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Review of Sharon L. Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII*

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SHARON L. JANSEN. *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII*. New York: St. Martin's. 1996. Pp. viii, 232. \$39.95.

Sharon L. Jansen's study of women and popular resistance in the reign of Henry VIII is an important work that breaks new ground and will be of value to a wide range of scholars. It is scrupulously well researched and shows a thorough grounding in the secondary literature on the politics of early Tudor England, women's history, and feminist theory. Jansen focuses on four women, all of whom were executed for treason in the reign of Henry VIII: Elizabeth Wood, Margaret Cheyne, Elizabeth Barton, and Mabel Brigge. Yet none of these women had posed a direct, physical threat to the king. They had taken no part in armed rebellion. The government of Henry VIII, however, perceived them as a threat to stability of the realm. While Jansen admits that it is difficult to separate politics from religion in the reign of Henry VIII, her study examines women whose protest emphasized concerns about legitimate authority and rightful rule. (She does not, for example, include Anne Askew in her study.)

Scholars today know a great deal about the wives and daughters of Henry VIII; most of the women Jansen discusses, however, are relatively obscure. Barton, the holy maid of Kent who warned Henry of the dangers to himself and his country if he went ahead with the dissolution of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, is the best known, although Jansen's work is the most sophisticated I have seen on Barton. Those who specialize in witchcraft may well have already come across Brigge, whose "black fast" against Henry

was the latest and final charge of doing harm through magic made against her. In a "black fast," the person eats no milk or meat for nine days while concentrating all her energy on the person against whom she is fasting. A successful fast would cause that person's death, and rumors spread through Norfolk about Brigge's fast against the king. Cheyne was executed in the aftermath of the Pilgrimage of Grace. The most obscure of Jansen's case studies, Wood died because of the "treasonous rumors" she had spread about Henry VIII soon after the planned (but never executed) insurrection in Walsingham, around the same time as the Pilgrimage of Grace. The Treason Act of 1534 had stated that in order for the government to construe treason, words had to be "maliciously" spoken. Unfortunately, few of Cheyne's and Wood's words survive. Those that do, Jansen argues, did not fit this definition, yet they still received the ultimate punishment. Particularly around the time of the Pilgrimage of Grace, women accused of treasonous words were subject to execution. Jansen's case studies demonstrate that women of all classes were at least somewhat aware of what was going on at the court and in Parliament. And some women were willing to make their opinions known.

Jansen's study is certainly the most thorough I have seen on Brigge and the most useful on Barton. Her chapters on Brigge are particularly well written and provocative. Jansen provides new research on all of these women, and presents them in ways that not only demonstrate their significance but also make them interesting to the reader. Her strategy of having two chapters on each person is very effective. I found, for example, her discussion of the family ties of Cheyne to be insightful and to raise a number of new issues about the reasons for Cheyne's execution.

Jansen makes innovative use of a broad range of primary sources, and she offers a very useful discussion of gossip as a source for historians. She is up to date on the secondary literature and employs the recent work of women's historians to strengthen her theoretical base. Jansen's case studies not only allow us more insight into these specific women's acts of protest and resistance; we can also learn more about how the political and social structure of early Tudor England dealt with such women's behavior. Understanding these women gives us more insight into popular reaction to Tudor political reforms of the 1530s. The book is written with engaging, readable style, which should make it accessible to students as well as specialists. Scholars in the field of sixteenth-century English history, literature, and women's studies will find this book valuable.

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