


BOOK REVIEW

Nicholas Orme. *Tudor Children*

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With *Tudor Children*, Nicholas Orme continues on from his 2003 book, *Medieval Children*. It represents another significant contribution to the study of childhood by Orme. As stated in the preface, it seeks to be an introduction to the subject rather than a comprehensive history and the book achieves this goal. There are two central arguments that hold *Tudor Children* together, which Orme highlights throughout. First, there was much more continuity than change in the “treatment and experience of children” over this period (227). Orme takes the opportunity to grapple with the perception that the Reformation was revolutionary and changed every aspect of life in England. With specific exceptions, the daily life of children remained much the same in 1600 as it had been in 1500. Second, Orme underlines the importance of studying the history of childhood. While this may seem obvious to cultural and social historians, and while the ghost of Philippe Ariès may appear to have been exorcised decades ago, this plea from Orme is still relevant. As a scholar of pre-modern education, I myself see how children’s experiences in the past are dismissed and ignored, to the detriment of a better understanding of social, cultural, and intellectual history. *Tudor Children* is another attempt to correct this ongoing issue.

Orme divides *Tudor Children* into seven chapters: “Birth and Infancy,” “Childhood at Home,” “Play,” “Religion,” “School,” “Speech, Songs, and Stories,” and “Growing Up,” with a reflective conclusion at the end. While each is valuable and utilizes interesting case studies and examples, “Religion” and “Speech, Songs, and Stories” are particularly strong. Orme’s descriptions present a useful and succinct summary of religious practices before and during the English reformations, covering topics from the rituals of baptism and how these changed over the sixteenth century to how being in a religious minority affected a child’s daily life. The chapter “Speech, Songs, and Stories” explores the popular culture of Tudor children and youths. Here, Orme makes judicious use of later (seventeenth century) materials to suggest which rhymes and songs were current in the sixteenth century. He demonstrates the continued interconnectedness of popular cultures across western Europe by noting the French origins of popular tales, and he makes an interesting argument about the existence of a shared adult/child literary culture. Orme successfully conveys the mental world inhabited by youngsters in Tudor England. To paraphrase Miri Rubin, Orme gives the reader a sense of what it was really like for them.

Overall, Orme does exactly what he sets out to do in the preface: to provide a general introduction to the topic of Tudor children. There are certain points, however, where more detail and/or greater nuance would have been appreciated and would have been entirely appropriate to an introductory work. These sections may have been the result of attempts to avoid tangents or to keep to editorial requirements, but they leave the reader with a less-than-accurate, or at least an overly simplistic, idea of the historical situation at hand. One example is Orme’s discussion of corporal punishment. While he cites Ben Parsons’s

2018 book, *Punishment and Medieval Education*, he does not capture the complexity of the theory and application of force in the classroom. Instead, we are left with the impression that education, medieval and Tudor, was an orgy of violence—the opposite of Parsons’s whole thesis. Another example of a statement that could be misinterpreted is Orme’s assertion that “hostility to dice playing” was “traceable back to Chaucer’s ‘Pardoner’s Tale’” (78). Does Orme mean within an English context only or does he mean in a general, European context? If Orme means the latter, both Alexander of Hales and Alfonso X of Castile were writing about the negative effects of dicing a century before Chaucer, as discussed in Andrew Brown’s 2021 article, “Passing the Time: The Role of the Dice in Late Medieval Pardon Letters,” *Speculum* 96, no. 3 (2021): 699–725.

There are some notable absences in *Tudor Children*. Barbara Hanawalt’s *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (1993) is highly relevant to Orme’s approach and the subject matter of English childhood, and yet does not appear even in the bibliography. Furthermore, Orme does not engage with the history of children in Ireland or in Wales. *Tudor Children* is explicitly English in its focus and misses the opportunity to compare the experiences of children—even elite children who are present in the historical record—in the wider Tudor polity. Finally, Orme tends to cite his own work in the endnotes, which makes them less convenient for researchers. The endnotes lack the detail that would have located *Tudor Children* more securely in broader scholarly conversations, especially regarding similar work done on other European regions, but it is possible this is a result of the constraints of the format.

This leaves us with a final question: who is *Tudor Children* for? It is not quite a popular history book, nor does it make—or claim to make—any major contribution to the scholarship on the history of childhood. It is an introduction to the subject, as Orme intended. As such, it is an ideal text for an undergraduate, or even graduate, seminar (too many of which are still reading Ariès). *Tudor Children* is also a useful reference for those seeking to present the history of childhood to a public audience, such as writers, producers, museum professionals, and historical interpreters. *Tudor Children* is another solid contribution from Orme to accessible literature on the history of childhood.