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Review Essay: Sommerville, John C. *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England*

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Weaver's 'Nota al testo' (pp 78–86) includes a description of the unique manuscript of the play, a list of obvious manuscript errors, and explanations of her regularization of spelling, usage, and abbreviations. Copious footnotes explicate obscure passages and grammatical constructions found in the text and compare scenes, actions, and characters of the play to their counterparts in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. Indices of historical and mythical names and of terms that appear in the footnotes follow.

One may choose to read *Amor di virtù* as an example of Renaissance *imitatio*, as an introduction to a relatively unstudied area of early European drama, or as a document of Florentine social history. In all cases, its publication is a valuable contribution to the Renaissance studies.

Robert M. Johnston
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Sommerville, John C. *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England*. University of Georgia Press, Athens 1992. 211 pp. \$35.00.

Although the title of this study leads the reader to expect something along the lines of Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood*, some of the most original observations have a slightly different focus: the family and Puritanism.

John C. Sommerville wishes to demonstrate that the Puritan preoccupation with children can be derived from the dynamics of the Puritan movement itself — from its attempt to build a future in the face of Elizabethan opposition. In structuring that ideal future, children became the natural focus of Puritan efforts, resulting in an acute sensitivity to the nature of childhood itself. Only later, after the failure of the great experiment and after the Restoration, did Puritanism evolve into a Dissenting survival mentality.

In the seventeenth century, a realistic depiction of childhood emerged, allowing the Puritans to see children as they really are. In the process, covenant theology and the central doctrine of human depravity were softened and even transformed into an effort to produce a milder paradigm of the childhood experience.

Although Sommerville may at times exaggerate the degree to which theology was bent to accommodate a perceived childhood reality, the Puritan image of childhood, 'warts and all', does seem to differ significantly from the establishment view. Sometimes, however, the definition of Puritanism employed in this study is so inflexible and static that little recognition is given to recent interpretations of more elastic, mythic dimensions of Puritan sensibility (in Bercovitch, for example). This somewhat rigid view of Puritanism later results in questionable statements: 'The concept of Puritan humor is virtually a self-contradiction' (p 111); Nathaniel Ward, author of *The Simple Cobler of Agawam*, would not agree.

Sommerville's analysis of Puritan educational writing is more thought-provoking than his treatment of humor and entertainment. It is directly committed to the Puritan ideal of respect for the individual and for that individual's right to achieve salvation without mediation. This observation permits an important distinction:

Puritan education writing is revolutionary because it is the first to make a clear contrast between education and indoctrination.

The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England concludes with an analysis of the inescapable tension between movements and families — a tension that can be traced back to the inception of Christianity itself. This tension was submerged for a time through co-optation by an official Christian establishment, but then at last reemerged in Puritanism. Here, the individualist focus threatened the cohesion and authority of the family, which could constitute, at times, dangerous, unwarranted mediation between the individual and God.

Finally, this Reformation attitude toward family is traced through Dissenting sects into the English Jacobin radicalism of the 1790s as Sommerville connects the earlier religious emphasis to later political reform efforts in Thomas Paine and William Godwin in an effective, persuasive manner. The centrality of childhood and family as dynamic agents of progressive, significant change is convincingly established. And through that change, far-reaching social and political currents continue to influence contemporary culture. This secular heritage of an overwhelmingly religious perspective further clarifies our complex debt to the Puritan experience.

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Wayne, Valerie, ed. *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y. 1991. x + 227 pp. \$48.95 / \$18.95.

Gajowski, Evelyn. *The Art of Loving: Female Subjectivity and Male Discursive Traditions in Shakespeare's Tragedies*. University of Delaware Press, Newark 1992. 153 pp. \$32.50.

Two new feminist studies employ very different approaches to Shakespeare's work. *The Matter of Difference*, a stimulating collection of ten essays with an introduction by Valerie Wayne and a theoretical afterword by Catherine Belsey, is motivated by a political agenda (generally Marxist and indebted to the new theoretical stance of Louis Althusser). It emphasizes what the contributors call 'cultural materialism', or the study of culture as it materializes beliefs through actual behavior. In contrast, Evelyn Gajowski's study, *The Art of Loving*, offers a more conventional modern (rather than Renaissance) view of sexual love and of female superiority in the realm of feeling. Both volumes properly criticize the 'new historicist' position as once again 'marginalizing' the female characters of Shakespeare and female audience responses by its critical concern with masculine power politics.

Although *The Matter of Difference* often disturbs the reader by its reliance on the academic jargon of an outworn Marxism, the essays in it often reveal sound historical scholarship and teach new material relevant to our understanding of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the Renaissance context. Some of the authors discuss popular topoi of the period, while others examine the laws concerning rape and theatrical performances at the time. In respect to topoi, Valerie Wayne argues