

If I Lose Mine Honour I Lose Myself: Honour among the Early Modern English Elite. Courtney Erin Thomas.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. xiv + 302 pp. \$75.

In a triad of interlocking essays published between 2004 and 2011, Professor Linda Pollock argued that historians had developed attenuated views of the understanding of honor in early modern British society that provided only a limited understanding of the social force of the concept. Female honor encompassed more than issues of sexual reputation upon which scholarship had focused. Male honor was not invariably locked into a vicious spiral in which the exchange of increasingly venomous language led ineluctably to violence or litigation. Historians, argued Pollock, had allowed their accounts to rest too heavily upon legal records. Discussions of male honor were dependent on the rich records of Star Chamber and the High Court of Chivalry; for female honor, slander litigation in the ecclesiastical courts was the overfavored evidential base.

Dr. Thomas's study affirms and builds on Pollock's suggestions. Its major source-base is provided by collections of the correspondence of elite families, and her extensive trawl through the archives, in unpublished or only partially published material, has produced some fascinating discussions. She demonstrates Pollock's points about the protean and malleable quality of the concepts of honor. These were deployed not only in relation to individual men and women, but also in discussion of "daily life and commonplace social interactions" (18): of household management, for instance, of responsibilities within the nuclear family, of duty to the wider lineage.

Yet, despite its rich array of in-depth case studies, and its broadly compelling argument, the book could have been more focused, more analytically acute. Part of the problem is that Dr. Thomas's writing is far from elegant. Heavy sentences, of multi-clausal construction, occasionally including parenthetical discussion, are too frequent. And this is particularly the case in the conceptual sections of the work, where the argument that the concept of honor had "multiple meanings and varied manifestations" yet was not "devoid of tangible meaning" (6), becomes very labored.

A lack of clarity in the book is not just an issue of style. There are also a number of substantive problems. One is Dr. Thomas's tendency to argue that honor is an issue in discussions where there is no direct reference to the concept in the sources she provides. A simple case is provided by her analysis (176–77) of Sir Richard Newdigate's understandably bitter fulminations against the attempt by his children to have him declared insane so that they could take control of his estate. This denunciation could have been phrased in terms of honor, but it was not: Newdigate's screed—angry, plaintive, and muddled as it is—does not raise the issue. Dr. Thomas also provides a long account (191–201) of the contested marriage between Thomas Thynne and Maria Touchet: Thomas's father and mother attempted to destroy the marriage by every means at their disposal, in litigation and in bitter recrimination against their son and his new wife.

Issues both of parental authority and of lineage identity (the Thynnes and the Touchets were ancient enemies in Wiltshire politics) might have led them to appeal to concepts of honor, but Alison Wall's extensive studies of the Thynne family indicate that no direct reference to personal or family honor is made in the rich correspondence surrounding the incident. Dr. Thomas suggests that "individuals often discussed matters relating to honor or reputation without necessarily employing those terms" (207), but this should be a preface to an obvious question. Why was the language of honor, so fertile in its potential meanings, avoided on some occasions? What alternative languages were preferred?

This criticism raises the second substantive issue that Dr. Thomas does not handle well: the question of changing meanings and the use of her key term in the early modern period. Dr. Thomas prefers to insist on the durability or continuity of concepts of honor but acknowledges that "the varying constituent parts of honor, and the level of privilege variously attached to them did change and shift slowly over time" (216). But she makes little attempt to understand the dynamics of these shifts in terms of the changing circumstance experienced by the elite. A parenthesis does remind us of "rising levels of urbanisation, shifts in conceptions of piety and religious identity . . . the expansion of the state, the rising wealth and associated prominence of some segments of society" (210). However, no attempt is made to demonstrate how these very general abstract forces inflected on the cultural expectations of the elite. This would require far more discussion of specific instances of value shifts in relation to constituent parts: on the decline of the heralds' visitations, for instance; on the move away from the expensive heraldic funeral; on the changed understandings of the significance of hospitality or gift-giving; on the common lawyers' suspicions of actions of defamation; on the feminization of service.

Clive Holmes, *Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford*

The Draining of the Fens: Projectors, Popular Politics, and State Building in Early Modern England. Eric H. Ash.

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The draining of the Fens in the seventeenth century was one of the most ambitious and large-scale engineering projects to be undertaken in early modern England. In the hands of a series of Dutch and English projectors, entire river systems were reconstructed, new artificial channels were created, and hundreds of acres of landscape were transformed from wetlands to arable and productive farmland, profoundly changing the lives and livelihoods of the inhabitants. But although the Crown had a vision of the Fenlands as unproductive and backwards, in need of reform and improvement, local people had a different view. In their eyes, the draining of the Fens threatened to destroy their