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Review of *The Discovery Of Childhood In Puritan England*, by C.  
John Sommerville.

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**The Discovery Of Childhood In Puritan England.** C. John Sommerville.

Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992. x + 211 pp. including notes and index. n.p.

John Sommerville has written a fascinating book that scholars from a number of interests and backgrounds will find valuable. His work is an intersection of the history of childhood and of religious history in early modern England. In this study, Sommerville is arguing for a much more sympathetic and positive view of Puritanism, especially in terms of how the Puritans thought about children and how they in practice related to their children. Sommerville's work is an interesting counterpoint to Linda Pollock's *Forgotten Children: Parent-child Relations from 1500–1900* (1983). Pollock argued for a very harsh attitude toward, and treatment of, children in early modern England. Sommerville counters that there is less change from the early modern period to the modern age. The change Sommerville does perceive is not necessarily the actual treatment, but the greater guilt over bad treatment, and this he traces to Puritan influence.

Sommerville makes an interesting case for how the difference between Anglican and Puritan views of childhood was deeply influenced by the political shifts and how much more entrenched Anglicanism was in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Since Anglicans felt they had more security, they did not worry so much about their children. From the 1590s onward, the Puritans saw molding their children as the way to attempt to reshape society from below in the coming generations.

Sommerville's study, besides discussing many early modern English texts with which many twentieth-century readers will not be familiar, has new insights into such famous works as John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Sommerville's second chapter, "Puritan Realism in Picturing Children," is especially impressive. He creates an important context by describing other significant moderate, Anglican, and Catholic writers, such as John Foxe, David Lloyd, and Thomas Challoner, whose works of martyrology often discuss children, and he analyzes how their work is different from Puritan and Dissenter authors. Sommerville makes a valuable contribution in his discussion of Foxe's interpretations of such famous children as Edward VI and Lady Jane Grey. He is also

insightful about the writings of Lloyd and Challoner, and how Challoner's Catholic martyrology has little concern for the childhood of his subjects. Sommerville is also very useful on the subject of Quaker ideology and its attitudes toward childhood. He makes an interesting case for how Quakers used positive characteristics of childhood to describe the adults' religiosity.

Sommerville's book would have been even stronger if he had made clearer his definition of Puritanism, always a difficult and troubling issue, and if he had also more clearly defined the difference between Puritans and Dissenters whom he often seems to put together. And some readers may feel overwhelmed by the many, many brief descriptions Sommerville provides of Puritan books. Some of his examples might profitably have gone into explanatory notes. Despite these qualifications, John Sommerville has produced a significant, well researched, and engagingly written book that adds to our understanding of both Puritanism and the history of childhood in early modern England. That he takes his study well into the eighteenth century allows him to answer a number of the questions he so provocatively raises about the impact of religion on attitudes toward childhood.

**Carole Levin..... SUNY College at New Paltz**