

*Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland: Essays in Honour of John Walter.*

Michael J. Braddick and Phil Withington, eds.

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*Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland* contains essays celebrating the career and influence of John Walter, emeritus professor of history at the University of Essex. Walter's research probed questions about the exercise of political agency among the lower and middling classes in early modern England and Ireland. This festschrift highlights work by former students and others who have been influenced by Walter to expand on his ideas and extend them further. The collection as a whole serves scholars of early modern England well by offering succinct summaries of research projects that shed new light on the variety of options for political action that were available to people. Some of these options are surprising and remind the reader that even hierarchical societies are never as stratified as they seem on the surface.

There are a number of very strong entries in the collection. Editors Michael Braddick and Phil Withington, both professors of history at the University of Sheffield, chose their essays well and weave them together in an order that allows for a progressive movement through the period and from high to low politics. Keith Thomas, fellow at All Souls, Oxford, provides a strong start to the collection with a reflection on the work and significance of Walter entitled "John Walter and the Social History of Early Modern England." Thomas notes, "Meanwhile, we are profoundly grateful for all he has done to broaden our understanding of crowd behavior, to probe the mentality of the common people, to reconstruct the politics of social relations, and to produce works of scholarship which are models of archival research and historical craftsmanship" (33). This introductory essay establishes the significance of Walter's work to those unfamiliar with it and also emphasizes the importance of the questions he has been exploring throughout his career.

Other contributors build on this foundation with some fascinating questions of their own. Notable essays include Alexandra Shepard's "Provision, Household Management and the Moral Authority of Wives and Mothers in Early Modern England." Shepard, professor of gender studies at the University of Glasgow, emphasizes the crucial roles played by women in upholding the domestic and economic stability of local villages. She posits that this indispensable function performed by women gave them political agency because of the reliance of their husbands and village leaders on them to perform their roles. Periods of protest opened the way for women to exercise agency due to their essential place in the social order, a position that could be leveraged constructively or as a catalyst for chaos when they protested the social order by choosing not to fulfill their roles. Shepard insists that "female protestors had good cause to feel aggrieved, as women, as mothers and as laboring people, and invested their efforts in upholding their claims to resources with assertions of moral authority and foundations

for grievance that were compatible in significance, if not always identical in substance, to men's" (89).

No exploration of popular culture's influence on early modern England would be complete without some reference to the Levellers. Michael Braddick delivers a focus on the ringleader himself with his essay "John Lilburne and Political Agency in Revolutionary England." While Lilburne gets some attention, Braddick highlights the influence of lesser-known figures who exercised their political agency in ways similar to Lilburne. While Lilburne got more attention because of his bombastic personality and higher status, other figures from the lower classes took advantage of the opportunities offered by the vibrant political and popular cultures of the revolutionary period. Braddick argues that Lilburne was "deeply involved in forms of political mobilisation which did offer opportunities for those normally excluded from political power to exercise political influence" (222). University of Warwick history professor Mark Knights explores the use of the specter of "popery" to mobilize popular agency in his essay "Religion, Anti-Popery, and Corruption."

These four essays are only a sample of the strong offerings in this collection. The authors' best tribute to Walter lies in their ample demonstration of how many doors he has opened for continued exploration. *Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland* provides the highest service a work of serious scholarship can by stimulating curiosity and pointing the way to further frontiers of exploration.

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*The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England, 1640–1650.*

John Rees.

London: Verso, 2016. xxii + 490 pp. \$34.95.

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The dustjacket describes John Rees as "an historian, broadcaster and campaigner," and all three personas are evident in this fine study. It is scholarly, engagingly written, and passionately committed. The Levellers were the most important political movement generated by the English Civil War, and it is astonishing that this is the first full-length study since H. N. Brailsford's account in 1961. Rees makes a valuable contribution in several important respects. Other scholars have explored various aspects of the Levellers' thought, some focusing (perhaps excessively) on the franchise issue, a heated topic at the Putney Debates, others probing their religious background and ideas. Most historians now accept that the Levellers' core principle was the sovereignty of the people and the challenge of how to make this a practical reality. The great strength of this study is the emphasis Rees places on the ever-shifting political context in which the Levellers operated, and their interaction with other players. Sudden changes in the political climate frequently demanded equally sudden shifts in strategy