In this innovative study, Diane Purkiss illuminates the role of gender in the English Civil War by focusing on ideas of masculinity, rather than on the role of women, which has hitherto received more attention. Historians have tended to emphasise a model of human action in the Civil War based on the idea of the human self as rational animal. Purkiss reveals the irrational ideological forces governing the way seventeenth-century writers understood the state, the monarchy, the battlefield and the epic hero in relation to contested contemporary ideas of masculinity. She analyses representations of masculinity in the writings of Marvell, Waller, Herrick and the Caroline elegists, as well as in newsbooks and pamphlets, and pays particular attention to Milton’s complex responses to the dilemmas of male identity. This study will appeal to scholars of seventeenth-century literature as well as those working in intellectual history and the history of gender.

Diane Purkiss is a Fellow of Keble College, Oxford, and University Lecturer in English at Oxford University. She has published widely on women’s writing in the Renaissance and on witchcraft. Her most recent book was Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories (2000).
LITERATURE, GENDER AND POLITICS DURING THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

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It seems appropriate that a book partly concerned with motherhood and the speaking subject should have been joyfully delayed by the birth of my daughter Hermione. In 1991 I wrote ‘my greatest debts are to my parents, who never lost faith in me, and to Ivan, who typed, cooked, cleaned, comforted, listened and saved’. It’s all still true, and this book is for Ivan, the only man I know who is equally at ease with both masculinity and femininity, and for my son Michael, in the hope that in his especial case, patrilinearity will prove true.