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Review of Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England*

Carole Levin
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, clevin2@unl.edu

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Susan Dwyer Amussen. *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England.* New York: Basil Blackwell. 1988. Pp. xi, 203. $39.95.

Susan Dwyer Amussen has produced an extremely well-researched and gracefully written study on gender and class in early modern England. Amussen describes her work as in part a response to and continuation of the issues raised by the early classic study of Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*. Amussen argues that "Clark's mistaken placement of the change from household to capitalist production in the seventeenth century—at least a century before it actually took place—makes it incumbent on students of early modern England to continue to study the family as the fundamental economic unit of society in that period" (p. 1).

But Amussen's work, with its emphasis on the family in many aspects, goes far beyond the questions asked by Clark. Amussen also continues the argument of many early modern historians that the family in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England was not only the basic unit of political and social order, but also served as a metaphor for the state. To support

her contentions she provides a close analysis of the workings of a number of villages in Norfolk. Thus Amussen's work not only helps us to understand family and village history but also aids our understanding of political structure, and helps us to unravel the popular uses and the ideologies of the analogy often made by early modern theorists between family and the state. Amussen argues that study of the analogy between family and state forces us to examine both families and villages as not only economic but political entities.Amussen suggests that we cannot understand the politics of the state without understanding the politics of the family. Amussen's analysis examines two systems of social hierarchy: gender and class and rank. Her analysis of the question of reputation in village life suggests that appropriate behavior in early modern villages was first and foremost defined by gender. Her study gives us more insight into questions of power, constructions of authority, and gender relations, and fits in well with the work of other authors such as Keith Wrightson and Martin Ingram who are concerned with class and gender in this period. Amussen sees the early eighteenth century as the beginning of the distinction between public and private, a distinction which is not applicable when discussing England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The middle of the seventeenth century, with its battle between king and parliament, was an especially critical period of change in terms of family and its relation to social order.

Amussen's work also demonstrates a solid grounding in the secondary literature and she brings to her study an understanding of not only political and local history but the impact of religious and economic forces on culture. Amussen uses a wide variety of primary sources to sort out both the ideal and the reality of family life and its analogy with the ordering of society. She is particularly adept at reading marriage manuals and court cases. If there is a weakness to her work, it is in her use of many cases as examples without giving enough background.

Amussen's work is valuable reading for any student of early modern England. She demonstrates the connection between high politics and the social order of the villages. The construction of the world in the eighteenth century can be more thoroughly understood by the contrast with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the ways in which order was maintained in the family and the village. Also in this period the order within the family was a reflection of the attempt at order within the state. Amussen's study helps us to understand the development of the conception of public as opposed to private in terms of family and the state.

State University of New York College at New Paltz CAROLE LEVIN