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### Austen, Katherine. Book M: A London Widow's Life Writings. Ed. Pamela S. Hammons

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tastes in the courts of the many politically diverse German-speaking lands. This magnificently illustrated and thoroughly researched publication holds an important place in art scholarship, adding to the knowledge and appreciation of a preeminent group of European paintings within an American collection that has too long been unrecognized.

GUITA LAMSECHI

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### **Austen, Katherine.**

***Book M: A London Widow's Life Writings.* Ed. Pamela S. Hammons.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 26.

Toronto: Iter Inc. / Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2013. Pp. xiii, 216. ISBN 978-0-7727-2150-1 (paperback) \$21.50.

This superlative and highly accessible edition of *Book M: A London Widow's Life Writings* will be a welcome addition to libraries and classrooms wherever early modern subjects are studied. Katherine Austen's eclectic manuscript has long interested researchers from many fields, particularly literary, gender, and religious studies. This seventeenth-century compilation, housed in the British Library, includes dozens of poems inspired by Austen's life and spiritual interests, as well as entries that reflect her readings, her family life, and her frequent frustrations at managing properties left her after her widowhood in 1658 until close to her death in 1683. The bulk of the manuscript was composed between 1664 and 1666 with revisions evident from as late as 1682. Pamela S. Hammons's edition makes it possible for many more readers to encounter and appreciate Austen's manuscript, sympathetically modernized and illustrated with eight images from the manuscript.

The text of *Book M* is particularly well-rendered. The modernization is sympathetic and well-explained in Hammons's "Note to the Text" as well as in unobtrusive yet highly informative notes to the main text itself. Hammons defines obscure words and identifies persons or events in these notes, as well as unpacking the intriguing revisions that would otherwise be invisible in a straightforward reading. For instance, the second poem's musings on the survival of Austen's son Robert and the death of another's boy due to smallpox

become much more lively and meaningful to modern readers when notes to the text indicate Austen's sometimes contradictory revisions of her composition. The complexities of the manuscript are ably represented in this edition as evinced in Hammons's note regarding Austen's alternation between "my" and "own" in "Was it his sin or own desert / Made mine to live and his to part?" (91). With over seven hundred notes to the main text, Hammons provides extensive context for readers interested in literary, historical, gender, or religious references while never overwhelming Austen's own distinctive voice or obscuring the well-organized text.

Hammons's introduction is supremely helpful and should be enjoyed by both novices and advanced scholars. She situates Austen's writing within literary, historical, and cultural traditions active in the seventeenth century that were of enormous import to the manuscript's creation. Hammons explains Austen's skilful negotiation of the challenges of life as a widow in Restoration England, negating ideas of early modern women as naïve or silent figures in this typically masculine world. Hammons's introduction unfolds important historical events of the time such as the plague outbreak of 1665 and London's Great Fire of 1666, which destroyed some of Austen's properties in the city. More importantly, the introduction explains how Austen herself and scholars who study her life see that these events affected the widow's life and thoughts, with musing on mortality emerging at the centre of the spiritually-minded widow's world.

Hammons is at her best in the introduction when she takes the time to fully explore the religious context of *Book M*. As she notes, all of Austen's poems include religious content (26), even "On My Fall off the Tree." Austen was part of a spiritually vibrant culture and, while self-consciously asserting her identity as a chaste and respectable widow supporting the Anglican mainstream restored by Charles II's return, she was also fascinated by prophetic discourse. Her own personal and political situation, opposed to contemporary prophecy promoted by republicans, Parliamentarians, and radicals, made this a troubling interest for Austen, herself, to negotiate. In the end, she grounded her prophetic interests in the distant past, turning to early church figures for models and parallels, while rejecting more contemporary and charged comparisons. Even readers comfortable with seventeenth-century religious discourse will appreciate Hammons's careful explanation of Austen's religious context.

The introduction also does an excellent job placing *Book M* within seventeenth-century manuscript culture as well as contemporary scholarship.

Hammons shows how printing and publicity were antithetical to Austen's interests as a woman writer as well as how manuscripts offered a prestigious niche in her world. This limited circulation she envisioned was a statement not on the quality of her writing, but on the context of her life and ambitions. The introduction necessarily draws on Austen's small but important circle of contemporary scholars, making much use of Sarah Ross's recent critical edition of *Book M* published in hardcover in 2011 as part of the Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies series. Hammons's *Book M: A London Widow's Life Writings* is a complement to Ross's edition, well-priced and beautifully prepared for classroom use.

JANICE LIEDL

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**Bailey, Amanda.**

***Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England.***

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Pp. x, 209. ISBN 978-0-8122-4516-5 (hardcover) \$55.

In her epilogue, Amanda Bailey explains how *Of Bondage* was originally intended as a study of slavery based on the presumption that specific historic and conceptual conditions permitted early modern men and women to construe certain persons as things, and that slaves were humans who gradually came to be regarded as forms of property. In the course of her investigation into the genealogy of bondage, Bailey recognized the insolvent debtor as the slave's symbolic and legal precursor, and realized that any inquiry into the history of priced persons must begin with the unique set of circumstances within sixteenth-century common law that increasingly subjected personhood to the domain of property. By the late sixteenth century in England, the bond had become the standard form for contractual agreements, and because the law recognized the borrower's body as collateral, an unsatisfied creditor could, without filing suit, proceed directly to the execution of a bond's terms by seizing the debtor's lands, goods, or person. As a result, at least as many early modern Londoners were imprisoned for debt as for crime, and debtors spent longer behind bars than the most serious criminal offenders. Defending the book's