. Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World 5. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018. 344 pp. €105.

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Over the past several decades, historians have increasingly turned their attention to examining stages of life: childhood, age and aging, and male adolescence. Studies of female adolescence have been rare, however. Common characteristics of this stage generally were “becoming sexually mature, developing the varied skills required for adult life . . . and entry into social networks and work life beyond her natal household”; this phase has commonly been assumed to end at marriage (20). As this ambitious collection of essays shows, however, each of these markers, and others, varied considerably according to social, economic, and religious status.

Far more than their male counterparts, young women had to learn both how to deal with their own sexual feelings and with the sexual desires of others. Considerable tension arose concerning the power and danger that accompanied being sexually attractive; while preserving the virginity of elite young women was usually involved in their families’ honor, the sexual activities of nonelite women were often acceptable to the community, particularly if they took place within a framework of courtship and assumed marriage. The most consistently satisfying section of the book is part 4, “Courtship and Becoming Sexual.” Here Elizabeth S. Cohen, Eleanor Hubbard, and Julie Hardwick each explore the various intertwinings of phases of young womanhood with social and sexual relations in early modern Rome, England, and France respectively.

Part 1, “Concepts and Representations,” presents intriguing and persuasive selections. Margaret Reeves contrasts Puritan assumptions of corruption with a proto-Romantic vision of innocent female youth, while Sarah Morris focuses on Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* to illustrate the space a roguish, roving young woman could create for herself. Jennifer McNabb examines the language of early modern English courts to explore contemporary perceptions of young women; Jacqueline Holler analyzes questions of female youth, agency, and emotions in New Spain; and Christiane Anderson’s highly accessible work highlights the tensions regarding young women’s sexuality as depicted in Swiss representations of camp followers.

The second section, “Self-Representations: Life Writing and Letters,” also ranges geographically, from Spain to Ireland to Florence to France. Barbara Mujica’s “Three Sisters of Carmen” focuses on the difficult early years of three disalced Carmelite nuns, whose radically different youths nonetheless contained common experiences. Julie A. Eckerle ties idealized versions of female youth in Ireland to the physical presence of the patriarch, while Megan Moran ingeniously investigates the independence Florentine women could exercise in clothing their families. Most provocatively, the letters of three generations of Orange-Nassau women provide Jane Couchman with rich

sources to reveal that marriage, even childbirth, did not necessarily provide bright-line divisions between stages of youth for early modern women.

“Training for Adulthood” examines, with mixed results, the training young women had to navigate in their transition from childhood to adulthood as they acquired moral and practical knowledge. Alessandra Franco’s “Malleable Youth” reveals the Catholic Church’s initiatives in responding to the Protestant Reformation even before Trent, as the Roman Conservatory rescued poor girls from the streets and schooled them to make them more appealing prospects as wives and nuns. Michele Nicole Robinson’s essay opens new avenues for research in its focus on the material culture of girlhood, though the actual childhood objects in question are few; her focus rests more on objects for a trousseau than on miniatures made specifically for younger girls. Ending the section strongly is Marja van Tilburg’s study of advice literature for young women in the Dutch Republic, which contrasts a seventeenth-century text with one from the next century, illustrating a shift from warning young girls about their sexuality to educating them about it.

Overall, this engaging collection successfully problematizes and confounds simplistic assumptions regarding the early phases of female existence in early modern Western society. As the cover illustration shows, and the editors clearly explicate in their introduction, contemporaries often saw nuanced phases of young female life (10) yet lacked the linguistic ability to distinguish between chronological age and social distinctions (8–9). *The Youth of Early Modern Women* provides a wide range of thought-provoking essays that will, one hopes, inspire similarly creative and innovative research in this field.

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*Early Modern Shipping and Trade: Novel Approaches Using Sound Toll Registers Online.* Jan Willem Veluwenkamp and Werner Scheltjens, eds.  
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The essence of this book shows more from its subtitle than from its title. This is not so much a book on early modern shipping and trade in itself, but rather a collection of methodological contributions concerning the use of the online database of the Sound Toll Registers (STR) that has been constructed at the University of Groningen and the Frisian Historical and Literary Center ([www.soundtoll.nl](http://www.soundtoll.nl)). As such, it can almost be seen as a user manual for this monumental database, which should enable historians to make a better and more efficient use of the classical data set of the Sound Toll Registers, the famous toll collected by the kings of Denmark at the Øre-Sound, the main connection between the North Sea and the Baltic. The registers contain information concerning no less than 1.8 million passages of ships between 1497 and 1857—