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Review of Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*

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REVIEWS

GOD'S ENGLISHWOMEN: SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RADICAL SECTARIAN WRITING AND FEMINIST CRITICISM, by Hilary Hinds. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996. 264 pp. \$74.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

Hilary Hinds has written an excellent analysis of seventeenth-century sectarian women's texts in a book that provides a richly detailed representation of the historical moment and illuminating close readings informed by theory, history, and admirable sensitivity to language. All these elements appear in lucid, personal prose: Hinds deserves her reader's gratitude for exploring and critiquing postmodern criticism without succumbing to jargon and for demonstrating repeatedly how feminist appropriation of theorists—including Foucault, Lacan, and Jameson—enables a powerful, supple criticism that reassesses the significance of texts by Independents, Baptists, Fifth Monarchists, and Quakers.

Following Christopher Hill's seminal work in *God's Englishman*, Hinds begins with a crucial—and welcome—assumption that in seventeenth-century texts, religion, politics, and literature are inseparable. Her method is to introduce her texts, to survey previous critical readings, to discuss recent theories and the ways feminist critics have responded to these theories and critical practices, and to propose the ways in which sectarian texts might be clarified by a rethinking and reapplication of feminist critical theory. Like Margaret Ezell's groundbreaking work in *Writing Women's Literary History* (1993)—to which, surprisingly, Hinds does not refer—Hinds's book adds to the current project of early modern women's studies a demonstration of how women actively contributed to the making of culture and the representation of their times.

There are many wonderful insights in every chapter of this study, and so I shall simply mention some of its most useful and stimulating arguments. Hinds's exploration in chapter three of the "gendered character of silence" (p. 69) offers a useful methodology for analyzing various kinds of authorial silence in the face of power relations defined by gender. The discussion in chapter four of authorial self-representation as an "instrument" or a "worm" contextualizes these metaphors most convincingly as part of the scriptural and prophetic persona. Hinds argues persuasively that once we read these texts with other seventeenth-century texts and beliefs, we see, for example,

that a connection between illness and writing does not imply pathology, but rather illness as a metaphor that establishes the necessary condition for uttering prophecy, God's words, and for doing God's work. She also demonstrates the necessity of reading these texts intertextually with the Bible. In chapter five, Hinds tackles the referentiality of language not only as the focus of twentieth-century criticism, but also as a major seventeenth-century concern, not the least in a text in which a woman claims that her words represent God's will. Hinds's study of diction, biblical imagery, syntax, and the passive voice familiarizes these rarely discussed texts and suggests how essential it is to read them differently from women's texts in later centuries. Hinds puts dialogic theory to excellent practice in chapter six, in which she examines the relations between the writer and her audience: she argues that these texts address both friendly and hostile readers, and she documents the angry, even violent, reactions to women whose writing and religious activities threatened to remove them from their socially ordained domestic sphere.

At every turn, Hinds involves her reader, whether by her technique of continually posing questions to define the problems and issues, or by the inclusion of appendices containing some of the texts themselves. Particularly effective is her strategy of using the analytic categories developed in the first six chapters in her chapter seven "case study" of Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole's *To the Priests and People of England* (1655); this text appears in appendix C so that the reader can follow Hinds's close reading. At this point, I wanted nothing more than to continue the discussion, to share with students and colleagues what Hinds taught me, and to see how her ideas worked with other texts. In this clear-sighted, learned study, Hinds acknowledges the paradoxes and the multiple voices in her chosen texts and in the feminist critical enterprise itself, yet she optimistically offers a patient, historical, empathetic criticism that enriches the field of women's studies and will surely stimulate further work.

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SAPPHO AND THE VIRGIN MARY: SAME-SEX LOVE AND THE ENGLISH LITERARY IMAGINATION, by Ruth Vanita. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 289 pp. \$49.50 cloth; \$18.50 paper.

Ruth Vanita's *Sappho and the Virgin Mary* is necessary reading for anyone interested in the subject matter announced in its subtitle, *Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination*. It generates new frameworks for literary history, locates an impressive number of tropes for love between women, and