Judith Bennet published History Matters in 2006, laying out the concept of patriarchal equilibrium where advances in women’s social and economic position were accompanied by losses that offset their gains and reinforced patriarchal power. Recently she has noted that this idea has been hardly taken up in the writings of the last decade and explored why. I suggest that a key reason is that structural explanations for power have been significantly less useful following the rise of practice and performance theories, that open up new ways of thinking about and explaining power in groups as well as individual agency. In this paper, I explore these ideas through a case study of the early modern family, attending particularly to the ways that ‘adding emotion’ has destabilised our understanding of family hierarchies. At the same time, I would like to suggest that affective and performance models are compatible, indeed reinforce, structures of power, not least patriarchy, and that bringing these ideas back together may fruitfully help us consider the operation of power.