

## A Critical Coterie

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David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul, eds., *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2015. 454 pp.

This excellent collection of essays, edited by David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul, is the first of its kind devoted to the poetry of Katherine Philips. Bringing together ten diverse essays, an important afterword, and an invaluable introduction that surveys critical approaches to Philips's work starting with her reception in the seventeenth century, this volume seeks to "demonstrate the 'state of the art' in scholarship at the present moment, and to reorient current understandings of Philips and her milieu" (p. 7). The collection does just that, largely because it sets five new essays that advance fresh approaches to Philips alongside five previously published seminal works updated with editor's and author's notes that situate these reprints in their own emergent critical moment as well as address the influence of their insights.

Orvis's and Paul's substantial introduction is divided into six sections that trace Philips's reputation from the Interregnum through her own restoration from obscurity into anthology, a "renaissance" that ironically "went hand-in-hand with her aesthetic and intellectual marginalization" (p. 6). By delineating early critics' dismissive initial recoveries of Philips's work from the more recent robust scholarship that attends to intersections between politics, sexuality, poetic form, and female friendship in Philips's poetry, the editors also implicitly provide a detailed historical account of scholarly responses to early modern women writers that usefully reminds us of the effects of the

subjective bias at work in the creation of literary history. Orvis and Paul masterfully construct a large web of critical voices, using the introduction to foreground not only their own essayists' work but also the important scholars who have steered Philips studies to date. However, the introduction's weaving of the collection's reprinted essays and new scholarship into a larger, more complex narrative of Philips scholarship can at times be difficult to navigate, and this wealth of critical intertextuality and historical overview in the introduction obscures the volume's own contributions on first read.

According to Orvis and Paul, the "three salient fields of inquiry" driving the volume include "1) cultural poetics and/or courtly coterie; 2) innovation and influence in poetic and political form; and 3) articulations of female friendship, homoeroticism, and retreat" (p. 35). The three essays grouped under the first field primarily engage Philips's royalist coterie, beginning with Catharine Gray's excellent 2002 essay, which examines how Philips's seemingly private poetry, including her love poems to women, participated in the construction of "a heterosocial coterie of royalist men" (p. 43). Within this "Royalist counterpublic" (p. 21), Philips "figures herself as a proxy poet at the center of a complex, postcourtly community, born of the decentering of royal power and royalist panegyric" that ultimately "sanctions the emergence of the nonaristocratic woman writer as a privileged member of the group" (p. 43). By reading Philips's friendship poetry within the context of her postcourtly coterie, Gray demonstrates how Philips moves royalist power from the monarch to a "politicized coterie" (p. 63) of elite writers and validates women writers' movement into the public sphere through her privileging of "female erotic parity" (p. 62). Gray's essay is one of only two reprinted works in the volume to include an author's note, which generously points to how other scholars have advanced further analysis of the "circulation and politics" of Philips's work through transnational and geopolitical foci on Philips's Irish and Welsh literary investments and through complicating our current understandings of Philips's political allegiances (p. 41). The two new essays in this grouping, written by Christopher Orchard and David L. Orvis, primarily model the latter advancement in Philips studies that Gray traces in her author's note.

Orchard's essay reads Philips's "On the 3. of September, 1651" as an example of the complexity of Philips's political thought by seeing

in that poem and in her poems focused on the heroic virtue of personal friendships a growing discomfort with an “irresponsible” Charles and a royalist leadership utilizing the rhetoric of heroic virtue (p. 65). In Orchard’s reading, the poem rejects the military heroism of Charles I that led to serious losses in the battle of Worcester and was embodied in Davenant’s preface to *Gondibert*, an “unrealistic royalist model of heroic virtue” (p. 66). Philips’s poetry interrogates the values of royalist ideology exemplified by Davenant’s preface and instead embraces the values of a “friendship-based model for heroic virtue that cut[s] across party lines” embodied in Lord Broghill’s *Parthenissa*, “a heroic narrative that neutralizes the divisiveness of civil war hatred” (p. 66). Broghill, unlike Davenant, advances in his romance “a set of values—generosity, gallantry, and civility—that trump ideological division” (pp. 85–86). Philips emerges in Orchard’s account as a committed royalist disenchanted with violent royalist policy and supremely capable of critiquing royalist rhetoric by proposing alternative models of heroic virtue centered on relationships that, like her own marriage, involved differences of political ideology. Orchard’s essay not only usefully complicates our view of Philips’s royalist politics but also explicates her engagement with other political writers in an enlarged geopolitical framework.

Like Orchard, David L. Orvis provides new tools for examining the political investments of Philips’s poetry. His essay fills a gap in attention to Philips’s use of Scripture and demonstrates that her “scriptural allusions amount to more than mere window dressing for poems that center on secular themes” (p. 123). Orvis examines how Philips employs primarily Old Testament prophetic language to situate herself as a prophet who interprets the divine will of God and understands the political events of the seventeenth century not as the end of days, as some millenarian prophets read the civil wars, but as a period of suffering to be followed by God’s restoration of the divinely ordained monarchy of Charles II. The essay argues for a new view of Philips as “not only a poet who knew the Word intimately but also as an exegete whose radical revisions offered an important contrast to the millenarian prophecies and politics of her day” (p. 123).

While Amy Scott-Douglass’s essay is categorized by the volume’s editors as about “questions of influence and genre,” it is an important compliment to the preceding essays of Gray, Orchard, and Orvis,

because it also explores the political and religious investments of Philips's work (p. 36). Scott-Douglass examines how the trope of bodily association between author and text is used by Philips and her fellow coterie poets to equate Philips with the monarchy, "defacement with Puritanism and restoration with royalism and high church Anglicanism" (p. 37). She begins with Philips's reaction—and that of her male coterie—to the 1664 unauthorized publication of her poems as a physical violation that is also symbolically figured as Puritan defacement. In response to this earlier, unauthorized collection, the publication of the authorized 1667 *Poems* becomes a "group effort to restore the virtuous royalist poetess who has been forcibly defaced" through new prefatory materials, which "represent Philips's recovered poetry book as a metaphor for the restored face of royalism" (p. 129). This essay astutely traces the pervasive images of monumental defacement as they are repurposed throughout Philips's collection to craft a restoration of her body, poetry, and royalist values. It also persuasively situates the 1667 *Poems*' use of the literary tropes of bodily defacement and restoration within the social and religious context of restoration Anglicanism's response to Puritan iconoclasm, and Philips's own complicated ties to both sides.

The three essays following Scott-Douglass's in the collection take up "form and poetic influence," starting with Paula Loscocco's important work on Philips's "transformation of Donnean poetics" (p. 37). Loscocco's 2003 essay was one of the first to situate Philips's complex poetics within English literary tradition without using her as a weak foil for male writers; Loscocco's updated author's note valuably traces the work of later scholars who have instead found her to be "one of her era's most skilled literary artists" (p. 155). Elizabeth Hodgson's contribution revises and expands an earlier 2003 essay to argue that Philips's epithalamia reveal the poet's complicated "social and literary manipulations of the poetic marriage scene" in the context of genre (p. 187). Hodgson first outlines the epithalamia tradition, pointing to poems by Donne and Herrick to establish complicated social satire, parody, and mockery alongside laudatory celebration of sexual aggression, gendered dependence, and the bride's lack of agency as defining features of the genre. While Philips's wedding poems employ some conventional epithalamic tropes, Hodgson contends they are most strongly marked by her weakening of the narrative structure used

by her male contemporaries and by her maneuvering “of the teleological relationship between the bride and the speaker-observer” (p. 198). Philips’s subversions of Stuart epithalamia sometimes replace the bride and groom with a central focus on authorizing the poetic speaker’s agency, which gives way to critiques of masculinist control and establishes female alliances between speaker and bride. Hodgson usefully highlights how the complexity and ambiguity many scholars have found in Philips’s other poetry is also present in her epithalamia if one is willing to read these poems in the context of her influences and English literary tradition.

A somewhat anomalous but very welcome new contribution is Linda Phyllis Austern’s work on Philips and music. Examining how Philips’s poetry engages musical metaphors that value and construct the performative possibilities implicit in verse and the role of the auditor’s response, Austern finds music to be centrally important to Philips’s writing, particularly to those poems that detail erotic affection. Her essay situates Philips’s use of musical tropes within an account of “seventeenth-century literary and musical aesthetics” (p. 38) whereby music and poetry were viewed as “sibling arts” (p. 216) that produced different, and gendered, effects in their auditors. Austern reads the two extant Philips poems set to music by Henry Lawes as collaborations that nevertheless modify and mitigate the passionate affections of Orinda, expressing in performance a “mutual affection for her Lucasia . . . at a lower level of intensity than the poet originally intended” (p. 239). Viewing Philips’s poetry through the historical frame of seventeenth-century musical tastes, as Austern does, establishes a new interdisciplinary ground that furthers our understanding of her readership and her cultural milieu.

The last of the collection’s three groupings considers “those questions of desire and eroticism that launched Philips’s recovery into modernity” (p. 38). The reprinted essays of Valerie Traub and Lorna Hutson, so influential to the study of homoeroticism in Philips’s poetry that they do not need extensive summary here, constitute a vibrant conversation about how we might historicize female same-sex desire and female friendship and read Philips within that historical accounting. Traub’s analysis, drawn from her larger study *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, positions Philips’s female eroticism as a “symptomatic break” between the discourse of

the impossible innocence of female love and the more visible and “public discourse of illicit desire” emerging at the end of the seventeenth century (p. 265). Philips’s poetry refigures pastoral tropes to constitute Nature, not as an impossible impediment to same-sex erotic union, but as a means to achieve and authorize it under the cover of innocent female friendship. Lorna Hutson responds to Traub by arguing that the history of the changing discourse of the body cannot be applied easily to early modern women writers for whom the female friend did not signify as it did for men. Hutson instead positions Philips’s female eroticism in the context of the “cultural significance of ethical (male) friendship” and finds Philips’s subversions in her “witty and erotic play with the language of *amicitia*, the language that for centuries endowed male intimacy with political prestige” (p. 268). Valuable editor’s notes to each of these essays deepens the conversation between Traub and Hutson, delineating their approaches and clarifying the stakes involved in situating Philips within a contested historical discourse of sexuality that is always impinged upon by the political.

The new essay added to this final section is Harriette Andreadis’s examination of the “female queer pastoral,” which reads the pastoral form as a genre that “offered a sustained and sustaining safe haven for the expression of coded desire as well as for the articulation of social and political sentiment” (p. 309). Andreadis’s essay is the only one in the collection to read Philips’s poetry within a larger diachronic sweep of female writers working in a specific form, and it reveals the benefits of considering Philips alongside other female queer poets as well as reexamining pastoral as a form that can convey not only “coded court politics” but also “transgressive eroticisms” (p. 291). Philips uses, and fuses, both the “soft” pastoral characterized by an escapist focus on bodily pleasure and the “hard” pastoral that critiques social order beyond that escapist landscape to create a “coding of female erotics” that appropriates Amelia Lanyer’s “eroticized version of escapist pastoralism” and provides a model for such disparate later female poets as Anne Killigrew, Christina Rossetti, Hilda Doolittle, and Olga Broumas (p. 298). Andreadis’s forward-looking, broader view of Philips’s place in the history of women’s poetry offers a strong conclusion to a carefully historicized volume that not only traces the most important developments in Philips studies but also ultimately

functions as a detailed case study of literary history's vexed treatment of women writers.

Elizabeth H. Hageman's afterword, an important coda, turns to book history's consideration of the material record to challenge received knowledge about Philips's reception. Through short analyses of early readers' marks in Philips's work, the material conditions that modified Philips's verse as it was etched into the windowpanes of Haddon Hall, and Washington Irving's incorporation of those verses into his fiction, Hageman demonstrates how study of historical materials can yield important reevaluations of what earlier centuries thought of and did to Philips's work. Finding in Irving's work an appropriation of Philips's verse that turns her erotic poetry written to women into "an early eighteenth century wooing poem by a young man to a beloved lady," Hageman's vignettes also remind us that others frequently have manipulated Philips's poetry, authorial position, and critical reception to flatten her complex writing on female friendship, homoerotic union, and seventeenth-century politics into one-dimensional engagements with royalism or female friends (p. 319). Overall, this collection provides a vibrant, panoramic correction to such flattening and beautifully reveals how different methodologies can greatly enrich our understanding of Philips's poetry and her enormous influence. In no small part because of the generosity of contributors willing to revisit their own work and clarify their contributions, Orvis's and Paul's collection will become indispensable for other scholars interested in Philips, in seventeenth-century poetics and politics, and in queer female poets. Through its contextual depth, careful biography, and wide-ranging critical approaches, it also promises to enrich undergraduate and graduate teaching on Philips.

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