

“By Their Bad Usage Made So”:¹⁾
Historical Models and the Status of Women
in Early Modern England.

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In recent years studies devoted to examining the literary depiction of women have proliferated.²⁾ There have been some notable examples regarding Elizabethan and Jacobean literature.³⁾ These studies have all depended to some degree upon prior conceptions of the status and role of women in early modern England; and it would not be going too far to say that those conceptions have played a significant part in determining the conclusions of respective studies.⁴⁾ With this in mind, it would therefore seem appropriate to evaluate recent historical work in this area: by appreciating the current historical parameters, the critic may be further enabled to attempt a convincing analysis of the way renaissance literature mediated social models with regard to this topic. Further, the critic may thereby also ascertain to what extent the literature may be said to contradict social usage.

But before we consider the specific case of women it would be useful to look at recent broad proposals concerning the interconnections of literature and history. Of central concern is discussion centring on the use of the word ‘subversion’ to the literature of this period. Three opinions may be discerned: there are those sceptical of the extent to which imaginative writing⁵⁾ has any direct relationship with the social forms contemporary with its production;⁶⁾ those who understand literature as containing all too fully the varieties and complexities of social power, such that ‘subversion’ of that power becomes impossible;⁷⁾ and those who understand

literature as being a site of ideological conflict where new meanings and new possibilities are rehearsed.⁹⁾ The extent to which the critic will be able to subscribe to these positions will again depend upon what historical model is held.

A pioneering historical study concerned with the status of women in early modern England was Alice Clark's *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*.⁹⁾ Clark was concerned to chart the detrimental effects of capitalism on the role of women in the pre-industrial economy. Her account stresses the complementarity of men's and women's activities.¹⁰⁾ It was this complementarity that was lost. Clark argues that capitalism made women dependent on male labour, owing to the destruction of the domestic economy. This brought with it a downgrading of the status of women. Joan Thirsk, in the foreword to *Women in English Society 1500-1800* edited by Mary Prior, is critical of the defects of Clark's study but agrees with its broad generalisations: "Alice Clark, for her part, gave a somewhat idealistic picture of family life under a regime of near self-sufficiency in the seventeenth century....It paid no attention to the many severe legal disabilities which denied women control over their property, their children, and, indeed, over the way they conducted their own lives....And even though she was aware of the writings of seventeenth-century theorists who upheld the notion of men as the rightful heads of families, and she recognized the ambiguities in this literature, yet she sidestepped this muddy pool by assuming that, in practice, in the home, the equality of husband and wife prevailed."¹¹⁾ Generally speaking, however, Thirsk agrees with Clark's conclusions, and this provides a useful framework within which to understand the literary depiction of women: "Gradually the net of government tightened, however, and between 1500 and 1750 continuing economic and political changes broke down decentralized rule and the relative autarchy of local communities. Public affairs of all kinds intruded more aggressively into the private world of the family, robbed it of half its sphere of influence, broke its unity, and

deprived the women of half their functions. It carried the male members away to rule more flamboyantly in the public world. The whole process proved extremely damaging to women, as Alice Clark fervently demonstrated."¹²⁾

The most significant historical contribution in recent years, however, was that of Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*.¹³⁾ Stone's account has received much criticism, most strongly on grounds of its applicability chiefly to the élite.¹⁴⁾ Nevertheless, Stone has been extremely influential. Indeed, a recent article makes explicit use of Stone,¹⁵⁾ despite the extensive criticism he has received. For our purposes, that of literary scholars, Stone's narrow focus may be less significant, since the literature of this period was almost entirely produced by the élite.

The arguments marshalled by Stone owe something to Clark but are substantially more complex. He outlines three forms of family formation interconnecting through the period: "the open lineage family, 1450–1630"; "the restricted patriarchal nuclear family, 1550–1700"; and "the closed domesticated nuclear family, 1640–1800". Stone's discussion of the open lineage family stresses the importance of property as a structural element in family formation. However, as such an emphasis would suggest, such family formation must have only been significant for that small percentage of the population who had significant property to inherit and pass on. The implications of property transfer are most important for women: and one may accord with Stone's somewhat gloomy interpretations as appropriate to the upper levels of society. Daughters could represent a strain upon resources: "In England, brides who were not landed heiresses were unable, because of primogeniture, to provide landed property, but were expected instead to bring with them as a dowry a substantial cash sum, called a 'portion'....Marriage, therefore, always involved a transfer of a significant amount of real or personal property from the family of the bride to that of the groom, with a reverse commit-

ment in the future of a significant proportion of annual income.” These important considerations had implications for the way women might be viewed by the élite: “rich wives were valuable—and widows more valuable still (especially widows past the childbearing age)—as prizes to be fought for.....Conversely, the dowry system, and the cultural obligation to marry off the girls, meant that daughters were a serious economic drain on the family finances, though they were useful in cementing political connections.”¹⁶⁾ Stone notably declines, in the early parts of his analysis, to consider affection as a motivating factor in marriage. His emphasis may well hold true for those families, during this period, for whom dynastic concerns would have been of primary importance.

Stone’s second descriptive category, the restricted patriarchal nuclear family, overlaps to some degree with his first: he sees an increase in “the importance of the nuclear core... not as a unit of habitation but as a state of mind”; and “the importance of affective bonds to tie the conjugal unit together began to increase”. He sees this as part of a long term process: “These two changes were the product of three concurrent and interrelated changes: the decline of kinship and clientage as the main organizing principles of landed society; the rise of the powers and claims of the state, encouraged by the Protestant reformers, both taking over some of the economic and social functions previously carried out by the family, the kin and the clientage, and subordinating kin and client loyalties to the higher obligations of patriotism and obedience to the sovereign; and the missionary success of Protestantism, especially its Puritan wing, in bringing Christian morality to a majority of homes, especially among the gentry and urban bourgeoisie, both in sanctifying holy matrimony and in making the family serve as a partial substitute for the parish,” and at the same time there was a “reinforcement... among these same social groups of the pre-existing patriarchal aspects of internal power relationships within the family.”¹⁷⁾ Stone is worth quoting at length, despite the controversial nature of his interpretation of social change,

simply because this emphasis on an *increase in patriarchal power* has been so influential. This increase is seen as taking place *against* the background of Puritan conduct books which had been taken as emphasizing the spiritual contribution of women to the family,¹⁸⁾ thus offering perhaps an accession of dignity to womanhood.

Stone and Thirsk would both accord on the significance of the encroaching state, both for local communities and the small units of the family; perhaps there would also be similar accord with regard to Stone's pungent analysis of the "subordination of wives" during the first half of this period.¹⁹⁾ Stone underlines the importance of official ideology: "the Homily on Marriage....It left the audience in no doubt about the inferior status, rights and character of a wife: 'the woman is a weak creature not endued with like strength and constancy of mind; therefore, they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions'....The ideal woman in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was weak, submissive, charitable, virtuous and modest....Her function was housekeeping, and the breeding and rearing of children. In her behaviour she was silent in church and in the home, and at all times submissive to men."²⁰⁾

Stone does mention one shortlived phenomenon: the "vigorous drive for female classical education by Renaissance Humanists like Vives and Erasmus." This was effective in the early sixteenth century. Stone quotes Richard Mulcaster who, as late as 1580 could boast: "Do we not see in our country some of that sex so excellently well trained and so rarely qualified in regard both to the tongues themselves and to the subject-matter contained in them, that they may be placed along with, or even above, the most vaunted paragons of Greece or Rome?"²¹⁾ It was a phenomenon, however, that had no impact on the majority of women.

Stone's discussion of changes in the broad outline of ideology

affecting the family has important implications for the role of women in early modern English society. If the family, as Stone suggests, was becoming increasingly patriarchal at the turn of the 17th century, then we might expect literature of this period to enter into some kind of dialogue with that process. But easy patterns are all too difficult to infer. Recently, in reaction to the dark picture Stone presents, emphasizing the high mortality rates, the lack of parental affection towards children,²²⁾ the importance of the dominant matrix in marital relations, scholars have now presented a less schematic almost proto-modern family, in which affection between members was of prime importance; indeed, where affection as a structural principle almost supplants Stone's insistence on property and authority.

Important in the reaction against Stone has been the work of Peter Laslett, together with the work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure of which he is a founding member. The Cambridge Group has been increasingly influential through the 1970s up to the present time. The publication in 1972 of *Household and Family in Past Time*²³⁾ was a most significant event in the sophisticated debate on the history of the family. The most important contribution made was the single, and revolutionary, insight that early modern family formation was dominantly *nuclear*, and that the old truism of a shrinkage of the family under industrialisation was far too simple: "The facts presented will show that mean household size remained fairly constant at 4.75 or a little under, from the earliest point for which we have figures, until as late as 1901. There is no sign of the large, extended coresidential family group of the traditional peasant world giving way to the small, nuclear, conjugal household of modern industrial society."²⁴⁾ This single insight, of general importance for the majority of the population, is difficult to evaluate regarding the status of women in these households of nuclear size. This insight was not made use of by Stone, but it does render his first category specific rather to the aristocracy.

Women may thus be seen to have been subordinate to their brothers, husbands and fathers, and generally to have lived in households containing four or five people, not all of whom will have necessarily been blood relations. By using extensive literary documentation, particularly literature stressing subordination, Stone detailed a harsh repressed existence for women during this period; but as the small nature of the conjugal unit shows, relationships would undoubtedly have entailed a degree of *partnership*, particularly in that harsh economic climate. Work has also been done to ascertain the average ages at marriage: "Analysis of parish registers suggests that this pattern [late marriage and a high proportion of the unmarried] was already well established for the majority of the population in Elizabethan and Stuart England. Such analysis points to a mean age of marriage for women of about 26, for men one varying between 27 and 29."²⁵⁾ Late marriage itself suggests the important economic venture that setting up a new household undoubtedly was. However, these average figures hide much variation throughout England on a regional and a group basis.²⁶⁾

The opposition between Stone's over-reliance on literary documents, and the Cambridge Group's extensive use of demographical statistics has been reconciled in some recent studies,²⁷⁾ all of which underline the affective nature of the early modern family, and tend to stress conjugality in marriage as opposed to an unequal partnership. Keith Wrightson's elegant synthesis of a broad range of historical research corrects Stone without underplaying some of the harsher realities operant in the period: "Woman's subordination was axiomatic, and was enshrined in legal disabilities, particularly with regard to property rights. Nevertheless it was also commonly agreed that the husband had duties towards, as well as privileges and authority over, the 'weaker vessel'."²⁸⁾ Wrightson stresses that the marital system did not merely oppress women but also entailed precise forms of behaviour for the man.²⁹⁾ He also focuses on the social specificity of marital restrictions: in the upper levels of society,

as Stone has argued, women were indeed subject to more social control because more depended on their behaviour; in the lower levels there may well have been more freedom to choose partners, and conduct less restricted lives: "Wives of the aristocracy and upper gentry were more often significantly younger than their husbands than was the case in the population at large....If submissiveness characterized the marital relations of great gentlewomen, however, they were sharply distinguished in this respect from their social inferiors, for the diaries of the middling sort contain quarrels enough."⁸⁰ In other words, we may be dealing with a society in which the literary stipulations regarding women did not do justice to the actual freedoms that women in the middle and lower reaches may have enjoyed.

In place of Stone's model of overlapping social forces converging on the family to produce contradictory social changes, Keith Wrightson offers a portrait of a society dense in its localities and obligations, with reciprocity operating horizontally and vertically, a society in many respects remarkably stable, though subject to increasing penetration by the state, and showing an augmented distance, as the period progresses, between the rich and the poor.⁸¹ He sees the family as one of the "enduring structures" in the period.⁸²

This brief survey of the conclusions reached in the most recent historical studies concerned with the family, although necessarily crude, does indicate the difficulty that the *literary* critic is faced with if she or he wishes to elaborate arguments about the nature of social power. There are certainly long term factors operating to alter the status of women. But on this topic is it possible to read *subversion*, when the dominant male ideology was rooted so strongly in such a solid social base? The difficulty the literary critic faces is precisely the near impossibility of tying *social change*, which is problematically defined, to the single specificity of individual texts.

However, there is a route from this impasse. It lies in a recon-

ciliation of the positions of both Stone and Wrightson, and is suggested in a review article of Stone's *Family, Sex and Marriage* by Keith Thomas.³⁸⁾ Thomas criticizes Stone for assuming too close a relationship between the literature of domestic advice and domestic actuality. He suggests that Stone's reading of the conductbooks is "au pied de la lettre" and he continues: "Much the same might be said about the literature urging the subordination of women. Theoretical patriarchalism was consistent in practice with almost every kind of conjugal equality. The actual independence of the wives and daughters of the upper classes was always greater than theory allowed; and part of the evidence lies in the very frequency with which that independence was denounced."³⁴⁾ In other words, we might read such literature urging subordination as operating in part in contradistinction to less patriarchal modes. Thus Stone's suggestion that the *family* became briefly more patriarchal towards the end of the sixteenth century, may be qualified by the suggestion that male stipulations became more *intense*, which would form part of a *concern with order* on the part of the elite. Thus, far from actuality being reflected in such literature, that literature rather displays a concern with control and rigour extending to and including prescriptive comment on the family. Some recent historical studies would support this tentative position.

The collection of essays by British and American specialists *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*,³⁵⁾ edited by Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, offers a platform to literary critics interested in the connection between writings and their social significance. The introduction to the collection is a particularly useful survey of historical work concerning order and disorder. The authors broadly agree with Wrightson's conception of social change. The family, as Wrightson underlined, was an "enduring structure" and vital to conceptions of order in this period: "Order in this period rested on the family and household, on schooling and apprenticeship and on the formal and informal institutions of control in the parish. Relations between husbands and

wives, parents and children and heads of households and their dependents and servants were deemed to be central to the maintenance of a well-regulated society. The supreme authority of the husband in marriage was clearly stated in law, in theology and in contemporary writing. There was considerable pressure for wives to live up to the models of modesty and obedience set out for them."³⁶⁾ Thus far both Fletcher and Stevenson are in agreement with all historians on this subject; but it is the sum total of the essays which lead to the statement: "We are left with a powerful impression of a surprisingly stable society considering the fragility of the means of control. Neither patriarchalism nor the ideology of the rule of law rested in the end on anything more than persuasion and propaganda."³⁷⁾ Two of the essays in the collection specifically deal with this issue.

David Underdown's essay,³⁸⁾ "The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England", is an ambitious attempt at making some connections between literary evidence and social evidence in order to argue for a crisis in gender relations between 1560–1640. His argument is to some extent at odds with the perceptions of Keith Wrightson that the family was essentially stable. However, his article is useful because it highlights the fact that the literature which urged the subordination of women has a clear social parallel in the treatment of unruly women in village communities. He cites puritan pamphlets, drama such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, and popular literature: "The fascination with rebellious women is equally evident in popular literature. Titles like *The Cruell Shrew* and *Hic Mulier, or, the Man-Woman* show what was on people's minds, or at least what Grub Street thought was on their minds. There seems to have been a steady demand for such reading-matter among the urban, middle-class public."³⁹⁾ He asks the question: "Did this anxiety about patriarchal order have any solid basis or was it a merely literary phenomenon, a matter of perception, not reality?"⁴⁰⁾

Underdown then convincingly outlines a concern with unruly women which seems to have been prevalent at this time. Unruly women, or scolds, were often “poor, social outcasts, widows or otherwise lacking in the protection of a family.”⁴¹⁾ He notes that this concern coincides with the prosecution of witches. Unruly women were often disciplined by use of the “cucking-stool” in both towns and rural areas: Underdown makes a case for arable areas being more likely to employ such a device. There were other methods of dealing with diverse manifestations of unruliness: “Scolds and witches could be prosecuted in the courts; unruly women who beat their husbands usually could not, so they had to be dealt with by unofficial community action, by shaming rituals like *charivari*.”⁴²⁾ Underdown presents evidence for the use of such informal social sanctions: he makes distinctions between those directed at unfaithful wives, and those directed at women who beat their husbands. Although it is difficult to be certain that Underdown’s account is completely persuasive of a “crisis in gender relations”, since the types of evidence he adduces may well be viewed as *exceptional* breakdowns of order, nevertheless the central plank of his argument is indisputable: that women in this period were the focus of male control, and that it was clearly the *women* who were important to the smooth functioning of the community.⁴³⁾ This paradoxical importance, one which brought down upon itself social obloquy at moments of perceived disjunction, must also be of significance in our reading of renaissance texts portraying women.

Further substantiation of this aspect of Underdown’s thesis is supplied by two important studies of witchcraft in early modern England. Alan Macfarlane, in *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*,⁴⁴⁾ has analysed the occurrence of witchcraft in Essex during this period. The greatest number of witchcraft accusations occurred during the 1580s and 1590s.⁴⁵⁾ The vast majority of those accused were women. Those who made the accusations usually came from a higher social level. Macfarlane lists the personality traits ascribed to witches by contemporary writers:

“Several writers outlined the personality types associated with witchcraft. Those who were boastful, illiterate, miserable, lustful, and leading a ‘lewd and naughty kind of life’, melancholy—all were likely to be witches. Above all, they were thought to be the type of person who went round begging and those who had vicious tongues. Witches were people of ‘ill natures, of a wicked disposition, and spitefully malicious’; ‘malicious people, full of revenge, having hearts swolne with rancour’. They were scolds and peevish.”⁴⁶ Macfarlane explains the phenomenon of witchcraft persecution as symptomatic of a crisis in neighbourliness: “witchcraft reflected tensions between an ideal of neighbourliness and the necessities of economic and social change”; “Pressure on economic resources and growing unease at the neighbourly values of village society...naturally tended to cause friction with the older inhabitants who, by their very presence, made demands on younger village families”; “witches were characteristically middle-aged or old”; the “high proportion of witches who were widows does suggest that widowhood was a serious problem in Elizabethan villages.”⁴⁷ Macfarlane does however find it more difficult to explain why such a crisis should articulate itself *against women*. He fails to raise the question of *male control* that the issue undoubtedly involves. Nevertheless, he does make some interesting conjectures as to the possible social significance: “The fact that witchcraft can be used to preserve a group’s or a society’s equilibrium by keeping all disruptive elements in control, and by encouraging such virtues as ‘good neighbourliness’ and charity, has frequently been emphasized.”⁴⁸ Although he denies that such conservatism was specifically at work in England, we may understand the phenomenon’s concern with the behaviour of women as essentially conservative, in that it reaffirmed traditional gender hierarchies. Since the accusations predominantly flowed from the less poor to the more destitute, we might also understand witchcraft as part and parcel of the process of differentiation that Keith Wrightson sees as happening through this period.

Keith Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*,⁴⁹⁾ follows the interpretation given by Macfarlane, and underlines the connection between scolding and witchcraft: the witch “was the extreme example of the malignant or non-conforming person against whom the local community had always taken punitive action in the interests of social harmony. Their ‘chief fault’, wrote Reginald Scot of witches, ‘is that they are scolds’. So close was the association between scolding and witchcraft in the popular mind that a foreign visitor, shown the cucking-stool at Honiton in 1760, was actually informed that it had once been used to punish witches.”⁵⁰⁾ Thomas argues that women were most dependent, and therefore most *vulnerable* to accusation.⁵¹⁾ However, he also includes the suggestion that there may be some connection between the social stipulations regarding female sexuality “women were generally believed to be sexually more voracious than men” and the witchcraft phenomenon. Both Thomas and Macfarlane fail to account for why women were specifically the targets of this persecution. Christina Lerner, in *Witchcraft and Religion*,⁵²⁾ is critical of this aspect of their analyses. She proposes hypotheses that accord with Underdown’s suggestions: “On average, witchcraft, the ultimate in human evil, was sex-related to women in much the same proportion as sanctity, the ultimate in human good, was sex-related to men”; “The questions which ought to be asked about the witch-hunt are why the stereotype of a witch is that of a woman, and why women were criminalized for the first time on any scale in this period”; “There is much to suggest that in the law-and-order crises generated by the new regimes of early modern Europe, women were a prime symbol of disorder”; “We must ask why women appeared particularly threatening to patriarchal order at this time, and why they ceased to be so threatening about 1700.”⁵³⁾ Although Lerner can offer no firm theory on this issue, it is clear that in conjunction with Underdown she perceives a new development in this period concerning women as the focus of patriarchal control.

Susan Amussen, in “Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560–1725”,⁵⁴ the final essay in *Order and Disorder*, brings together the elements converging on women in the early modern period. She discusses the commonplace in this period whereby the family served as a universal political metaphor: “Patriarchal political theorists described the king as a father, and located the origins of political power within the family, but they did not discuss the quotidian implications of such an analogy. Gouge, Griffith and other writers of household manuals described the fathers of families as having the same powers in their families that kings had in the state, but never developed the political implications of their theories.”⁵⁵ Amussen suggests that although such writers did not explicitly integrate the two, they were nonetheless crucial: “The analogy helped define order and hierarchy in early modern England. Householders were to keep order in their families: their wives should be meek, submissive and chaste, their children orderly, their servants chaste and honest....The failings of inferiors, if uncorrected, provided a criticism of their superiors.”⁵⁶ Amussen defines this hierarchy as the “gender order” and shares the same conclusions as Wrightson: “The reality of gender relations rarely conformed to theory, but there were no direct challenges to the gender order. No one questioned women’s subordination to their husbands—they just sometimes refused to give it”.⁵⁷ Her overview provides a useful framework within which to locate the factors previously discussed: “The period between 1560 and 1640 saw rapid population growth, inflation and massive transfers of land. The governors of England, from parish officers to those in parliament, sought to impose order on a society which was changing, and apparently disintegrating, before their eyes. In their attempts to impose order on society, they were aided by the commonplaces of political and social thought. The analogy between family and state, gender order and class order, offered an effective response to disorder. By insisting on the proper gender order, local notables could effectively reaffirm the social

order, since no one had ever called the power relations of the family into question."⁵⁸⁾

Amussen's explanatory framework, although perhaps implicitly overemphasizing the actuality of *disorder* in the period, does justice to the *sense* of disorder that was undoubtedly experienced by the élite: it was *felt* that the world was changing drastically, and in some respects it was.⁵⁹⁾ Furthermore, her argument, in conjunction with the previous studies, supplies a model that goes some way to contributing to the subversion/containment debate (between 'cultural materialism' and 'the new historicism') that we glanced at briefly in the opening paragraphs.⁶⁰⁾

To summarize the findings: the status of women was *theoretically* low at the turn of the seventeenth century: that is to say that literary stipulations regarding women almost universally promoted the notion of *inferiority*; the actual status of women in the society was undoubtedly more varied than this, and the literary stipulations may be seen to be reductively normative; over the long term there seems to have been a loss of status, owing to various factors, but it is possible perhaps to overemphasize this; the theoretical inferiority of women was never questioned in this period, although in the disciplining of unruly women, (and also at the time of the civil war)⁶¹⁾ we have evidence that there may have been some disjunction between theory and practice; and so, gathering these points together, and remembering that practically all literature of whatever sort was written by *men*, we may hesitantly conclude that to expect subversion of the dominant sexual consensus is perhaps to expect too much. A more fruitful line of approach may be, as Amussen indicates with the analogy of the family, to understand the male literary presentation of women as having some relationship with the concurrent male concern with female role and order.⁶²⁾ The writings of such as Shakespeare clearly have no *simple* relationship; but it does not follow therefrom that a character such as Rosalind is *subversive*.

One final point remains to be made: this is the fact that historical

research regarding the role of women in past culture is still in its infancy.⁶⁹⁾ It is notable that the most interesting propositions made by Christina Lerner were couched in the form of questions. But despite the provisional nature of most hypotheses in this area, the veritable avalanche of social historical studies over the last fifteen years can only be of interest to the literary scholar wishing to cite the literature more firmly in its context.

NOTES

- 1) William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, &c *The Witch of Edmonton: A known true Story* (1621), II i 8–15; Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 3: 506.

Some call me Witch;

And being ignorant of my self, they go
About to teach me how to be one: urging,
That my bad tongue (by their bad usage made so)
Forespeaks their Cattle, doth bewitch their Corn,
Themselvcs, their Servants, and their Babes at nurse.
This they enforce upon me: and in part
Make me to credit it.

This is cited by Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1978) 628. Thomas cites the text differently: with 'language' in place of 'usage'.

- 2) For surveys of the field see: Ellen Carol Dubois et al., *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, eds., *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1985); Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985); K. K. Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 1984); Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).
- 3) A selected bibliography is supplied after the notes.
- 4) See Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983) 1–8; and for more sophisticated comments on this issue see: Lisa Jardine, "Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare's Learned Heroines: 'These are old paradoxes'," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1987): 3–4. Jardine writes in *Shakespeare Quarterly*: "The attempt to unravel the women from Renaissance literary texts tends to *begin* with explicit position-taking on what are in fact the crucial areas of difficulty for interpreting the surviving social historical data." This is seen to be: "only one example of the pressure on the textual critic to embrace

- the fiction that there exists a reliable body of social and historical “fact,” to be “tested” somehow against the “fiction” of the literary representation.”
- 5) ‘Imaginative literature’ refers to the most conventional forms of ‘literature’ in this context: ‘writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect.’ (O.E.D. VI: 342) Differentiation between the types of ‘literature’ is problematic. An inclusive definition of ‘literature’ is employed here.
 - 6) See the foreword and introduction to Lauro Martines, *Society and History in English Renaissance Verse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); see also the introductory essay “The Pre-Revolutionary Decades” in Christopher Hill, *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill, Volume One: Writing and Revolution in 17th Century England* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985); see also Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Both Martines and Hill argue for more interaction between history, literature and literary criticism; Felperin provides a critique of contemporary literary theory, and this involves criticism of new Marxist approaches: “In sum, what Macherey and Eagleton have been attempting to do all along is to deprivilege ‘literature’ by assimilating it to ‘history’, then reprivilege ‘history’ in the name of science, and thereby their own discourse as ‘scientific’ historians.... It is history that now assumes the dictatorship that literature held, the concept of literature having supposedly withered away, like the state in Marx’s own residually Hegelian scheme of history.” Felperin 67.
 - 7) See the illuminating review article by Peter Erickson in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (Summer 1986): 251–255. Erickson discusses the difference between “cultural materialism” and the “new historicism” manifested in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985). Stephen Greenblatt, the chief exponent of the “new historicism”, has developed the argument that authority in the renaissance supplies and defuses its own subversion: see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); the introduction to Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982); Stephen Greenblatt, “Invisible bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*” in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*; Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare and the exorcists” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, edited by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985).
 - 8) See Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); see also Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984); see the joint essay by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, “History and ideology: the instance of *Henry V*” in John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares*, New Accents series (London and New York: Methuen, 1985); see the essay by

Catherine Belsey, "Disrupting sexual difference: meaning and gender in the comedies" also in Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares*; for a less theoretical and more solidly historical approach see David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); see the current debate regarding the composition of the Shakespearean audience, notably Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) who argues for a dominantly élite composition, and Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) who argues for a more heterogeneous audience. A reading of the ideology of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama may depend in part on who the plays were watched by.

- 9) Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1919; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982): References are cited from the 1982 edition which contains a useful introduction by Miranda Chaytor and Jane Lewis; see also Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women's History in transition: the European case," *Feminist Studies* 3.3/4 (Summer 1976): 83-103; see also Christopher Hill's review in *History Workshop* 15 (Spring 1983): 173-6; see also Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (London and New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978): this deals with the late early modern period; see also Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978); see also Roger Thompson, *Women in Stuart England and America* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); see also Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin, eds., *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); see also the important article by Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XX (1959): 195-216; for recent general surveys see Patricia Crawford, "From the Woman's View: Pre-Industrial England, 1500-1750," in Patricia Crawford, ed., *Exploring Women's Past* (Carlton, South Victoria, Australia: Sisters Publishing Ltd, 1983); and bibliographical see Rosemary Masek, "Women in an Age of Transition, 1485-1714," in Barbara Kanner, ed., *The Women of England from Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present* (London: Mansell, 1980): 138 ff; Olwen Hufton, "Survey Articles. Women in History. I. Early Modern Europe," *Past and Present*, CI (November 1983): 125-41.
- 10) Clark 12: "In the seventeenth century the idea is seldom encountered that a man supports his wife; husband and wife were then mutually dependent and together supported their children." See also: Clark 296.
- 11) Joan Thirsk, "Foreword" in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society, 1500-1800* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985): 11; for more recent studies sensitive to regional variations see Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk and E.P. Thompson, eds., *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

- 12) Thirsk in Prior 14.
- 13) Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977; abridged and revised edition: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). References are to the Penguin edition. See also Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1661* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite?: England 1540–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
- 14) Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982): “Stone’s powerful arguments and adventurous hypotheses constitute the most ambitious attempt yet undertaken to interpret the development of the English family over time. Nevertheless they are seriously open to question in both their characterization of family life in later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and in their account of change within this period. Although he is undoubtedly aware of the major distinctions which may have existed between social groups in England, Stone has devoted insufficient care to the exploration of the experience of the mass of the population. As a result his interpretation has been elaborated on the basis of the historical experience of the aristocracy, upper gentry and urban plutocracy with which he is primarily concerned and retains at its heart the tacit assumption that analytical categories derived from their experience can somehow be extended to encapsulate phases in the history of the English family. This is a mistaken assumption.” Wrightson 71.
- 15) Phyllis Rackin, “Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 102.1 (January 1987): 41. Rackin does not cite any other accounts of the English family.
- 16) Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage* 72.
- 17) Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage* 93–94.
- 18) For comprehensive comment on this issue see Kathleen M. Davies, “Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage” in R.B. Outhwaite, ed., *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London: Europa Publications, 1981): 58–80.
- 19) Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage* 136–146.
- 20) Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage* 138.
- 21) Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage* 142–3. See Lisa Jardine, “Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare’s Learned Heroines: ‘These are old paradoxes,’” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1987): 1–18. Jardine discusses the contradictions inherent in such education: “On the one hand the view is expressed in pedagogic treatises that an education (by which is meant an education in the classics) will contribute to the pupil’s moral fiber and fitness to be an active member of a social élite; this view is matched by the equally clearly expressed position that there is something intrinsically *indecorous* about a woman who (whether with the encouragement of her

- family or not) transgresses the social code which requires her to observe a modest silence and passivity in public." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1987): 4. Women's writing in the renaissance is being given more attention: see the special issue *Women in the Renaissance of English Literary Renaissance* 14.3 (Autumn 1984); see also Betty Travitsky, ed., *The Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); see also Sara Heller Mendelson, "Stuart women's diaries and occasional memoirs" and Patricia Crawford, "Women's published writings 1600-1700" in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).
- 22) For revision of the 'black legend of childhood' see Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 23) Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). For recent work on population change in this period, and particularly the crucial role of *female fertility* see E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981). For a conservative but most influential account of early modern English society see Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: Further Explored* revised third edition (London and New York: Methuen, 1983).
- 24) Laslett, *Household and Family in Past Time* 126.
- 25) Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London and New York: Longman, 1984): 63. Houlbrooke is citing the findings of the Cambridge Group. These statistical facts enable the literary critic to determine to what extent theatrical representations of the family were true to the general norms.
- 26) See Miranda Chaytor, "Household and Kinship," *History Workshop Journal* 10 (1980). Chaytor argues against the insistence on an early modern 'nuclear family'. See also Miriam Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century: The Verneys of Claydon House* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) for discussion of an élite family in the mid-seventeenth-century.
- 27) See Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London and New York: Longman, 1984); Joyce Youngs, *Sixteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
- 28) Wrightson 91.
- 29) Wrightson 98: Wrightson argues that domestic violence was comparatively rare: "In fact none of the contemporary diaries known to me provides evidence of wife-beating as a response to domestic conflict. Undoubtedly it was allowed (in 'moderation') by English law, but it seems likely that the religious moralists were as much reflecting as shaping the opinions of their audience when they unanimously opposed it."
- 30) Wrightson 95.
- 31) Wrightson 13.

- 32) Wrightson 66–118.
- 33) Keith Thomas, “The Changing Family” *Times Literary Supplement* (October 21, 1977): 1226.
- 34) Keith Thomas, “The Changing Family” 1227. Examination of such literature can be found in: Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935; reissued Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958): 201–227, 465–507. See also Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540–1620* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984.)
- 35) Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 36) Fletcher and Stevenson 31.
- 37) Fletcher and Stevenson 38.
- 38) David Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England” in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 116–136.
- 39) Underdown in Fletcher and Stevenson 118.
- 40) Underdown in Fletcher and Stevenson 119.
- 41) Underdown in Fletcher and Stevenson 120. In this context see also Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975): particularly chapter five “Women on Top” which examines carnivalesque inversion and its social significance. Davis’ assumption that “sexual symbolism had a close connection with questions of order and subordination” (150) is relevant to our concern with such matters in the literary presentation of women.
- 42) Underdown in Fletcher and Stevenson 127.
- 43) This might entail doing men’s work: see Mary Prior, “Women and the urban economy: Oxford 1500–1800” in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).
- 44) Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Harper and Row, 1970). References are to the Harper edition.
- 45) Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* 28.
- 46) Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* 158.
- 47) Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* 161, 164, 162, 164: “As wives and mothers and gossips, they tended to be more intimately concerned with various village groups; they were the co-ordinating element in village society. People would feel most uneasy about them when society was segmenting.” (161). See Barbara J. Todd, “The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered” in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London and New York: 1985). Todd remarks:

- “the independent widow was also an anomaly. Patriarchal society required that, like the state, the household should be headed by a man.” (55) Todd makes stimulating suggestions that it was the *freedom* of the widow that was problematic. Rowena E. Archer likewise comments on the widow’s anomalous position, “Rich Old Ladies: The Problem of Late Medieval Dowagers” in A.J. Pollard, ed., *Politics and Property: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Glasgow: Alan Sutton, 1984). Archer discusses the widow as an obstruction in patriarchal inheritance.
- 48) Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* 248. The time of the peak witchcraft persecution was a time of crisis: see Peter Clark, ed., *The European Crisis of the 1590s: Essays in Comparative History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985). For conjectural but stimulating statements on the connection between ‘cultural anxiety’ and increased male power see Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). She argues that times of cultural stress may see an attempt, in a male dominated society, at an augmentation of the dominant power. (187).
 - 49) Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). References are to the Penguin edition.
 - 50) Thomas, *Religion and the Decline in Magic* 632.
 - 51) Thomas, *Religion and the Decline in Magic* 678.
 - 52) Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).
 - 53) Lerner 61, 62, 86, 87.
 - 54) Susan Amussen, “Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560–1725,” in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 196–217.
 - 55) Amussen in Fletcher and Stevenson 197. For more discussion of the family as a political metaphor see Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964): 460–461; see also G.J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); see Jean Bethke Elshtain, ed., *The Family in Political Thought* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).
 - 56) Amussen in Fletcher and Stevenson 204–205.
 - 57) Amussen in Fletcher and Stevenson 210.
 - 58) Amussen in Fletcher and Stevenson 216–217.
 - 59) Wrightson chapter 6.
 - 60) See Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985): 2–17.
 - 61) See Keith Thomas, “Women and the Civil War Sects,” *Past and Present* XIII (1958): 50, 53.
 - 62) This approach, which can be seen to be justified by recent historical work, is followed by Coppélia Kahn, “‘Magic of bounty’: *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1987): 34–57. Kahn discusses a marriage between new historicism and feminist psychoanalytical

criticism.

63) Lerner 63.

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