Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: From the Sixth through the Eighth Century by Pierre Riché, translated by John J. Contreni. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976. xi+560 pp. $19.50 (cloth); $9.95 (paper).

Since the first French edition of this book in 1960, it has become established as the definitive study of educational experience during the transition period between the decline of Rome and the emergence of the European medieval era. And with it and later studies, Pierre Riché is becoming established as one of the major French historians, a presence among a group of dedicated scholars who are almost making great history into a French métier. What characterizes current French historical writing is a mastery of detail combined with a breadth of vision, characteristics well exemplified in *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*. The unusual strength of current French historians is their dedication and imagination in turning intractable sources into means of revealing the human dimensions of seemingly lost experience. In this, too, Riché is exemplary.

Riché's book transforms the picture of education in western Europe from the sixth through the eighth century. One can get a sense of this transformation by comparing Riché's account with that given by James Bowen in *A History of Western Education* (2 vols. [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972 and 1975], see esp. 1:315–45 and 2:1–36), the most distinguished account of Western education currently available in English. Bowen basically ignores the period Riché covers. The first volume of *A History of Western Education* ends with a brief account of sixth-century developments, stressing the decline of secular learning in the fourth through the sixth centuries and the tentative preservation of learning primarily through monasteries. The second volume picks up the story with the so-called Carolingian renaissance in the late eighth century. Riché's study does not merely fill in the gap; it suggests the thesis that the emphasis habitually put on the Carolingian renaissance by historians like Bowen is deceptive. According to Riché, it is precisely in those obscure years from the sixth to the eighth century that the educational enterprise of medieval Europe took shape. To understand what followed in the Middle Ages, one needs to look *closely* at what happened during the period of transition.

This effort to look closely at what happened, an effort so characteristic of current French historical writing, seems at first to be daunted by the dearth of sources. As Riché from time to time observes, very, very little was written about education during this period. Nevertheless, to the thorough researcher a great deal can be gleaned. Riché gives the impression of having read practically everything written that has survived from this period, and he has an eye, not only for what those documents say, but equally for how they say what they say. From this critical assessment of the texts, he uncovers a wealth of information about the education taking place in different times and different places, identifying where and to what degree contact is maintained with the classical tradition, defining the characteristic concerns and resources effectively utilized by those who had broken contact with the classical tradition, and, from the resulting sense of what sort of education people in fact achieved, as evidenced by their work, picking up all sorts of clues about how and why they achieved such an education.

Riché's methodological strength, which is characteristic of current French historians, is his respect for detail and his lack of fear in the face of detail. What historians like Riché are showing is that when triviality from too much detail arises it is not the fault of the detail but, rather, of the failure of mind by the scholar, who fails to turn the detail to his larger purposes.

There is a very, very long way to go, but one can imagine a potentially great enrichment of comparative education by the methods and corpus being developed by French historians like Riché. The *limes* is still a significant marker in the patterns of causality affecting current European education; local and regional traditions that stretch back over centuries and millennia still generate some of the most pressing issues, the tensions over language and curriculum. To understand these adequately, there is a great work of detail to be done, to be done in the spirit of Riché's work, of Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip* (trans. Sian Reynolds, 2 vols. [New York: Harper & Row, 1972, 1974]); of Pierre Goubert's *Beauvais et les Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (2 vols. [Paris: SEVPEN, 1960]); of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (2 vols. [Paris: Mouton, 1974]); of Michel Devèze's *La Vie de la Forêt Française au xvi^{e} siècle* (2 vols. [Paris: Editions Jean Touzot, 1961]); and of Georges Duby's *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (trans. Cynthia Postan [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968]). An indication as to what this kind of effort might lead can be found in Eugen Weber's fascinating study, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976), which gives a significantly detailed, textured picture of how French education became national. Were there more such studies, equally thorough and imaginative, students of comparative education would have an infinitely enriched basis for comparing different people's educational experience. It is a potential direction for the field that may prove well worth pursuit.

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Introducing Comparative Education by A. R. Tretheway. Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon Press, 1976. 141 pp.

Since Noah and Eckstein's *Toward a Science of Comparative Education* went out of print several years ago, there has been no basic text for introductory courses in comparative education, save for readers containing a range of case studies and excerpts from leading methodologists in the field. Those of us teaching comparative education more than welcome an introductory text like Tretheway's, which is short, clearly written, in paperback, and designed for undergraduates.

Introducing Comparative Education makes no pretense about innovation. It makes no methodological contribution to the field, nor is there any reason why it should; rather, it is a workmanlike treatment of the field. Tretheway begins the