

the 1640s and 1650s. And that complexity is, after all, a major source of our fascination with the period.

Teresa Feroli. *Political Speaking Justified: Women Prophets and the English Revolution*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2006. 270 pp. index. append. bibl. \$49.50. Review by B. F. PARKER, ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

In her ambitious study of three female prophets (Eleanor Davies, Anna Trapnel, and Margaret Fell), Teresa Feroli argues that women entered the political sphere during the English Revolution and Restoration by claiming authority to speak based on their identity as women. Her aim, in part, is to locate female political consciousness much earlier than has historiographically been supposed. More importantly, however, Feroli suggests that the prophesying of these three women represented not only a powerful call for political change but anchored an acute awareness that ultimately shaped secular feminism (32). In closely analyzing the religious texts of these prophets, Feroli follows through on her promise to assess not only their feminism but also their political thought (31). She also remains mindful in unpacking of selected texts that prophesy was a puritan discourse rooted in self-identification, a genre that lent itself to political representation and activism in a world turned upside down. Along the way Feroli demonstrates how justification of female authority shifted from a patriarchal model under the righteous rule of James I to a model of sexual difference under the tyrannical Charles I, Cromwell, and Charles II.

To her credit, Feroli gives two chapters to Lady Eleanor Davies, whose prophetic works distinguished between the reign of fellow prophet James I and the wicked and unjust Charles. This is carried out by a close textual analysis of Davies' *Warning* (1625) and her anti-Charles tract *All the Kings* (1633), a reading that demonstrates an increasing awareness of Davies' role as the Prophet Daniel under the Babylonian King Belshazzar (51). What Feroli makes of this is illuminating, arguing that Davies came to understand her authority as rightfully inherited from James I, a source of truth and order in a time of an impending apocalypse. Charles' failings are also read in Davies' *The Restitution of Prophecy* (1651), which provides an "extensive meditation on

the fate of her brother, the earl of Castelehaven," who was convicted of rape and sodomy in 1631 (73). She, like her brother, is alienated by the ruling powers and Castlehaven's alleged "sexual deviance" is compared to her own "transgressions" as a female prophet. Thus her brother's execution, a result of Charles's failure to intervene of his behalf, is representative of the end of times. At such a moment, when men are effeminate rulers, "domineering women have taken center stage (96)."

Feroli's depiction of the political thought of Trapnel and Fell is less engaging, even if their justifications for female prophesying are more novel and modern. For the Fifth Monarchist Trapnel, the body was a sacred if material possession that represented a political domain. In January 1654, just a month after the termination of the Barebones Parliament, she fell into a fortnight trance at Whitehall where she fasted and "uttered Revelations (97)." As she blended individual and national crises, Trapnel argued she was not a sufferer but rather a harbinger of God's holy will. Literally and figuratively filled with Christ's spirit, Trapnel's body becomes a habitat for godliness and, consequently, divine political authority. In a similar vein, Margaret Fell, the "mother of Quakerism" (149), articulated a vision of prophetic and political power based on the intimate bond between women and Christ. With Fell, Feroli is bolder in her claims, arguing that her *Women Speaking Justified* (1666) is a tract that "transcends the bounds of much Quaker gender polemic because it not only affirms the theological point that women may speak in the church but also attempts to change general perceptions of women's abilities (151)." Such an assertion is rooted in Fell's belief that women's sexual difference was a positive attribute, explaining that their maternity, weakness, and carnality made their reliance on Christ all the greater. Female sexuality was no longer to be neutralized or excused, but rather embraced as the divine sanction for political engagement.

Feroli is to be commended for writing an account of little known and certainly undervalued women prophets, and her analysis of their writings evinces some clear political thinking about the authority of women to speak on national issues. Nevertheless, her study could have been more convincing had it situated the texts more closely in political problems of the revolution. As with any examination of specific texts and literary genres, she runs the risk of isolating the works and rendering them intellectually sterile. To avoid this danger, Feroli links the prophets as building blocks for one another. As a

result, prophetic discourse and female authority is presented as a tidy narrative of increased feminine consciousness and radicalism, culminating with Mary Astell, who used the politics of sexual difference to write a “recognizably secular female tradition” and a “vision of female equality (214).” Feroli claims much for her book, and when she compares texts, relates them to broader contexts, and details the role of sectarian prophesying, her arguments work. But unfortunately those moments are too few and she resorts to reasserting, with greater insistence, her broad claims.

Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein, editors. *English Radicalism, 1550-1850*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007. vii + 381 pp. Review by ROBERT MCJIMSEY, COLORADO COLLEGE.

In this collection of eleven essays, adding an introduction and two “afterwords,” thirteen scholars offer their definitions and applications of radicalism and its proponents. Given the slippery nature of English radicalism, each author’s approach is somewhat idiosyncratic and the best this reviewer can offer is guidance concerning a few interpretative and analytical points. Along this line, reading the introduction and the “afterwords” would be a good preparation for digesting the main corpus.

The approaches of these scholars to their subject reflect the historian’s dilemma of seeking a proper perspective. Akin to choosing a camera lens, the closer one views the subject the more disparate and particular the evidence becomes and the more the writer relies on descriptive language. Essays one through five, eight and eleven fit this approach. Pulling back the lens leads to more interpretative approaches, often focusing on the use of language as radical strategies. Essays six, seven, nine, and ten fit this general approach. Thus the reader emerges from this volume with a sense of the variety of radicalisms. Although most radicals wished to delegitimize established authority, governments and loyalists could resort to radical, or emergency, measures to support political stability. The Bond of Association (1584) to secure Queen Elizabeth’s crown and the Church and King associations of the French Revolutionary period would be examples found here. Otherwise the ranks of the disaffected stretched across Levellers, Millenarians, Restoration republicans, feminists, and institutional reformers of various stripes and causes.