

Helen Berry, Elizabeth A. Foyster, eds. *The Family in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xv + 244 pp. \$105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-85876-2.



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This volume of essays, dedicated to early modern historian Anthony Fletcher, brings together a range of perspectives on the history of the family in early modern England. It takes its starting point from Lawrence Stone's magisterial *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1700* (1977), and the authors, all of them already with distinguished publications of their own, address various aspects and themes raised by his book. The focus on Stone gives the volume a measure of coherence that is normally lacking in collective volumes of this sort, allowing readers a rounded view of the debates that had raged the field from its inception and offering insight into the most important themes and preoccupations of family history today. The volume thus attests to the force that Stone's thesis still commands, but, at the same time, as the editors indicate in their introductory chapter, it substantially modifies, complicates, and goes well beyond Stone's initial perceptions and arguments.

The nature of early modern patriarchal authority,

which was at the heart of Stone's thesis, is addressed and reexamined by all of the contributors. By integrating gender perspectives with family history (reflecting here on trends in the historical scholarship elsewhere), many chapters evoke the complexities and inner tensions of patriarchy, demonstrating the varied forces and contexts within which it was negotiated and worked out. The volume thus brings into sharper focus two strands of argument that had emerged in three decades of research: first, that patriarchal authority in the early modern period was indeed enormously potent and disadvantageous to women (as Stone had postulated); but, second, and *pace* Stone, that such authority was limited by a range of contexts, institutions, and, not least important, by the actions of women themselves. Tim Stretton's essay on marital separation, which builds on his previous pioneering work on women and the courts, offers an instructive overview of the varied central and local courts that some women used skillfully, and between which they could occasionally maneuver, in combating male rule and

obtaining legal separation outside the ecclesiastical courts. In her chapter on crime and the early modern household, Garthine Walker shows the use women made of the legal principle of coverture (which subsumed them under the authority of males) to their own benefit, indicating the participation in crime of women and men as family units that displayed a great deal of partnership rather than the coercion of wives by their husbands. John Walter, in an essay on the early modern crowd, highlights not only the ubiquity of masculine/patriarchal values in all forms of protest, but also the extensive participation of youth and women in such activity (the former especially in urban riot, and the latter most notably in protest over food), emphasizing the multiple implications such participation had for protest itself and for the measure of domestic power exercised by women. In their illuminating discussion of childlessness, Helen Berry and Elizabeth A. Foyster raise the question of how childless fathers fared in a society in which paternity was a mark of patriarchal authority and masculine identity, with childlessness being experienced as humiliation, ridicule, and shame. Their findings point again not only to the strength and depth of patriarchal norms, but also to the limitations placed on such norms by demography (relatively high rates of those who never married), medical ideas, or more practical and material considerations, all acting to moderate assumptions regarding the absolute desirability of having many offspring under the rule of adult males. In a somewhat different vein, but pointing again to familial dynamics that allowed women a measure of resistance, the chapters by Ingrid Tague and Joanne Bailey, respectively on aristocratic women and on parenting in the eighteenth century, address the issue of affective bonds, and show, contrary to Stone, that patriarchy and affection were hardly incompatible, with affective bonds producing familial dynamics and wifely maneuvering that could limit or undermine the authority of males.

A second issue raised by many contributors is that of change over time: had the family modernized in three stages, as Stone presumed? Stone's emphatic pronouncement of a shift from medieval "open lineage" family, to the early modern "patriarchal nuclear" family, and to the affective domestic unit of the eighteenth century had been variously contested. Some historians have postulated that no change had occurred at all, while others have pointed to an inverse course, with the onset of modernity in the eighteenth century implying more, rather than less, patriarchal authority and rule. The chapters in this volume do not produce uniform judgments, but overall they suggest a great deal of continuity of both male dominance *and* emotional ties, while also pointing to change, albeit more nuanced than the one postulated by Stone. Stretton's essay on women at the courts belies the novelty of the eighteenth century by showing, contrary to Stone, that avenues for separations had existed "since at least the time of Queen Elizabeth" (p. 39). Tague shows the coexistence of components of all three family models postulated by Stone in the early eighteenth century, while Bailey concludes that no evidence can be adduced to show that parental affection substantially grew by the eighteenth century. At the same time, Tague and Bailey reaffirm the special place of the long eighteenth century in affecting change, underlining shifts in representation and discourse rather than in the actual experience of family relations and life. Bailey stresses the role of the language of sensibility in the intensification (rather than simply the emergence) of parental emotions and the attention given to fatherly caring and love, which, as she shows, by no means reduced cases of domestic cruelty, although it might have given more weight to wives' complaints against such cruelty at court. While Stone's analysis tended to assume rather than prove the impact of the new language of sensibility, here Bailey evokes the gap and potential tension between idea and practice, with the precise dynamics between the

increasing emphasis on tender paternal role, on the one hand, and lived experience, on the other, remaining, as Bailey suggests, “yet to be unraveled” (p. 223).

Overall and most important, the volume strongly evokes the embeddedness of the family in broader networks and institutions that invariably sustained, regulated, and intruded households and family life. There was, of course, some of this in Stone's book, for the crux of his narrative was to show the evolvment of the family within shifting political, judicial, and social institutions or process. Yet these assertions remained at the level of broad generalizations, while his strictures regarding the emergence of the nuclear patriarchal family presumed the growing isolation and “atomization” of the family from the sixteenth century onward. In contrast, the chapters here unequivocally point to the openness, dependence, exposure, or subjection of the family in all social classes to networks and institutions outside, and well into the eighteenth century. The role of the “rich mix” of kin, neighbors, and political surveillance is highlighted by Stretton in his discussion of marital bonds and the courts, and it is also underlined by Walker in her essay on crime, Walter on protest, and Tague on elite women in the eighteenth century. Focusing on the period of the Interregnum (1649-60), Bernard Capp also demonstrates the potency of the godly campaign against sexual immorality, pointing to the surveillance and intrusion of family life that it entailed as well as to the challenges such monitoring encountered or the hostility it sometimes provoked. Particularly valuable here is Steve Hindle's extended treatment of a case study of a single family that sheds new light on the family among the poor, highlighting the critical role of both parochial public relief as well as neighborly ties for the survival of the family among the indigent.

Recent years have witnessed the appearance of varied multivolume histories of the family,

women, childhood, and youth in the European West (for example, David Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli's three-volume edited collection *The History of the European Family* [2001-03]). The present volume does not offer a full survey or a narrative that would replace Stone's, nor does it cover all areas pertaining to the family, even in an early modern English context. Yet, as a rounded treatment of some major themes and findings that point to where we now stand and what more might be gained, it is an important and illuminating collection, skillfully and thoughtfully implemented. It attests to the continued vigor of family cum gender history, and would benefit students and scholars working on family, gender, and the social history of Britain, the continent, or elsewhere.

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[1]. Among recent histories see, David Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, eds. _ The History of the European Family_, 3 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001-2003).

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