

Chapter 3. The Malthusian Marriage System and its Origins

A number of the central features of the marital and family structure which Malthus believed to be present can be abstracted from his analysis. Most important are certain characteristics which he takes for granted, hardly bothering to mention them with any emphasis, or simply ignoring them. One of these was a set of assumptions about the nature and purposes of marriage, which were self-evident and 'natural' to an English clergyman living at the turn of the eighteenth century but are unusual in comparative perspective.

Malthus assumed monogamy, though most societies at his time practised polygamy; a fairly egalitarian relationship between husband and wife, while most societies assumed male dominance; unbreakable marriage, though many permitted easy divorce; permissive remarriage, though the majority either forbade remarriage or made it mandatory; independent residence after marriage, though the majority of societies have been virilocal or uxorilocal;¹ a fairly equal contribution to the conjugal fund, though the usual situation was for wealth to flow preponderantly from either bride's or groom's group. These structural features, which would have seemed so extraordinary to those living in China, India, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America at the same time as Malthus, are the assumed foundations of his scheme. They were the basis for beliefs about the nature of marriage choice which were equally unusual at that time.

Malthus' 'preventive check' was based on the assumption that it was the individual man and woman who would decide whom to marry. But the vast majority of people believed that, on the contrary, marriage was not a matter to be left to the couple themselves, but was to be arranged by the parents and wider kin. Malthus' analysis was

¹ 'Virilocal', residence at husband's place; 'uxorilocal', at the wife's.

also founded on the presumption that there were few positive rules restricting the choice of spouse, and in particular, that the individual could marry whomever he or she could 'catch'. The very elaborate rules which in the greater part of the world dictated that an individual should marry within a certain group or category defined by kinship, geography, caste, class, religion or occupation, are not apparent in his analysis. All this betrays an even deeper assumption - that there was choice in the matter of marriage. Malthus believed that to marry or not to marry at all was a matter for decision by the individual concerned. The almost universal view at his time was that marriage is an automatic, 'natural' event, like birth or death, but such a way of looking at things was not contemplated in his scheme. Both as to when one married and whether one married at all, it was confidently assumed that the matter was open to choice. Marriage was like choosing a career; but there was also an element of 'calling' or vocation, and not all were called.

A further cultural assumption which would have startled other parts of the world was the view that marriage, and particularly the rearing of children, would be economically and socially 'costly'. The whole Malthusian analysis was based on the weighing up of the advantages and disadvantages of marriage, regarded from the individual standpoint. Malthus argued that the state should not tamper with the balance by increasing the Poor Law provisions, thereby favouring those who took the risk and married young. Such people should be forced to bear the full cost themselves. Behind this argument is the assumption that the participants were faced with real costs. Most human societies contemporary with Malthus would not have seen any opposition between individual desire (biological and psychological forces) and individual wealth (economic and social pressures). Usually, the two have run alongside each other rather than conflicted. Unusually, it is precisely marriage, and above all the children and their labour which marriage produces, that bring wealth of all kinds. To talk of the cost of marriage, to see children as an expense and marriage as likely to threaten individual prosperity, has been until recently an almost incomprehensible view. Wives and children are wealth and happiness.

Although the assumptions revealed in Malthus' scheme and Darwin's personal reflections were unusual at the time in a world context, they are now so familiar to us that we tend to take them for granted. They show a set of cultural and social features which have

frequently been dissected in the contemporary world when theorists discuss the differences between the 'traditional', 'familist' system and the 'modern', 'individualistic' one - Malthus and Darwin fitting well into the latter. To elaborate more fully the nature of the marriage system of which Malthus wrote, we may examine a few more examples from the vast literature in this field.

Just after the Second World War an American social demographer, Kingsley Davis, wrote a textbook in which he outlined the major features of what he called the 'Great Transition' to the 'modern family system', the movement from 'familistic' to 'individualistic' societies. In the 'familistic' society - for instance, Hindu India, where the immediate family is controlled by the extended family - there is likely to be plural mating (either polygyny or concubinage), an authoritarian power of husband over wife, young age at marriage, marital choice determined by parents, and an absence of romantic love. Economic exchanges at marriage are complex, 'embracing not only a wide range of goods and services but also a wide circle of relatives', and the newly married couple will tend to live with the parents. There will probably be a high fertility rate to compensate for high mortality. Inheritance will either be automatic or strictly along kinship lines. The familistic system has historically 'prevailed to a much greater extent than the other' (individualistic) system. Yet it is now being destroyed by the 'small family system' which is 'now being diffused, along with other features of industrialism, to the rest of the world'. The individualistic system is the mirror image of the structure described above. For instance, 'mass romanticism - the deification of romantic courtship - has reached its pinnacle'; couples wish to set up a separate home; the 'sole effective kinship group is now the immediate family, and even this unit has lost its size and function.'⁽²⁾

This contrast has been elaborated in the work of W. J. Goode, who outlines the major features of the 'modern' conjugal family system. The most important characteristic is the 'relative exclusion of a wide range of marital and blood relatives' from the affairs of the young couple. From this flow a number of other features. The young will establish 'neolocal' or separate residence after marriage and will be relatively independent. The courtship system will be based on the mutual attraction between the future husband and wife, rather than the interests of the wider kin. The age at marriage will rise, for 'the

2 Davis, *Human Society*, 417-18; 424; 422.

3 Goode, *World Revolution*, 8-9.

youngsters must now be old enough to take care of themselves; i.e. they must be as old as the economic system forces them to be in order to be independent at marriage.' The couple decide the number of children they want, rather than their choice being dictated by the needs of a wider group. The husband-wife relationship becomes the most important of all ties, and 'the emotions within this unit are likely to be intense, and the relationship between husband and wife may be intrinsically unstable.' Remarriage is likely to be widespread 'because there is no larger kin unit to absorb the children and no unit to prevent the spouses from re-entering the free marriage market.' Goode then proceeds to analyse how far this system has already penetrated in the Middle East, Africa, India, China and Japan. He argues that there is a rapid spread, based as much on a cultural or ideological pressure as on any link with Western economic or technological systems. 'The ideology of the conjugal family is a radical one, destructive of the older traditions in almost every society. (4)

A complementary depiction of this marital and family system, specifically linking it to the Malthusian and demographic arguments, is provided by John Caldwell. Caldwell's major thesis is that there is a great difference between the two main types of social-demographic regime. In many traditional societies there is no economic or social advantage from restricting fertility or avoiding marriage because, on balance, children are an economic and social advantage. The net flow of assets is upwards, from children to parents. Children contribute more to their parents than they consume. This results not from the nature of the means of production - for instance, the type of agriculture or industry - but from the set of cultural expectations about relations within and outside the nuclear family. Thus one finds that even in an urban-industrial setting such as the city of Ibadan in West Africa, children are a net advantage to their parents.⁽⁵⁾ Caldwell argues that 'as long as children ungrudgingly share their earnings with their parents it will pay to have a large family and to educate them.'⁶ Here we have a society where there appears to be little 'cost' in marrying and having children; both activities expand a person and add to his material and social wealth.

What transforms the situation, according to Caldwell, is the importation of the 'Western' family system, or what we have termed

4 Ibid., 19.

5 Caldwell, 'Fertility', 243 .

6 Caldwell, 'Rationality', 16.

the 'Malthusian' marriage system. This alters the situation, so that wealth flows preponderantly down rather than up. Hence children begin to become a cost to their parents. 'What causes this emotional nucleation of the family whereby parents spend increasingly on r children~ while demanding - and receiving - very little in return?' asks Caldwell. His answer is that it is 'undoubtedly the import of a different culture; it is westernization.' This process of 'westernization' is 'the central feature of our times'. (7) It is the culmination of a long history, mounting in the nineteenth century through the pressure of missionaries, traders and Western imperial governments, and today pushed by the mass media and mass education. Yet we may wonder what the specific content of this 'westernization' is, that leads to 'family nucleation and the reversal of intergenerational wealth flow', which Caldwell believes will 'almost inevitably ... guarantee slower global population growth'.

The central features are precisely those which were illustrated by Malthus and Darwin. They are the 'predominance of the nuclear family, with its central conjugal tie and its ideology of concentrating concern and expenditure on one's own children'. (8) The theme is an application of Davis' and Goode's ideas to demography; it is the rise of the dominant husband-wife relationship, the decrease of obligations to wider kin, and the concentration on children. The whole package is succinctly presented in Caldwell's explanation of our own assumptions and how they hinder a Western observer from understanding Third World societies. In the West there is a 'strong nuclear family' with few obligations outside immediate relatives; a deep bond between spouses; an increased expenditure on children 'accompanied by a decline in moralizing about what is good for them'; 'property bought on an open market largely regulated by the State', with little community or family ownership. Caldwell does not discuss at this point the other parts of the system that we have noted, particularly individual 'love marriage', but his scheme fits well with the earlier analyses. And Darwin's self-examination and Malthus' general scheme fit excellently with his analysis. Caldwell helps to show why it is that marriage and childbearing become, instead of automatic and self-fulfilling, a matter of choice and of the weighing of advantages. He is correct in seeing this as a vast transformation without which contraception and a deferred marriage system are

7 Caldwell, 'Restatement', 352, 356.

8. Ibid., 356.

unlikely to occur. He is also right in arguing that the origins of the change lie in the 'perhaps unique familial and social structure' that had somehow emerged in the West at least by the time of Darwin and Malthus. (9)

Caldwell's major field research has been undertaken in West Africa. It is supported by the analysis of anthropologists who have worked in the same area - for example, Meyer Fortes. Fortes notes the peculiarity of the Western family system assumed by Malthus and Darwin, that is, 'the monogamous, independently co-resident, conjugal or nuclear family'.⁽¹⁰⁾ In contrast to this family structure, with its emphasis on marriage and husband-wife relations, is the system in West Africa where 'the critical factor is parenthood.' There, marriage is 'valued primarily as the indispensable condition for the achievement of parenthood', rather than as an end in itself. This is because the 'achievement of parenthood is regarded as a sine qua non for the attainment of the full development as a complete person to which all aspire.' While, in the West, people 'have children incidentally to conjugal or other sexual relationships', and with the Welfare State 'there is no need for parents to have children with a view to augmenting family income or insuring against penury or loneliness or in old age', in West Africa 'the supreme purpose of marriage', Fortes tells us, is procreation. To attain any kind of political status, as well as personal wealth, one must have children." Because of the 'enormous investment individually and collectively, emotionally and morally' in offspring in West Africa, it is, Fortes argues, 'inevitable that members of a filial generation will strive to achieve marriage and parenthood as early as they are permitted to.' In such a situation, 'no one is a complete person until he or she marries and achieves personhood', and 'there is a deeply ingrained ideal that normal men and women should continue to beget and bear children throughout their fecund years.' Thus a 'woman becomes a woman when she becomes able to bear children and continued childbearing is irrefutable evidence of continued femininity', just as masculinity is equated with virility and the fathering of children. (12)

This description of West Africa is indeed a long way from the world of Malthus and Darwin, for here a fulfilled life, marriage and childbearing are all deeply associated. The kind of oppositions and

9 Caldwell, 'Fertility', 246-7.

10 Fortes in Hawthorn, *Population*, 124.

11 *Ibid.*, 125, 127, 128, 132.

12 *Ibid.*, 137, 141.

choices which were taken as axiomatic in the Western discussions in the early nineteenth century and by family planners today, would and do strike people in these cultures as most extraordinary. We could summarize the contrast between the two polar extremes of these ideal types in a different way, as follows.' (13)

In familistic societies, those that analysts often term 'tribal' and 'peasant' or having a 'domestic mode of production', the central feature is that production and consumption are inextricably bound to the unit of reproduction, or family; units of social and economic reproduction are identical. The farm and family are bound together as the place where both wealth and children are produced. As T. Shanin puts it, 'the family farm is the basic unit of peasant ownership, production, consumption and social life. The individual, the family and the farm, appear as an indivisible whole.' (14) Or as A.V. Chayanov summarized the position, 'The first fundamental characteristic of the farm economy of the peasant is that it is a family economy. Its whole organization is determined by the size and composition of the peasant family and by the coordination of its consumptive demands with the number of its working hands'. (15)

In many societies, historically, the basic or smallest unit of production and consumption is not the individual, but the members of a family, which may merely consist of parents and children, or a larger group. All those born into this minimal group have an equal share and rights in the resources; labour is pooled in the group; the 'estate' is passed on undiminished from generation to generation. In this situation each new child is an asset, giving of his or her labour and drawing off the communal resource. Each member contributes to the welfare of parents and wider kin (especially as the parents pass their prime), increasing the prestige and political power as well as the economic well-being of the group. The unit of production and the unit of reproduction coincide. To increase production, one increases reproduction; likewise, as Malthus would have argued, if productivity increases, so will reproductivity. Where the basic unit of production and consumption is the domestic group, whether co-residential or operationally united in work and consumption, there fertility will be highly valued - as in much of traditional China, India, Africa and Eastern Europe. Each small group will try to maximize its size.

13 What follows is based on Macfarlane, 'Reproduction'.

14 Shanin, *Peasants*, 241.

15 Wolf, *Peasants*, 14

Economics, social structure, politics, ideology and demography have become intertwined; to control fertility is to alter part of a delicate structure which also threatens many other good things in life. Deeper than this, it is not even a matter of choice; one is not weighing advantages, for there is no contradiction between the different interests of parents and of kin, between psychological and economic needs.

The opposite situation is the one described by Davis, Goode and Caldwell as the 'Western', capitalist, nuclear family and individualist systems. Here the central feature is that the lowest unit of production and consumption is not the family but the individual. And the individual only expands his or her self in one way - through marriage, to one person. In such societies the husband-wife bond is stressed, there is no communal, family ownership of property or permanent joint consumption unit. Production is not based on the family but on non-familial links. The permanent basic unit is either the lone individual or the married pair. By focusing on the individual rather than the family, many demographic features are changed. Instead of a population expanding in quantity as Malthus has predicted, an increase of productivity is used in the first place to increase the quality of life for the individual, rather than the wider kin group. Hence a rise in productivity will not immediately be channelled into reproductivity: there may well be that delay, that deferral of gratification, which Malthus pleaded for.

In this individualistic variant, parents do not see production and reproduction as inextricably connected; sex and childbearing are separable activities. Women's main role is no longer as a productive and reproductive machine; extra children do not necessarily increase the prestige and well-being of a wider group, or even of their own parents. In fact, children, and certainly a large number of them, become a threat to the happiness of their parents, to their mother's health and to their father's peace and pocket. Many children are seen as a drain on the individual, who is not recompensed by labour invested in a common resource which will provide a store for the future. In such a situation, marriage and child bearing incur a cost, celibacy has its attractions and family limitation is likely to be encouraged. Marriage age is likely to be high, and people will pause and reflect both before marrying and later, on procreation.

Thus in a familial mode of production, fertility increases the well-being of the smallest units of society, even though it may be

disadvantageous to the society as a whole. While there is no tension between social, economic and productive ends for the individual, there may be a new tension between the needs of the family and of the nation. Such a congruence between a family system and reproduction is nicely illustrated by two examples. A Spanish farmer told the poet Laurie Lee, 'Buy land and breed sons and you can't go wrong. Come war and thieves and ruined harvests - they don't signify at all ... If a man, s got strong blood like me, and scatters his seed wide enough, that man must flourish.' (16) Or as a Punjabi water carrier explained to the anthropologist M. Mamdani, mistaking him for the family planner who visited him years before,

'You were trying to convince me in 1960 that I shouldn't have any more sons. Now, you see, I have six sons and two daughters and I sit at home in leisure. They are grown up and they bring me money. One even works outside the village as a labourer. You told me I was a poor man and couldn't support a large family. Now you see, because of my large family, I am a rich man.' (17)

Here, to invest in reproduction is to increase production and consumption, but it would not have been so if the children had refused to hand over a substantial part of their wages to a family fund. If they had kept their own money, set up separate homes, paid their taxes to the government who might have provided some security for the old, the situation would have been quite different. In that case, an individual would have had to choose between children and leisure goods, between a child and a mortgage, between a child and geographical and social mobility, perhaps between a child and a career. Acquisitive or possessive individualism alters all the equations. It leads to a world where the assumptions of Malthus and Darwin make some kind of sense.

That world of expectation and family obligations predominated in the first half of the nineteenth century in England, and is now spreading by way of Europe and America over much of the world. This leads us to ask where it came from, how it originated. Ultimately we wish to know how it worked and what caused it. In order to understand this we first of all need to know how long it has operated as a system. If it had started in the eighteenth century, then certain explanations can be advanced; if earlier, then others. Since the

16 Lee, *Rose*, 24.

17 Mamdani, *Myth*, 109.

pattern of marriage is both at the heart of the problem and also clearly of so much contemporary importance, it is not surprising that there has been growing speculation as to its origins. As we shall see, there is a good deal of confusion about the historical facts, even in relation to England.

The current state of uncertainty in the matter, with almost radically opposed views on most of the central issues concerning timing, is well surveyed by Michael Anderson in his summary of the historiography of the present situation. (18) It is therefore unnecessary to go into detail here. A number of writers have argued that the curious family system which underlies our modern world and that of Malthus and Darwin is a recent phenomenon. Thus the anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown wrote that 'we must remember that the modern English idea of marriage is recent and decidedly unusual, the product of a particular social development.'(19) It was the product of the industrial and urban revolutions, and hence basically a phenomenon created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (20) Others see the changes starting in the sixteenth century, after the Protestant Reformation, but only reaching their modern, nuclear family form with 'love marriage', in the later seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.(21) Some discern a deeper continuity, stretching back into the later Middle Ages, for they can discover no major revolution in structure or sentiment in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. (22)

Interestingly, it is the demographic sociologists and historians who have seen the deepest roots and greatest continuity. Thus Kingsley Davis wrote that 'Western European society tended to set the nuclear family apart a long time ago - a fact which is borne out by Western legal history, kinship terminology and courtship customs ... a product of cultural peculiarities extending back at least into mediaeval times.'(23) Richard Smith, speaking of the Malthusian demographic system, writes that 'the regime was most likely in existence when

18 Anderson, *Western Family*; for a further recent survey of approaches to the English family see Houlbrooke, *English Family*, ch. 1. A particularly strong difference exists between my views and those of Stone, *Family*. My detailed criticisms of Stone's position are given in Macfarlane, 'Review'.

19 Radcliffe -Brown, *African Kinship*, 43.

20 Notestein, 'Population Change', 16; Lowie, *Social Organization*, 220.

21 Stone, *Family*; Goode, *World Revolution*; Shorter, *Modern Family*.

22 Mount, *Subversive Family*; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*; Houlbrooke, *English Family*.

23 Davis, 'High Fertility', 35.

More wrote his Utopia as well as when Marx wrote *Das Kapital*. (24) Caldwell argues that 'For reasons that lie deep in its history, the family was increasingly nucleated in Western Europe centuries ago; indeed some social groups may have crossed the divide reversing the intergenerational wealth flow as early as the seventeenth century', and elsewhere he takes it back even further. The individualistic family system, he argues, could occur even 'before the creation of the modern economy. This seems to be what happened in Western Europe. The feudal system, built on the inherited ruins of the urbanized civilizations of the ancient world, went far towards making a nuclear family economically viable.'(25) A few have even argued that the basic premises of the system go back to the thirteenth century or before. These include Goody, Fortes and myself.(26) The causes are disputed, but the roots are thought to be very early. As Fortes argues, the preoccupation with marriage and other features of the modern pattern is claimed by some to be 'based on the religious ideology and the sexual morality and procreative ideal of Christianity, but I myself believe that it goes back even further in the history of Europe, probably to the Germanic tribes described by Tacitus.' (27)

Our present situation can be summarized briefly. We can see that the emergence of the Malthusian regime is of fundamental importance both in explaining the social and economic history of Western Europe and particularly England, and in analysing current developments in much of the world. Yet we are still very unsure about how that system worked as a set of interlocked institutions, and of when it emerged. In order to deal with these questions we shall be faced with great problems of variation and of evidence. Just to list a few of the difficulties gives an idea of the very high level of generalization and abstraction in which we shall be engaging.

We will be examining the central nature of marriage over the period roughly from Chaucer to Malthus, that is, from the late fourteenth century to the early nineteenth, a period of more than four hundred years. This is slightly shorter than the five -hundred -year period which F. W. Maitland dealt with in one lecture on the forms of action at common law. Like Maitland, we can say that this is (enormously long', but like him we can also argue that we 'do not

24 Smith, 'Fertility', 615.

25 Caldwell, 'Restatement', 356, 346 .

26 Macfarlane, *Individualism*; Goody, *Family and Marriage*; Fortes in Hawthorn, *Population*.

27 Hawthorn, *Population*, 124.

know that for our present purpose it could be well broken into sub-periods.'⁽²⁸⁾ Obviously, as we shall see, there were major changes over the period, and only a few of these can be highlighted. The difficulties of dealing with such a long span are compounded by the changing nature of the evidence. Many new sources become available, particularly from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, so that questions we are unable to answer for the later Middle Ages suddenly become partly answerable. One of the aims of the following analysis is to see how far the world of Malthus was a creation of his time, and how far it was already in essence present a century or more before the Reformation. In attempting to do so there will be a tendency, in describing a timeless model, to stress continuity. Obviously the physical, social, political, religious and economic world changed in numerous ways over this period, yet only by taking a long period can these questions be illuminated.

A second problem concerns differences in attitudes and structures between the various levels in society. Over the whole of this period England was a highly stratified society with vast differences of wealth and life style between the levels. Observations about one level cannot be extrapolated to others. In particular, anyone who has considered the evidence will be aware that the demography and familial structure of a small elite were in many respects different from those of the majority of the population, as T. H. Hollingsworth and Lawrence Stone have shown.⁽²⁹⁾ In essence, it would seem that as very large fortunes became involved, some of the characteristics of the domestic mode of production and reproduction emerged: marriages were more like alliances, arranged between kin groups, male dominance asserted itself, heirs were more important. This wealthy group has already received extensive attention, and the fact that many of the more obvious records were generated at the top makes its particular features especially prominent. In order to redress the balance, and because from the demographic and social point of view the rest of the population and its behaviour are equally important, we will concentrate here on the rest of the social strata. This encompasses basically the four groups which Malthus outlined, that is, from the minor gentry downwards.

The relative size of the two segments of the population in the seventeenth century can be seen from Gregory King's scheme of the

28 Maitland, *Forms of Action*, 43.

29 Hollingsworth in Glass, *Population*; Stone, *Family*.

English population in 1688.(30) King gives the whole population as roughly 5.5 million. Of these, some 19,720 or about 0.36 per cent were among the temporal and spiritual lords and baronets. If we add for good measure knights and a thousand of the 'Persons in greater Offices and Places', as well as the top lawyers and clergy and many of the wealthier gentry, we are still only dealing with less than 1 per cent of the population. Our concern in the following pages will be mainly with the other 99 per cent below that rank. In trying to present a clear picture of the heterogeneous groups below the aristocracy we will necessarily iron out differences between the poor, the middling and the rich, between professions and occupations. Like the ironing out of the subtler changes over time, this is the price one pays for attempting a general synthesis. Differences in education will likewise be minimized.

A third homogenization is a geographical and social one. Although it would seem that England by the start of this period had a remarkably uniform culture, there still remained important regional differences, particularly between the highland north and west with its pastoral economy and the lowland south and east with its arable agriculture. Although we have selected for intensive study and example communities located in each of these areas, this does not overcome the problems of variation. Furthermore, there are the differences between urban and rural populations. Can the inhabitants of London, Bristol or Norwich be lumped in with those of small villages in Essex or Westmorland? We have had to do so, and the extremely high urban-rural mobility which ironed out many of the strong oppositions found in many countries between country dwellers (paysans) and town dwellers (bourgeois) may partially justify this. Yet there is the same danger of compression into a single stereotype. Likewise, there were clearly very considerable differences between religious sub-groups - Quakers, Catholics, Anglicans - and between political groups - Cavaliers and Puritans, or Whigs and Tories. None of these dealt with in any depth.

A further problem concerns the degree to which England was merely a part of a much wider 'West European' pattern, or somehow peculiar. Throughout the following chapters I will be concentrating on the English evidence. This reflects my own interests and a belief that, as with the language, legal system and political structure, there was something distinctive about England within Europe. Yet, just as

30 Laslett, *Lost World*, 36-8.

the language is one example of a wider European, or even Indo-European, language family, so it is reasonable to believe that many of the family features we are examining are not unique. While concentrating on England, I do not necessarily imply that the peculiarities noted inevitably separated it off from Europe, and particularly from north-western Europe. As an anthropological historian, the comparisons I am making are usually not with other parts of Western Europe, but with non-European, peasant or tribal societies. Thus the book is primarily about England, but also has implications for the contrasts both within Western Europe and between it (including offshoots in America, Australia and elsewhere) and other non-European civilizations. The characteristics of English society, particularly the unspoken assumptions and rules, become easier to consider when we set them within this broader comparative framework.

A final over-simplification of a very important kind should be noted. Much of the discussion will be concerned with those areas of reproduction and sexuality which affect women even more than men. There are clearly ways in which men and women feel and behave differently. Yet nearly all of our sources of a personal kind were written by men, and the author of this work is a man. It should thus be noted that there will be a male bias in the discussion from both these causes, which not even the reading of Aphra Behn, Jane Austen and Dorothy Osborne, or the advice of female friends, can rectify.

If one had taken each geographical area separately, multiplied this by social class, added in the time dimension broken into reasonable slices of about a hundred years, and looked at this from both male and female points of view - in other words, applied the sort of microscope that enables an anthropologist to study one community of a few thousand people for one year of its history this book would have turned into thousands. As it is, what I have attempted to do is distil from a variety of sources some of the quintessential structures and sentiments. Readers interested in particular periods, places or persons can judge for themselves how far the general description fits what they know.