

Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640–1680. Rachel Adcock. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. xiv + 218 pp. \$109.95.

Critical scholarship has begun to correct the misogynist memory that first erased and then forgot the importance of women in early modern religious movements. Rachel Adcock has made a significant contribution to the *ressourcement* of women's literature and to the history of seventeenth-century nonconformist groups by providing a richly detailed account of the literary and religious activity of women among the early Baptists. Dissenting groups in seventeenth-century England ranged along a spectrum from Presbyterians on the right, who were closest to the Church of England, to Quakers on the left, who were nearest radical outliers like Familists, Levellers, Diggers, and Muggletonians. In the middle were Congregationalists (Independents) at the center right and Particular Baptists at the center left, with General Baptists on their left flank adjacent to the Quakers. It has been assumed that Baptists, as part of the sociopolitical center of dissent, were less indicative of the revolutionary culture that emerged. Adcock challenges this assumption.

Previous studies have tended to concentrate on Quaker women, who were more distant from the prevailing social norms. Even scholarship that has explored the role of early Baptist women has lacked such a thick account. Adcock offers the fullest and finest treatment to date of early Baptist women in their context. General Baptists are noticeably absent from the story, though as Adcock explains, no publications by General Baptist women have survived. Independents, who were theologically closest to Particular Baptists, serve to delineate the issues of doctrine and polity that were at stake between the two groups, but the book's focus is women in Particular Baptist congregations in which everyone was required to give an account of the experience of grace before being admitted into membership. It was precisely this requirement that opened up space for women's voices in churches. The main cast of characters in Adcock's narrative includes Elizabeth Poole, the prophetess of Abingdon; Jane Turner, a spiritual advisor to communities in the north of England and Scotland; Deborah Huish, who was highly regarded in her Fifth Monarchist congregation at Loughwood; Katherine Sutton, whose prophecies emphasized the importance of spiritual worship; Anna Trapnel, the prophetess of the Allhallows Church in London; and Anne Wentworth, who confronted her abusive husband and the elders of their congregation in London.

Adcock argues that Baptist women "enjoyed an authority and independence that were not available to women in other cultural contexts of that time" (1). To support this

thesis she shows how Baptist women defended themselves against popular beliefs that depicted them as weak-minded and immoral. She then explores how despite restrictions placed on their speech, women assumed spiritual leadership in congregations and contributed to theological debates. Finally, she examines their strategic roles in supporting the politically radical Fifth Monarchists. Adcock shows that the relation of women to their churches was mixed. Some exhibited the tension women undoubtedly faced in Baptist congregations, while others acted in support of their communities. Through careful and complex analysis of texts and contexts Adcock convincingly displays her conclusion that “Baptist networks allowed women more freedom to step outside their conventional roles” (193).

Still, there are unresolved issues. The line of demarcation between Independents and Particular Baptists is so sharply drawn that Vavasor Powell, the prominent Baptist evangelist and mixed communion advocate, and Sarah Wight, the (oddly omitted) prophetess and member of Henry Jessey’s Baptist congregation, are not regarded as strictly “Baptist.” But denominational boundaries were permeable, particularly in the first half of the seventeenth century, and liminality was contested. Such sharp delineation makes the selection of “Baptist” authors seem arbitrary and anachronistic. Nor is there any attempt to explain how the difference between congregational meetings and social gatherings was subverted by prophetic women as beds were transformed into pulpits and friends and family assembled in bedchambers became ecclesial communities. This trajectory of Baptist ecclesiology that defined ecclesiality as much by the gathering community as ministries of word and sacrament created new ecclesial space for women. There is also a presumed distinction between prophesying and preaching applied to women, while among Baptist congregations and in wider Protestant circles the terms were virtually interchangeable. These quibbles, however, do not detract from the overall success of Adcock’s book, which deservedly will be a standard work for years to come.

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