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Author

Amussen, Susan D

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Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland: Essays in Honor of John Walter, edited by Matthew Braddick and Phil Withington, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2017 and Brewer, 2017, xiv + 309 pp., \$99.00 (hardback), 978-1783271719

John Walter is one of those historians best known by other historians: since 1976 he has written a series of important essays, co-edited several important collections of essays, as well as the book, *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: The Colchester Plunderers* (1999). His work has always been notable for its deep engagement with archives, which provides a rich engagement with historical context. He taught at the University of Essex from 1976, but he lived in Cambridge, and this collection reflects his influence in both those places. The collection here – based on a conference recognizing his 65th birthday in 2013 – honors Walter’s work by picking up a range of themes that have engaged him: death, popular protest, and gender, while pushing them out in a range of directions.

The fourteen essays in this collection are by an impressive group of historians, representing those who have come of academic age over more than 40 years. There is an overview written by Sir Keith Thomas, and contributions from senior historians like Richard Smith, John Morrill and Paul Slack, contemporaries of Walter’s like Keith Wrightson, and the slightly younger Michael Braddick, and Steve Hindle, and a group of equally accomplished younger historians like Alexandra Shepard, Clodagh Tait, and Amanda Flather. As one would expect with a group of such fine historians, the essays in this collection are fine pieces of scholarship. Richard Smith compares susceptibility to famine from the early fourteenth to the late sixteenth century, arguing that the emergence of village elites who were

responsive to pressure from below explains the relatively low mortality of the 1595-97 as compared to 1315-17. Paul Slack examines changing thinking about political economy in the 1620s, linking it to both politics and economic development. Keith Wrightson's essay, for instance, thinks about sense of time, and the differences between how rural and urban people talked about calendrical events. Alexandra Shepard's essay picks up on Walter's early essay on Ann Carter and the Maldon riot of 1629, and argues for us to see women's roles in provisioning their households - as economic actors - as a key source of authority. Andy Wood uses the "boggart of Towneley Hall" to discuss the process of enclosure, the role of curses in the response to it: in doing so he demonstrates how the memory of enclosure's injuries was maintained. Amanda Flather's essay provides a gendered analysis of responses to Laudian reforms, and shows that conformist women as well as the godly objected to Laudian innovations; what she call "religio-political activism" predated the Civil War. Clodagh Tait uses the 1641 Irish Depositions to analyze the role of emotions - the grief of the victims, the apparent anger of the perpetrators - as part of the political and social context. I could go on - with an accomplished group of scholars, there are accomplished and interesting essays.

There is always a tension when reviewing a collection of essays between reviewing the book and reviewing the essays. Every one of these essays is a well-crafted discussion of an interesting question. I could imagine using many of them in teaching, as they provide relatively short introductions to complex and important work. This is true even for those, like Shepard's, which are related to a larger project: while readers of Shepard's *Accounting for Oneself* (2015) will find nothing new, her essay makes one piece of that argument accessible. As a collection, however, the book is frustrating. While all the essays connect (with more or less

clarity) to Walter's work, each essay is largely isolated from the others: the ways they draw on and extend Walter's work does not provide intellectual coherence. In addition, the essays are short - most less than 20 pages including notes -- so the book feels choppy. And because they are brief, they do not go as deeply into the subject as the reader would like.

While this collection falls short as a book, its fine essays offer stimulating ways to think in new ways about the early modern period. They provide an excellent reminder of the range and significance of the work that John Walter has done over the last forty years.

Susan D. Amussen

University of California, Merced

samussen@ucmerced.edu