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All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics, and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832

Hilda L. Smith

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All Men and Both Sexes explores the use of such universal terms as "people," "man," or "human" in early modern England, from the civil war through the Enlightenment. Such language falsely implies inclusion of both men and women when actually it excludes women. Recent scholarship has focused on the Rights of Man doctrine from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as explanation for women’s exclusion from citizenship. According to Hilda Smith we need to go back further, to the English Revolution and the more grounded (but equally restricted) values tied to the "free born Englishman." Citing educational treatises, advice literature to young people, guild records, popular periodicals, and parliamentary debates, she demonstrates how the "male maturation process" came to define the qualities attached to citizenship and responsible adulthood, which in turn became the basis for modern individualism and liberalism. By the eighteenth century a new discourse of sensibility was describing women as dependent beings outside the state, in a separate sphere and in need of protection. This excluded women from reform debates, forcing them to seek not an extension of a democratic franchise but a specific women’s suffrage focused on gender difference.

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