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Maureen Quilligan. *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. 272 $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8122-1905-0.

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Maureen Quilligan's latest publication explores the connections between incest and authorship in a small number of works, many aristocratic women's, published during the Elizabethan Renaissance. In many respects, this is a challenging piece of scholarship, arguing, as it does, that endogamous relationships provided elite women with power and authority to write and publish. Quilligan's theoretical basis is modern anthropological theory, with feminist revisions. In feminist reassessments of Marcel Mauss's theory of gift exchange, insufficient attention is given to the status of women as gifts. This "traffic in women" is meant to solidify alliances between patriarchal households, and women are treated as passive objects with no subjectivity, as commodities. Women have three alternatives by which to resist this traffic: incest, celibacy, or homosexuality. Quilligan's argument is that by halting this traffic in women through incest, female Renaissance authors "did manage to claim an active female authority by writing in high canonical genres ... and who, even more transgressive at the time, often sought publication in print" (p. 7).

For the meat of her work, Quilligan presents a series of case studies, often of personages from the same extended kin networks, whose lives or works in corporate demonstrate Quilligan's thesis. In her case study of Elizabeth I, Quilligan argues that Elizabeth's refusal (or inability) to participate in the traffic of women through marriage enabled her to "turn inward to a nonexogamous arena in which she [could] exercise some, if not total, control. She ... thereby claim[ed] an active agency for herself" (p. 36). To demonstrate Elizabeth's own skill at negotiating her agency in this period, Quilligan turns her attention to the various publications of an adolescent translation Elizabeth did of Marguerite de Navarre's ***Miroir de l'ame pechere-esse***. This "meditation," Quilligan claims, "offered a remarkably supple and long-lived discourse for articulating female agency during the reign of an autonomous queen" (p. 74). Elizabeth's translation was put to print four times. For each edition, Quilligan explores the actors involved in its publica-

tion, providing at times tantalizing clues about the history of the book, with its complexities of publication and the intertwined roles of author, publisher, printer, and patron. Historians of the book will no doubt find these analyses rewarding and fascinating, but those unfamiliar with the moments of high Catholic threats during Elizabeth's reign may not grasp fully the larger argument.

Many of Quilligan's case studies center around the members of the Sidney family: Sir Philip Sidney, his sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and their niece, Mary Wroth. Through the posthumous editing and publication of her brother's works, the countess legitimized her own work. It was her love (possibly incestuous love) for her brother Sidney that produced her poetry. Again, we see Quilligan claiming the family as a site of agency for women. Power for women lies within the family: "Allying herself with a male family member, insisting on her sibling status, the female can speak" (p. 120). It was through "the cultural capital of her natal family" (p. 120) that the Countess of Pembroke exercised her agency. And it was her realization of her family's cultural capital that the countess took advantage of, promoting her identification with her family and its more illustrious members, such as her brother, in order to capitalize on the agency afforded her within her society's social structures. One of Quilligan's more fascinating analyses is her examination of the frontispiece of Mary Wroth's *Urania*. Engraved by Simon Van de Passe, Van de Passe did portraits of James I and his wife, Anne of Denmark, as well as portraits of John Smith and Pocahontas. The frontispiece is a representation of Penshurst, the Sidney family seat where Wroth grew up. By drawing upon the cultural capital of the Sidney family, Wroth not only "elevate[d] the status of the family and increases its cultural prestige" (p. 191), but deliberately signaled the extended kin network from which Wroth drew her endogamous power, like her aunt, locating her agency within her natal aristocratic family.

Perhaps the most revolutionary of all Quilligan's case studies is her ex-examination of the figure of Cordelia from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Quilligan argues that Cordelia's refusal to speak in the opening scene of the play represents not, as others have argued, the moment of Cordelia's actualized selfhood and agency, but rather her lack thereof. Her silence reveals her obedience to early modern patriarchal law and injunctions against incest, refusing to claim that she loves her father, as her sisters do, above all others. Rather, Cordelia's act of agency comes at the end of the play, when she returns at the head of an army. Her love for her father, the incestuous love she denied at the opening of the play, is what legitimizes her actions and gives her the authority to head an army.

Nonliterary scholars of early modern England will undoubtedly find *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England* interesting, but ultimately of little value to their scholarship. Quilligan's focus is on a select group of women, often related to one another, who all come from the aristocracy, if not royalty. Their privileged positions in society gave them access not only to classical educations, but also, such as in the case of Mary Worth, manuscript copies of her uncle Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. Unless one's work focuses on aristocratic women or aristocratic publications, Quilligan does not expand the field of women's agency in early modern England. Scholars interested in such themes would do better to look at Laura Gowing's work on the subject. Other historical errors Quilligan makes also undermine her argument. Sir Philip Sidney could not claim to be part of Elizabeth's extended kinship groups, as the Earl of Leicester was not, as Quilligan claims, Elizabeth's cousin.

On a more methodological and theoretical level, Quilligan's definition of incest is somewhat problematic. She applies the term rather loosely, such as claiming that Elizabeth herself was the

product of incest, as her father had an affair with her aunt, Mary Boleyn. Quilligan applies to the term to all endogamous relationships, not considering that the power relationships between parent and child, brother and sister, and cousins could differ wildly. Furthermore, it is unclear whether all of these endogamous relationships necessarily entailed sexual relations, such as the relationship between Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. In addition, by focusing on incest as a brake on the traffic of women, Quilligan does not acknowledge that within the elite, patriarchal families that form the basis of her study, sons were traded by fathers just as much as daughters were. In this very real sense, sons lacked as much agency as their sisters. Limiting herself to three brakes on the traffic of women, Quilligan also denies women other means of agency. For example, elite widowed women, such as Bess of Hardwick, could and did trade themselves through marriage.

In spite of these criticisms, there is much to admire in *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England*. Quilligan's extended examination of the role that the active claiming of the natal family played in legitimizing the women of the Sidney family is particularly fascinating. While this is not a text that would work well in an undergraduate course, scholars of early modern English literature will find much to appreciate, undoubtedly stimulating further debate.

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