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Julie Hardwick, *Sex in an Old Regime City: Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660-1789*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2020. ix + 280 pp. \$35.00 U.S. (hb). 978-0-190945183.

Review by Suzanne Desan, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In Lyon in 1688, Claire Bariou found herself pregnant by Jean Dumas, her intimate partner of the last two years. Anticipating that her father would oppose their marriage, Claire explained their dilemma instead to her confessor. This local friar introduced the young couple to a surgeon's widow with invaluable local connections. She in turn helped Claire Bariou find a midwife who housed her for the final months of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy, delivered the baby, facilitated visits from the father, Jean, and eventually aided them in having the child baptized and placed with a rural wet-nurse.

Like many other young couples, Claire and Jean moved within a communal network of "safeguarders" who assisted them in managing their out-of-wedlock pregnancy in myriad ways. Safeguarders could include "family, employers, friends, neighbors, landladies, midwives, wet-nurses, servants, local officials, clergy, and the staff of local welfare institutions" (p. 8). These networks might help women find "remedies" to end unwanted pregnancies, share in the logistics of delivery, conceal news about the death of a baby, or pressure putative fathers to marry or at least bear financial responsibility for their offspring.

The communities surrounding young couples play a pivotal role in Julie Hardwick's superb excavation of youthful intimacy in the urban working world of Lyon. By her account, local actors, rather than the state, shaped attitudes toward courtship and sex outside of marriage. Neighbors and local authorities were more interested in creating stability or urging marriage than in shaming women who became pregnant outside of marriage. Before skillfully teasing out these local dynamics, Hardwick first challenges the widespread historiographic claim that early modern states like France expanded their power in part by regulating female sexuality and pursuing patriarchal family strategies.^[1] To undercut these long-standing assumptions about the disciplinary early modern state, she cogently demonstrates that the 1556 Edict on Clandestine Pregnancy did *not* require all unmarried women to formally declare their pregnancies. It instead warned that single women could be accused of having committed infanticide, punishable by death, if they had concealed their pregnancies or childbirths without declaring them or having them witnessed (to see if the baby was dead or alive), and if they had also failed to baptize the child.

Hardwick also points out that “declarations of pregnancy” in fact were paternity suits that tell us far more about youthful courtship and communal stances toward intimacy and heteronormativity than they do about the state regulation of sexuality. These paternity suits then form the core documents within her “archive of reproduction.” This source-base also includes legal investigations of infant deaths, the records of the Hôtel-Dieu, doctors’ reports, notarized agreements, parish records, and stray artifacts, such as love letters, marriage promises, and even ribbons pinned to abandoned infants.

With this multi-layered archive, *Sex in an Old Regime City* unveils the world of courtship among working couples. The book focuses on the period of “young adulthood” between the late teen-age years and late twenties when women and men had begun working outside their parents’ homes and were usually making steps toward marriage. The overwhelming majority of paternity suits involved couples in consensual relationships who seemed to be on the path toward matrimony. In sync with local expectations, women pressing paternity suits were almost always between twenty and twenty-five years old. The men’s ages ranged more widely, but they also clustered in the mid-twenties, with a few middle-aged men, most often employers accused by female workers, silk workers more often than servants.

Even as Hardwick deftly evokes the hierarchical interactions and precarity of work and survival in this textile-producing city, she conveys the lightness and happy expectations of couples who were “walking out” together, getting to know one another, and sharing kisses and caresses. This walking out was licit and acceptable, precisely because it took place *in public*, with the full knowledge of neighbors, employers, and co-workers. Once marriage seemed clearly in the cards, communal observers also considered it legitimate for the couple to engage in intercourse behind closed doors. If pregnancy outside marriage resulted, any young woman pressing a paternity suit consistently emphasized two points: the man in question had promised marriage and he had taken the lead, coercing her to have sex. Keenly cognizant of gendered power dynamics, by highlighting these two points, the female plaintiff tapped into communal assumptions about male sexuality and made it clear that she had worked to manage the risks of pregnancy. Only the clear progression toward marriage made it possible for a woman to acquiesce to her partner’s sexual aggression. Hardwick builds on her long track record of writing with sensitivity about how the ordinary women and men of early modern France negotiated power hierarchies, gender norms, and personal goals.^[2] At the same time, she makes clear that these stories embraced a legal strategy about the legitimate use of male force, embedded in the system of coverture that allowed men to claim control of women’s bodies and property.

Yet, Hardwick also argues that the communal networks of safeguarders held men accountable for their actions. In another major intervention, she calls into question the assumption that a “double standard” almost always disciplined or shamed women and let men off scot free. On the contrary, she offers extensive evidence of community members pressuring men to marry their intimate partners, or failing that, to provide for their offspring. When Pierre Vincent delayed fulfilling his promise to Barbe Moulin, “her mother, the midwife, a neighbor, one of her girlfriends, and Vincent’s employer were all involved in pushing him toward marriage” (p. 88). Exploding the view that pregnancy and childbirth were the domain of women alone, Hardwick shows the frequent interventions of men in “scaffolding progression toward marriage” (p. 87). Male friends, co-workers, family members, and neighbors often took part and shared the communal quest for social order through marriage or, at least, shared responsibility. To further dismantle clear-cut suppositions about the double standard, Hardwick points out that the courts,

intent on guaranteeing male accountability, sometimes temporarily imprisoned alleged fathers during paternity suits. In addition, judges often assigned custody of newborns to men, so that they would be the ones liable for finding and paying a rural wet-nurse. Needing to return to work, single women generally gave up their babies when marriage did not follow.

Paternity suits inevitably reveal points of conflict and contestation between couples, but Hardwick brilliantly mines these cases and the overall archive of reproduction to demonstrate a range of negotiations, including much more amicable ones, between intimate partners. In a surprising twist, the female plaintiff might for example use a paternity suit to pressure her partner's parents to allow him to marry her. Likewise, backstories in court records show intimate male partners and various community members aiding women to "restore their health," in other words, engage in blood-letting to induce miscarriages or procure abortifacients, known as "remedies." Women always professed ignorance about these steps. That could be true, but it more often served as a necessary legal narrative. A couple not yet ready to marry might also seek other solutions. Desperately poor couples (or women alone) turned to the Hôtel-Dieu for delivery services and wet-nursing of the surrendered newborn. Some couples found a notary to draw up an agreement about the man's payments toward his partner's lying-in expenses.

Along these lines, Hardwick paints a fascinating portrait of "intimate labor," the paid work surrounding out-of-wedlock pregnancies. This intimate economy included midwives and wet-nurses, but also other less known actors. Some landladies specialized in renting rooms to single women before, during, and after their deliveries. At times they provided food and newborn care. Adult children of these landladies might act as godparents for the infant. Often widows, the landladies sometimes were paid by male partners and also served as go-betweens for the couple. Especially by the eighteenth century, municipal authorities in some cities tried to regulate landladies or midwives, demanding that they register their short-term rentals or deliveries of babies by single women. As was so often the case in early modern Europe, this world of informal economic arrangements reveals the gap between law and practice. Actors in the intimate economy repeatedly side-stepped regulations and acted with discretion and silence. Hardwick emphasizes that they, like other safeguarders, valued pragmatic solutions over moralizing judgments.

Networks of safeguarders also supported the mother or the couple in the more dire situations of abandonment or infanticide. Communal silence often surrounded the death of a newborn. When a tiny coffin bearing an infant cadaver appeared in front of a church, the act bore testimony to respect for the child, but also to awareness of the need for secrecy and delicacy. As Hardwick stresses, it could be hard to distinguish between a stillbirth, a late-term "remedy"-induced termination, intentional infanticide, or situational infanticide due to neglect, inaction, or lack of medical help. The anxiety of elites about infanticide had made it a capital crime, but prosecution rates remained low, especially in the eighteenth century. Between 1720 and 1790, the Lyon court prosecuted only eight infanticides, most likely due to the difficulty of proving guilt and the complicit silence of community members. To reduce the risk of infanticide, authorities tolerated "safe place abandonments in an unspoken but clear agreement between young people, communities, and the courts" (p. 183). Once again in Hardwick's account, pragmatism and the community's quest for stability trumped disciplining.

Sex in the Old Regime focuses more on continuities than on change, yet Hardwick does detect some evolutions over time. By the 1730s and 1740s, women incrementally began to speak more

frequently of affection within relationships. They less often insisted on men's use of force and more often acknowledged their own willingness in agreeing to intercourse. By the 1760s, some women began to insist on raising their own babies rather than surrender custody to fathers who would find wet-nurses. Men were increasingly allowed to avoid responsibility. Some readers will wish that Hardwick had devoted more time to analyzing these changing practices and exploring how they might have interacted with evolutions in the worlds of labor and public culture. More attention to these newer dynamics would have strengthened her already impressive analysis and would not undercut her point that older patterns often persisted, intertwined with newer ones. Likewise, because the "unevenness" of documents on paternity suits "does not lend itself to meaningful quantitative analysis" (p. 24), Hardwick does not offer any numerical analysis. Yet she has clearly conducted this work behind the scenes because she writes with convincing confidence about her discoveries, e.g. "Over 90% of women who made paternity claims in royal courts were in stable consensual relationships" (p. 22). Showing us some of her quantitative work would have only fortified her richly textured portrayals.

These portrayals powerfully underpin Hardwick's book and make it captivating reading for anyone interested in early modern European social or gender history. By weaving together subtle analysis with deeply human stories, Hardwick gives us unparalleled insight into an almost inaccessible aspect of working people's lives: the world of intimacy and emotion, courtship, and reproduction in early modern France.

NOTES

[1] See especially Sarah Hanley's influential article, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16 (1989): 4-27.

[2] Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economies of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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