Grief and Women Writers in the English Renaissance. Elizabeth Hodgson.
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The demise of purgatory in early Reformation England had enormous consequences for individuals and institutions across society. In redefining the relations between the living and the dead, Reformers not only altered the inner life of individual mourners, but also transformed the social meanings attributed to grief as a political act. More than a psychological experience endured by an isolated individual, mourning in early modern England often powerfully charged personal and public affiliations. According to Elizabeth Hodgson, this is partly because post-Reformation mourners, especially women mourners, found themselves the objects of increased social scrutiny as the nation slowly came to terms with new religious and social realities. In the wake of such scrutiny, Hodgson claims, writers refigured "the similitudes between mourners and those they mourn" (2). On this account, to mourn someone publicly in early modern England is to discover the links connecting the living and the departed at a historical moment when previous forms of kinship had been severed. Both complicating and engendering this process of grieving, Hodgson further asserts, is a shift in focus from the mourned to the mourner, from the medieval world's investment in the departed person's transit through purgatory to the early modern emphasis on the politics of memory active in the griever.

Hodgson pursues the political and literary dynamics of mourning in four women writers, moving from Mary Sidney Herbert and Aemilia Lanyer to Mary Wroth and Katherine Philips. The first chapter argues that Sidney derives much of her poetic authority in and through her articulated grief over the death of her brother Philip. By identifying with her dead brother's authority, Sidney figures herself as the inheritor of his muse in an affectionate but "aggressive, competitive, and appropriative" manner (24). In this way, Sidney's personal experiences of mourning are said to be inextricably bound up with dynastic traditions of aristocratic inheritance This thesis amounts to a canny, hard-nosed account of how the realities of aristocratic power get refigured in Sidney's poetry.

If Mary Sidney Herbert used the politics of aristocratic grief as a way of authorizing herself as poet, then Aemlia Lanyer did something similar at a lower level of social privilege. Attending to Lanyer's social and generic contexts, Hodgson argues that *Salve Deus* reimagines the medieval convocation of saints in Reformed and secular terms, thereby refashioning the meaning of "patron saint" in Protestant form. This reading of Lanyer's short epic as a eulogy for Christ is a welcome reprieve from those who approach

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Lanyer as though she were a Protestant divine rather than an imaginative poet ambitiously seeking patronage from nobles who practiced different styles of piety.

If the book's first two chapters offer sharply unsentimental readings of the politics of female mourning in early modern England, then chapter 3 unflinchingly traces the self-emptying vortex of Wroth's melancholy. According to Hodgson, Wroth exaggerates Petrarchan love-melancholy to such a degree that her verse rejects all consoling gestures. In Wroth's hands, the sonnet becomes a virtual "concretization of grief," a verbal monument to inconsolable sorrow. The most distinctly literary of the four chapters, this analysis offers a highly suggestive set of readings of Wroth's lyrics. The final chapter argues that Katherine Philips's Royalist eulogies disclose how public acts of politically charged grieving are often figured in private terms in the 1640s, 1650s, and early 1660s. If not the strongest chapter in the book, this discussion nevertheless offers a striking analysis of the politics of forgetting in Restoration England, especially with respect to the rather astounding first sentence of Charles II's Act of Oblivion, which Hodgson analyzes to very good effect.

In her "*Postlude*," Hodgson connects the early modern desire to forge links with the departed with the historicist's desire to speak with the dead. Made very much in passing, the connection nevertheless raises the question of what responsibility the living have to the dead, be it in early modern literature or scholarship about it. While Hodgson astutely discloses how early modern women writers instrumentalized their grief for temporal ends, what spiritual and ethical responsibility they felt for the departed remains less clear from these readings. In this respect, the book's significant strengths are also, at some moments at least, its main, if minor, weaknesses.

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