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Anne Laurence. *Women in England, 1500-1760: A Social History.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. xvi + 301 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-12207-2.

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Early modern English women have finally had their (historical) Renaissance. A decade ago, there were only a handful of specialized studies or general works (Warnicke, 1983; Fraser, 1984) in early modern women's history. Except for Alice Clark's trailblazing study (Clark, 1919, new ed., 1992), those works focussed on elite women at court, in education, and charitable institutions. Anne Laurence's new overview of women's experience in early modern England is just one of several new surveys and monographs. While Laurence is able to draw from pioneering articles by Patricia Crawford, Amy Louise Erickson, and Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, and other collections (Charles and Duffin, 1985; Fildes, 1990; Prior, 1985), her book has not benefitted from recent monographs by these authors (Crawford, 1993; Erickson, 1993; Ben-Amos, 1994) and others (Mack, 1992; Kermode and Walker, 1994). This book surveys, perhaps too even-handedly, different approaches to how women's experience changed. But this is a fine introductory text regarding the problems and possibilities in women's history.

The work has five parts. The first part, which examines how earlier historians related women's history to traditional history, perhaps artificially divides the seemingly changeless past of women from the history of (male) power. The next three parts focus on reproduction (marriage, sex, and family), material production (life and work), and mental production (literacy, religion, and culture). The final part returns to gender and women's relation to property, politics, and the legal system.

In part I, an initial overview on "Gender, Class and Race" argues that not until the eighteenth century was there "any discussion of women's role as autonomous beings rather than in relation to men" (15). But this as-

sertion ignores Civil War satire and Restoration comedy. And Laurence isolates this chapter's theoretical concerns too radically. Later chapters tend to ignore these assertions.

Part II competently discusses the dismal science of demography, though most demographic realities apply to both men and women. The chapter on "Marriage" is especially clear. Students will appreciate Laurence's usable definitions. A brief discussion of lying-in should now be supplemented by David Cressy's *Past & Present* article on churching. Given recent arguments advanced in the United States for an expansion of Boy's Town-type institutions, it is interesting that "the opening of Thomas Caram's London Foundling Hospital in 1741 aroused considerable controversy on the grounds that it encouraged irresponsible behaviour by parents" (84). Several chapters recast debate between Lawrence Stone and Alan Macfarlane over whether or not an affective family pattern replaced the patriarchal family, or whether parents loved their children. While the case for Stone presented seems weak, Laurence does not position herself. The period did see a shift from the elite marrying younger and having more children to the lower classes marrying younger and having more children. The impact of this shift on women's roles and status must have been as significant as the demographic results.

Part III contains a valuable discussion of girls' apprenticeships. But do we know yet how likely it was for girls to experience work outside their home? Laurence's discussion of agricultural work is lucid and informative. By the end of the period, women were being paid distinctively less and were less active in harvesting. A tantalizing paragraph on women's participation in the trades during the Civil War suggests an interesting question for

future research. Chapters on material life draw upon recent work on noble and gentry Tudor-Stuart households. But, again, what really happened? The standard argument that “women in great houses became more isolated,” follows the claim that “men and women were less segregated” (155). Is this then, not circumscribed elite women’s roles, but instead the withdrawal of the elite?

Part IV suggests a marked increase in women’s literacy during the seventeenth century, especially in London. A brief section lists women writers. There are two chapters on women’s religious life. Laurence’s Reformation is not that of revisionists Eamon Duffy and Christopher Haigh. Roman Catholic practice falls away quickly. The section on Protestant women might be expanded with discussion of Lady Pakington or Susannah Hopton. Laurence, who has written elsewhere on women in Civil War sects, is perceptive and judicious regarding sex and sects, and women and Puritanism. Yet two questions remain. Did the Reformation result in “a marked reduction the range of public activities open to” women (196)? Indeed, did the Reformation affect deeply the mental world of most English, men or women?

Part V summarizes recent work on marriage settlements and wills and discusses women in political theory and politics. More proof is needed for the plausible but not convincingly demonstrated hypothesis of “the increasing unacceptability of women’s appearance in public” (238). Certainly a parliamentary speaker told Leveller women petitioners not to concern themselves with matters “of a higher concernment than you can understand” (244). But, as Mandy Rice Davies noted in another matter, he would say that wouldn’t he? Charles II made virtually the same response to London freemen petitioners in the 1680s. Class or gender? Finally, the fine chapter on women and crime should be consulted along with new studies (Kermode and Walker, 1994).

This work will be useful as a text for social history or as a map of current and future research. But its insistence on surveying virtually every aspect of women’s experience does not fully satisfy. Disease and starvation, for example, seem not at all bound by sex or gender. Though Laurence asserts she has “deliberately said little” regarding “attitudes of men to women” (275), she does allude to plays, ballads, and chapbooks which portray the ideal of marriage and its inversion. Such material suggests other ways into the subject than Laurence’s approach. Her rigid distinction between the literary (eschewed) and the archival (embraced) is troubling. Students might be equally directed to Laurence or Weisner’s

new survey (Weisner, 1994).

This work is pleasantly produced. Though notes are minimal, bibliographical review essays for each chapter are informative. Accompanying prints include a timely contemporary engraving of another era’s representation of Pocahontas.

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