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Diane Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. vi + 307. CDN\$85.00 (cloth). ISBN: 0-521-84137-2.

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For those who know Diane Purkiss's other works, *Literature, Gender and Politics during the English Civil War* should come as no surprise. Smart, theoretically astute, and innovative in its approach, Purkiss's study has much to offer. In it, the author asks us to reconsider concepts of masculinity through the filter of Civil War desire. In an effort to break away from more traditional studies that gauge masculinity strictly in terms of a Cartesian rationality, Purkiss demands that we look instead to questions of psychic need, to the irrational and impulsive elements of motivation and affect. This book makes three related claims. First, Purkiss asserts that concepts of masculinity are historically specific. Refusing an essentialized and psychologically static understanding of human desire, she considers instead the specific material circumstances that generate particular needs at particular times. Second, she argues that conceptions of "maleness" are, in psychological terms, hysterically repetitive, constantly reworked in order to stave off fears of dissolution and abandonment. This repetition manifested itself in especially significant and disturbing ways during the tumultuous years at mid-seventeenth century. Third, Purkiss suggests that concepts of masculinity ultimately involve a separation from the mother "as the keystone of identity formation" (10). Masculinity, then, is constantly being redefined in terms of what it is not, and that "not" is in fact the feminized and maternal "other." After years of less than satisfactory attempts to achieve a historically attentive early modern psychology, Purkiss actually delivers on that promise.

Literature, Gender and Politics reminds us that masculine subjectivity does not belong to biology per se — it is not the domain of particular men — but rather it is a "complex, fractured and seamed system of signs and symbols" (1) that operates on and around both men *and* women, a system that is necessarily multivalent in both its objects and its definitions. In early modern England, politics determined not one but many masculinities. The very attributes that defined male being and gave it power — mastery, hardness, discipline, and bodily control — simultaneously prefigured their antitheses. Vulnerability, unruliness, subservience, and abandon, worked oppositionally to codify competing and dynamic signifiers of manliness in early modern culture.

Purkiss breaks her analysis into eight pithy chapters and deals throughout with a wide range of English writers, from John Cleveland to Abraham Cowley, from Andrew Marvell to Matthew Hopkins. As we might expect, John Milton's gender-inflected writings filter through many of the book's key discussions. Chapters one through five, perhaps the strongest portion of the book, juxtapose the problem of the republican and royalist imaginary, tracing similarities and differences and revealing the degree to which civil war political possibilities were shot through with gender signification. Discussions weave

back and forth between two very different rubrics of masculinity, illustrating how each depended for its construction on the other and how fluid and intertwined both were as writers from across the political spectrum navigated the minefield of a nation at war.

In chapter one, Purkiss opens her discussion in the bloody aftermath of the Battle of Edgehill (October 1642). Three ghostly retellings of the body-strewn battleground set the stage for investigating mid-century masculinity's fractured identities. Apposing the demands of military protocol with the terror of battle and the broken dismemberment that rendered soldiers abject, Purkiss illustrates how the English Civil War paved the way for the multiplication of masculinities by "disturbing the assumption that wars had a single tone that derived from the soldier's inalienable identity" (45). Combining two equally powerful paradigms, the first, represented in the "closed, hard, [and] tight" (35) body of the disciplined soldier, and the second, in the broken ranks and fleeing survivors that littered the battlefield, the civil war produced in its wake incoherence, not the "rational liberal [Cartesian] subject" (4) but rather its inevitable apostrophe.

Chapters four and five provide readers with the most directly antithetical and vivid illustrations of how masculine difference operated. Here, Purkiss establishes the terms of debate through two of seventeenth-century England's most iconic figures: the first, the royalist Charles Stuart, and the second, his parliamentarian replacement Oliver Cromwell. In drawing up the oppositional parameters of masculine virtue, represented on the one hand by hardness, military heroism, and self-discipline, and on the other by penetrability, passion, and self-sacrifice, Purkiss illustrates the slippage that occurred between and within political fields.

The last three chapters on monsters and witches respectively work less well as it is not entirely clear how these framings relate to one another or to the performance of masculinity as a category. In chapter six, Purkiss uses the idea of the monster (already introduced in preceding chapters) as a means to contest the notion of unmediated patrilineal descent — of writing as parthenogenesis. Purkiss suggests how monstrosity exploded the logic of masculine sameness by reintroducing, in the form of a prodigious birth, the displaced maternal body. While the analysis takes an interesting detour through medical writing to reveal the uncertain transmission of inheritance and usefully reminds readers what is or might be at stake in any patrilineal bequest, the chapter is less clear in telling us how to make use of this information or how controversies over inheritance might further complicate the divisions already introduced. Part of the problem is that Purkiss has moved away from governing concepts into a study of masculine signification as it was reflected within specific social domains. In this instance, she looks at trade publication and news books, using gender difference to illustrate social instability in the uncontrolled proliferation of meaning in print. Because Purkiss has not offered enough signposts, readers must struggle to integrate the generic expectations noted here with the more generalized categories that she has already established.

Despite this caveat, *Literature and Gender* is a truly exceptional study. When Purkiss writes that "the wager of this book has been that it is entirely possible that the Civil War — the war of the battlefields, but also of the writings, of politics and ideas — was, among other things, an opportunity for the creation *and* discharge of tensions implicit in early modern masculinity, a masculinity [both] socially and psychically constructed" (231), she is simply hedging her bets. The wager has already paid off. Purkiss has written an altogether convincing and historically attentive account of masculine identity in mid-century England. Through careful and meticulous methodological rigor, she has also provided her readers with the theoretical apparatus to carry out similar research in other historical sites and venues.