

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the changing role of women in the seventeenth century from a Marxist and then a feminist perspective. The Marxist analysis focusses on the effects on the role of women of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The feminist analysis focusses on the redefinition of patriarchal ideology which resulted from the Protestant Reformation.

The effects on the role of women of the relationship between the rise of capitalism and the Protestant Reformation are then drawn out.

© This analysis indicates that a Marxist and a feminist perspective provide complementary and interlocking accounts for the changing position of women during this century.

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Lastly, it is clear that this paper was not conceived in a political vacuum. I am directly indebted, personally and intellectually, to the women who pioneered the second wave of feminism, the Women's Liberation Movement.

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CHAPTER 1

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: AN INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century has been called "one of the great watersheds"¹ in modern English history. The transition from feudalism to capitalism interlocked with the rise of Protestantism to leave no aspect of English life untouched. The changes in the lives of women as a result of such major social upheavals have generally gone unexamined. This paper offers an interpretation of how and why the position of women did change during this remarkable century.

The inquiry was provoked by two related questions which, having surfaced periodically for centuries, have been asked more systematically with the development of the Women's Liberation Movement in the last decade. Firstly, why have women occupied a subordinate position in society? Secondly, how can the variations in form and intensity of that subordination be explained?

Within the Women's Liberation Movement there have been two different interpretations which have usually been viewed as opposing: a feminist and a Marxist. The feminist analysis has addressed itself to patriarchal ideology, that ideological mode which defines the system of male domination and female subjugation in any society. Like other ideologies, it is instilled through socialization and maintained by

institutional methods.² But it differs in one crucial respect. It is predicated on biological differences between the sexes, giving it a materialist basis of its own. The feminists have, therefore, insisted that patriarchal ideology cannot be seen simply as part of the superstructure.

They have a persuasive case. Why not biology? It is the one persistent factor in all cultures, classes, time and space. Citing the time and energy involved in menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and child care Shulamith Firestone concluded that "unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created different, and not equally privileged".³ Stories of healthy peasant women giving birth to healthy babies in the field are largely apocryphal; the high female mortality rate from childbirth throughout history is not. No respecter of affluence or power, childbirth was a frequent, inevitable, high-risk activity for women. Periods of despondence after childbirth and low mobility during nursing combined to ensure that women would need to rely on men for a large part of their adult life.

The feminist strategy for overcoming patriarchy stems logically from its analysis. Birth control, abortion and finally testtube babies will provide the material basis for overcoming the limitations of female biology. The family, once necessary to provide for women during her periods of dependence, will crumble; men, women and children will love freely; the division between affection and eroticism will cease to exist as the need to confine the latter withers away. Furthermore, since all other class and racial antagonisms grew out of, and are reducible to, that initial inequality between men and women, a strike in the marriage

beds of the land would not only be a threat to sexism but also to racism and the class struggle.⁴

It is difficult to imagine an analysis which provides an adequate explanation for the position of women that does not deal with biological differences. All societies make something of menstruation, whether magical, fearful, unclean, or debilitating, in addition to the associated physical discomforts which vary from woman to woman. No society until our own has had the technology to control conception. Women have, therefore, had to "bring forth children ... in sorrow", in the words of the scripture. Those children have had to be nursed through the first part of the long period of dependence characteristic of human infants. The feminist analysis has located the source of female subordination and male domination in the biological differences between the sexes.

The Marxist analysis, on the other hand, has located the origins of female subordination in "the development of surplus wealth due to the development of production",⁵ that is, in the phenomenon of private property. The different forms of male domination and female subjection would, therefore, correspond to different modes of production. This analysis sees the oppression of women arising not from biological differences in themselves, but from the acquisition of private property which made possible and necessary the exploitation of those differences. The more central the role of private property became, the more ground women lost. Bourgeois women are the culmination of this process: socially useless, their role is to produce legitimate heirs for their husbands' wealth. Working class

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women have made greater strides since they were forced into the factory system. While their entry into production was a crucial step, real liberation can only come, as for men, with the overthrow of capitalism and the abolition of private property. For Marxists, patriarchal ideology appears as an historical abstraction or, at best, part of the super-structure.

The Marxists would argue that even if a biological argument can account for the differences between men and women, it cannot account for, and by this omission tends to underestimate, the staggering differences among women. How can it explain and properly understand the differences between the woman of the aristocracy and the peasant woman, herself often little more than a beast of burden; between the child-like ornament in her Victorian drawing room and the world-weary prostitute of the next street; between the middle class college student and the waitress who serves her her third cup of morning coffee?

This is the class question, the crucial dimension for Marxists. Feminists counter that not only does the sexual caste system precede private property, reaching back into the animal kingdom itself, but that it survives its abolition. The sexual caste system shows no more sign of breaking down in socialist countries than in capitalist, unless it is treated, for itself, as a crucial division in society.

AN HISTORICAL TREATMENT OF THE MARXIST-FEMINIST CONFLICT

This conflict between a Marxist and a feminist analysis has pervaded the literature for a decade. The feminist analysis has been able to account for the differences in life-chances between men and women, but has fallen short of a credible explanation of the differences among women. The Marxist analysis has been persuasive in explaining the class differences, but is much less adequate in its explanation of the omnipresence of the status differences between men and women.

At this level of inquiry into 'first causes' it has often seemed more like an attempt to deal with the 'eternal verities' than a treatment of a manageable sociological problem. As a result, this paper does not consider the seemingly unanswerable question: And in the beginning, how did it all happen? Rather it is an attempt to shape an inquiry in an historically specific sense. The presenting questions become: Can both a feminist and a Marxist analysis account for the changes in the role of women during a particular historical period? Do such accounts conflict with each other making a choice inevitable? Or do they overlap to such an extent that retaining both would be redundant? Or, finally, are they complementary; can they, in fact, usefully co-exist?

The choosing of the time period and country was very important. If a period were selected which was inappropriate, either because of lack of information, or because ~~the~~ change in woman's position during that time turned out to be more apparent than real, the specific problem would dissolve

leaving only the original general questions. The decision to consider investigating seventeenth century England was initially based on a rather hazy idea. That it turned out to be an incredibly fruitful period for such a study must be attributed as much to good luck as to discerning and knowledgeable judgement.

It was chosen because of scattered references in various sources to the work of Alice Clark on seventeenth century England.⁶ Her thesis seemed to be that women had played a more important role in the preindustrial economy than they had subsequently. Any casual student of English history would also have known that it was the century which encompassed both what Hobsbawm has called "the first complete bourgeois revolution"⁷ and the acceptance of what Weber termed the Protestant ethic.⁸ Slowly, as the study proceeded, understanding the rise of capitalism, on the one hand, and the development of Protestantism, on the other, became central to developing an interpretation of how and why the position of women had changed during that period. But saying this skips over an important part of the process which led to the selection of the seventeenth century.

The original reason for considering this period was based on the idea that preindustrial women played a greater part in the economy. This was not an undisputed point of view. Marx had held that, on the contrary, it was the development of technology that had made possible, and even necessary, the introduction of women into the economy.⁹ Engels went further calling "the rule of the wife over her husband, a natural consequence of the factory system".¹⁰

Why did Clark's interpretation differ from Marx's? Her conclusion had arisen from a study of the seventeenth century. But - and the importance of this was not immediately evident - this was a hundred years before the Industrial Revolution. If the important dimension in understanding the changing position of women in the economy was industrialization, either because it further limited women, as Clark seemed to suggest, or because, on the contrary, it made possible women's direct role in the economy, as Marx believed, why was the crucial period for Clark one hundred years prior to industrialization? A study of seventeenth century economic history¹¹ along with a careful reading of Clark revealed why she had selected that century, and not the late eighteenth century as her period. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries have been interpreted by scholars as the decisive moment in the collapse of the feudal economy and the simultaneous process of capitalization.¹² It was this transitional period from feudalism to capitalism that Clark had been studying. The collapse of the feudal economy meant the decline of the domestic and family industry upon which it was based. Clark was only peripherally dealing with the effects of industrialization on women; her main focus was the effects of the decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism on the family, and, therefore, on women.

What then was this paper to consider as being most important to understanding the changing position of women: the rise of capitalism (as had Clark) or the development of technology (as had Marx)?

Marx proposed that industrial capitalism was crucial in redefining the role of women. But this was in complete contrast to the focus of his

total analysis: namely the rise of capitalism. The social relations of production, he insisted, determined how the means of production would be used. Marx's definition of the Civil War and its consequences make this clear.

"The Revolutions of 1648 and 1789... were not the victory of a definite class of society over the old political order; they were the proclamation of political order for the new European society. The bourgeoisie was victorious in these revolutions; but the victory of the bourgeoisie was at that time the victory of a new order of society, the victory of bourgeois property over feudal property, of nationality over provincialism, of competition over the guild, of partition over primogeniture, of the owner of the land over the domination of the owner by the land, of enlightenment over superstition, of the family over the family name, of industry over heroic laziness, of civil law over medieval privilege."¹³

Why did Marx, who so clearly saw the rise of capitalism as the key process, focus on industrialization when he came to study women? Why was he so impressed because industrialization had freed them to work outside the home? After all, in feudal times men did not primarily work outside the home either. The division between 'working' and 'living' had not yet been made; the workplace and the home were coterminous.

There are two plausible and complementary explanations. First, Marx was comparing working class women not to peasants but to the bourgeois women - leisured and at home - with whom he was more familiar. Secondly, his view of women led him to believe that the introduction of machinery had enabled women to participate in the economy because great physical strength was no longer required.¹⁴

In fact, women had been active in all aspects of the feudal economy, including those areas requiring physical strength and endurance. That Marx had shared some of the preconceptions of his age about women, and that this had caused him to abandon his overall analysis when considering them, seems reasonable. A 'Marxist' analysis would suggest that, since the society was so completely transformed during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the position of women would also have changed; that is, capitalization rather than industrialization should be the key process on which to focus.

What about a feminist analysis? What would it suggest as the crucial dimension in understanding the changing role of women: the rise of capitalism or the Industrial Revolution? For the feminist, the family is the mediating institution between women and society. It is here that "the social functions and the psychic identity of women as a group is found".¹⁵ The most familiar theme in the literature has been the effects of early industrialization on family life. Perhaps, then, this was the most important period not just for the social worker but also for the sociologist? This would be the starting point: the mother forced to neglect her children in order to work inhumanly long hours in the factory.

"To the long working hours away from home were added insanitary working conditions and very large families. Child neglect was rife and disturbed the public conscience. So did also the fact that many working-class women, used from early childhood to work in factories, had so little experience in the most elementary household duties that they were unable, not only through sheer lack of time and physical exhaustion, but also through absence of training to turn their living quarters into "homes" - with the result that many husbands took refuge at the public house or the "gin-shop".¹⁶

But with what would this bleak picture be compared? Who was the preindustrial woman?

The first answer and the easy answer - that she was a peasant - was wrong. The economic historians from Tawney to Thirsk have shown that people did not leave their land to flock to the factories.¹⁷ On the contrary, they had already been evicted or 'freed' from the soil. By the time of the Industrial Revolution there was a virtual army of people totally dependent on wage labour employed in agriculture, manufactories, in their own hovels or in domestic work. A complex system of poor relief and Poor Laws was already in effect to deal with the vast surplus landless population which threatened the tranquility of the English countryside as well as the burgeoning towns and cities.¹⁸ Nor, on the other hand, did money to build and run factories come out of the feudal economic arrangements. Rather it came from the capital accumulated during pre-industrial capitalism.

As a result, both the wage earning family and the bourgeoisie family were well established long before the Industrial Revolution. The economic basis of this preindustrial, but post-capitalist family was the same as that of the industrial family: it was totally dependent either on the wage labour of individual family members, or on capital. The fundamental changes in the family occur not with industrialization but with capitalism. The peasant evicted from the land must turn to wage labour for sole support; the bourgeoisie lived not from the result of their own labour as did their predecessors, the craftsman or trader, but off capital - the surplus value produced by the newly forming wage earning class.

The family ceased to be the economic unit of production. It was this process - the decline of family and domestic industry - which shattered the interdependent relationship between husband and wife, which led to the identification of family life with privacy, home, consumption, domesticity - and with women.

Both a feminist and a Marxist analysis would indicate, then, for different though related reasons, that the transition period from feudalism to capitalism rather than the process of industrialization was the most crucial. This was so because for the Marxists it had been the most important transformation in the society in a thousand years, for the feminists because the family, that institution which mediates between women and society, had been fundamentally altered as a result of the transition.

The decision to interpret the changing position of women in terms of the transition from feudalism to capitalism was made with Marxist and feminist considerations. Essentially, however, it resulted in a Marxist explanation; that is, it interpreted the mode of production as crucial to the role played by women in society. This proved useful in accounting for the productive role played by women of all feudal estates. It further explained the development in capitalist society of 'two nations'¹⁹ of women, to use Viola Klein's descriptive phrase. Women of the labouring classes were burdened with toil at home and work, while a pedestal was erected for the women of the bourgeoisie. From this pedestal - bored with their life of idleness and powerlessness - they would eventually press their 'feminist' demands.

This account - the analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism - did not lend itself, however, to an interpretation of the changing ideas about women which developed in the same period. Historians agree that feudal women of all classes had been economically productive. The reason seemed clear: the family was a unit of production. Women were partners with their husbands in the economic functions of the family, a situation which gave rise to what Power called a "rough and ready equality".²⁰

But this was in conflict with most of the literature written about women in feudal times, the literature of the Catholic Church. Its ideas about women, far from mirroring ideas of equality concern rather their evilness, their potential threat to men, their general uselessness to men except in procreation. The family was seen as a third-rate choice for the weak; men and women were urged to enter monasteries and nunneries to avoid cohabiting with each other.

To put it another way: at a time when the family was the economic unit of the society the best the Catholic Church could find to say about that institution was "it is better to marry than to burn".

By the end of the seventeenth century women of the rising bourgeoisie were increasingly idle, their leisure first becoming an occasion for ridicule, then a status symbol. Their image at this time, however, had become one of helpfulness, loyalty, domesticity and purity. The Protestant preachers had turned Catholic ideology on its head: women

were now the custodians of morality and spirituality; men were tarnished by the dirt and corruption of the world. As the study into religion proceeded, the concept of patriarchal ideology ceased to be an abstract idea. For during this period it was the church, more than any other institution, which carried and dispersed the ideas about the nature of men and women, and the appropriate relationship between them. Some interesting questions arose when the teachings of the church about women, men and the family were studied.

Why did the Protestants harshly attack the Catholic ideas on the evilness, the carnality, the seductive powers of women? Why did they adamantly insist instead upon the image of 'good wife', as helpmate and companion to man in the travails of his life?

The answer was first sought by looking at the changing economic system. Were the Protestants' ideas about women reflecting in some way the transition from feudalism to capitalism? It seemed not. For the redefinition of patriarchal ideology by the Protestant preachers was proceeding in the late sixteenth, early seventeenth centuries. At that time they were still decrying the greed and corruption of the emerging capitalist system which, they felt, endangered the existence of religion itself.²¹ More importantly, the Protestants, in their redefinition of the relationship between men and women, were referring not to the bourgeois family but to the working partnerships prevalent in the households of the yeomen and craftsmen.

It seemed reasonable, then, to consider that it developed out of the Protestant world-view itself: from their doctrines advocating a life in

the world, rather than an escape from it, a married rather than a chaste life, a life with woman rather than without her.

The Catholic ideas on the evilness of women were not suitable to the gentle life of conjugal bliss that the Protestants envisioned for themselves. They wanted a life with women. But they were no more prepared to grant women a life of equality with them than were the Fathers of the Church of Rome.

With great ingenuity and countless contradictions, they proceeded to change the nature of patriarchal ideology to conform with their developing view of the world.

Addressing themselves to the institution of the family, they invested it with an ideological significance which owed more to the Jews of the Old Testament than the Christians of the New. Within the family they set guidelines for the relationship between husband and wife, and developed appropriate attitudes about sexuality, love, marriage and divorce.

The Church was the primary institution for education and propaganda in the feudal and early capitalist world. Its teachings indicate that the ideas that men and women held about themselves, each other and the relationship between them, were not simply reflections of the economic system. Rather these ideas appeared, as it were, to have had a life of their own. The Churchmen themselves would agree. For on a manifest level they attributed the inferiority of the female sex, at least in part, to her biology. Like the Catholic Church, the Protestants believed that Eve's transgression had only made the yoke of women painful. "The woman in

innocency was to be subject to the man."²² Her nature suited her for a life of obedience, his for a life of domination.

That there was a relationship between the emergence of capitalism and Protestantism, if not the nature of that relationship, has been taken as axiomatic by all scholars since Marx and Weber. At the end of Weber's book, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, he wrote these words,

"It is ... not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history. Each is equally possible, but each, if it does not serve as the preparation, but as the conclusion of an investigation accomplishes equally little in the interest of historical truth."²³

With those words in mind, it was tempting to continue this study a little further in history to look at the inter-connections between the changes in the position of women attributable to capitalism, and those resulting from Protestantism.

Protestant teachings on women and the family had been patterned on the household of the yeoman or craftsman. Their ideas shifted slowly but steadily in tone and meaning as they were picked up and taken over by succeeding generations whose experience in family life was bourgeois. The home as "a tent pitch'd in a world not right"²⁴ posed a false dichotomy for Protestants who saw "little churches" as the foundation not a retreat from the Commonwealth. But the idealization of the home was one of their more remarkable bequests to posterity. It was an inheritance given substance by the capitalistic division of the world into work and home, public and private. The pale Victorian lady, the ultimate bourgeois woman,

was scarcely the Protestants' idea of a worthy helpmate, yet her genesis owed much to their redefinition of womanhood.

The lives of women changed profoundly during the seventeenth century. Their activities, attitudes, behaviour, their place in the order of things, the ideal towards which they were to strive: nothing remained the same. A Marxist and a feminist interpretation each reveal different aspects of those changes. In the next chapter a Marxist interpretation will be used to account for the changes in the role of women during this century. Marx analyzed the transition from feudalism to capitalism. He at once railed against, and saw as a necessary historical development, the reducing of "the family relation to a mere money relation"²⁵ The effect of this process upon the role of women will comprise the substance of this next chapter.

Following this, in Chapter 3, a feminist interpretation will be employed to account for how the ideas about women changed during this period. These ideas, comprising what feminists have described as patriarchal ideology were undergoing great changes in response to the gradual replacement of Catholicism by Protestantism. How and why Protestants undertook this transformation in patriarchal ideology, and the effects of that on the position of women, will be explored in this chapter.

In conclusion, there will be an exploratory attempt to show the interconnections between those changes discussed in Chapter 2 and those discussed in Chapter 3. These interconnections will be looked at on two levels. First, the historically specific level: what were the effects on the role of women in society of that great historical process in which capitalism and Protestantism became inextricably bound up with each other?

Second, what does that say about the Marxist and feminist interpretations of the position of women in society? Should they be seen as legitimately rival perspectives, or as complementary accounts of this question: why are men and women treated differently, why do they behave differently, why have women had to mount a Liberation Movement to alter their subordinate place in the scheme of things?

CHAPTER 2

THE TRANSITION FROM FEUDALISM TO CAPITALISM: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the family structure of three feudal estates - the peasantry, the craft and tradespeople, and the nobility - and the role played by women within each, will be described. With this in mind, there will follow a Marxist interpretation of how the transition from feudalism to capitalism undermined the basis upon which these families had rested, and gave rise to the bourgeois family and the proletarian family. This analysis will provide the material for drawing out the consequences of the transition from feudalism to capitalism for women.

"A presupposition of wage labour, and one of the historic preconditions for capital, is free labour ... (this above all means) the release of the worker from the soil as his natural workshop ... hence dissolution of small, free landed property."¹

By 1642 there was an estimated half million workers who had been "freed" from the soil.² Their propertylessness was making possible the accumulation of property by the growing capitalist class. These two emerging classes - one composed of free landless labourers, the other of men of capital - were giving rise to their own forms of the family and new roles for women.

In feudal times the land had been the immediate source of life. Prior to 1530 the majority of English men and women lived in rural

households which were almost economically self-sufficient.³ This situation had to change for the capitalization of the economy to proceed. Wages or capital had to come to mediate between people and their survival. And, from the latter decades of the sixteenth century, a growing number of people were becoming totally dependent on wage labour or capital.

The economic basis of the feudal family - that its members jointly made a living from the land - had rested on the unity between capital and labour. The separation of labour from what Marx called "the objective conditions of its realization, namely from the means of labour and the material for labour"⁴ underlies the decline of the family as an economic unit of production.

THE FEUDAL FAMILY - AN ECONOMIC UNIT OF PRODUCTION

What does it mean to say that the feudal family was a unit of production? That its basis was the unity between capital and labour?

In what sense is it even possible to analyze the feudal family as if it were a monolithic institution? Is it useful to consider the peasant's hovel, the substantial farmhouse of the yeoman, and the enormous village-like manor as sharing common elements which can then be compared to the capitalist family?

The short answer lies in returning to the Marxian formulation about the unity of capital and labour. But, in order to understand the implications of this for feudal family structure, the historian must become aware that certain pairs of concepts which are part of his own experience, which he sees as 'natural', in fact represent historical ideas: for example,

production-consumption, work-home, work-housework, public-private. These concepts arose with capitalism, with the separation of people from the means of providing for their own livelihood. Each pair of concepts can be seen as a different dimension of the separation of labour and capital. Each casts light on aspects of the differences between feudal and capitalist families.

At the same time, in the separation of production from consumption, work from home, housework from work and public from private, the sex division of labour particular to capitalism developed. Having these categories in mind helped to shape the comparison in this chapter of the feudal family with the capitalist family. The following discussion of each indicates in somewhat more detail how the concepts were employed.

Production-Consumption: It is a tired cliché that men make money and women spend it. But behind its implicit sexism lies an important reality about contemporary society: the division between consumption and production. The modern family, even with its enthusiasm for pocket-size vegetable gardens, breadmaking or furniture finishing is, economically speaking, a unit of consumption.⁵ Women, furthermore, in popular mythology, if not in reality, are seen as the prime agents of that consumption, whether modest or conspicuous, and men as the chief producers.

The feudal family was a self-sufficient economic unit.⁶ It owned the tools which it used to grow food for itself from the land. While most poorer peasant families fell short of the ideal of self-sufficiency, wage

labour was, nonetheless, a supplement to the living that they could eke from the land.⁷

The point to be made is that production and consumption were coterminous, interrelated and were both imbedded in the economy of the household. The richest families of the manor and those squatting on the scrubbiest commons ate most of what they grew and grew most of what they ate, made most of what they used and used most of what they made.

There was a division of labour based on sex which varied from class to class. But men and women cooperated in producing a livelihood for their families. Alice Clark wrote that "in the seventeenth century the idea is seldom encountered that a man supports his wife; husband and wife were then mutually dependent and supported their children."⁸

The identification of men with production and women with consumption awaited the emergence of capitalism. Even then, it at first only properly fitted the bourgeoisie. For working class women were swept into the proletariat along with their children.

Work-Home: The great debate about whether women should go "out" to work would have greatly puzzled the stout citizens of sixteenth century England. Family life and work life were part of the same round of activity in the same locale. Even to say people worked at home and lived at work is imposing concepts which are irrelevant to a description of feudal life. When the young left their families as servants and apprentices it was, for all practical purposes, to join other families.⁹

This was changing at the beginning of the seventeenth century. When people were evicted from the land they were separated from "the objective conditions for the realization of their labour"; they had to leave 'home' to go to 'work'.

Who went to work? In the working class it was men and women; in the bourgeoisie and, therefore, in popular mythology, only men. Women would remain identified with the home, while men started the slow process towards seeking life satisfactions from 'work'.

Work-Housework: In the last ten years the women's movement has begun to insist that housework must be recognized as work. Its "Wages for Housework" slogan has been greeted generally with dismay: a dismay that reflects the belief that domestic labour is 'natural'. Encouraging women to expect payment for this labour was sacrilegious. Such action helped to push aside the mystifications about the nature of women which have obscured her role in the economy. The belief in the 'naturalness' of the wifely and maternal roles have helped ward off any analysis of the role of the family in capitalism. Pointing out that the family was the producer of the next generation of workers and the service unit for the present was seen as an attack on the 'cult of true womanhood'.

The feudal family was engaged in providing a livelihood for its members. Domestic labour was embedded in the total productive process.¹⁰ There was a sex division of labour. But it did not correspond to 'natural' functions (what women do) and 'real work' (what men do): the feudal woman would not be asked "do you work or are you a housewife?"¹¹

Certain tasks of feudal life can be labelled domestic but this reflects contemporary rather than feudal distinctions. Alice Clark made the distinction, and projected it backwards in time:

"If women were upon the whole more actively engaged in industrial work during the seventeenth century than they were (subsequently) ... men were much more occupied with domestic affairs than they are now. Men in all classes gave time and care of the education of their children and the young unmarried men who generally occupied positions as apprentices and servants were partly employed over domestic work."¹²

What did Clark mean precisely by "domestic work"? She was obviously referring to the kind of work that we are now accustomed to women doing within the home.

Public-Private: One of the surest indicators of a person's wealth in our society is the amount of 'privacy' he is able to purchase. Centuries of socialization have ensured that most people see privacy as a basic need coming not far after food and shelter.

Privacy is identified with home, with family life. Marx argued that in capitalist society "man only feels himself freely active in his animal functions - eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling".¹³ People began to feel that they could only 'be themselves' at home. Privacy became the compensation for alienation from one's labour.

The study of feudal society provides evidence that the need for privacy develops through socialization. Ariès stated that, "at that time ... there were no frontiers between professional and private life; sharing professional and private life meant sharing the private life with which

it was confused".¹⁴

When each of these dimensions is analyzed separately it becomes clear that men are identified with one of the concepts in each pair, women with the other. Men are the producers who go to work, to do 'real' work in the 'real' world. Women are the consumers who stay home, performing their 'natural functions' of wiving and mothering. They are the custodians of the private and personal life; their role in the economy is obscured. Alice Clark, gently parodying the Biblical phrase, put it this way,

"Thus it came to pass that every womanly function was considered as the private interest of fathers and husbands, bearing no relation to the life of the State, and therefore, demanding from the community as a whole no special care or provision."¹⁵

For with the separation of labour from the objective conditions of its realization came the concurrent separations — really the same separations looked at in different ways — between production and consumption, work and domestic chores, public and private.

These concepts are used as a matter of course in any analysis of the capitalist family and the roles of men and women in capitalist society. They were made explicit before attempting to understand the feudal family for the reason which Ariès stated so well. "I can tell the particular nature of a period in the past from the degree to which it fails to resemble our present."¹⁶ By discussing them, the particular aspects of the feudal family which are of interest here — namely those which differ from the capitalist family — are shown in relief. At the same time this has cleared the way for exploring the differences among feudal families of different

estates, and for seeing how the roles of women differed depending on the position of their family in the social structure.

The feudal family was a unit of production, Women, as a result, played acknowledged roles in providing a livelihood for their households:

"In every class of the community the life of the married woman gave her a great deal of scope ... the home of the period was a very wide sphere; social and economic conditions demanded that a wife should always be ready to perform her husband's duties as well as her own, and that a large range of activities should be carried on inside the home under her direction." 17

This manifested itself in very different ways depending on 'the manner born'. This can be graphically demonstrated by looking at three of the feudal estates: the peasantry, the crafts and tradespeople, and the nobility.

The Peasant Family

"True, our system is wasteful and fruitful of many small disputes. True, a large estate can be managed more economically than a small one. True, pasture-farming yields higher profits than tillage. Nevertheless, master steward, our wasteful husbandry feeds many households where your economical methods would feed few. In our ill-arranged fields and scrubby commons most families hold a share, though it be but a few roods. In our unenclosed village there are few rich but there are few destitute, save when God sends a bad harvest, and we all starve together." 18

In these eloquent words Tawney captured the difference between the poverty of the peasantry and that of the wage labourers. People were not totally separated from the objective conditions for the realization of their labour - even if those objective conditions simply meant holding a "few roods" of land. And in addition to their own holding they had common

rights in the village fields, meadows and wastes.¹⁹ This joint access was at once necessary for survival and the location for some aspects of a communal rather than a family life.²⁰ "Ploughing was co-operative, as were many other operations above all harvesting."²¹

If the poorest section of the peasantry was not without some means of livelihood in the form of land, animals or tools, another section, by the sixteenth century, had succeeded through good luck and good management in becoming significantly better off than the majority.²² Referred to as the yeomanry, they have often been romanticized as the backbone of the nation, embodying the "old English tradition".²³

The poorer peasantry had to supplement their production through wage labour.²⁴ The yeomanry, however, represented a near perfect unity between capital and labour. A contemporary account states that they

"lay out seldom any money for any provision, but have it of their own as Beef, Mutton, Veal, Pork, Capons, Hens, Wildfowl, and Fish. They bake their own bread and brew their own drink."²⁵

Their self-sufficiency made it unlikely that they would be among those who "starved when God sent a poor harvest".²⁶ As Mildred Campbell put it, "the pinch of hard times was rarely felt at his own table."²⁷

Most peasant families were not so fortunate. "In her one-roomed or two-roomed cottage dark and smokey" wrote Eileen Power, the peasant woman "must labour unceasingly."²⁸ There were basically two ways for poor peasant families to bridge the gap between what they could produce from the land and their survival. First, there was wage labour. For married couples this usually meant only the husband went out to work and often just at harvest time. Wage scales were very low reflecting the cherished idea

that families were basically self-sufficient.²⁹ To the extent that poorer peasants had to supplement their livelihood with wage labour, there was the beginning of a distinction between work and home. This, however, can be seen as the beginnings of capitalist farming rather than as an aspect of feudal life.³⁰

Secondly, there was the common practice of sending those few children who survived infancy to the homes of the better off to be servants when they were about ten years old.³¹ Children could only be kept at home if their families occupied enough land to keep them busy. By sending them away, their bed and board was ensured at the same time as they ceased to be an economic burden on the family. These children would remain there until they married. The children of yeomen were far less likely to be sent off as servants. Not only could they be well-employed at home, but their parents could not have afforded to hire others as servants.

The importance attached to the family as a unit which provided for its members is well-illustrated by the severe legal punishments for producing a bastard. Public whipping and the stockade accompanied the insistence that the child be supported by his parents until he could be apprenticed.³² The usual fate of the bastard - early death - underscores the social organization of feudal society: one's survival was contingent upon membership in a family.³³ Bastard children were merely particular cases of the general rule: husbands and wives were both responsible for the support of their families. In general, women

"can hardly have been regarded as mere dependents on their husbands when the clothing for the whole family was spun by their hands, but ... in many cases, the mother in addition to spinning provided a large proportion of the food consumed by her family." ³⁴

Husband and wife were responsible for different aspects of the productive process. This was especially true for the yeoman's wife.

It was "beneath her station" to "labour in the fields or ... (care) for swine and other livestock." ³⁵ But, like her less fortunate sisters, the amount of work she did in the kitchen, garden, poultry yard, dairy and at the loom was not restricted: witness Mable Mallet's epitaph:

"From my sad cradle to my sable chest,
Poor pilgrime I did find few months of rest." ³⁶

Her life, nonetheless, was easier than that of peasant women lower down the scale who would have also been expected to do fieldwork and care for livestock.

Celia Fiennes wrote about hay-harvesting in the West of England where people were "forced to support (the hay on the horses' backs) with their hands, so to a horse they have two people and the woman leads and supports them, as well as ye men and goe through thick and thin". ³⁷ Even to her contemporary eyes it looked like inhumanly hard work and she "wondered at their labour in this kind for the men and women themselves toiled like their horses". ³⁸

There is every indication that the activities of the peasant woman of whatever rank were seen as 'work'. Gervase Markham advised that "she must be ... generally skillful in the worthy knowledges which do belong to her vocation". ³⁹ Nor was it suggested that she confine her

ministrations to her own family. Rather she was counselled to be "full of good neighbourhood".⁴⁰ The customs surrounding marriage reflect the fact that the family was an economic unit. A man and woman were expected to show some indication that they could be self-sufficient before they left service to marry.⁴¹ But the actual selection of a mate reflected the economic circumstances of the family. The poorer peasantry had little to offer their children, and no way of ensuring them a better life than they had had. As a result there was more freedom of choice in marriage for the poor: "a man of the lowest classes who had little and demanded little might marry as he could or would".⁴² But among the yeomen there was more insistence on a profitable, and therefore an arranged, marriage. And while some of their children bolted and married whomsoever they chose, others took their own and their parents interests to heart, as seen in one young man's letter to his betrothed. "I know my portion, and when yours is put to it we shall live the better."⁴³

The interdependence of husband and wife and their mutual responsibility for their children combined to make marriage a necessary and 'honourable' estate for men and women of all ranks of the peasantry. "To thrive the yeoman must wive"⁴⁴ wrote Thomas Tusser with better sense than poetry. And he usually did, more than once.

Summary

By the seventeenth century a distinct section of the peasantry had attained a secure economic position. Their life conditions conformed closely to the Marxian concept of the unity between labour and capital.

The lives of the poorer peasantry were meaner, and their chances of survival more precarious. But even they were not totally separated from the means to make a living.

The roles of husband and wife were integrated with the economy of their households. Their labour was directed towards filling the physical needs of themselves and their children. As a result the division of labour between them, while more marked among the yeomanry, did not correspond to production-consumption divisions or work-domesticity.

Husband and wife were economically interdependent; upon them both fell the burden, an awesome one especially for the poor peasantry, of supporting their children. The key to understanding this interdependence, and the resulting indispensable role played by peasant women in their families' survival, is the integration in feudal society of the household and the economy.

The Craftsman and Tradesman's Family

Much of what was written about the yeoman's family holds good for the families involved in a craft or trade. Very often these families also had small farms which they worked.⁴⁵ The whole family participated in the productive process. Living and working with them were journeymen who themselves expected to become masters. The status distinction between them and their masters was slight since they represented differences in stage-of-life rather than rank.⁴⁶

Wives - not women - were an intrinsic part of the productive process. Their right to participate as co-partners was so inviolable that it was assumed that they would continue to run the operation if they were widowed.

"The weavers, like other craft guilds, regarded a wife as a trade partner having the right to succeed to and carry on the business after her husband's death. Widows, in fact, took over all the rights, privileges and liabilities of their deceased husbands, for example as to the proper number of looms, journeymen and apprentices."⁴⁷

Clearly, in these estates, men and women were engaged in all of the same aspects of the productive process. Young people of both sexes were kept as servants to do the more menial work.⁴⁸

The productive unit and the household were synonymous. In 1619 the bakers of London justified their application for an increase in the price of bread by listing their legitimate expenses. Among them were food and clothing for apprentices and their children's school fees⁴⁹: an illustration both that the family was a productive unit and that the entire household constituted the family.

The Noble Family.

The feudal manor was very close to self-sufficient.

"A large country estate was then an almost self-supporting unit. Its flocks, herds and pig-styes provided its meat; its fields and gardens supplied the flour for bread made in the bakery, fodder for the horses, hemp and flax for spinning, fruit, vegetables, and all the herbs needed for the medicine chest. Round the manor-house were grouped the farm buildings, the blacksmith's forge where the horses were shod, the slaughter house, carpenter's shop, laundry, dairy, brewhouse, stables and a variety of outhouses

that were used for all sorts of purposes. Fish came to the table from the stew-ponds which had to be kept well-stocked against Lent and other fasts, cider-apples from the orchards and fuel for the great hearths from the sawpit and woodyard." 50

Outside of some luxuries, usually foreign imports, the people of the manor produced all that they used.

The most likely occupants of the manor outside of the nobleman, his wife, their first-born son and any younger children past infancy, were a retinue of "household officers, the gentlemen and gentlewomen-in-waiting, the ceaseless throng of guests and dozens or even hundreds of inferior servants". 51

It would be almost true to say that no one had the right to live at the manor except the nobleman himself. People lived there as an adjunct to their place in the world, whether labour, service or marriage. The noble woman could make it her home only as long as her husband lived. Their eldest son's place was assured only after his father's death. And for a few brief years between infancy and youth, the couple's children lived with them.

Other people lived in the manor when they were in service. People-in-waiting, often of high rank but diminishing fortunes, servants of many gradations, the almost-grown children of other noble families who were there to learn the rules for a gentleman's life, all mingled in the great hall with the never ending stream of guests.

"To the servants, clerics and clerks who lived there permanently, one must add the constant flow of visitors ... These visits were not simply friendly or social: they were also professional; but little or no distinction was made between these categories." 52

There were no rooms set aside for 'business'. People ate, met, talked, slept, made love and made deals all in the same rooms. Living in an environment of open hospitality, a noble or his wife was more likely to rub shoulders with his servants than his children, his waiting people than his parents, his guests than his siblings.

Privacy in the sense of being alone was not an aspect of life in the manor.

"Historians taught us long ago that the king was never left alone. But, in fact, until the end of the seventeenth century nobody was ever left alone. The density of social life made isolation virtually impossible and people who managed to shut themselves up in a room for some time were regarded as exceptional characters." 53

Nor was there any equation of privacy with family life. For while it would romanticize the situation to see all the occupants of the manor as a large productive family, it would be equally distorted to see the noble family as a nuclear unit surrounded by its many servants.

To begin with, marriage among the nobility was an explicitly economic arrangement contracted to further family fortunes and to produce a male heir.⁵⁴ There was no idea that such a relationship would be the occasion for psychological intimacy or a pushing away of the world. Such a reaction would have been, at the least, inhospitable. If servants and retainers had no guarantee of fair treatment and security in old age, neither did family members. The continuation of the family name was the central concern; other considerations were subordinate to it. The separation between 'my family' and the rest of the world was not clear cut. To keep family fortunes intact the first-born son was singled out as heir.

For as long as wealth lay with the land, it could not be divided up without diminishing the size of the estate.

They were not without a sense of family obligation. There were jointures for widows, modest bequests for younger sons, dowries for daughters. But a couple's children mingled with their father's illegitimate children,⁵⁵ and with the servants who were often no older than themselves. They were sent out as infants for wet nursing and, when they were older, were sent to other noble families for training in proper deportment. The household can be seen as constantly shifting, with outsiders moving in, insiders moving out.

Many people had a claim on the attention and hospitality of the lord and lady. That these obligations were taken seriously is shown in this rather hilarious incident in the life of the Hobys. A group of young men hunting on the moors requested hospitality for the night. Sir Thomas received them warmly although his wife was ill. They drank, played cards, spilled wine all over the floor and made much noise. When they were requested to be quieter as a courtesy to their sick hostess they replied with insults. The worst of these contravened the whole concept of hospitality; they demanded to know the cost of their food and drink.⁵⁶ Sir Thomas had fulfilled all his obligations; the guests none of theirs. But when he brought a suit against them he was much criticized for unneighbourliness.

The production of those living in the manor would have been insufficient to maintain the living standard of wealthy aristocrats. The patterns of conspicuous consumption and open hospitality of the English nobility was made possible through land ownership which gave the aristocracy the right to extract the fruits of their tenants' surplus labour. This right to exploit their tenants was particularly necessary to maintain a lifestyle in which many people were not expected to play a direct role in production. For one of the keys to understanding feudal life is the idea of service - there were those who served and those to be served. The distinction was made not only according to rank but also to stage-in-life.⁵⁷ The children of the nobility were not exempt from this activity.⁵⁸

"The idea of service had not yet been degraded ... sons of houses went on performing domestic functions in the seventeenth century which associated them with the servants' world, particularly waiting at table."⁵⁹

It would be limiting, therefore, to look at production only in a narrow sense, for from the point of view of feudal values and expectations, a worthy and indispensable role was performed by those in service.

The role of the nobleman himself seems to have varied considerably. Professor Stone wrote that "an essential prerequisite for membership in the élite was financial independence, the capacity to live idly without the necessity of undertaking manual, mechanic or even professional tasks".⁶⁰

Nonetheless, he added that at the turn of the seventeenth century "landlords had to run just in order to stay still".⁶¹ Clearly the managing of a viable manor was no mean task.

In this endeavour the role played by the nobleman's wife has often been described. There were virtually no aspects of manor life which she could not supervise. And she participated in many of the less physically laborious tasks. Eileen Power summarized her role: She was

".. obliged not only to be housewife in her own capacity but amateur soldier and man-of-the-world in her husband's absence, and amateur doctor when no skilled doctor could be had. She was also obliged to be something rather more than an amateur farmer for the comprehensive duties of a country housewife brought her into close connexion with all sides of the manorial economy."⁶²

While most accounts confirm the role noble women played in estate management and in general production,⁶³ Professor Stone took an opposing view in the course of his explanation of the religiosity of women: "Given the idle and frustrated lives these women lived in the man's world of a great country house, it is hardly surprising that they should have turned in desperation to the comforts of religion".⁶⁴

One of the women Stone includes in this description left a diary. Lady Margaret Hoby, unfortunately, gives no indication about her emotional state, frustrated or otherwise. But idle she was not. The editor of her diary speaks of her "ability to read, write (and) keep accounts ... her knowledge of household and estate management, of surgery and salves."⁶⁵ December 29, 1599, was yet another seemingly unremarkable day in her life. After private prayers and her morning round of the house Lady Margaret breakfasted at the usual hour of eight o'clock. She was "busie about the house" until ten o'clock that night with time out for meals and a discussion

with Mr. Rhodes, who appears to have been the resident chaplain at the Hoby manor.⁶⁶ Certainly it was an easy life compared to those of the peasants on her estate. But neither can it be grouped with the life of the upper class Victorian woman. The management of the estate, in fact, seems to have been shared by husband and wife. This was particularly evident when the men were away. At this time the women naturally took over their responsibilities. Their competence would indicate that there was not a gulf of experience between their more regular tasks and those of their husbands. When the men were away the Verney women,

".. acted for them in their numerous and endless lawsuits ... they leased their farms, they found a market for the crops; they kept the money hidden in strong chests concealed in mysterious hiding-places and they wrote long and interesting letters to the absent ones full of business and news."⁶⁷

So while the noble woman was married for her dowry, her managerial talents, her bravery, her skills in housewifery could do much to preserve her husband's fortune.

Summary

The feudal manor was a unit of production. It was the visible sign as well as the actual source of a family's wealth and power. Marriage was the explicitly economic arrangement whereby the integrity of that estate was maintained. A woman was married off by her father to her husband for the aggrandizement of her father-in-law's estate, and in order to relieve her own father of the burden of her upkeep. And the ways were many, and seldom subtle, to force the hand of an unwilling young woman.⁶⁸ If the

match were economically successful and the estate thrived, only her first-born son stood to benefit. Even she herself could be turned out, though not without an income, upon the death of her husband.

While husband and wife were rarely alone together, they cooperated in the management of their estate, in maintaining the good health and conduct of their many dependents and in receiving their endless succession of guests.

Thus it was that

".. at the beginning of the seventeenth century it was usual for women of the aristocracy to be very busy with affairs - affairs which concerned their household, their estates and even the Government." 69

Having looked at the families of these three estates, it is now possible to consider what happened to them as the capitalization of the economy proceeded. What was the nature of the bourgeois family and the proletarian family which emerged from these feudal family structures?

THE TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

"The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors" and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than callous cash payment ... The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation." 70

The feudal family of all estates had rested on its access to the means and material for the realization of its labour.* The high standard of living of the noble family was additionally, and importantly, due to its right to extract the surplus value produced by the peasant population.

As an institution, the feudal family encompassed close to the totality of most people's lives. Men and women were both integrated in the economy of the household, and were dependent on their own and each other's labour for their livelihood.

But this interrelation of men and women within the household had been synonymous with the social relations of feudalism. And the "tearing asunder" of those relations meant the separation of labour and capital, production and consumption, work and home, work and domesticity and public and private lives.

What were the processes which began to disturb "the feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations" between noble and peasant?

A cyclical movement was developing between the increase in capital accumulation and the growth in the landless population. The first was possible in part because of the rising food prices resulting from the expanding population of towns and cities.⁷¹ But in turn the population of the towns was being drawn from the growing population of landless people seeking to sell their labour. Peasants were being evicted from the land through enclosure laws and through the conversion of land from tillage to pasture.⁷² The abolition of feudal tenures in 1646 removed the final brakes on this process. Although three-fifths of the cultivated land was still unenclosed in 1642 a rural proletariat of some half million was being caught between the rising prices and the punitive wage structure.⁷³

The feudal household of all estates shared in the fate of other feudal institutions.

From the Peasant Family to the Family of the Proletariat

"At Leeds in Kent, when it was rumoured in 1608 that the tenants' leases would not be renewed, it "went so near ... the heart" of one "poor and simple man, as he lived but few days after, leaving behind him a poor wife lying and three small children having no other dwelling, nor means but the alms of parish to go on."⁷⁴

Perhaps the poor wife was then moved to lament - that is the trouble with men, you can never count on them. For when peasant families were evicted from the land, marriage ceased to be mutually beneficial to husband and wife. The days of interdependence were numbered.

The economic basis of the peasant family had been its land and its access to common lands. The enclosure laws, coupled with the eviction of tenants from their holdings separated the people from the objective conditions for the realization of their labour. A class of landless people totally dependent on selling their labour began to grow quickly.

This emerging proletariat was also swelled from the ranks of craftsmen and tradesmen, many of whom were losing their independence. Their self-sufficiency was being eroded in two complementary ways. On the one hand, merchants set up craftsmen in the countryside - the so-called putting out system.⁷⁵ Their position differed little from wage labourers. At the same time they provided competition to the existing independent producers who were then gradually taken over by their suppliers.

A new family structure was in the making, and with it the alteration of the life conditions under which the majority of women had lived. The landless poor were forced to rely entirely on selling their labour in order to buy what they needed. And if they did not sell their labour, they theoretically did not eat. Willingness and ability to labour were no longer sufficient to ensure survival. Even success in selling their labour was not enough. For wages had been fixed for an age where they were only a supplement to a family's living. And when other sources of sustenance were taken away, wages did indeed prove grossly insufficient.

"One fact alone is almost sufficient to prove the inadequacy of a labourer's wage for the maintenance of his family. His money wages seldom exceeded the estimated cost of his own meat and drink as supplied by the farmer." 76

He could clearly not afford to support his family; he was, nonetheless, held responsible. The results of these changes for women were devastating and far-reaching.

The Consequences for Women

The peasant woman had laboured long and hard every day. But that she shared with the men of her class. When she was evicted from the land she lost the means to help provide a living for her family. Producing at home had, at least, left her in the same physical location as her children. Nursing a baby, supervising a young child, preparing meals had been part of the general labour.

The meagreness of her husband's wages presented her with a grim choice. She could sell her own labour power for half of what her husband made. This would further endanger her children's survival through lack of supervision and withdrawal of lactation. Or she could stay home, if indeed she had such a place, and risk starvation for herself and her children.

The productive unit of husband and wife was thus shattered. Marriage became a liability for men while at the same time women's dependence upon it was increasing. Marriage became her food ticket, and an inadequate and shaky one at that.

A man's obligation to provide for his wife and children was enshrined in the Poor Laws by capitalist farmers unwilling to pay adequate wages and land owners unwilling to pay taxes for poor relief. For men marriage became their duty to the state, women their burden to support.

"Single women known to be with child by a stranger were promptly and forcibly married, sometimes the bridegroom having to be brought to church in chains. Such pressure was not for the sake of morality but to 'save the parish harmless' since by this means it freed itself from the responsibility for mother and child." 77

A man's only way out to save his own skin was to desert his family as this excerpt from the Second Humble Address from the poor weavers indicates.

"That the Poor's Rates are doubled and in some places trebled by the multitude of Poor Perishing, and Starving Women and Children being come to the Parishes, while their Husbands and Fathers not able to bear the cries which they could not relieve, are fled into France ... to seek their Bread." 78

Popular mythology had it that the woman was busy making a home for her husband and children. That seems unlikely. She had neither the material nor the psychological means to do it; indeed by the time she was a generation or two from the land she did not have the training and knowledge either. She was part of the private world, yet had no private world of her own.

"The starvation and misery described in Quarter Sessions were not exceptional calamities but represent the ordinary life of women in the wage earning class. The lives of men were drab and monotonous ... (but) the labourer while employed was well fed for the farmer did not grudge him food though he did not wish to feed his family. There was seldom want of employment for agricultural labourers, and when their homes sank into depths of wretchedness and the wife's attractiveness was lost through slow starvation the men could depart and begin life anew elsewhere."⁷⁹

The phenomenon of the deserted wife was, therefore, becoming a commonplace. What about women whose husbands stayed? They were becoming "domestic drudges" for their working husbands "rather than partners in a family workshop".⁸⁰

The Bourgeois Family

From the latter half of the fifteenth century a growing number of men were accumulating capital through agriculture and trade.⁸¹ In the course of that accumulation they developed a lifestyle, values and family system that were appropriate to it. That part of the nobility which survived, and indeed became more affluent, found it convenient to incorporate much of what was new in their own lives.⁸²

The outcome of the Civil War can be seen as the victory of this new class of people, the bourgeoisie. This victory ensured that the State would not interfere with, and would indeed support, its interests. "From 1688 onwards England was, for the propertied class, an exceptionally free society by contemporary European standards."⁸³

The family of the bourgeoisie lived off his capital which he accumulated through his exploitation of workers. This state of affairs had developed in different ways. The successful craftsman started to hire others to work for him. When his workshop grew larger he removed it from his home. Its growth had indicated that he no longer required his wife's labour; its separation from the home removed any likelihood of her participation.⁸⁴ The yeoman, who became a particularly successful farmer, sometimes hired a "woman servant of the best sort" so that his wife "doth not take the pain and charge upon her".⁸⁵ This resulted in a household and in a family life very different from those of the feudal estates.

The growing affluence of the bourgeoisie was providing them with the means to build larger, more comfortable houses.⁸⁶ They were built as specifically private dwellings for three interrelated reasons: First, they were only places in which to live; they were no longer places for production as well.

Secondly, they were designed to keep out a world which was now teeming with undesirables. The unemployed, the landless, soon became the beggar, the vagrant and the criminal. Servants once classed as faithful, trusty and child-like were now defined as part of the threatening outside

world.⁸⁷ Thirdly, they were built as private dwellings to match the redefinition of the family as members of a close, intimate group apart from the world.

In the course of these developments, a new role emerged for women which was to set the pattern for women of their class for three hundred years.

The Consequences for Women

When the home no longer included production, and servants were still plentiful, idleness became the new status symbol for women. It was a value still in an early enough stage to be criticized. Men used to "court and choose wives...for their modesty, frugality, keeping at home, good housewifery and other economical virtues then in reputation"⁸⁸ lamented John Evelyn.

Samuel Pepys finds numerous occasions to complain of his wife's desire for money and her costly extravagances. That these were more apparent than real is revealed by the cost of each of their wardrobes for one quarter - £55 for his, £12 for hers. As one editor commented, "He evidently regretted the £12 much more than he did the £55."⁸⁹

Bourgeois women can be seen as parasites, living a life of ease and luxury - "the parasitic life of its women has been in fact one of the chief characteristics of the parvenu class".⁹⁰ The Town Ladies Catechism published at the turn of the seventeenth century satirizes their life.

'How do you employ your time now?'

'I lie in Bed till Noon, dress all the Afternoon, Dine in the Evening, and play at Cards till Midnight.'

'How do you spend the Sabbath?'

'In Chit-Chat.'

'What do you talk of?'

'New Fashions and New Plays.'

'Pray, Madam, what Books do you read?'

'I read lewd Plays and winning Romances.'

'Who is it you love?'

'Myself.'

'What! Nobody else?'

'My Page, my Monkey, and my Lap Dog.' 91

On the other hand, can it be said that this life of uselessness was 'chosen'? Mary Astell writing A Serious Proposal to the Ladies,

For their true and greatest interest, in 1694, thought not. "What poor woman is ever taught that she should have a higher Design than to get her a Husband?"⁹² It was in her husband's interest that she was kept at home and unoccupied. He wants a wife

"an upper servant, one whose interest it will be not to wrong him, and in whom therefore he can put greater Confidence than in any he can hire for Money. One who may breed his Children, taking all the Care and Trouble of their Education, to preserve his Name and Family. One whose Beauty, Wit or good Humour and agreeable Conversation, will entertain him at Home when he has been contradicted and disappointed Abroad ... one whom he can entirely Govern, and consequently may form to his Will and Likings, who must be his for Life, and therefore cannot quit his Service, let him treat her how he will." 93

Astell lit on two of the reasons why the bourgeois woman was encouraged to play a 'parasitic' and dependent role. First, her husband had to will his accumulated wealth to his legitimate heirs. Unlike the nobility who bequeathed name and fortune to the oldest son only, the bourgeoisie treated all their children equally. For capital, like land, was infinitely divisible. But unlike land it was infinitely expandable. Since all his children inherited equally, he did not wish to be in doubt about the

paternity of any of his children.

Secondly, Astell realized that the family was a haven from the world. But she saw it as a haven only for the husband; for his wife it was a prison.

While capitalism did not bring about the treatment of women as property, their role in the centre of this narrowly domestic scene arose directly out of the breakdown of the unity of capital and labour. In feudal times their place had also been in the home. But the bourgeois home was only a place to live, not a place to work, only a place for one's family, not the crossroads of the community.

As the woman's environment - the home - shrank in size and scope, the man's world was expanding. For him it was a new world of business, politics, the professions, trade, land, the colonies. Elizabeth Janeway expressed it well, "Man's World, Woman's Place."⁹⁴

The Embourgeoisement of the Noble Family

The turn of the century was a bad time for the English aristocracy. For centuries the feudal land arrangements had served them well. Now they were being challenged by a new breed of landowner who hired only the labourers that he needed, raised rents, evicted tenants who could not pay, worked hard and adopted the more efficient farming methods that were being developed.

These new methods - land drainage and reclamation, the use of fertilizers, hedging and ditching enclosed land - all required capital.⁹⁵

Racking rents and evicting tenants required the abandonment of one set of values, its replacement with another.⁹⁶ The investment of capital in new procedures instead of the displaying of wealth in potlatch fashion required a changing lifestyle.

Certain individuals failed to adapt and thereby faced financial ruin. The English aristocracy as an important and powerful sector of the population survived. Its survival involved the partial embourgeoisement of their households and family life.

The Noble Woman: From Feudal to Capitalist Society

The noble woman had enjoyed a high standard of living in feudal times. She was not, however, without obligations to those people whose labour made it possible. She had far more leisure time than women of other classes. But she put in, by twentieth century standards, long and busy days.

The capitalization of the countryside transformed her role. No longer was she foreman of a huge productive estate, or hostess to all who came in their mixed pursuits of business and pleasure. The manor was becoming a private home run by servants who had once mingled with their master and mistress but who were now relegated to the back stairs and servants' quarters. It was shrinking in size as the throngs of servants were pruned down. That together with the growing availability of consumer goods reduced the need for a manor's self-sufficiency.

The nobility which kept up town houses grew accustomed to purchasing what they needed, and these customs carried over to their country estates. As the productive processes carried on at the manor declined, there was less and less for the noble woman to do.

At the same time, the men were becoming increasingly involved in business and politics.

As the men began to spend more time in London, the wives began to insist that they spend 'the season' there. Two ménages were often set up and there was far less for them to do in London than in the country. The women's sole preoccupation became the social life to which men retreated when their business had been conducted.

The efficient investment of capital began to take priority over the maintenance of the hospitable great house. "The keeping of open house to all comers gave way to the invitation to personal friends."⁹⁷ Ben Johnson pointed out the rationale for this change.

"That ancient hospitality, of which we hear so much, was in an uncommercial country when, men, being idle, were glad to be entertained at rich men's tables. But in a commercial country, a busy country, time becomes precious, and therefore hospitality is not so much valued ... Promiscuous hospitality is not the way to gain real influence ... No Sir the way to make sure of power and interest is by lending money confidentially to your neighbours at a small interest, or perhaps at no interest at all, and having their bonds in your possession."⁹⁸

But this flagging of hospitality was not only a pragmatic economic decision. It represented a growing need and desire to keep out the same elements which promoted the privatization of the bourgeois family: the increasing numbers of landless poor, "the many-headed monster".⁹⁹

At the same time as the world was being kept out of the manor, the world inside was being segregated into 'us' and 'them' replacing the many slight differentiations which had characterized feudal society. Servants' quarters were springing up; families retired into living rooms and bed rooms, where servants were rung for when needed.¹⁰⁰ The children of the nobility stopped mingling with the servants and bastards; the treatment of servants and children, once so similar, became sharply differentiated. But while their children were separated from servants and bastards, they were not made equal among themselves as in the bourgeoisie. For among the nobility the principle of primogeniture was retained.¹⁰¹ As long as the land was the source of a family's wealth its integrity had to be maintained.

The decline in the physical size of the manor paralleled its decline in psychological size. There were fewer people for whom the noble woman was responsible, and less responsibility towards those who remained. Relations between the nobility and its servants became more like capitalist-worker relations.

The values of the aristocracy did not change uniformly, but in many ways the aristocratic woman was becoming 'bourgeois'.

SUMMARY

In feudal society the family was the basic economic unit. Viewed retrospectively, it represented a unity of labour and capital, an integration of production and consumption, work and home, work and domesticity, public and private life. The self-sufficient feudal family had relied on

the labour and direction of husband and wife as co-partners in a serious endeavour: family survival. For peasant families, for families in craft and trade, this meant actual physical survival. For noble families it meant perpetuation of the family name, honour and reputation.

Women played an important role in production and management, resulting in a "certain rough and ready equality"¹⁰² between them and their husbands. "It is not too fanciful" suggested Viola Klein, "to deduce that the knowledge of their equal "worth" produced in women a degree of self-esteem which eluded subsequent generations."¹⁰³ In any case, husband and wife were dependent upon each other, and their children upon them both.

The growing penetration of capital into the economy undermined the basis of that family, destroying the unity of capital and labour within it. Peasants evicted from the land became solely dependent on selling their labour. As a result, the women could no longer combine in their general labour the bearing, birthing, suckling and rearing of children.¹⁰⁴ Without land they were bereft of ways to contribute to their family's livelihood. Who would care for their children if they went 'out to work'? And if that problem could be met, their wages did not cover their own upkeep, let alone their children's.

Their dependence upon their husbands increased. Wives became financial liabilities to poor labouring men, threats to their survival. For the state, having made husbands responsible for the upkeep of their wives and children, then passed maximum wage laws¹⁰⁵ which made the execution of those responsibilities impossible.

In an age when the numbers of destitute poor were rapidly increasing,¹⁰⁶ women were over-represented.¹⁰⁷ Their pauperization led to starvation,¹⁰⁸ harassment by officials, death while giving birth under hedges and in ditches.¹⁰⁹ For centuries their place, however mean and precarious, had been as necessary members of a family. This family had been undermined as an institution because it was no longer a help, but a hindrance to male survival. The desperate situation of many women at the end of the seventeenth century thus arose. There was no place for them to go with their children. At the same time, many other women began to set the pattern for the role women would play during industrialization. They sold their labour for pitifully low wages, adding overwork and fatigue to their general destitution.

An affluent bourgeoisie dependent upon capital - that is, the surplus value produced by the landless - was emerging from the better-off yeoman, craftsmen and tradesmen. It was in the course of this separation between labour and capital, production and consumption, work and home, work and housework, public and private that bourgeois women acquired the particular identity which set the pattern first for noble women, and much later, for working women. The spheres of consumption, home, domesticity and privacy became their 'natural' habitat.

Men were making a new world apart from the home: a world of business, politics, investment, law, a new capitalist and imperialist world. Sheila Rowbotham put it this way.

"The most crucial factor in deciding the peculiar helplessness of women was the exclusion of the privileged from production. As bourgeois man justified himself through his work, asserting his own industry and usefulness against the idea of aristocratic leisure, his woman's life was becoming increasingly useless." 110

Even Mary Astell and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, both proponents of female education, would not have espoused her "justifying" herself through her work.

Mary Astell: "They (men) may busy their Heads with Affairs of State, and spend their Time and Strength in recommending themselves to an uncertain Master, or a more giddy Multitude, our only endeavour shall be to be absolute monarchs in our own Bosoms." 111

Lady Mary: "I do not complain of men for having engrossed the government. In excluding us from all degree of power they preserve us from many fatigues, many dangers and perhaps many crimes." 112

Like the advocates of female education a century later, they failed to see any connection between education and work. That women's lives need not, and indeed should not, be productive was an unquestioned axiom by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In this chapter it has been shown that women of all feudal estates made important contributions to their families' livelihood. The transition from feudalism to capitalism removed economic production from the household. Women of the rapidly growing proletariat were left dependent on husbands who had no adequate means to support them. Marriage for working people became a threatened institution: men had little to gain from it and much to lose, while women needed a husband more than ever.

The home for the women of the newly emerging bourgeoisie was shrinking to the Doll's House. The women were supported in style, but they were paying a price. Increasingly, they were considered good for very little. By the end of the seventeenth century two clear classes of women were emerging: one destitute, one privileged; one overworked, and the other idle.

In the next chapter a feminist perspective will be used to try to account for the changes in the ideas about women during the same time period. This will involve looking at the nature of patriarchal ideology as it was propagated by the Catholic Church, and how it was altered after the Protestant Reformation.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRANSITION FROM CATHOLICISM TO PROTESTANTISM, A TRANSFORMATION IN PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the basic ideas preached by the Catholic Church about the family, women and sexuality will be touched upon in order to show why and how the Protestant preachers undertook their transformation. In particular, the Protestant ideas about the relationship between husband and wife, sexuality, love, marriage and divorce will be discussed in order to draw out their implications for the position of women?

CATHOLICISM, WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

"In the woman wantonly adorned to capture souls, the garland upon her head is as a single code or firebrand of Hell to kindle men with that fire; so too the horns of another, so the bare neck, so the brooch upon the breast, so with all the curious finery of the whole of their body. What else does it seem or could be said of it save that each is a spark breathing out Hell-fire, which this wretched incendiary of the Devil breathes so effectually ... that, in a single day by her dancing or her perambulation through the town, she inflames with the fire of lust - it may be - twenty of those who behold her, damning the souls who God has created and redeemed at such a cost for their salvation. For this very purpose the Devil thus adorns these females, sending them forth through the town as his apostles, replete with every iniquity, malice, fornication."¹

Extravagant words. But John Bromyard, a prominent fourteenth century Dominican, did not depart from the substance of clerical thought throughout the middle ages when he penned those lines.

The position of the Catholic Church on women had been fashioned from the combined misogyny and ascetism of Paul: women were evil and sex was evil. The object - women, and the activity - sex, were part of the same process. It resulted in Paul's famous dictum, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman".

There was another side to the Catholic teachings about women. The Virgin Mary and the female saints provided an idealized vision of woman, chaste, virginal, loving and otherworldly. While this only served to accentuate the failings of most women, it also softened the effects of the uncompromising God of the Old Testament. The mediation of this softening was the body of a woman. It is significant that the highest symbolism of the Church included male and female images.

But the relationship between them, as befits images, was spiritual not carnal. And to this day the Catholic Church has preached the moral superiority of the celibate life. Normal married life was a third-rate choice for the weak; an unconsummated union, recommended by Erasmus² was second-best.

The Catholic Church was hegemonous in the feudal world, the sole moral authority, the only educational institution. Its views on the nature of women went almost unchallenged. It was the articulate bearer, the enormously influential proselytizer of patriarchal ideology.

Given the church's views on sexuality and women it appears paradoxical that it coexisted with courtly love, that it permitted men and women with money and power great freedom to enter and leave marriage,³

that it had so little to say about the proper conduct of conjugal and family life. There is the cynic's explanation: that the church was concerned with making and keeping the peace with the rich and powerful, that it has always shown amazing facility to adjust to social conditions. That may be.

But there is an explanation which flows from the church's own view-of-the-world. Firstly, its concern was to keep at least some men virtuous and holy, to keep them celibate, unmarried. The souls of those who did marry were not as worth saving. Secondly, given its dim view of women it would not have made much sense to develop great expectations of them. There was, therefore, little time or energy taken in defining or monitoring their behavior. If they could not be convinced to be cloistered virgins and thereby remove themselves as objects of temptation for men,⁴ the attitude towards them tended to be one of laissez-faire. The result was the church's considerable tolerance of a great range of behavior that would come under attack after the Reformation. Child marriages, annulments, the keeping of lovers and mistresses were all either openly sanctioned or tacitly condoned by the church.

The Protestant Reformation changed all that. In the course of interpreting the new religion, preachers reconsidered and altered the Catholic position on all aspects of the family and family life. These changes - in the proper relationship between husband and wife, attitudes towards sexuality, ideas about love, views on marriage and divorce - together transformed the ideas and attitudes about women. The Protestants changed the face of patriarchal ideology.

What was it about the Protestant world-view that made it incompatible with Catholic ideas on the family, sexuality and women?

THE PROTESTANT WORLD-VIEW

The Protestant problem with their inherited Catholic views on these 'domestic' matters stemmed from a critical aspect of its theology: namely the priesthood of all true believers.⁵ True belief was a gift from God which could be delivered to a person in any honourable station in life.

"The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world."⁶

Three related developments proceeded from this doctrine. Firstly, the Catholic belief in the moral and spiritual superiority of celibacy was attacked. The family man in any calling had as good a chance of being among the elect as any priest. Some said a better chance.

"Celibacy," ranted William Gouge, a prominent Puritan preacher,

"is a Doctrine contrary to God's word, and a Doctrine that causeth much inward burning and outward pollution, and so maketh their bodies which should be temples of the holy ghost, to be sties of the devill."⁷

Celibacy was not, of course, banished to the dust-bin of English history overnight. While Edward VI permitted Bishops to have wives, they subsequently had to be banished, or sometimes worse, under the Catholic Mary. And during the time of that Great Protestant, Henry VIII, Thomas Cramner, who had been indiscreet enough to marry a German lady, had her carried around in a chest with air holes in it whenever she left

the house.⁸ Elizabeth was said to deplore marriage among the clergy, snubbing the wives of bishops,⁹ and as late as the end of the seventeenth century, the Puritan Baxter echoed St. Paul in describing marriage as a "remedy against lust".¹⁰ The weight of Protestant opinion, nonetheless, came increasingly to reject celibacy in favour of marriage.

Secondly, speaking with God no longer required the mediation of a priest, the intercession of the saints, or the intervention of the Virgin Mary. Thirdly, the Bible was placed in the hands of the lay person. No longer did he await a priest's pleasure for the interpretation of God's word.

Behind these changes lay the more fundamental point: that the whole of one's worldly life had to be lived in a godly fashion. The purpose of Protestantism was "to enable men to live in this present world so as they may walk with God even by bringing them from a general and confused thought of Christianitie to a daily and particular case of Godliness".¹¹

Since people passed most of their lives within a family, the proper conduct of family life was no longer only peripherally important. This new interest in the family was emphasized by the growing recognition of the definitive nature of early socialization and childhood. "I am forced to judge," wrote Baxter, "that most of the children of the godly that are ever renewed, are renewed in their childhood."¹²

The family became the key to fulfilling the rather awesome goal of the Protestants: that ordinary men and women should make a total commitment to a godly life in both their public and most intimate acts, in their daily utterances and secret thoughts.

But granting each person the right and obligation to confront God, directly, without mediator, through prayer and the Bible, had spawned a diversity of religious views which eventually destroyed the institutionalized unity of the church. Is it reasonable, therefore, to treat the effects of Protestantism on the family as if it represented one set of doctrines and beliefs?

Books have been written exploring the differences, doctrinal and pragmatic, between Anglicanism and Puritanism.¹³ Others, notably Charles and Katherine George, have taken the view that there were no substantive issues dividing Puritans and Anglicans:

"In our effort to find a distinguishing line between 'puritan' and 'anglican' we have found no issue, doctrinal or ecclesiastical of which we can speak in other than relative terms."¹⁴

This paper does not need to take such a controversial stance because, for the aspects of Protestantism relevant to this study, it seems legitimate to assume that much less divided Puritans and Anglicans than brought them together. This is the position of Schucking, who observed:

"however far apart such people (Baxter the Puritan and Jeremy Taylor the Anglican) were in their dogmatics and in their views on church government, they were to an astonishing degree in agreement in their ideas concerning practical conduct, in such matters for instance as family duties."¹⁵

There is one qualification to this position: the far-reaching effects of Protestantism in articulating and propagating a particular kind of family centred around a particular kind of woman stemmed from very similar views whether they were enunciated by Anglicans or Puritans.

But some of the radical sects of Protestantism had a temporary and rather dramatically different effect on the family, and for women.¹⁶ Even this exception tended to logically extend, rather than negate, the more widely held beliefs in the sanctity of the family.

The Protestants did not pull their idea of the family out of the proverbial hat. Rather, it was fashioned from two main sources, both dear to the hearts of the preachers: the family partnership which prevailed in the homes of the yeomen and craftsmen, and the great patriarchal families of the Old Testament.

The Sources of the Protestant Conception of the Family

The first source were the families of whom Christopher Hill has called, "the industrious middle sort".¹⁷ The Reformation had occurred at a time when the economic power of the craftsman and yeoman's households, which had been increasing for two centuries, was approaching its zenith.¹⁸ In these families, the father was the undisputed senior partner of an industrious and thriving household with its extensions in the farmstead and workshop.¹⁹ This was the kind of family from which many Protestant preachers had come.²⁰ Their fathers had been yeomen and this was often what they were too - at least for six days of the week.²¹

This kind of family made up the most important part of the preachers' congregations. Noble families had their chaplains;²² the poor probably did not go to Church.²³

The second source was the Old Testament. To the Bible-reading Protestant preachers these families appeared to be contemporary versions

of the great patriarchal families that they were rediscovering in the Old Testament. Schucking wrote

"... the English Puritan sought to shape his life by the example of the Bible and particularly that of the Old Testament. Thanks to this, the great historical achievement of the Jewish people, the creation of its own form of the patriarchal family, gains an importance for posterity which, till now has been insufficiently appreciated."²⁴

The patriarchs of the Old Testament had not only guided their families' economic destiny but had directed their large households through their spiritual crises, holding themselves responsible only to God Himself. Having been displaced by Christianity with its army of saints and priests, they were resurrected as role-models for the seventeenth century English householders. For the Protestant denial of the need for a mediator between God and man had left this spiritual role partly dormant. Protestant preachers began to urge that heads of households move into the gap and play a semi-priestly role in guiding the spiritual life and godly behaviour of their families.²⁵

The kind of family the preachers were viewing and experiencing in Elizabethan England, and the role model provided by the Old Testament patriarchs resulted then in the family being seen as a "little church, a little state".²⁶

THE ELEVATION OF THE FAMILY

Family life had to be made equal to its task. And in language varying in tone from sober to something close to enthusiastic abandon,

descriptions and prescriptions of the newly sanctified family poured out.

"The family" said the preacher Gouge,

"is a seminary of the Church and Commonwealth. It is as a Bee-hive, in which is the stocke, and out of which are sent many swarms of Bees; for in families are all sorts of people bred and brought up; and out of families are they sent into the Church and Commonwealth ... whence it followeth, that a conscionable performance of domestical and household duties, tend to the good ordering of Church and Commonwealth ...

Besides a family is a little church and a little Commonwealth ... whereby tryall may be made, of such as are fit for any place of authority, or of subjection in Church or Commonwealth. Or rather it is as a schoole wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned: whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or Commonwealth."²⁷

The use of the word seminary is not accidental nor the use of 'chastity' and 'virginity' in the next quotation from Rogers. What they wanted to emphasize was the purity of the marriage-bed, the holiness of conjugal love.

Rogers echoes Gouge's sentiments, but in more flamboyant language.

"Marriage is the preservative of Chastity, the Seminary of the Commonwealth, seed-plot of the Church, pillar (under God) of the world, right-hand of providence, supporter of lawes, stats, orders, offices, gifts and services: the glory of peace, the sinewes of warre, the maintenance of policy, the life of the dead, the solace of the living, the ambition of virginity, the foundation of countries, cities, Universities, succession of Families, Crownes and Kingdomes; Yea (besides the being of these) its the welbeing of them being made, and whatsoever is excellent in them, or any other thing, the very furniture of heaven (in a kinde) depending thereupon."²⁸

Such descriptions attest to the new regard in which the family was held. But for the family to be so elevated meant that attitudes towards sex and women had to be substantially changed. For how were men to live

morally impeccable lives copulating with the evil seductresses which populated Catholic treatises? Perhaps the Protestant preachers were not consciously motivated. They, nonetheless, went about the task of rescuing sex and women from what they saw as the worst slurs of Catholicism. As a result, although "love and marriage ... was only one among the many topics of Puritan edification ... no topic underwent a more interesting or distinguished development",²⁹ Wright confirms this in his massive study from literary sources of the middle class in Elizabethan England.

"After the break with the Church of Rome, with its conservative attitude toward all sex relations, new opinions regarding woman, marriage and the home gained favour ... No longer ... was virginity held to be the highest good but a chastity of marriage was glorified by the Protestants. As Puritanism further modified Church beliefs, the insistence upon the sterling virtues of the home became louder."³⁰

In their many sermons, books and proclamations on the family, the preachers did not stay in the realm of high flown rhetoric. Rather they dealt quite precisely with all aspects of family life: the relationship between husband and wife, sexuality, love, marriage and divorce, leaving little to the imagination of their congregants. Each of these areas will be discussed in turn.

Relationship between Husband and Wife

Central to the running of a stable and godly household was a proper relationship between husband and wife. Here the Protestants undertook a delicate balancing act between two contradictory ideas which, if they did not keep each other in check would destroy the harmony of the household,

the stability of the society and the working out of the divine plan. On the one hand, there was an ideal projected of close and loving companionship between husband and wife. On the other, there was an insistence upon the subordination of the wife to her husband.³¹ The more the first was emphasized, the greater the fear, seemingly well justified, that wives would aspire to equality with their husbands. But a concern with the second to the exclusion of the first would not have invested the family with the emotional content necessary to produce faithful and responsible husbands.

For the Protestants there were three reasons why a man needed a wife: procreation of children, the relief of concupiscence and the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other.³²

This view contrasted with the view of Aquinas³³ who had submitted that in every way except procreation another man would have been a better companion for Adam than a woman. The Protestants dwelt long and lovingly on the mutual comfort husband and wife should be to each other. Some of the ministers' marriage services, notably Gataker's and Baxter's, went further and asserted the primacy of mutual help over procreation.³⁴

Whether the ordering was changed or not, preachers agreed that marriage was a state

"wherein one man and one woman are coupled and knit together in one fleshe and body in the feare and love of God, by the free lovinge, hartly and good consente of them both, to the entent that they two may dwell together, as one fleshe and body of one vyl in the equal partaking of all such thinges, as god shal send them with thankes gevyng."35

The forms of this mutual sharing were not; of course, to be left to the discretion of the married couple. Long lists of duties, correct behaviour, proper forms of address were expounded. All had much the same ring because they stemmed from one overriding perspective: that the man was obliged to provide guidance in all things to his wife, and his wife was bound to obey. These were good Catholic sentiments.

Like the Catholic Church, Protestants also turned to Paul most often for his unequivocal statements: "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands for the husband is the head of the wife." "Man, is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." They displayed no reluctance to call upon Paul when appropriate, and cast him aside when he made less popular statements: "It is better to marry than to burn", for example, was conveniently overlooked.

Paul may have been their chief historical source for statements on female inferiority, but they were not at a loss for their own words to emphasize their deep commitment to the principle. From Milton's poetry, "Hee for God only, shee for God in him",³⁶ to the more prosaic and threatening language of William Whately came the same sentiment.

"(E)very good woman must suffer herself to be convinced in judgement that she is not her husband's equall. Out of place, out of peace and woe to those miserable aspiring shoulders that will not content themselves to take their place below the head."³⁷

The preachers were delivering a double message. It was compounded by the one exception to the otherwise unqualified obedience a wife owed

her husband; it was not greatly dwelt upon by Protestant preachers but, nonetheless, it was, in Haller's words, "the camel head of liberty within the tent of masculine supremacy".³⁸ A wife was instructed to disobey her husband if there was no doubt that in carrying out his order she would be disregarding one of God's. That such a thing might happen stemmed from the spiritual equality between husband and wife which meant that God could communicate as easily with one as the other.³⁹

Every person had his own source of God's word. The family Bible readings may have encouraged devotion to God. But it was also to give men and women ideas that had not been in the reformers' script.

Sexuality

The redefinition of the family involved a reworking of the clerical views on sexuality. There were two aspects to this process: on the one hand, new attitudes towards marital intercourse had to be developed; on the other, the Catholic views on the sinfulness of extra-marital sex had to be articulated with new vigour in order that it could be distinguished from the 'pure virginity' of marriage.

Their acceptance of conjugality has led some writers to stress that the Puritans re-established the naturalness of sexual intercourse,⁴⁰ "est congressus viri et exoris natura sua res indifferens neque bona neque mala".⁴¹ A couple should proceed, according to Gouge, "with good will and delight, willingly, readily and cheerfully".⁴² The Anglican Jeremy Taylor cited "a desire of children, or to avoid fornication, or to lighten and ease the cares and sadnesses of household affairs or to endear each other"⁴³ as sufficient reason for marital intercourse. There are many

admonitions to those who might choose a celibate marriage in the mistaken belief that it would be more pleasing to God. This is in contrast to the Erasmian view that marriage differed little from virginity and was perfected in abstinence.⁴⁴

Their condemnations of the sin of adultery, on the other hand, have led to the more popular association of Puritans with sexual repression. Sebastian Franch, for example, saw, "the significance of the Reformation in the fact that now every Christian had to be a monk all his life."⁴⁵

For as much as the Protestants insisted on the purity of marital sex, their proclamations on the sin of adultery were, "stronger than anywhere in Christian literature".⁴⁶ "Adultery" intoned Andrewes "is of all sins most brutish, and maketh us come nearest the condition of beasts".⁴⁷ "The laws of God shoulde be obeyed and fulfilled, whiche commaundeth bothe the adulterer and the adultresse to bee stoned unto deathe",⁴⁸ thundered Bacon. These outpourings seem to have been prompted by three considerations. First, there was the fear that the new tone given to marital relations might have some carry over to sexual relations in general, that the acceptance of marital sex would somehow open the door to rampant promiscuity.⁴⁹

Secondly, the Protestants, in contrast to the Catholics, insisted on the sanctity of the family and its stability over time. Adulterous relations were seen as the greatest threat to the stable kind of family life which was so essential to the good government of the commonwealth.

Their writings about marital sex reveal a third motivation. Between the concepts of virginity, on the one hand, and adultery, on the other,

marriage had a difficult time being defined for itself. For if marriage in one breath was praised as 'pure virginity', in the next it was castigated as a potential whorehouse. "Neither are husbands to turn their wives into whores, or wives their husband into whomasters, by immoderate, intemperate, or excessive lust".⁵⁰ Many such cautions and prohibitions accompanied their assurances that the "marriage bed was undefiled".

Frye tries to resolve this contradiction in Protestant thought by documenting the Puritans' acceptance and approval of conjugal love. What they disapproved and feared, says Frye, was lust in marriage, that "immoderate love whose very violence precluded it from maintaining the stability necessary for the marriage relationship".⁵¹ The Puritans did see lust as a temporary passion akin to "fire that is kindled in the stubble (and) is soone put out",⁵² and therefore, not compatible with the solid marriages for life which they advocated. But this point is crucial for understanding those who see the Puritans intrinsically linked with sexual repression: the language that they used to describe lust is the same as that used by the Catholic Church to describe sex. Is it not difficult, therefore, to avoid the conclusion that it was the Puritans, rather than Masters and Johnson (as Germaine Greer would have it) who "supplied the blueprint for standard, low-agitation, cool-out, monogamy"?⁵³ And they did it precisely by avoiding the specifically erotic aspect of what had been seen by the Catholic Church as the 'disease' of love.

The Catholic Church castigated sexual love. But it more than recognized its potential intensity, and assumed that those outside its

exclusive celibate circle would experience this "greatest bodily pleasure".⁵⁴ The Protestants, on the other hand, would have liked to legislate lust out of marital intercourse. Bolton cautions that the marriage bed, "ought by no means to be stained ... with sensual excesses, wanton speeches, foolish dalliance"⁵⁵ while Robinson reminds his readers that a man may play "the adulterer with his own wife ... by inordinate affection and action".⁵⁶

The redefinition of sexuality by the Protestant preachers urged the repression of the specifically erotic component of sexual love, a process which was to reach its full flowering a hundred years later in the Victorian belief in the asexuality of women.

Love

It is scarcely fair to the Protestants to separate, even for purposes of analysis, their views on sexuality from their attitude to love. Schucking argues that the Puritans' greatest cultural achievement was the bringing together of spiritual and sensual love into one unifying experience.⁵⁷ His value judgement aside, the substantive aspect of his remark is persuasive. For the Catholic Church had seen spiritual love as directed towards God,⁵⁸ while the courtly love tradition had absolutely denied the compatibility of love and marriage.⁵⁹

The Protestants, in contrast to both these models, melded the roles of wife and mistress into one, and urged that marital love should be patterned upon devotion to God. This love is seen as an obligation, one which they might have preferred to be able to legislate. Unless both

of the marriage partners love each other ... "with an ardent love, they cannot but be damned",⁶⁰ warned Whately.

Not that young men were advised to marry for love, at least certainly not for love alone. Those who did were "poor greenheads",⁶¹ and would live to rue the day. The encouragement to choose a "fit wife" was as close as most preachers came to making love a precondition rather than the result of marriage. While virtuousness was the first prerequisite for choosing a wife, second in importance was that she be 'fit'.⁶² In modern parlance: she should be 'right for him'.

"Therefore a godly man in our time, thanked the Lord that he had not onely given him a godly wife, but a fitte wife: for he sayd not that she was the wisest, nor the holiest, nor the humblest, nor the modestest wife in the world but the fittest wife for hime."⁶³

Some showed more inclination to consider the feelings of the young man. Gataker displayed particular sensitivity.

"A Father may finde out a fit wife and thinke such a one a meet match for his sonne, and his Parents may bee also of the same minde with him and yet it may be when they have done all they can they cannot fasten their affections ... There are secret lincks of affection, that no reason can be rendered of: as there are inbred dislikes, that can neither be resolved or reconciled."⁶⁴

The idea of marrying for love, though hedged with many cautions, was given a foot in the door by the Puritans. Its ascendancy to the chief ideological underpinning for marriage would await another century.

Marriage and Divorce

Discussions about getting into and out of wedlock were problematic for the Protestants. Following from the Calvinist dictum that "children owed absolute obedience to their parents on pain of death",⁶⁵ Protestants believed that it was the parents' obligation to choose suitable mates for their children. Their children's duty was to accept the choice.

Yet it is possible for Lawrence Stone to have attributed a preponderant part to the Puritan ethic in "slowly weakening in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the doctrine of the absolute right of parents over the disposal of their children".⁶⁶ How can this apparent contradiction be explained?

The Protestants were very concerned with stable, non-adulterous, life-long marriages. The selection of a suitable spouse was, they knew, rudimentary in attaining this goal. This led them to instruct young men on these matters at length. The instruction in itself presumed some freedom of choice. Preachers were beginning to cautiously enunciate the child's right to at least a veto over a marriage partner proposed by his parents.⁶⁷

At the same time, there was increasing pressure from children for some freedom to choose.⁶⁸ For marrying an appropriate woman had become especially critical since the Reformation. The Protestants had made getting out of a marriage impossible except for adultery. While the Catholic Church had not sanctioned divorce it had had a great succession of "evasions, fictions and loopholes". These, according to O.R. McGregaor

"had made the medieval system tolerable in practice".⁶⁹ Powell went further:

"so tangled was the casuistry respecting marriage at the beginning of the sixteenth century that it might be said that for a sufficient consideration, a canonical flaw might be found in almost any marriage."⁷⁰

The Protestants abolished all these popish remnants: adultery became the only way out of a marriage.⁷¹ The contradiction between this position and their view of marriage as "a sweete compound of both religion and nature",⁷² was put succinctly by John Milton.

"Among Christian writers touching matrimony there lie three chief ends thereof agreed on; godly society, next civil and thirdly that of the marriage-bed. Of these the first in name be the highest and most excellent, no baptized man can deny ... but he who affirms adultery to be the highest breach, affirms the bed to be the highest of marriage, which is in truth a gross and boorish opinion."⁷³

But the least concern of the preachers was with internal consistency. The family was a "seminary of the Church and Commonwealth".⁷⁴ Upon it depended the preservation of both.

They had been willing to compromise on the right of parents to choose their children's marriage partners. The fusion of spiritual and sensual love had made the choice of a wife too important to leave to parental discretion, while the tightening up of the ways to abandon a marriage had made the choice too irrevocable.

But there would be no compromise on the grounds for leaving a marriage. People, agreed the preachers, had to learn to choose the one they love and love the one they choose.⁷⁵

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN: A WIN, A LOSS OR A DRAW?

The Protestant ideas on the family, the relationship between husband and wife, sexuality, love, marriage and divorce, were carefully spelled out and full of contradictions. They had implications for women that resulted in a new conception about their true nature and a more precise perspective on their proper role.

But contained in the new were the images from Catholicism which had only been half-discarded. That alone would have made the results of Protestantism for women complex and difficult to unravel. The internal contradictions posed by Protestantism itself further confounded that process.

On the one hand, Protestantism contributed, however unintentionally, to an improvement in women's position. On the other hand it led to a more closely defined and limiting role for women. There were several aspects to each side which can now be drawn out.

An Improvement in Women's Position:
From Natural Allies of the Devil
To Godly Companions of their Husbands

Women - Apostles of the Devil?

Overwhelmingly Protestant preachers insisted that they were not. They rejected the idea that women were evil for two reasons. The first related to their new conception of the family. The family that the preachers had in their minds was the household of the yeoman or craftsman. For the

preachers they were also "little churches", spiritually as well as economically self-sufficient. This new moral stature of the family had an inevitably elevating influence on the tone in which women were discussed. A spiritual unit like the Protestants' family needed members capable of a high standard of morality. Doctrines emphasizing the evilness of women had to be muted.

Secondly, the redefinition of sexuality - the rejection of celibacy and the elevation of conjugal love - undermined the Catholic position on the evilness of women. Katharine Rogers has pointed out that while there is no necessary relationship between a condemnation of sexuality and hatred of women, the connection is clear. Since "abhorrence of sex leads to abhorrence of the sexual object ... guilt feelings about desire are conveniently projected as female lust and seductiveness".⁷⁶

The phenomenon of seeing women as evil did not suddenly cease.

Wright observed,

"it is true that there was no diminution of interest in the age-old controversy in which priests throughout the Middle Ages had cudgled their brains for terms evil enough to describe the daughters of Eve."⁷⁷

But, he continues, this point of view was being challenged.

"despite the recrudescence of medieval condemnations of the female sex, a new note of respect was creeping into the popular literature as writers reflecting the trend of middle class opinion arose to defend woman against her traducers."⁷⁸

As early as 1598, the influential Puritan Robert Cleaver severely admonished those who believed in the evilness of women.

"So that a wife is called by God Himselfe, an Helper and not an impediment, or a necessaire evil as some advisedly doe say, as other some say: It is better to burne a wife, than to marie one. Againe if wee could be without women, we could be without great troubles ... These and such like sayings, tending to the dispraise of women, some maliciously and indiscreetly doe vomit out, contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost."⁷⁹

The challenge to the doctrine of the evilness of women had been sounded.

Woman - Companion and Helpmate

"God made the man Adam altogether perfect, set him in the Paradise or garden pleasure and afterwards sayd immediately: It is not good that man should be alone."

The Protestants interpreted this to mean that woman was man's natural soulmate and helper. In the families that they observed and experienced, women were economic co-partners. They simply extended her role as economic helpmate to spiritual and social arenas:

"husbands and wives should be as two sweet friends, bred under one constellation, tempered by an influence from heaven, whereof neither can give any great reason save that mercy and providence first made them so, and then made their match."⁸⁰

As Haller observed, "the more important the family became to them as an institution, the more important became the role they found themselves assigning to woman in the life of man".⁸¹

Spiritual Equality

While basic spiritual equality between men and women is a fundamental Christian tenet,⁸² the Protestants took special pains to emphasize it. It followed from their insistence that woman was a fit companion for man.

"Some will not allow her a soule; but they be souleless men. God in his Image created them, not Him onely, but Him and Her . . . Some will not allow her to be saved; yet the Scripture is plaine; shee shall be saved by child-bearing."⁸³

The concept of spiritual equality, as the mainstream of Protestantism defined it, was an extremely limited one. It was given practical application in the Civil War Sects which flourished during the period of religious toleration permitted during the Interregnum.⁸⁴ The sectarians dealt with the practical problem of a believer cohabiting with a nonbeliever. The sectarian view advocated separation from the ungodly. This meant that women were not discouraged from leaving their husbands if those unfortunates were not among the regenerate. Thus Keith Thomas documented that "from the early 1640's we find evidence of sectary women casting off their old husbands and taking new, allegedly for reasons of Conscience."⁸⁵

Presbyterians were, in fact, against Religious Toleration because, they argued, it would threaten the authority of the father,⁸⁶ - and the stability of the household, they might have added - a fear which proved all too real in the history of the sects at this time. "I pray you tell me", demanded Katherine Childley, "what authority (the) unbelieving husband hath over the conscience of his believing wife; it is true he hath authority over her in bodily and civil respects, but not to be a Lord over her conscience."⁸⁷

It is only the tone, not the substance, which differentiates her remarks from the preachers' that a wife's submission "not extend itself to anything against the Will and Word of God".⁸⁸

The Protestant preachers witnessed their own teachings about spiritual equality being used to undermine their central concern, the stability of the family.

Sexual Equality

The Protestant campaign against adultery was very clearly aimed at men as well as women.

A single sexual standard was urged for, "although a wife's infidelities may cause greater disaster to the family, the same sin in the husband is no less iniquitous".⁸⁹ While the Protestants insisted on marital fidelity for the good of men's souls⁹⁰ and for the proper government of the commonwealth of families, their teachings also constituted a major attack on the double standard.⁹¹ Their rejection of the double standard contributed to greatly intensified sexual repression for men. But, at the same time, it provided support to women for their right to equality in sexual conduct.

In the seventeenth century sexual equality for women could only have been secured at the price of intensified repression for men. One of the sects, the Ranters, tried to base sexual equality on the principle of sexual freedom. Proclaiming the principle of 'free' love for men and women, they tried to combat the sexual guilt of their age.⁹² And yet, as Christopher Hill has pointed out, there could be no sexual freedom for women without effective methods of birth control.⁹³ Winstanley pointed out the implications for women of this route to sexual equality.

"The mother and child begotten in this manner is like to have the worst of it, for the man will be gone and leave them, and regard them no more than other women ... after he hath had his pleasure. Therefore, you women beware, for this ranting practice is not the restoring but the destroying power of the creation ... by seeking their own freedom they embondage others."⁹⁴

The very biological differences precluded equality in terms of sexual freedom in the seventeenth century. Only by restricting the sexual freedom of men could such equality be realized. By doing this, the Protestants enunciated perhaps the strongest defence, hitherto in recorded history, of a single standard of sexual morality for men and women.⁹⁵

Control Over Her Body

The attitude to love, to the family and to adultery led to pressure from sons that they be permitted to choose their own wives.

Women were indirect beneficiaries as their right to a veto over a proposed marriage, what Stone describes as "this significant advance in the history of the emancipation of women",⁹⁶ was accepted between 1560 and 1640. It was, of course, only the right to reject a suitor. A lay author warned that a virgin should never express herself positively lest she be suspected of "somewhat too warm desires".⁹⁷

General Good Treatment

Whether in the interests of family harmony, their more elevated conception of women, or some genuinely humanistic sentiment,⁹⁸ husbands were counselled to be kind and considerate to their wives, to refrain from criticizing them publicly⁹⁹ and to chastize with moderation. The right to beat one's wife, still enshrined in the law, was specifically forbidden by the preachers.¹⁰⁰

Thomas Aquinas had granted men the right to beat their wives provided that they did not kill them (a modest request).¹⁰¹ All the Protestant preachers forbid corporal punishment although the tone of some of the prohibitions is somewhat suspect. Fuller counselled that even if a husband had a wife "of a servile nature, such as may be bettered by beating" he must refrain.¹⁰²

A More Closely Defined Role for Women:
 "Art thou to make any choise of a wife?
 Choose thee an housewife."¹⁰³

An Inferior Partner

The Protestants urged Elizabethan householders to be the spiritual leaders of their families. While the Catholic Church had relied on priests to keep its flock from straying, the Protestants insisted that it was the proper duty of fathers and husbands. "A Family is a naturall and simple Societie of certaine persons, having mutuall relation-one to another, under the private government of one."¹⁰⁴

The woman acquired, as a result, a live-in spiritual advisor. Christopher Hill emphasized this point: that one person's authority meant another's submission.

"At the same time that his responsibility for the moral welfare of his household enhanced the dignity of the father of the family, as Milton noted, the dependence of the rest of the family upon him was increased, including, of course, that of his wife and children. He was their instructor in matters of conduct."¹⁰⁵

The spiritual authority of the husband had a necessary corollary: the inferiority of his wife. This inferiority stemmed from two sources. First, the nature of women suited them to a life of submission. Biological analogies were popular in support of this position: men were the head, women the body. "The man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man, who is the glory of God, the woman's head, and every way fittest to be chiefe commauder in the whole Family and household."¹⁰⁶

Secondly, her inferiority was inherent in her role. Protestant preachers did allow that a wife might be spiritually greater than her husband. That notwithstanding, she owed him obedience because he was her husband. "For the evil quality and disposition of his heart and life, doth not deprive a man of that civill honour which God hath given unto him."¹⁰⁷

All this is not very much different from Catholic teachings. The rather minor differences result from the insistence on the priest-like role of the husband, and from the constant reiteration of the theme of wifely submission.

The real implications of their proselytization on female inferiority are more profound than this. For the Protestant teachings began at the very time when women of the upper classes were beginning to receive excellent educations, and when women of the bourgeoisie were finding time to emulate them.¹⁰⁸

The breakup of the old feudal structures, the weakened moral position of the Catholic Church, the general renaissance in life and letters,¹⁰⁹ the influence of humanist thought¹¹⁰ were providing an environment for an

unprecedented expansion of female learning and status. A contemporary historian, William Wotton, looking back on it in 1694, wrote that there were "no accounts in history of so many truly great women in any one age, as are to be found between the years 1500 and 1600".¹¹¹

Reflecting this situation, and undoubtedly encouraging it was the "popular controversy about women".¹¹² This exciting century-long dialogue produced gutsy defences of female virtue and learning as well as vitriolic diatribes against them. Women offered their own most compelling defence.

"If we be weake by Nature, they strive to make us more weake by our Nurture. And if in degree of place low, they strive by their policy to keepe us more under ... lest we should be made to vindicate our owne injuries."¹¹³

The Protestants' teachings on female inferiority have to be seen against this background to appreciate their full significance. The Protestants were not just in dialogue with the Catholic Church but with the whole "popular controversy" about women.

This helps to explain why women were unreceptive to the message of their inferiority. The preacher Gouge lamented that Inferiors "thinke their burden the heaviest and are loathe to bear it" and of all inferiors women were "the most backward in yielding subjection to their husbands".¹¹⁴

"No sooner was she a woman than presently a wife."¹¹⁵

Since it was the role of the family which concerned the preachers, it is a literature not on the image of women but the nature of wives which is their legacy. This contrasts with Catholicism. First, that Church had female religious images worthy of the highest devotion from men and

women. The Protestant Church banished these and retained only Jesus Christ and his Father, the stern and demanding God of the Old Testament. Secondly, the Catholic Church had provided an institutionalized alternative to marriage for women of high birth. Life in a convent could be, at the least, a way out of an anticipated marriage, and at the most an opportunity for leadership and decision-making.¹¹⁶ In any case, it was a life in which woman was the Body of Christ, a role which, depending on the circumstances might have been more comfortable than as body to a flesh and blood husband.

The suppression of convents left only spinsterhood as an alternative to marriage: a thought which must have led more than one unwilling young woman to the altar.¹¹⁷ Mary Tattle-Well and Ioane Hit-Him-Home certainly considered a husband no prize.

"If there had been any lawful way for them to have had Children without Husbands, there hath beene, and are, and will bee a numberless number of women that would or will never be troubled with wedlock nor the knowledge of man."¹¹⁸

The clerics saw no other role but wife for women. The harnessing of the Marys and Ioanes of the world to home and husband was their avowed purpose.

A Proper Wife

What should she be like, this proper wife, this only semi-mythical creation of the Protestant preachers? First, she had to be godly.¹¹⁹ For would not a woman who loved and obeyed God also love and obey her

husband in Whose Image he had been created? Bridget Cromwell received this letter from her famous father shortly after her marriage.

"Dear Heart, press on let not husband, let not anything cool thy affections after Christ ... That which is best worthy of love in thy husband is that of the image of Christ he bears. Look on that and love it best, and all the rest for that."¹²⁰

Arise Evans was impressed by the women of his household, who insisted "that they thought upon God at every breath they drew".¹²¹

She should have "that forgetfulness of self which causes her to submit to the inevitable with patience and goodwill".¹²² The perils of childbirth in the seventeenth century, if nothing else, made such a quality combined with godliness a formidable source of strength. Alice Thornton wrote of the birth of her ninth child, only three of whom survived infancy.

"After this comfort of my child I recovered something of my weakness, better recovering my breasts and milk, and giving suck, when he thrived very well and grew strong, being a lovely babe. But lest I should too much set my heart in the satisfaction of any blessing under heaven, it seemed good to the most infinite wise God to take him from me ... And, therefore, with a full resignation to His providence, I endeavoured to submit patiently and willingly to part with my sweet child to our dear, and loving Father."¹²³

John Banks admired the same quality in his wife who "was never known to murmur, tho' I was often Concerned, to leave her with a weak Family".¹²⁴

A woman should have "that modesty which led her to be quite ignorant of her merits".¹²⁵ This might have been the only characteristic of Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, which the preachers could have applauded. By her own admission she knew no housewifery¹²⁶ and according to Pepys, "all the town-talk is now a-days of her extravagances".¹²⁷

But she did write, "it cannot be expected that I should write, so wisely or wittily as men, being of the effeminate sex, whose brains nature has mixed with the coldest and softest elements".¹²⁸

With all this a woman had to be cheerful, amiable and of equable temper, particularly towards her husband, "shunning all violence and rage, passion and humor".¹²⁹ Even if she were matched with a "crooked, perverse, profane" and "wicked" husband, it was her duty to be "milde, meeke, gentle and obedient".¹³⁰

These were the traits which a woman would bring to her calling. A man exercised his calling in Commonwealth, Church and Home;¹³¹ for the woman it was only the last of these three.¹³² Everything within the home "must be frugally and thriftily done and her children brought up in a Christian manner, and all she set her hand to 'even spinning, sewing and knitting' done as to the Lord".¹³³

John Banks was fortunate; his wife pleased him greatly in her calling. "She was a Careful, Industrious woman in bringing up of her children in good order ... a Meet-Help and a good Support to me ... always ready and willing to fit me with Necessaries."¹³⁴ Samuel Pepys, on the other hand, an admittedly less virtuous man himself, had a wife whose "domestic talents were, to put it kindly, a bit uneven.

"Home to dinner, and there I took occasion, from the blackness of the meat as it came out of the pot, to fall out with my wife and my maid for their sluttery and so left the table."¹³⁵

How many husbands fared as poorly as Pepys is unknown. Clearly Elizabeth Pepys had not conformed to the standards of the Protestant image-makers.

The time-consuming and important task of cataloguing the virtues of a good woman and the duties of a proper wife had been undertaken with a vengeance. "The clerics had locked women into one role, a role sanctioned, they said, by divine, natural and human law".¹³⁶

The image of the good wife supplanted that of evil woman in religious literature.

The Shame of Spinsterhood

As long as marriages were arranged, failure to marry was the fault of one's parents. As freedom to choose and be chosen gained support, not attracting a husband became a reflection on oneself. There was no escaping the anguish and pain of being unchosen: the last of the English nunneries had already been suppressed.

The right to veto a marriage partner, a landmark in personal freedom had, therefore, a definite underside for women.

Her new problem was to attract a mate while appearing passive and uninterested. The lot of the unmarried woman had often been unhappy in feudal times. It would become a predictable misery as love and the freedom to choose one's love became enshrined as the only legitimate basis for marriage, and as marriage became the sole respectable goal for women.

SUMMARY

The Catholic Church counselled a celibate life as the most perfect way of loving God. Through such a life the twin evils, women and sexuality, could be resisted.

The Protestants disagreed. They sought a saintly life not in escape from, but through immersion in, the world. God was beseeched to "so spiritualize our hearts and affections that we may have heavenly hearts in earthly employments".¹³⁷ Motivated by this world-view, they developed a new and elevated conception of the family. In the course of this transformation they redefined the relationship between husband and wife, and dealt at length with questions of sexuality, love, marriage and divorce. Through these discussions, and also more directly, they took on the Catholic conception of women as evil, and found it to be untrue.

In order that man not be forced to face life alone, God had created woman as his helper and companion. Man was to wed her, bed her, love her and keep her till death. Perhaps in that order. For the Protestants were wary about love as a precondition for marriage. Unaccustomed optimism, however, made them reasonably certain that if the decision to marry had been wisely taken, love would surely follow.

Loving companionship was only to be one of the dimensions of the relationship, however. The other was the obedience a wife owed her husband, the responsibility to govern that a husband owed his wife. It took many rhetorical manipulations to put just the proper aspect on the relationship.

Marriage was to be a sweet friendship within a power relationship. "We would that the man when he loveth should remember his superiority",¹³⁸ went a popular manual on the subject. In 1970 Shulamith Firestone could write "power and love don't make it together".¹³⁹ While the Protestant preachers would have disagreed, their recognition that there was a problem, is unmistakable. "Of all degrees wherein there is any difference betwixt person and person," wrote Gouge, "there is the least disparity betwixt husband and wife."¹⁴⁰

There was also the least disparity, as it turned out, between virginity and conjugality. The latter was promoted in images reminiscent of the glowing praise extended to chastity in the Church of Rome. It was then contrasted to lust and passion which were described with much the same language Catholicism had reserved for sexual intercourse. While lust was seen as a typical aspect of adulterous relations, it was a sin equally to be avoided in the marriage bed.

The importance which they attributed to marriage as a stable, life-long relationship led them to give some support, primarily by inference, to the love match over the arranged marriage. This provided a splendid opportunity for them to expound on the qualities of a good woman. They produced a formidable list with which a young man should arm himself in his search for a suitable wife.

This is the role - the proper wife - that they substituted for that of evil woman. A way out of evilness was no longer offered to the few,

as Brides of Christ, but to the majority, as godly helpmates to their husbands. That was a gain in human dignity. But the rules for her behaviour and character were so stringent, that the result should not be over-estimated. The Puritans said Keith Thomas "had done something to raise women's status, but not really very much". What they had done was to redefine the nature of patriarchal ideology to suit their own world-view.

The Protestant conception of women developed in a world that was increasingly being shaped by the emerging bourgeoisie. The interests of that class and that of the Protestant preachers were coinciding by the end of the seventeenth century. The effects of that merger on the position of women in society is taken up in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAPITALISM AND PROTESTANTISM

INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter will consider the two related questions which have motivated this research. First, the historically specific question: how did the interlocking histories of capitalism and Protestantism transform the position of women in society? Second, the question of the tension between a Marxist and a feminist perspective: do they offer conflicting, redundant or complementary interpretations of women's subordinate place in society?

PROTESTANTISM AND CAPITALISM AND THE FAMILY

The Protestants enunciated a new image for women, a new conception of their place in the cosmic order, and transformed the ideas about the family and the proper relationship between the sexes; that is, they redefined patriarchal ideology. This new perspective was not fashioned because of its particular appropriateness to capitalism. On the contrary, the preachers of the early seventeenth century were explicitly anti-capitalist. "In the Country," charged Bishop Hall,

"they censure not the oppressing gentleman that tyrannizes over his cottagers, incroches upon his neighbour's inheritance, incloses commons, depopulates villages, scruges his tenants to death but the poor soules that when they are crushed, yield the juyce of tears, exhibit bits of complaint, throw open the new thornes, maintaine the old wounds; would these men be content to be quietly racked and spoiled, there would be peace."¹

It was not, then, as apologists but as critics of the emerging economic system that Protestant preachers developed their teachings on women and the family. Their ideas were motivated by their fervent prayer to "have heavenly hearts in earthly employment",² and were patterned on the household of the yeoman or craftsman.

But Protestantism was crossing historical paths and becoming entwined with capitalism. Its particular form of patriarchal ideology was, then, itself altered, providing a remarkably successful - if only in terms of its persistence - ideological basis for the bourgeois family. In fact, it would be more reasonable to say that the success of this Protestant perspective over time, can be attributed to its adoption and adaptation by the bourgeoisie.

The Family: The Last Bulwark of Protestantism In Capitalist Society

With the rise of capitalism the maintenance of the family became important to the very survival of the Church. Throughout the Middle Ages the Church had laid down moral precepts for all aspects of society. As Tawney wrote,

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"However Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans and Calvinists may differ on doctrine or ecclesiastical government, Luther and Calvin, Latimer and Laud, John Knox and the Pilgrim Fathers are agreed that social morality is the province of the Church, and are prepared both to teach it, and to enforce it, when necessary, by suitable discipline." 3

The challenge to the Church's prerogatives came from the rising bourgeoisie. "The House of Commons, and the class which it represented, had triumphed at every point ... the sovereignty of Parliament was established, including a de facto sovereignty over the Church." 4 The success of the bourgeoisie was part tribute to its power, and part to internal dissension within the Church which "made it evident that no common standard existed which could be enforced by ecclesiastical machinery." 5

The Church did not, however, go away, nor did religion disappear. Just in time, it had established a new, and by its own standards, an important site in which to operate: the Christian home, "the Seminary of the Commonwealth, seed-plot of the Church, pillar (under God) of the world". 6

This home, about which they waxed so eloquent, was still the society in microcosm, the economically productive household of the better-off peasant or craftsman. The world for which this new and elevated conception of the family had been developed, however, was changing. The households of the less fortunate yeoman or tradesman were sinking into the swelling class of wage labourers. The more successful among them were becoming capitalists, increasingly living off the surplus value produced by others.

The home was shrinking. No longer was it a place to produce, rather a place to consume, no longer a place to 'work' but only a place to 'live'. A place for private emotions and intimacy, a place for children, a world for women. This was a far different home than the one in which the Protestants had so recently enclosed the woman as good wife. And by a stroke of historical irony, perhaps justice, when the world was divided in two, not only women but religion itself was relegated to the home. The Church increasingly would have little to say about how things were produced, but only about how they were used.

⑥ "Wealth," stated Max Weber, "(became) bad ethically only in so far as it (was) a temptation to idleness and sinful enjoyment of life, and its acquisition is bad only when it is with the purpose of later living merrily and without care."⁷

Defining private morality, rather than public standards, became the last legitimate interest of the Church, and the state continued to acknowledge the Church's right to influence in this sphere. That is, the men of the state and the men of the Church combined to control women, within their 'natural' place within the family. Laws against birth control, abortion, divorce, adultery - these were the moral principles which the Church could and would defend.

As a result, the home became, by inference at first, and later by definition, the centre of morality. The Church acquiesced in this belief, and in its corollary: that the world of business was controlled only by "the new science of Political Arithmetic, which asserts, at first with hesitation and then with confidence, that no moral rule beyond the letter of the law exists".⁸

The Church, once powerful enough to define the family, had become dependent upon it for its own survival as an institution. The Protestant intention that the home be a moral and industrious place in the midst of a Godly Commonwealth of men went unrealized. Instead, stripped of its productive functions, the home became a spiritual retreat, in need of protection from an, at best, amoral world.

This development was most fully realized in the bourgeois family. The home of the wage labourer was equally unproductive but it could not afford the aura of morality and spirituality which characterized the bourgeois home. The effects of the relationship between Protestantism and Capitalism were thus felt very differently by bourgeois and working class women.

Bourgeois Women

With the rise of capitalism had emerged a class of women isolated from production and economically dependent on their husbands. Their lives were increasingly ones of leisure and idleness. "Why won't you begin to think and no longer dream away your time in a wretched incogitancy?" pleaded Mary Astell with the ladies in 1701. The women whom she was addressing were a far cry from those who had been the models for the Protestant conception of the good wife. Rather, the worthy preachers had matched the economic importance of the family with a comparable ideological presence, the economic partnership of husband and wife with a spiritual and emotional relationship. The preachers had "called women to an

intensively active existence on the emotional and spiritual as well as the physical and practical level".¹⁰ With the removal of production from the home, the spiritual partnership was no longer based on the companionship of working in daily life. The nature of the relationship shifted: the woman, the centre of the home, was to inject the spirituality, warmth and emotional support. She was to provide a peaceful retreat in which her husband could refresh himself after the rigours and harshness of the world.

But her retreat from production had other, less desirable, consequences for her husband. Whereas once industry and thrift had been inseparable aspects of a husband and wife's productive life together, now their interests diverged: his interest was to make money, hers to spend it. By the end of the seventeenth century bourgeois women were being criticized by the Protestant standards. Their extravagances, idleness, foolishness were sources for gentle parodying and stinging satire. The Spectator, 1710, steered a middle course between these two:

"The toilet is their great scene of business and the right adjusting of their hair, the principal employment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribbons is reckoned a very good morning's work and if they make an excursion into a mercer's or a toyshop, so great a fatigue makes them unfit for anything else all the day after."¹¹

Women were brought to court for sins of extravagance. "It was proved that she was very extravagant and used to pawn her clothes for money,"¹² read a court statement by Sir John Holt, c. 1700. Pepys was one of the first to record such troubles: "At home and find my wife of her own accord to have laid out twenty-five shillings upon a pair of pendants for her ears which did vex me."¹³

Mary Antell was a lone feminist hoping to rouse her female readership into an awareness of their position. Her criticisms, though made from the wish to change not disparage women, were the same. "Can you be in love with servitude and folly? Can you dote on a mean, ignorant and ignoble life?"¹⁴ she challenged.

These kinds of criticisms, whether prompted by ridicule or concern, became less frequent during the eighteenth century. There were three inter-related processes involved in this decline. First of all, as long as women were being judged by similar standards as men, their folly and idleness were seen as faults. As women, confined in their homes, became seen as a breed apart, their weaknesses began to appear as virtues. Oliver Goldsmith, writing in Ladies Magazine, revealed the rationale behind this new sentiment. Condemning intelligence in women as an affectation, he condoned, "their genteel little terrors, antipathies and affections. The alternate panics of thieves, spiders, ghosts and thunder are allowable to youth and beauty. (Feminine) imperfections will become them better than the borrowed perfections of men."¹⁵ Memory is short. Qualities once regarded as shameful had become not only acceptable but natural.

Secondly, the separation of the home from the amoral world continued to add to its ideological importance insisted upon by the Protestants. The home began to be represented as a haven for peace and morality. The following passage was published in 1920, but the author quotes the nineteenth century historian, J.R. Green.

"In considering our indebtedness to the Puritans, it should never be forgotten by those who value English home life that they gave it to us. "Home, as we conceive it now," writes J.R. Green, "was the creation of the Puritan." If Puritanism occasioned the "loss of the passion, the caprice, the subtle and tender play of feeling, the breadth of sympathy, the quick pulse of delight" of the Elizabethan age, "on the other hand life gained in moral grandeur, in a sense of the dignity of manhood, in orderliness and equitable force. The larger geniality of the age that had passed away was replaced by an intense tenderness within the narrower circle of the home." Gravity and seriousness reigned there, softened and warmed by family love, until the home of the honest, upright Englishman has become the sweetest and purest thing on earth:

"A quiet centre in a troubled world,
 A haven where the rough winds whistle never,
 And the still sails are in the sunbeams furled." 16

Thirdly, the women's enclosure within this home, "the sweetest and purest thing on earth",¹⁷ coupled with the total involvement of men in the world, led to the reversal of the Catholic ideal of male spirituality, female carnality; male virtue, female evilness. The Protestants had played an intermediary part in rejecting the concept of women as evil, and substituting it with that of good wife. By the nineteenth century she had reached the apex. She was the representation of "unfallen humanity".¹⁸ Her heart "enshrines the priceless pearl of womanhood before which gross man can only inquire and adore".¹⁹ It was a kind of secular mariology, in Rosemary Reuther's words,²⁰ although there is also a debt to courtly love.

The early Protestants would not have admitted to a share in this image-creation. They had not believed that women were naturally saintly. Virtuous behaviour was a continuous daily struggle for everyone, not least

of all for women. Yet they had idealized marital love and the home, and they had enclosed women in the family. Finally, the confinement of religion itself to the family had helped to create the idea of the home as an island of peace in a troubled world, of women as custodians of goodness and spirituality.

Women's goodness came from, and could only be preserved through, isolation from the world. Women were seen as pure, innocent, child-like and asexual. Their asexuality also owed a special debt to the Protestants. The Protestants had defined, more explicitly than ever before, a single sexual standard based on the non-erotic sexual purity of the marriage bed, on one hand, and absolute abhorrence of adultery, on the other.

The double standard, however, after flourishing for centuries was almost impervious to Protestant teachings. So much so that, during the Interregnum, when adultery was made an offense - and a capital one at that - it only applied to women.²¹ The ineffectiveness of the Protestant teachings was compounded by two developments. The separation of work and home, with morality being confined to the latter, put fewer strictures on the behaviour of men outside the home. At the same time, the hardships of working class life were creating a greatly expanded population of prostitutes and potential mistresses.²²

Relationships between these women and the men of the bourgeoisie undermined the Protestant ideal of the faithful husband. To these liaisons were attributed all the mad passion and lust which had so astringently been set apart from marital sex. While men escaped into these illicit

relationships, the purity of conjugality flourished within the bourgeois home.

The religious strictures against adultery proved useful for the need of the bourgeoisie to produce only legitimate children. Female chastity was a priority, wrote Dr. Johnson, because "upon that all property in the world depends". The essence in the crime of adultery, "is the confusion of progeny". Therefore, he added, "wise married women don't trouble themselves about infidelity in their husbands (since they) impose no bastards upon their wives".²³ Johnson's concession to Protestant teachings that a man who commits adultery "is criminal in sight of God"²⁴ did little to redress the imbalance produced in sexual equality.

The non-erotic aspect of marital sexuality led the way to the ultimate protection for bourgeois property: the eighteenth century witnessed the triumph of the "new feminine ideal afforded by Richardson's Pamela (who fainted) at the first sexual advance, and (was) utterly devoid of feelings towards her admirer until the marriage knot was tied".²⁵ Less than a century later came the acceptance that properly brought-up women experienced no sexual feelings. "Happily for society" the supposition that women possess sexual feelings can be put aside as a "vile aspersion".²⁶ Women had finally been cleared of the most serious charge levelled at them by the Catholic Church: the desire and power to seduce men.

Perhaps if any one idea of the Protestants had contributed to keeping women within the home in the intervening centuries, it was their marrying of spiritual and conjugal love. Led to this by their desire to legitimate

marriage and avoid promiscuity, they developed it at a propitious moment in the history of the family. Its economic functions were declining; men were no longer dependent upon the labour of their wives; women no longer had important responsibilities to fulfill within the home.

The elevation of love as the chief ideological underpinning for marriage has been so successful in maintaining the nuclear family as an institution that it appears as a brilliantly executed move by its proponents. Shulamith Firestone, for example, writes that "romanticism is a cultural tool of male power to keep women from knowing their condition."²⁷

The Protestants did not, of course, give primacy to love within marriage. While love may have been, "the marriage vertue which sings Musicke to their whole life",²⁸ it was most certainly not its substance. That was provided by the economic and religious partnership of marriage. When this broke down, however, love was left as the sole legitimate reason for marriage. The elevation of love increased the emotional content of the husband-wife relationship. But for the man, love was still only part, and a small part, of his life. For women it became their *raison d'être*.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
"Tis woman's whole existence"²⁹

Women's economic dependence upon their husbands was matched then by an emotional dependence, their sense of self to come from the reflection in their beloved's eye.

Not being chosen to be a man's wife meant not having a home, not having a place in the world. When households were busy and multi-faceted there had been work for the unmarried woman. With the passing of production from the home, there was no role for her. She had no husband for whom to create a harmonious and boring retreat from the world.

"The subject (of surplus women) aroused anxiety, not because the numerical superiority of women was actually greater than previously - the contrary was the case - but because there was no longer a useful place in the family for the surplus woman to play." 30

Women had to cultivate those qualities which would make her appealing to a man. Puritans had urged wives be chosen for their godliness, unselfishness, modesty, cheerfulness and industry. In contrast, James Fordyce advised in 1766 that "men of sensibility" desire soft prettiness, fragility and tearfulness in women as well as cowardice. Since "an intrepid female seems to renounce our aid ... we turn away and leave her to herself". 31

Proletarian Women

The working class home provided neither the material nor the spiritual possibilities of retreat from the world. The women were depicted as evil, sexual, dirty, passionate, in contrast to the purity of bourgeois women. Without direct access to production, with totally inadequate wages, a high proportion of them supplemented their income with prostitution. 32 With no method of birth control, no means of protection from disease, there is no cause to romanticize the access to their own sexuality, which was denied bourgeois women. "It is, of course, impossible for us to live upon (my

wages)" a woman told Henry Mayhew, "and the consequence is I am obligated to go a bad way ... I am now pregnant ... If I had been born a lady, it would not have been very hard to act like one."³³ If the chastity of bourgeois women was the Protestant expression of mariology in capitalist society, the majority of women, working women, poor women, sometime prostitutes and their more professional sisters, carried the Catholic ideas of female evilness and seductiveness into the new society.

With what Zaretsky has called, "the proletarianization of personal life"³⁴ (a development which lies nearly two centuries beyond the time scope of this paper) working class women were expected to model themselves after the bourgeois ideal of woman despite "its glaring inappropriateness to a life of toil".³⁵

What then of the debate between a Marxist and a feminist perspective? In summary, what did they each contribute to this study of the changing role of women in the seventeenth century?

THE MARXIST-FEMINIST DEBATE: AN HISTORICALLY SPECIFIC EVALUATION

Marxist Analysis: A Marxist analysis of the period drew attention to the importance of the feudal mode of production in understanding the crucial role played by women of all estates in that society. At the same time it brought out the differences among women of different estates - differences which, for example, made it possible for Lady Margaret Hoby to keep a diary, women of the yeomanry to leave recipes, and for millions of peasant women to die leaving no record of their stay on this earth.

These differences between women crystallized and became polarized, as the feudal economic arrangements broke down and as two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, emerged in capitalist society. The women of the bourgeoisie were kept in physical comfort, in idleness and in a state of total dependence. Proletarian women lived out a continuous struggle, combining working and mothering, in a desperate attempt to feed their families.

The Marxist perspective showed that the mode of production affects the lives of women within their households. It further revealed how the exploitation of women of some feudal estates, and of women of the proletariat was manifested.

But a Marxist analysis omitted questions about the differences between men and women, between the different ideas a society holds about women and about men; about how and why those ideas change; questions, that is, about specifically female oppression.

Feminist Analysis: A feminist perspective using the concept of patriarchal ideology drew attention to the role of the Church in propagating ideas about female inferiority, about the proper relationship between husband and wife, about love and sexuality. Why did ideas about these subjects change during the seventeenth century? The Protestant embrace of life in the world, its rejection of celibacy, led to a radical re-appraisal of the family. The Protestants raised it from a third-rate place in the moral hierarchy to the status of "little church", an indispensable institution for the rearing and maintenance of the godly. Women

were made fit for this new family. While still inferior, they no longer carried the greater share of responsibility for the evilness of humanity.

The feminist perspective showed how the manifestations of patriarchal ideology changed without altering the power relationship between men and women. An army of modest, hardworking, loyal and godly wives became the fond dream of the preachers.

The dream did not come true. It was aborted through its historical contact with the changing mode of production. Understanding this development required an analysis of the interconnections between the Marxist 'findings' and the feminist 'findings'.

Marxist-Feminist Analysis: The home of the bourgeoisie was a very different place from that of his predecessor on the land, in a craft or in trade. Economically speaking, it was merely a shadow of that self-sufficient household. But the ideas of the Protestant religion were investing the home and family with an unprecedented ideological importance.

The partnership of marriage, economic and spiritual, and sweetened with love, had been the Protestant ideal of marriage. With the decline of the economic functions of the home, the spiritual partnership underwent a parallel erosion. Men were spending most of their time in a world untouched by religion, and their image was changing to suit the world of work, business, politics. The marriage was left with one spiritual partner, the woman. That was no longer a partnership. Spirituality merely became transposed into a quality of the dependent and powerless female member. The implications were heady: spiritual translated into innocent, innocent into child-like. Bourgeois women, mused Reuther, were "half angel, half idiot."³⁶

The Protestant views on the chastity of the marriage-bed collided with the separation of work and home. In that process they became transformed into the twin beliefs of female frigidity and male sexuality. Such men married to frigid women needed an outlet for their "natural impulse".³⁷ The impoverished women of the labouring classes were to provide it, becoming themselves the representation of the evil or fallen woman.

Love had been conceptualized by the Puritans as combining sensual and spiritual feelings within a conjugal setting. When love between two people was elevated as the only reason for marriage it was a gross violation of Protestant intentions. But the development and maintenance of a nuclear family useful to capitalist development owes a heavy debt to the Protestant idealization of love.

With the separation of work and home, the role of the family in society became obscured. Family life, intimacy, sexuality, love - and women - came to be seen as totally separate from the economic system. So did religion. Moral and ethical principles were shunted into the home, the arena for private life. Men were told how to treat their wives, their children, their parents, but not their workers, their business partners or their customers. Women on the other hand were told how to behave. This relegation of religion to the home gave substance to the growing belief that morality was an aspect of personal relations and, on the other hand, further legitimated the idea that the family played no part in the economy.

In this study, a feminist and a Marxist perspective illuminated different aspects of the changes in the position of women in the seventeenth century. The ideological mode of patriarchy and the mode of production lent themselves to independent but interlocking analysis. This perspective revealed both the differences among women and that which they share. Why then has there been resistance to this approach, why a debate between a Marxist and feminist understanding of the 'causes' of women's position in society?

An answer may lie in looking at this debate as an ideological dispute that arose as part of the history of Marxism and feminism.

THE MARXIST-FEMINIST DEBATE:
A QUESTION OF IDEOLOGY

Marxists have been anxious to maintain that the 'woman question' can be dealt with adequately within their own framework. Consequently, when there have been aspects of contemporary women's existence that cannot be easily identified as 'created' by capitalism, they have defined them as "institutional remnants left over from feudal structures".³⁸

Secondly, they have been unwilling to abandon the anthropology of Lewis Morgan as presented by Engels.³⁹ While the positing of a matriarchy prior to the accumulation of surplus wealth, has been discredited even by Marxists, there has still been an uneasiness about considering the consequences for women in any social system, of bearing the greater burden of perpetuating the species.

Thirdly, the crucial struggle for Marxists is the class struggle. Their priority has, therefore, been to define the position of working class women within that context. Marlene Dixon expressed why Marxists feel the position of women cannot be analyzed in and for itself.

"The ethic of sisterhood disguises and mystifies the internal class contradictions of the women's movement. Specifically, sisterhood temporarily disguises the fact that all women do not have the same interests, needs, desires: working class women and middle class women, student women and professional women, anglophone and francophone women have more conflicting interests than could ever be overcome by their common experience based on sex discrimination. The illusions of sisterhood are possible because Women's Liberation is a middle class movement - the voices of poor and working class women are only infrequently heard, and anglophone and francophone voices are heard separately." 40

Turning to feminism, its historical roots lie with bourgeois women, and their position in the late nineteenth century. Their life of ease and luxury, atop a pedestal, concealed the uselessness, idleness and dependence of their position. Millicent Fawcett, one of the leading English feminists, described how she was stirred into action for "the Women's Cause" when the futility of feminine existence was brought home to her in a flash of sudden insight. She overheard a conversation between two women making small articles of lace to be sold for charity. "What do you find sells best?" asked one. "Oh, things that are really useful such as butterflies for the hair," was the reply. 41

Similarly, in the late sixties the Women's Liberation Movement arose with middle class women. "The gap between the deprivation they suffered and glory they were supposed to enjoy" wrote Juliet Mitchell, "was sufficiently startling for them to challenge both." 42

The central issue for some women became the caste-like system in which the sexes related, rather than class. Shulamith Firestone was the most articulate advocate of that position.

"The contemporary radical feminist position sees feminist issues not only as women's first priority, but as central to any larger revolutionary analysis. It refuses to accept the existing leftist analysis not because it is too radical, but because it is not radical enough: it sees the current leftist analysis as outdated and superficial because this analysis does not relate the structure of the economic class system to its origins in the sexual class system, the model for all other exploitative systems and thus the tapeworm that must be eliminated first by any true revolution."

Through this period there have been those who attempted to use both a Marxist and a feminist analysis. This position has, on the one hand, recognized the impossibility of initiating an effective attack on women's oppression without challenging the capitalist system of economic exploitation. On the other hand, it has dwelt upon the centrality of specifically female oppression: the psycho-social system in which all women live out their lives, the way the family operates to keep women in an inferior place, the responsibility of caring for children, all the unnatural burdens arising from the natural processes of bearing and breastfeeding children.

The difficulty with this approach has been the rush to establish connections between exploitation based on class and oppression based on sex. The conclusions of this study indicate that they first require separate analysis.

This approach has revealed how the genesis of the present-day family and the roles that women play within it can be found in the interlocking and overlapping histories of the capitalist mode of production and the Protestant form of patriarchal ideology.

CONCLUSION

Alice Clark declared that "coming events cast their shadows before them", and that the shadows in the lives of women in the seventeenth century are still those of our contemporary life.⁴⁴ The working woman with no place to leave her child, the upper-middle class woman economically and emotionally dependent upon her husband, the privatized nature of the family which resists interference even in the case of battered children, the problematic nature of a loveless marriage, the social and psychological dilemmas for the unattached woman: these were not aspects of feudal life, but they were emerging in the seventeenth century and are still matters of personal anxiety and public discussion.

A Marxist and a feminist analysis have shown how these particular dilemmas, which are manifestations of the position of women in this society, can be seen in the context of, and as intrinsically related to, both the mode of production, the ideological mode of patriarchy and their interconnections. Juliet Mitchell reached a similar conclusion in her study of psychoanalysis. But she went further: analyzing the mode of production and the ideological mode of patriarchy separately was not only essential to understanding the position of women in society but also provided the means for seeing how it could be transformed.

"To put the matter schematically, in analysing contemporary Western society we are (as elsewhere) dealing with two autonomous areas: the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy. The interdependence between them is found in the particular expression of patriarchal ideology - in this case the kinship system that defines patriarchy is forced into the straightjacket of the nuclear family. But if we analyse the economic and the ideological situation only at the point of their interpenetration, we shall never see the means to their transformation."⁴⁵

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 1

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23. Weber, op. cit., p. 183. U
24. Patmore Coventry, as quoted in Eli Zaretsky, "Capitalism, Family and Personal Life," Socialist Revolution, N. 13-14 (Jan.-Apr. 1973), p. 102.
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CHAPTER 2-

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2. Dobb, op. cit., p. 230.
3. Christopher Hill, Reformation to Industrial Revolution (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 20.
4. Marx, op. cit., p. 471.
5. Klein, op. cit., p. 250. This requires some qualification. Houses must be cleaned, meals prepared, clothing washed so that what is bought with the wages can be used. This labour is housework. The significance in capitalist society that it has use value but not exchange value is most simply expressed by the common apology that one is "just a housewife".

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17. Power, in Crump, op. cit., p. 433. g
18. Tawney, op. cit.
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24. Hoskins, op. cit.; p. 147. Clark, op. cit., p. 43.

25. William Webb as quoted in Mildred Campbell, The English Yeoman (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1942), p. 244.
26. Tawney, op. cit., p. 409.
27. Campbell, op. cit., p. 251.
28. Power, in Crump, op. cit., p. 428.
29. "There was a work-home generation in feudal society which arose out of its own social relations. The villein had owed his lord a certain number of days work on his land in exchange for his own small plot. (Tawney, op. cit., p. 41) And the villein's wife would work their own land to provide food for her family. This custom, which by the seventeenth century had been replaced by rent payments, had produced a kind of work-home dichotomy.
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33. Laslett, op. cit., p. 149.
34. Clark, op. cit., p. 145.
35. Campbell, op. cit., p. 256.
36. Ibid.
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74. Gouge as quoted in Haller, op. cit., p. 247.
75. Ibid., p. 255.
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78. Ibid. Wright does not attribute this "new note of respect" for women to the Puritans, whom he claims reduced the controversy over women to "course invective" and "ribald satire" but rather to burgher writers "who were setting up some early landmarks in the literature of woman's rights".
79. Robert Cleaver as quoted in J. Espérance, op. cit., p. 7.
80. Daniel Rogers as quoted in Haller, op. cit., p. 269.
81. Ibid., p. 247.
82. C.H. and K. George claim, however, that Thomas Aquinas implicitly rejected spiritual equality between men and women.
83. Thomas Adams as quoted in C.H. and K. George, op. cit., p. 282.
84. Keith Thomas, op. cit., p. 332-57.
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115. M. George, op. cit., p. 165.
116. Lanndon-Davies, op. cit., p. 272.
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