

Review of Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford UP, 2012)

What should historians do with masculinity? In British studies, at least, it depends which century you work on. Historians of seventeenth- and nineteenth-century men place him firmly in the home, as a patriarch or a domestic governor. By contrast, eighteenth-century men have tended to be characterised by their rather more ebullient and public masculinities: what might be characterised as the 'sex and shopping' school of politeness and consumption (p.22). Karen Harvey offers a corrective to this in her important new book. It is commonplace now to argue that men's public role was reliant on their private one, but Harvey drills down on the precise nature of this connection by examining some of the specific discourses and practices concerning men's position and power within the household. To do this, she emphatically focuses on 'house' rather than 'home'. The latter encompasses 'the imaginative, the emotional, or representational', and has come to dominate historical approaches to the domestic at the expense of 'house', which instead 'combined a configuration of space and gendered relationships of management' (p.12-13). 'Management' is, of course, a key eighteenth-century term, and gives us a revealing way-in to men's relationship with the house and its inhabitants and contents, one that has much in common with their wider roles in society and politics.

The title *The Little Republic* hints at the political nature of this approach. There is an unusually large amount of politics in this study of domesticity. Early modern historians are accustomed to the connection between the patriarchy of kings and of heads of household, but Harvey argues that in the eighteenth century this connection came to be seen more in Classical terms. The Aristotelian model of the *oikos* concerned the good management of both the household and the polity, and this manifested itself in the eighteenth century in the discourse of 'oeconomy' (or 'æconomy'). This important concept has been virtually ignored by modern historians, or conflated with 'economy', whereas Harvey devotes a substantial opening chapter to it and makes it the focus of much of what follows. She begins with a useful working definition – 'Oeconomy was the practice of managing the economic and moral resources of the household for the maintenance of good order' (p.24) – and then painstakingly traces this word and concept through the course of the century. The close analysis of discourse is reminiscent of the 'linguistic turn', which is less fashionable now than it was in the 1990s, but Harvey demonstrates that it can still pay dividends, and in any case her approach goes beyond the textual: she explores space, objects and relationships in order to show how this discourse permeated domestic life, and situated men within it. Chapter 2 reveals a hitherto neglected genre of oeconomical literature, encompassing prescriptive texts, treatises and periodicals. Chapter 3 then shows how this structured men's own domestic textual practices, exploring the world of accounting, commonplace books and pocket books, which men literally kept in their pockets, close to their physical person: surely evidence that they had internalised this 'oeconomical' approach to the world. Chapter 4 uses language to think about men's actual roles in the house: Harvey distinguishes 'keeping house' – an eminently oeconomical practice – from the more mundane 'housekeeping' (p.106). The latter was emphatically not a man's sphere, and to prove this there are enjoyable anecdotes of men's consternation when there was no one else around to make the bed or do the cooking.

What is most impressive about *The Little Republic* is its sense of the *longue durée*. Harvey herself has previously argued that historians of masculinity have lost sight of this, in their focus on moments and crises. To be clear, this is not broad-brush gender history. Indeed, students expecting a Georgian equivalent of John Tosh's classic *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999) might find the tightness of focus in *The Little Republic* to be rather off-putting. This is not a comprehensive survey of male domesticity – you won't learn much about love here, for example – but then it doesn't claim to be. What this book has instead is a sure sense of chronology and causation, and a rare willingness to connect changes in gender relations to those in citizenship and political theory. In doing so, Harvey shows that historians should have much more to say about the relationship between the public and private spheres in the eighteenth century.