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Love and Order: William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622)

Karen Harvey

I remember that when these Domesticall Duties were first uttered out of the pulpit, much exception was taken against the application of a wives subjection to the restraining of her from disposing the common goods of the family without, or against her husbands consent. But surely they that made those exceptions did not well thinke of the Cautions and Limitations which were then delivered, and are now againe expresly noted: which are, that the foresaid restraint be not extended to the proper goods of a wife, no nor overstrictly to such goods as are set apart for the use of the family, nor to extraordinary cases, nor alwaies to an expresse consent, nor to the consent of such husbands as are impotent, or farre and long absent. [...] I take the maine reason of the many exceptions which were taken, to be this, that wives duties (according to the Apostles method) being in the first place handled, there was taught (as must have beene taught, except the truth should have beene betrayed) what a wife, in the uttermost extent of that subjection under which God hath put her, is bound unto, in case her husband will stand upon the uttermost of his authority: which was so taken, as if I had taught that an husband might, and ought to exact the uttermost, and that a wife was bound in that uttermost extent to doe all that was delivered as dutie, whether her husband exact it or no. But when I came to deliver husbands duties, I shewed, that he ought not to exact whatsoever his wife was bound unto (in case it were exacted by him) but that he ought to make her a joynt Governour of the family with himself [...].¹

William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* is one of the most sophisticated post-Reformation conduct books written in English and the first substantial Puritan analysis of household duties. The book is a weighty tome both in topic and physical size. The first edition of 1622 ran to 693 pages and this

was supplemented by 23 pages of family prayers by the third edition of 1634. This is a large book to digest, to be sure. Yet William Gouge (1575–1653), a famous Puritan preacher in London, intended his work not as a philosophical text on which high-minded readers would ruminate at their leisure. Rather, Gouge designed the book as a daily guide to family life. Books such as this on the family engaged with some of the most pressing public and political matters of the time. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were characterized by demographic and economic change which had further divided the rich and poor in England. This generated social disorder, or fear of that disorder, and long-held views that the family was central to social and political order meant that attention became focused acutely on the family and the maintenance of its government.² It was in this context that, '[c]ontemporary writers constructed a household that was a microcosm of the whole kingdom, hierarchically ordered by bonds of obedience'.³

The opening of Gouge's book belies this larger context, though, and roots the work firmly in the practical life of people's families in a London parish. Gouge's dedication to his parishioners at St. Ann Blackfriars church in London flatters its readers, as all dedications must. The first sentence of the dedication – and thus of the book – characterizes the relationship between Gouge and the men and women who thronged St. Ann Blackfriars in a striking way, as one of '*intire love*' (i). Gouge here foregrounds the affective nature of human relationships, as he goes on to do in his discussion of the family. Yet the remainder of the dedication and large sections of the main text suggest conflict with these parishioners as much as harmony. Indeed, the book was clearly rooted in a dynamic relationship between this charismatic preacher and his congregation. Gouge first presented these ideas orally, in sermons, and the community of his congregation then discussed them. *Of Domesticall Duties* was a series of sermons to Londoners before it was a patriarchal text. Gouge's description of the sermons and ensuing debate show that his initial emphasis on a husband's principal authority over the family was not met with universal acceptance:

I remember that when these Domesticall Duties were first uttered out of the pulpit, much exception was taken against the application of a wives subjection to the restraining of her from disposing the common goods of the family without, or against her husbands consent. (iv)

It is surely a reflection of the strength of opposition he faced, his desire to satisfy his congregation, his wish to make his book relevant and useful, as well as his belief in a husband's ultimate authority as Christian truth, that Gouge subsequently amended his book. Indeed, for all the significance of this text

as a patriarchal landmark, it is remarkable that it contains a retraction of some of his comments about women: '[t]his just Apologie I have been forced to make, that I might not ever be iudged (as some have censured me)* an hater of women' (v). His initial response to the complaints in the printed version was this: God has put wives under the subjection of their husbands' ultimate authority; yet I do not say that a husband should exercise that ultimate authority to exact entire subjection but rather that '*he ought to make her a ioynt Governour of the family with him selfe*' (v). To pacify his detractors further he then combed his manuscript and added an asterisk in the margin at every point where the duties of wives were to be matched by the corresponding duties of husbands and compiled these corresponding duties in a table. This table conveyed in visual form the unequal yet harmonious balance that wives and husbands should carry in their joint governorship of the household (viii–ix).

Understanding this direct engagement with the readers of his book is key to the interpretation of the text. Gouge's experiences of his parishioners drove him to write a book that was practical. He was conscious that '*the worke may seeme at first sight to be too copious*' (ii) and anxious that readers would find it '*tedious*' (iii). And so he used a form to render the book more digestible and navigable, with eight clear chapters (or treatises) each with short numbered paragraphs and marginal pointers that were laid out in tabular form at the start of the main text. All of this would, he hoped, enable the reader, to '*more readily finde out such particular points as you desire most especially to read*' (vi). Historians might be inclined to reach for Gouge as an example of 'prescriptive literature' which provided men and women with an idealized model of a godly life. Yet the provenance of the text, as well as Gouge's insistence that the book be useful, should caution us before we relegate *Of Domesticall Duties* to a realm of mere 'prescription'. Such books were not inflexible ideals but derived from and interacted with everyday practice in dynamic ways: they provoked reflection and opposition as well as aspiration.⁴ Gouge's own concerns are clear evidence that not all women – or men – lived the family lives he wished for them. As a 47-year-old father of eleven, married to Elizabeth (née Caulton) for eighteen years, Gouge was surely familiar with the challenges of keeping both order and affection in a busy household.⁵

Identifying readers of early modern books with confidence is difficult. Two of the three digitized copies available on Early English Books Online belonged to male readers, though these copies surely had other readers and listeners.⁶ William Gouge did not direct *Of Domesticall Duties* at either male or female readers; the book was neither a tool with which men were to govern or educate

their wives nor a simple conduct book. Instead, Gouge pictured his readership as the whole community of his parishioners: husbands, wives, children, masters and servants. This broad intended audience – in practice limited to the comfortably off ‘metropolitan bourgeoisie’⁷ – reflected Gouge’s underlying patriarchal vision, one in which the distinct spheres of family, household, church, commonwealth and society nevertheless shared the same principles of Christian love and order. His parishioners of St. Ann Blackfriars were, of course, a microcosm of the larger commonwealth.

Gouge gets to the heart of this vision by providing answers to a series of rhetorical questions:

oh if the head and severall members of a family would be perswaded every of them to be conscionable in performing their owne particular duties, what a sweet society, and happy harmony would there be in houses? What excellent seminaries would families be to Church and Commonwealth? Necessary it is that good order be first set in families: for as they were before other polities, so they are somewhat the more necessary: and good members of a family are like to make good members of Church and common-wealth. (ii)

Of Domesticall Duties is thus a classic patriarchal text that slips back and forth between a literal and analogous relationship between the family and wider social entities: ‘a familie is a little Church, and a little common-wealth, at least a lively representations thereof, whereby trial may be made of such as are fit for any place of authoritie, or of subjection in Church or common-wealth’ (18). In the order of the family lay the order of the state or commonwealth. Yet it denies the depth of Gouge’s comprehension of human relationships and the human soul to reduce his book to one about order. The family was distinct for Gouge because it was constituted above all out of affective relationships, not just ones of order and hierarchy.

Of Domesticall Duties is structured according to Ephesians 5:22–6:9, passages in the New Testament which treat directly of wives, husbands, children, parents, servants and masters. The first of the book’s eight treatises grounds the *Of Domesticall Duties* in scripture. At 178 pages in the first edition, this is by far the longest chapter and the most significant to laying out the supporting architecture of Gouge’s vision for the household. It establishes two important principles that run throughout the eight treatises: first, that there are general Christian duties to be performed by all persons (faith and obedience, for example); second, that distinct groups of people have particular duties related to their place in the divine order. These particular duties require that each individual be cognizant of her or his place in three

separate degrees or orders: husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. As Gouge puts it, 'A bad husband, wife, parent, childe, master, servant, magistrate or minister, is no good Christian' (17). This first treatise establishes the particular duties of husband and wife, starkly summed up in the two words, 'love' and 'feare': '*Love* as sugar to sweeten the duties of authoritie, which appertaine to an husband. *Feare* as salt to season all the duties of subjection which appertaine to a wife' (128). The virtuous balance in the marital relationship rests on emotion and the duties of husbands and wives are characterized by feelings, feelings made palpable by Gouge's invocation of the sense of taste.

The second treatise lays out the good grounds for marriage and then the 'common mutuall duties' of man and wife (179). This second part is remarkable. It represents a significant addition to the brief injunctions in Ephesians, which say nothing of the duties husband and wife bear each other or the duties they exercise in unison. Indeed, this is the only treatise that does not begin with a quote from Ephesians, though it is supported by other biblical references throughout. In its insistence on both the mutual respect of husband and wife and their joint responsibility to others in the family, the section was perhaps written in response to the criticism generated by the original sermons. The vision of the marital relationship is one of mutual care. First are those common duties which are absolutely necessary for marriage to exist: '*Matrimonial Unity*' and '*Matrimonial Chastity*'. Second are those common duties which are needful for marriage to be comfortable: '*A loving affection of one to another*' and '*A provident care of one for another*' (213). The striking feature of this section, and one which echoes the dedication, is the balance of pairs. This repetition of pairings expressed Gouge's vision of the equal significance of husband and wife and their joint governance of the household.

The particular and distinct duties of wives and husbands are the subject of treatises 3 and 4, respectively. Women's subjection to their husbands should be complete (268–9). Their submission takes the form of women's attenuation of their external actions: she should be mild in her countenance, courteous in manners, modest in dress and reverent in speech (278–85). This extensive system of bodily fashioning assumes a husband's superiority in all things. It is for this reason that historians commonly use Gouge to illustrate the dominant view of women as subject to their husbands.⁸ But Gouge knew that not all men warranted this complete subjection:

it oft falleth out that a wise, vertuous, and gracious woman, is married to an husband destitute of understanding, to a very natural (as we say) or a frenzy

man, or to one made very blockish, and stupid, unfit to manage his affaires through some distemper, wound, or sickness. (287–8)

Gouge equips his patriarchal system with adaptive devices that take account of the real (flawed) men and women in his community and the tensions inherent in prescribing a joint partnership of unequals. The book could be seen as one of many with internal contradictions.⁹ Maintaining the delicate balance was typical of household manuals which sought to combine male superiority with the realities of everyday life, different callings and the equality of souls: 'The husband had to be the head, but to recognize the practical and spiritual importance of the wife; he could not have too much power.'¹⁰ Gouge's language struggled to accommodate the complexities of this relationship and those of the family overall; rather than a sustained analogy he deploys a series of distinct metaphors to convey the intricate ordering of a series of relationships. In this third treatise on wives' duties, it is with the metaphor of the human body that Gouge tries to express the ideal marital relationship as based on the husband's superiority: 'This metaphor sheweth that to his wife he is at the head of a natural body, both more *eminent* in place, and also more *excellent* in dignity: by virtue of both which, he is ruler and governour of his wife.' (343) Gouge draws explicitly on both nature and scripture as authority, as do all early modern writers who envisage social order as a Great Chain of Being; in so doing he ensures that the challenge of a wife to her husband's authority is both ungodly and monstrous.

If wives are counselled to submit, men are counselled to love. The fourth treatise prepares the husband to be the family head but the emphasis is on the tenor of that role rather than the particular tasks that such a husband might enact. One of Gouge's primary concerns is to dissuade men from 'the furious, and spightfull actions of many unkinde husbands (*heads too heady*) whose favours are buffets, blowes, strokes, & stripes' (389). Gouge is unequivocal: men should not beat their wives (389–93). Instead, they should be tender like birds that protectively spread their wings over their young (421). This metaphor is revealing. It couches a husband's love towards his wife in terms of a parent protecting a child. Furthermore, Gouge remarks, the metaphor itself – the very words – comes directly from God (408). The metaphor encapsulates patriarchy though Gouge reserves the metaphor for the marital relationship and does not use it in the subsequent chapters on children and parents. It was particularly within marriage that relationships were bound by emotion as well as power and duty. Indeed, Gouge saw these features as indivisible; they constitute what Victoria Kahn has called 'affective duties'.¹¹

And yet the chapters on the duties of children, parents, servants and masters are indispensable to the larger vision. Each individual possessed duties particular to their role in the household hierarchy. Children, for example, were to regard their parents with love, obedience, submission and care. While the differences between husbands and wives were apparent when Gouge laid out their duties to each other, from a child's perspective they were as one:

children are not to looke to that difference that is betwixt their parents in that mutuall relation that is betwixt husband and wife, but to that authority which both parents have over their children: and so carry an equall respect to both (485).

Following Ephesians, it was the duty of parents to nourish children's bodily needs, to nurture with discipline and instruct them in the ways of God (497–8). Yet Gouge draws on other scriptural authorities for his claim that in fact all these duties stem from natural affection or love (498–9). No such affective duties were required of either servants or masters. Fear and faithfulness characterize service, while masters are counselled to wisely maintain their authority over servants and use them well (647).

Sitting out with the affective core of the family, these relationships might appear peripheral. And yet they were exemplary. Duty to masters was duty to Christ and 'in rebelling against their master they rebell against Christ' (641). By the same token, masters were to be forever mindful (to know) that 'God will doe the same things to all sorts of masters that they doe to their servants' (693). Wives and husbands were at the heart of the family but that could only function if each individual performed their role as laid down by nature and by God. Early modern patriarchy was not a ladder but a 'grid of power'.¹² For a Puritan preacher this grid stretched through society, the commonwealth and the family but was seeded in the individual's Christian heart. This was why William Gouge styled himself, 'The Watch-man of your soules' (vii). *Of Domesticall Duties* thus marks the moment when patriarchalism combined the social, political, religious and individual within the family.