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Review of Anne Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760: A Social History*

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two very different accounts of the origins and nature of royal power circulated in Henrician England, arguing that people who subscribed to the divergent theories nevertheless managed to coexist peacefully until the reign of Charles I. Kelley's chapter suggestively addresses the question of the links between British and Continental thought. Peck combines discussion of some excellent new material that she has discovered with a useful survey of the extensive secondary literature on her subject. Lamont's contribution ("The Puritan revolution: a historiographical essay") recapitulates themes with which his earlier work has made us familiar, again stressing the importance of millenarianism, and paying particular attention to Baxter and Prynne. Arguably, his discussion would have been still more useful if he had at least mentioned such royalist pamphleteers as Henry Ferne, Dudley Digges, Sir John Spelman, and such parliamentarians as John Lilburne, Philip Hunton, and William Bridge. Some reference to John Sanderson's important "*But the People's Creatures:*" *The Philosophical Basis of the English Civil War* (1989) would also have been in order here. The chapter by Pocock and Schochet on "Interregnum and Restoration" ranges well beyond the limits of its title, discussing a number of writings published in the early 1640s as well as works produced in the 1650s and 1660s. Nenner vigorously asserts the absolutism of the last two Stuart kings, and provides a judicious and nuanced account of the links between ideological change and political reality in the later seventeenth century. Phillipson's fine and wide-ranging chapter does discuss Scottish as well as English thought. Among much else, Phillipson convincingly stresses the polemical significance of Charles Leslie, arguing that his "demonstration that 'The Great Lock' was a radical exclusionist was of enormous importance to eighteenth-century culture" since it meant that Whigs thereafter regarded the *Second Treatise* as "a volatile text, which was best handled gingerly" (p. 221). In his two chapters on 1760-90, Pocock (like Phillipson) adopts a genuinely *British* perspective, and indeed says a good deal about American thought as well. Finally, Schochet's Epilogue reflects upon the uses to which a book such as this one might be put in these post-modern times.

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Anne Laurence. *Women in England, 1500-1760: A Social History*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1994. Pp. xvi, 301. \$39.95. ISBN 0-312-12207-1.

Anne Laurence's study of the social history of women in early modern England has much to recommend it, though it will probably be much more appealing for students than for scholars doing serious research. The purpose of this book, as Laurence states it, is to examine the experience of a wide variety of women, and how expectations about women may have changed between 1500 and 1760, from the Reformation to the Industrial Revolution. The goals in her study include not only seeing the differences between male and female experience but also the differences as well as shared experience for women depending on class, marital status, location, religion, and ethnic/racial background.

The book is organized in thematic sections: historians' views of women; gender, class, and race; women's life cycles; marriage; sex; motherhood and friendship; health; work; material culture; learning; religious communities and practice of Christianity; popular belief and custom; law; crime; and women's and men's worlds.

Some of the chapters are excellent and present a lot of new information. The chapter on gender, class, and race is illuminating, and her work on women's life expectancy, for

example, is useful. Laurence employs some very interesting examples: she effectively explores court cases to explain how family members felt about one another. On the subject of women's work, Laurence is particularly astute. In many of her chapters, Laurence frequently provides individual examples to back up her assertions, as well as a thoughtful analysis of how early modern women might have felt about their lives. She is persuasive in arguing that these mothers loved their children and deeply felt their loss when they died, but that they would have felt more resignation about their children's deaths than their twentieth-century counterparts.

Laurence's chapter on women's work provides valuable information on the legal regulations for women's work and restrictions in the guilds. In the 1640s, during the civil war, regulations for trade, apprenticeships, and employment relaxed, especially in London. Many women in London were responsible for themselves. Though many worked for wages, others might take in lodgers to survive. Domestic service was also an important source of women's employment—increasingly so as other possibilities dwindled.

An interesting section on women living as men provides examples of women who disguised themselves as men to fight in the Civil War, both as Royalists and Parliamentarians. There is a brief but fascinating story of Hannah Snell, who in the eighteenth century served as a soldier, received a pension, went on the stage, but finally died insane in Bedlam.

Laurence's analysis of the gendered nature of the law is excellent in demonstrating how women were treated differently from men. On the one hand, women were four times less likely to be charged at the assizes with a felony, unless it was witchcraft or infanticide. On the other hand, a higher standard of behavior was expected for women. For example, in 1633 Thomas Mace and his wife were found to have been drunk on a Sunday night; *she* was sent to the stocks but he was not. Not surprisingly, women were more likely to have been victims than perpetrators.

Laurence's chapters on religious experience are mixed. Though she presents valuable material on women's religious communities, she is less persuasive on the more general question of the impact of religion on women's lives. And I believe she seriously underestimates the popular religious significance of Elizabeth I as queen.

The book's great strength—that it is so wide ranging—is also its greatest weakness. There are occasional mistakes or oversimplifications, and in some cases Laurence deals with issues too briefly and superficially. For example, there is one page on same-sex relationships and she devotes only a page-and-a-half to prostitution. The book is filled with fascinating information and anecdotes, though the discussions are often frustratingly brief.

Anne Laurence demonstrates in her study that what benefited men in early modern England did not necessarily improve women's circumstances. Unfortunately, Laurence has very few notes, and only provides a rather sketchy general guide for further reading, but someone who wants a well-written and interesting introduction to the lives of women in early modern England will certainly find it here.