

Eleanor Hubbard. *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 297. Cloth \$125.00

Eleanor Hubbard's book is an elegantly written account of women's experience in London from 1570 to 1640. Based primarily on the records of the Consistory Court, but supplemented by readings of ballads, pamphlets, and prescriptive literature, Hubbard argues that the constraints on women were not just those of gender; instead, she argues, London's magistrates were more concerned with economic order than sexual order. She builds this argument through both quantitative analyses of deponent biographies in the church courts, and detailed textual analysis of these life histories. She shows how women's opportunities, as well as the constraints on them, were connected to life-cycle changes.

Hubbard builds her argument through a careful exploration of women's lives. She begins with migration, and the reasons women moved to the capital. She demonstrates that young women servants did not spend long in any one household; they migrated to the city and around the city. Her biographical studies show that girls who came at younger ages stayed in households longer than those who came when older: they were servants, but it was a more familial setting.

Most young women were servants before they married. Thus Hubbard turns next to courtship and marriage, showing the ways in which women sought to balance personal affection with the approval of friends and family. Hubbard emphasizes the importance of money to successful marriage; poor women tended to marry older men or widowers, less valuable marriage partners. Her analysis of marriage litigation confirms that neither women nor men were independent in making choices about marriage, but rather both sought to satisfy family demands as well as personal desire. Not all young women navigated courtship successfully,

at least initially. A chapter on women who bore children out of wedlock is particularly intriguing in the way it shows that women who did so might later marry: unwed motherhood did not make marriage and respectability impossible. In this sense, she suggests, the importance of limiting the economic fall-out (and particularly the burden on poor relief) trumped the moral condemnation of sex outside of marriage.

Marriage, as we know, marked a major shift in women's identities, giving women authority as household mistresses. Hubbard's discussion is particularly interesting in charting the ways women's authority was felt to be particularly strong in assessing their daughter's marriages. She shows that women expected (and were expected) to help their husbands become good citizens; and that servants often sought to protect mistresses from abusive and violent husbands. What women valued most in their own reputations, she argues, was thrift and industry: it was work, not morality that mattered. A chapter on "Public Lives" shows the role of the neighborhood: London women were visible on the streets, and the neighborhood was an important site for women's reputations. Not only did women gossip in their doorways, but they aided their neighbors in times of sickness or when in childbed; they monitored, and sometimes served as arbitrators, in marital conflict. While women had few roles in formal institutions, they were active in the public world of the neighborhood. Two final chapters examine women's work in a range of trades (including crime and prostitution), as well as women's experience of death - whether of their husbands or their own.

Throughout, Hubbard has a gifted eye for the telling story which illustrates her points, though she is always careful to ground the patterns she seeks to illustrate in the quantitative analysis of her sources as well as the qualitative

analysis. While the specific findings will be unsurprising to scholars of early modern England, particularly those who have worked on gender, her focus on the life-cycle makes visible both the constraints and opportunities London offered women. Yet there are a number of outstanding questions that Hubbard does not address. Why life-cycle and economic constraints are described as opposed to, rather than intersecting with, those of gender? Hubbard is not engaged with the (surely relevant) feminist research on the ways hierarchies of class and age are inflected by gender: after all, historians of women since the 1980s have explored differences between women. More generally, while Hubbard has read the scholarship on women and gender in early modern England, she is rarely in dialogue with it. Finally, it would be useful to have further analysis at a number of points. How different is London from the rest of England, and in what ways? What is the relationship between popular literature and ecclesiastical court depositions, two very different literary genres? Such analysis would have more effectively situated Hubbard's work in the social and economic history of early modern England.

It is the sign of a good book that it raises questions. More importantly, Eleanor Hubbard's work makes visible the patterns of women's lives in London. This is a meticulously researched and well written book, which places women's life-cycle at the center of our vision.

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