REVIEW ARTICLE

WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE ROMAN FAMILY*

In 1810, a young woman from New Hampshire named Sarah Connell confided to her diary the nature of her feelings for Samuel Ayer, the man she was soon to marry:

> Absent from the *Man* who possesses my undivided heart, nothing interests me. I am alone in a crowd. I pass through life in a kind of stupid indifference to all around me. It is not a momentary romantic attachment I feel for Mr. Ayer. No, "It has severest virtue for its basis, and such a friendship ends not but with life."

Half a century later in Racine, Wisconsin, a certain Mary Butterfield wrote a letter to her fiancé, Champion Chase, in which she lingered over the intimacy of the experience they had shared the evening before:

> I did not feel so quiet a part of the time last night as I appeared & you supposed. Although I love you dearly & trust you so perfectly that I am perfectly willing & glad to make you happy by those favors which no one else in the wide world could obtain, yet even towards you I can not at once resign all the feelings which nature & education have fixed in my mind—I *was glad* afterwards when you seemed so sincerely pleased & happy—so *satisfied* with *me*.

It is from such personal records as these, available in great numbers over a long interval of time, that a history of courtship among the middle classes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America has been written, a history that describes and analyzes both the rituals and practices of courtship, and, as the opening quotations suggest, the private thoughts and inner feelings of the couples involved with them.[1] With each aspect change across time is perceptible. If church socials and neighborhood parties were once the predominant places for couples to spend time together, the nickelodeons, dance-halls, and tea-rooms of the late nineteenth century brought them a greater privacy than they had traditionally enjoyed, and with the automobile and the telephone came a greater independence too. Similarly, if in the age of Sarah Connell romance was a dangerous, even subversive, concept, by the time of Mary Butterfield its negative associations had been lost and romance

**War, Women and Children in Ancient Rome.* By John K. Evans. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. xvi + 263; 10 plates in text. $45.00.

The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present. Edited by David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991. Pp. xiii + 399; 15 tables, 1 fig. in text. $40.00.

Die Familie und weitere anthropologische Grundlagen. By Jens-Uwe Krause. Unter Mitwirkung von Bertram Eisenhauer, Konstanze Szelényi, und Susanne Tschirner. Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien, Band 11. Bibliographie zur römischen Sozialgeschichte, 1. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992. Pp. xii + 260. DM 68.00 (paper).

1. E. K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1987). The opening quotations are from pp. 39 and 126.

had come to be regarded as the essential ingredient of marriage. In the words of Ellen K. Rothman:

> [Romance] was no longer associated with wildness and youthful passion; it was made safe. Romance was redefined as the key to domestic harmony rather than as a threat to it. As romantic love became something to celebrate rather than mistrust, "falling in love" would become an increasingly normative part of middle class courtship.[2]

Change over time is a central concern of John K. Evans' book, *War, Women and Children in Ancient Rome,* and of the volume of papers edited by David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller, *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present,* more than a third of which is concerned with classical Rome. But I have introduced my discussion of them with an item from modern social history as a way of emphasizing the unavailability for Roman social history of a body of private evidence comparable to the diaries and letters of people like Sarah Connell and Mary Butterfield from which change can be easily and convincingly illustrated. The Romans of course wrote letters all the time. But those of Cicero apart very few have survived, and those that have are often no more than fragments (the private letters from Vindolanda, for example). The situation with journals is even worse. Consequently, although Susan Treggiari is able in her contribution to the Kertzer-Saller volume to identify the criteria by which elite Roman families arranged marriages for their children, and to establish the possibility that some couples shared intimate experiences before they married, little can be seen of courtship in Roman society in detail, "kisses and amorous conversation" aside (p. 106), of how or indeed whether conventions and attitudes altered from one generation to another.[3] Was there for instance any change in practice like the rise and decline of eighteenth-century bundling, or was there any significant shift in sentiment like that referred to by Rothman? How would we know?

Evans' subject is the change, or rather changes, that imperial expansion in the mid and late Republic brought to Roman society. He points in particular to an erosion of *patria potestas,* a growing independence among Roman women, and a new sensitivity to young children as three specific developments of large numbers of men being forcibly separated from their families by long periods of overseas military service. He investigates as well the fate of peasant women driven from the land when unable to survive without the men the Roman military machine consumed, finding that the phenomenon of expulsion was especially characteristic of Latium if not the whole of Italy. Ill-prepared for work in the city of Rome, to which they migrated, these women had to compete with slave labor and found few opportunities other than textile work and prostitution by which to support themselves. The argument is a powerful reminder that change is not always for the better. Overall, however, Evans contends that expansion had a liberating effect on Roman society: "so rigidly patriarchal a society as Rome of the Twelve Tables," he writes, "could not send hundreds of thousands of men abroad to prosecute wars of conquest that went on virtually without interruption for the last two hundred years of the Republic's

2. Ibid., p. 103.

3. See the full discussion in S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: "Iusti Coniuges" from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 83–160; and, further, eadem, "Conventions and Conduct among Upper-Class Romans in the Choice of a Marriage-Partner," *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 6 (1991): 187–215.

existence without inviting severe erosion of the institutions that kept women and children in thrall" (p. x). All in all, therefore, a gradual improvement over time.

Evans' book has much to offer of interest and appeal, and the inherent plausibility of his main thesis is made more attractive still by the analogy one might draw with the way in which the experiences of women who worked in untraditional ("male") roles during the two world wars permanently shaped the subsequent history of women, and that of men and children for that matter, in the later twentieth century. However, the main question Evans' work raises is whether the social trends he associates with Roman expansionist warfare are actually as historically valid as he takes them to be. He believes, for instance (pp. 171–72), that the infrequency of references in Plautus to children at play and the lack of Republican dolls in the archaeological record are signs that at one time Roman children had fewer opportunities to play, or that adults were less interested in children at play, compared, say, with the Principate, when Roman dolls are archaeologically well-attested and play is more visible in literature. The argument is intended to help show the phenomenon of "the emergence of the small child" (p. 4) that Evans adapts from M. Manson. But a host of queries at once obtrudes. Is it reasonable to expect any references to children at play in Plautus at all, in contrast for example to a work like that of Plutarch to his wife on the loss of their young daughter? If it is, what are they to be compared with earlier (or later), and what account has to be taken of literary antecedents? Is it of any relevance that "Republican" dolls have been found in southern Italy, in Greek Tarentum for example? Is it simply an accident of excavation that none have been found from Rome? What if children habitually played with straw dolls (cf. Petron. *Sat.* 63.8) or other perishable toys and what is the significance of the solitary reference to dolls in Varro (*Sat. Men.* 4)? In reviewing Thomas Wiedemann's book on Roman children in a recent issue of this journal (*CP* 86 [1991]: 258–63), I stated how difficult I think it is to prove such a development as the emergence of the child in the late Republic when the evidence for third-century Rome is so quantitatively and qualitatively different from that for first-century Rome. The difficulty seems no less real now.

The posited change from a harsh patriarchal regime at the time of the Twelve Tables to something far less severe by the end of the Republic brings up similar concerns. The literary evidence for archaic Rome is notoriously problematical, and on occasion (e.g., p. 192) Evans makes it clear that the legends recounted by authors such as Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus are more valuable for showing how ancient Roman history was conceived of in the central era than for anything else. Yet like Maurizio Bettini in *Anthropology and Roman Culture* (Baltimore, 1991), Evans seems prepared on other occasions to take the literary evidence very seriously indeed as evidence of authentic archaic social conditions (e.g., pp. 50–51 on Lucretia), a procedure that many may consider dubious for providing a secure basis from which to trace a historical trend, especially when the formal mitigation of *patria potestas* is illustrated from legal measures of imperial date (pp. 187–88). A. Drummond and T. J. Cornell have recently shown how knowledge of early Roman society is always likely to be incomplete and controversial.[4] But while there is little doubt that the patriarchal family was the basic social unit at Rome by the time

4. See their respective contributions to *The Cambridge Ancient History*[2], volume 7, part 2, eds. F. W. Walbank, A. E. Astin, M. W. Frederiksen, R. M. Ogilvie (Cambridge, 1989), chaps. 4–7.

of the Twelve Tables, the oppression patriarchy entailed may have been far less onerous than has traditionally been thought, if, as Drummond suggests, allowance is made for a low average life-expectancy that probably put an end to the effects of *patria potestas* for many individuals before they reached adulthood.[5] This in fact is the demographic argument that Richard Saller has advanced for the Principate—that *patria potestas* had a relatively limited effect on adult sons because most of them no longer had living fathers by the time of their first marriage; the image of the harsh *paterfamilias* was thus more symbolic than real.[6] Evans rejects Saller's argument outright, for reasons I do not fully understand (p. 205, n. 53). But there can surely be little doubt of its essential validity, even if some details are open to discussion.[7] The consequences for the trend Evans perceives may, therefore, be more serious than he is prepared to recognize. (And in any case, what happened between the middle of the fifth century and the point from which the last two centuries of the Republic are counted?)

The volume from Kertzer and Saller is concerned not only with change across Roman time but also with change (and continuity) in Italian family history all the way from antiquity to the modern era. The seventeen papers it contains were composed for a conference of historians and anthropologists held at Bellagio in 1988. The conference organizers hoped at the outset for a set of papers that might lead to "a developmental account of family life in Italy over two millennia" (p. 1), but in the event they settle for a more modest goal: stimulation of new questions and research into "how and why patterns of family life in Italy changed" from "the points of comparison and contrast between the chapters" (p. 19). In my judgment the book succeeds admirably in the ancillary aim of advancing the study of family life in Europe. But I suspect that most users will be specialists seeking the contents most pertinent to their own fields and interests rather than readers prepared to read the book in its entirety—and certainly the contributors as a group, the modern authors especially, pay little attention to each other's work. Here, accordingly, I intend to focus on the Roman papers, which deal variously with heirship strategies (Saller *ipse*), childrearing practices (Peter Garnsey), commemorative practices for the dead (Brent Shaw), matchmaking (Susan Treggiari, as already noted), the Augustan legislation on adultery (David Cohen), and the construction of kinship ties (Mireille Corbier). In her investigation of homicide for cause from antiquity to the present, Eva Cantarella also discusses the Augustan adultery law.

All the Roman papers are first-rate and stand as a tribute to firm editorial direction. They are essential reading. But before considering how they relate to the theme of change, I wish to make clear that the greatest impression the book leaves as a whole is that of the great divide, the "profound rupture" (p. 128), as Mireille Corbier calls it, between the world of classical Rome and later periods of Italian history. In examining medieval views of men's and women's roles in procreation, Jane Fair Bestor traces their classical roots—the continuity is there—but shows at the same time how they were already associated with new ways of conceptualizing

5. *CAH*[2] VII, 2:148.

6. R. P. Saller, "*Patria Potestas* and the Stereotype of the Roman Family," *Continuity and Change* 1 (1986): 7–22; idem, "Men's Age at Marriage and Its Consequences in the Roman Family," *CP* 82 (1987): 21–34.

7. See now T. G. Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society* (Baltimore, 1992).

the nature of family ties. Similarly, in another medieval paper, Michael Sheehan takes as his subject the problem sexuality posed for Christianity, arguing for its resolution first through the way Christian marriage, with its stress on the permanent and sacred character of the marriage bond, provided a safer refuge for sexual activity than its Roman counterpart, and secondly through the way Christian celibacy, encouraged by monasticism, offered a new alternative to conventional family life. Continuity with antiquity is again evident, but the sense of contrast is stronger still. Keith Hopkins has recently observed that the Romans were not just different but "dangerously different."[8] This book affirms that the "difference" of Roman society cannot be neglected whatever the attractions (and of course they may be many) of cross-cultural comparison.

Adding to a series of items that have become standard expositions, Shaw returns in his paper to the study of Latin sepulchral inscriptions, a medium of evidence that because of its survival in bulk and its relatively good regional and chronological distribution offers promising prospects for illustrating change. He argues for two developments: first an increase in the imperial age in the social valuation of children, especially on the part of the prime commemorators of deceased children, their parents; secondly a visible equalization of the sexes over time in terms, again, of the social valuation represented by dedications made to the dead. Both developments he restricts to the urban populations of the western empire (because of the provenience of the inscriptions), so that their relevance to the much larger rural populations must be left in abeyance. Nonetheless, by tracing patterns of commemoration in nearly 55,000 inscriptions, Shaw is able to claim in the imperial period a "massive shift in the public valuation of men, women, and children in Roman society in the west" (p. 89). This he associates with the proposition that "the small, or simple, family unit was almost certainly more typical of the mass of the urban-centered populations" than the "complex family" of the upper classes (p. 72), in support of which he points to the constant manumission of slaves in cities, the patterns of ex-slave labor and perhaps Christianity as well, as factors promoting familial simplicity.

Shaw begins his chapter with an epigraph, an inscription representative of the texts on which his study is based (though because of the urban-rural split not necessarily representative, in sentiment and expression, of the whole Roman world):

> Dis Manibus T. Flavi Romuli, vixit annis X, mens. VIIII,
> dieb. XII fec. T. Flavius Primigenius et Flavia Romula
> filio carissimo.

The inscription is not discussed in detail (nor for that matter is any other), but it is worth a moment's reflection, I think, on what it can and cannot show. Clearly enough it concerns a simple family group, a deceased boy and his parents, all of whom are free. The common *nomen* of the parents suggests a common servile background, but whether Primigenius and Romula were ex-slaves, Junian Latins, or *ingenui* it is impossible to say with utter certainty. Their juridical status, and hence their social status, is in doubt. More importantly, the inscription will not

8. K. Hopkins, "From Violence to Blessing: Symbols and Rituals in Ancient Rome," in *City-States in Classical Antiquity & Medieval Italy*, ed. A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, J. Emlen (Ann Arbor, 1991), pp. 479–98, at p. 482.

show whether Primigenius and Romula had been married before they married each other, and if so whether their current family group included offspring from those unions (i.e., stepchildren, or half-siblings for Romulus); it will not show whether grandparents or other relatives were living with Romulus and his parents at the time of his death; and it will not show whether Primigenius and Romula had other children, now or later, or whether they entered new marriages at some future date. Instead, like the photograph of the modern Italian family on the dust-jacket of the Kertzer-Saller volume—a picture of two young children and a set of grandparents, it seems—the inscription shows just a single moment in a family's life-course, frozen in time, that is necessarily partial and that raises as many questions as it answers. (And where are the Italian children's parents?)

In elite Roman society, family complexity was governed by factors such as premature death, especially premature spousal death, divorce, and serial marriage. As far as I know, these factors were not unique to one sector of Roman society alone. Thus the simple structure of Romulus' family suggested by his inscription may in the end be more apparent than real. It will not follow of course that posited trends in the social valuation of individuals are misconceived, but the argument that a typical simple family form is verifiable from Roman sepulchral inscriptions is to my mind questionable, no matter how many tombstones are amassed in support. Three of the later papers in the Kertzer-Saller volume that deal with Italian family life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show that the modern Italian family never adhered to one type or form at all, but followed several patterns, in part because of regional considerations, a variable on which Shaw places a great deal of emphasis.[9] This evidence suggests a need for considerable flexibility in defining the form, or forms, of the Roman family.

Like sepulchral inscriptions, Roman law is another category of evidence that has a high potential for revealing historical change since it is by nature a developmental, and incremental, body of material. Evans argues, for example (pp. 13–14), that the legal position of Roman women changed profoundly under the Principate, on the basis of a series of legal items whose chronology is generally clear. In his discussion of heirship strategies, however, Saller goes beyond the bare legal record to show what prompted the law to adapt and develop. He does this by setting law in the context of the demographic construct I mentioned earlier, taking it as axiomatic that almost all adult Romans had lost their fathers by the time they were forty and that less than half of adults aged twenty had fathers who were still alive. He maintains that within this very severe demographic regime, where death was utterly unpredictable, testators' wishes could be easily upset: children intended to become heirs might die before they had the chance to inherit; those who inherited might be too young to be able to administer their inheritances; the economic future of children might be put in jeopardy by a parent who remarried. Situations were thus created in which testators needed to give themselves maximum maneuverability to ensure that property would go where they wanted it to go, and this explains why over time the Romans were continually inventing and refining new legal

9. Observe the unambiguous statement of M. Barbagli: "If one thing emerges clearly from all the data we have examined, it is that Italy, unlike other European countries, has always had multiple systems of household formation, not just one system" (p. 257).

instruments such as *fideicommissa* and *tutela* to guarantee their wishes. The paper is a remarkable demonstration of how Roman society actually functioned, as also of the "difference" created by death's failure to follow a generational course. The observation, "only a minority of Romans inherited as full adults" (p. 37), is sobering indeed.

Cohen is also concerned with legal evidence and again to good effect, though his strategy is to look at law from a strictly anthropological perspective. He sees the Augustan marriage laws as a massive, revolutionary attempt at social engineering designed to transfer regulation of marriage, divorce, and sexuality from the private to the public domain. But he concentrates especially on the Augustan adultery law, which he explicates in terms of notions of honor and shame evident in traditional Mediterranean societies, identifying three factors that influenced how the Romans evaluated sexual conduct (or misconduct): a very heavy emphasis, first, on female sexual purity; the idea, secondly, that a man's honor was judged by the degree to which the chastity of his womenfolk was maintained; and thirdly, the ambivalent reaction in men evoked by the male adulterer—regard for the enhancement of masculinity on one hand, the fear of family disruption on the other.[10] He then concludes that the adultery law was an act of social policy intended not to counter widespread degeneracy in the Roman upper classes or to impose a new morality upon them, but to confront the perception that the elite were not reproducing themselves in sufficient numbers. A similar methodology is used by Cantarella, who argues that the Augustan innovation of sanctioning the killing of adulterers for reasons of *iustus dolor* led naturally to the medieval and modern concepts of homicide *honoris causa* and *causa d'onore*. The result was a static, but powerful ideology across an enormous interval of time that required men to avenge the dishonor that inevitably befell them when their wives and daughters lapsed into adultery.

The amount of Roman law that survives is enormous. But it is not always enormous enough for the true significance of all of the law's many aspects to be understood in detail: developments in the history of the law of dowry, for example, can be followed no more than imperfectly.[11] The use therefore of sociological and anthropological filters through which to run the evidence for new insights is undoubtedly worthwhile, and the honor and shame framework that Cohen and Cantarella adopt seems to me to have much to recommend it. Not everyone will agree. Treggiari has already denied the relevance of the concept to the history of Roman marriage on the grounds that the Romans had no word for cuckold, no tradition of duelling (as Ronald Syme was inclined to note), and no real idea at all of avenging male dishonor.[12] Yet in Apuleius' story of the miller's adulterous wife—to take just one example—the phrases used of the abused miller, *erili contumelia, damno pudicitiae magnopere commotus,* and *corruptarum nuptiarum vindicata perfruebatur* (*Met.* 9.27–28), seem to provide such a close fit that it is difficult to see why the concept is not relevant. The issue will doubtless provoke more debate. Here, however, Cohen's

10. See for fuller discussion, D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 54–69.

11. See Treggiari, *Roman Marriage,* pp. 323–53, with the caution: "the sources from which we could construct a full account of chronological development are lacking" (p. 324).

12. Ibid., pp. 311–13.

conclusions strike me as less imaginative than the manner in which he reaches them, and Cantarella's study could certainly be taken to a deeper level of discussion to become impregnable. As for Saller's demographic filter, Evans as already seen is one who is not altogether persuaded by his results, though I suspect he will prove to be in a minority; it would be helpful, however, if Saller were now to respond with a full account of how the view of the Roman population he has drawn on repeatedly in his work was conceived and developed.

The remaining papers fall into a different methodological category altogether. Rather than taking change from one age to another as the element of history that must always be demonstrated, they prefer to concentrate on Rome's central era, which they regard as a single entity, and to evoke the characteristics of an age that was essentially changeless for the duration. (There is an obvious link with the view of P. A. Brunt, that Rome's social and economic structures remained static during the Roman revolutionary era, change being confined to the political and constitutional domain.)[13] Thus in her provocative paper on the interplay between objective criteria and personal considerations in the arrangement of upper-class marriages, Treggiari is explicit: "there was no fundamental division between the ideals and practices of selection of husbands and wives among the aristocracy *between the time of Cicero and the time of Ulpian*" (p. 108, my emphasis). Likewise, in a careful treatment of the extraordinary flexibility the Romans allowed themselves in creating kinship ties, as they manipulated marriage and divorce, adoption and filiation with great freedom, Corbier stresses the unique nature of a society that was the same from century to century, as far as its social ideology is concerned. There is much in my view to be said for an approach of this sort, because it allows a mental mosaic of the central era to be pieced together from dozens and dozens of fragments of evidence that individually seem to offer very little. Treggiari remarks in this connection that while in the age of Cicero there is evidence of "the joys of life in the close family circle of husband, wife, and children," a "trend" towards "heightened expectations of emotional rewards in marriage" (p. 105) cannot be proved because sufficient evidence on the emotional content of Roman family life at earlier periods is lacking. A similar set of assumptions underlies Garnsey's important examination of childrearing practices. But here issues are raised that go very much beyond the question of social change and how to document it.

As Treggiari's study indicates, one of the biggest problems that family historians face is that their subject involves issues of emotion and sentiment that are very difficult to objectify and to measure. In dealing with them, therefore, historians expose themselves to the charge of excessive subjectivity or anachronism, the risk being that their own contemporary standards and views will play too large a role, even if only implicitly, in how they recreate the past. Evans is confident that there was a growing sentimentalization of Roman family life in the late Republic. A comparable view is taken by Suzanne Dixon in her new book, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore, 1992).[14] Treggiari, both here and in *Roman Marriage,* is eloquent on the affective content of marriage at Rome, arguing for the existence of widespread

13. P. A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 9–12.

14. See also S. Dixon, "The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome,* ed. B. Rawson (Oxford and Canberra, 1991), pp. 99–113.

romantic love in society at large.[15] But it is the implication of Garnsey's paper that views of this kind are all misapprised.

Garnsey's subject is parental attitudes to infants and young children.[16] He begins from the fact that the young died in antiquity at rates that by modern western standards are appallingly high. But he argues that historians should not worry whether parents were indifferent to child death as a result, as some have in fact done, but should direct their energies to reconstructing the sociocultural and socioeconomic context in which the heavy mortality occurred. Indifferent by whose standards is the question that troubles him. He emphasizes the harshness of a child-rearing regime that denied infants colostrum, encouraged wetnursing and swaddling, and gave weaning infants foods that were low in nutritional value and led to undernourishment and disease. But he maintains that scientific ignorance explains these habits better than any emotionally-based theory of indifference, and that many of the habits were practised because parents valued children very highly indeed and believed them ways of helping infants to reach a point of true viability. The religious rituals intended to safeguard newborns should also be seen as evidence of parental caring for the young. Consequently, "the social norms and cultural practices of a prescientific society" are the objects on which historians should focus their attention, not "theories of affective relationships" (p. 65). Once this is recognized, issues of emotion—of "indifference, neglect, and cruelty" (p. 64), in this case—can be properly set aside.

This seems to me to represent a real challenge. The past has to be re-created on its own terms, it appears, in a sort of intellectual vacuum where the historian casts aside all personal and presentist influences that might distort the re-creation. It is a point of view similar to that expressed by F. Millar in the preface (p. xii) to *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977), where Millar warns against "contaminating" the past with the present. But it is an idea that raises two fundamental questions (at least) about the very practice and purpose of history. First, is such a separation between past and present possible, or is it not rather the case that the decision to pursue any historical investigation automatically requires choice of a personal and subjective sort that must be repeated many times before the investigation concludes? Secondly, is a separation between past and present desirable if, as may be the case, the final product is seen repeatedly to have minimal relevance to the present? Who will want to know, and who, in particular, will want to know of a human past from which all human emotion has been stripped away as far as its family history is concerned?

There is much of course to be said against distorting history with heavy-handed moralizing undertaken from an assumed vantage-point of contemporary superiority. Yet it is unlikely that for most historians history can ever be anything but a dialogue between the present and the past. It is the "cultural practices and social values" (p. 51) of the past that have to be understood, according to Garnsey; but if the conclusion is then reached that the "Romans placed a high value on their babies" (p. 56), meaning will fail unless the statement is assumed to stand in relation

15. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, pp. 253–61.

16. See also on this subject, B. Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships in Roman Society," in Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children*, pp. 7–30.

to a standard of experience and knowledge the historian has imposed upon the past from his (in this case) own world. The conclusion, that is to say, is value-laden in more senses than one. It seems to me that the step between "values" and the emotions of indifference, cruelty, and neglect may not be all that great, and for family historians the challenge is surely to find a way of taking that step that adds life and vitality to the bare bones of history without creating a monster in the process.

Certainly one might say that Roman family history is now at something of a crossroads. Both of the books under discussion reflect the explosion of interest in the subject over the last decade or so that has created virtually a new field of Roman history. The proof lies in the recent publication of a source book on the Roman household for undergraduate teaching purposes.[17] (And as anyone who has taught the subject will appreciate, part of the subject's appeal is to be found in its "affective relationships" content: that is what students want to know about.) Just how enormous the general scholarly literature on family-related topics is can be gathered from the bibliography compiled by Jens-Uwe Krause, which gives a total of 4,336 items that Krause has organized under a sequence of major rubrics: demography, women, marriage, family and kinship, sexuality, the life course, death, and burial. The book is an invaluable resource to have at one's disposal, even if the prospect of trying to master its contents induces despair: there is simply too much for one lifetime. Its excellent indices make it easy to use and it incorporates some items from as recently as 1991. Users will at once want to bring it up to date by adding the volumes by Evans and Kertzer-Saller and the other major works referred to earlier.[18] But the question that remains is where the subject as a whole will go, and how the past will be explored, now that the first wave of the new family scholarship has crested. To the extent that they can be carried out, more regional studies are needed, as the modern Italian papers in Kertzer-Saller suggest and as Saller himself notes in introducing the Roman papers (p. 25). Of equal importance, more studies of the household on the lines laid down by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill are also desirable, studies that will perhaps bring greater benefits still if there is more collaboration in the future between social historians and art historians than has traditionally been the case.[19] Whatever the directions taken, however, the barrier raised by the lack of private sources will always remain. It can be seen and taken into account; it can be skirted or approached quite closely; but it can never be overcome.

To my mind, however, there are also some conventional literary sources that have not been fully exploited for the glimpses they give of Roman family life and the attitudes that went with it. The correspondence of Pliny is one such example. To conclude, therefore, I wish to point to some features of the family comportment and behavior on evidence in Pliny's *Epistulae* that strike me as particularly interesting when set against the background of the various family topics that have been mentioned above. The evidence is still dreadfully inadequate when compared to

17. J. F. Gardner and T. Wiedemann, *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (London and New York, 1991).

18. Note also particularly, A. McLaren, *A History of Contraception from Antiquity to the Present Day* (Oxford, 1990).

19. A. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *PBSR* 56 (1988): 43–97; idem, "Houses and Households: Sampling Pompeii and Herculaneum," in Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children*, pp. 191–227.

the private documents available to modern historians (as in the history of American courtship): it covers a very brief span of time, and because it was meant from the outset for a public audience it is not the place to look for the innocent expression of private thoughts and inner feelings. On the other hand its public character lends the material a certain conventional plausibility: the historian sees now what an upper-class male writing at the turn of the second century wanted an audience of his social peers to see and, for the most part, to approve. It cannot illustrate or illuminate society as a whole, but it is a window through which to look for signs of mentality, and at the moment that may be all that is possible.[20]

Marriage in Pliny is brought into being principally as a result of decisions taken by men. Both in the upper echelons of society and elsewhere, fathers choose husbands for their daughters from pools of available candidates, basing their decisions on such considerations as the candidates' social standing, family pedigree, political profile, wealth, and general character. These elements emerge most clearly of all in a letter on the merits of Minicius Acilianus of Brixia, whom Pliny recommends to Junius Mauricus as a suitable match for his niece. (When a woman has no father to make the choice for her, an uncle will naturally assume the responsibility, seeking the advice of a male associate as he sees fit.) Even if the father professes comparatively liberal ideas on marriage and the education of women, he will still follow convention and choose a husband for his daughter himself. The participation of women in the process, especially the marrying women, is hardly to be found. Only in the case of Pliny's own marriage to Calpurnia is the determining presence of a woman seen, that of Calpurnia's aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla, who Pliny says chose her niece and Pliny for one another. Calpurnia was young enough to be Pliny's daughter when she married him and at that time had no known living relatives except Hispulla and her aged grandfather, Calpurnius Fabatus.[21]

Pliny tends not to name the women destined to become the wives of men when he writes about the mechanics of mate selection. They exist only as the relatives of fathers, uncles, or grandfathers, not as individuals in their own right. (Even Calpurnia is a brother's daughter when Pliny addresses Hispulla.) If these women had opinions of their own about any of the candidates from whom their husbands were to be selected, Pliny does not register them nor does he intimate that they may have done so. He comments in the letter recommending Minicius Acilianus on the man's good looks (they were a fair exchange for the niece's virginity) for the reason that Minicius looks the model of a Roman senator and so will impress the uncle, not because Pliny is concerned about the feelings of the niece. As for sentiment, Pliny speaks of his own love for Minicius, but in the catalogue of qualities he advances to Junius Mauricus there is no hint of any attachment between Minicius and the young woman. It is not obvious why it should have been inappropriate to say so had a sentimental tie between the two existed.[22]

20. In what follows all textual references are to Pliny's *Epistulae*. I give a summary note at the end of each paragraph in the interests of efficiency.

21. *Ep.* 1.14, 5.16.6, 6.26, 1.10.8, 3.11.7; 4.19.8 (see R. Syme, *Roman Papers VII* [Oxford, 1991], pp. 509–10, 554–55).

22. *Ep.* 1.14.1 *fratris tui filiae*, 4.19.1 *filiamque eius*, 4.21.1 *Helvidiarum sororum*, 5.16.1 *Fundani nostri filia*, 6.26.1 *filiam tuam*, 6.32.1 *tuam filiam, Tutili neptem*. 1.14.8 (cf. 7.24.3), 1.14.10.

The *raison d'être* of marriage is to produce the next generation of the family line. Reproduction in the world of Pliny is viewed as a civic duty, which every married man has an obligation to fulfill. If Minicius Acilianus is the man who will father grandchildren for the dead Arulenus Rusticus, Fuscus Salinator must make Julius Servianus a grandfather as soon as possible and Saturius Firmus is to be credited because he has already made his father-in-law a grandfather. Pliny's interest in this is indeed very personal: it becomes incumbent upon him after his marriage to Calpurnia to produce great-grandchildren for Calpurnius Fabatus and successors for himself. But the contribution women make to maintaining the family again elicits little comment, though Pliny is very much aware of how *fecunditas* defines a woman.[23]

There is no sign in Pliny that love is a prerequisite for marriage, but love may develop between husband and wife once their life together has begun. The clearest expression comes from Pliny's letters to Calpurnia, in which he speaks of his love for his own wife at a time when circumstances have temporarily separated them. He misses her deeply, the separation is not something they are used to, and they correspond frequently, it seems, to console themselves. At one point Pliny draws on the passionate language of poetry to communicate his distress, but precisely when his feelings became so intense he does not say. In any case the sense of intimacy conveyed by these letters (and there are only three, and all quite short) does not carry over into the letters Pliny writes about, rather than to, Calpurnia. Because Calpurnius Fabatus is eager for great-grandchildren and Hispulla was Pliny's matchmaker, Pliny reports to both on significant points in his marital history—the way Calpurnia is turning into a model wife, the fact that she miscarries. Touches of affection appear in such letters, but there is a cool detachment at the same time that makes the overall situation "different" and that reflects, I think, how a Roman husband (here a man in his middle forties), socially obliged to give a periodic account to her relatives of the state of his relationship with his wife, understood that marriage was much more concerned with the well-being of a large family group than with the personal contentment of the husband and wife themselves. Given Pliny's evidence on the way marriage begins and the expectations that were held of it, this could hardly be otherwise. Marriage may well take on a companionate quality, and the loss of a spouse after many years of living together may well be a tragedy. But there is little notion of equality between husband and wife, and the success of a good marriage is stated in negative terms—the absence of strife. A man is expected to mold a wife's tastes to his own and she is expected to adapt accordingly. To the degree, therefore, that marriage is a partnership it is very one-sided. When Pliny writes of his daily regimen, Calpurnia hardly figures at all.[24]

Children are not on great display in Pliny, especially very young children. He recognizes that play forms part of the world of the child and he has a keen interest in education, recommending teachers to parents who consult him and generously promoting a new school in his native Comum. He communicates as well his desire for children of his own in the felicitous era of Trajan. Yet childraising itself he regards as tedious and laborious, a burden and an expense.[25]

23. *Ep.* 1.14.2, 6.26.3, 4.15.3–4; 8.10; 4.15.3, 4.21.2, 8.10.2.
24. *Ep.* 6.4, 6.7, 7.5; 4.1, 4.19, 8.10, 8.11; 3.1.5, 8.5; 1.16.6; 9.36.4.
25. *Ep.* 9.33.3, 5.16.3, 2.18, 3.3, 4.13; 10.2; 1.8.11, 1.14.9, 4.15.3.

It is older children who command Pliny's interest, those who after the dangerous years of infancy stand on the threshold of adulthood and promise soon to add to the luster of their families. The assumption is strong that boys especially should emulate the achievements of their male forebears. Thus the son of Corellia Hispulla, at about the age of fourteen, is to follow in Pliny's estimation the guiding steps of his two grandfathers, his father and his father's brother, men who all in their turn had risen to the consulship. But even a girl can be her father's image and through careful collocation can serve the family cause. Not every man of course was a proper example for his son to follow: Aquillius Regulus' son was virtually doomed from birth. But it is the prospect of *honores* in the next generation that comes to Pliny's mind when he thinks of sons of his own, achievements in public life that will add to those of the past and the present. In all of this affective interest is minimal. Pliny professes tolerance of a youth's excesses when a stern father reproves, and there is sympathy and sensitivity in his portrait of Minicia Marcella, prematurely dead in her early teens. But children, like women, are seen less as individuals then as links in a family chain, and infants are the weakest links of all.[26]

The complex family, prone to disruption and reconstitution, is much in evidence in Pliny's society, the result of three well-attested factors. First there is death, which strikes not just the elderly but friends and associates of every age: children, young men in their prime, the newly married, young women in childbirth. (Premature death, when it occurred, cannot have been an unanticipated tragedy.) Secondly, new marriages: Pliny chooses not to mention divorce, but he knows not least from his own experience that early spousal death will quickly lead to remarriage for the surviving partner. Regulus is too old to marry again, he says, but the remark is spiteful. Thirdly, survival to an advanced age: if the great-grandparents of grown men and women observable near Tifernum Tiberinum are exceptional, there are still more elderly people in Pliny than perhaps one might expect. The following items are variously instructive. Ummidia Quadratilla, of pantomime fame, lived to almost eighty, Pliny's *tutor* Verginius Rufus to eighty-three; the father of Attia Viriola disinherited her when he remarried at the age of eighty, *amore captus* (the tone is reproachful), and Vestricius Spurinna was still going strong at seventy-seven, despite the loss of his adult son.[27]

As for the rest, observe that Pliny's one-time mother-in-law Pompeia Celerina was remarried when Pliny married her daughter, and Anteia, the widow of Helvidius Priscus (victim of Domitian), later became the wife of a man Pliny chooses not to identify. Helvidius' two daughters each died giving birth to daughters of their own; Junius Avitus had been married only a year when he died, leaving an infant daughter with his wife and mother; even Regulus did not deserve the loss of his teenage son. Ummidius Quadratus grew up in his grandmother's household; Voconius Romanus was adopted by his step-father; Calpurnia was raised by an aunt (no husband is on record) who lived with her father, and Pliny himself was adopted by an uncle who shared his house with his sister.[28]

26. *Ep.* 8.13, 3.3 (see Syme, *Roman Papers VII*, pp. 594–602); 5.16.8; 4.2.1; 8.10.3; 9.12, 5.16; 4.21.

27. *Ep.* 1.12, 2.1, 3.7, 7.24, 8.5, 8.18, 4.2, 4.7, 5.16, 2.7, 3.10, 5.21, 8.23, 4.21; 9.13.4, 4.2.6–7; 5.6.6; 7.24.1, 2.1.4, 6.33.2, 3.1.10 (cf. 3.7).

28. *Ep.* 9.13.13, 9.13.16; 4.21.4, 8.23.7, 4.2.1; 7.24.3, 10.4.4, 4.19.6 (cf. 4.1.7, 5.14.8), 5.8.5, 6.16.4, 6.20.4.

When Domitius Tullus died and left a surprisingly honorable will, his family comprised his wife, a widow he had married late in life who had children of her own, his adoptive daughter, Domitia Lucilla, who was by birth his niece (his now dead brother's daughter), his grandsons by Domitia, and a great-granddaughter. In the letter describing the will, Pliny does not mention Domitia's husband, who may at this time have been P. Calvisius Tullus Ruso (perhaps her third husband), but it is clear enough from what he says that his conception of the Roman family made every allowance for the practical consequences of early death, remarriage, and old age. His way of thinking about the family is expressed at times by the phrase *tota domus,* which he takes to include as many generations and as many collaterals as necessary. From the whole family of Minicius Acilianus, it is his father, grandmother, and uncle who particularly help to promote his cause; from that of Sextus Erucius, a political candidate, his father and uncle. The son of Helvidius must grow to resemble both father and grandfather. There are in fact no limits in Pliny to the extensive character of the family, for one set of ties is always being added to another as nature and time take their course. Once married to Calpurnia, Pliny quickly contracts obligations to Calpurnius Fabatus, assuming the role of a son, but his relationship with Pompeia Celerina remains still a relationship with a mother-in-law; that is how he addresses her long after her daughter's death, and when he thanks Trajan for a favor on her behalf and that of her relative Caelius Clemens, both clearly belong in Pliny's mind to *his* family: "Ex illo enim et mensuram beneficii tui penitus intellego, cum tam plenam indulgentiam cum tota domo mea experiar . . . " (*Ep.* 10.51.2).[29]

In this assemblage of frozen moments from Pliny there is an austerity of attitude that might recall the patriarchal austerity of the ancient Roman family Romans of the central era sometimes liked to imagine. (And Pliny makes clear, indeed, that *patria potestas* was not meaningless in his day.) It might recall too the austerity of the traditional portraits of married couples, who as they clasp hands to symbolize their married state never seem to smile. Whether the attitude had changed from earlier times, or how much it had changed, is best left as a question: other indications of mentality need first to be contrasted and compared. And all of course was not gloom: *tot spes, tot gaudia,* despite the shadow of death (*Ep.* 8.23.7). Pliny's evidence nonetheless has a certain suggestiveness for conceptualizing the nature of the Roman family, at the heart of which lies the complete subordination of the individual to the extensive family group. That is not necessarily dangerous at all, but the difference is unmistakable.[30]

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29. *Ep.* 8.18 (see R. Syme, *Roman Papers V* [Oxford, 1988], pp. 527, 532–34); 1.14.6, 2.9.3, 4.21.4; 5.11, 6.12, 6.30, 7.11, 7.16, 7.23, 7.32, 8.20.3; 1.4, 3.19.8, 6.10.1.

30. *Ep.* 4.2.2, 10.11.