

Sarah Apetrei and Hannah Smith, eds. *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660-1760*. Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. viii + 217 pp. \$124.95. Review by C. JAN SWEARINGEN, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY.

The essays collected here, including an excellent Introduction, substantially revise and update extant approaches to women's religious roles in early modern Britain. While attending to the familiar categories of wife, mother, celibate, nun, and non-public presence each of the essays problematizes these categories by noting how in specific denominations, contexts, and periods women's self presentations in writing and speaking advance deliberate revisions in those roles. Apetrei and Smith ask several questions to frame the collection as a whole. To what extent has the history of women's roles in this period reinforced rather than challenged very old notions of oppression? How much has the narrative of secularization that has shaped so many studies of early modern Protestantism obscured vital, energetic innovations promulgated by women in the public and not just the private sphere? Among the notable contributions of this collection are innovative and well-documented treatments of the concepts of marriage advanced by women in different denominations, promotions of women's education as essential to religion and virtue, attention to writings by as well as about women in the new periodical culture, and women's public speaking in a variety of religious roles. It is too simple, the collection as a whole proposes, to suggest that religion in this period suppressed public roles for women that only rebellion could overcome. Instead, example after example illustrates that whether Whig or Tory, Catholic or Protestant, numerous women shaped a revised and reanimated practice of religion, and brought others with them. The overall dual focus on roles in and responses to religion is amplified by two further objectives. By looking at "women" rather than "gender" as an organizing category, the aim is to seek out "hitherto neglected female identities and experiences" (16). The Introduction and several of the chapters give ample attention to how the narrative of secularization shaping many studies of early Protestantism has neglected the substantive contributions made by women to insure its religious progress and improvement, "to privately and more publicly contribute to, and intervene and adjudicate in, their religious communities" (18).

Alison Searle's "Women, Marriage, and Agency in Restoration Dissent" provides a fresh look at how concepts of marriage and the roles of husband and wife were altered by emerging self understandings of dissenters within the vexed climate of post-Restoration religion and politics. Sarah Apetrei's "Masculine Virgins: Celibacy and Gender in Later Stuart London" explores a similar theme, with an eye to the unease created by High Church practices that verged too closely upon Catholicism, including Mary Astell's proposals for celibate women's communities. Hannah Smith's essay, "'Our Church's Safety' and 'Whig Feminism'" highlights similar concerns among Whig women, whose anti-clericalism, while typical of Whig views more generally, was far from secular, given its attention to "our church." Two essays illuminate specific groups of women in denominational contexts; Alasdair Raffé's "Female Authority and Lay Activism in Scottish Presbyterianism 1660-1740"; and Claire Walker's "'When God Shall Restore them to their Kingdoms': Nuns, Exiled Stuarts, and English Catholic Identity, 1688-1745." Four essays on individual figures and their importance provide case studies of little-known ecclesiastical activism, correspondence, and presence in the culture of polite letters: Melinda Zook's "A Latitudinarian Queen: Mary II and her Churchmen"; Sarah Hutton's "Religion and Sociability in the Correspondence of Damaris Masham (1658-1708)"; William Kolbrener's "Slander, Conversation, and the Making of the Christian Public Sphere in Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* and *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England*"; and Emma Major's "The Life and Works of Catherine Talbot (1721-70)."

The essays provide rich sources for cross-referencing themes, movements, and individuals as they were seen in and responded to a variety of related religious and political contexts. Many are concerned with women's presence in the new print culture of polite letters, attending to the religious genres they advanced in media that are often thought of as a largely neo-classical Republic of polite letters. It is notable that when they adopted or were assigned neo-classical characters such as Aspasia, Steele's tribute to Lady Elizabeth Hastings, it was in praise of virtue and learning, and not with the mockery usually associated with that name in classical literature. The marriage of neo-classicism with Christian virtue is a striking synthesis in many of the women's

writings and speaking genres. Mary Astell, in particular, is credited with forging a “Christian Public Sphere” (131-143). Alternately, Dissenters and Evangelicals made good use of pamphlet and periodical literature to defend their liberties and advance their challenges to the Established Church. It may come as a surprise to many readers that Presbyterian women, before and after the restoration of Scotland’s established Kirk were active in prayer societies and field preaching promoting the Covenanter cause. Even Whig women, associated with an anti-clerical movement often thought of as secularist, produced writings devoted not only to the cause of the Revolution, but also to the “political and religious developments that accompanied it” (147). On this point it is again evident that the approaches pursued in these essays are moving away from a secularist, Namierite (15) historiography and toward more nuanced attention to women’s self-understandings as religious figures or at the very least as thinkers advancing political views that were irreducibly theological in their implications. The chapter on Mary II details a number of achievements of this activist, forthrightly latitudinarian regnant Queen who did much to secure religious toleration and liberty for the eighteenth century by appointing twenty-five bishops opposed to preaching against Dissenters, and making Tillotson Archbishop of Canterbury. I wanted more attention to Quaker women. Like the Particular Baptists, they are examined here as examples of innovative freedom given to women preaching in several denominations that was in the second and third generation rescinded. Rebecca Larson’s *Daughters of Light* documents the careers of over a thousand Quaker women itinerant preachers circulating in Britain and America between 1770 and 1775. One of them, Rachel Wilson, whose preaching was acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic, was invited by the student body to speak at the College of New Jersey in the late 1760s. Along with the defenses of “The Liberty of Women Preaching” that appeared in pamphlets and periodicals during the first half of the eighteenth century, Quaker women’s presence as preachers was perhaps the most controversial and provocative to defenders of women’s religious roles.