

Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation

Joanne Bailey

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Parenting in England is the first study of the world of parenting in late Georgian England. The author, Joanne Bailey, traces ideas about parenthood in a Christian society that was responding to new cultural trends of sensibility, romanticism and domesticity, along with Enlightenment ideas about childhood and self. All these shaped how people, from the poor to the genteel, thought about themselves as parents, and remembered their own parents.

With meticulous attention to detail, Bailey illuminates the range of intense emotions provoked by parenthood by investigating a rich array of sources from memoirs and correspondence, to advice literature, fiction, and court records, to prints, engravings, and ballads. Parenting was also a profoundly embodied experience, and the book captures the effort, labour, and hard work it entailed. Such parental investment meant that the experience was fundamental to the forging of national, familial, and personal identities. It also needed more than two parents and this book uncovers the hitherto hidden world of shared parenting. At all levels of society, household and kinship ties were drawn upon to lighten the labours of parenting.

By revealing these emotional and material parental worlds, what emerges is the centrality of parenthood to mental and physical well-being, reputation, public and personal identities, and to transmitting prized values across generations. Yet being a parent was a contingent experience adapting from hour to hour, year to year, and child to child. It was at once precarious, as children and parents succumbed to fatal diseases and accidents, yet it was also enduring because parent-child relationships were not ended by death: lost children and parents lived on in memory.



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