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The Power of Women: Women's Contributions in the English Civil Wars

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The Power of Women

Women's Roles in the English Civil
Wars

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Introduction

- Women had a subtle yet critical role throughout the English Civil Wars
- Not only were they responding to the political environment, they were also responding to social changes occurring at the time.
- The English Civil Wars were a challenge to the entire structure of English society and allowed women to speak out their beliefs in this reactive time period

The English Civil Wars

- When did this occur?
 - 1642- 1651, during the Stuart period
- What were they?
 - The English Civil Wars separated the nation between Royalists and Parliamentarians
 - Called for
- Why?
 - A complex accumulation of events throughout the decades led to this
 - Previous monarchs subscribed to the notion of Absolutism and abused their power, namely King Charles I who was in power at the time
 - Parliament and the monarchy were at odds as parliament tried to limit the king's power

Social Changes

- In the early Stuart period women began dressing in a more masculine fashion
- James I addressed this as seen in his message to the clergy
 - “Inveigh vehemently and bitterly in theyre sermons against the insolence of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimd hats.. theyre haire cut short or shorne.”¹
- John Chamberlain’s remarks at the time sum up the sentiments of men to these actions
 - “...the truth is the world is very far out of order.”²

Social Changes

- These continued well into the 1500s, as in Charles I ruling William Prynne stated:
 - “these... unnaturall and unmanly times.. Female sexe are.. transformed into men.. not only immodest.. but even in the.. odious if not whorish, cutting of their haire.”³
- The social changes have an implication that women are starting to question their role in society and begin to develop a more independent identity than previously seen.

Religion and Women

- By the Stuart Period, the Church of England had 100 years to develop a significant position in the lives of the English
- In the 17th century people relied on the bible's teaching to determine their place in society with the bible passages taken in literally frequently
- In the 17th century women's main role was to take care of the home, and are inferior to men
- The next slide highlights specific passages of the Bible that illustrate this

Bible Passages

- I Corinthians 14:34-35, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."
- I Corinthians 11:8-9, "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for man, but woman for man."

Religion and Women

- These passages portray women to be under man, and to be in the service of men.
- Teachings such as these kept women in their place in society, and kept men in positions of power.
- Access to bibles became an important aspect to worshippers beliefs, as well as attending church weekly, making the messages of the Bible widespread in society.
- With these messages consistently told, along with pressures from the monarchy, reinforced the image of women and their place in society.

Religion and Women

- As tensions increased, the need to keep society contained and unchanging was pushed on by those who wished to keep their power.
- It was believed that "... for a woman to take over political or military leadership would be contrary to the law of God and the law of nature."⁴
- However, as men grew more vocal about this position, select women did go against the societal standards and challenged them when the wars occurred.

Margaret Cavendish

- Queen Henrietta Maria's lady-in-waiting prior to the wars and was banished during the English Civil Wars
- She came from a position of wealth and was the Duchess of Newcastle
- A writer in the 17th century whose plays reflect the mindset of women during the English Civil Wars
- Margaret Cavendish's plays highlight the parallels of the courts in her plays and the courts she was personally involved in with her position
- An advocate for women's independence and potential for her time

Cavendish's *Love Adventures* (1662)

- *Love Adventures* highlights the injustices Cavendish felt from her society
 - Reverses the roles of women and men, putting women in a position in power
 - The protagonist is given dual identities one of a woman pretending to be a man and one where they are a Lady
 - The lady version of the protagonist takes her fate into her own hands highlighting Cavendish's desire for the women around her to do the same.
 - The story and its portrayal illustrates how Cavendish believes that the women going and fighting should be fighting in the wars for the love of their men, and not for fame or glory, while also highlighting the importance of women's work in this time- gaining courage and fighting for themselves, as themselves.
 - Both protagonists are prideful, and thus pride felt by women with their other sisters who took up their own cause in the wars.

Cavendish's *Bell in Campo Pt. 1 & 2* (1668)

- She further explores the concept of women involved in the wars
- In these, men are not supportive of women are useful to only encourage the men in battle, and to nurse the men reaffirming women's roles
- *Pt. 2* challenges this, the protagonist calls forth brave women and to fight as equal as men
- Cavendish questions "should only men be Conquerers and women slaves?" clearly states Cavendish's unhappiness with the dynamics between men and women in power

Margaret Cavendish

- Her change from acknowledging men as superior in *Loves Adventures*, to challenging this in *Bell in Campo* is a direct challenge to the social and political atmosphere
- Writers are influenced by their society, and in turn influence those who experience their works, Cavendish sees the bravery in women in her time and tried to encourage them to do what they think is right, and go from fighting for love, to fighting for glory and bravery

Ballads and Cross-Dressers Oh My!

- Ballads were released in this time about women cross-dressing and their direct involvement in battle
- The ballads of women fighting could bring pride and support to the people of the time
- Ballads have the ability to rouse people for the cause and are easily spread through song, garnering a widespread audience
- Sparking women to fight in battles further can influence women to be brave and fight
- The next slides are copies of several ballads of the time

An Excerpt of *The Valiant Commander with his Resolute Lady*

“Put mee on a mans attire/ Give mee a Souldiers coat,/ Ile make King
Charleses foes/ Quickly to change their note./ Cock your match, prim your
pan/ let peircing bullets fly./

I do not care a pin,/ whether I live or dye:/ Dearest cast care away/ let kisses
comfort thee/ Thou and Ile neer depart/ Ile live and die with thee./

She took a Muquet then/ and a sword by her side,/ In disguise like a man/ her
valour so she tride,/ And with her true love she,/ marcht forth couragiously,/
And made away with speed,/ quite through the enemy./ Dearest cast care
away/ let kisses comfort thee,/ Thou and Ile neer depart/ Ile live and dye with
thee.”

Oh! Bonny Lads.

A NEW SONG.

Oh! bonny lads, will you lie in a barracks,
Oh! bonny lads, &c.
And marry a soldier, and carry his wallet?
O! yes I will do it, and think no more
of it
I'll marry my soldier, and carry his wallet,
I'll neither spare leave of my mama or
daddy,
But mount and away with my soldier laddie.

Oh! bonny lads, will you go a campaigning,
Endure all the hardships of battle and famine,
When bleeding and fainting, Oh! could you
draw near me,
And kindly support me, and ten tery cheer
ut?
Oh! yes, I will go thro' those hardships you
mention,
Had twenty times more if you have the in-
vention,
Neither danger, nor death, nor battles alarm
me,
My soldier is near me, and nothing can harm
me.

Oh! bonny lads, in the heat o' the batt'e,
When men lay a bleeding and cannons do
rattle,
When your soldier by enemies force is af-
falled,
Your heart that's most ten'ere, O sure it will
fail you?
Not so, no such danger shall ever affright me,
To follow my soldier shall ever delight me,
In battles fierce conflict I'll cloely attend
him,
And cheerfully venture my life to defend
him.



THE FEMALE DRUMMER

A maiden I was at the age of sixteen,
From my friends I ran away, and a soldier I became;
I had in a regiment and a soldier I became,
And I learned to beat on a drum rap-a-drum.

Many a prank I've seen in the field,
And many a Frenchman I've forced to yield;
Many is the slaughter I've seen for the French,
And so bold I fought when I was but a child.

A fighting top-gallant in my time I have been,
With the noble Duke of York at the Siege of Valenciennes;
Favoured by my officers, for fear I should be slain,
They sent me to old England recruiting back again.

My hat and my feather if you had but seen,
You'd thought and have sworn a man I had been;
The drummer enjoyed me with my fingers long & small
And I played the row-de-dow best of them all.

Every night when to my quarters I came,
I was no way ashamed to lay with a man;
In pulling off my breeches to myself I often said,
For so lay with the soldiers and a maid all the world.

They sent me to London to keep guard at the tower,
Where I might have been a maid to this very hour;
A young girl fell in love with me, I told her I was a
maid,
And she to my officers the secret conveyed.

The officers they sent for me to know if it was true,
For such a thing can scarcely be believed of you,
When I told him of it he smiled and said,
'Tis a pity we should lose such a drummer as you've
made.

For your noble courage at the siege of Valenciennes,
A bounty shall be allowed you, my girl, from the king;
Now I've got a husband and a drummer he's I vow,
And I've learned him to play on my drum, row-de-dow.

Here's a health unto the king, and a health unto you,
A health to every soldier that sticks to his colours true;
And if the king be short of men, and war be should
proclaim,
So boldly will I march away to fight for him again.



The Lancashire Heroes.

MY father is a squire and I am his heir,
And I fell in love with his fourspan so fair,
They sent him to sea where the waters roll long,
The Lancashire heroes pray Britons strike home.

Then I was resolved to follow my dear
Straightway I did go and lift for a volunteer,
We soon went to sea while the waves rolling,
The Lancashire heroes, &c.

The ship that we sailed in was called the Neptune,
We landed at sea on the fourteenth day of June,
Not a finer ship on the sea had not room,
The Lancashire heroes &c.

Our ship it set sail with nine hundred men,
And out of the number nine hundred got slain,
Like Lions we fought while the blood down deck did
run.
The Lancashire heroes &c.

There came a large bullet right over our mainmast
Which took of her left breast so great a wether-pie
Resolved to conquer she fired a gun.
The Lancashire heroes &c.

Our Captain was killed and Lieutenant likewise,
And so was my sweetheart to my great surprize,
But I never seemed afraid but fired of my gun.
The Lancashire heroes, &c.

From broadside to broadside we fired away,
Those French beaten cowards from us drove away,
But now I'm got cured to old England I come.
The Lancashire heroes &c.

Come all you young virgins attend to my song,
See how boldly I ventured my life for a man,
I took up arms when a soldier I became.
The Lancashire heroes &c.





The Female Soldier's Adventure for her true LOVE,

COME all young girls of courage so bold,
Who value your true love more than gold,
Listen awhile, and I'll let you know
How I follow'd my true love thro' frost and
Snow.

My love he was a comely youth
As ever lov'd a girl with truth,
A smart young drummer then was he
As ever belong'd to his Majesty.

For seven months he courted me,
So well I lov'd his company,
He wou'd he lov'd me as his life,
Fain would have made me his lawful wife;

But when my parents came to know
That I lov'd this young drummer so,
They comb'd me without delay,
Unto my chamber night and day.

My love he dur'd not let me know
That his regiment abroad must go,
To Flanders then they march'd away,
By orders of his Majesty.

And when this sad news I did hear,
My eyes did flow with floods of tears,
Locks and bolts I soon made fly,
Retolv'd so follow my love or die.

In man's apparel then straightway
I dress myself so smart and gay,
Cockade and feathers, neat and trim
In my love's regiment enter'd in.

With drums and trumpets merrily
I follow'd my love so cheerfully,
The music that did sweetly play,
With colours flying, rich and gay.

Come all young men where'er you be,
A toast then drink so cheerfully,
Unto each life of courage bold,
That values her true love more than gold.

Lady Bankes and the Women at Home

- Lady Mary Bankes of Corfe Castle stood defiantly to protect Corfe Castle—an important feature that dated back longer than anyone knew and was previously owned by the royal family during the Tudor period.
- The Parliamentarian troops led several attempts to take the castle, and Lady Bankes was able to use tact to beat them, even as her correspondence was intercepted and she was monitored.
- When the opponents began to use physical tactics she partook, and led, in a physical battle
- She later helped other women and families who were hurt and had damaged homes from the battles

Lady Bankes and Women at Home

- Lady Bankes is an excellent example of women who stayed a home- the traditional role of women at the time- and worked bravely and strongly against their enemy
- Lady Bankes never took on a passive, meek role in the war, but rather actively took measures to assist in the wars.
- Her active role in defence and using wit and strategy in war, and against men, actively challenged the preconditioned ways of society at the time.

Queen Henrietta Maria

- Henrietta Maria is one of the most well documented women during the English Civil Wars
- She was responsible for several wins for the royalists, and had inspired women across the country to fight in the way they were able to
- She is thought to be the inspiration for the woman protagonist in Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* highlighting the idea of women challenging men's natural position of power in their society
- She secured funds, troops and other means of support to help assist the Royalists
- While not an active fighter, she was a powerful inspiration and image for women

Conclusion

- When society is disrupted, opportunity for change occurs, and women's identity in society continued to be challenged in the wars
- Women faced a lot of societal pressures during this time, and the actions of significant women helped push back against these notions.
- The disruption of the English Civil Wars allowed women to be more vocal in their works and actions
- Works like Margaret Cavendish, and actions of those fought like the women in the ballads and Lat Mary Bankes, and Queen Henrietta Maria highlight their own personal beliefs and gave inspiration to others

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