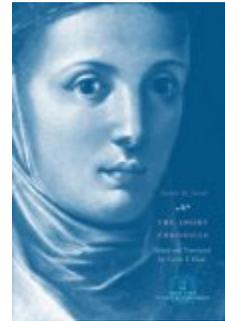


H-Net Reviews

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Jeanne de Jussie. *The Short Chronicle*. Klaus. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xxix + 224 pp. \$21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-41706-6.

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A Fantastic Classroom Resource

One of the central questions Reformation historians have asked in the last thirty years is that of how the Reformation was perceived by what German and Swiss historians call the “common man,” that is, the average inhabitant of territories that experienced a Reformation. One major contribution of this historiographical strand has been an increased scholarly awareness of the persisting sympathies for the Old Church and even resistance to the inroads of the Reformation in many areas. These matters have been of particular interest with regard to Geneva, not only because of its role as the unofficial capital of the Calvinist Reformation and a location where the coercive effect of the Reformation was supposed to have been felt strongly, but also because surviving sources allow a more comprehensive look at these issues there than in many other locations. The records of the Geneva Consistory, now being edited under the supervision of Robert M. Kingdon, are a case in point.[1] These archival traces allow us to look more closely at the survival of sympathies for the Old Church even in communities like Geneva, which were assumed to be virulently reform minded. The result of this project has been a greater sensitivity to the extent to which the patrician factional opposition to the Reformation extended to the Genevan populace at large, and a discussion of how this resistance or inertia worked itself out in religion on a day-to-day basis. But, scholars who want to transfer the results of this by now well-developed social history of the Reformation to their classrooms have been severely challenged: numerous translations facilitate instruction of the theological and intellectual history of the Refor-

mation, but few touch on everyday lives. Thus, the translation of the first volume of the consistory minutes into English was a major landmark.[2] Now, instructors will have a similarly significant resource in Carrie F. Klaus’s translation of Jeanne de Jussie’s chronicle of her experiences in Geneva, one that is valuable as a more direct representation of the view of a Geneva resident who opposed the Reformation and, indeed, was driven away for her religious allegiances. While Jussie’s chronicle is not a diary—she did not write on a day-to-day basis—its composition from 1534-46 still places it at the center of the events it records. And, because many of the most well-known Reformation-era ego-documents are written from the pro-Reformation “conversion” perspective, this translation is particularly valuable.

Jussie (1503-61) was in no respect a “common man”: one of six surviving children of a rural Savoyard noble family fallen on hard times, she was a woman and a member of the Order of the Poor Clares. (Hence, the inclusion of this item in the series *The Other Voice*, which promotes English-language translations of early modern women’s writing, a context Klaus exerts herself to justify in a few notes on Jussie’s attitudes toward gender issues, but which—aside from a few pieces of information about gender usage in the original source—she does not push on the reader.) Jussie attended a Genevan girls’ school (for which her text is the singular evidentiary basis) before entering the convent in 1521 at the age of eighteen. She functioned as the institution’s scribe, and various documentary traces of her activities in this role have survived

in archives in Geneva's hinterland. Her chronicle traces events beginning in 1526, when Geneva's regional alliance system changed in a way that predisposed the city toward religious reform: the turn away from the Duke of Savoy and the local Catholic bishop toward alliances with Swiss powers meant a split in the local patrician government; when Bern went Protestant, it increased the likelihood that Geneva would as well. The bishop fled for the first time in 1528. Jussie and her fellow nuns were all members of the local nobility and their allegiances were clear; this stance, along with their decision—with the exception of one member of the convent—to cling obdurately to their vows, was partly why they were treated so aggressively by the city's patrician government. In 1532, the first evangelical preachers came to the city under the auspices of the Bernese. Though they were eventually ejected, in 1533 violence led the bishop to flee for the last time, and attempts to reinvigorate allegiance to Catholicism and Savoy by sponsoring Catholic preaching in the city were only of temporary effectiveness in holding back the storm. The Reformers returned; in 1534, they were preaching in the Franciscan monastery, and in 1535, after a long disputation that firmly established the Reformation in Geneva, they were given permission to preach to the Clares. After a series of encounters that were polite, emotional, dramatic, and violent by turns, the Clares were allowed to leave the city and traveled on foot to Annecy, where they settled in an empty Augustinian monastery (the Reformation having been hard on the Augustinian order). The community continued there until its dissolution as a consequence of the French Revolution. Jussie's memoir ends with the nuns' reception in Annecy and a discussion of the benefaction they received there. The details are known, but what makes Jussie's memoir such a wonderful read is her record of exactly how her convent refuge was barricaded and eventually breached, including a great deal of the appertaining dialogue. In this case, the cover blurb, which describes "devious councilmen who lied to trusting nuns, lecherous soldiers who tried to kiss them, and iconoclastic intruders who smashed statues and burned paintings," is for once *not* exaggerating. Students will like it for that—but what fascinated me was the relative accuracy with which Jussie sketches the arguments of her opponents; the Genevan proponents of the Reformation are, in the style of Thucydides, described as saying what they should have said in the situation. What Jussie's recollections point out is precisely the gap between the Reformers and the Old Church: what the Reformers thought they were saying in kindness, piety, and reasonability constituted from the perspective of the nuns the deepest, most shock-

ing outrage. In this respect, despite her clear partisanship, Jussie provides us with a highly accurate account of the religious culture clash that characterized the early Reformation.

Laying aside the tumultuous events it describes, the memoir ultimately succeeds because of its language. Jussie employed a holier-than-thou tone in her writing that makes her prose come alive for the reader even in the original, and Klaus's translation perfectly captures this mood, which falls somewhere between personal memoir and devotional text. This translation is a work of art that truly provides a comprehensible, living voice for the text of an author dead for almost five hundred years. Klaus also provides an introductory essay and bibliography, and here she embraces a less-is-more aesthetic that some scholarly readers may find themselves questioning. The introduction limits itself to a few paragraphs on the Genevan situation, a brief discussion of Jussie's biography, an introduction to the life of the Poor Clares in Geneva, and a non-exhaustive discussion of thematic, linguistic, and stylistic aspects of the texts. As a reviewer, I feel torn here insofar as I tend to resent editors of primary source editions directed at students who give away all the important points about a text in the introduction, but, at the same time, there are points on which I wish Klaus had offered more commentary. Given her emphasis on the architecture of the convent (one of the most noticeable features of Jussie's narrative, and a theme on which Klaus has published), I wish Klaus would have discussed a bit more the paradoxical qualities of the text. Jussie frequently delivers detailed reports of events at which she cannot possibly have been present. "How does she know that?" I found myself wondering again and again, and Jussie herself apparently feels obliged to respond to this question, for toward the middle of the narrative, she begins interjecting statements about her presence at certain events into the text. Further consideration of this point might have led to some contemplation about the porous quality of cloistered life and relations with the many people who had contact with the sisters. The text also provides a great deal of self-justification, as Jussie is included by the Genevans in a group of nuns thought to be held against their will, and more comment on this issue would have intrigued me. Other themes and historiographical questions might also have borne further discussion in the introduction, such as the uniqueness of this foundation as the only female cloister within the city walls, the question of anticlericalism as a factor in the European city Reformations, and iconoclasm and the fact that many of the destroyed urban sculptures appeared to have been cast

into the convent well. In the end, however, I decided I was grateful that Klaus chose to hold back, as there will be more undigested fodder for students to chew on. Literature students should have a field day with the implications of Jussie's many statements that she will not write or describe something immediately after she has already done so.

Nonetheless, despite my enthusiasm over the translation and introductory essay, I am slightly less enthusiastic about the notes. This is not the first edition of Jussie's text, which was printed for the first time in 1611, and, indeed, Klaus works from the recent critical edition prepared by Helmut Feld, the employment of which will remain *de rigueur* for scholars.[3] Klaus takes over Feld's paragraph divisions and textual subheadings (all of which were introduced into a next that originally included neither). This strategy makes the text friendlier to the nonspecialist reader, but, at the same time, moves us a step further away from an experience with a convent chronicle based in verisimilitude. Students will thus discover an early modern voice in this translation, but not really what an early modern text is like. Klaus's notes add little to those of Feld, except at the very few moments where she finds occasion to disagree with him. Feld's notes, frankly, are much more informative, correcting mistakes in Jussie's account and adding the opposing perspective as taken from the minutes of the Genevan city council. Usefully, she draws on Feld to identify the individuals in the narrative effectively, but I would have liked to have found the text (or a translation) of the additional archival traces of Jussie in the notes. As pleased as I was that Klaus's rather spare introduction enhances the book as a useful teaching text by refraining from discussing every aspect of its significance analytically, I would have appreciated the correction of some of the errors in Jussie's account, as I fear my students will not notice them. Klaus's introduction notes places in which Jussie appears to be exaggerating, but the notes are silent on, for example, the errors in her portrayal of the beginnings of the Luther affair, or Jussie's misunderstanding of the term "Eidgenossen." Some of the notes are not very deep, and teachers will have to suggest secondary reading additional to that suggested by Klaus, particularly on the topics of clerical marriage, signs and portents (comets), and images of "the Turk." For instance, the imagery associated with the term "Mameluke" is more multifaceted than Klaus suggests, given that Mamelukes were not only slaves but also rulers in the period. The section on plague is left without comment in the notes, which is interesting given the association between heretics or Jews and the plague in the

period, and also because the text seems to suggest that the Genevans held some sort of theory of germ transmission, which would be odd if it were the case. The section on blood miracles is also left without notes, although students could easily be helped here with a bibliography. Indeed, the superficiality of comments on religious matters may be problematic for some professors—in particular, the notes on the Eucharist, indulgences, and the proper form of baptism are all (too) vague, and the works suggested there should have been supplemented with references to the respective entries in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, which seems strangely absent throughout. Improving the exactness of these notes would have done more to help students understand the details and components of Jussie's own piety. And, some matters simply need more explanation. For instance, why did Genevans find it scandalous that someone would be executed in the afternoon? How could the pieces of destroyed altars be used as washtubs? As a professor, these are questions I want an editor to answer when I cannot.

Every potential editor of a text, however, would edit it differently, and so these criticisms should not be read to take away from the important instructional role that this text should assume in the Anglophone world, particularly in courses on Reformation, church, or early modern history, as well as in student work on gender themes. Jussie's is an individual perspective with which students should be able to identify, and the descriptions of ritual, piety, violence, and verbal exchanges make for compelling reading. I was excited when I saw that the text had been translated, I read it eagerly with a growing sense of pleasure in thinking of all the potential questions I could use it to discuss with my undergraduates, and I am thrilled and grateful that, because of the affordable price, I will be able to read it with students in my Reformation history courses.

Notes

[1]. *Registres du Consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin*, ed. Thomas Lambert and Isabella Watt under the direction of Robert M. Kingdon (Geneva: Droz, 1996-). Four volumes have appeared so far, taking the edition from the consistory's founding in 1542 to 1548.

[2]. *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, ed. Thomas Lambert and Isabella Watt under the direction of Robert M. Kingdon, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

[3]. Jeanne de Jussie, *Petite Chronique. Einleitung, Edition, Kommentar*, ed. Helmut Feld (Mainz: von Zabern, 1996).

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