

## SEX AND SECTS: GENDERED LANGUAGE IN INTERREGNUM HEREFORD

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English politics and society underwent sweeping changes after Civil War and Revolution. Parliament, Puritans, and the Army's experiments with England's government marked the period of 1647-1653. The victors tried creating a Godly nation through Republicanism and other non-traditional forms of government. The chaos of politics replaced the chaos of war. Experimentation climaxed with 1653's Parliament of Saints: A Parliament of the Godly selected by church congregations. English politics risked turning from traditional government. Rule by the Godly lasted less than a year; the attempt to impose Heaven on Earth failed. By 1654 radicalization of the English government ended. Ideological and religious differences exposed by Revolution hastened a return to traditional government and societal order. As government returned to familiar forms, in guise of the monarchical Protectorate, society desired pre-war stability, especially with religious and sexual issues. Many English men and women hoped restoring power to local gentry would end religious dissent and experimentation, but radicalism refused to disappear. Doctrinal disputes existed not only between defeated Royalists and victorious Puritans, but also among the victors themselves.

Sometimes religious, political, or personal disagreements would find expression in print. An example of this is a 1654 Hereford pamphlet exchange:

*Impostor Magnus* and its response *The Close Hypocrite Discovered*. The dispute concerns radical religious doctrine but reference to acceptable sex and gender roles also appear. The gendered language reveals a shared vision of women's relation to political upheaval and societal disorder. Images of disruptive women existed as part of Puritan England's Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary *mentalité*.

This essay proposes the following analysis of the above pamphlets: first, an outline of the pamphlets by Silas Taylor and Richard Delamain, second, an overview of gendered language in Early Modern England, last, a return to the pamphlets examining how shared language indicates shared *mentalité*, even between bitter enemies.

The first pamphlet, *Impostor Magnus*, promises examination of the religious and social doctrine of Richard Delamain, a minister in Hereford. The author, Silas Taylor, attacks the religious doctrine of Delamain who, "with inticing words, gliding over his bitter pills of blasphemy and error, hath done much mischief in the neighbouring Counties."<sup>1</sup> Fearful that others had "an itching ear to hear novelties," Taylor warns Hereford not to "embrace Doctrines of the Devil."<sup>2</sup> While "confess[ing] ignorance" in understanding Delamain's teachings, Taylor believes these teachings "hogs-wash."<sup>3</sup> Taylor finds disturbing some Christians "delight to make Religion a covert for their baseness."<sup>4</sup> Removal of Delamain would be difficult. Both Taylor and Delamain emphasize the Governor and several leading men in Hereford support Delamain.<sup>5</sup>

Richard Delamain's response disputes allegations of wrongdoing. Calling into question the character of this "accuser of the brethren," Delamain illustrates Taylor's various sins.<sup>6</sup> While admitting to unnamed "errors," Delamain "upon mature Deliberation, and due consideration renounce them all along since."<sup>7</sup>

1 Silas Taylor, *Impostor Magnus, or the Leperdeman of Richard Delamain, Now Preacher in the City of Hereford. Being A Narrative of his life and Doctrine since his first coming into that County* (London: 1654), 2. Spellings have not been modernized from seventeenth-century sources.

2 *Ibid.*, 4.

3 *Ibid.*, 10.

4 *Ibid.*, 17.

5 Taylor, 18; Richard Delamain, *The Close Hypocrite Discovered: or a true Description of the Life and Perion of Cap. Taylor, in the City of Hereford: Being a Vindication of Mt. Rich. Delamain, Preacher in the said city, and Pastor of a Congregated Church in the said County: In answer to a scurrilous pamphlet entituled Impostor Magnus* (London: 1654), 5 (7). Pages misnumbered, corrected page in parenthesis.

6 *Ibid.*, 1.

7 *Ibid.*, 3.

Delamain believes his doctrine confirmed by the "Letter of Scripture."<sup>8</sup> Attacks on Taylor's character include Delamain comparing Taylor to Satan tempting Christ in the wilderness.<sup>9</sup> The pamphlet ends with Taylor labeled a common liar with no honor among gentlemen.<sup>10</sup>

Images of women appear within these attacks and responses of both Taylor and Delamain. "And you may see here he first makes practise with women and widdows," Taylor tells his audience when describing the spread of Delamain's heresies.<sup>11</sup> *Impostor Magnus*, by connecting Delamain with religious radicalism, attempts to evoke memories of Revolutionary disorder created by religious radicals. In the popular mind religious radicalism equaled female independence which led to sexual and social disorder. According to Taylor, Delamain used "familiar and private converse to sow the seed of the Doctrine of the Seekers."<sup>12</sup> Delamain also allegedly endorsed Ranter doctrines.<sup>13</sup> Both sects, the Seekers prior to the Revolution and the Ranters afterwards, gained a reputation for female independence and were viewed as responsible for much turmoil. Taylor exploited the fear of women abandoning traditional gender and sex roles, suggesting that Delamain, by endorsing radicalism, threatened the natural order of society. Surely any rational man, Taylor asks, could see the danger of "ignorant silly women, teilling] men both learned and knowing: That they could not understand" God because of their sinfulness.<sup>14</sup> The importation of sectarian beliefs by Delamain into Hereford would give rise to independent women. The independent woman, the spiritual and social equal of man, violated "natural order" and lead to chaos. This was a lesson of the Civil War and Revolution. This is Taylor's reason for wanting the potentially disruptive force of sectarianism removed from Hereford.

In his response, *The Close Hypocrite Discovered*, Delamain distances himself from the charges of radicalism by rejecting several Sectarian principles.<sup>15</sup> His response contains the same "feminized" language as Taylor's attack. "[Taylor] would make you believe of his valor . . . it must not be in actions, but in words,

8 *Ibid.*, 4.

9 *Ibid.*, 1.

10 *Ibid.*, 10 (12).

11 Taylor, *Impostor Magnus*, 3.

12 *Ibid.*, 10.

13 *Ibid.*, 15.

14 *Ibid.*, 5.

15 Delamain, *The Close Hypocrite Discovered*, 6.

his best skill being in that weapon, which is most proper to women."<sup>16</sup> Delamain insultingly compares Taylor to a gossip or scold.<sup>17</sup> English society expected women to be silent, those who did not were viewed as upsetting social order.<sup>18</sup> Delamain also refers to Taylor as the "mother of this divelish Pamphlet."<sup>19</sup> In a patriarchal society the role of father was held in highest esteem, not the role of mother. Once Delamain reduces Taylor to the status of a woman, the latter's argument becomes ignorable. Delamain thought Taylor no better than a woman, an almost-human with little importance.<sup>20</sup>

Before focusing on charges of sexual disorder, contemporary views of women and sects, and their relation to the images described by Taylor and Delamain, require examination.

The realms of politics and religion belonged to men, but limited roles for women existed.<sup>21</sup> The active role of women in sects was not unusual. In many ways it was a continuation of trends almost a century old.<sup>22</sup> For a few women in separatist Churches that role sometimes involved challenging Anglican or civil authority.<sup>23</sup> These challenges sometimes met with brutal response. Parliament's punishment of Quaker James Nayler in 1656, for entering Bristol on the back of a donkey while women placed bougns on the road in front of him, bordered on barbaric.<sup>24</sup> But the women who assisted Nayler received no punishment.<sup>25</sup> It was unthinkable to most Englishmen that a woman could be more than an accessory. Sects seemingly encouraged women to feel equal to men. Female equality threatened societal order. Many Englishmen, wearied by over a decade

16 *Ibid.*, 6 (8).

17 David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 38.

18 N. H. Keeble, "The Colonel's Shadow: Lucy Hutchinson, women's writing and the Civil War," in *Literature and the English Civil War*, ed. by Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 337.

19 Delamain, *The Close Hypocrite Discovered*, 7 (9).

20 *Ibid.*, 6 (8).

21 Phyllis Mack, "Women as Prophets During the English Civil War," *Feminist Studies* 8 (Spring 1982), 21.

22 Claire Cross, "He-Goats Before the Flocks: A Note on the Part Played by Women in the Founding of Some Civil War Churches," in *Popular Beliefs and Practice*, edited by G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), 202.

23 Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 204-205.

24 On Palm Sunday, 1656, James Nayler re-enacted Christ's entrance into Jerusalem. After his arrest, Parliament debated six weeks about his sentence. Christopher Hill describes Nayler's punishment and the results: "[He was] to be flogged through the streets of London, his tongue to be bored with a hot iron, his forehead branded; . . . [taken] to Bristol for a second flogging; and to be kept in prison until Parliament decided otherwise . . . physically he never recovered from it; he died three years later at the age of 43." Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 249, 364-65.

25 Patricia Crawford, "The Challenges to Patriarchalism: How did the Revolution affect Women?" in *Revolution and Restoration*, edited by John Morrill (London: Collins and Brown, 1972), 122.

of unrest, viewed control or elimination of religious radicalism as essential to preserve "natural order."

However, the popular view of sectarians and women had little foundation in reality. Despite involvement by women and vaguely feminist rhetoric, radical sects were still patriarchal.<sup>26</sup> Sectarian men generally did not support women taking active and public roles in religion.<sup>27</sup> Separatists expected women to be submissive, like women in sanctioned churches.<sup>28</sup> Belonging to a sect was not the liberating experience contemporaries believed.

Sects were also suspect because of their sexual philosophies. The Seekers and Ranters appeared to encourage adultery and promiscuity. Fear existed of women expressing themselves sexually. This perception differed from reality. The Digger Gerald Winstanley acknowledged in the seventeenth century that sexual freedom was available only for men since pregnancy limited women's sexual freedoms.<sup>29</sup> Pregnancy was not the only barrier to female sexuality. Sex outside of marriage also carried strict legal sanctions. Anti-fornication laws passed by Parliament in 1650 provided the death penalty for female adulterers, males subject to lesser punishments.<sup>30</sup> Although the harshest sentences were rarely carried out, the Interregnum assured the control of women both legally and sexually.

Taylor and Delamain, despite their disagreements over religion, share common images of women. Taylor's images of women include heretical beasts, unrestrained by the rationality of men, and cold-hearted sexuality.<sup>31</sup> Female sexuality causes Delamain to show "himself more effectionate to Mr. Cogans wife, then to his own child when it dyed."<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that Taylor contrasts Mrs. Cogan's proper role of wife with mistress by omitting her first name. Delamain's presence would only result in an increase in incidents similar to when

John Davis a Taylor, and Anne Madox a School-mistress ... in this County of Hereford ... perswaded his wife to permit Anne Madox to lye with them ... Davis perswades his wife to rise and go . . . left her husband and Anne Madox fast asleep together: (may further, you must believe that there they lay without waking four hours together, or you shall be none of Delamains Churchy)<sup>33</sup>

26 *Ibid.*, 123.

27 Laurence, *Women in England*, 204.

28 Crawford, "The Challenge to Patriarchalism," 123.

29 *Ibid.*, 115.

30 *Ibid.*, 116.

31 Taylor, *Impostor Magna*, 12.

32 *Ibid.*, 17.

33 *Ibid.*, 17-18.

For Taylor a threat to the social order existed. Delamain, he feared, preached a message of license to the women of Hereford.<sup>34</sup> The encouragement of society's marginalized people to defy order equaled radicalism. In Taylor's view, radicalism offered Hereford nothing except chaos and humiliation. Any man who preached Delamain's doctrine encouraged disorder.

Delamain, however, also attacks sexual disorder. Responding to charges of "importing with one Ginni Clare," Delamain assures the reader he was most active in expelling her from the Church.<sup>35</sup> The sexually free woman remained ignored by polite society. Delamain rejects the concept of "community of women," a symbol of Ranters supposed free-love doctrine, "as a most abominable wicked thing."<sup>36</sup> When Taylor attacks Delamain's wife as a "maid servant," Delamain argues his wife's good reputation--and points to Taylor's own sexual misdeeds with a Jane Clare.<sup>37</sup> However radical his doctrine is, Delamain emphasizes traditional roles for women.

Taylor and Delamain's use of gendered language indicates a shared *mentalité* among conservative and radical Parliamentarians. Their shared image of woman as an element of disorder reflects societal fears of religious instability and social disorder. The desire to return to the pre-Revolution order perpetuated the use of women as a symbol of political disorder. Associating an opponent with women labeled him a radical and a threat to traditional order. In response, radicals distanced themselves from feminist rhetoric, and separatist churches formed hierarchies that excluded women.<sup>38</sup> The linkage of women and sects had been made, providing more conservative elements an easily understood symbol to attack. Associating women with disorder during the Revolutionary era lasted into the Interregnum, exhibiting itself in the *mentalité* of the Puritan victors.

34 *Ibid.*, 3.

35 Delamain, *The Close Hypocrite Discovered*, 7 (9).

36 *Ibid.*, 6.

37 Taylor, *Impostor Magna*, 17; Delamain, *The Close Hypocrite Discovered*, 7 (9).

38 Anne Laurence, "A Preshood of She-Believers: Women and Congregations in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England," in *Women in the Church*, edited by W. J. Shields (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), 345.