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But Pagels adheres to an idealist view of history—ideas and their conflicts are the crucial factor in analyzing history—rather than in plucky historical actors, who, despite their corruption, we recognize. Not surprisingly, Pagel's colleagues, as she dutifully reports, are a bit confused with her research. Appropriately, they ask what is she doing?

She maintains, as many modern thinkers, that the origins of religion may be discovered by science. These true reasons are located, not in dogmas—but in religious practice. It was in the practice of religion, as William James discovered, that the scientific reality of religious experience lay.

Often we sense contamination through contact with others and seek an escape. But the materialist world that we are living in cohabits with fallen matter and corruptible persons. We would do well to consider a myth of our "materialist" age: our failing is not materialism *per se* but a lack of respect for matter.

The implied revealers of the truth who sit with equanimity—without suffering— are instructed in the text of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Elders who persevere sit on a couch while Hermas, who falls short, sat alone on a chair. Thus sequestered, Pagels is the person alone on the chair.

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Seed, Patricia. *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1988.

At the 1989 Conference of the American Historians' Association, Patricia Seed was presented the Herbert Bolton Memorial Prize for her book, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico*. Seed's work is certainly deserving of this award, given annually by the Conference of Latin American Historians for the best book written in English on any significant aspect of Latin American History. This official appreciation of her work can be seen as an acceptance of women scholars into the field of Latin American History, as well as the recognition of the necessity of including women and their concerns in historical writing.

In *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico*, Patricia Seed

explores changes in normative discourse during the colonial period, as exemplified in prenuptial conflicts dating from 1574 to 1821 from the archdiocese of Mexico. She illustrates shifts in societal attitudes and values by examining the use of language in these documents, especially the changes in the meanings of the words "love," "will" and "honor," and the increasing assertion of patriarchal authority. The socially constituted meaning of the language employed in these documents is established through the use of religious and literary writings of the period. Ecclesiastical and state regulations concerning marriage are also examined to determine how changes in social discourse became encoded in the legal structure. This approach as well as the conclusions reached have generated controversy within the fields of both Latin American and Family history.

Seed begins her work with an examination of prenuptial disputes dating from 1574, the first documented instance of conflict between parents and children over marriage choice, and 1689, when there was a significant increase in the number of marriages parents were able to prevent. The voices of parents are absent from these documents. Instead, the couple, supported by members of the community, articulate their desire for marriage and the reasons for its opposition.

In this context Seed examines the meaning of "will." Couples during this period consistently used the word "*voluntad*", or free will, as an explanation for their desire to marry. To understand the meaning of will in its historical context, Seed examines popular literature and religious doctrine. She determines that will is the socially sanctioned expression of love; love is understood as an act of will. With this definition, love is conceived as the personal expression of the religious doctrine of free will and is thus supported by the ecclesiastical authorities, who have exclusive rights over marriage. The existence of witnesses in support of the couple's right to marry despite parental objections illustrates popular belief in free will in marriage choices. Social status or economic gain is never mentioned as a motive for marriage. On the contrary, one third of the cases during this period express the belief that it was disreputable to marry for money or to allow monetary considerations to interfere with marriage choice. The church, bolstered by community consensus on the importance of free will, actively engaged in the protection of the couple's right to marry over parental objections.

After this period, community consensus on the interpretation of

free will begins to dissolve. By 1720, the conflicts over marriage choices are considered by the church to be private disputes between parents and children. The separation of society into public and private spheres undermines the legitimacy of community intervention in family conflicts, legitimizing their control over their children's marriages.

Seed feels that with the advent of mercantile capitalism there was an evolution towards a positive regard for self interest and personal gain; wealth and status began to take priority over love and attraction. During this period, love begins to have connotations of lust or passion, thus becoming the opposite of reason. Love, now expressed as "*amor*" rather than *voluntad*, comes to be seen as an unstable emotion on which to base a stable union, such as marriage. Stressing the importance of prudence and calculation, parents argued that they understood the gravity of marriage better than their children, who were afflicted by immature emotions. They articulated objections to their children's marriages on the basis of disparity of economic and social status between their child and his or her prospective partner. This toleration of parents' use of economic sanctions was reflected in laws at the end of the eighteenth century which mandated parental permission before couples could marry. Patriarchal authority was confirmed, as the father's decision on the choice of his child's marriage partner became the legal guideline.

Seed's work contradicts the traditional theory on family history which was advanced by Edward Shorter in *The Making of the Modern Family*. In this view, fathers controlled and manipulated children's marriages for gain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the onset of capitalism in the eighteenth century there was greater emphasis on the individual which allowed freedom of choice and marriage for love. The work of Patricia Seed illustrates an opposite trend in hispanic society. Parent consent was not mandatory at the beginning of the period under study. Instead she finds moral and institutional support from the community for the free will of couples to marry over the objections of their parents. Rather than increasing the role of individual freedom, capitalism became a catalyst for increasing patriarchal control over children.

There are objections to the method used to reach this controversial conclusion. Her main source, the ecclesiastical records of prenuptial conflicts, are limited geographically to Mexico City and the urban areas directly surrounding it. In addition, this source is not necessarily

representative of the society at large since only a small minority of marriages were actually contested. Thus, whether this source can be used to make general statements on Mexican society or can even be considered representative of Mexico City has been questioned. Though ostensibly using these records as her main source, she also draws quite heavily from religious and literary writings from Spain. Using this type of source as a basis to determine the behavior of people has been criticized. She does qualify her usage of literature, pointing out that she does not use it to describe behavior, but as a "means of establishing the range of socially constituted meanings as understood and expressed in a given historical period" (pg. 9). However, even if we grant this use of texts, the accuracy of interpreting Latin American Society through Spanish literature must be carefully considered. For these reasons, her study has been seen as operating in a vacuum; the perceived difficulty of tying it in to other historical developments has prompted some to label this work "tunnel history."

This term, tunnel history, is often used to describe institutional history. In fact, Seed's work doesn't contain elements of institutional history. Her main source comes from ecclesiastical archives, and the examination of church doctrine and religious writings is essential in her work. Sectors of society outside her main source are not examined, another common practice of institutional history. The people who do appear in the prenuptial conflicts, arise from nowhere and disappear as suddenly; we know little about the rest of their lives outside of their brief appearance in these documents. These tendencies of institutional history have usually resulted in the institution in question appearing extremely powerful and central to the organization of society.

There are several reasons why Patricia Seed's work does not fall into this category. Her objective is not to impose the church or marriage conflicts as central in colonial society. Both the power of the church and the languages used in prenuptial conflicts can only be understood in relation to cultural codes, the sanctioned discourse of hispanic society. Prenuptial conflicts can be seen as an arena where normative discourse is challenged. That this arena is isolated, an aberration in colonial society's majority of noncontested marriages, allows ruptures in social consensus to become apparent. The individuals involved, regardless of their economic or social class, attempted to elaborate a variety of discourses used to control and define the institution of marriage for their



own use. This way of viewing marriage redefines the object of historical inquiry. Rather than understanding texts as referring to a closed and definitive exterior reality, Seed's work dialogizes history; that is, she recenters her analysis at the point of intersection between various discursive or textual forces. Her source, prenuptial disputes, allows for an analysis of discourses competing to define the nature of marital relations on the basis of love or economic interest. Seed's work does not deny the efficacy of underlying economic and empirical forces; rather her position insists that these forces must manifest themselves through discourse alongside other more purely discursive entities, such as romantic love and free will.

This approach is intriguing. An interpretation of texts allowing for the reconstitution of cultural codes within an historical framework in the words of Michel Foucault rejects "the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies." It is recognition that the possibilities of identity are projected onto the subject, that identity is not separate from history. Patricia Seed's work can be seen as an effort to move in this direction. The subject of her analysis, marital relations, is not prefabricated and projected back on to history. Rather, the concept of marriage becomes discontinuous, continually redefined by societies within their specific historical settings. Her research illustrates the struggle of competing discourses for the definition and therefore the control of marital relations. This approach thus offers us an unusual view into the past. More studies of this kind will greatly broaden our access as historians to life in colonial Latin America.

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