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Women, Beauty and Power in Early Modern England: A Feminist Literary History

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Situer conciliarisme dans la pensée espagnole de la première modernité

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Mandeville argued it was useful for the good of society for people to believe, even if what they believed was false. These diverse strands of thought, Shagan argues, combined to form modern ideas of belief as a personal form of opinion which one finds helpful, but which requires no objective demonstration.

This broad conception of belief, he argues, has allowed the modern West to become more open and peaceful. Since the threshold for a belief is now so low that anyone can say he or she believes in something, and because belief is seen as inherently personal, multiple expressions of faith can now coexist. Herein Shagan seeks to temper Gregory's pessimism.

Shagan convincingly argues that the concept of belief has changed over time. Drawing on a breadth of sources, his work demonstrates the vitality and volatility of eighteenth-century thought, blurring the lines between religious and radical enlightenments. Further, it invites greater reflection on how and why the religious majority came to follow the pioneering thinkers Shagan identifies and accept lowering the bar of belief. It is a work which challenges scholars once again to engage in the social history of ideas.

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Snook, Edith.
Women, Beauty and Power in Early Modern England: A Feminist Literary History.
Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. x, 230. ISBN 978-1-137-50368-8 (paperback) $29.

Edith Snook's *Women, Beauty and Power: A Feminist Literary History* is a significant and valuable intervention in the ongoing discussion of the construction and interpretation of female beauty in the early modern period. Snook redirects the current conversation, which includes such important recent works as Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass's *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (2000) and Farah Karim-Cooper's *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (2006), by turning to writing by women. In doing so, she unsettles the notion that in the literature of the period female beauty is comprehensively a trope, deriving from the Petrarchan ideal

adopted by mostly male writers of lyric love poetry; and that in the discourse of sermons, advice books, and debates about women, beautification is indivisibly associated with vanity. What she does find is that ideals and practices of beauty and beautification are inextricably related to issues of race and class.

The enquiry addresses three areas of beauty—cosmetics, dress, and hair—with each section offering an essay contextualizing the issues paired with a second chapter that analyzes literary texts. Snook's choice of material offers a broad-spectrum view of women's thinking about beauty: she includes household manuals with recipes for medicines and restoratives; a short novel; account books; a prose romance; mothers' advice to their children; a prose narrative; and both a personal diary and a set of formal memoirs. The research is both deep and extensive, her conclusions compelling, and her choice of texts for close analysis inspired. In the section on clothes, for example, she reads Mary Wroth's *Urania* beside Margaret Spencer's personal accounts, discussing a range of ways in which clothes contribute to the construction of identity, noting also their importance as class markers that offer the potential for negotiating the power accorded by high social status. She also explores the role of clothes as both reflective and productive of the inward state. This chapter provides an effective basis for a most intriguing analysis of the maternal advice of Elizabeth Jocelin and Brilliana, Lady Hartley, as they guide their sons in the details of dress as both social and moral indicators. These mothers offer extensive instruction as to what to wear, and more particularly what not to wear, to aid their sons in securing places in the world and demonstrating their inner solidity and virtue to those who may affect their progress.

For the section on cosmetics, Snook addresses not only the early modern interpretation of "painting" as falsifying nature, attending only to the exterior and pandering to vanity, as it is expressed in religious tracts and conduct books, but also third-wave feminism's assumptions about cosmetics as playing to the male gaze and therefore devaluing the feminine. In the collections of recipes, books of household management, and medical treatises she finds, interestingly, that beauty is associated more with the health of both body and mind than with simple appearance, and that recipes for lotions to cleanse and repair the skin are offered for men as well as women. The association of both outward beauty and inward goodness with light, and therefore fairness of skin and hair, underpins assumptions about the relationship between race and virtue that she finds played out in the masque *Salmacida Spolia*, where fairness "triumphs […]

as a political and epistemological structure" (41), so that Chaos is dark and bedraggled while rays of pure light glow from the head of the queen. Snook also notes that *Salmacida Spolia* brings medicine onto the stage itself, foregrounding the queen's fair beauty as the cure for the nation's disorders.

In the section on hair and the culture of the head, Snook juxtaposes a discussion of the metaphorical and symbolic significance of hair as a key element in cross-dressing in fiction by Mary Wroth and Margaret Cavendish with an extensive and detailed analysis of Anne Clifford's references to her own, real hair in her diaries, accounts, and the Great Books of Record. As a young woman, Clifford's hair is an essential feature of her overall beauty, and her position as a member of the aristocracy gives her permission to be proud of it, to attend to it, and to purchase costly products for its care and dressing. In her later years, as a widow and a landowner, she begins to cover her hair in accordance with her age and position of authority, and ultimately to cut it off. At this stage of her life, the covering and then removal of her hair are both character markers, reflecting self-discipline, and spiritual acts not unlike tonsuring. Clifford, then, affords Snook a compelling illustration of her central argument—that the ideals of beauty in the period are associated with, and the practices enabled by, class privilege and assumptions about racial difference

Snook herself observes that this book "cannot be the final word on early modern women's thinking about beauty" (8). Rather, and as the best scholars invariably do, she has established a number of lines of enquiry that may be pursued by herself and others to develop into a productive conversation. It is an important book.

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Terpstra, Nicholas ed.
Lives Uncovered: A Sourcebook of Early Modern Europe.
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Collections of documents in translation have long been a staple in the undergraduate classroom. They allow students, lacking the linguistic abilities to