

# CONDUCT BOOKS FOR CHILDREN IN DANISH

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## 1. Defining the conduct book

The first Danish conduct book for children was incidentally also the first Danish children's book of any kind. It was titled *Børne Speigel* ("Mirror for Children"), authored by the teacher and priest Niels Bredal and published in Copenhagen in 1568. The most recent conduct book for children in Danish is Sabine Lemire and Rasmus Bregnhøi's 2015 *Opfør dig ordentligt og vær en god ven* ("Behave properly and be a good friend").

Defining the conduct book as a literary genre can prove difficult because, as Luisa Tasca observes, «it often merges into categories such as moral tutors, catechisms, sports manuals, and guides to married and domestic life and hygiene» (Tasca 2015). These books are a subgenre of conduct literature, which, as Dietmar Till points out, 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» (Till 2015). A characteristic feature of conduct literature, and therefore of conduct books as well, is that it not only lays down norms for verbal communication, but also advises readers on how to display their emotions and behave with their bodies. It was this feature of the conduct book that made the genre a cornerstone of Norbert Elias' ambitious attempt to empirically study the civilizing process, that is, the process that gradually led people in the West to repress their natural and violent urges,

among other outcomes. Elias was one of the first scholars to focus on conduct books, showing that although many of these texts had no great literary value, they did reveal «the standard of habits and behavior to which society at a given time sought to accustom individuals» (Elias 2000: 72). For this reason, they represent important sources for cultural and social history.

Historically, conduct books were often directed at specific audiences, such as courtiers, court ladies, married women, widows, etc., because rules of conduct varied according to the individual's gender and social class. Another parameter in laying down behavioral standards was the individual's age. One of the most famous conduct books is Erasmus of Rotterdam's *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (1530, *A Handbook on Good Manners for Children*), which was used as a textbook in Latin schools all over Europe and translated into numerous languages in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. *De Civilitate* – which Elias considered an important text documenting a transitional phase in the civilizing process, a text facing both feudal and modern societies – was dedicated to the son of a prince but written for the instruction of well-bred boys more generally. Erasmus' work was translated into Danish in 1623, but fragments of it had appeared in Danish translation well before that time because Niels Bredal incorporated parts of this text in *Børne Speigel*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bredal himself states in the preface to his work that he had copied and translated from Latin sources and specifically mentions Erasmus. Various scholars have documented Bredal's reliance on *De Civilitate*, including Rørdam (1894: 38-45) and Weinreich (2006: 20).

## 2. Conduct books for children

The conduct book may thus have many different audiences, but regardless of the target group in question the genre establishes a typical relationship between the writer and the reader of the text, namely a parent-child/teacher-student relationship, as Judith Gero John observes. She continues:

As a result of this relationship, it is not surprising that one of the most common audiences for advice books, handmade or published, continues to be children and young adults. [...] From the medieval book of manners [...] to the more modern children's advice book [...], adults feel obligated to instruct. Parents especially want to offer advice to help their children achieve success – whether that success is interpreted as wealth, happiness, respect, or heaven (John 2005: 52).

John does not specify when children should ideally achieve the success in question but it is clear from her examples that she sees conduct books as preparing children for their future roles as adults.<sup>2</sup> One may thus conclude that the conduct book for children is an anti-romantic genre, if by romantic children's literature we mean literature that views childhood as a more authentic and original form of existence and accordingly refuses to consider this stage of life as mere preparation for adulthood (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2008: 183).

The conduct book for children is a relatively little-studied genre, although some important studies of conduct books for girls have appeared in recent years (e.g. Bérenguier 2011; Wright 2016: 146-78). In the Danish context, Mette Winge's 1981 book *Den Kunst*

<sup>2</sup> John, for example, discusses *Basilikon Doron*, James VI of Scotland's letter to his infant son from 1599, the purpose of which was to prepare the boy for his duties as a king. *Basilikon Doron* belongs to the tradition of 'mirror for princes' literature and is thus a form of conduct literature (John 2005: 55).

*at blive en god Pige, Hustru, Moder og Huusmoder* (“The Art of Becoming a Good Girl, Wife, Mother, and Housewife”) traces common views as to how girls ought to be brought up and the role of various kinds of literature, for instance conduct books, in shaping and challenging these views.

This relative lack of scholarly attention may be due to the genre’s openly didactic nature given that, as Perry Nodelman points out, scholars often «express dislike of ‘didactic’ children’s books» while at the same time assuming that children’s literature «ought to teach without seeming to do so» (quoted in Paulin 2012: 45). Furthermore, the genre’s framing of not only girls’ roles but the roles of children more generally can appear depressing when viewed from a contemporary perspective. However, conduct books constitute important resources for children’s literature research. In this article, I would like to explore some of the potential scholarly uses for this genre, taking as my test cases the earliest and most recent examples of conduct books for children published in Denmark, namely *Børne Speigel* and *Opfør dig ordentligt*.

As my point of departure, I would like to draw on an observation made by Helena Sanson with reference to conduct books for women: «While being presented with ideal manners and modes of behavior, we also learn about existing customs that were perceived as bad and deplorable» (Sanson 2016: 13). In other words, this genre is both prescriptive and descriptive, fluctuating between stating the norm and identifying failures to comply with this norm.

If we transfer Sanson’s observation to conduct books for children, we can say that they furnish advice on how children ought to behave while also depicting how children occasionally behave in reality. To this observation one might add that, if conduct books contain norms for proper behavior «within the family, at school, at church, in the town, and in the country» to quote Tasca, they also furnish oblique descriptions of these and other settings for children’s lives (Tasca 2015). By regulating behavior in school, for

example, the conduct book indirectly describes what a school was at a particular point in history, although the descriptive level cannot be strictly separated from the prescriptive one, that is, an idea of what a school ought to be, including the relationship between teacher and pupil.

In this article I will explore prescriptive as well as descriptive aspects of *Børne Speigel* and *Opfør dig ordentligt*, showing that the two texts testify to changing ideas of what children are and how they ought to behave themselves while also allowing us to grasp – or imagine – how children lived and live in Denmark four centuries apart.

The two works are dissimilar in many ways, as we shall see, but they also share some important features. The first is that their target group is not gender-specific; the authors address children in general, not boys or girls specifically. There are various motives behind this choice on the part of the authors. Whereas it would be inconceivable in present-day Denmark to write a conduct book for girls as if the norms of behavior expected of girls differed from those expected of boys,<sup>3</sup> in the case of *Børne Speigel* Bredal's choice probably stems from the fact that he was inspired by *Der Kleine Katechismus* (1529, *The Small Catechism*). Traces of Martin Luther's influence are apparent throughout *Børne Speigel*, as we shall see. In the very beginning, to cite just one example, Bredal quotes the morning prayer that Luther recommends Protestant Christians recite to begin their day (Bredal 1568: 1; Luther 2016: 67). In his catechism, one of the subjects Luther discusses is the role of children vis-à-vis parents (in his interpretation of the Fourth Commandment) and in the household (in his so-called *Haustafel*, Table of Duties). He does not assign specific duties to

<sup>3</sup> One could claim, however, that books recommending strong and independent women as model figures for girls belong to the genre of conduct literature.

girls and boys, but rather 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, and indeed Luther considered men to be the family heads (Koefoed, Sigh 2017: 328-330). Bredal shares Luther's focus on the duties of children in relation to their superiors irrespective of their gender, although there are some passages in his work that outline recommended gender-specific behavior.

Another important similarity between *Børne Speigel* and *Opfordig ordentligt* is that the authorial discourse is directed toward a 'you'. Relying on standard narratological terminology, I shall term this entity the narratee (see e.g. Chatman 1978: 253-62).

Although conduct writing in general «sits more comfortably in the realm of historical and sociological, rather than literary, studies», as Sanson points out, it is important to focus not only on what conduct books say but also on how – and for whom – they say it (Sanson 2016: 12). To conclude, I will show that the contemporary conduct book transmits its didactic content in a significantly different way than the historical one does, namely by widening the audience to include adults and using humorous illustrations as a means of both conveying its message and providing comic relief from the dogma expressed in the text.

### 3. The authors and their works

After centuries of oblivion, *Børne Speigel* was brought to the attention of the academic community by the church historian Holger Frederik Rørdam when he issued a new edition of it in 1894.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The work has been reprinted – in its entirety or partly – several times. I will quote from the Royal Library's digital facsimile edition of the work, available at: [www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/696/](http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/696/). Despite being considered the first work

The author Niels Bredal, whose exact dates of birth and death are unknown, had been a Dominican friar before the Reformation. He was appointed first principal of the Latin school in Vejle, established in 1542, and besides working as a principal he most likely also served as a priest. His name has been passed down to posterity for two main reasons: because he wrote *Børne Speigel*, of which there is only one surviving copy held at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, and because he was the teacher of Anders Sørensen Vedel, who translated Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* into Danish in 1575 (Wegener 1846: 11-15; Rørdam 1894: VI).

*Børne Speigel* is a short book published in a small format and consisting of 29 printed pages. It is written in rhymed verses – so-called *knittelvers* – and, unlike Erasmus' work which is written in prose, it adheres 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» (Elias 2000: 53). Several verses do indeed greatly resemble proverbs formulated in a way that is easy to remember, as the following: «Small things can lead to great strife / that can ruin both your wealth and life» (Bredal 1568: 11).<sup>5</sup>

*Børne Speigel* contains only two images, one of the Virgin with child and one of Jesus on the Cross, and is divided into various titled segments comprising roughly four components: a preface; a few prayers; precepts of good behavior in various social settings; and precepts of carriage, facial expressions, gestures, and dress. Despite the brevity of the text, Bredal is thorough and systematic in his listing of instructions and prohibitions. He advises the nar-

of children's literature in Danish, scholarship on this text is quite meager. For presentations of the work, see Stybe (1969: 12-13); Winge (1981: 14-15); Weinreich (2006: 15-21).

<sup>5</sup> «Aff lidet kand ippes en stoor kiiff / Som kand forkaste baade Gods oc Liiff». All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

ratee on how to behave from morning to evening and introduces the main parts of the body one by one from top to bottom, laying down precepts for the proper use and hygiene of each body part.

*Opfør dig ordentligt og vær en god ven* was first published in 2015. It was hailed by the Danish weekly *Weekendavisen* as «an excellent, entertaining and modern version of Emma Gad for children». <sup>6</sup> The weekly thus compared the book to Gad's 1918 manual *Takt og Tone. Om Omgang med mennesker* ("Etiquette: How we interact with people"). <sup>7</sup> A couple of years later, in 2018, it was republished in an expanded edition featuring a new chapter with advice on children's use of digital media and it is this expanded edition that I reference in this analysis.

The author of the text, Sabine Lemire (b. 1974), is a prolific writer with more than forty publications to her name. She has written fiction for children as well as hobby and activity books for a mixed audience of children and adults. *Opfør dig ordentligt og vær en god ven* is richly illustrated by Rasmus Bregnhøi (b. 1965), Lemire's partner and one of Denmark's most acclaimed illustrators of children's literature. <sup>8</sup> His style is simple and fun, and the overall humor of *Opfør dig ordentligt* derives almost exclusively from his illustrations or rather from the interplay between the normative affirmations of the text, written in a pale, factual prose, and the colorful visual interpretations of these same affirmations. Some of the illustrations comment on a specific social situation discussed in the text, whereas others are comic strips displaying a short narrative. In some instances, the precepts of the book are provided solely by Bregnhøi's pen.

<sup>6</sup> «Fremragende, underholdende og moderne udgave af Emma Gad for børn». Quoted from the back cover of the book.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding Emma Gad and *Takt og Tone*, see Wilkinson (2020: 28-48).

<sup>8</sup> For Bregnhøi's biography and career, see Sørensen (2019).



*Opfør dig ordentligt* presents itself as a reference book (*opslagsbog*). While it does not contain an index, it is divided into fifteen chapters including a section with blank pages for the reader's own notes and a quiz titled "Er du englebarn eller møgunge?" ("Are you an angel or a brat?"). Some of the chapters bear titles that indicate some of the main contexts of socialization in a child's life – e.g. "Hjemme" ("At home") and "I skolen" ("In school") – whereas other focus on friendship, clothing, the use of digital devices and the Internet, and codes of conduct in particular social situations such as when sharing a meal with others.

#### 4. Prescriptive aspects

Conduct books are prescriptive and provide evidence of how authors think children ought to behave. Their ideas are connected to underlying notions of what a child is and what role children ought to play in the family and society at large. For this reason, conduct books offer valuable insights into ever-changing understandings of childhood.

In his preface, Bredal compares the child to an empty vessel awaiting the content that will be poured into it. According to Lotta Paulin, who has studied the construction of role models in exemplary fiction in Swedish from 1400 to 1750, this comparison is an expression of adultism, meaning that children are considered immature and incomplete beings while adults are seen as mature and socially competent (Paulin 2012: 54). Other metaphors expressing the same idea that appear in early modern literature include the child as an empty slate or a pliable willow branch.

For educators this is at once both good and bad news. The child is malleable and can be shaped according to the educators' ideas, but should the child receive a misguided education s/he will be ruined forever: the vessel will be tainted, the slate imprinted with faulty ideas, the branch made to grow crookedly. For Bredal, childhood is an important period in human life

because it prepares the ground for adulthood, not because it has any positive intrinsic meaning of its own.<sup>9</sup>

Bredal conceives of the family as a hierarchy with the child occupying the lowest position. At the top of this hierarchy, he places the head of the house, termed «Hosbonde» in the text (Bredal 1568: 7). The narrator, rephrasing a passage from The New Testament, admonishes the narratee not to choose a place of honor when dining but rather to take a seat in an inconspicuous place (Bredal 1568: 8; Luke 14: 7-14). Another example of the way in which the family hierarchy is partly structured according to the age of the individual members is the narrator's advice as to who is allowed to talk during meals: the narratee is exhorted not to participate in adult conversations unless someone explicitly addresses her or him, and in this case s/he should only reply briefly and truthfully (Bredal 1568: 12).

If the wrong kind of education can ruin the child and thus the future adult, it is paramount that s/he be surrounded by wise and benevolent adults and follow their guidance. Ideally, therefore, children should be obedient. Bredal spells out that children owe their obedience to the head of the house as well as parents and teachers. Indeed, he presents these latter authority figures as equivalent. At school – and training in the ability to read, write, weave or sow is represented as a privilege rather than a punishment – children should therefore obey their teachers. Bredal explains why this obedience is necessary and appropriate:

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.

<sup>9</sup> This view of childhood dominated pedagogical thinking until the romantic period. See Klingberg (1998: 13).

Patiently endure beatings and punishments  
Do not grumble or complain angrily about them (Bredal 1568: 15).<sup>10</sup>

According to Hans-Heino Ewers, didactic literature for children – which I shall return to below – initially borrowed its precepts from other writings such as catechisms (Ewers 2012: 142). Such borrowing is evident in the above passage. Bredal’s framing of teachers as parents draws on Luther’s interpretation of the Fourth Commandment as outlined in his *Small Catechism*, for centuries the most important book for children in Denmark in that it was used to teach the upcoming generations both how to read and the tenets of Christianity (Appel 2006: 188-91; Appel 2017: 263-66). What was particularly important about Luther’s interpretation of the Fourth Commandment was that he saw it as regulating not only the relationship between parents and children, but social relationships in general. According to this view all social relationships involved a parent and a child, one who commanded and one who obeyed, and all authority figures were to be obeyed as if they were parents (Koefoed, Sigh 2017: 328). By applying the Fourth Commandment to the context of education, Bredal conferred a God-given authority on teachers while portraying them as caring figures in that Luther also viewed parents as having obligations vis-à-vis their children, for instance the duty to raise them in the Christian faith. Similarly, Bredal implied that any rebellion against the authority of parents would constitute a rebellion against a heavenly sanctioned order.

While obedience is the key virtue required of children in this model, they should also be industrious. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the text is the narrator’s repeated pleas to

<sup>10</sup> «Vere dennom hørige som teg skal lære / Beuisse dennom al tucht: heder oc ære. / Gjør gjerne efter deris vilge oc bud / Thi de ere oc dine foreldre for Gud. / Hug oc straff tolmodige fordrag / Knurre icke eller vredelig paa dennom klag».

the narratee to keep busy and never waste time. After rising in the morning and reading the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer and saying a morning prayer – that is, after studying the Small Catechism outlining Luther's interpretations of these and other core elements of the Christian faith – and after greeting parents and servants, children should promptly see to their assigned tasks.

Then take diligently care of your calling  
Do not spare any effort or work  
Let godliness and righteousness sustain you,  
Earn your bread with glory and honor (Bredal 1568: 2).<sup>11</sup>

*Børne Spiegel* is sprinkled with phrases such as «rise early in the morning,» «hurry up, don't be lazy», and «get out of bed promptly» and these statements, together with the aforementioned passage, could be interpreted as expressions of a Protestant work ethic permeating the text (Bredal 1568: 1, 13, 15).<sup>12</sup> It is common knowledge that Luther rejected the idea that people might earn salvation by doing good deeds, instead conceiving of salvation as a gift of God's grace. Christians should instead trust infinitely in God by performing as well as possible the earthly duties he placed them in the world to perform. Phrased in a Lutheran way: people should follow their calling.<sup>13</sup> Bredal's exhortations to the narratee to take up her or his calling could be seen as another important Lutheran trace in the text.

<sup>11</sup> «Tag siden dit Kald flytteligen ware / Ingen wmag eller arbeyde skaltu spare. / I Guds fryct oc retferdighed teg at nære / Atspøre dit Brød med heder oc ære».

<sup>12</sup> «Betimeligen om Morgen skalt tu opstaa», «Skønt teg snart / wer icke ladt», «Reiss teg god betid aff din seng».

<sup>13</sup> For a brief discussion of Max Weber's concept of the Protestant work ethic, see Christensen 2017: 13-20.

Unlike Bredal, Sabine Lemire does not provide any metaphorical definition of what a child is. However, in her preface she portrays children as beings who need to learn how to interact with others in the family and among friends, in school and later in their adult lives. Learning how to behave properly, she writes, is like learning the rules of a game: «It is not easy to play [this game] together with others if one does not know the rules. One makes mistakes or cheats and quickly becomes unpopular or is misunderstood» (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2918: 2).<sup>14</sup> The child is thus not a passive recipient as in Bredal's conceptualization but rather an inexperienced player who is in the process of learning the rules of a social game. The implication of this framing is, of course, that rules of good conduct are not handed down from above but established through social agreement. Lemire further confirms this idea that the child is a novice player of a social game in the last section, the quiz, where readers can gauge how well they have understood the book's messages.

In her preface, Lemire also compares rules of good manners to a common language. People who do not speak the same language obviously have communication problems. They are unable to understand other people and are not understood themselves; they become socially isolated while also remaining oblivious to what others are trying to tell them. The core virtue that the author requests of children is attentiveness to what others are communicating through their words and actions, an attentiveness that only translates into understanding once the child has learned the rules of the common language. To give just one example from the book's first chapter dedicated to greetings:

<sup>14</sup> «Det er ikke nemt at spille sammen med andre, hvis man ikke kender reglerne. Så laver man fejl eller snyder og bliver hurtigt upopulær eller misforstået».

Never sit down when you shake hands. If you are sitting down when someone wants to shake your hand, stand up and say hello. By standing up you grant the other person your attention, and that is nice when you have just arrived (Lemire, Bregnhøi: 6).<sup>15</sup>

The handshake represents a desire on the part of the other person to establish contact and the narratee should honor that desire by getting up and granting that person her or his undivided attention. As the example also shows, Lemire claims that by ignoring what others are communicating through their words and actions, you run the risk of hurting their feelings. In Bredal's text, the stakes were somewhat higher: you risked your wealth, your life. Lemire constantly urges the narratee to think of what might be going on in the minds of others and to avoid upsetting them, for example, when she asks the narratee not to talk about how much pocket money s/he receives, explaining that «there might be someone who does not get any pocket money at all and who will become sad» (Lemire, Bregnhøi: 62).<sup>16</sup> And just as the readers should be able to put themselves in other people's shoes, so too they should be able to think of themselves in terms of how they come across to others, e.g. as regards clothing. By encouraging readers to boost their capacity for both empathy and introspection, Lemire places herself directly in the tradition of Erasmus whose manual Elias saw as documenting an «increased tendency of people to observe themselves and others» (Elias 2000: 68).

Lemire portrays the family not as a hierarchy, but as a more egalitarian institution. The title page illustration makes clear that the work is based on an idea of the parent-child relationship

<sup>15</sup> «Man sidder aldrig ned, når man giver hånd. Hvis du sidder ned, når nogen vil give dig hånd, rejser du dig op og hilser. Når du rejser dig, giver du nemlig den anden person din opmærksomhed, og det er rart, når man lige er ankommet».

<sup>16</sup> «Det kan være, der er nogen, der ikke får lommepege og bliver kede af det».

completely different from Bredal's. Bregnhøi portrays a girl playing fetch with her father; she is about to throw a stick, while he, prone in a dog-like position, is ready to fetch it. While the book does not detract from adults the authority to educate children – such a move would run counter to the purpose of a conduct book – it does, as we shall see, occasionally put children and adults on the same level, for instance by representing them both as learners of good manners.

While children's rebellion against adult authority represents a threat to the order of the family unit according to Bredal, in *Opfør dig ordentligt* the family runs the risk of disintegrating for other reasons, namely due to the state of distraction and inattention typical of contemporary society. Lemire thus urges the narratee not to play at the dinner table: «At table you eat and talk together. If you are all doing different things while you are eating, you are not sharing a meal» (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 64).<sup>17</sup> Luther's teachings permeated *Børne Speigel*, but this contemporary conduct book – which, needless to say, is secular through and through – taps into other discourses, in this case a discourse of concern about the potentially damaging effects of media-created interruptions that may, in Lemire's view, lead to solitude and lack of connectedness between individuals, even within the family.

## 5. Descriptive aspects

Conduct books are descriptive in at least two ways. First, they inform their readership of «prevailing social rules and practices», including existing customs that are considered unacceptable (Sanson 2016: 13 quoting Bérenguier 2011: 3). One might

<sup>17</sup> «Ved bordet spiser man og snakker sammen. Hvis I alle laver andre ting, når I spiser, er I ikke sammen om måltidet». See also pp. 48, 73, 95.

say that the depiction of undesirable customs provides the dark background against which the positive ones recommended by the authors stand out.

There are numerous examples in *Børne Speigel* and *Opfør dig ordentligt* of the authors warning against certain kinds of behavior. For example, Bredal advises the narratee not to talk or walk in church during sermons or to gossip or curse in the churchyard, a recommendation that suggests Danes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century used the church for purposes other than worship per se (Bredal 1568: 6). Lemire repeatedly contrasts examples of good and bad behavior, in particular social situations under the headlines «du må gerne» (“you may”) and «du må ikke» (“you must not”). In the chapter on table manners, for instance, she explains to the narratee that «you must not eat in front of your computer, television or other screens. Concentrate on the food you are eating» (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 65).<sup>18</sup> This instruction, which reflects her overall concern that readers must bring their attention to the present moment, indirectly indicates that some children do indeed have their dinner in front of a screen.

As I argued earlier, however, conduct books may also be said to provide descriptions of some of the key settings that framed and influenced the way children were brought up. They may allow us to catch a glimpse of how children lived. What kind of homes were they brought up in? What was their school environment like? What kind of towns did they live in and how did they use those urban spaces? One may pose these and other questions to the conduct book, and the answers it provides are especially significant as regards earlier historical periods for which accounts of children’s lives are much scarcer than they are today. While it

<sup>18</sup> «Du må ikke spise foran computer, TV eller andre skærme. Koncentrer dig om din mad, når du spiser».



may be objected that it is problematic to use children's literature as a source of information on childhood in the past – and while this objection is generally valid – it is probably less relevant when it comes to the conduct book given that, to provide guidance, the genre must adhere closely to reality as readers know it.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, it is also clear that Bredal cannot be understood merely as a historical observer of a particularly Danish environment for the upbringing of children. He partly relied on and copied from Latin sources, so it is perhaps more correct to say that he depicted a typical European context for the lives of middle-class children.

One example of how conduct books can provide insights into children's lives in the past can be found in Bredal's depiction of the child's sleeping arrangements. In a certain passage modeled on Erasmus, the narrator urges the narratee to lie quietly in bed so as not to disturb the companion with whom he is sharing the bed. The child must not take all the covers for himself, nor must he kick or squeeze his sleeping partner; he must not snore or snuffle, but should he need to break wind, he should do so freely because withholding flatulence, in the author's opinion, may lead to illness (Bredal 1568: 3-4).<sup>20</sup> The contrast between this portrait of sleeping arrangements and Lemire's request that the child have her or his own private – or partly private – room is striking: «It is important to have something for yourself. Maybe you have your own room, or you share with a sibling, and then you have part

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the problem of using children's literature as a source for historical research, see Heywood (2001: 6-7); Christensen (2012: 47-53). In the past, *Børne Speigel* attracted the attention of cultural historians who were particularly interested in extracting the rich information this work offers as regards food and table manners in 16<sup>th</sup> century Denmark, e.g. Lund (1870-1901); Andersen (1971: 40, 59).

<sup>20</sup> I use the masculine pronoun here because the narratee in this passage is clearly of the masculine gender.

of a room. In either case, it is great to be able to go to one's own place» (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 25).<sup>21</sup> Based on Bredal's advice, we can hypothesize that it was common for middle-class children in 16<sup>th</sup> century Denmark to share a bed. This observation is supported by other sources and studies as well. Regardless of where s/he lived, before the Industrial Revolution «a child did not expect to sleep in a separate bed, to say nothing of a separate room, whether living in a farmhouse in a North American colony or in a townhouse in a German city», Marta Gutman writes (2012: 251). It was only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that separate spaces for children, stemming from a sentimental ideal of children's innocence and difference from adults, began to take hold among the privileged classes.

Another example of how conduct books can shed light on childhoods from the past is Bredal's intriguing depiction of children's games, toys, and musical instruments:

Children should not always be forbidden to play,  
But sometimes they must amuse themselves and be entertained.  
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 (Bredal 1568: 14).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> «Det er vigtigt at have noget for sig selv. Måske har du dit eget værelse, eller også deler du med en søskende, og så har du en del af et værelse. I begge tilfælde er det dejligt at kunne gå ind til sig selv».

<sup>22</sup> «Børn skulle icke alle tide forbiudendis at lege / Men maa støndum seg forløste oc vederquege. / 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». English translation available at: <http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/696/eng/>.

The passage is directed at the adult co-reader of the text (see below) rather than the child reader because it is, of course, adults who can prohibit or encourage children's games. It contains both prescriptive and descriptive levels: the author recommends some games and activities while he deems others acceptable yet potentially harmful. The text continues with the author forbidding children to play cards or dice, claiming that these games will make young people neglect their duties and forget their obedience to authority figures. In general, the quoted passage reveals a new humanist understanding of the importance of relaxation and play for children's wellbeing, an understanding that first surfaced in Christiern Pedersen's writings in the 1530s (Søndergaard 2008: 309). In Bredal's view, however, children's play also has a value for adults in that it is by observing playing children, he claims, that one can predict what kind of persons they will become as adults.

This passage shows how the conduct book can inform us about 16<sup>th</sup> century adult attitudes to children's playtime activities while offering a lively impression of what these playtime activities consisted of. In *Opfør dig ordentligt*, the chapter on children's digital media practices can be compared to the above segment of *Børne Speigel*; on the one hand, it transmits an idea of the forms of digital communication available to children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while on the other, it reveals the author's concern about the potential dangers of these forms of communication, e.g. cyberbullying and children being exposed to images of sex and violence (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 92-123).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Regarding children's media cultures and adult debates about them, see Drotner (2009: 360-73).

## 6. Teaching the child

According to Hans-Heino Ewers, the oldest norm shared by children's literature is that it should be didactic, that is, it should transmit the knowledge and values that young readers require in their process of enculturation (Ewers 2012: 141). To define a work of literature as didactic is to focus on the given work's content level. As Ewers outlines, the didactic character of children's literature consists of two components: the given work may transmit knowledge about the world (theological, geographical, mythological, historical knowledge, etc.) and/or norms and values of various kinds. Ewers notes that, with the introduction of obligatory mass schooling in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children's literature was partially relieved of the obligation to convey knowledge about the world – this task was transferred to schoolbooks – whereas the transmission of norms and values is still considered a key task for children's literature (Ewers 2012: 142). Ewers also identifies another shift, namely a radical change in the method of conveying norms and values over the centuries, but without furnishing any examples of this shift. Initially – Ewers claims – children's literature required its readers to memorize commands and prohibitions that were extracted from various catechisms, mirrors of virtue, etc. Now, however, children's literature instructs its readers almost exclusively through fiction in the form of moral *exempla* in the widest sense.<sup>24</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that fiction has replaced non-fiction, narratives have taken the place of authorial admonishments, and the direct has given way to the indirect. Daniel Hahn also suggests that there has been a shift as regards the methods of conveying norms and values in children's literature and argues

<sup>24</sup> On the moral and instructive tale, see Grenby 2008: 61-86.

that the conduct book became less important in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The function of the genre was, in Hahn's argument, gradually overtaken by the moral tale and the moral tale in turn eventually gave rise to «more sophisticated didactic fiction» for children and young people (Hahn 2017: 397).

However, as we have seen, the conduct book as a genre has not altogether disappeared from the panorama of children's literature in Denmark. The two works examined in this article suggest instead that the contemporary conduct book communicates norms and values rather differently than the 16<sup>th</sup> century example. An important aspect of this difference lies in the audience of the texts. If didactic children's literature transmits norms and values, who is meant to assimilate these norms and values?

Children's literature can be defined in various ways, but a key element in most definitions is that children's literature is literature written and/or published explicitly for children (e.g. Weinreich 2004: 33; Christensen 2012: 20). Children are thus the addressees of children's literature. However, Ewers points out, adults are also addressees of children's literature because children are dependent on the role adults play in buying and recommending the books that they read. Children's literature thus has an innately twofold character, being literature both for children and for the adult mediators – parents, teachers, tutors, librarians, and others – who evaluate and choose among the literary offerings for children (Ewers 2012: 38-40). Adult mediators do not read children's literature for their own sake; rather, their task is to evaluate if a given text corresponds to their ideas of what constitutes proper children's literature (proper with reference to the age and gender of the prospective readers, for example). To designate the way adult mediators read children's literature, Ewers proposes the term 'co-reading' (*Mitlesen*) and posits that adults are co-readers of children's literature (Ewers 2012: 57).

The innately dual character of children's literature may be more or less evident. According to Ewers, adult mediators can be both

official and unofficial addressees of children's literature. Whereas adult mediators are generally unofficial – hidden – addressees of contemporary children's literature, they were addressed more officially in older children's literature. Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost every text for children also addressed the adult mediators directly, typically in the preface or afterword. This is the case with *Børne Speigel*. Its title indicates that it is a book for children. This is a historical novelty in that, as Paulin notes with reference to Swedish children's literature, it was not until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that it became common to use titling to signal that a given work was intended for children (Paulin 2012: 65-66). However, in the preface Bredal directs his words to an adult audience, thus also making adults official addressees of the work. He explains that many learned men, first and foremost Erasmus, have laid down how young people should be brought up in godly and honest ways, but since few Danish children learn Latin, he has decided to make the teachings of these learned men accessible in the Danish language. Bredal also provides a justification for his writing of the book, presenting his view of children as passive receptacles in need of adult instruction. Moving from the paratext to the text, the narratee of *Børne Speigel* is a child rather than an adult, and the rules of behavior listed by the narrator are directed to this narratee. It is the child who requires instruction and guidance. This does not mean, however, that the text never addresses the adult co-reader: as we have seen, adults are addressed when Bredal presents general pedagogical considerations such as his admonition that children should not always be prohibited from playing.

In contrast, *Opfør dig ordentligt* – as announced by the blurb on the cover – is a book for both children and adults. The latter are envisioned as readers, not only co-readers and gatekeepers of children's literature. Using Ewers' terminology, the book is a multiply addressed work of children's literature (Ewers 2012: 58). Each chapter contains a section, graphically distinguished from the rest of the text, containing advice for the adult reader on how

to help the child reader understand the various norms and values proposed by the author. At the same time, these sections also contain direct commands to adults, such as the following: «Greet children in the same way as you would greet adults. How is one to learn how to greet if adults are talking over one's head?» Or: «If you do not want to hear many swearwords at home, then try to be a good example yourself» (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 11, 85).<sup>25</sup>

The overall message of these sections is that adults should also learn to behave properly, not only children. Indeed, Bregnhøi often portrays erring adults: the chapter dedicated to table manners, for example, contains a series of illustrations of a man and young boy sharing a meal. In one illustration, the man releases a smelly belch, causing the boy to hold his nose in disgust; in another, the man talks loudly on his mobile phone while the boy gives him an annoyed look (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 61, 64).

While, on the one hand, it positions the adult as the one who ought to guide the child, *Opfør dig ordentligt* also portrays adults as ignorant and fallible and therefore in need of guidance themselves. This is a significant difference between Bredal's work and that of Lemire and Bregnhøi. Didactic children's literature transmits norms and values, but whereas Bredal asks only children to absorb his teachings, Lemire and Bregnhøi also urge adults to improve their manners. And yet erring adults were not wholly absent from early modern conduct books. Erasmus, for example, provided several examples of misbehaving adults, but he did not specifically advise grown-ups to change their ways. Rather, Erasmus' examples served to warn young readers against committing the same mistakes (see also Paulin 2012: 64).

<sup>25</sup> «Hils på samme måde på børn som på voksne. Hvordan skal man ellers lære at hilse, hvis de voksne taler hen over hovedet på én?» [...] «Hvis du ikke ønsker mange bandeord hjemme, så vær selv et godt forbillede».

Another important difference regards the way the two works communicate their didactic content. For a contemporary observer, Bredal's text is stern and humorless, imbued as it is with catechetical teachings. It lists commands and prohibitions and, by virtue of its very form urges the reader to memorize them. In contrast to this impression, however, it could also be argued that it is difficult to judge how people of past historical periods judged a literary work and, particularly, if they found the given work to be humorous. It could also be added that, since the conduct book relies in part on descriptions of inappropriate behavior, the genre may have an innate tendency to cultivate the ridiculous, as when Bredal paints a picture of a foolish, gape-mouthed face: «The mouth must not yawn or stand open / so that flies and mosquitoes can fly into it» (Bredal 1568: 19).<sup>26</sup>

Lemire and Bregnhøi deliberately attempt to make the reader laugh. In contemporary Denmark, it would be difficult to find a didactic work of children's literature that did not mitigate its didactic content through humor, just as it would probably be nearly impossible to find one that singled out children for correction without encouraging adults to reflect on their own fallibility.

The humor derives from the images rather than the words, as in a comic strip illustrating the advice «You need to know when to use your screen». The strip shows a boy who is playing a game on his mobile phone while urinating and who ends up clumsily dropping his phone into the toilet (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 97). Bregnhøi's images can be considered examples that flesh out the general rules put forward in the text, examples that serve to make concrete and palpable what is otherwise abstract and impalpable. One might say that the purpose of Bregnhøi's illustrations is the same as Bredal's rhyming verses, namely, to help the reader re-

<sup>26</sup> «Munden skal icke gabe eller oben staa / At Flyuer oc Myg der ind flyuæ maa».



member the precepts. However, he portrays not only ridiculous situations but also episodes of anguish and sadness, such as a scene of bullying in a schoolyard (Lemire, Bregnhøi 2018: 88).

In this article, I have tried to delineate some of the possible scholarly uses of the conduct book genre for children's literature research, showing that they are sources for both tracing varying conceptions of children and childhood and for information as to the material and institutional settings of children's lives. Given these potential uses, conduct books for children deserve closer study. Although the two examples discussed in this article are very different, they have a common point of departure, namely showing benevolence toward children. Didactic children's literature – and the conduct book is a clear example of literature that sets out to transmit norms and values – has a bad reputation, but this should not lead us to overlook the fact that, as Lotta Paulin reminds us, its fundamental underlying element is «care and concern, even when occasionally misdirected» (Paulin 2012: 273).

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