

THE CHILD AT THE MIRROR:



Niels Bredal's *Børne Speigel* (1568)

By Anna Wegener

Niels Bredal's conduct book Børne Speigel (1568) has received surprisingly scant attention despite being considered the first work of children's literature in Danish. In Børne Speigel, an adult speaker directs his words to a young narratee, a 'you'. In this article, I explore the identity of this 'you' in an attempt to picture how children in early modern Denmark might have lived. I also discuss Bredal's possible sources of inspiration, showing that Børne Speigel is indebted not only to Erasmus' De civilitate morum puerilium (1530), as many scholars have pointed out, but also to Martin Luther's Kleiner Katechismus (1529).

A neglected text

Scholars concur that the first work of children's literature written in Danish is *Børne Speigel* (Mirror for children), a conduct book by the teacher and priest Niels Bredal.¹ It was printed in Copenhagen in 1568 by Mads Vingaard and only a single copy of it survives, which is held by the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

Bredal's book was made accessible to a wider audience in 1894 when the church historian Holger Fr. Rørdam republished it as part of a series of writings issued by Universitets-Jubilæets Danske Samfund (The University Anniversary's Danish Society), a society devoted to disseminating and preserving knowledge of the Danish language and Danish dialects.² Rørdam

¹ See e.g. Stybe 1969; Winge 1981, 14–15; Weinreich 2006, 15–21; Christensen 2012, 82. On Bredal's life and career, see Wegener 1846, 11–15; Rørdam 1894, III–VII; Vester 2012, 237–248; Bredal, whose exact dates of birth and death are not known, was probably born in the village of Bredal in the vicinity of Vejle in southern Jutland. He was a Dominican monk before the Reformation. In 1542, he became the first principal of the Latin school in Vejle, a position he held for many years. His name has been passed down to posterity for two reasons: first, because he authored *Børne Speigel*, and second because he was the teacher of Anders Sørensen Vedel, and indeed Vedel is said to have learned impeccable Latin as a boy under Bredal's guidance.

² *Børne Speigel* – the entire text or parts of it – exists in various editions. See Bredal 1894; Stybe 1969, 12–19; Bredal 2009. In this article I quote from the digital facsimile of

observed that Bredal's text contained many elements of interest for linguists and cultural historians, and he hoped that his edition would prompt scholars to study the work more closely. Rørdam considered *Børne Speigel* the first pedagogical treatise written in Danish. He viewed it as a historically interesting document revealing how "vore Forfædre" (our forefathers) lived and thought, but disregarded the fact that Bredal addresses children.³ While emphasizing its value for cultural historians, he ignored that *Børne Speigel* is children's literature.⁴

In 1969, Vibeke Stybe, a pioneer of children's literature studies, reinterpreted *Børne Speigel* as a text for children by including parts of it in her anthology of early Danish children's literature. Stybe even named her anthology after Bredal's text, finding that it was representative of the period under scrutiny in her book, i.e., the time from 1550 to 1850. According to Stybe, the history of Danish children's literature could be roughly divided into two parts: whereas early children's literature was aimed at educating children, authors of later periods – from approximately 1850 onward – focused on entertaining their young audience.⁵ Elsewhere, Stybe characterized early children's literature as follows: "Belæring og gudsfrygtighed [*sic*] er indholdet af de tidlige bøger for børn, og illustrationerne er af religiøs art" (Instruction and godliness are the content of early books for children, and the illustrations are of a religious nature).⁶ This description shows why *Børne Speigel* – despite Stybe's considering it a text that both inaugurates and represents an important period in the history of Danish children's literature – has hitherto never been subjected to thorough scholarly analysis. Bredal's text is both didactic and profoundly pious, and as such it does not seem to be 'good' children's literature by today's (normative) standards.⁷

the 1568 edition of The Royal Library in Copenhagen:

<http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/696/eng/>.

³ Rørdam 1884, X. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ For a standard definition of children's literature as literature written and published for children see Weinreich 2004, 33; Christensen 2012, 20. Troels Lund, author of *Dagligt Liv i Norden i det sekstende Aarhundrede* (Daily life in the Nordic countries in the sixteenth century), early recognized the value of Bredal's text as a source for the cultural historian, see e.g. Lund 1903 V, 101, 103.

⁵ For a criticism of this simplified view of the history of Danish children's literature, see Christensen 2012, 139–152.

⁶ Stybe 1993, 58.

⁷ According to Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore "some literary critics have stigmatized Enlightenment children's books as too crudely didactic to sustain serious critical attention" (Immel & Witmore 2006, 8). Bredal's book predates the Enlightenment, but their argument could also explain the lack of scholarly interest in his work. See also Christensen

Child figures

Internationally, however, there is currently a growing interest in exploring the history of childhood and children’s literature in both the medieval and early modern periods. Some important recent publications include Andrea Immel & Michael Witmore (2006), Lotta Paulin (2012), Edel Lamb (2018), Naomi J. Miller & Diane Purkiss (2020) and Anna French (2020).⁸ In Denmark, Charlotte Appel’s groundbreaking research on the history of schools and schooling has shed new light on the ways in which Danish children came into contact with the world of letters in the early modern period.⁹

I would like to contribute to this expanding field by examining the figure of the child in *Børne Spiegel*. Indeed, there is more than one child figure in the text – there are at least two.

Bredal’s title indicates that he adheres to the moral-didactic tradition of *speculum* literature. Titles in Latin including the term *speculum* were common from the twelfth century to the early modern period and beyond, and the vernacular counterparts *Spiegel/miroir/specchio* were also frequently employed. In Latin, the title had multiple functions: the entry on ‘Spiegelliteratur’ in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (1995) enumerates six different uses of *speculum* in titles.¹⁰ Of interest in this context is the fact that the *speculum*-term was used in the titles of works aiming to help readers improve themselves spiritually and morally by serving as a mirror of self-knowledge. Examples of this use of the term are found, among other sources, in works specifically targeted at a young audience, the most important being *Speculum virginum* (Mirror of virgins), a twelfth-century didactic dialogue indicating how a young woman should prepare herself for monastic life.¹¹ In children’s literature in the Scandinavian languages, the mirror metaphor appears not only in the title of Bredal’s book but also in two translations from German into Swedish: Conrad Porta’s *Een sköön och härligh Jungfrw Speghel* (A beautiful and glorious mirror of virgins, org. 1580, Swedish translation 1591) – traditionally considered the first Swedish children’s book – and Michael

2012, 9–10, 150–152, who argues that the Romantic construct of childhood has excluded Enlightenment children’s literature from scholarly attention.

⁸ In the Scandinavian area, Göte Klingberg pioneered research in early modern children’s literature. See Klingberg 1964 and Klingberg 1998. In Denmark, Nina Christensen has greatly advanced knowledge of Danish children’s literature of the eighteenth century, see Christensen 2012.

⁹ See e.g. Appel 2006 and 2017. See also Christensen & Appel 2021.

¹⁰ Roth *et al.* 1995, 2102.

¹¹ Regarding this text see Roth 1995, 2090; Paulin 2012, 175–196. On the mirror metaphor in medieval Danish ballads see Dahlerup 1998, 142–143. According to Dahlerup in the ballads the word ‘speil’ always refers to a woman who is an ideal for other women.

Sach's *Kyskheets spegel* (The mirror of chastity, orig. 1602, Swedish translation 1622).¹²

In choosing his title, Bredal shows that he intends to illustrate the proper role and conduct of a particular group in society, namely children. He formulates the virtues that children ought to possess – obedience, piousness, humility, diligence and temperance, to name the most important – and he does this not in an abstract way, but rather by stating how children ought to behave themselves in specific social situations. One might say that the text presents a figure of an ideal child, a child worthy of emulation. This figure comes into being not only through Bredal's representations of laudable behavior (positive examples), but also through his depictions of behavior that children ought to avoid (negative examples).

Børne Speigel is a conduct book, a genre that, as Luisa Tasca points out, is difficult to define because “it often merges into categories such a moral tutors, catechism[s], sports manuals, and guides to married and domestic life and hygiene.”¹³ Conduct books belong to the overall category of conduct literature, which, as Dietmar Till observes, covers “very different genres of texts, the common function of which is the regulation of individual behavior according to norms that were historically and socially subject to change.”¹⁴ *Børne Speigel* is thus a prescriptive text instructing, admonishing and giving advice on proper behavior for children.

In *Børne Speigel* an adult speaker – or narrator – addresses a child referred to as ‘you’. Following standard narratological terminology, I shall call this ‘you’ the text's narratee, that is, “the addressee of the narrator, the fictive entity to which the narrator directs his narration.”¹⁵ The prescriptive function of the text rests on the speaker's advice to the narratee. At the same time, the speaker has specific ideas about the identity of the narratee, the place where the narratee lives, the nature of the household that frames the narratee's upbringing and the work and leisure activities that this young person engages in. I hypothesize that Bredal constructs his narratee in such a way that the actual readers of his text would have been able to put themselves in the narratee's place and identify with the narratee's conditions. One might even claim that *Børne Speigel* is children's literature because the author writes about a world – with its household structures, physical spaces, games, etc. – that child readers would know from their own lives. Seen in this way, *Børne*

¹² On Laurentius Johannis Laelius' Swedish adaptation of Conrad Porta's *Jungfrauen Spiegel* see Klingberg 1991, 15–35.

¹³ Tasca 2015.

¹⁴ Till 2015.

¹⁵ Schmid 2013. On the concept of the narratee see also e.g. Chatman 1978, 253–262; O'Sullivan 2006, 99–101.

Speigel becomes a descriptive text depicting in general terms how children in mid-sixteenth century Denmark lived.¹⁶ Not all children, but the urban middle-class children – boys as well as girls – to whom the text was directed. It is this second child figure, the extratextual child to which the text beckons, that interests me in this article.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that one should generally be wary of using literature as a source not only of the life of children in the past but also of the changing conceptions of childhood as Nina Christensen, following Colin Heywood, has observed.¹⁷ In the case of *Børne Speigel*, one could argue that given this text's highly intertextual nature, it points less to historical reality than to other texts that it quotes and transforms. While it is certainly true that literature cannot give us direct access to historical reality, one could also claim – as I do here – that the conduct book by its very genre must, as Norbert Elias observes, “adhere closely to social reality [...]”¹⁸ Or, to quote Helena Sanson, conduct texts reflect “contemporary realities, norms, and customs.”¹⁹ I will thus claim that *Børne Speigel* sheds light, at least to some extent, on the life of middle-class children in mid-sixteenth century Denmark.

First, however, I would like to begin by providing an overview of the text itself while indicating some of Bredal's possible sources of inspiration. Holger Rørdam notes that Bredal might have been inspired by the Italian humanist Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli's *De moribus puerorum in mensa servandis* (How to behave at the table), a short didactic poem from the end of the fifteenth century teaching moral precepts and proper table manners, and by Erasmus of Rotterdam's famous treatise *De civilitate morum puerilium* (*A Handbook on Good Manners for Children*) from 1530.²⁰ Both Holger Rørdam and later scholars have stressed that *Børne Speigel* is neither a translation nor a slavish repetition of someone else's thoughts: it has “et originalt dansk Præg” (an original Danish character).²¹ In terms of Bredal's relationship with Erasmus, Rørdam finds that the former uses the latter's treatise quite freely, borrowing what he needs while contributing much of his own. To Rørdam's observation it is necessary to add that for many centuries European children's literature was quite homogenous and characterized by numerous translations and translations of translations that circulated among various countries and

¹⁶ On prescriptive and descriptive aspects of conduct literature for women see Sanson 2016, 13, 34.

¹⁷ Christensen 2012, 50; Heywood 2001, 6.

¹⁸ Elias 2000, 63.

¹⁹ Sanson 2016, 34.

²⁰ Rørdam 1884, VII. Rørdam adds that Bredal might also have been inspired by the Italian humanist Antonio Mancinelli's *Speculum de moribus et officiis*, an edition of which appeared in Copenhagen in 1541. *Ibid.*, 32. On Erasmus's treatise see Elias 2000, 47–72.

²¹ Rørdam 1884, VIII.

language areas.²² It was thus not an exceptional move on Bredal's part to include translations or paraphrases of one or more texts written in Latin in his own work. Second, and this is my main point, although Bredal does rely on Latin sources (notably Erasmus), there is another major source of inspiration behind *Børne Speigel* that scholars have so far ignored, namely Martin Luther's *Kleiner Katechismus* (*Small Catechism*), which was published one year before Erasmus's treatise. I will point out examples of both Erasmian and Lutheran traces in *Børne Speigel*.

Børne Speigel: an overview

Børne Speigel spans 29 small printed pages plus a one-page preface. It is sparsely illustrated, containing just two illustrations, one of the Virgin with baby Jesus and one of Jesus on the Cross. Unlike Erasmus's work, which is written in prose, *Børne Speigel* is written in verse – so-called *knittelvers* – thus adhering to a medieval tradition, in which, as Elias notes, “rhymed precepts were one of the means used to try to impress on people's memories what they should and should not do in society, above all at table.”²³

The text can be divided into four parts which I will examine in the following order: 1) a preface, 2) some prayers and a hymn, 3) rules of conduct for specific social situations (in bed, at the table, at school, etc.), 4) instructions for personal hygiene and body language.

On the title page, Bredal dedicates his book to two mayors of Vejle, Jens Michilssen and Clement Søffrensen, as well as to the citizens of this city. In the preface, Bredal directly addresses these mayors and explains why he has written his book while revealing his conception of childhood. Many learned men have taken great care to describe how children should be brought up in godly and honest ways, but, Bredal argues, their counsel is partly inaccessible to young Danes because few parents send their children to school and even fewer children learn Latin.²⁴

²² Klingberg 1998, 10–11. According to Klingberg, the first time the phrase ‘Swedish original’ was used in the paratext of a children's book in Sweden was in 1839. On the basis of this finding he concludes that, in the preceding centuries, it does not seem to have been a point of interest whether a given children's book was an original or a translation. Nina Christensen observes with reference to eighteenth-century Danish children's literature that it is often difficult to find out whether a text is a translation or not, or if the translation is so different from the original that it must be considered a new original. See Christensen 2012, 142.

²³ Elias 2000, 53.

²⁴ Bredal's comment may regard the past rather than his own present. In the years around the Reformation, people stopped sending their children to school in part because Denmark was torn apart by a civil war (1534–1536) and in part because education no longer assured pupils a future occupation within the church. In a 1524 letter to German councilmen, Luther exhorted them to institute new schools, fearing that the abolition of church and monastery

Among the learned men who had written about children's manners, Bredal explicitly mentions Erasmus's name, a fact which testifies to the immense popularity of the Dutch humanist and *De civilitate* in sixteenth-century Europe – the educational treatise was published in numerous editions and translations and used in the Latin schools – and reveals Bredal's wish to borrow some of Erasmus's stardust to enhance the appeal of his own work.²⁵ The novelty of *Børne Speigel* thus resides, according to Bredal, in the fact that he has drawn on a Latin source – or multiple Latin sources – to extract some of the “fornæmmeligste Lærdomme” (palpable instructions) for children's proper conduct and reformulated them in Danish for the benefit of young Danish readers.

The reason why it is important to bring up children in a godly and honest way has to do with children's nature. In Bredal's view, children are highly receptive to learning; indeed, he considers them to be empty vessels awaiting the content that will be poured into them. However, this content must be good, because otherwise it will contaminate the vessel. As Bredal puts it: “Karret beholder gierne en smag aff det som først lades der wdi” (The vessel retains a taste of what is first poured into it).²⁶ As this striking metaphor shows, Bredal believed children are influenced for their entire lives by what they learn in childhood. To Bredal – and to many other educators of his kind – childhood is important not because it has any intrinsic value of its own, as the Romantics were later to sustain, but because it determined life in adulthood and old age.²⁷ The idea that children are highly receptive and malleable is present throughout *Børne Speigel*²⁸ and it is on the basis of this fundamental belief that Bredal justifies the writing of his book. Didactic literature – and *Børne Speigel* is obviously an example of didactic literature – is important in Bredal's view because it molds children and helps them become competent adults.²⁹

schools would have a negative impact on children's education. Since Bredal's text was dedicated to two mayors, he might have drawn indirectly on Luther's text, which was translated into Danish in 1531, to call for their moral and financial support for the Latin school in Vejle. Klingberg also points out that the primary purpose of dedications at this time in history was that the dedicatee should give money to the dedicator. Klingberg 1991, 19. Regarding Luther's 1524 letter, see Appel 2017, 252. See also Jørgensen 1957–1958, 21–22.

²⁵ On the popularity of Erasmus's text, see e.g. Klingberg 1998, 21; Elias 2000, 47–48; Hahn 2015, 81.

²⁶ Bredal 1568, 1.

²⁷ In the long stretch from the Reformation to the Enlightenment, childhood was seen as a preparation for adulthood. See Klingberg 1998, 13; Paulin 2012, 54–55.

²⁸ See e.g. the following verses: “Thi hvad Børn wdi ungdommen vennis til / Di det saa nødigt forlade vil.” (For what children in (their) youth get accustomed to / they leave only reluctantly). *Ibid.*, 25, vv. 10–11.

²⁹ On didactic children's literature see Ewers 2012, 140–142.

Børne Speigel also contains a number of prayers and a hymn. Rørdam notes that, as a poet, Bredal was particularly successful with his morning and table prayers.³⁰ This statement suggests that these prayers were Bredal's own inventions, but this is partly incorrect. While the table prayer was written by Bredal, the morning prayer derives from Luther's *Small Catechism*.³¹ Given the importance and diffusion of Luther's text, anyone reading *Børne Speigel* in the sixteenth century would have recognized the provenance of the morning prayer. The opening of the text also leads the reader back to Luther. The narrator exhorts the narratee to rise early in the morning and read the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. This is another way of saying that the narratee should read the *Catechism*, which contains Luther's explication of precisely these three pillars of the Christian faith.³² The *Catechism* also includes Luther's interpretation of the meaning of the Protestant sacraments, some prayers – the morning prayer already mentioned, among others – and a so-called *Haustafel* (Table of Duties), which, based on a division of society into three estates – ecclesiastical estate, the household and the civil government – outlines the duties and responsibilities of all members of the society. According to Luther, every person was a member of all three estates and occupied within each estate the role as either ruler or ruled.³³

In addition, Bredal offers rules of conduct for a wide range of everyday situations, paying special attention to desirable table manners. The narrator urges the narratee to set the table, serve the diners, engage in respectable behavior while eating and to clear the table after the meal has ended as well as avoid uncouth acts such as coughing, spitting, throwing leftovers on the floor, etc. Bredal's advice stems partly from Erasmus, but it also draws on Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli and Bredal seems to explicitly quote Sulpizio when exhorting his reader to eat in moderation.³⁴ From Bredal's precepts of good table manner it is very clear that children occupy the lowest place in the family hierarchy, as can be seen from the speaker's advice to the narratee to seat himself or herself at the lowliest, most humble place at the dinner table.³⁵

³⁰ Rørdam 1894, VIII.

³¹ Cf. Bredal 1568, 1 and Luther 2006, 65–68.

³² Scholars have discussed when the broad population in Denmark became acquainted with the *Catechism*. Bredal's advice to the narratee to begin the day by reading the *Catechism* suggests that Luther's text must have been common knowledge among the middleclass by the mid-sixteenth century. See Kofoed & Sigh 2017, 328.

³³ On the Table of Duties see Appel 2017, 254; Kofoed & Sigh 2017, 327–350.

³⁴ Cf. Bredal 1568, 12, v. 17–18 and Martini 1980, 50, v. 76: “Du leffuer icke attu skalt æde oc tære / Men du eder / At tu leffuinde kand være” and “Esse decet vivas vivere non ut edas”.

³⁵ Bredal 1568, 8, vv. 24–25.

Finally, Bredal presents advice on personal hygiene and body language through a systematic top-to-bottom approach, beginning with the hair, head and face, moving on to the shoulders, arms, hands and waist and ending with the legs and feet. This part of the text reads indeed almost like a pious version of the modern children's song "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes". Erasmus's influence is once again palpable in this part of the book. Bredal is not only interested in the body as a purely physical entity that might decay if not taken care of properly, but he also sees it as his task to admonish children not to assume certain postures or positions because they connote bad character. For example, Bredal – like Erasmus – suggests that children should not stand with their arms behind their backs because this posture is typical of thieves.³⁶ At the same time, however, Bredal holds not only that the outer appearance reflects the inner state, but he also argues that the former affects the latter. By disciplining the body – combing one's hair, walking properly, etc. – one also disciplines the mind. This last part of the book is invested with an important Christian meaning. It opens with a series of verses about what the different species on the ladder of creation – from the lowliest to the noblest, from worm to mankind – are destined to do. In contrast to the other species, man was created in the image and likeness of God, Bredal states in accordance with the Bible. Man was not made to crawl, swim, fly or walk on four legs, but to walk upright with his face turned toward Heaven hereby expressing that his longing is directed toward God.³⁷ Bredal invests bodily comportment (erect posture) with religious significance, and he seems to think that, by keeping his body clean and holding it properly, man honors God in whose likeness he was created.

The child at the mirror

Who is the child that is supposed to look into Bredal's mirror and imitate the image of the ideal child present in it? What is the age and gender of this young person? Where does s/he live and what life does s/he lead?

The adult speaker exhorted the narratee to read the *Catechism* in the early morning. For this reason the narratee cannot be extremely young and must instead be a child who has already acquired certain skills, such as reading, and has certain tasks and duties to perform.

In contrast to Sulpizio and Erasmus, who both operate with a male narratee, Bredal's narratee does not have a specific gender. The gender references in the text are quite vague and fluctuating. Most of the narrator's advice is directed at both genders, whereas other parts are meant for one

³⁶ Bredal 1568, 22, vv. 5–6; Erasmus 2004, 41.

³⁷ Bredal 1568, 16, vv. 5–6.

gender exclusively. He has boys in mind particularly when he offers elaborate counsel on how one shares a bed with a male companion, as the term ‘Staldbroder’ (fellow) attests, which furthermore shows that children in Denmark at this time did not have their own bed or bedroom.³⁸ Indeed, before the Industrial Revolution there were no distinct physical spaces for children in houses anywhere in the Western world.³⁹ On one occasion, however, the narrator does specifically advise girls when he points out how the narratee ought to take care of her hair. Long hair is a woman’s glory, the narrator states in accordance with St. Paul’s teachings (1 Cor. 11:15), but he urges the narratee not to try to improve her looks in any way, for instance by using pins and hair lotion to make her hair curlier and more lustrous.⁴⁰

That the narratee can be both a boy and a girl is important. Bredal’s choice is linked in part to his decision to write *Børne Speigel* in Danish. Girls in the early modern period would normally not learn Latin, and thus would not have been able to read Sulpizio’s or Erasmus’s Latin texts in the original language.⁴¹ In contrast, by writing in Danish, Bredal made his counsel – and that of his Latin sources – available to the female sex as well. After the Reformation, an increasing number of girls were taught to read in their mother tongue out of the belief that anybody should be able to access the basic articles of the Christian faith as described in the *Small Catechism*.⁴²

Bredal’s choice to address both girls and boys can indeed be seen as a Lutheran trait. In his catechism, Luther discusses, among other things, the role of children vis-à-vis parents (in his interpretation of the Fourth Commandment) and in the household (in the abovementioned *Haustafel* which was based on Luther’s interpretation of the Fourth Commandment). The German reformer does not assign specific duties to girls and boys in the *Haustafel*, but stresses that children in general should obey parents and other authority figures. This does not mean that Luther promoted gender equality; he saw men and women as spiritually equal before God, but in the home the wife owed submission to her husband.⁴³ Like Luther, Bredal is interested in the role and duties of children as submissive beings irrespective of their

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3, vv. 19–30.

³⁹ Gutman 2013, 251.

⁴⁰ Bredal 1568, 17, vv. 7–12.

⁴¹ Only girls from the upper nobility would have been offered the opportunity to learn Latin. There is unfortunately few written sources relating to the education of upper-class girls, but they were certainly taught religion and reading and writing. There is evidence that some girls also learned math, while others learned German. A few girls were taught Latin and other languages. However, their education was not only intellectual, but also manual, and they were active in lace-making, embroidery and sewing. See Appel 2017, 266–268.

⁴² Appel 2006, 191.

⁴³ Koefoed & Sigh 2017, 328–330.

gender, although there are some passages, as we have seen, where he focused on proper behavior for either boys or girls.

Far from being a contextless individual, Bredal's narratee is positioned in a clearly defined social setting. First of all, s/he lives in a city and not the countryside: in two instances the narrator describes the narratee as going to school or running errands in town. *Børne Speigel* was dedicated, as we have seen, to two mayors of Vejle as well as to the citizens of this city, and the urban setting of the narratee's upbringing is probably a smaller town (*købstad*) in the Danish provinces. By placing the narratee in this context, we also understand that s/he is the child of neither peasants nor nobles, but rather of middle-class citizens.⁴⁴

The child is part of a large nuclear family with servants and lives in a big house in town. According to Anna French, “when considering the lives of early modern children, it is [...] important to take into account the families and households of which they were an integral part.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the history of childhood cannot be separated from the history of the household, meaning “a group of people as well as a physical space and location in which the family member ate, slept and prayed” because, for obvious reasons, children's lives are influenced by the familial context and physical surroundings in which they grow up.

It is unclear, however, whether the narratee actually lives with his or her own parents. The term ‘Foreldre’ (parents) is used four times,⁴⁶ fewer times than the term ‘Hosbond,’ the figure the child is first and foremost duty-bound to respect in Bredal's text.⁴⁷ ‘Hosbond’ refers to a man who is in charge of a household, the master of the house. The fact that ‘Hosbond’ appears more often than ‘Foreldre’ may mean several things. First of all, it is an obvious indication of the complete sidelining of maternal caregiver figures in Bredal's text. Indeed, the Danish word for ‘mother’ does not appear anywhere in the text. It could also be seen as yet another Lutheran trace in that ‘Hosbond’ is a synonym of ‘Husfader’ (*Hausvater*), the figure in the *Small Catechism* who stands above and rules over the other members of the household and is responsible for teaching them the cornerstones of the Christian faith.

The preference for the term ‘Hosbond’ may also indicate that the child does not in fact live with his or her parents. It was not unusual, as Katie Barclay observes, for children in this period to be moved to other households and families after the death of one or both of their parents. In early modern Europe, “only a minority of children would grow to adulthood without having

⁴⁴ Regarding the four estates in early modern Denmark, see Scocozza 2006, 44–61.

⁴⁵ French 2020, 5.

⁴⁶ Bredal 1568, 2, 10, 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2, 7, 8, 12, 13.

lost at least one parent.”⁴⁸ If one parent died, the remaining one might remarry and the child would thus gain a step-parent. Both death and remarriage could act as forces pushing the child into a different household. Children were also dislodged from their homes for other reasons: parents could place them in the care of childless relatives in the hope of securing them an inheritance, or in other households so that they may learn a trade or domestic skill.⁴⁹ We cannot be certain, therefore, if the narratee actually lives with his or her biological family.

This middle-class child has the opportunity to go to school, as appears from one of the most interesting sections of the text dedicated to children’s education (“Om Børne Lære”). The child is taught somewhere outside the home; s/he does not study the liberal arts, such as Erasmus’s narratee, but learns more basic skills like reading, writing, weaving and/or sewing.⁵⁰ From Bredal’s representation of the school environment, it is evident that corporal punishments were quite frequent, as one may deduct from the following quotation, written in the prescriptive mode:

Vere dennom hørige som teg skal lære
 Beuisse dennom al tucht: heder oc ære.
 Giør gierne effter deris vilge oc bud,
 Thi de ere oc dine foreldre for Gud.
 Hug oc straf tolmodige fordrag,
 Knurre icke eller vredelig paa dennom klag.⁵¹

Bredal explains why children should accept corporal discipling by relying – once more – on Luther and more precisely on his interpretation of the Fourth Commandment in the *Catechism*. To Luther, this commandment meant that one should honor, serve and obey not only one’s own parents but also other authorities, treating the latter as parent-like figures.⁵² Luther framed, in other words, all social relations as family relations, with one person in the role of the parent and one in the role of the child. This meant that the family was, so to speak, everywhere in society. Since the teacher was a parental surrogate any attempt to rebel against his authority would be seen as a rebellion against a parent and this parent’s God-given authority. Reading this passage of

⁴⁸ Barclay 2020, 16. See also Appel 2017, 258–259.

⁴⁹ Barclay 2020, 24. Leonora Christina mentions in her *Jammers-Minde (Memoirs of Leonora Christina)* that Maren Larsdatter, the servant who accompanied her on her journey to England, had served her since the girl was only eight years old. Ulfeldt 1949, 174. See also King 2007, 372–376.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15, v. 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vv. 29–24. (Be obedient to those who teach you / Show them all your decency, esteem, and honor. / Do as they want and bid, / For they are also your parents before God. / Patiently endure beatings and punishments / Do not grumble or complain angrily about them.)

⁵² Luther 2016, 20. Kofoed & Sigh 2017, 328.

Bredal's text also suggests that the 'Hosbond' would, as the head of the household, automatically assume parent-like responsibilities vis-à-vis the child, even if this man was not the child's biological parent. It suggests that parenthood to Bredal was a question of a particular social role rather than of biological affiliation.

One aspect of the text that cannot but strike a modern reader is the way the narrator admonishes the narratee to take up his or her 'Kald' (calling) early in the morning.⁵³ The child should work, serve and never be idle. Childhood is not segregated from adulthood in this view; rather, children seem to take part in the household chores alongside adults. However, on some occasions, children are allowed to play. "Børn skulle icke alle tide forbiudendis at lege" (Children should not always be forbidden to play) the narrator states, while offering an intriguing view into the games and playtime activities of sixteenth-century children:

Med skudsten, Bold, Trild oc top,
 Med Klode oc keile, løbe oc hop.
 At siunge, quæde, dantze oc springe,
 Med Hackebred, Tromper oc gier at klinge,
 At skerme oc fickte monne ey skade,
 Om det er venligt oc til maade.⁵⁴

The above are all physical or musical activities, and the narrator distinguishes them from other games, such as playing cards or dice, that he believes will lead children to neglect "deris kald" (their calling). In this context, 'calling' probably refers not only to the child's daily tasks, but also to the role that Luther believed the child should assume more generally, namely that of being ruled. In other words, the narrator suggests that certain games will disrupt the hierarchical order of the family and, more generally, society.

Børne Speigel is an important text that set the scene for didactic children's literature in Denmark for several centuries. Here I have used it as a possible source of information for sixteenth-century childhood in Denmark, while also showing that it is an ambitious and fairly complex work that incorporates contemporary humanistic texts in Latin. However, as we have seen, another important source of inspiration has been completely sidelined in the criticism

⁵³ Bredal 1568, 2, v.3

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14, vv.13–19. (Playing with pebbles, ball, hoop, and top, / With bowls and ninepins, running and hopping, / Singing, chanting, dancing, and jumping / Playing the dulcimer, trumpets, and fiddles. / Fencing and fighting may do no harm, / If it is done in a friendly spirit and not exaggerated.) English translation available at: <http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/696/eng/?var=>. According to Leif Søndergaard this passage reveals a new humanist understanding of the importance of relaxation and play for children's wellbeing, see Søndergaard 2008, 309.

devoted to the book. Was Luther's influence too obvious to bear mentioning? Did Rørdam overlook him because late nineteenth-century modernization and secularization were in the process of diminishing Luther's importance more generally in society? Or did Rørdam and later scholars simply find the Latin sources of inspiration for *Børne Speigel* more 'exotic' and worthy of attention than a German one? Whatever the reason for this previous omission, there is no question that *Børne Speigel* displays many significant traces of Lutheran influence.

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