Concepts of Childhood: What We Know and Where We Might Go

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by MARGARET L. KING

The publication some forty years ago of the landmark work by Philippe Ariès, entitled Centuries of Childhood *in its widely-read English translation, unleashed decades of scholarly investigation of that once-neglected target, the child. Since then, historians have uncovered the traces of attitudes toward children — were they neglected, exploited, abused, cherished? — and patterns of child-rearing. They have explored such issues, among others, as the varieties of European household structure; definitions of the stages of life; childbirth, wetnursing, and the role of the midwife; child abandonment and the foundling home; infanticide and its prosecution; apprenticeship, servitude, and fostering; the evolution of schooling; the consequences of religious diversification; and the impact of gender. This essay seeks to identify key features and recent trends amid this abundance of learned inquiry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the history of childhood begins, as everyone knows, with Philippe Ariès, whose *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* — an evocative mistranslation of the original title, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* — burst on the scene in 1962. Poor Ariès: surely he could not anticipate that his imaginative essay would become the premier site of contestation, as one says, in this little corner of our collective enterprise, and his views both pilloried and defended by Anglophone knights of the monograph over the course of a generation.

Ariès was right, at least in this regard: the modern concept of the child, the sentimental concept of childhood, of which there were glimpses in Renaissance Italy and Reformation Germany, first crystallized in seventeenth-century England, more or less, and then, in the eighteenth century, in France and more highly urbanized regions of Europe and the Americas. At this juncture, as some of the studies discussed below inform us, elite mothers embraced their destiny to breastfeed, swaddling clothes disappeared, obstetrical science trumped old wives' tales, the children's-book industry was born — along with children's clothing, children's furniture, and children's games — and middle-class parents, publicly expressing their love for children and their grief at child death, dedicated themselves to the welfare and advancement of their offspring in a surge that culminated in today's so-called "helicopter parents."

It is not this argument, of course, that especially energized Ariès's critics, but rather the hypothesis that high rates of infant and child mortality

discouraged parents from investing emotionally in children. Lawrence
Stone (1977), looming large among others, agrees; Linda Pollock (1983,
1987) disagrees, along with Alan Macfarlane (1970, 1986), among others:
most volubly, Steven Ozment (1983, 1990, 1999, 2001). The argument
has petered out, although the obligatory review of the whole Arièsian
debate is still performed in the introductory chapter of volumes pertaining
to childhood: among recent roundups, Steven Ozment's in his *Ancestors*
(2001) and Nicholas Terpstra's in his *Abandoned Children of the Italian
Renaissance* (2005). It is time to reach closure on this: the rates of infant
and child mortality were horrendous (between 25 and 50%), but levels of
parental affection for children varied with region, setting (urban vs. rural),
and class. In terms of their investment in children, bourgeois and profes-
sional families of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries quite nearly
resembled our own — which is to say, bourgeois and professional —
families today.

Ariès's greatest contribution, however, is his insistence on the histo-
ricity of childhood: that childhood was not an essential condition, a
constant across time, but something that changed — or, if childhood itself,
bound by biologically- and psychologically-determined phases of develop-
ment, is constant, then the understanding of it differed, as did the way it
was experienced by both adults and children. A modest successor to earlier
overviews of this sort, including those by Hugh Cunningham (1998),
Richard Vann (1982), and Adrian Wilson (1980), this essay reflects on the
study of the history of childhood (often embedded in studies of household
and family) since Ariès. Focusing primarily on the early modern period, but
making, where appropriate, occasional forays beyond its boundaries, it
maps out some of the main lines of inquiry and suggests issues that remain
unresolved.

2. The Heroic Era: Studies from the Mid-1960s to Mid-1980s

Ariès's assumption of the historicity of childhood was the platform for the
important work that followed in a first stage from the mid-1960s through
the mid-1980s. The key figures are Peter Laslett, singly (1965, 1983a,
1983b) and with collaborators (1972, 1977, 1980), David Herlihy and
Christiane Klapisch-Zuber in collaboration (1978, 1985) and singly
(Herlihy, 1978, 1985; Klapisch-Zuber, 1985), Alan Macfarlane (1985),
and Michael Mitterauer (1992) singly and in collaboration with Reinhard

Sieder (1982).[1] From these authors we learn important new information about the evolution of diverse household structures (especially Laslett, Macfarlane, Herlihy, and Klapisch-Zuber), the volatility of family life (especially Herlihy, Klapisch-Zuber, and Mitterauer and Sieder), and the variability of household functions (especially Macfarlane and Mitterauer and Sieder), all of which necessarily affected the lives of children.

The critical realization was that the European family — more precisely, the Western European family — was from the outset not extended, involving multiple generations ruled by an elderly patriarch. Instead, for the most part, marriage was neolocal: newlyweds formed their own households. In exceptional pockets, such as southern France, rural Tuscany, and the Venetian patriciate, brothers formed joint households to share an inheritance. In northwestern Europe, especially, marriage ages were late for both men and women, well into the twenties, while among wealthy Italian families, as among the Greeks and Romans, adolescent brides married men around age thirty.

Although the modern nuclear family was not universal, European families tended to conform to this model more than to the extended families and complex households of other regions, such as Asia. One consequence was demographic adaptability: when stressed by famine, disease, and war, Europeans married younger and had more children; when productivity increases no longer kept up with population growth, they married later and were less fertile. The presence of a large group of celibates, most committed to the Church, was a further advantage. Nevertheless, exuberant population growth ahead of resources left Europeans vulnerable to the Black Death, in which some one-third to one-half perished.

Although household structure, for the most part, tended to the nuclear and household size was limited, the European family was dynamic and volatile, characterized by many entrances and exits. Children were often sent away young, while elderly or otherwise dependent kin, especially females, rotated into the household. These served as additional laborers, to the extent that when they were in short supply, servants might be brought in to overcome the shortage. Even the identity of the parental couple

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[1]To these might be added the work of anthropologist Jack Goody, principally his *Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (1983), relating the distinctive structure of the European family from the medieval period to the threshold of the modern to patterns of landholding and to the presence of the Catholic Church; see also his (with collaborators Joan Thirsk and E. P. Thompson) *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe* (1976). Goody's synthesis *The European Family: An Historico-Anthropological Essay* (2000), pursues these themes across the whole chronological span of European history.

shifted. A householder might have three or four wives in succession, as each succumbed to early death, perhaps in childbirth: each surviving wife managed a household containing their own children and also those of one or more predecessors. Widowed, a young woman might leave for a new husband, leaving her children to be reared by their kin in the paternal line; or she might stay, to be sidelined by the wife of the inheriting son. Few children lived in a household whose configuration remained constant for the length of their childhood.

Not only did family configurations shift unpredictably in premodern times, but families performed different sets of functions. In our own world, families most often provide (or aim to) "havens in a heartless world," to use Christopher Lasch's phrase in his pessimistic assessment of 1977. In former times, they performed a range of functions: political, military, judicial, and religious as well as social and cultural, as Mitterauer and Sieder (1982) aptly show in their schematization of the progressive shedding of household functions to the core purpose of acculturation. In the early modern era, many noble and royal households had political, military, and judicial functions, while peasant, artisan, and some merchant households were themselves places of production: factories as well as families. The emergence of radical religious groups, such as Anabaptists, Puritans, Quakers, Jansenists, and Pietists, put a premium on the task of acculturation, as minority faiths sought to secure their future through the careful training of their offspring.

The authors contributing these insights to our knowledge of child and family employed the characteristic methods of social historians. Ariès was a humanist who examined written and visual texts. Those named in the preceding paragraphs mined the archives, studying tax data, notarial documents, and baptismal and death records while quantifying what could be quantified. Laslett worked on his several volumes in association with the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, which he cofounded and codirected, while the joint project of Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber on Tuscan families involved a unique and pioneering display of quantitative historical methods for this region. (Both of the latter, their commitment to social-science methodology notwithstanding, were also insightful readers of literary, religious, and humanist texts.) Mitterauer and Sieder are both sociologists, and their *European Family*, like Mitterauer's *History of Youth*, is properly described as historical sociology.

Also working principally in the 1970s and 1980s, Alan Macfarlane and Lawrence Stone offer strikingly different visions of the English family. Stone's *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (1977) is a blockbuster analysis of the family's evolution through three stages — from

large weblike structures devoid of emotional warmth to small enclaves of intense feeling — that tracks, as noted above, the Arièsian trajectory. Macfarlane, in contrast, both in his *Origins of English Individualism* (1978) and in *Marriage and Love in England* (1985), locates the birth of the intensely-connected, emotion-rich family much earlier, perhaps as early as the thirteenth century: before, according to Ariès, the concept of childhood existed. Macfarlane's extended review (1979) of Stone is an absorbing piece.

Macfarlane's reading of the English experience is echoed for France in the work of Jean-Louis Flandrin (1979) and James Traer (1980). In his 1979 *Families in Former Times*, Flandrin finds that, prodded by priests and confessors, patriarchal control of the French family began to loosen in the seventeenth century, while parents conspired to limit births and increase children's life chances. In his 1980 *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France*, Traer explores how tensions between ecclesiastical and state concepts of the family promoted the liberalization of family life in law codes and procedures.

The 1970s also saw psychohistorical approaches to the history of childhood, for which Ariès's discussion of sexual games played with children and developing notions of privacy paved the way. David Hunt's *Parents and Children in History* (1970) explores the psychic roots of political and social repression, while Edward Shorter's *Making of the Modern Family* (1975), focusing on the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, identifies the development of sacrificial maternal love as the keystone of the modern family. Lloyd de Mause's signature 100-plus-page essay, "The Evolution of Childhood" (1973) is the manifesto of the psychohistorical approach, published in the important first volume of the *History of Childhood Quarterly* which he founded, and reprinted (1974) as the introduction to a collection of essays (also entitled *The History of Childhood*) he edited. Tracing the evolution of childhood from the barbarisms of the remote past to the bliss of the dawning moment of psychic freedom, de Mause usefully reminds historians of the mental cost of enduring patterns of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

Although de Mause's own approach is imaginatively and boldly psychohistorical, the contributions to his volume are often more standard (and some would say more reliable) studies organized by era in a coherent sequence. Notable for readers of this journal, and offering insights still valuable, is J. B. Ross's "The Middle-Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century" (1974). Two other useful essay collections from the early 1970s, more miscellaneous in structure, showcase the variety of methodological approaches and regional perspectives that

mark a field just venturing forth: those edited by Charles Rosenberg (*The Family in History*, 1975) and by Theodore Rabb and Robert Rotberg (*The Family in History: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 1973).

3. Filling In: Monographs and Surveys from the 1980s to the Present

The next phase of the investigation of childhood, from the early 1980s to the present day, has been constituted by a stream of monographs punctuated by syntheses and new editions of texts. To start with the smaller group, the syntheses include, in order of date of publication, those by John Sommerville (*The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, 1982), spanning from antiquity to the present; by Hugh Cunningham (*Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, 1995), on the period from 1500 to the present; and by Colin Heywood (*A History of Childhood*, 2001), on the period "from medieval to modern times."[2]

In defining the different periods they address, these three overviews acknowledge the difficulty of writing about childhood in the period before ca. 1200, or about childhood beyond the Western world; only for ancient Rome are there adequate specialist investigations to support the generalist's effort of synthesis.[3] Sommerville's early work, especially broad in its purview, already displays his focus on the culture of Puritanism he later explores in depth in *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England* (1992). The syntheses of Cunningham and Heywood, likewise, bear the stamp of their authors' specialist interests: Cunningham's in children and poverty and their representation in modern England (1991) and Heywood's in children and work in nineteenth-century France (1988).

In addition to these overviews of childhood history, Michael Anderson offers a concise report in *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500–1914* (1995), and the team of Joseph Hawes and N. Ray Hiner

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[2]Other syntheses of interest include those by Shulamith Shahar (*Childhood in the Middle Ages*, 1990) and Beatrice Gottlieb (*The Family in the Western World*, 1993), and, in German and French, respectively, Klaus Arnold's 1980 *Kind und Gesellschaft*, which preceded Sommerville and later titles but was little read in this country (the New York Public Library does not even possess a copy); and Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Dider Lett's 1997 *Les enfants au Moyen Age: V–XVe siècles*. A monograph rather than a synthesis, Clarissa Atkinson's *The Oldest Vocation* (1991), on medieval mothering, is fundamental.

[3]For Rome, especially Keith R. Bradley (1990), Suzanne Dixon (1988, 1992, 2001), Jane F. Gardner (1998), Judith P. Hallett (1984), Beryl Rawson (1986, 2003), and Thomas Wiedemann (1989). For Greece, the works of Sarah Pomeroy (1997, 2002) are a standalone achievement.

contribute an invaluable collection of articles providing an international and comparative overview of childhoods past and present (*Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 1991). The wide-ranging essays collected by David Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli in *Family Life in Early Modern Times (1500–1789)* (2001), the first of their three-volume *History of the European Family*, may be too broad to be greatly helpful to specialists in our era.

Even as such general works appeared, a wave of monographs surged to explore particular aspects of the history of children and related topics. The following pages consider first those specific to regions or places, and then those grouped according to theme or problem.

England: English historians, building on the foundations laid by Laslett, Macfarlane, and Stone, have looked closely at aristocratic households and everyday life. Joel T. Rosenthal (*Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England*, 1991) and Barbara J. Harris (*English Aristocratic Women, 1450–1550*, 2002) give complementary portraits of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century aristocracy, the former stressing the importance of patrilineal strategies, the latter the significant authority and sometimes invisible power exerted by matriarchs. For the eighteenth century, Judith S. Lewis (*In the Family Way*, 1986) and Naomi Tadmor (*Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, 2001) offer studies of aristocratic family relations to supplement Randolph Trumbach's earlier work (*Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, 1978) on aristocratic kinship. Explorations of aristocratic households benefit from the analysis of the papers of two families in particular: the Verneys (Miriam Slater's *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century*, 1984) and the Pastons (Colin Richmond's three volumes on *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century*, 1990, 1996, 2000), based on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions of the documents. Alison Hanham, in addition, has edited the papers of a merchant family, the Celys (*The Cely Letters, 1472–1488*, 1975), and has contributed a study based on those texts (*The Celys and Their World*, 1985).

Feminist scholars look at the women of the elites because of the greater abundance of literary texts, which they use to illumine the lives of women as mothers, as does Sylvia Brown (*Women's Writing in Stuart England*, 1999) and Betty Travitsky ("The New Mother of the English Renaissance," 1980, and "'A Pittilesse Mother'?", 1994). Not only such studies, but also editions of works by mothers — both as facsimiles and in new critical editions — fill out our understanding of early modern motherhood: especially valuable is Elizabeth Joscelin's *The Mothers Legacy to her Unborn Childe*, edited by Jean Metcalfe (2000). Valerie Fildes's works on breastfeeding (*Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, 1986, and *Wet-Nursing: A History*, 1988)

explore this particular aspect of the maternal role in a broad sweep over time, region, and class; also invaluable is Fildes's collection of essays on early modern mothers (*Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, 1990).

The surge of private literature in the seventeenth century was authored not only by mothers but also husbands, fathers, and sons. Pollock's study of *Forgotten Children* (1983) draws on an immense roster of diaries and memoirs by aristocratic and middle-class authors, from which she also published a useful anthology of excerpts (*A Lasting Relationship*, 1987). One of the earliest works of this sort to receive a critical edition is the still-invaluable *Diary of Ralph Josselin* (1976), edited by Alan Macfarlane.

The early modern era was also the era of the first works of children's literature, as seen in the work of Warren Wooden (collected essays in *Children's Literature of the English Renaissance*, edited posthumously by Jeanie Watson, 1986). The dawning of this genre is also recounted in the first chapter of the encyclopedic *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*, edited by Peter Hunt and others (1995).

Alan Macfarlane's earlier work on the English family (1970, 1978, 1985, cited above) paved the way for David Cressy's magisterial examination of village life for the whole Tudor-Stuart period (*Birth, Marriage and Death*, 1997), centered on crucial life events. Ralph Houlbrooke's studies (*The English Family, 1450–1700*, 1984, and *Death, Religion, and the Family*, 1998) and editions (*English Family Life, 1576–1718*, 1988) touched on similar themes, as does Mary Abbot's brief and student-friendly *Life Cycles in England, 1560–1720* (1996). Looking at the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Barbara Hanawalt presents pioneering studies on children in peasant families (*The Ties that Bound*, 1986) and the city of London (*Growing up in Medieval London*, 1993). Examining seventy-four autobiographies, Ilana Ben-Amos painstakingly reconstructs the varieties of adolescent experience over the period 1500–1800 (*Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*, 1994).

Italy: Mining the archives of the cities of northern Italy, especially Florence, historians have produced a wealth of studies of families and other institutions concerned with the care of children. Two particular institutions have attracted study: youth confraternities and foundling homes. Richard Trexler inaugurates the discussion of youth confraternities in his *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (1980), and Konrad Eisenbichler and Lorenzo Polizzotto follow his lead with their studies of the confraternities of the Archangel Raphael (1998) and the Purification (2004), respectively; meanwhile, Trexler writes on the renunciation of worldly life of the youth Francis of Assisi (*Naked before the Father*, 1989), and his various studies on

youth are reprinted in the first volume of his *Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence* (1993).

Foundling homes have attracted even more attention than confraternities, resulting in important contributions by Volker Hunecke (*I trovatelli di Milano*, 1989), Philip Gavitt (*Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence*, 1990), Francesco Bianchi (*La Ca' di Dio di Padova nel Quattrocento*, 2005), and Nicholas Terpstra (*Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance*, 2005) on the abandoned children of Milan, Florence, Padua, and Bologna. Trexler's earlier study of the Innocenti in Florence is reprinted in his *Power and Dependence* (1:*The Children of Florence*, 1993), while David Kertzer turns to the descendants of the Renaissance *esposti*, the abandoned children of the nineteenth century (*Abandoned for Honor*, 1993). These examinations of Italian institutions form part of a larger investigation of European foundlings homes, discussed below.

Broader approaches to the experience of Renaissance children are offered by Ilaria Taddei (*Fanciulli e giovani*, 2001) and the collection of essays *The Premodern Teenager*, edited by Konrad Eisenbichler (2002), while Louis Haas, looking primarily at *ricordanza* texts, proposes in his *Renaissance Man and his Children* (1998) a more positive view of parent-child relationships than has emerged from earlier studies. In a classic essay, George McClure studies the response of humanist fathers to child death ("The Humanist Art of Mourning," 1986), a theme which the present author also pursues in probing the outburst of grief experienced by a Venetian nobleman on the death of his son (*The Death of the Child Valerio Marcello*, 1994). The classic studies of the Venetian nobility by Stanley Chojnacki (collected in his *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*, 2000) are often concerned with the socialization of adolescents, while the care of children is among the issues illumined in Patricia Brown's study *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (2004). Thomas Kuehn has contributed three important monographs over a twenty-year period on women and the law, the emancipation of minors, and child illegitimacy (*Emancipation in Late Medieval Florence*, 1982, *Law, Family, and Women*, 1991, and *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 2002), which map out the legal constraints on the Florentine family and their impact on its subordinate members: women and children.

Studies of Florentine families by Richard Goldthwaite (*Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence*, 1968) and F. W. Kent (*Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence*, 1977) belong to an earlier historiography, but deserve mention because of the consequences for children of the household structures that they describe. The sweeping collection of essays *The Family in Italy* edited by David Kertzer and Richard Saller (1991) includes important

contributions for the ancient through early modern periods by Jane Fair Bestor, Michael Sheehan, Julius Kirshner, and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber. Turning to the latter stages of premodern history, Giulia Calvi's examination of mothers and children in modern Tuscany (*Il contratto morale*, 1994) continues the Florentine Renaissance story in the next centuries, as does her cameo study ("Maddalena Nerli and Cosimo Tornabuoni," 1992) of one seventeenth-century Tuscan widow and her children; likewise, Stuart Woolf's study of work and family in Italy and France (*Domestic Strategies*, 1991) ranges from 1600 to 1800.

In addition to this large harvest of secondary works, textual sources for Italy are uniquely rich. Besides the *ricordanze* — of which many are in print — documented in footnotes to many of the works named here, they include the humanist works on marriage and the family by Francesco Barbaro (a translation of the second part from the 1916 edition of Attilio Gnesotto was published by Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt in *The Earthly Republic*, 1978) and Leon Battista Alberti (*I libri della famiglia*, edited by Ruggiero Ruggieri and Alberto Tenenti in 1969, among other editions; translated by Renée Neu Watkins in *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, also in 1969). More recently, the invaluable letters of the Florentine widow Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi to her children in exile have been made accessible, analyzed by Ann Crabb (*The Strozzi of Florence*, 2000); an Italian edition by Alessandra Bianchini (Macinghi Strozzi, *Tempo di affetti e di mercanti*, 1987) and an English translation of *Selected Letters* by Heather Gregory (Macinghi Strozzi, *Selected Letters*, 1997) are both available.

France: The issues of family and private life have attracted some of the most notable French historians — beginning, as has been seen, with Ariès himself. The formidable couple of Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff coedited a collection of essays on family and kinship in the medieval West (*Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval*, 1977), reflecting their separate work on these issues. At about the same time, Ariès joined with Duby in editing a five-volume collection of essays on private life from antiquity to modern times (English translation, 1987–91), with volumes 2 and 3 — edited by, respectively, Georges Duby and Roger Chartier — most pertinent for our period. Monographs by Cissie Fairchilds on patronal relations with servants (*Domestic Enemies*, 1984), by Kristen Gager on adoption and "fictive kin" (*Blood Ties and Fictive Ties*, 1996), and by Annik Pardailhe-Galabrun on intimacy in the eighteenth century (*The Birth of Intimacy*, 1992) further explore the private life of the household.

Family and Sexuality in French History (1980), a collection of essays edited by Robert Wheaton and Tamara K. Hareven, explores these themes

from the late early modern to the modern period, while Elizabeth Marvick's biography of King Louis XIII (1986) — based on the famous journal (a work previously explored by Ariès, David Hunt, and de Mause) of the physician Hérouard, the tireless observer of the young royal's bodily and mental growth — continues the psychohistorical approach of the previous decade. Turning to the political realm, Katherine Crawford (*Perilous Performances*, 2004) looks at the relations between maternal regents and their royal sons, while Suzanne Desan (*The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, 2004) examines the changes wrought on gender relations and the family by revolutionary politics from the 1790s through 1805. Other studies focusing on education, demography, childbirth, and nursing in France are noted below.

Other regional approaches: The different settings of England, Italy, and France each called forth an abundance of monographs, attuned to different sets of questions. Counterbalancing these are the handful to come from the Low Countries, the German lands, or Iberia; even less work has been done on the peripheral regions to the east and north.

David Nicholas's archivally-based study of family relations in Ghent (*The Domestic Life of a Medieval City*, 1985) provides a neat contrast to the more patriarchal family structures of France and Italy: in this self-contained urban society, whose legal code had echoes of Germanic custom, cognates mattered, and bastards not so much. Katalin Peter's *Beloved Children*, surveying the experience of aristocratic children in the early modern age, also reveals patterns not typical of what has been taken as the Western European norm.

Turning to the German lands, James Schultz's important study *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100–1350* (1995), which identifies 375 individual children for whom there is historical knowledge, reaches to the edge of our period. The sequence of Steven Ozment's works on domestic lives in Reformation German towns, derived from a rich lode of memoirs and letters, paints a portrait of close-knit families, loving parents, and dutiful, productive children reminiscent of our ideal of the American family: these begin with his 1983 *When Fathers Ruled*, continue in *Three Behaim Boys* (1990) with the analysis of 207 letters of adolescents to mothers or guardians, go on to a further analysis of the corpus of Nuremberg private literature in *Flesh and Spirit* (1999), and culminate in the concise restatement in *Ancestors* (2001).

Historians of Spain have looked at children as part of the broader issue of poverty, as does Mary Elizabeth Perry in her study of the poor women of Seville (*Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, 1990), James William Brodman in his on hospitals serving the poor of Catalonia (*Charity*

and Welfare, 1998), and Joan Sherwood in hers on the Madrid foundling home of the Inclusa (*Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Spain*, 1988).

4. THEMATIC APPROACHES

Poverty and childhood: The connection between poverty and children targeted by these scholars might better be seen as one of the themes of the history of childhood that crosses regional and national boundaries. Several studies of Italian foundling homes (by Gavitt, Hunecke, Bianchi, and Terpstra) have already been noted above, as has Sherwood's study of the Madrid Inclusa (1988). To these should be added, for central Europe, Otto Ulbricht's extensive 1985 article on the proponents and opponents of these institutions in eighteenth-century German lands, and the two monographs by Thomas Safley and Anne McCants on the orphanages — distinctly not foundling homes, the refuge of the poor — of Augsburg (*Charity and Economy in the Orphanages of Early Modern Augsburg*, 1997) and Amsterdam (*Civic Charity in a Golden Age*, 1997), respectively. Also to be consulted is the massive, kaleidoscopic 1991 collection of essays presented in Rome in 1987 (*Enfance abandonée et société en Europe, XIV–XXe siècle*), and the relevant essays in John Henderson and Richard Wall's *Poor Women and Children in the European Past* (1994). Brian S. Pullan's masterful overview of foundlings and orphans in Europe (1989) is indispensable. A consideration of some other transnational themes follows.

Childbirth and related topics: In a truly international effort, scholars have explored in numerous studies the related topics of childbirth and midwifery, obstetrics and pediatrics, nursing and wetnursing, and the deadly trio of contraception, abortion, and infanticide. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's account of the visual documentation of the performance of Caesarian sections in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (*Not of Woman Born*, 1990) opened up the world of midwifery, further examined in Jacques Gelis's account of childbirth, especially in seventeeth-century France (*The History of Childbirth*, 1991). These studies paved the way for Jacqueline Musacchio's exhaustive study, brilliantly illustrated, of the culture of childbirth in Renaissance Italy (*The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 1999).

Employing a cultural studies approach, the essays in *Maternal Measures* collected by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (2000) reflect on the experience of maternity in several linguistic settings. Cressy's study of life stages (*Birth, Marriage and Death*, 1997) and Mendelson and Crawford's overview of *Women in Early Modern England* (1998), along with the contributors to Valerie Fildes's collection of essays on *Women as Mothers*

(1990), explore the many facets of childbirth in England. In the last, Adrian Wilson's article on "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation" is a notable contribution, among others.

The role of the midwife, and the overtaking of midwifery by professional male obstetricians, has been a major theme. From the fifteenth century, Italian, German, English, and French physicians followed the example of Soranus, a Hellenistic Greek whose *Gynecology* (trans. Owsei Temkin, 1956) was directed to an audience of literate midwives. Such publications included, most notably, those in Italian by Michele Savonarola (*Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico in volgare*, ed. Luigi Belloni, 1952), and by Giovanni Marinello and Girolamo Mercurio (ed. Maria Luisa Altieri-Biagi et al. in *Medicina per le donne nel Cinquecento*, 1992); in German by Eucharius Rösslin (*When Midwifery Became the Male Physician's Province*, trans. and ed. Wendy Arons, 1994; widely circulated in the original German and in translation); in English by Thomas Raynalde (his *Birth of Mankinde*, a translation via the Latin of Rösslin, published repeatedly from 1544); and in French by Jacques Guillemeau (*De l'heureux accouchement des femmes*, 1609).[4] These experts wrote to advise midwives, whose incompetence otherwise might endanger the lives of infants; they did not presume to usurp the role of midwife, as at this juncture male manipulation of women's bodies in childbirth was inconceivable.

By 1600, however, midwives themselves had begun to write, as did Louise Boursier Bourgeois, who tended the childbirths of French queen Marie de' Medici. Boursier's story is told by Wendy Perkins (*Midwifery and Medicine in Early Modern France*, 1996), while her memoir of her experience, one of the first by a woman, has been edited by François Rouget and Colette H. Winn (*Récit veritable de la naissance de Messeigneurs et Dames les enfans de France*, 2000). Other midwife-authors followed in the seventeenth century: in 1671, Jane Sharpe published her recapitulation of Rösslin, narrated by one midwife to her peers (*The Midwives Book*, ed. Elaine Hobby, 1999), and in 1690 appeared the instruction in dialogue form of Justine Siegemund, court midwife to Frederick William, the

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[4]The medieval collection of obstetrical texts known as the *Trotula*, deriving from the eleventh- to twelfth-century Salerno school — which did not depend on Soranus — is analyzed by Monica Green (2001) and, in her introduction to the *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*, by Beryl Rowland (1981). These and other obstetrical guides cited above, also deal (often as an afterthought) with pediatrics, which came into its own as an independent enterprise during the early modern period: see, for instance, Rick Bowers, *Thomas Phaer and the Boke of Chyldren* (1994).

Elector of Brandenburg (*The Court Midwife*, ed. Lynne Tatlock, 2005). A century later, the diary of New England midwife Martha Ballard, a spontaneous rather than self-consciously literary project, describes midwife practices not greatly distant from those of her predecessors, as shown by Laurel Ulrich Thatcher (*A Midwife's Tale*, 1990).

These midwives and their colleagues were figures of solid social standing, whose training by a network of female empirics was respected and whose services were warmly appreciated by the women they assisted. Merry Wiesner-Hanks (*Working Women in Renaissance Germany*, 1986) has pointed to the reliance of magistrates and officials on midwife experts in judicial matters, while Doreen Evendeen's archivally-based study *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (2000) reveals the high level of expertise and professionalism expected in this setting. The essays collected by Hilary Marland in *The Art of Midwifery* (1993) look at a full range of Continental as well as English examples, and detail in these diverse settings a move toward greater regulation by the seventeenth century. By this era, as well, the incursion of male physicians into the midwife's realm had begun, a process that would result in their triumph in Western societies by the twentieth century: a process traced by Jane Donnison (*Midwives and Medical Men*, 1977), Lianne McTavish (*Childbirth and the Display of Authority in Early Modern France*, 2005), and Adrian Wilson (*The Making of Man-Midwifery*, 1995), among others.

Closely related to the story of the midwife is that of the wetnurse. The ironic nature of wetnursing was brought to historians' attention by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's important 1983 study of the Florentine breastmilk trade ("Parents de sang, parents de lait," translated in *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, 1985). The irony is this: it was precisely the women of the elite, those who modern readers might otherwise suppose would be most committed to the early nurture of their infants, who most freely abandoned them to mercenary nurses; in this abandonment even of male heirs, they were supported — indeed, led — by their husbands.

The broader histories of wetnursing and infant feeding by Valerie Fildes (*Breasts, Bottles, and Babies*, 1986, and *Wet Nursing: A History*, 1988) made clear how widespread the phenomenon was, despite the repeated pleas by physicians, clerics, and humanists for maternal nursing. During the seventeenth century in England and New England, mothers of the upper strata led the way to a modern ideology of maternal nursing.[5] By the

[5]For this pattern, see especially, in addition to the works of Fildes just noted, the previously cited works of Sylvia Brown (1999), Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford (1998), and Betty Travitsky (1980); and, in addition, Patricia Crawford, "The Sucking Child" (1986), and Dorothy McLaren, "Marital Fertility and Lactation, 1570–1720" (1985).

nineteenth century, as George Sussman has shown for modern France (*Selling Mother's Milk*, 1982), it was not women of the elite, but of the poor, who outsourced the job of infant feeding.

Also akin to the theme of childbirth is that of child death. Historians have considered the array of methods used to prevent the birth, or survival, of the child. In two important studies, John Riddle (*Contraception and Abortion*, 1992, and *Eve's Herbs*, 1997) showed that contraception and abortion have been possible since antiquity, secured (not always reliably or safely) through herbal medicaments the use of which (transmitted orally until recent times) has been known not only to physicians and monastic herbalists but also to communities of women.

Beginning with John Boswell's pathbreaking book (preceded by a much-cited article announcing the principal claim) on the abandonment, or "exposure," of children (*The Kindness of Strangers*, 1988, and "'Expositio' and 'Oblatio,'" 1984), child abandonment and murder have been a target of inquiry in many historical settings.[6] For our period, notable are the studies of Claudio Povolo ("Note per uno studio dell'infanticidio nella Repubblica di Venezia, secoli XVI–XVIII," 1978–79) and Richard Trexler ("Infanticide in Florence: New Sources and First Results," 1973–74, reprinted in *Power and Dependence*, 1:*The Children of Florence*, 1993) for Italy, observing Venice and Florence, respectively. Studies by Peter Hoffer and N. E. H. Hull (*Murdering Mothers*, 1981), Mark Jackson (*Infanticide*, 2002), Josephine McDonagh (*Child Murder and British Culture*, 2003), Susan Staub (*Nature's Cruel Stepdames*, 2005), and Deborah Symonds (*Weep Not for Me*, 1977), study patterns of infanticide and its prosecution for the British isles and colonial North America.

Demography: The triple killers of contraception, abortion, and infanticide were not only the refuge of desperate women, but also tools of population control of interest to male householders. Marvin Harris and Eric Ross (*Death, Sex and Fertility*, 1987) studied the relations of population control and fertility in premodern societies crossculturally, pointing to infanticide as a remedy ("death control") where other methods did not stem population growth. That relationship was already well-established for

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[6]Indispensable studies for earlier periods include Emily Coleman, "Infanticide in the Early Middle Ages," 1975, Barbara Kellum, "Infanticide in England in the Later Middle Ages," 1973–74, and William Langer, "Infanticide: A Historical Survey," 1973–74, and "Further Notes on the History of Infanticide," 1974–75; for modern times, they are numerous. The literature on the medieval charge of ritual infant murder against the Jews is vast, but see especially the works of the early modernist R. Po-chia Hsia (*The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 1988, and *Trent 1475*, 1992).

ancient Greece, late imperial China, and India into modern times, as recently shown in the work of Sarah Pomeroy ("Infanticide in Hellenistic Greece," 1983, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece*, 1997, and *Spartan Women*, 2002), Françoise Lauwaert (*Le meurtre en famille*, 1999), and Mala Sen (*Death by Fire*, 2001), for these three settings, respectively.

Jean-Louis Flandrin (*Families in Former Times*, 1979) raised similar themes for seventeenth-century France, posing the hypothesis that France's primacy in the use of birth control reflected an attitude shift among the elites in the direction of altruism: fewer children would be born, but more would survive. Looking at the intersection of population trends, power, and ideas in the eighteenth century, Carol Blum (*Strength in Numbers*, 2002) argued that pronatalist Enlightenment freethinkers exploited the perceived fertility crisis to urge resistance to the moral authority of church and king. Wally Seccombe's study of changes in family structure and behavior over the millennium "from feudalism to capitalism" in northwestern Europe (*A Millennium of Family Change*, 1992) targeted the opening of the "nuptial valve," the self-regulation of population through delayed marriage, as the critical factor in modern trends. Whereas the self-control of premodern European peoples had spared them Malthusian disasters (the terrible fourteenth century aside), to the benefit especially of children and the young, the unchecked childbearing of the poor in modern times has endangered those imprudently brought into the world. Further useful contributions to these discussions of fertility and demography are gathered in *The World We Have Gained*, a Festschrift for Peter Laslett edited by Lloyd Bonfield, Richard Smith, and Keith Wrightson (1986).

The schooling of children: Today, we expect that all children should receive at least an elementary education: free and compulsory schooling for all children is one of the principles enumerated by the United Nations' "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" (1959). In premodern times, though, few children were schooled, and the evolution of the concept of schooling as an essential prerogative of children is an important theme in the history of childhood: one which the ubiquitous Ariès himself addresses in the much-ignored second part of *Centuries of Childhood*.

The early modern period is pivotal in this evolution. In earlier centuries, schooling was considered necessary mainly for future monks, priests, and ecclesiastical officials. Even the literate advisors of kings, and the secretaries and notaries serving urban governments, were often clerics: Venice was exceptional in disqualifying all clerics from secretarial positions. Beginning in the fourteenth century, fee-based public schools began to spring up in towns and cities to train children for secular vocations as

merchants or bureaucrats, while princes and patricians hired tutors to teach their sons.

Paul F. Grendler masterfully traces the multiple configurations of schooling for children of different sexes, social origins, and vocational destinies in his *Schooling in Renaissance Italy* (1989), a story continued in *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (2002). Robert Black looks specifically at the development of the humanist curriculum in his *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (2001). Giuseppina Battista analyzes the educational views of humanism's early opponent, the Dominican Giovanni Dominici, in her *L'educazione dei figli nella regola di Giovanni Dominici* (2002), while Sharon Strocchia studies convent schooling for girls in her substantial essay "Learning the Virtues" (1999). Ruth Kelso's older compendium of guides to the training of girls, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (1956) — which is not restricted to their academic education, which was minimal — is still invaluable. Craig Kallendorf's recent translation of *Humanist Educational Treatises* (2004), replacing the venerable 1897 collection of William Harrison Woodward, is most welcome, while Woodward's related 1906 volume, *Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance*, is still worth a look.

For England, William Courtenay's *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (1987) and Nicholas Orme's several studies of schooling and society among the aristocracy (*English Schools in the Middle Ages*, 1983, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 1984, and *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*, 1989) address similar issues to around 1500; Jo Ann Moran Cruz's *Growth of English Schooling, 1340–1548* (1984) looks specifically at the York diocese. The humanist reshaping of the curriculum in the sixteenth century is documented in contemporary works available in modern editions and translations: Roger Ascham (*The Scholemaster*, 1966, 1967), Thomas Elyot (*Boke Named the Governour*, 1992), Richard Mulcaster (*Positions Concerning the Training Up of Children*, 1994), and, attending specifically to the preparation of girls, Juan Luis Vives (*The Education of a Christian Woman*, translated from the Latin, 2000; *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, an edition of the sixteenth-century English translation, 2002). Vives may have been encouraged in his project of learning for women by his good friend Erasmus, whose views of female education are outlined by J. Kelley Sowards in "Erasmus and the Education of Women" (1982).

On this issue, the essays collected in Barbara Whitehead's *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe* (1999) examine several aspects of girls' schooling in Europe without providing a unified vision. Further volumes (in addition to Vives's) of The University of Chicago's The Other Voice in

Early Modern Europe series (coedited by Albert Rabil, Jr., and Margaret L. King) add to the discussion of women's educability and depict their schooling: notably, Anna Maria van Schurman's *Whether a Christian Woman Should Be Educated* (1998), Jacqueline Pascal's *A Rule for Children* (2003), Mme. de Maintenon's *Dialogues and Addresses* to the students of Saint-Cyr (2004), and François Poullain de la Barre's "On the Education of Ladies" (in *Three Cartesian Treatises*, 2002). François Fénelon's treatise on the education of girls (1966) poses more modest claims for female education than his just-named contemporaries. The *Lessons for my Daughter* of the fifteenth-century Queen Anne of France (in Sharon Jansen's 2004 edition) rounds out this growing library of works on girls' schooling. Of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1995), although it betrays a glimmer of her later radicalism, expectations should not be allowed to rise too high.

Jesuit schooling, which Grendler discusses for Italy, is presented more broadly by Aldo Scaglione (*The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System*, 1986) as the vehicle by which the humanistic program of the liberal arts was incorporated across Europe. It had special impact in France, as George Huppert details in his *Public Schools in Renaissance France* (1984). Meanwhile, Protestant reformers required the availability of rudimentary education for all children. This ideal was not entirely realized even in Luther's Germany, as Gerald Strauss (1978) has shown. The rest of the story is still to be written, concerning which more below.

5. UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The outpouring of studies pertaining to the history of childhood is extraordinary: a field that did not exist a half-century ago has been a zone of fervid production. Yet, as the preceding review has shown, some issues are studied more than others, and some are quite neglected. This unevenness proceeds, in large part, from the kind of sources that can be mined for the early modern period: the literary texts, institutional, judicial, and notarial documents available admit historians only selectively to the complex reality of the age. We are well-informed about at least some European foundling hospitals, about midwifery and its takeover by male physicians, about the effects of inheritance laws, the status of illegitimates, the domestic life of the English aristocracy, and, increasingly, about the education of women. We know less about the course of childhood itself, the socialization of the young, and the lives of the poor, always a black hole. The following paragraphs suggest areas where our knowledge seems to be lacking. Perhaps we shall remain in ignorance, given the problem of sources; but at least we should recognize what we do not know.

The silent years: Ancient, medieval, and Renaissance authors wrote and thought much about conception, pregnancy, childbirth, baptism, and nursing; but hardly anything about the period between infancy and age seven when, by common agreement, children should be assigned chores, sent away, made an apprentice, and committed to a tutor. While the years from early infancy to First Communion are a total blank, middle childhood, from age seven to age fourteen, is also obscure. How many children had lives like the little *picaro* Lazarillo de Tormes, who, at seven, received a hug and a good-bye from his mother and went off on his own to learn what could be learned in the terrible school of experience?

During these years, many children were the dependents of non-related adults — their masters, employers, teachers, and hosts — who had the responsibility to feed and clothe them, and the power to discipline and abuse them. These are (for males) the *garçons* and *Knaben* — the "boys" — whose condition was indistinguishable from that of household servants, who were in turn treated, and abused, like children. Discipline and protection went hand-in-hand for child servants, apprentices, and students, and even for the children of elites, who, as generally in England (but also in some other regions), circulated out of their own homes to those of their parents' social peers, where they acquired experience necessary for their later lives that, as it seemed self-evident to contemporaries, they could not learn at home.

A few children stayed at home, such as the designated heir of a peasant household in areas of impartible inheritance, or peasant boys indiscriminately in areas of partible inheritance; likewise, the son or sons likely to inherit from a merchant father. But others left: the non-inheriting children of peasants (including most daughters) for employment or service elsewhere, the sons of artisans to apprenticeship in a trade other than their father's, the sons and daughters of the nobility to remote courts and halls, and aristocratic and bourgeois daughters to convents, either for schooling preliminary to marriage, or to lifelong vocations.

How many children left home forever at ages seven, eight, and nine, and how many circulated to other households as boarders, servants, and apprentices? From what families did they come, and to what destinies did they travel? David Herlihy's mesmerizing table in the last chapter of his *Medieval Households* (1985) shows brilliantly how a large fraction of all the children in Florence spent their childhoods in the households of the rich: in what capacity, and to what end? Did they ever return home?

The children who circulated between households as apprentices, servants, and students came, it seems, from households that were capable of placing them. But what happened to the children of the poor, those who

were born but not placed? Where did the surplus children go? Did they end up in brothels, as did so many in antiquity? How many found refuge in church-run asylums, or in the new foundling homes, which quickly became a magnet for unwanted children? How many in the army or navy, as factotums or even, if lucky, little drummer boys? How many were sold into slavery beyond the boundaries of Christendom?

Do poor men have no children? The lowest, poorest class of Roman citizens in the early Republican era was that of the *proletarii*, our proletarians: the word means "those who bear children," or, more expansively, those who because of their abject poverty have no other productive purpose beyond bearing children. The nonproductive, nonworking poor, who occupied themselves with those infamous *circenses*, were the recipients of the grain dole. One of the purposes of the dole was to enable poor people to have children: or, more properly, poor families, since women bore children all the time outside of matrimonial boundaries as a consequence of rape and exploitation. Similarly, the purpose of the alimentary benevolences of the emperors from the second century CE forward was to sustain a population of children who might otherwise starve: the children of the poor. In the absence of such ancient welfare programs, presumably, the poor would have had no children at all, either because they would not have been born, or they would not have survived.

Generalizing freely for the moment, in medieval Europe the households of the working poor were small, and those of the privileged rich were large. What of the very poor? Did poor men have no children? In the sense that they acknowledged responsibility for none, though they might have conceived many? Poor women, in contrast, certainly did: the largest category of the poor were poor women with their children, the offspring of illicit unions or of marriages disrupted by desertion, abuse, and death. The story of poverty in the West generally features female poverty, just as our own populations of the poor tend to live in households without fathers: this phenomenon is considered by the essays in John Henderson and Richard Wall's *Poor Women and Children in the European Past* (1994), as well as in Mary Elizabeth Perry's *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (1990) and Bronislaw Geremek's *Poverty: A History* (1994).

In this connection, what was the effect of the new out-relief programs instituted in the early modern period, triggered in part by Protestant reform but found also in Catholic regions? Did the out-relief systems introduced in the early modern centuries incentivize childbearing by the poor, just as the foundling hospitals, as has been speculated, summoned into existence new waves of foundlings? If so, did poor men thus aided

accept responsibility, or were they forced to accept responsibility for the children they fathered?

The death spectrum: In Western society today, most people are opposed to child abandonment, abuse, neglect, and murder for any purpose (and certainly not for population control) but would permit medicalized and sanitized procedures of contraception and abortion; committed minorities oppose all of these interventions for moral and religious reasons. In pre-modern times, the markers between these different forms of fetal and infant death were blurred, and, while all were deplored, they were not universally barred. The norms of our ancestors were both more stern and more per-missive than our own, not seeing contraception and abortion as lesser assaults on the child than postnatal events but, equally, not criminalizing all postnatal aggression against children.

The position of the Catholic Church was in principle pro-child then as now — leaving aside the lapses of individual members and episodes of child abuse — in the sense that it opposed all hostile interventions, both prenatal and postnatal. But less rigid principles prevailed in other forums. The same herbal potions that might (or might not) prevent conception could trigger abortion or dispatch an unwanted neonate, their multiple uses obscuring the distinctions moderns make between prevention and destruction. Even the moment of birth was not unitary: there was the moment of conception, the prenatal event of quickening (earlier for boys than for girls), the exit from the mother's body, the cutting of the umbilical cord, and the ritual of baptism. All were seen as beginnings of life.

Law courts, moreover, did not always deem maternal infanticide of a neonate reprehensible. Even in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, when prosecution of infanticide intensified — an act associated largely with poor unmarried females — courts looked sympathetically at alleged per-petrators who expressed regret, or who had expressed their willingness to embrace the new baby by the prior preparation of infant linens. The neglect of children was not always detectable in a society where not only children went hungry and ill-clad, while the corporal disciplining of children was permitted not only to parents but to parental surrogates, including em-ployers and teachers.

These ambiguities require more study, an uncomfortable pursuit that threatens our own certainties about the beginnings of life and the demar-cations made on the spectrum from conception to maturity.

Tear down that wall: Childbirth was an all-female event, not only in the West, but in other civilizations and cultures as well. Its chief figure was the midwife, the person in charge not only of the mother's well-being and the child's best outcome, but of the management of the community of women

who encircled the parturient woman, and the rituals, both religious and communal, that were necessary to complete the birth process. All of the participants were female: midwife, nurse, servants, kin, and neighbors, young and old. The wall between the female birth community and the external community of male experts — clerical, philosophical, legal, and medical — was virtually impassable well into the seventeenth century. That the leading obstetrical writers addressed their works to midwives testifies to this barrier: Soranus (*Gynecology*, 1956), Michele Savonarola (*Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico*, 1952), Antonio Guainerio (for whom Helen Lemay, "Anthonius Guainerius and Medieval Gynecology," 1985), Eucharius Rösslin (*When Midwifery Became the Male Physician's Province*, 1994), and followers were all men; while in order to assist his researches, Guainerio employed women midwives to explore the female body in ways that he himself could not.

The female monopoly of the childbirth theater begins to erode in the late seventeenth century, after which our knowledge about the process of birth becomes much better. Prior to this, almost nothing is known of the events of childbirth, which transpired behind the wall of gender difference. Some hints of the circumstances of premodern childbirth are given by modern anthropologists and sociologists, who have observed village societies that survived into recent times but seem to display features of an earlier era. The work of Doranne Jacobson for India ("The Women of North and Central India: Goddesses and Wives," and "Golden Handprints and Red-Painted Feet: Hindu Childbirth Rituals in Central India," in Jacobson and Susan Wadley, *Women in India*, 1992) and David Ransel for Russia (*Village Mothers*, 2000) are cases in point. More such investigations would greatly enhance our understanding of the childbirth process behind the wall.

Old wives' tales: The humanist Desiderius Erasmus was by no means hostile to women. He was an admirer of the pedagogical experiment conducted by his friend Thomas More, who educated the women of his household to a high standard, and charmingly made the case for female learning in his colloquy "The Abbot and the Learned Lady" (ed. Erika Rummel, *Erasmus on Women*, 1996). Erasmus favored greater freedom for women, lamenting their imprisonment, as he saw it, in convents, and showed unusual respect for widows, for whom he sketched a productive role. But in his *De pueris instituendis* (*On the Education of Children*, a large extract of which is in Rummel, *The Erasmus Reader*, 1990), he wrote that, above all, young children should be removed from the influence of women, who taught nothing but trivialities and old wives' tales. Yet it must have

been that most of our forebears were the pupils of these frivolous instructresses, and were raised on the folk tales, gossip, and stories that the "old wives" purveyed.

In premodern times, children spent their first seven years with their mothers, or with a wider circle of women including maternal kin, friends, neighbors, and servants: roughly speaking, the same kind of groups that supported the process of childbirth. Men were not merely unavailable for diaper changing and baths, as in some households today: they were wholly absent. Erasmus's suggestion that a male tutor should intervene in early childhood is unusual, and Montaigne's education from infancy by his father and a tutor, carried on in a language — classical Latin, the badge of the male fraternity of the academic elite, which Montaigne learned "while I was nursing and before the first loosening of my tongue"[7] — was perhaps unique, more totalistic even than the paternal tuition of John Stuart Mill as recorded in the latter's *Autobiography*.

We know today how important early childhood is for establishing adult health and proper mental and psychological functioning. The cognitive gain is essential. Children acquire language in the first months of life, mostly from maternal example, and then add vocabulary differentially depending on how much complex speech they hear (Eve V. Clark, *First Language Acquisition*, 2003; William O'Grady, *How Children Learn Language*, 2005; Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, 1994, among many others). The benefit for further learning of rich language acquisition in the early years is enormous. If in premodern times most children spent their first seven years (the age when schooling or training began) amid maternal circles, where literacy was rare and reading materials for the most part scarce, what could they have learned? Why were Europeans not all imbeciles (the possibility Erasmus certainly feared) if raised on the babbling of old wives?

They were not universally imbeciles because the speech they heard was not in fact imbecilic. But we do not know what it contained: what stories? What songs? These were the media that shaped the minds of Europeans, and we know only a little about this process of acculturation aside from hints about the circulation of folk tales — Robert Darnton's *Great Cat Massacre* (1984) is an exceptional contribution — and the nature of lullabies. Can we learn more?

Radical childrearing: Was the ancestor of the modern helicopter parent a Puritan, a Quaker, or even an Anabaptist? Is it possible that in these

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[7]Montaigne, 128.

radical (sectarian) groups, persecuted by Catholic and Protestant establish-
ments, the acculturation of the young was an urgent need, as John
Sommerville has suggested (*The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England*,
1992), propelling in turn a deeper involvement of parents in their young
children's lives? From the record tantalizing hints emerge of the special
concern for the young among radical parents: Anabaptist mothers who on
the eve of execution write letters to their children exhorting them to keep
the faith, Quaker mothers banding together, soon followed by a significant
Quaker investment in schooling, and the Puritan strand of emerging pro-
gressive attitudes about maternal nursing, swaddling, and individual
autonomy. Humanism, too, with its progressive attitudes toward child
learning — and its repudiation of corporal punishment — affected radical
religious groups, including the English Puritans, as Margo Todd's *Christian
Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (1987) has established.

To Anabaptists, Quakers, and Puritans may be added the case of the
Lollards, whose underground movement was kept alive through a network
of house churches, often presided over by women (Claire Cross, "'Great
Reasoners in Scripture,'" 1978; Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*,
1995); and the example of the Jews, ever embattled, who yet assured the
continuity of their beliefs, customs, and sacred language by intensive in-
struction, including parental instruction, beginning in early childhood
(Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children*, 2004; Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of
Childhood*, 1996). It may also be no coincidence that Jan Amos Komensky
(Comenius), the key advocate of early childhood education in the early
modern era, was the much-persecuted former bishop of the Moravian
Brethren, another sect whose historical importance far outstrips the size of
its membership (Daniel Murphy, *Comenius*, 1995).

Despite the diversity of religious experience in the West prior to
Luther, there was as yet just one church. The Protestant revolution ushered
in an age of multipolar religion even within Western, Latin Christianity.
Different groups displayed different levels and kinds of interest in children,
which historians have begun to explore. Jean-Louis Flandrin's important
study of early modern France (*Families in Former Times*, 1979) on the
Catholic side shows the post-Tridentine church intervening in the attitudes
and behaviors of the faithful within the family setting, scrutinizing sexual
behavior while limiting the abuses of patriarchy. While not focused spe-
cifically on children, R. Po-chia Hsia's *Social Discipline in the Reformation*
(1990) may yet be seen as a companion to Flandrin, exploring how Protestant
churches subjected domestic life to an increasingly panoptic gaze.

It is the radical Reformation, however, which may have most affected

attitudes toward children. Sommerville credits Puritans with a newly intense investment in children, which, if he is correct, may explain the novelties of Puritan childrearing practice in its New England setting, as noted by scholars John Demos (*A Little Commonwealth*, 1970, and *Past, Present, and Personal*, 1986), Judith Graham (*Puritan Family Life*, 2000), and Edmund S. Morgan (*The Puritan Family*, 1966). Karin Calvert (*Children in the House*, 1992), examining the material culture of childhood across the early modern to modern eras, finds that the Puritan inclination was to hurry children towards adulthood, while later colonials celebrated the natural child. Unlike these others named, Philip Greven (*The Protestant Temperament*, 1977, and *Spare the Child*, 1990) sees Puritan childrearing practices as distinctive, but deplorable.

Although an Anglican by choice and by marriage, Susanna Wesley was reared a Puritan and gave birth to two sons — among ten of the seventeen to nineteen children who survived infancy — who were pioneers of the non-conformist Methodist Church. Her widely circulated (and absurdly travestied) maxims on childrearing — she is best known for her precept that children bear the blows of the rod softly — misrepresent her principles, which might be called enlightened for that age. These she explicated herself in her 1732 work *On the Education of My Family* (in Wesley, *Complete Works*, 1997) composed at the invitation of her son John. Most remarkable was her method for instructing her children, male and female, in reading: instruction began the day after the sixth birthday, the alphabet was to be mastered by bedtime, and the reading of the Bible, from Genesis straight through to Revelation, began the next day. All her children succeeded in gaining literacy by this method, a success perhaps furthered by the many hours of prayer that Wesley devoted each week to each of her children in turn.

Is the West exceptional? Lloyd de Mause famously pronounced in 1973 that the history of childhood was a nightmare from which we were just awakening. He was correct in noting the abuses of children that were nearly universal in past times, but wrong in many ways. We have not yet awakened from the nightmare, on the one hand, as our daily newspapers inform us; and on the other, the awakening, though it has not arrived, began quite some time ago. From at least the twelfth century — and earlier, in some regards due to a legacy of law and custom from Rome — European society was distinguished by features favorable to children.

The West was not burdened by an ancestor cult, although there are reminiscences of a primordial one in the genealogies and rituals of the nobility. The impress of the ancestor cult is evident in the civilizations of

China and India, and in Rome prior to the last century BCE, when moderating trends developed. The need for each household to have a son to perform ancestral rites bitterly limited possibilities for women, who became ineluctably subordinated to brothers, fathers, husbands, and their husbands' mothers, the formidable mother-in-law, and were vulnerable as well to selective infanticide and neglect. It also limited possibilities for sons, whose ritual and social responsibilities bestow honor as they hamper initiative.

Free of the ancestor cult, Western society could be more open to cognate kin, widening social networks and the possibilities for offspring. The marriage of girls could be delayed beyond the moment of puberty, with the result that the mothers birthing and rearing children were older, healthier, and more capable of asserting themselves within the household for the benefit of their offspring. Widows, as well, were — if they or their natal families chose — set free from the household of a deceased husband. Although widow remarriage was discouraged in Christian Europe as in pagan Rome, widows often moved on to new households and to further mothering, escaping the widow denigration and widow suicide encountered elsewhere.

A second distinctive and oft-noted feature of Western society is the general absence of the extended family under the rule of the eldest male: a pattern often encountered elsewhere, including in ancient Rome before the social transformations of the late republic and early empire. Joint families were found in certain locations, and in cases where (as was habitual among the nobility) inheriting sons took over their fathers' household. But young men, on the whole, began new households when they married, a structural pattern encouraging multiple freedoms: of male householders to innovate, of their wives to exert authority without the impediment of mother- or father-in-law, of children to roam free and to seek to build in time a new household of their own. Alan Macfarlane (*The Origins of English Individualism*, 1978) has traced to such patterns as these the early origin of individualism in England. To some extent, this relation is true of much of Europe. In this climate, children were not always housed and cared for, but they were also less confined, and more often free to shape their own destinies.

A third distinguishing feature — one that especially tantalized David Herlihy — was Christianity (*Medieval Households*, 1985, and two volumes of essays, *The Social History of Italian and Western Europe*, 1978, and *Women, Family, and Society*, 1995). Christianity encourages commitment to God over commitment to family: it is thus, ironically, the gateway to

individualism. As is often noted, the preference for the individual is illustrated in the medieval church's theory of marriage as constituted by the utterance of words of consent by both partners "in the present moment," with or without parental approval. Furthermore, the church privileged virginity over marriage, for both men and women: a preference that disadvantaged the children left unborn and the families that had hoped for them, but which opened a zone for free thought and action for those individuals who opted for chastity. The church further advocated marital chastity for those who did not choose virginity, pressuring the powerful men most able to acquire additional wives and concubines to recognize at least the forms of monogamy — the pattern of human association arguably most advantageous for children, even in a post-Christian age.

Despite the terrible forces that threatened the young in premodern times — from microbes to pederasts, murderous mothers, and abusive employers — the structures of Western society, culture, and ideology have not been uniquely or exceptionally hostile to children. Rather, they have constituted a basis for the development of institutions and principles that would enable children to thrive and flourish in modern times. Perhaps, now, with hunger, poverty, and disease at bay, old demons such as war, greed, and lust — and new ones such as Internet predators, an irresponsible media, and child-targeted advertising — may yet be conquered: and then, assuming the West chooses to reproduce itself, the bliss of childhood may be discovered at last.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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