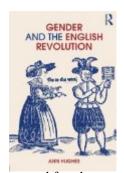
## H-Net Reviews in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Ann Hughes**. *Gender and the English Revolution*. London: Routledge, 2012. vi + 181 pp. \$115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-21490-2; \$35.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-21491-9.

Reviewed by Michelle White (University of Tennessee Chattanooga) Published on H-Albion (August, 2012) Commissioned by Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth



In this slim volume, Ann Hughes sets an ambitious agenda: to "try to discuss all the ways in which the political upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century interacted with, were affected by and had an impact on gendered roles and relationships" (p. 10). While I am not entirely convinced that Hughes succeeds in fulfilling her ambitions-for the reasons identified below-she does succeed in presenting her readers with an exciting work that places gender at the very heart of the English revolution. Structured thematically into five chapters, the book begins with a lengthy (almost thirty pages) and informative introduction that summarizes the main points of each chapter and details the gendered nature of politics leading up to the 1640s. Supplied here is a valuable overview of how religion, conduct books, medical and scientific knowledge, and common law all reinforced women's inferiority to men as well as wives' subjection to husbands.

Chapter 2-twice in length than the other chaptersfocuses on the diverse ways in which women actively
participated in the wars and male responses to their
activities. Among the women Hughes investigates are
those who served as spies, conspirators, and intermediaries; helped to defend besieged towns; defended their
estates and homes; aided with the civil war administration; and acted as camp followers. Discussed also are
the women who petitioned for the return of confiscated
property, pensions, the release of imprisoned (and often
condemned) husbands, and peace. Underlying Hughes's
assessment is the contention that, in large part, women
justified their public and political involvement on the basis of their familial duties and household responsibilities.

In this chapter, the author's examination of captured female spies is particularly intriguing. In one instance,

parliamentary soldiers captured a supposed female royalist spy and hurled her into a river "as if ducking a scold or investigating witchcraft" (p. 36). The woman was subsequently executed (presumably by hanging) and then tossed back into the river. To further emphasize the gendered disparity of punishment, Hughes might have mentioned that captured male spies were hanged without ever having to undergo the typical "swimming test" associated with witchcraft. Additionally, while Hughes rightly points out that many of the women targeted as witches were also branded as royalist sympathizers, she overlooks any reference to the fact that accusations of witchcraft, on occasion, crossed the gender and political divide. Oliver Cromwell, for example, was frequently referred to as a witch-though, as Diane Purkiss and others have pointed out, "often metaphorically rather than literally."[1] Perhaps the most peculiar accusations of witchcraft were leveled at Prince Rupert's dog, Boy, who was repeatedly portrayed to great propaganda effect as a "witch-dog" or familiar.[2]

Equally as thought provoking is Hughes's exploration of male responses to female petitioners. Because of their political activism, women petitioners (who by the very act of petitioning had overstepped the boundaries of appropriate feminine behavior) "faced much derision, contempt and, on occasion, violent opposition" (p. 55). Curiously absent from this chapter entitled "Women and War" is any exploration of the women who allegedly donned men's clothing and disguised themselves as soldiers—the so-called she-soldiers, such as Jane Ingleby who purportedly fought with the royalists at Marston Moor.[3] So alarmed was the king by female cross-dressing soldiers that in July 1643 he issued a proclamation calling for the "the Severest punishment

which Law and our displeasure shall inflict" should a "woman presume to Counterfeit Her Sex by wearing mans apparell."[4]

In chapter 3, Hughes turns her attention to male political activities and focuses on the various forms of political manliness that developed throughout the civil war period. Royalists and parliamentarians, we learn, often denounced one another as "inadequate, imperfect or effeminate men" (p. 92). The Levellers Richard Overton and William Walwyn suffered from attacks on their masculinity, in response to which they launched spirited defenses. The twice cuckolded Earl of Essex became grist for Royalist political mills by being routinely insulted and taunted in poetry, pamphlets, and sermons, as well as on military banners. The king too, we are reminded, was not immune to attacks on his masculinity. Following the Royalist defeat at Naseby and the publication of Charles's personal correspondence to Henrietta Maria, "parliament's editorialising of the captured letters emphasised the pernicious influence of the queen; her dominance unmanned and, by implication, unkinged her husband" (p. 119). Overall, Hughes's chapter "Manhood and Civil War" certainly reinforces Susan Kinsley Kent's salient point that "gender and sexuality served as an effective ideological weapon in the war between royalists and parliamentarians."[5]

At the center of chapter 4 is an assessment of "the political origins and purposes of sexualised language, sexual fantasy and pornography, and ... how civil war divisions were reflected in and in turn affected understandings of the gendered body" (p. 126). Here readers learn that during in the early stages of the war fears about the war's impact were often manifested in dirty jokes, bawdy entertainments, and mock petitions-most of which "presented women as sexually obsessed" (p. 127). Between the First and Second Civil War, Hughes argues rather convincingly, "a satirical and sexualised stress on women out of place was a means of coming to terms with uncertainty and division on the parliament's side" (p. 128). Hughes then advances her discussion chronologically by exploring how the king's trial and execution affected "the parallels drawn between the body politic and the human body" (p. 10).

The monograph ends with a brief conclusion in which Hughes recapitulates the main themes of the book, shows how her study contributes to the historiography of the English revolution, and finishes with the provocative observation: "We cannot be certain how relationships between men and women were transformed in the long run by the English revolution, but it is clear that we can only

fully understand that revolution by paying attention to gender" (p. 149). Although not a suitable introductory text for English (British) civil war novices, Gender and the English Revolution would serve well as supplementary reading for many advanced undergraduate courses in English history and gender studies. With that in mind, the book's short chapters, subheadings, and synthesis of much of the recent literature on the subject make it particularly appealing. The lack of a bibliography is a drawback as it frustrates attempts to track down many of the sources identified in the endnotes. Moreover, because of the book's thematic organization, an introductory summary of the events that led to the outbreak of the First Civil War-or even a chronological table at the front of the book that identifies important political and military events-would have been a welcome addition for undergraduates as well as other nonspecialists.

Despite the criticisms and caveats noted here, Hughes has produced an excellent, compelling work that not only spotlights the gendered political world of the English revolution but also makes a clear and convincing argument for the examination of gender and gender roles to better understand the political turmoil of the mid-seventeenth century.

## Notes

- [1]. Diane Purkiss, Literature, Gender and Politics during the English Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 215; and Brian Levak, Witchcraft in the British Isles and New England (London: Routledge, 2001), 277.
- [2]. The most recent account of this subject is Mark Stoyle, *The Black Legend of Prince Rupert's Dog: Witchcraft and Propaganda during the English Civil War* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011).
- [3]. Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (London: Women's Press, 1998), 21; and Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-51* (London: Routledge, 1992), 308.
- [4]. Fols. 75-76, Harleian Manuscripts, 66804, British Library, London, quoted in Guyonne Leduc, "Women in the Army in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women's Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Isabelle Baudino, Jacques Carré, and Marie-Cécile Révauger (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 81.
- [5]. Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, *1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 22.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion

**Citation**: Michelle White. Review of Hughes, Ann, *Gender and the English Revolution*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. August, 2012.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=34750



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.