

literary critical embrace of historicism (and its set-piece, the anecdote). Borrowing Giovanni Arrighi's concept of the long twentieth century, Baucom illustrates how, far from being a new world order, today's globalism should be seen as intensifying the economic and cultural logics that produced the *Zong* and its legal aftermath.

But just as the defense for the *Zong*'s insurers was itself underwritten in part by a coalition of British abolitionists, Baucom finds in artistic and political responses to the case an important counterdiscourse of modernity, what he terms "melancholy realism" (33). This romantic, testamentary expression of "cosmopolitan interest-ness" (230) resists modernity's disinterested, speculative, calculating logic by seeking to accumulate, to incorporate, or to resuscitate that which has been lost (or rendered invisible) by time or space. If the historical fiction of Sir Walter Scott and the sweeping canvases of J. W. M. Turner suggest ambivalent nineteenth-century attempts to reconcile these two countervailing discourses of modernity, Baucom suggests, Black Atlantic authors like Edouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, and Toni Morrison have more consistently articulated melancholy realism's challenging political imperatives and complex forms of sedimentary geopolitical knowledge.

Baucom does an admirable job of summarizing a daunting array of theorists, from Adam Smith and Walter Benjamin to Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, and Slavoj Žižek. Too often, however, the attempt to reconcile a wide range of theories verges on becoming a discrete intellectual exercise that threatens to detract from Baucom's brilliant analysis of the trial and its contexts. Less attention to such theoretical luminaries would have left Baucom more space to elaborate the implications of his rich findings for closely related (but here virtually unacknowledged) discussions in the legal history of slavery and abolitionism in the United States. How, for example, does his reading of British abolitionists Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson's "affective theft" (254) of the slave's suffering resonate with the very similar arguments made by Karen Sánchez-Eppler and Saidiya Hartman in the antebellum context? Or how do the British court's contradictory claims of financial disinterest and humanitarian interest pertain to the similar tensions in American slave law discussed by Robert Cover and William E. Wiethoff? Ultimately, however, any criticism of Baucom's magisterial, impressively readable study is rendered insignificant by the magnitude of his accomplishment.

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Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 282. \$70 cloth (ISBN 0-521-83451-1); \$27.99 paper (ISBN 0-521-61912).

Mary Beth Sievens, *Stray Wives: Marital Conflict in Early National New England*, New York: New York University Press, 2005. Pp. 169. \$42 (ISBN 0-8147-4009).

Elizabeth Foyster and Mary Beth Sievens have given us two fine works on the history of community responses to marital discord. Considered together, they raise

useful questions about our understanding of continuity and change in family law and family life in the English speaking world from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

Foyster anchors her study of marital violence in analysis of 220 marital disputes heard at the appellate levels of England's church courts between 1660 and the passage of the 1857 Divorce Act. She also draws on a much wider source base that includes records of summary judgments by local magistrates, custody cases in King's Bench, and reports on the London police courts and sensational trials from the nineteenth-century *Times*. Her introductory discussion of the "historical records of marital violence" will be useful to scholars of many stripes; as Foyster notes, the stories found in these records open up "a much wider history of gender and household relations, changing ideas of parenting and childhood, and the varying balance of responsibility for family welfare between the individual, community, professional and state" (2). Her book ably develops each of these themes, in addition to offering sustained and nuanced reflection on violence as a subject of historical inquiry.

Foyster's long view of the problem of marital violence leads her to challenge the prevailing narratives in which the early nineteenth century saw a sharp break with earlier practices and beliefs about marriage. Foyster instead emphasizes continuity. Across her period, jurists and laypeople alike affirmed husbands' superiority and authority, while also condemning the abuse of that authority. Excessive male violence was never acceptable, yet coercion was never out of bounds, per se. What counted as excessive violence was subjective and situational and could encompass emotional and sexual abuse, as well physical brutality. The early nineteenth century did see differentiation by class in the types of behavior deemed violent, and a more circumscribed range of the appropriate female responses. Victims needed to be convincingly patient, passive, and weak to claim legal protection; a woman who fought back compromised her claims on outside defenders.

Sievens has done impressive archival legwork on the other side of the Atlantic. She has reconstructed from local records the marital histories of 175 of the more than 1400 couples who advertised their marital difficulties in the Vermont and Connecticut newspapers between 1790 and 1830. Husbands used postings of eloping or "stray" wives both to express the authority and to escape the obligations that followed from the doctrine of marital unity. Their advertisements literally discredited their wives, barring them from obtaining support or credit in their husbands' names. The couples who appeared in such advertisements far outnumbered those who sought formal legal remedies for their difficulties, even though the divorce provisions in Vermont and Connecticut were among the most liberal in the English speaking world at this time. With these sources, Sievens captures community responses to marital discord that were informed by, but outside of the scope of the formal legal system. *Stray Wives* also contributes fresh evidence of women's economic importance within their households and communities, offering an unusually detailed snapshot of the ways husbands and wives worked within and against women's legal disempowerment under coverture.

Many of Sievens's findings reinforce Foyster's skepticism about the distinctiveness of early nineteenth-century marital regimes. Both books supply ample

evidence of continuity in family and community oversight of married couples, countering the notion that “modern” ideas about marital privacy gained currency during this period. Sievens reintroduces new “ideals of domestic privacy” to explain the increasingly formulaic nature of elopement notices by 1830, but taken together these books suggest that the concept needs to be used with care in any setting (Sievens, 120). Their overall effect is to reinforce Nancy Cott’s recent arguments about the enduring public character of marriage (Cott, *Public Vows*, 2000). Foyster raises the intriguing possibility that the late nineteenth century saw a shift in the nature of public responsibility for marital breakdown, rather than a new concept of privacy. The rise of institutional and professional resources addressing the problem of marital violence made neighbors and other community members less likely to intervene. “When marital violence became somebody’s problem, in terms of it lying within their professional expertise,” Foyster argues, “it ceased to be everybody’s problem” (233).

Foyster’s and Sieven’s books call attention to geographic as well as chronological continuities in the legal and extra-legal practices regulating marriage. Despite the comparative ease with which early national New Englanders could obtain divorce, they closely resembled the English couples documented by Foyster in their preference for alternative means of mediating marital conflict, and in the behavioral standards by which they judged husbands and wives. The parallels suggest the need for more explicitly comparative work on the relationship between customary forms of household justice, popular beliefs about marriage and family, and legal change. The dramatic modifications in family law that have occurred on both sides of the Atlantic over the past two centuries cannot be understood solely in terms of national narratives, however much they have hinged on national politics and played into debates about national identity.

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Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. 314. \$35 (ISBN 0-801-43678-8).

Cross-dressers named Fanny and Stella; working-class telegraph delivery boys; Podge, the defamed son of a duke; Eton schoolboys Chat and Regy; a beloved teacher and poet Cory; Lord Arthur Pelham Clinton; Labby; Bosie; and a professional sodomite John Saul. Nineteenth-century characters? Yes. From a Charles Dickens novel? No. These real-life people take center stage in the fascinating stories that Morris B. Kaplan tells in his book that explores the “conditions of life for men who loved men and attitudes toward same-sex desire” (2) in late Victorian Britain. While a book with this focus can hardly avoid the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials, and Kaplan does ultimately turn to these proceedings, Kaplan’s major contribution with this study is his thick descriptions of the legal and cultural contexts of homoerotic desire *before* what many have considered to be the defining events of the Wilde trials.