A DOMESTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE 15ᵀᴴ CENTURY HIERARCHY-BASED SOCIETY: THE EDUCATION OF UPPER AND MIDDLE-CLASS CHILDREN IN THE TUDOR PERIOD / UNE REPRÉSENTATION FAMILIALE DU XVᵉ SIÈCLE ANGLAIS DANS UNE SOCIÉTÉ TRÈS HIÉRARCHISÉE : L'ÉDUCATION DES ENFANTS DES CLASSES MOYENNE ET SUPÉRIEURE À L'ÉPOQUE DES TUDOR / O REPREZENTARE CASNICĂ A SOCIETĂŢII BAZATE PE IERARHIE ÎN SECOLUL AL XV-LEA: EDUCAŢIA COPIILOR DIN FAMILIILE ARISTOCRATE ŞI DIN CLASELE DE MIJLOC ÎN EPOCA TUDORILOR [1]

Abstract: The Tudor community of the fifteenth century was based on a system of dependences which were significant at every social class level. The human body acted as the symbol of a perfect 'machinery', and was referred to as the model to create links between the State and the English citizens. The medium used to weave such a hierarchy was education. The middle-classes imitated the aristocrats who were their models and the noblemen copied the king who represented God. The children had to comply to the system to make it work as a whole.

The Tudor elementary institutions corresponded with the different educational needs of the pupils. The aristocrats' sons were taught at home by tutors and masters (household up-bringing). Then from the age of seven on they were sent to other noble houses to learn the principles of 'maintenance' and good manners. Middle-classes boys and girls were sent to several different schools (A.B.C.; Chantry; grammar; gilds) where they spent ten or twelve hours a day. They learnt how to become successful merchants or clerks by priests and masters. The lower-classes got some literacy in order to read The Bible.

Key words: Tudor, childhood, education, social-classes, literacy, hierarchy.

Résumé: Au XVᵉ siècle, la communauté des Tudor était basée sur un système d'interdépendances fortes à tous les niveaux de la classe sociale. Le corps humain servait de référence en tant que 'machine parfaite' et de modèle pour établir les différents liens entre l'État et ses citoyens. Le moyen utilisé alors était l'éducation. Les classes moyennes supérieures de la société anglaise imitaient les aristocrates et les nobles copiaient le roi. Les enfants devaient se conformer au système pour qu'il puisse fonctionner en un tout cohérent.

Sous Henry VIII, les institutions d'enseignement élémentaires correspondaient aux différents besoins éducatifs des élèves. Les fils des aristocrates apprenaient chez eux sous la houlette de tuteurs ou de maîtres. A partir de l'âge de sept ans, ils partaient étudier dans une autre maison de nobles afin d'acquérir les bonnes manières.

Les garçons et les filles des classes moyennes étaient dirigés vers diverses écoles où ils travaillaient pendant dix à douze heures par jour. Là, ils se formaient pour devenir de riches marchants ou des secrétaires zélés grâce aux prêtres et aux maîtres.

Les classes inférieures obtenaient quelques rudiments d'écriture et surtout de lecture afin de pouvoir

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déchiffrer La Bible.

Mots-clés: *Tudor, enfance, éducation, classe sociale, alphabétisation, hiérarchie.*

Introduction

The Tudor social theory was rather sophisticated but made of clear notions coming from the medieval philosophy. The adults had to conform to their group according to a strong hierarchy-based structure. At the top of it was the king followed down by the aristocracy and the gentry and then by the middle-class – rich merchants, clerks and even yeomen – and by the lower classes. Men had the main role in the English community. As the husband in a couple, for example, he was the dominant partner. He was also the leader of the household religious and domestic lives since he supported his servants. As the father, he controlled his children's education. The Church, the State and above all the family were groups in which the essential prerequisite was acceptance.

In the fifteenth century, childhood was not considered a separate and privileged phase in one's life. This time was rather dedicated to education. It was not a unique and public organization but a combination of processes which were associated with the economic needs of the country.

In this paper work, we will study the varied aspects of the Tudor children education. We will first start with the description of the historical social background. Then we will study the status of the child in the fifteenth century English society. We will end our essay by the analysis of the educational system under Henry WIII's reign.

I. Being a child in the fifteenth century: the Tudor social background.
A. The body politic.

The concept of 'body politic' must have been one of the most characteristic of all the early Renaissance pictures of the community. The human body being the symbol of a perfect machinery was referred to as a model to create a relationship between the State and the English citizens. What was at stake behind this notion was the need to enhance the notion of society by comparison with the human body and its strengths or weaknesses. Later on it gave birth to the concept of 'commonweal' and commonwealth. It stressed the ordinary man's duty of obedience to political authority and underlined the fact that everybody had their role or place in the society. It implied a notion of dependence showing that social conservatism was the rule during the Tudor period. In other words, the people admitted the rigid structure of their society. It seemed closely linked with the general religious tenets. The relationship between the members of the same social group was also established on this notion of body. Could it be considered as the consequence of the geographical situation of the English people?

At that time, the power of any social group expressed itself through a system of community-based supervision with the citizens at the centre operating many forms of institutional pressure like 'the popular ridicule'. The Church had their own means of control over the Tudor people. The local secular authorities employing constables embodied the State power on one's private life. As a result, the rights and duties of the family members were organized by laws and customs. They had to be learnt by 'outsiders' and obeyed by the new conjugal units. The Church, the State and above all the families were groups led by the feeling

of 'acceptance'.

Home was considered a microcosm. Its leader was the father who had the main role in his house. Factors like social status, material resources and means of livelihood influenced the household size and structure. They also had direct consequences on the ability of the family unit to execute its basic functions and to promote the relationship among its members and towards others. These materialistic matters particularly showed in the upper- classes. The old landed aristocracy, for example, their titles dating back before 1485, gave a very important role to their physical aspect and to the notion of representation. The costume was the aristocrats' favorite means to distinguish themselves from their 'rivals' in the middle-class. It underlined their military origins and wealth. The difference between a lord and a gentleman could be defined in terms of social status and role in the English country. In the sixteenth century the latest members of the nobility were alluded to as 'newcomers' with various origins. Generally speaking, they were men of business, merchants and industrialists. These 'new men' were knights or esquires and, above all, they were yeomen as well as professionals: lawyers and physicians in towns. Their political and economic powers were strengthened when they got monastic lands after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1536.

Middle-class men imitated the aristocrats who appeared as the model that they had to stick to. Their aim was not to distinguish themselves as a world apart but to integrate the higher social class in the hierarchy. The closer they were to the lords, the closer they got to the king. They achieved their goal thanks to what was known as 'formal training' at the universities and the Inns of Court. The increasing desire of the middle and upper classes to get an education for their children was the way to break down the barriers between the groups. In a word, literacy and culture became the gentry's 'instruments' to reach the position that the aristocrats used to have as traditional privileges. So, what we call education took two major aspects. On the one hand, it meant the process of studying to get a situation in life and, on the other hand, it symbolized a kind of social accomplishment. The gentlemen's children had to adapt themselves, first to their social group and then to their parents' ambitions to reach and conform to a higher social class.

Before studying the Tudor educational system, we will analyze the child status in England in the fifteenth century.

B. Equality of status between the child and his adult partners.

Childhood was a social situation more than a physical and psychological step in life. In the Tudor period, it was accepted that it was made of two phases: the first one up to the age of seven and the second from the age of seven to puberty. As a consequence, being seven was considered a 'milestone' in the child growth. Here again it is striking to see how different costumes were the means to underline this evolution because when they were six or seven boys adopted adult dresses. Dividing youth into periods tended to be institutionalized in the fourteenth century. It was part of a wider system which concerned the whole life cycle. At that time, children were supposed to be idle, easily influenced and changeable according to a negative Augustinian postulate. Many adults associated them with little wild and unruly animals that had to be tamed before being introduced to the community. Religious ideologies were very important in the Tudor period and youth was seen as a necessary step in one's life but sometimes as a burden too. The negative light through which childhood was generally

viewed makes it clear that the purpose of education was to show the parents' social position and to reach a moral perfection. Schools were the instrument to form – to tame – the children's personality. Educating a youth allowed him to be accepted by superiors. School training was considered a transition from a morally inferior to a superior position by most pedagogues. To make sure the masters were loyal to the Church of England ideals, the Tudor and then the Stuart governments developed a system of licensing and supervising teachers. In their eyes it was the counterpart of the medieval way of controlling the masters by insisting on bringing up both boys and girls in proper piety and obedience. Schools and, more generally speaking education, were supposed to be means to keep moral ideals or the public order and to achieve political and religious conformity. In the fifteenth century the parents' scheme was not only to provide their children with a general academic knowledge but to bring them to integrate their community as quickly as possible. In the Tudor times there was quite an equality of status between the child and his adult parents and relatives since most of the time they experienced the same kind of life and social pressure.

II. The educative system.

In the fifteenth century, the children's instruction mainly depended on a structure called 'household up-bringing'. This private method affected the aristocracy and well-organized social groups. This sort of formal training was also suitable for the gentry. It mixed the traditional schooling at home and a more 'modern phenomenon called the *tour* from a French[1] expression. In the Tudor years, the latter progressively took the place of the former. It responded to new economic and social concerns. If the chivalric education had represented a way of keeping and repeating the old medieval notions of the aristocrat being exclusively at the service of the king, the apprenticeship system of the *pages* seemed to obey the new educational and practical needs of the English upper-classes. Under Henry VIII's reign the sons of the gentry took advantage of the scientific, financial and literary curricula provided by the grammar schools and the universities and, in a way, competed with the aristocracy to get powerful functions in the government. Under such pressure noblemen regularly joined colleges in order to integrate new social situations based upon the individual's merit rather than on inherited privileges and titles.

A. *Household up-bringing: a private process.*

Household up-bringing had two different aspects. First it was a typically masculine way of training the sons of old landed nobility called chivalric education. But then it became a wider phenomenon: the apprenticeship system of the *pages*.

The boys' chivalric education of the early Tudor times came from the knight's culture of courtesy from the Middle Ages. The youths were devoted to military service so it was basically a physical training. The boys were taught how to ride a horse, how to fight and how to organize battles. It required a long and tough practice but corresponded with the physical and psychological development of the knight-to-be. It started when the boys were seven with moral instruction. They used to begin their apprenticeship as squires and were

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[1] Like in the French expression *faire le tour de l'Europe*: travelling round Europe.

taught the menial tasks of household service. For the following seven years, they would start to learn the rules of courtly love both by precepts and through the *chansons de gestes*. Towards the ends of this training period, the squires paid more attention to their physical exercises. They practised running, wrestling and above all horse-riding. Until they were twenty-one and ready to be dubbed as knights, the young men were trained in the use of several weapons. They also completed their knowledge in hunting and hawking. At twenty-one they were fit for knighthood.

Becoming a school age boy – either at home or in an elementary institution – really meant leaving the constant attention of the mother and her servants to spend most of the time with men and educators. Household-upbringing depended on tutors and specialized masters. It represented a formal kind of training at home with a few children. Besides teaching tutors often went with the eldest son of the family on what had become part of a gentleman's education, his travelling abroad. It corresponded with a time when French young men were sought-after for private tuition in noble homes. Refugees from the Continent and The Low Countries were even encouraged to set up schools. Tutors sometimes acted more like friends and counselors than like private teachers, roles often performed by specialized masters.

Parents had a contribution to pay too. The influence of the family could be called 'education by analogy' the children being asked to imitate their fathers and mothers. Household-upbringing fitted the girls' future life. The daughters' education, unlike that of boys, remained essentially the responsibility of one parent throughout childhood: the mother. It was the consequence of the general belief of the girls' inferior psychological ability. The parents' duty was to associate their children to what they undertook, to their own way of living and to their community. Most of the time it was achieved through letters and written essays on behaviour. *The Paston Letters* became famous in the Tudor period because they taught the sons and grandsons of the family long after the father had died.

Landed families parents usually sent their children to the houses of great noble men or, if possible, to the king's. Dispatching young people to other places as *pages* used to be the other aspect of teaching at home. The academic side of the boys' education was the responsibility of one of the chaplains or, in a very important house, of the specialized masters of grammar who were priests most of the time. It was the case of Henry VI who went to live by Robert, Duke of Gloucester, for example, and of Henry VI who was a *page* at Richard Beauchamp's, earl of Warwick. Sending one's boys or even one's girls away made the family appear as a 'cell' which had first and educational and then a sentimental function but the presence of outsiders at home made little room for privacy.

B. *Going to school or teaching the commoner.*

The teaching method of the Tudor times was composed of three major subjects. Chivalry was the first one with a skill in the use of weapons, wrestling, dancing and so on. The constant aristocratic emphasis on manners came second. The third and newest aspect was the teaching of moral and political philosophy, history, law, modern languages, mathematics and astronomy.

What was called modern instruction took place in the existing institutions of learning: the elementary schools and grammar schools, the universities and finally the Inns of Court. The 'newcomers' or the lawyers, the rich merchants and even the prosperous

yeomen's sons practised growing pressures on Henry VIII's institutes to get by skill what young aristocrats had by service. These people joined the ranks of the gentry in their ways of behaving and living according to the highest codes of good manners. It was often associated with the Protestant principles of life and philosophy. To draw the general outline of the fifteenth century organized instruction, we must first note that formal education was mainly provided by clerks – the keepers of 'petty[1] schools' – for the children of humbler birth. Few documents are left about A.B.C. schools maybe because of the lack of attention that the first educators showed to the basic training of the English pupils since, most of the time, they were supposed to be taught at home. However this kind of institutions already existed in the late Middle Ages. English school programmes were originally available to everyone, for the good of the State and the good of the individual. The children who attended the A.B.C. establishments belonged to the middle and sometimes lower-classes who could not afford to pay for the services of a private tutor. Indeed, poverty was not really an obstacle to instruction since many gifts were given for the training of destitute pupils. It was also considered very praiseworthy.

A.B.C. schools curricula were simple enough and only suitable for very young children – they were not aged seven – who used to attend the place to learn how to read The Bible, how to write and sometimes how to count. In the Tudor times, A.B.C. institutes could be compared with the 'petty schools'.

The Song and Chantry schools were already mentioned in the Middle Ages as religious places. They were associated with the building of the great cathedrals. Important religious communities had actually appeared as places of knowledge in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Then they provided organized teaching for young children in latin as well as a real science in singing, a skill needed to take part in services at church. As elementary institutions, Song schools main purpose was to train choristers in music and singing as well as in reading and writing. It became also available to outsiders once regular institutes were at a 'higher level' than petty schools.

C. Grammar school: the way to university.

Chantry schools were not built to respond to the needs of particular Christian institutions like the cathedral gilds but came from the pious philanthropy of individual benefactors. So sons of merchants, yeomen and craftsmen were likely to find an education in the growing number of local places. In the Tudor period it depended mainly on the social structure of the gilds. Under Henry VIII's reign, these schools provided a minimum of literacy for the poor. The method by which children were taught how to read and write was simple enough. They began by learning their alphabet by heart, for instance, and then they tried to put together vowels and consonants. Then they went on associating diphthongs and longer combinations of letters. These places were available for girls as they were asked a far lower standard of academic knowledge. They eventually appeared as the best places for the children who wished to become clerks.

The notion of regular schooling was quite incidental in the Tudor period. It became compulsory for those who, from an early age, looked to enter the Church and thus attended a

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[1] From the French *petit*: small.

grammar school before registering at the university. The famous ones built at that time were mainly designed to educate the children of their locality either for no cost at all or for some more or less free entrance. The intellectual background that was required before starting on a grammar course was most of the time provided outside the establishment by the parish priest. The curriculum was composed of the *trivium* based on grammar, rhetoric and dialectic and of the *quadrivium* which dealt with geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music. Students had an oral training made of exercises. Studying The Bible was the school main topic because elementary and even secondary Tudor education were basically religious in aim. More attention was paid to the study of grammar which fell into two rather well-defined parts and supervised in the larger schools by the usher who used drills and repetition while the master taught latin composition. The students spent most of their time writing and translating classical authors. It underlines the traditional aspect of educational classes long before the Humanist reforms.

In all the teaching places the school session used to begin and to end with religious exercises which varied from a few prayers prescribed by the founder (like The Lord's Prayer or The Ten commandments) to a more elaborate service for the older students. Learning a foreign language was part of what was called 'modern subjects' like history and geography, physical training or even sciences. They were often unknown in the ordinary grammar schools which kept providing a traditional teaching in latin and religion. Nevertheless, they were considered a necessity in the education of a gentleman but not a priority to the development of the masses. Studying French was 'fashionable' in England under Henry VIII's reign for the children of the nobility since the king was a perfect linguist. French tuition remained however in the hands of private tutors. History and geography which were important subjects of the chivalric training were still taught in pre-reformation schools, as well as music and sports. They represented a less academic side of the syllabus but were, like the practice of a musical instrument, a priority in the education of a gentleman.

The analysis of the Tudor grammar school curriculum would not be thorough without a few lines about the teaching of sciences. The scarce information which could be found out in specialized texts revealed that educators were generally suspicious about mathematical exercises. However in the sixteenth century it became a priority probably because of the growth of financial exchanges and business deals and transactions. In the 1530's the teaching places which had before often been poorly administered because subordinated to priestly purposes were oriented towards preparing many male students for apprenticeship or university entrance.

From the time of leaving home until their late returns at night, Tudor pupils used to spend ten or even twelve hours a day studying. They would stay at school as much as adults would work in their shops or offices.

Conclusion

One of the words that could qualify the Tudor society is 'conformity'. For the ordinary man it implied the individual's duty of obedience to authority and hierarchy and meant that everybody must keep their due place. The lower classes were submitted to a rigid social framework based on a religious philosophy which emphasized the power of the group

upon its members. The Tudor community was based on a framework of dependences and social pressures which were significant in the different school systems.

In the fifteenth century, childhood was not considered a separate and privileged moment in life. It was all dedicated to education. The child was seen as an apprentice since he was supposed to learn how to integrate the adults' worlds. At that time boys and girls were taught their future functions in life either at home for the wealthiest or at school for the others. Broadly speaking, schools and private tutors had to form the children's personality and to teach them the religious and social norms of their groups.

Education was the medium used by parents so that pupils would go from a morally inferior to a superior situation and could make themselves acceptable to their community members. It was supported both by the Church and the State in their concern to achieve political and religious conformity. If the secondary and superior educational structures appeared as basically religious in aim, their curricula composed of grammar, latin, law, mathematics, astronomy, music and 'good manners' were reliable enough to raise the gentlemen, the merchants and the yeomen's sons to the highest offices. The development of an international economy promoted the middle classes which, thanks to their entrepreneurial and zealous spirit as well as their suitable educational background reached what had previously been the aristocracy privilege. Lords and gentlemen were the representatives of the notion of 'maintenance', a sophisticated code which organized each phase of their everyday lives and behaviours. They both featured the highest degree of the body politic just below the king. They trained their children as superior members of the English society. Boys and girls were taught at home by tutors and then they were sent to other prestigious houses as *pages*. They repeated a system in which a child was to imitate an adult who had to integrate a social group before being accepted by the Tudor society.

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