Laura Lunger Knoppers, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xxvi + 306 pp. index. illus. chron. bibl. $80 (cl), $29.99 (pbk). ISBN: 978–0–521–88527–0 (cl), 978–0–521–71242–2 (pbk).

Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. http://orlando.cambridge.org/.

The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing and the Orlando website form an instructively contrasting pair of scholarly resources. The Cambridge Companions are a well-established and highly-regarded feature of the academic and pedagogical landscape — sometimes (rather unfairly) viewed as an intellectually respectable crib for students and academics trying to get to grips with a new subject. The Orlando website, by contrast, is an eminently twenty-first-century resource that has been fully imagined for and that takes full advantage of the modern electronic environment. What can these two very different resources offer the contemporary scholar of early modern women's writing?

In the case of Laura Knoppers's Cambridge Companion volume, the answer to this question is comparatively straightforward. Knoppers's volume comprises a well-planned collection of intelligent, informative essays by twenty leading scholars in the field of early modern women's writing. Collectively, these essays succeed remarkably well in achieving the Cambridge Companions' particular and deceptively challenging remit: providing a discussion of their subject that is accessible to newcomers, while also holding interest for established specialists. The fourteen illustrations, most of which reproduce either manuscript leaves or handwritten annotations to early modern printed books, form a useful complement to the mainly print-based resources to which most university libraries are likely to have access, and the quality of reproduction is pleasingly high. The use of "Material matters" (e.g., handwriting, the material book) and "Sites of production" (e.g., "Women in church and in devotional spaces," "Women in the royal courts") as organizing categories for the first two sections of the book may, retrospectively, come to seem very much of its time, but is none the worse for that. (The title of the third section, "Genres and modes," strikes a more traditional note.) The essays, which are of a consistently high quality, are by no means merely summaries of already-published research, but are in each case firmly based on the author's own archival research. Some essays, most notably Heather Wolfe's on "Women's handwriting," represent the most comprehensive short account of their subject

currently available. Since the Cambridge Companions are also now published in an online, searchable version, this collection can also be said to combine the best of both the old and the new in scholarship and technology.

Even the online Cambridge Companions, however, merely represent the digitization of a resource originally conceived, and still primarily produced, within traditional print-based norms and parameters. By contrast, the Orlando website — though originating as an offshoot of Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy's *Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (1990) — would have been impossible, if not inconceivable, in a pre-electronic age. (The resource aims to encompass "Women's writing in the British Isles from the beginnings to the present," but for the purposes of this review I have chosen to focus on writing from the period 1500–1720. The following discussion of inclusions and exclusions in the resource is correct as of November 2010.) The project has been well-served by its web design, which is bright, accessible, and easy to use. The site offers the facility for searches by name, date, occupation, place, and genre (to name but a few of the many possibilities), while entries on individual writers can be selected for "writing," "life," or "writing and life." The scholarly introduction provides a useful guide to the aims and origins of the resource, and the Help function is genuinely helpful. References to primary and secondary texts are scrupulously provided.

The principal weakness of the Orlando website, however, is the uneven quality of its intellectual content. Notwithstanding the complex searches facilitated by Orlando's technology, I suspect that many users will treat it chiefly as a reference source for individual women writers. Here, inconsistency of provision is perceptible at many different levels, from the inclusion of subjects to the range of reference and the quality of discussion. In terms of inclusion, for instance, Orlando leans heavily towards women whose reputations were already established by the mid-to-late twentieth century: predominantly women whose words were print-published in the early modern period (such as Aemilia Lanyer, Margaret Cavendish, or Mary Chudleigh) or who are also well-known for historical reasons (such as Anne Clifford and Lucy Hutchinson). Women who circulated their writings, if at all, only in manuscript — the subject of much important recent research on early modern women's writing — are much more rarely mentioned. There are, for instance, no entries on Anne Southwell or Elizabeth Lyttleton — or, still more surprisingly, on the amazingly prolific and accomplished Huguenot-Scottish scribe, Esther Inglis. There are no independent entries on any of the Cowper women — Sarah, Mary, or Judith — though each is referenced a few times elsewhere in the resource. There is, however, a very well-informed and interesting article on Agnes Wenman, Catholic translator of the Byzantine historian Zenoras, two of whose manuscript volumes are now held in the Cambridge University Library. Pleasing though it is to see Wenman's achievements in translation and historiography given their due, the inclusion of such a little-known figure, while Southwell, a major figure in recent scholarship on early modern women's manuscripts, is excluded, seems curiously random. Overall, where information on manuscript writers is included, it is often sound and detailed, but the principles of inclusion are difficult to discern.

Orlando's treatment of high-profile and print-based women writers is also somewhat uneven. The entry on Isabella Whitney, for instance, is admirably clear and knowledgeable, providing, for instance, a very well-judged account of Whitney's contributions to *A Copy of a Letter* (though the biographical claims in Whitney's poetry are taken somewhat uncritically at face value). The entry on Mary Sidney provides a solid and nicely balanced discussion of Sidney's (manuscript) psalm paraphrases as well her print-published translations and her editorial work on her brother's unpublished oeuvre. By contrast, however, the entry on Katherine Philips includes a surprisingly tendentious account of the publication of Philips's 1664 *Poems* — a controversial volume on which scholars continue to disagree. While it is true that Philips's protestations of non-involvement in the publication of this collection "may have been a smokescreen," the opposite possibility — that her professed dismay may have been genuine — is not given adequate consideration. The element of bias in Orlando's account of this delicate and contentious issue seems out of place in a resource aspiring to reference status.

I do not underestimate the many advantages and achievements of the Orlando website — clearly a labor of love undertaken by an enthusiastic and dedicated team. Chief among its advantages is the sheer pleasure it offers its readers, who can roam at will through its vast resources, discovering new information and making unexpected connections. Its capacity to delight and inspire newcomers to the field is probably greater than any of the other resources in its field, whether print or electronic. All the inconsistencies and omissions I have touched on in this review are potentially correctable, though in these straitened times one has to wonder whether the large sums necessary to expand (or even update) such a huge website will be forthcoming. As it stands, readers at all levels will find much to enjoy in Orlando, but teachers may wish to exercise a degree of caution in recommending it to their students.

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