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Reading Material in Early Modern England: Printer, Gender,
and Literacy (review)

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catalogue of this nature will ever be fully comprehensive — additions are bound to turn up from time to time — but this is about as complete as it is reasonable to expect until funding and sheer will-power implement someone's search of those remaining volumes. For that matter, wouldn't it be splendid if a superhuman team could be assembled to catalogue the next chronological stage: that equally golden era of verse production, so much of it in manuscript form, from 1604 to 1640?

But this fancifully wishful thinking also touches on one aspect of the present volumes that cannot escape notice. In the era of electronic databases and the internet, with all their search facilities and manifest advantages for any type of reference work, why has this catalogue been confined to print format? I assume that the answer lies in the long history of the project, dating back to Ringler's work well before the internet era, as well as in long-standing publishing contracts. Perhaps one day it will all be digitized. In the meantime, *Elizabethan Poetry* must surely be the last prodigious monument to bibliographical scholarship of this kind ever to appear as purely printed text.

London

PETER BEAL

Reading Material in Early Modern England: Printer, Gender, and Literacy. By HEIDI BRAYMAN HACKEL. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. xii + 322 pp. £45. ISBN 0 521 84251 4.

THE RICHEST PART OF HEIDI BRAYMAN HACKEL'S REWARDING BOOK comes at its close: her transcription of the 1627 catalogue of the Countess of Bridgewater's London library. As Frances Bridgewater's collection was one that any reader or collector today might envy, so is Hackel's labour of identification and classification something for which to be grateful. Large as the Countess's London library was, the greater part of it still survives today and is given local habitation by the catalogue in the Huntington Library and elsewhere. Yet it is chiefly as the object of envy that it fascinates. Imagine having owned a volume of 'Diuerse Playes by Shakespeare' or 'Diuerse Playes in 5 thicke Volumes' and not having needed to specify what it was that you had on your shelf in any greater detail; imagine, too, being able to reach down a copy of Mary Wroth's *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania* (1621), Jonson's *Workes* (1616), or a 'Fayery Queene' (1609) from among your folios. Hackel has, in fact, gone some way to imagining this, and with the cooperation of the Huntington's staff has assembled equivalents to the 241 books in the catalogue on close to thirty feet of modern shelf space (the resulting image is Fig. 10 in her book, a detail from which is used on the dust jacket). But what might one woman's private library tell us about the broader questions opened out by Hackel's work? How can the evidence of book ownership, or in greater detail book annotation, build towards an accurate picture of early modern reading habits?

Reading Material in Early Modern England, Hackel writes, is an attempt 'to delineate the asymmetries of early modern English literacies and reading habits'; it takes at its centre marginalia, annotation, commonplace books, and the evidence of book ownership such as Frances Bridgewater's catalogue as the historical, material traces of 'multiple readers at single moments in their reading lives' and looks to set them against the fiction perpetrated elsewhere of 'the singular ideal reader ungrounded in place or time' (p. 257).

At moments such as those in Chapter 4, where we are introduced to a gallery of named and nameless annotators of, and extractors from, Sidney's *Arcadia*, the project is fascinating in its wealth of local detail: one copy of the 1627 *Arcadia* (described on p. 162) displays a 'tangle of sixteen contemporaneous signatures' and accompanying marginalia, evidence of its elaborate circulation within a household; others are bulked out with glosses, summaries, and indexes; while the reader of one copy of the 1605 edition (described on p. 164) took to the margins of *Astrophel and Stella* to protest 'I love Philoclea by G_d because she is a very pretty Girle' ('rather inane' is Hackel's gently qualitative comment). So too in Chapter 5, Hackel listens closely to the echoes of female reading practices often less audible than the noisy annotations of male contemporaries. The two prose portraits of Anne (Clifford) Pembroke and Frances (Stanley) Egerton that complete this chapter follow a sensitive, recuperative survey of what is known of many less famous female readers. This is a work of reconstruction that, as Hackel acknowledges, is often both 'laborious and partial', conducted in the face of the paucity of wills and probate inventories left by early modern women and also the ease with which a woman's property became her husband's in the period (p. 214). The Elizabeth Hunt who inscribed 'her Book *not* his' in a copy of *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives* was at the very least lonely in her obvious assertion of ownership.

My admiration for the mass of new, useful, and valuable material accumulated by Hackel is not to say that I found *Reading Material* consistently easy going at all moments. Chapters 2 and 3 are both substantial, the one an account of the 'gestures and habits' of early modern reading, the other an account of the way in which 'preliminaries and margins' frame the early modern reader. There is a huge amount of material collected in these chapters and their dense footnotes, and much of its value comes, entirely in keeping with Hackel's methodology, from the patient accumulation of specific, well-described detail. But on more than one occasion I found myself assaulted by the disparity between the main text and the footnotes that depend from it. One quotation from Richard C. Newton about 'the invention of print' (p. 27) is itself a nod towards earlier arguments ('as Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has shown', Newton writes); but from this already recursive single sentence follows a forty-five-line note that occupies the foot of this page and the bulk of the following. Hackel is acute about the damage done to our understanding of the early modern page, and therefore early modern reading, by modern editions that omit the evidence of the preliminary and marginal, but I do wonder which modern reader such a synoptic footnote is meant to serve. Those who come to the book will presumably already come, as I did, with a more or less grounded sense of the ways in which 'the invention of print' may or may not have 'bestowed [...] an almost incalculable legacy on Western culture' (in Newton's formulation of Eisenstein's argument); it is hard to see how a little sifting of this supporting material might not have eased a reader's path through the argument without lessening its impact. This footnoting habit, however, might simply frame the book's astonishingly widely read author, who, its first page tells us, knows how to read not only in the bath but also in the shower. That is a way of reading material on which I *would* have liked a footnote.