

Merridee L. Bailey. *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England, c. 1400–1600*.

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*Socializing the Child* offers a merger between the history of childhood and that of education and the cultural transformation associated with the Renaissance and the Reformation. Based on manuscript and printed sources, as well as on substantial historical scholarship, the book traces families and children — boys and girls — in five chapters that focus each on a literary genre specifically addressing these groups. Beginning with courtesy poems written by and for the elite and increasingly also the lesser gentry, the discussion moves to printed books, from early Caxton editions of courtesy poems through the rapidly expanding literary corpus of didactic books and household manuals aimed at broadened audiences among urban mercantile and craft families (the “small reading family”). A final chapter looks into grammar schools and the pedagogical schemes and ideals evident in school guidelines, statutes, and teaching materials. A major theme that emerges overall is a shift from the early elite emphasis on courtesy, manners, and outward appearances, to a far greater preoccupation with the molding of character through the inculcation of morality and Protestant values. The shift by no means marked a dramatic break or disruption with the early aristocratic habits and focus on manners; rather it involved more subtle change and mutations, with the early forms of socializing the young remaining in place while also embracing new values and interests in the upbringing and integration of the young into adult society. Evident to some extent already in the early courtesy poems, the shift to morality came fully to the fore in the didactic literature published and disseminated among the households of the urban bourgeoisie,

while old and new values were exemplified in patterns of socialization in schools, with the blend of good manners, learning, and morality that they inculcated and extolled.

There is much to commend in the book. While the transformation it delineates would not altogether surprise Renaissance and Reformation scholars, Bailey here offers a nuanced articulation of that shift in its broader historical contours. Set within a chronological frame that runs from the fifteenth century throughout the era of the Reformation, it renders the process of change and continuity in socializing concepts its due course, from well before the Reformation and proceeding thereafter. The emphasis on intertextuality is particularly persuasive, highlighting as it does interconnections on different levels, from the mute changes introduced by scribes or owners of manuscripts into courtesy poems, to shifts in emphasis between manuscripts and printed books or between successive editions of books. Attention is also paid to connections between writers, publishers, and audiences, delineating the dissemination of books within social groups, families, and networks that shaped and were shaped by the literature. Early manuscript poems that are less well known find their voice here, and an appendix provides a useful and comprehensive list of vernacular courtesy poems and printed books.

Some pitfalls need pointing out. Bailey's attempt to bring together varied strands of enquiry — literary analysis, the history of the book (publishing, audiences), and a great deal of historical scholarship on family, society, religion, and politics — is laudable, but the narrative at times strays and is overburdened with information or ideas that do not always integrate into coherent arguments, and it tends toward repetition (the book would have gained from more careful editing). No less important, the reader is left largely with prescriptions for rather than with the process of “socializing the child” itself, focusing as it does on ideal worlds and children, on model parents and families as these were conceived by educators, parents, or publishers. Children themselves remain rather transparent, and aspects of the actual process of socialization — its dynamics, tensions, or potential for conflict, for example — remain largely concealed. This obviously reflects the limitations (and choice) of the sources, but it leaves the subject of a book on “socializing the child” only partly explicated and explored.

For all this, the book is a valuable contribution to the literature on educational aspirations and expectations in the period from 1400 to 1600, updating and adding to our understanding of the increasing and intense interest in morals and education that characterized the era. It meticulously elucidates the varied strands of continuity as well as change, grounding that change in major historical transformations and illuminating the intriguing ways — and the range of literary texts — through which education was conceived and promoted in the decades before and following the great religious transformation of the Tudor era.

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