Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475–1640*. San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1982. Pp. xv, 247. \$15.00.

The adjectives that form the title of this book, “chaste, silent and obedient,” reflect what the author believes to have been the primary message of books intended, at least in part, for female readership between the introduction of printing into England and the Civil War. Hull has reached this conclusion on the basis of her examination of books on lists that she compiled using Short Title catalogues and other materials at the Huntington Library where she is currently Director of Administration and Public Services. An annotated bibliography of 163 books, most of which were published after 1570, appears as the “Basic List” at the end of the book. This is followed by a simpler “Supplemental Catalogue.” In compiling the “Basic List” she applied five criteria to the works available; books to which some, but not all, of the criteria applied formed the “Supplemental List.”

The criteria Hull used in making her selection were: books specifically directed to women by title or dedication, subjects clearly within a woman’s province, books with sizable sections on women’s duties or roles, histories or biographies of famous women, and books with multiple dedications to individual women. She gives a brief discussion of how she arrived at these criteria. Some are obviously more subjective than others and contain certain assumptions. How, for example, are subjects determined to be *clearly* within a woman’s province?

From her list the author has drawn conclusions about what this body of material can tell us about the world of women in Renaissance England. Her discussion of what she believes to have been the principal issues addressed in these books forms the meat of her book, six chapters with the lists forming the final third as appendices. Chapter One begins with an investigation of the problems encountered in attempting to ascertain the extent of literacy among females. Hull then turns to a discussion of the rationale behind the emergence of a female literature during this period, especially after 1570. One reason pertains to men as well as women readers, the rise of commercial publishing. Hull then discusses the general characteristics of this body of female publications and categories emerge that become the focus of investigation of subsequent chapters: practical guidebooks, recreational literature, devotional literature, and books on the “controversy,” as she calls it – the nature of women. A general trend seen in all categories is the rise of the translation, as women were not necessarily able to read Greek and Latin.

In this chapter Hull admits that very few women were actually authors during this period but they did have a direct impact on literary production as patrons, perhaps because this was a socially acceptable activity similar to nurturing. She provides much valuable statistical information about the women who were active as patrons: their social class, religious background, and education. As one of her criteria for the inclusion of a book on the "Basic List" was multiple dedication to individual women, understanding the role of literary patronage is extremely significant. She states that although "A number of women, including the Queens, were sought by writers as patronesses for their works ... [this] doesn't necessarily mean that the literature was intended for women. Such dedications attempt to secure the support of a wealthy or influential person. The fact that the dedicatee was a woman was incidental" (xi). Are we to infer that the sex of a person in a position of influence is insignificant?

Chapter Two covers works classified as "Practical Guidebooks," and the author notes that more than half the total on the "Basic List" fall under this category. These included "How-to" books on education, midwifery, cookery, needlework, gardening, marriage, and other topics. Hull states that this group has "the potential to reveal the most about the daily lives of females" (31). This brings up an interesting question that Hull discusses elsewhere, namely to what extent were these books intended to be *read* by women? Men were no doubt intended to read them in order to instruct women or in some cases educated women would have read them in order to instruct men or other women. Documents show, for example, that many of the embroiderers employed by Bess of Hardwicke were male.

The rise of recreational reading for women occurs after 1570 and is the focus of Chapter Three. The "chaste, silent, obedient" admonition can be found in these works indicating that even recreational reading remained at best a questionable occupation for women, requiring careful supervision. It is probably in this category that most works strictly intended for female *readers* (as opposed to those intended to influence their lives) can be found. Hull mentions the growth of romance as a new recreational literary genre during the period under consideration and attributes its increasing popularity to an increase in female readership. Included in this category, and also discussed in Chapter One, are Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, examples of the very few literary masterworks that Hull believes to have been directed, at least in part, to a female audience. The importance of the development of romance as a new genre intended for women readers during this period cannot be overestimated. Even if there are only a handful of works intended for women that can be considered of major importance, these two are among the most influential works of their entire century. Would Spenser have written *The Faerie Queene* if Elizabeth were not on the throne?

This brings up the question of what a definition of women's literature ought to be. Hull's conclusions, not surprisingly, are that it is largely out of the mainstream of great works and therefore in a secondary position. Although her book is intended as a survey of books published during the period under consideration, questions of what has determined the hierarchy of literature and how it came into being might be useful in this context.

Also included in this category are biographical works intended for female readership, and an interesting sampling are discussed.

Society dictated that women should read from the devotional literature and these works are discussed in Chapter Four. Prayerbooks and treatises form the bulk of this

group, but they are surprisingly in the minority with regard to the total number of works included on the "Basic List." These books can be closely allied to the Practical Guidebooks as women were expected to supervise the religious education of their children in the absence of their father.

Chapter Five deals with books on the "Controversy," "the innate goodness or badness of women" (106). There were books, the author notes, on both sides of the issue, all of which cited sources from the classics and the Bible in support of their arguments. There were also satirical as well as serious works. The author believes that women were expected to read from all types, and she quotes at length from books on both sides of the argument. The method employed by those authors who favored women was to cite numerous examples of virtuous women from the past. Hull then introduces demographic evidence that helps to place this philosophical controversy in its social and historical context. As women formed the majority of the population, they had to conform to the male dictated ideal of docility in order to find themselves husbands, as marriage was the only acceptable way of life for women, especially after the dissolution of the monasteries. They had to adapt, and the message from the books on the controversy, whether the books themselves were pro or con, was clear: either women were innately bad, or, if good, were so because they followed a virtuous path.

The final chapter contains additional conclusions derived from Hull's compilation of the lists. More books for women were published during the end of the period than at the beginning. Hull believes that women had an influence on the literary output of their day, especially towards the end of the period. In addition to the all-pervasive message – "Be chaste, silent, and obedient" – there were some additional messages. The hierarchical arrangement of the sexes was upheld even by apologists praising women. Men were expected to assume a teacher-student relationship to women. The women, however, did not always obey the commands, and thus the archetype of the shrew emerged. Women were not professional writers at this time. In addition to the traditional hierarchy of the sexes, existing class structures were also supported. The books on the whole are simple, unsophisticated, and very revealing about everyday life. The power of the press was recognized as a weapon in controlling the female segment of the patriarchal society.

This book is a very valuable contribution to understanding the role of women in early modern England. Hull has provided a comprehensive list of books and has drawn some provocative conclusions about them. The compilation of these lists is in itself a remarkable achievement that will form, no doubt, the basis for much future interpretive research. The Huntington Library is also to be commended for supporting this kind of publication.

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Early Music History I, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music, edited by Iain Fenlon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. 381 pp. \$49.50.

The authors of a recent examination of musicology in Great Britain since 1945 in "Acta Musicologica" (1980) begin their survey with the observation that the British musical scene can be characterized by "the almost complete absence of what one may