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Anselment, Raymond A. The Occasional Meditations of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick

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Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Anselment, Raymond A. *The Occasional Meditations of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick*. Ed. Raymond A. Anselment. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 363. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009. Pp. xv, 218. ISBN 978-0-866984-119 £35

The act of meditation was a crucial one for seventeenth-century Protestants. In 1606 Joseph Hall influentially distinguished between two types, extemporal (or occasional, spurred by an event or observation) and deliberate (typically inspired by a biblical text or theological doctrine). The believer was to take the sight of a fair apple, or the slime left by a snail, as the occasion to contemplate in writing some moral or religious point. For Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, the apple, fair on the outside but rotten in the middle, is like a hypocrite, prompting Rich to ask God for truth in her inward parts, and the snail's slime represents the defiling corruption of original sin which can only be washed clean by God's mercy.

Raymond A. Anselment's superb edition of Rich's extant occasional meditations of 1663–1677 gives the necessary apparatus to understand her devotional world. Anselment's introduction situates Rich's work in several important contexts: the genre of occasional meditation (about which instructional manuals were written by many divines, including her own brother, Robert Boyle), meditations written by women (such as Elizabeth Egerton, Katherine Austen, Elizabeth Delaval, and Anne Halkett), and her own biography. The footnotes offer a wealth of information, primarily copious biblical references which indicate the extent to which the Scriptures formed the basis of her own thinking and language. The footnotes also draw frequent attention to significant seventeenth-century theological terminology used by Rich, such as "ordinances" or "experimentally," to meditations on similar topics by a wealth of other writers, and to Rich's own milieu, including significant people and sources such as sermons she references in her writing. The range of information Anselment brings to bear on his topic is astonishing; through this edition of one writer's meditations he gives a picture of an important genre in action. So many aspects of this

volume, such as the substantial and frequent glosses (like that on citron water), the detailed table of contents, and the index of biblical citations, help enrich its usefulness. The cross-referencing between meditations is also very helpful, enabling readers to trace the recurrence of certain themes or images, such as Rich's desire to be dissolved and be with Christ, and her characterization of the Scriptures as God-breathed oracles.

Thirteen of Rich's occasional meditations were printed in 1678, the year of her death, appended to her expanded funeral sermon preached by Anthony Walker. Walker's principles of selection are unclear, but four of the printed meditations do not appear in manuscript and so Anselment has included those in his edition. It is likely that more occasional meditations are extant, given that none survive from particular years, and given that Rich's written record is substantial (numerous quartos were bound by the British Museum into an autobiography, a five-volume diary, and the meditations). Textually, the holograph manuscript meditations are complex given that a later owner, William Woodrooffe, added notes and emendations throughout (for example, "Here I don't well understand this good Ladys meaning," fol. 217r). Anselment has taken the entirely justifiable decision to compromise between the original and edited versions of the manuscript, which cannot always be differentiated, but has preserved Rich's spelling as much as possible. There is also a thorough list of additions and deletions at the end of the edition.

Anselment makes the case that Rich developed the occasional meditation in a distinct manner, citing her meditations' personal voice, immediacy, and vividness. But unlike moments in her diary which express passion over domestic and spiritual matters, the occasional meditations are "reflective rather than affective" (24). They follow a common formula: Rich observes or notes something in the natural world or her own experience, she addresses a particular interpretation to her soul, then she beseeches God to help her learn from this example. There is pleasure for the modern reader in seeing exactly what lesson Rich will draw from her topic; a meditation on the superstition that drawing the curtain will prevent the sun from quenching the fire becomes a contemplation of how God draws a dark curtain between us and our earthly loves (for example, through death), so that we do not forget our love for Him. In a meditation on a sunflower, Rich notes that God made her heart broad at the top and narrow at the bottom to teach her that her heart should strive after things above and should shun the things of this lower world. The repetitive nature of

the exercise (image, analysis, application), however, can become tedious. That is not to say that a complete edition of these meditations is not welcome and important, and perhaps the sheer number of meditations demonstrates best the kind of mental discipline practised by Rich, as she analysed the world in particular ways to give it spiritual meaning. But this book may best be savoured in sections, or as a research tool. For example, it may be illuminating to consider clusters of meditations, such as those on autumn leaves (which become meditations on vanity and aging, on prizing the immortal parts of loved ones rather than the cabinets of their bodies, and on how God chooses to allow some leaves to cling longer to trees, that last meditation offering a rare comment about her dead son). Anselment's edition helps us appreciate when Rich is drawing on tradition and when her interpretation is surprising or possibly unique, as in the case, he argues, of several of her meditations on building or maintaining a fire. The flames represent not God's love but instead her yearning for a spiritual fire to be kindled in her own heart, through devotional exercises like meditation, which can then inspire other believers' hearts.

Rich states at several points in her meditations her desire for an audience for her meditations, but only as a means of bringing others to know God. Rich's life writings have received some scholarly attention, but her meditations deserve to be more widely known. Anselment's splendid edition illuminates a popular seventeenth-century spiritual practice and allows a distinctive voice to be heard.

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Blair, Ann M. *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information in the Modern Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. xv, 397. ISBN 978-0-300-11251-1 (hardcover) \$45

This is a book you will want to make notes in or copy-and-paste from if you purchase a digital copy, although buyer beware: the original Kindle version of this title does not contain many of the images that help make the print copy such a valuable resource. The full-colour reproduction of Thomas Wijck's *Der Gelehrte* (c.1650) on the dust jacket is alone almost worth the price of the book.