

NOTE

SUSANNA HOPTON'S BOOK

ALTHOUGH WE KNOW a considerable amount about books and their readers in Restoration England — thanks not least to that indefatigable diarist Samuel Pepys — it is not often that a single copy of a particular seventeenth-century book can in itself add something to our understanding of the literary history of that period. Such is, however, the case with the Australian National University Library's copy of the third edition of Robert Boyle's *Some considerations touching the style of the H. Scriptures*.¹

On the evidence of the front endpaper autograph, an early — indeed, probably the original — owner of this book was Susanna Hopton, who paid three shillings for it at an unspecified date, and whose attentive reading of it is reflected

Susanna Harvey Hopton (1627–1709) was herself the author of several devotional books, including *Daily devotions . . . by an Humble Penitent* (1673), a collection of prayers and meditations which had four editions to 1700, and *Devotions in the ancient way of offices* (1700), a 'reform' of John Austin's work to bring it into conformity with Church of England usages. She published anonymously, her writing on at least one occasion being attributed to a deceased clergyman, and her authorship of these works was revealed only after her death, by her friend and sometime editor George Hicks.²

It is in the context of this little-known writer's own life and work that the marginalia in the ANU copy of Boyle's book are of particular interest. For example, they reveal that, even in her middle years, Hopton had still to contend, as a devotional writer, with the limitations of an apparently typical female education. Boyle comments disparagingly upon those religious writers who appear to be 'Strangers enough to Rhetorick, not to know the Difference betwixt a Trope and a Figure, betwixt a Prosopoea and a Metaphore, or betwixt a Climax and a Metonymy' (p.182). Hopton painstakingly filled the margins of this page with definitions of each term. However, she also marked the later passage in which Boyle lists examples of women famed for their studies of the Scriptures (p.229) — a list from which she obviously derived encouragement for her own ventures into a literary area which was at that time very much the prerogative of male writers.

The wife of a judge, Hopton was childless and wealthy, devoting her energies and means almost exclusively to theological study, piety, and friendship for the clergy. A further manuscript note in this book seems to provide a clue to the temperament that shaped her somewhat remarkable lifestyle. Boyle, observing that familiarity with the Bible 'breeds not Contempt but Reverence,' adds parenthetically 'and I Like a Book, Acquaintance still Endears' (p.250). The remark provoked the following marginal comment from Hopton: 'Very Rare, But Very

Happy is y^t Acquaintance w^{ch} still endeaes. but y^e Script. does soe. Therefore y^e Scrip^s are y^e best freind comfort stay Treasure, & truest Joys on Earth to y^e Diligent & Believing reader hearer & converser with them. One houre Spent in reading & applying y^e Scrip: hath more comfort then all y^e Societiee in y^e World, & only theirs who can & do assist therin are to be endured in Competition with it.' One suspects that Susanna Hopton herself had found 'Societiee' to be as uncongenial as her religious studies were to prove rewarding.

It seems clear that Boyle's *Considerations touching the style of the H. Scriptures* was a purchase of no small importance to Susanna Hopton, as an aspiring but inadequately-educated female devotional writer; however, this copy of the book seems not to have been more highly valued by later generations for the addition of her notes — a titlepage autograph reveals that it was bought by J. Edwards on 3 November 1738 for only 10d.

Ra Foxtton,
Australian National University,
Canberra.

¹ Some considerations touching the style of the H. Scriptures; extracted from several parts of a discourse, concerning divers particulars belonging to the Bible; written divers years since to a friend. 3rd ed. London, for H. Herringman, 1668. (Wing B4027; J.F. Fulton, *Bibliography of the Honorable Robert Boyle* (Oxford, 1932), no.43).

² A biographical memoir of Hopton is included in George Ballard, *Memoirs of several ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences* (Oxford: by W. Jackson, for the author, 1752).

CORRIGENDUM

The second paragraph of Ra Foxtton's Note 'Susanna Hopton's Book' on p.62 should conclude with the line:

in the copious endpaper and marginal notes in her hand.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)