

Public Abstract

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Title:DOMESTICATING THE CITIZEN: HOUSEHOLD AUTHORITY, THE MERCHANT CLASS FAMILY AND THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

This dissertation uses paradigms developed by new historicist and feminist critics to define the early modern London family inhabiting a radically transforming world. To mediate the hyperbolic vision of the family in city comedy — the primary genre under study — the dissertation turns to the idealized family of equally stylized Puritan conduct books. In the period, the family was a controlling metaphor for the state, and thus allows the opportunity to examine a range of concerns of early modern Londoners, including adultery, widowhood, paternity, dowries, child abuse, dishonest servants, ambitious merchants, the volatile and new marketplace, and gender identity of all members of the family. The dissertation considers husbands and wives in plays by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker; parents and children in plays by Philip Massinger and William Shakespeare; and masters and servants in plays by Francis Beaumont, Ben Jonson, George Chapman and John Marston. The family in the city of the seventeenth century resided at the intersection of practices heard from the pulpit and of generic forms those listeners might see in the theaters. Upon both of these ideals lie the inevitable valences of authority for the householder. This complex web of relationships is merely one small part of a much larger social web in a vastly growing city. The treatment of the family as society in small, however, allows for a modern interpretation of the city, or at least a vital part of the city for many of its citizens