© Studia methodologica, ISSN 2307-1222, No. 39. 2014

Studia methodologica 2014; (39)

PERSONAL DIARY AS A REALITY PRESENTATION METHOD. LADY MARGARET HOBY'S SELF-PORTRAIT (1599-1605)

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ABSTRACT

Chylińska Bożenna. Personal Diary as a Reality Presentation Method. Lady Margaret Hoby's Self-Portrait (1599-1605)

The paper aims to discuss a Puritan female diary exploring English Puritan female experience at the turn of the seventeenth century. The daily account of the life of Lady Margaret Hoby, the first English woman-diarist, perfectly illustrates the Calvinist ideal of womanhood. Scattered evidence, placed together from brief entries, records the narrow life of a high-status Gentlewoman captured between her two essential callings: large household managerial duties, and elevated religiosity. Lady Hoby's personalized narrative prominently emphasizes both her spirituality and the daily demands of managing the large manor affairs. Her writing can thus be approached through a wider cultural world in which devotional activities structured female domesticities, following the Calvinist doctrine that the church remain the place of worship, but its performance be extended to the home and family as a center of religious devotion. Lady Margaret Hoby's self-portrait is here recognized as an almost exemplary image of a Puritan woman's spirituality, strictly combined with religious zeal, feminine chastity, diligence, and industriousness.

Key words: diary, self-portrait, gender, womanhood, English Puritanism

Any interpretation of history can be approached through a category of gender; unquestionably, early England Puritan history is also a female history. The gender category was one of the most significant factors contributing to the female experience in the patriarchal reality of the Puritan community. The Puritan magnification of motherhood, the idealization of conjugal love, and the elevation of female religiosity, clearly visible in late sixteenth – early seventeenth-century England, and documented in contemporary diaries, letters, sermons, and pieces of literature, significantly evidenced female life. Marital state and conjugal love gained high approval in Puritan theology and morality. It was seen as a holy combination of spirituality and sexuality in the consort's role. The Puritan conviction that the subordination of women to men resulted from the divinely ordained social order was broadly expounded by the Church thus confirming the domination of male authority in both the private and social lives of the English Puritans.

Even a brief exploration of the Biblical responsibilities conferred upon everywoman reveals that a spinning wheel, although unquestionably a crucial feminine craft in late sixteenth and early seventeenth – century England, was but a small faction of the woman's housework and of her perpetual service to her family. Hers was a broad responsibility of a devoted running of her household, which was virtually a family enterprise requiring her response to the unceasing daily demands of maternity, managerial and complex home production skills, and social adaptability. Most occupations and roles were determined and defined by gender. Women were most commonly domestic, and it was the husband who took the prominent seat in the family and community.

The fundamental virtues formulated for women by the English Puritan moralists: Industry, Charity, Modesty, Religiosity, Meekness, Prudence, and Obedience, were the key words denoting not solely the idealized, occasionally abstract virtues of the housewife; they most of all

proclaimed a broad scope of the strict female obligations, responsibilities, and modes of conduct, conferred upon women within a specific context of ordinary life in a particular place and in the precisely determined time. Those moral fundamentals also provided clear ideas about what was suitable for a woman in her position, and they warned against apparent insecurities. The most essential rules of female social mores: Industry, Charity, and Modesty, were perspicuously pronounced in The Bible in the proverbial wisdom, commonly known in the Puritan world: "She toils at her work"; "She keeps her eye on the doings of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness;" "Like a ship laden with merchandise, she brings home food from far off." (Proverbs 31:10-31) Thus by her efforts she strictly obeyed the virtue of industriousness required by her male-dominated community which preferred "productive" to "ornamental" women, and which praised submissiveness, rather than wit. Admittedly, women's work was supportive not creative, in the sense that they did not construct, invent, or discover; moreover, not infrequently could their productivity not directly be measured and evaluated by the effect of their effort because it was quickly consumed and, most commonly, not evidenced or even noticed. Significantly, however, although their labor was not tied to products but to people, it came to be an integral part of the larger human context.

If the requirement of Industry was directed to all women, in stratified English society Charity was essentially recommended for women of higher social and economic status, that is for prominent female members of the community. In a broader sense of the Puritan morality, the virtue of Charity was measured by the housewife's neighborly concern; by her willingness to stretch her hand to the needy and to offer relief to her poor neighbors. Commonly, most people had neighbors and relied on them in the moments of repeated natural disasters or illnesses. Most of all, however, neighborliness, denoting a friendly, good neighborhood forming a small area within a larger place, was a cultural norm in England.

Borrowing was both a common social practice and part of the re-current cycle of life. Family and social circles shared commodities but, no less importantly, they also shared work which produced those commodities. Female work sharing brought women neighbors together; physical proximity combined with collective material interdependence authenticated personal relationships; confirmed a sense of togetherness; ensured the feeling of participation and of common caring. Thus those shared daily duties which had for long come to be identified with the essential laborious female calling, although continually challenged by the image of the "pretty gentlewoman," greatly contributed to the development of the Puritan communal solidarity [5, p. 35-37].

As noted earlier, the primary social category and distinction in the Puritan ethic was gender. However, the principal factor which determined one's worth and moral values was religious status. Church membership was one of the few public distinctions available to women, and not conditioned upon the social or economic status of her husband or even on his religious inclinations.

The most appealing illustrations and prominent source materials documenting every nation's history are personal diaries. Female diaries, memoirs, and journals as the narrative sources for the sixteenth-century history of the English Reformation, and for the early history of Puritan England were scarce. Hidden in the attics or long-forgotten in the archives, those personal narratives represent female roles in the religious development of the region and, at the same time, they personalize the state of mind and soul of some zealous Puritan women in a somewhat apologetic setting of an idealized local history. The value of those early specimens of personalized narratives lies in the fact that they most accurately and most directly explore the theme of the nature of female experience in the history of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth century English Puritanism. A personal diary of an English female whose life perfectly demonstrates the Calvinist ideal of Puritan womanhood was the scrupulous daily account of Lady Margaret Hoby, virtually the first English woman-diarist who plainly and unemotionally drew a vivid portrait of one God-fearing English Puritan Gentlewoman, and exemplified the diverse ways of everyday routine. Margaret Dakins (c. 1567-1633) was born in Lincoln, Yorkshire, England, as the only child of a landed gentleman, Arthur Dakins from Linton, East Riding, Yorkshire, and his wife, Thomasine Gye (d. 1613). Margaret was educated in York, in the Puritan household of the Countess of Huntingdon, Katherine Hastings, who ran a school for young gentlewomen. Margaret's first husband was Walter Devereux, the younger son of the 1st Earl of Essex, a court favorite of Queen Elizabeth I. Walter died in 1591 in France, at the

Siege of Rouen, where he supported the French Protestants. Margaret subsequently married Sir Thomas Sydney, the younger brother of Philip and Robert Sydney. Sir Thomas died in 1595.

Margaret's protestant persuasion and zealous religiosity could not be questioned. When still in her twenties, she was married for a third time, at the wish of her dying noble patron, the Lord of Huntingdon, to Sir Thomas Posthumous Hoby (1566-1640), a Puritan devotee, an English gentleman, member of Parliament, and Justice of the Peace. Sir Hoby was the younger son of Sir Thomas Hoby (1530-1566), the English Ambassador to France, and the brother of Sir Edward Hoby (1560-1617), a diplomat and scholar. Thomas Hoby was born after his father's death, which gained him the name : "Posthumous." The couple was childless. It could be argued whether Lady Margaret wrote her private diary for purely religious reasons to fulfill her compelling sense of a spiritual calling, or for seeking consolation in her bitter married life experience with the hunch-backed, short-statured husband, also known for his being overbearing, touchy, and resentful. He has been claimed as the inspiration for William Shakespeare's character Malvolio in Twelfth Night. He was educated at Eton and at Trinity College, Oxford, matriculating in 1574, according to The Eton college register, 1441-1698, at the age of eight. Whatever the reasons, it should be noted here that Lady Hoby's diary explicitly reveals the couple's mutual affection or at least strong attachment. The Hobys settled in the village of Hackness, near Scarborough, Yorkshire, known for its sturdy Catholicism. Although Sir Thomas, with his lump and strong Puritan persuasion, met with resentment, he was brave enough to show his determination and high spirits which earned him respect, especially of the Hackness local authorities. It was also the Hackness manor where Lady Margaret and her private chaplain, Puritan preacher Richard Rhodes, who, not insignificantly, had recently come from Cambridge University – the traditional center of English Puritanism - organized the religious life and instruction not only in the extended Hoby household but also in Hackness itself. During family prayers, Lady Margaret's servants read from John Foxe's Actes and Monuments of Matters Most Memorable, as well as from the Bible, sermons, and other devotional works of the distinguished Puritans

Lady Margaret Hoby's week-by-week diary provides one of the best available examples of the Puritan women of landowning families in England at the turn of the seventeenth century. She inherited a large estate in East Anglia and her daily routines encompassed not only devotional practices, spiritual exercises and her personal relationship with God, but also female anxieties and ordinary everyday activities. The diary entries depict Lady Margaret's unusual piety and spirituality as well as the manner in which contemporary gentlewomen exercised their high social status, and exerted influence and authority both within the household and in the religious domain. No less significantly, Lady Hoby proved to be an effective author experimenting in the Puritan autobiographical mode, later developed by John Bunyan (1628-1688) in his Puritan allegory The Pilgrim's Progress [from this World to that which is to Come, 1678]. Her diary, written between 1599 and 1605, gave a detailed account of her usual week, as in the following excerpts written in 1599:

> "Wednesday the 24 [probably October]
>
> After private prayer I went about the house a while, then I wrote in my testament[New Testament] and after I had eaten my breakfast, I went abroad; after I came home prayed and soon after when I had read of the Bible, I dined; after, I dispatched some business in the house, then I took a lecture; after, I writ in my commonplace book [a collection of extracts from readings, conversations, and observations] and then prayed with Mr. Rhodes, and went about the house awhile, and then returned to meditation and private prayer; then I studied a while for my lecture, and after went to supper; and after I heard a lecture, and then I read of the Book of Martyrs and so went to bed" [1a].
>
> "Thursday the 25

> After private prayer and breakfast I did read a while for being not well, partly through mine own folly, which I humble pray the Lord to pardon; I went to dinner; after I writ some notes in my testament…, after to prayers, and then to bed" [1b].
>
> "Monday the 24 [December]
>
> After private prayers I did eat my breakfast; then I read of the Bible, prayed, walked a little abroad, dined; after served divers poor people with beefers [beef broth] then was busy in the kitchen until 5 a clock, and then examined myself and prayed; after, I went to supper, then heard the lecture, and so to bed" [1b].
>
> And of the entries probably of Sunday, 20 January, 1600 or 1601:
>
> "The Lord's day 20
>
> After private prayer I read a while and then did eat my breakfast; after, I went to the Church, then I came home and prayed, after dined; then I read in Perkins till I went again to the Church, where I found the Lord to assist me most graciously from the malice of my enemy; after, till night, I kept company with Mr. Hoby who read a while of Cartwright's book to me, then I went to private examination and prayer; then I went to supper, after to public prayers, then I walked a while and after prayed privately and so went to bed" [1b].

These records shelter the narrow life of a high-status Puritan woman captured between her two essential callings: large manor managerial duties, and elevated religiosity, demonstrated in her regular participation in public prayers and church instructions, but most of all in her private prayers, spiritual exercises, self-examinations and meditations in the solitude of her home retreat. Spiritual introspection, such as self-examination and meditation, was the pivotal requirement of Calvinism for the moral and religious uplift. Lady Hoby's devotional activities also included reading Scripture as well as theology. On her reading list there was John Foxe and his famous Actes and Monuments of 1563, popularly known as The Book of Martyrs, frequently mentioned in the diary, as well as orthodox Puritan divine and professor of theology Thomas Cartwright whose sermons and Cambridge lectures aroused as much enthusiasm as resentment. There are also direct references to the popular preacher and writer, William Perkins, the celebrated author of a tract A Reformed Catholike, first published in England in 1598. These works were relatively recent at that time, brought and recommended to Lady Margaret, as were the other devotional writings, by Mr. Rhodes who, as noted before, served as a live-in chaplain and mentor to the Hoby family.

A careful examination of the content of the entries clearly suggests that Lady Margaret did not choose to challenge the established social order; despite appearances, her narrative does not only prominently emphasize the spiritual side of her life, piety and the moral format of the mistress of the aristocratic manor-house, who is setting an example to her presumably extended domestic service staff; it also reveals the persistence of the daily demands of managing the complexity of the large home affairs and, most likely, the skillful dexterity required from the frequently conflicting roles of the lady of the manor and a housewife, a dignified and virtues woman, a worthy and loyal consort, as well as a helping neighbor and respected community member. Significantly, her worship and piety were now concentrated on the domestic life of the manor according to the Calvinist concept that the family should serve as a center of religious devotion. William Dyrness, Professor of Theology and Culture, observes that

although from the time of Calvin the church remained the place of worship, its performance was extended to the home and family [2, p. 143]. The domestic sphere and, in this particular case, the customary female duties were carefully balanced with devotional times, prayer, self-examination, and meditation. But these spheres were neatly combined together by the widely understood significance of God's word, measured by one's inner and outer life. No less importantly, the practice of reading, or hearing devotional texts read by others prominently contributed to the emerging Puritan ethos. ef Calvin tce of tended to the home and family. although from the time of Calvin the church remained the pl

Lady Margaret's day reading was part of her spiritual exercises and a metaphorical articulation of her daily routines and, consequently, of her whole life. It was a common practice to annotate readings from the Bible; in her diary Lady Hoby frequently refers to writing notes in her personal copy of the New Testament ("I wrote in my testament," "I writ some notes in my testament"), or to writing up her notes after listening to a sermon ("I wrote out the sermon"). Typically, Lady Margaret Hoby regularly read Foxe and Perkins alongside the Scriptures. However, equally important is to contextualize those theological texts, that is to consider and to understand their social and cultural contexts and to trace their effectiveness for the believers' lives. For the culture of the turn of the seventeenth century, in which literacy rates were rising, reading theological texts, listening to sermons and, most of all, the precise understanding of those texts became an essential constituent of contemporary life. Consequently, Lady Hoby's reading was a part of a wider cultural world in which devotional activities, that is church services, sacraments, sermons, private prayer, self-examination and religious meditations played fundamental roles. Not only did they shape her devotional life but they also constructed her outer world, structured her domesticities, and gave sense to her daily duties, all measured by housework, charity and neighborliness which included midwifery. Her diary was the outcome of her personal interpretation of what she had read, understood and transmuted into the flow of her seemingly monotonous days:

> "Friday 10. [August 1599]
> After I was ready I betook myself to private prayer, wherein it pleased the Lord to deal mercifully [… page torn]; after, I went about the house, and instructed Tomson's wife in some principles of religion, … after dinner I went to work, at which [… page torn] continued till:4:, then I took order for supper [… page torn] went to prayer to write some notes in my testament, from which I was called to walk with Mr Hoby, talking of sundry business …: immediately after prayer and lector [used variously as a reading or a brief oral exhortation of a spiritual nature]for the diligent attention of which the Lord did hear my prayer by removing all wanderings which use [spelling original] to hurt me so that I received much comfort, I went to bed" [1a].
>
> "Tuesday 2. [October 1599]
>
> After private prayer I wrote notes into my testament, then I went to church: after [dinner] I gave out corn, wrote more notes in my testament, took order for supper, took a lector, and then went to meditation & prayer" [1a].
>
> "Friday 5.
>
> After private prayer I went about the house, then I wrote notes in my testament: then Mr Hoby came home, with whom I talked till dinner time: after dinner I was busy about preserving quinces, and, a little

> before supper time, I walked about the house: then I examined myself…" [1a]
>
> "Tuesday 30.
>
> After private prayer I did eat my breakfast, then I was busy to dye wool till almost dinner time …" [1a].

Domestic duties were the year-round tasks of Lady Hoby. The variety and complexity of those day-by-day routines included cooking which prominently featured the practice of preserving seasonal specialties, e.g. "quinces," or "sweet meat." The latter, in old use, could have been seasonal fruits preserved in sugar, for instance all sorts of jams or jellies. Frequent references in the diary to the tasks of overseeing the house or garden, although they may be circumstantial, clearly indicate Lady Hoby's central position in housewifery, despite her high status. By piecing together scattered evidence from a number of brief entries, Lady Margaret's life continued uninterrupted. Much of the day was spent in useful occupations. The pattern of her daily work certainly did not certainly did not show clear segregation of public and private spaces. No sharp distinction between sleeping, eating, and usual domestic tasks was clearly visible; the undisturbed sequence of those tasks, punctuated by devotional activities, gave a sense of the flow of Lady Hoby's life and created continued, absolute regularity in a harmonious long-lasting order.

Sewing tasks seem to have been a frequent and crucial part of Lady Hoby's day. Her regular references to her 'wrought' work, that is, presumably, to ornamental art, very likely implied needlework, most probably embroidery, but could also possibly have been a variety of other sewing tasks. On the other hand, the administration of a manor required the skillful management of businesses and wit in dealings with servants. Within her broad domain, Lady Hoby acted confidently and independently. Impenetrable gender barrier in managing the Hoby manorial household seemed to be blurred. The customary restrictions had little relationship to the ordinary decisions of Lady Margaret's daily occupations: she collected rents, paid wages to the servants, kept the household book, regularly inspected granary and rationed corn, dispatched orders to the household domestics; she was spinning and dyeing. She gave neighborly counsel to others ("… then I took leave, with some conference, of some that came to see me …") [Saturday, 27 October, 1599], instructed one of her servants in buying land ("… I talked with Thomas Addison about the purchasing of his own farm …") [Friday, 28 September, 1599], offered the most welcome advice to her consort ("… I was called to walk with Mr Hoby, talking of sundry business …") [Friday, 10 August]; "… and then [I] walked with Mr Hoby about the town to spy out the best places where cottages might be built …") [Monday, 20 August, 1599] [1a].

It is noteworthy that Lady Margaret's testimony tells little about her private feelings to her husband. References to Sir Thomas are formal, though it is known that she was strong-minded to resist, at least until shortly before her death in 1633, his repeated request that she make over her Hackness manor and other properties to him and his heirs.

Apparently, the building of cottages scheme, mentioned in the latter piece quoted above, was to be a charitable action planned to undertake to provide the neighborhood poor with a suitable dwelling. The customary duty of the "Lady of the Manor" was to distribute alms; on a particular Christmas Day, 24 December, 1599, Lady Margaret "served divers poor people with wheat and beefer." Her neighborly obligation was also to help other women in labor: "… I went to a wife in travail of child about whom I was busy … till :1: a clock, about which time, she being delivered and I having praised god …" [Wednesday, 15 August, 1599] [1a].

Lady Hoby's ordinary and devotional activities did not leave much space for leisure; recreations were few, mostly bowling ("… [I] exercised my body at bowls a while, of which I found good …") [Friday, 7 September, 1599] or occasional visits, even away from the manor, to talk socially with cousins and friends: "… After I had prayed, I went to breakfast to my cousin Bouser's house: after that I went to Gremston, to my Cousin Stanhopes …") [Monday, 24 September]; "… after breakfast I came to York … and [I] supped there, and took my leave of my Lady Burghley, came to my lodging and went to bed" [Tuesday, 25 September] or "After I had prayed privately, I went to breakfast: I took my coach and came home to Hackness safe …"

[Thursday, 27 September] [1a]. However, it is the spiritual introspection revealed in Lady Margaret Hoby's diary that, more than anything else, brings theological reflection on the nature of her life and gives it a relevant moral dimension. When she writes about her sickness she sees it as God's punishment for her sins: "… it pleased [God] for a just punishment to correct my sins, to send me feebleness of stomach and pain of my head …" [Friday, 17 August, 1599] [1a]. We never find her complaining but humbly accepting the divine will. Apparently, her sense of guilt, framed within her elevated piety, and her strong conviction that sickness was God's admonition, was not diminished by the fact that her husband was stricken with the same illness two days later: "… because Mr Hoby was not well, I kept him company …: that done, I thanked God who gave him will and ability, we went to church …" [Sunday, 19 August]. In the Scriptures a sinner was frequently compared to a sick person, and the figure of Christ – the physician, the healer of the body and the soul, was an important image of the New Testament. Therefore, early modern women, both Catholic and Protestant, equated the healing of illness with the curing of sin. Accordingly, Margaret Hoby tended to see sickness as divine retribution and her body as the instrument of her soul. The spiritual vision of bodily pain led to the same explanation for all diseases, as is revealed by Lady Hoby who considered that God sent her illness as a "punishment to correct my sins."

In 1605, Lady Hoby abandoned her discipline and gave up writing her spiritual testimony as soon as Richard Rhodes left the Hackness manor. As she admitted herself, she had been too overburdened by the managerial tasks demanded by a large estate to continue scribbling about the tiny events making up her daily life. However, through her self-portrait, though perhaps not deeply moving, yet vivid and powerful, we can clearly recognize an almost exemplary image of Puritan female spirituality, religious zeal, feminine chastity, trustworthiness and, no less significantly, diligence and industriousness.

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