

Hunter, Lynette. *The Letters of Dorothy Moore, 1612-64: The Friendships, Marriage, and Intellectual Life of a Seventeenth-Century Woman*. The Early Modern Englishwoman 1500-1750: Contemporary Editions. Aldershot, Hants, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2004. lviii + 138 pp. \$74.95. Review by ELLEN J. JENKINS, ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY.

In seventeenth-century Europe, while any number of scholars were occupied in the observation and analysis of the natural world and Man's place in it, a few religious leaders were still engaging in serious discussion about whether women even possessed souls—there was very little question that if they did, a woman's soul would not be the equal of a man's soul. Women were lesser creatures. The physicality of the childbearing process relegated women to a status barely above the beasts, and it was common knowledge that the female was morally and intellectually inferior and significantly more depraved than the male. Education was the province of men. A woman's intelligence was based upon the “softer” realms of knowledge, limiting her scope to housewifery and childrearing, caring for the sick, and ministering to the poor. Only in private life was a woman able to practice her gifts; public life was the domain of men.

Dorothy Moore (1612-1664?) was not satisfied to allow society or Protestant clergymen to set limits for her personal vocation or religious convictions. The daughter of an English colonist in Ireland, the young widow of an Irish nobleman, Moore was a woman of great intellect who lived in England and on the Continent at various times in her life. She also came to be a participant in the circle of Protestant reformers that included the Polish-born “intelligencer” and educational-reform advocate Samuel Hartlib; the theologian and philosopher, John Dury, whom she later married; Katherine Boyle (Lady Ranelagh) and her brother, the chemist Robert Boyle; and others who aimed to end sectarian divisiveness among Protestants and to reform education. Moore's letters to these compatriots, circulated by Hartlib, and to other contemporaries demonstrate what Hunter describes as her exceptional rhetorical skills, noting examples of formal, conversational, and informal styles. Moore was remarkable in another respect: she wrote to important men outside her circle to discuss religion and education with less feminine deference than was common at the time for correspondence between women and men, whether she was addressing the Dutch ambassador in London or

a professor of theology at the University of Leyden.

In an exchange of letters she initiated in October 1643 with the latter, Professor André Rivet, who was also tutor to William II of Orange, Moore asked an important question: if women had specific gifts that were granted to them by God, and if women, as well as men, were members of the Body of Christ, then how could women use their talents to benefit the entire membership while they were excluded from the public sphere? When Rivet's answer seemed to skirt the issue with evasions and responds that women can only care for the poor and sick and be good mothers and housewives, Moore writes again. In a polite but pointed response, she apologizes, suggesting that her choice of wording must have caused Rivet to misunderstand her question, or he surely would have given a more useful answer.

Moore also argues that women should be educated in areas other than dancing and dressing, which serve little purpose but to inflame pride. In a letter to Lady Ranelagh written in approximately 1650, Moore addresses her concerns that females are not being given the sort of education that will enable them to serve mankind but are being trained to "the working of fancy" (87).

By this time, Moore had married Dury, whose efforts to reform education and to prepare mankind for the coming Millennium involved a call for improved schools and religious training and the dissemination of knowledge to all classes. Dury was, himself, responsible for reorganizing the royal library at St. James's Palace and saving many of the documents and records left behind after the arrest and execution of Charles I. He was also one of the earliest proponents of infant schools. While Dury's responsibilities as a minister and then as Cromwell's agent abroad kept him away throughout much of their marriage, their correspondence shows that Moore and Dury had similar aims in educational and religious matters.

Lynette Hunter, the author of *The Letters of Dorothy Moore*, is Professor of the History of Rhetoric and Performance at the University of California-Davis. Hunter has a polymathic background, having worked in biochemistry and humanities computing before turning to the history of medicine, feminist rhetoric, and even aboriginal storytelling. Other works by Hunter include *Shakespeare, Language and the Stage: The Fifth Wall, Approaches to Shakespeare from Criticism, Performance and Theatre Studies* (with Peter Lichtenfels, 2005); *Literary Value/Cultural Power: Verbal Arts in the Twenty-First Century* (2001); *Critiques of*

Knowing: Situated Textualities in Computing, Science and the Arts (1999); and *Women, Science and Medicine 1500-1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society* (with Sarah Hutton, 1997).

The Letters of Dorothy Moore suffers from an inconvenient structure, with commentary and interpretation in the first half of the book and the letters, themselves, in the second. The commentary would be more useful if it appeared between or alongside letters, as, for instance, in Michael and Eleanor Brock's *H.H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley* (1983). In Hunter's book, by comparison, the reader finds herself having to flip pages repeatedly in order to find relevant text, an unnecessary and annoying distraction.

The greatest lapse, however, is in context. The author refers to the historical events that provided the setting for Moore's life and even discusses their effects upon the finances, occupation, and whereabouts of the subject but assumes that the reader will already know everything necessary about those events. For instance, the "reduction" of the Irish and Moore's investment in the campaign is oblique at best. The Irish Rebellion of 1641 is only mentioned in passing, and the English Civil War is omitted almost entirely, despite the official roles several of the letter-writers played on the fringes of the Stuart court and then in the Commonwealth.

On the whole, *The Letters of Dorothy Moore, 1612-64*, while unsuitable for a novice or undergraduate, is interesting and revealing reading. Hunter's commentary brings to light the subtleties of Moore's rhetoric and discloses the sense of vocation, the radical Christianity, and the dedication to service of this remarkable seventeenth-century woman.