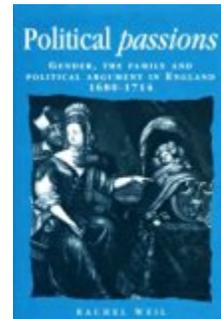


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Rachel Judith Weil. *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680-1714*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. 300 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-5622-2.

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Rachel Weil's study of disputes over the family, and men's and women's political standing, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries deals with a range of important issues situated in crucial political moments. It integrates a wealth of materials beginning with the dispute over the exclusion of James Duke of York from the crown, and including Tory-Whig disputes concerning the role of the family in politics, the warming pan scandal, Mary Astell's writings, and the debates over the limitations of queenship which emerged to a lesser extent during the reign of William and Mary, and to a greater extent under that of her sister Anne. It offers a range of useful information and analysis for those not familiar with late seventeenth-century ideological disputes, or the importance of family and inheritance to royalty and political legitimacy.

The work does, however, possess a number of problems. Most likely its greatest difficulty lies in organization. It is essentially a series of essays linked together more securely by the work's title than by connected arguments or similar topics. One of the difficulties arises in the author's use of the term, "gender." Gender, as it has come to be used by contemporary historians, is based on the social construction of the two sexes and an assessment of the power realities and assumptions that construction entails. But Weil employs gender in a much broader and inappropriate sense. Certainly the Whig and Tory theorists who she quotes extensively would have been surprised to find their comments on the role of the father and the subordination of the wife as part of a gendered understanding of society. It is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss gender without analyzing women's position within society from their own perspective, but virtually no one does so in this study, except for the fem-

inist Mary Astell. Whig and Tory theorists, except when they were forced to confront a specific female monarch, dealt with women in the family and the state very much as mathematicians deal with the "zero," as a placeholder necessary to make their analysis of patriarchal authority clear, but not as an active force, and certainly not from an analytical perspective emergent from women's realities or interests.

Such a problem emerges from two realities. First, that thinkers have consistently linked family, blood, and inheritance to dynastic politics, and that what happened in the 1680s and '90s is little different from arguments emerging in the 1530s and 1560s. In terms of inheritance, royalty has been consistently linked to the ability of men and women to produce legitimate heirs. This necessitates a role for women, but it does not constitute evidence that contemporaries analyzed politics or society from a perspective intended to assess the role of gender in determining social or political behavior. Second, that there is a distinction between authors who are writing within a traditional framework of patriarchal and divine right theory of rule (whether in support or opposition) and those such as Astell who, while Tory, chose to use her Tory values specifically to question the treatment and status of women in English society. William Lawrence, who she discusses as a Whig theorist, may be an exception to this point; but his attack on women's abuse within marriage seems as strongly tied to arguments against his political enemies, as an advocate for women. This study, by linking examples of such distinct types, gives the impression that Tory and Whig politicians and thinkers gave much more serious concern to women's role in the family and society than they actually did.

The strongest portion of the work is her analysis of Queen Anne and her court. Its strength emerges from a thorough exploration of Anne, and her ministers and political supporters and opponents, within a framework of cultural and political realities and assumptions. She treats Anne as a woman, or more precisely through the stereotypes of feminine behavior that were used interchangeably to understand her nature, to defend her, and to support or oppose one or more of her policies or personnel decisions. It is a sophisticated analysis which integrates values inherent in gendered, linguistic constructions and the political realities which underlay them. >From the importance of her female advisors, or bed-chamber women, through the personal ambitions and ideological loyalties of those assessing the queen, Weil offers a complex picture of how late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century political figures framed their views in often contradictory, and self-serving, positions utilizing gender-based terminology. She is particularly strong in her discussions as to how the queen's "weakness" could be seen both positively and negatively depending on how her actions affected an author's, or his party's, prospects.

Finally, the study would have been strengthened by a firmer grounding in women's history. Elinor James was hardly a "prophetess" as she is termed (p. 106), and *Reflections Upon Marriage* (p. 142) was a much less prominent work of Mary Astell's than her *Serious Proposal*

to the Ladies, which went through four editions from 1694-1730. The work's limited grounding in women's history is suggested by her referring readers to a note in Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford's textbook on early modern women for a list of recent scholarship on women and politics (p. 101).

Taken as a whole, the work offers a number of valuable insights into how Whig and Tory authors used images of the family and gender differences in their description of the state, the crown, and their legitimacy. Readers should, however, be chary of taking such insights as definitive about the actual standing of men, women and children in the late 1600s or early 1700s family and politics. Women rarely speak for themselves here, and those writing about them are more apt to concern themselves either with roles such as "wife" or artificial qualities such as "femininity" than with real women. As for children, the materials quoted (pp. 36, 53, 56, 61, 63, 69, 70) make clear that "sons" is a more appropriate term and questions the author's assumption that control over the wife was as problematic as that over "children"; a son often had clear legal and political precedence over his mother.

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