with which she was affiliated through marriage and other political alliances, ensuring her descendants' influence into the fourteenth century.

Mitchell's study is strongest in its reconstruction of the litigation Joan and her husband pursued throughout their lives to establish their rights over their possessions. The suits involved competing heirs in the Marshal family, other nobles, retainers managing the estates, and even the king. One of the more intriguing and puzzling cases concerned Dionysia, the minor daughter of Joan's half brother William de Munchensy. Joan and her husband William de Valence attempted to remove Dionysia from the line of succession on the basis that she was a bastard. The litigation drew in the archbishop of Canterbury, Parliament, and the king, who maintained his prerogative to control Dionysia's marriage arrangements. Mitchell disagrees with other scholars about Joan's motives: "It seems a bit extreme to ascribe to Joan a 40-year-long enduring hatred of her half-brother and stepmother" that would motivate her legal suits, although she admits it's "plausible " that they would object to permitting a child born out of wedlock to inherit (76). Joan's denial of Dionysia's property rights culminated in conflict over the manor of Painswick, which both claimed. The king wanted to award Painswick to Dionysia and her husband for their services but, knowing Joan would be upset, he instructed his chancery to take precautions to hide his machinations. Mitchell comments, "It seems extraordinary that Joan, in her early seventies, could intimidate the brother of the earl of Oxford—and create such a level of anxiety in the scarcely faint-hearted King Edward" (137). Clearly, Joan had clout.

Mitchell has reconstructed Joan de Valence's place as a major "political actor" in the thirteenth century, but she also insists that historians have overlooked many other highly influential royal and elite women: "rarely do historians of 'mainstream' political history explore how frequently women appear in the public records and how compellingly their activities suggest the dynamic place and contribution of medieval women in social and political contexts formerly ascribed only to men" (150). In *Joan de Valence*, Linda Mitchell takes up a number of challenges that face any scholar attempting to write the life history of a medieval woman. The result is a book making the case not just for this one powerful noblewoman, but for a return to the archives to reassess the underappreciated but important roles that women played in medieval society.

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JANET E. MULLIN. *A Sixpence at Whist: Gaming and the English Middle Classes, 1680–1830*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015. Pp. 228. $80.00 (cloth).
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A Sixpence at Whist: Gaming and the English Middle Classes, 1680–1830 by Janet E. Mullin is a highly readable account of the cultural and social significance of card games in the leisure worlds of the middle classes throughout the long eighteenth century. Mullin's thesis is that card games held "natural appeal" for a people who "relied on their wits for economic survival." Card games and their associated rituals and rules dovetailed neatly with enlightenment precepts of "order, organisation and rationality" (31). Domestic and polite leisure spaces provided respectable and highly regulated social stages where one might experience the frisson of moderate gambling.

Extensive archival research into family records underpins these claims. Mullin has found, for example, that the newly popular phenomenon of the pocket book provided an obvious textual space for an individual to record winnings and losses at the card table. Children too were socialized into such behavior. According to Mullin there was a consensus that incorporating the

young into these leisure activities acculturated them to the rituals of polite entertaining, helping to instill appropriate responses to small triumphs and disappointments. In the process good habits of record keeping might be encouraged—for children, too, were expected to keep track of their gambling.

Mullin seeks to appeal to a popular as well as an academic audience (and the footnotes, which are used a little unevenly, are often left to articulate the more salient, detailed points). Some academic readers may feel that an appropriate balance has not always been struck between description and analysis. Nonetheless, Mullin does seek to advance an ambitious argument. For Mullin asserts that the norms of middle-class culture were actually partly established through the shared practices of card playing. These sociable activities were woven into the attempts of the middle order to carve out a "leisure culture" of their own. The experience of playing cards, asserts Mullin, created a "shared history," and the collective recourse to expected patterns of behavior were a significant feature in the emergence of middle-class identity. The argument convinces in many respects, but this a short book (the substantive text comprises 175, generously spaced pages) and further elaboration would often be welcome. In particular, how does this analysis accord with the starkly different portrayal of middle-class identity provided in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's classic account, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987)? Evangelicalism was the foundational ideological creed in Davidoff and Hall's account of middle-class formation, and a concern over the morals of card playing often featured in Evangelical literature. While Mullin's book abounds with card playing clerics, surprisingly there is no reference to Evangelicalism. An important opportunity to address this dramatic divergence in historiographical perspective has therefore been missed.

While Davidoff and Hall's account centered on the "English middle class," in Mullin's analysis the more capacious plural of "middle classes" is preferred. As Mullin attributes considerable weight to the ideological intersections of card playing and business culture, it would be helpful to know how these connections are sustained for other elements of the middling orders: the rural or professional classes; low-ranking officials and so on, let alone differences in religious or ideological perspective. How does one small aspect of a diverse leisure culture function as a cultural pivot for such an enormous and amorphous social grouping, and what chronological patterns might be discerned? In teasing out the role of card playing in class formation Mullin also leaves the reader wanting to understand more fully how middle-class gambling actually differed from aristocratic practices. Mullin writes of the middle-class desire to distance themselves from the "high-flying, deep-playing excesses of the aristocracy" (175) but is this necessarily a story of oppositional class formation? Presumably at least some middle-class card players would have assumed that the upper classes were capable of moderate play too. (And how easy is it to distinguish middle-class gaming culture from that of the gentry?).

Mullin is attentive throughout to the significance of gender and devotes a separate chapter to the fraught interpersonal dynamics card playing could create between fathers and sons. There are glimpses that a compelling chapter might also have been drawn from examining further the gendered implications of female card playing for family life. We hear, for example, that Parson Woodforde's niece, Nancy, was frequently in debt to their neighbors; that Betsy Sheridan dismissed her sister's qualms over card playing on a Sunday; and that the gambling losses of poor Fanny Braddock led her to take her own life in 1731. The book teems with such fascinating vignettes. Further work may yet be required to elaborate precisely upon the significance of card playing for broader narratives of class formation. Nonetheless, Mullins has identified important questions concerning the relationship between leisure and the middle classes.

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