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Female Servants in Early Modern England by Charmian Mansell.

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Charmian Mansell's *Female Servants in Early Modern England* is a beautifully written pathbreaking study of female servants, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis to provide a rich and revealing portrait of what service meant to women. Mansell has used the records of the ecclesiastical courts in the dioceses of Exeter, Bath and Wells, Winchester, Gloucester and Hereford between 1532 and 1649. She has collected 'almost 9000 cases, over 15,000 litigants and more than 27,000 witnesses', which provide a context for almost 1100 servants (14). Throughout Mansell balances quantitative analysis with careful critical analysis of depositions. Central to her argument is the ways in which women servants exercised agency, and sought to control their environment. In this way, she illustrates Allyson Poska's notion of agentic norms: servants had expectations of their treatment, these expectations were generally accepted, and servants sought to enforce them.

The book is divided into three parts. The first is more descriptive, focusing on who the servants were. Its three chapters provide an analysis of the church courts and those who appeared; show how Mansell traced lives before and after an appearance in the records; and the place of service in women's lives. The second part is centered on the experience of work, with chapters on mobility, the agreements that were made between servants and masters, and the range of work women servants did. The final part places

female servants in larger worlds, focusing on space, communities, and time. Each chapter begins with a vignette about a particular woman, illustrating the themes of the chapter. Mansell is always reminding readers that the servants she is writing about were people, and they matter as individuals. This attention to individual experiences as both part of patterns but also distinct is one of the great strengths of the book. We even get repeat appearances, further deepening our appreciation of individual experience: Isott Riches appears in the Introduction, chapters 4, 6, 7 as well as the Conclusion.

For an example, Chapter 2, 'Tracing Lives', begins with the account of a clandestine marriage in 1607 between Thomas Nashe and Mary Mayo in Brockworth, Gloucestershire. Mary was pregnant, and their daughter was born a few months later, followed by five sons. More than twenty years later, one Anne Nashe, a servant of John Jones of Gloucester, testified in a matrimonial suit brought by one of her fellow servants in 1630. Anne Nashe was the child born after that clandestine marriage; she had served Jones since 1618, starting when she was only 10 or 11 years old. When Jones made his will (shortly before she testified), he left her 40s, far more than the 13/4 his other servants received. The ability to make these connections is a virtue of Mansell's database; her willingness to push beyond it and make Anne Nashe a person is a great virtue of the book. The chapter continues by tracing out the lives of servants in multiple ways. Mansell starts with looking at the status of servants, beginning with literacy, and the complexity of understanding the implication of different marks; she then turns to the ways servants defined their wealth or 'worth' when asked by the court. She then turns from servants to masters, and the ways in

which different masters shaped the futures of their servants. Throughout, she works to trace the servants she identifies in the court both before and after their service, painting a rich and evocative portrait of the lives of a range of women in early modern England.

Mansell shows the range of work done by women servants, and reminds us that women servants were part of a household, but not enclosed in it. Their work was economically productive, and mattered for the prosperity of the household that employed them. They worked in fields, were sent to market, ran errands, attended the local parish church, and socialized with other young people. In those situations they were not only not closely supervised, but they engaged with many people outside the household which they served. And, as all of us who have worked with consistory court depositions know, even the household was rarely completely enclosed, but was generally closely observed by neighbors. Throughout, Mansell shows servants choosing masters, changing masters, protesting mistreatment, and trying to create conditions where they succeed. At the same time, she is always aware that service was a necessity for many women: for some it was a way-station on the road to marriage, for others the only way to maintain themselves.

Few of us who have closely studied early modern households will be entirely surprised by Mansell's portrait of women servants, though the depth of the evidence she provides provides convincing evidence for our impressions and enriches our understanding. At times Mansell oversimplifies existing understandings of service: few early modernists doubt the economic importance of servants' work. The balance between the very real power structures within which women worked (including the legal

requirement that they be in a household) and the ways women could shape their experience as servants is a delicate one, and Mansell occasionally overemphasizes women's ability to shape their experience. Female servants often found ways to meet their needs, but they did so within a system that constrained them in multiple ways.

This is an extraordinary book, that among other things shows the impact of technology on research. The large database Mansell developed, and the ability to photograph depositions, enabled her to craft a riveting and marvelously detailed account of the lives of women servants in early modern England. It promises to be the starting point for all discussions of female servants for many years to come.

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