

Ann Hughes. *Gender and the English Revolution*.

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New books by Ann Hughes are always eagerly anticipated events. As one of the world's foremost authorities on the English Revolution; editor of Gerard Winstanley works; historian of religious radicalism, Presbyterianism, and the Leveller movement; and the surest guide to origins and causes of the Civil War, she has amassed an unrivalled knowledge of the culture and politics of the mid-seventeenth century. Her latest book draws on that career's work and compellingly demonstrates how the political crises of the revolutionary decades should always be read as gender trouble.

Even if Hughes, with characteristic modesty, claims that her conclusions are "tentative and provisional" (145), it is difficult to dissent from the principal narratives offered by the book. One of these is that, given the ways in which contemporaries variously and vigorously based their arguments for political authority on ideas of the body, the household, the public, and the private, we need to put gender at the heart of our understanding of the revolution. This relocation of gender to the interpretive center of debates about the nature of the English revolution has several benefits not the least of which is that it helps to "overcome the unhelpful divisions between social, cultural, and political history" (4) that Hughes contends — along with John Walter and Keith Wrightson — have hampered historical studies of the early modern period in recent years. Hughes is keen to break down disciplinary divides elsewhere, too. She insists that women's history and gender history, so frequently presented as opposed in feminist scholarship, are best seen as complementary and interanimating approaches that might helpfully strengthen the foundations on which we approach seventeenth-century women's lives and texts and go some way toward preventing women's history from becoming "a sort of ghetto with little effect on general historical scholarship" (3).

For this reason, therefore, Hughes's book is dazzlingly eclectic in its range of reference and refuses to confine itself to a single perspective or set of sources. Here the experiences and writings of both men and women, conservatives and radicals, rich and poor are studied in tandem to contest that familiar Whig account of British history as the slow, steady march of progress. There is, as Hughes's evidence demonstrates beyond all doubt, "no straightforward connection between opportunities for women's agency . . . and the most radical [political] initiatives" (149) of the period.

Hughes makes this case over five densely footnoted, copiously evidenced chapters. Between an introduction and conclusion that rehearse the methodological debates outlined above, the second and longest chapter (at sixty pages), "Women and War," represents approximately one-third of the entire book. It analyzes the quotidian struggles, passions, and writings of an astonishing number of women who lived in this revolutionary society. Alongside her consideration of countless nameless women who resisted the excise tax or petitioned parliament for relief,

Hughes offers rich and suggestive readings of work by writers such as Katherine Chidley, Henrietta Maria, Katherine Philips, Hester Pulter, and Anna Trapnel. In scrutinizing the parts played by such women in political mobilizations and religious divisions, Hughes gives the lie to the idea that women were helpless victims in a masculinized political realm. That said, one of the most affecting moments in the chapter concerns the fate of a royalist woman spy captured by parliamentary forces after the battle of Edgehill (36). The troops threw her into a river to determine if she was a spy or a witch and when she confessed to her place in a royalist intelligence network, she was killed and thrown back into the river.

The third chapter, “Manhood and Civil War,” explores the ways in which military engagement and revolutionary crises redefined contemporary understandings of manhood. Through the study of Charles I as a uxorious king (118–22) or the discussion of the ways in which radical groups like the Levellers privileged forms of public male agency (100), Hughes shows how competing royalist and republic images of manhood were absolutely central to political culture from the regicide to the Restoration. Chapter 4, “Bodies, Families, Sex,” considers how fundamental concepts of gender identity and difference — such as fatherhood, motherhood, marriage, virginity, promiscuity — were deployed to explain political division. Especially valuable is Hughes’s discussion of the gender implications of the manipulation of the boundaries of public and private that took place in contemporary debates about the relationship between the public good and a private life.

Hughes is as persuasive and clever in this book as she always is. *Gender and the English Revolution* makes an important contribution to the study of gender and agency in the early modern period and will be a fixture on undergraduate reading lists for many years to come.

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