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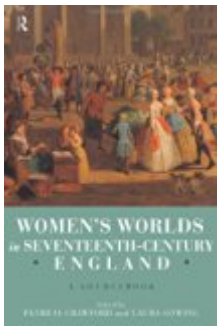
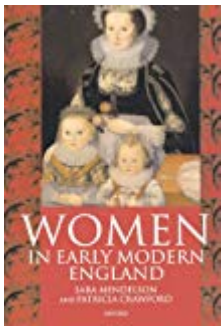


Patricia Crawford, Laura Gowing, eds.. *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook.* London and New York: Routledge, 2000. xviii + 314 pp. $24.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-15638-7.



Sara Mendelson, Patricia Crawford. *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720.* Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1998. xvi + 480 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-19-8201249; $19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-820812-9.

Reviewed by Belinda Peters

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In their "search for the legacy of women's lives," these historians have produced two fine examples of a "collaborative, feminist history of women...." (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 1). *Women in Early Modern England* is an extraordinary work of archival research, reconstructing a detailed history of English women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not simply a compilation of secondary works -- though the authors make fine use of essays and monograph studies -- it draws from a wide range of primary sources, most of them previously unpublished and many examples of which appear in the source collection, *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England*. Court records, letters, literature, ballads, and wood-block prints have been painstakingly pieced together to illuminate not just the lives of middling and noble women, but of women marginalized by poverty, age, or belief. These histories of English women present Tudor-Stuart social historians with new questions and a broad range of sources on which to draw for research and teaching. Their concentrated focus, however, may limit their usefulness for courses on Europe or European women.

Like many social historians, Mendelson and Crawford have organized their research by topic rather than chronology in order to create an integrated portrait of a society divided by "age, social rank, matrimonial and familial and sexual status, and geographical locale," not to mention religious and political convictions (p. 2). Each chapter be-

gins with a brief overview of attitudes toward women relevant to its topic. In addition, but Chapter One, "Contexts," provides detailed analysis of the generally prevailing "medical, scientific, legal, and political framework" that provided the "discursive boundaries" of women's existence (p. 15). Chapters on women's life-cycles cover childhood through old age, including the education and working experiences of youth; the physical, emotional, and cultural changes associated with marriage, maternity and menopause; and the woman's role in careful attention to death and the dying. "Female Culture" traces the ways in which women used space, language, material goods, and piety to connect themselves and their homes to the community. "Politics" includes discussion of the powers invested in queens regnant from Mary I and Elizabeth I to Mary II and Anne alongside analysis of the impact of women's petitioning from the revolutionary period through the Restoration.

I found the two chapters describing women's adult work experiences particularly engrossing, in part because the evidence here represents the bulk of the authors' latest archival research. More important, however, in these pages Mendelson and Crawford effectively use women's practices to critique and reassess traditional historical terms or paradigms--in this case, the "family" economy. "The Makeshift Economy of Poor Women" reconstructs with telling detail the ways in which these women --only sometimes as part of a family -- made use of every hour and every option available to feed and clothe themselves. Illustrations show them spinning, carrying milk pails, begging with their children, or selling goods on the streets, and we are apt to thus label women spinners, milkmaids, etc. But court records make clear that they might, like Isabel Dodd, have several occupations at once: "'she winds silk and knits and washes and scours whereby she maintains herself'" (p. 278).

Even professional women of the middling classes, described in the next chapter, were capable of similar flexibility, as their working lives changed with each shift in status from servant to wife to mother to widow. As the authors point out in the epilogue, early modern working women, rarely tied to or protected by traditional trade identities, often suffered more severely than men from economic change. But it is also clear from their analysis that early modern economies depended upon the flexible work of individual women to support the so-called "family" economy. What, I wondered, did this flexibility make possible as new productive techniques appeared in the eighteenth century? *Women in Early Modern England* inspires such questions, providing a range of useful starting points for undergraduate and graduate research in Tudor-Stuart history supported by excellent reference tools. Footnotes provide complete citations of sources at their first appearance in each chapter -- no searching through the entire text for document references -- and the "select" bibliography is sufficiently extensive for even the most eager graduate student. And yet, the detail that makes this text so useful for British social historians also makes it too long for most classroom use. Even courses on European women will be better served by Crawford's and Gower's excellent sourcebook.

The documents in *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England* will, of course, integrate easily with chapters from Mendelson's and Crawford's text for courses in English history. Readings from the chapters on "Bodies" and "Sexual Experience," for example, will enrich students' understanding of the life cycles described in the Oxford text; those on "God and Nation" or "Politics and Protests" will complicate as well as clarify discussion of women's connection to the political arena. Like many Routledge sourcebooks, however, this one can be used independently as a course textbook. Each section provides complete introductory and background material, including guidance for students on how to approach particular kinds

of sources such as court records. Difficult or unusual terms not defined in the glossary are briefly, but fully explained in footnotes; spelling and grammar have been modernized where necessary; and bibliographical material is organized as "Further Reading" under subject headings useful to undergraduates. An overview of only one section -- "Relationships" -- will give some sense of the range of subjects covered and documents gathered here. Woodcuts portray women drinking and conversing. Consistory court records show the ways in which neighborly relationships could turn to conflict, as women argue over seating in church or exchange public insults. Quarter sessions cases reveal how necessity might compel poor neighbors to cooperate in thievery or greed incite a son to abandon his mother. That most dangerous of neighbors, the witch, appears in brief excerpts from both printed histories and government papers. And finally, women's letters and diaries demonstrate touchingly and eloquently the passionate affection that could exist between mother and child, sister and sibling, friend and friend, and even an owner and her pet. A very "user friendly" text, this sourcebook touches on many problems relevant to European and European women's history, and could be incorporated into an upper-division overview.

These books are thoroughly fascinating and excellent resources for English social and women's history, but in terms of scholarship and teaching, both are somewhat limited by their concentration on English women. Although some discussion of Scotland, Ireland, or Wales would have enriched either text, especially in terms of politics and the economy, the omission of any reference to continental and colonial influences -- beyond brief references to the salons of seventeenth-century Paris or passing mention of English convents on the continent -- is more troubling. In Mendelson's and Crawford's text, for example, the term "Reformation" means "English Reformation," as if developments in Switzerland, France, or the empire had no impact across the Channel. Several letters in the sourcebook suggest that continental politics, economics, and religious change might have been significant forces in Englishwomen's lives, but there is no explanation of this connection and, overall, very little to indicate that England was part of Europe, much less had colonies in North America and the beginnings of trade worldwide. As I suggested above, this does not negate the sourcebook's usefulness in the classroom, but as universities continue to replace "western civ" courses with world history, British women's history that does not acknowledge the relevance of the "world" may cease to be relevant to the academic community.

Finally, although there is, happily, little jargon used in either of these texts, I have a cranky complaint about the authors' use of "gender." In their introduction, Mendelson and Crawford define "class," "patriarchy," and "feminism," but not "gender." Throughout most of their text, however, they use the term as if it meant "women." In the chapter on "Politics," for example, the authors argue that "[g]ender was deeply significant to matters of government and rule in early modern society" (p. 345). What follows is a searching analysis of "women's involvement in mass politics ...starting with women themselves, with their goals, and ...the kinds of action open to them" (p. 382). This is excellent women's history, complete and persuasive, but not gender history, for it is done without any reassessment of the constantly shifting meaning of male citizenship, from the Parliamentary representatives of the 1620's to the Levellers of the 1640's to the "Lockeans" of the 1680's. If writing "gender" history is not to mean "add women and stir," historians of women must make clear -- as these authors do in their analysis of the economy -- that men have "gender" too. As long as the difficult task of reconstructing women's lives remains the central problem, however, it is, perhaps, best to avoid the term altogether.

Despite these problems, either or both of these texts will enrich any course in Tudor-Stuart

history, bringing English women's experiences vividly to life for students and professors alike and raising critical questions for future research and analysis.

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