

Maren-Sofie Røstvig. *Ars Aeterna and Other Essays on Literary Structure*. With a Preface and Appendix by H. Neville Davies. Oslo: Novus Press, 2015. 314 pp. €49.50. Review by MARIA SALENIUS, UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI.

Ars Aeterna is a collection of essays by the Norwegian literature scholar Maren-Sofie Røstvig (1920–2014), collected and published in honor and in memory of her life's work. The collection focusses on essays on poetics and literary practice by Røstvig over three decades.

The Preface (5–13) of the book is written by H. Neville Davies, and it opens with a moving description of Maren-Sofie Røstvig's heroic resistance work as a 23-year old student in Second World War Norway. Thus the Preface also defines the aim of the collection: It is not only a compilation of her scholarly accomplishments, but a valorization of her life's work. Maren-Sofie Røstvig is not only presented as a literary scholar but as a publisher of words on "freedom" and "peace" (the Norwegian title of the paper she was involved in publishing during the war was *Frihet og Fred*). This introduction sets the stage for Røstvig's enthusiasm and dedication for her undertakings in general. The Preface then goes on to depict Maren-Sofie Røstvig's education; her graduate studies in the United States and her doctorate at UCLA, and eventually her career at the University of Oslo. The Preface finally ends with explaining how Røstvig chose to reside "in the kinder climate of southern Spain" (12) in her retirement years, and this gives the Preface a somewhat obituary-like quality, which may perhaps undermine the focus on her scholarly career. (It felt slightly irreverent to continue to refer to the mature Dr. Røstvig merely as "Maren-Sofie" throughout the Preface.) However, although the purpose of the collection is to valorize Maren-Sofie Røstvig's academic work, it particularly also wants to point to Røstvig's whole life's work and especially her aptitude to combine her private devotion and her public scholarship. For this, then, we need this more comprehensive and more personal introduction.

The book reproduces a total of thirteen of Maren-Sofie Røstvig's essays, focusing on the later part of her career, from 1969 to 1999; it is divided into two parts, titled "Poetics" and "Literary Practice." The parts include four and nine essays respectively. (Røstvig's interest in

number symbolism could perhaps inspire some structural implications from this division.) The essays are arranged chronologically within each part, the essays in the first part ranging from 1970 to 1999 and in the second from 1969 to 1997. This gives the two parts a logical sequence and an idea of the progress of Røstvig's thinking within the topics discussed.

The first essay in Part I, "Ars Aeterna: Renaissance Poetics and Theories of Divine Creation" (first published in *Mosaic* in 1970), has lent its title for the collection, and it thus, quite justifiably, sets the tone for the whole volume. It is an article that from its very outset strongly underlines the ancient, medieval and early modern tradition of "mathematical formulas" (21). Røstvig illustrates how the ancient numerical formulas link up with philosophical deliberations and with the biblical tradition. The plan in religious text—and the Bible in particular—is one of creating an illusion of harmony and symmetry, in order to support the *vera religione*. In addition to early writers, such as Augustine and Bonaventura, Røstvig also shows the continuum of this reasoning through to the reformers, with her strongest example being that of Calvin. Finally, the tradition reaches the English poets Edmund Spenser, John Donne, and John Milton.

The second article in Part I is titled "Structure as Prophecy: The Influence of Biblical Exegesis upon Theories of Literary Structure" (originally published in the collection *Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis*, edited by Alastair Fowler in 1970). While this article is grounded in the theories of rhetoric (mainly Puttenham and Wilson), the latter part of the essay—and its application to early modern poetry—strongly illustrates the discussion of biblical exegesis and religious poetics with support from numerical argumentation.

Røstvig's third essay in this part, titled "Images of Perfection" (first published in 1971 in *Seventeenth-Century Imagery: Essays on Uses of Figurative Language from Donne to Farquhar*, edited by Earl Miner), continues in the same vein: Spenser, Milton, and a number of the Metaphysical poets, are enlisted in the pursuit of the *harmonia mundi* through their resolute application of symbolic and numerical structures. Finally, the fourth essay in the group is a much later text ("Coming to Terms," originally published in *Nordlit* in 1999), and it returns to the theme through Røstvig's early reading of John Donne's

Essays in Divinity. In this essay, Røstvig seeks to make the distinction between more purely “numerological” study (with all its long-time stigma), and a “topomorphical” approach (with a more balanced view of both numerical and verbal structures where the main literary focus is on the verbal patterns). (This latter approach had earlier been presented in Røstvig’s book *Configurations. A Topomorphical Approach to Renaissance Poetry*, 1994.) In addition, in this essay Røstvig introduces the third concept of a “conceptual mode” (106 ff.) of reading, which seeks to reconcile the verbal and the numerical as well as the realistic and the allegorical.

Part II of the volume includes articles with more overall poetic deliberations and scriptural analyses, yet strongly supported by numerical arguments. Again, the earlier essays (like “*The Shepherdes Calender—A Structural Analysis*,” the oldest essay in the volume, published first in *Renaissance and Modern Studies* in 1969) tend to be more straightforward in their numerical analysis, whereas particularly the two later ones (“*The Craftmanship of God*” of 1995, and “*Arithmetical Divinitie*” of 1997) turn to intricate structural analysis of especially the *verbal* patterns which underline the rhetorical purpose of the text.

The second article in Part II, “*Syncretistic Imagery and the Unity of Vaughan’s ‘The World’*” (first published in *Papers on Language and Literature* in 1969), presents both a Hermetic and a theological reading of the poem. This is the least numerical of the articles in the volume, and the focus is most strongly on visual presentation—including a discussion of the image of the title page of John Swan’s *Speculum Mundi* (1644). The discussion of both Platonic and biblical visual images, though, links this article strongly to the other depictions of symmetry and balance.

Another article that could be seen to diverge slightly from the overall line of the volume is the sixth article in Part II, “*New Perspectives on Fielding’s Narrative Art*” (originally published in 1981 in a collection of papers from the First Nordic Conference for English Studies in 1980). In this article Røstvig applies the structural formulas perhaps most generally, and on a later text than in the others, yet showing that the same Renaissance concepts and biblical exegesis apply.

The remaining articles in Part II include “*Structural Images in Cowley and Herbert: A Comparison*” (from *English Studies*, 1973),

“In ordine di ruota: Circular Structure in ‘The unfortunate Lover’ and *Upon Appleton House*” (from *Tercentenary Essays in Honor of Andrew Marvell*, edited by Kenneth Friedenreich, 1977), “A Frame of Words: On the Craftsmanship of Samuel Daniel” (from *English Studies*, 1979), and “Golden Phrases: The Poetics of Giles Fletcher” (from *Studies in Philology*, 1991). As the titles indicate, the articles all seek to provide structural and verbal readings of their texts and authors by presenting strong support of numerical/structural arguments. Also, the articles all show a good grounding in both the Classical and the biblical interpretative models. Yet, the most interesting aspect here is to trace the development of the arguments from one context to another.

The article titled “The Craftsmanship of God: Some Structural Contexts for the Poems of Mr. John Milton (1645)” (published first in the collection *Heirs of Fame: Milton and Writers of the English Renaissance*, edited by Margo Swiss and David A. Kent in 1995), as suggested above, is indeed a breathtakingly exhaustive account of structural detail in a number of texts and writers. Røstvig returns to Augustine and Plato’s *lambda* formula, already introduced to the reader in the opening article in this volume, and her arguments are painstakingly minute.

The volume ends with the article “‘Arithmetical Divinitie’ and the Unity of Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* (1642),” originally published in *Contexts of Baroque: Theatre, Metamorphosis, and Design*, edited by Roy Eriksen in 1997. Chronologically, this is not the last article in the collection, but it provides a suitable conclusion, and it allows the author to end the volume with prose and thus close the circle by returning to the more prose-centered discussions of the first part of the volume. This article, too, presents diagrams and structures when describing the context of the Reformation and the “balance between the individual and the Church, reason and doctrine” (292).

The choice of these particular thirteen articles out of the total of more than fifty in Maren-Sofie Røstvig’s scholarship is reasonable for the present purpose (although some readers may have wished for some further presentation of some of Røstvig’s eighteenth-century interests, or maybe even of some of her insightful reviews). For the seventeenth-century specialist, the particular importance of the present volume of Røstvig’s essays is that it presents a collection of writings especially

focusing on different aspects of (religious) literary scholarship from late Renaissance writers to the seventeenth century, like Spenser and Milton, and setting them against the backdrop of older texts and concepts by, for example, Plato and Augustine.

Furthermore, this volume presents an overview of the development of the thinking of a particularly devoted and engaged scholar, who set out to establish a role for her specific form of scholarship. Starting in her twenties, as a dedicated resistance operative, a champion of freedom and peace, Røstvig continues to fight for space for some fundamental attributes of (primarily) Renaissance literature that have unfortunately much been obscured under the pseudo-scientific terminology of ‘numerology’. Maren-Sofie Røstvig’s arguments show the often disregarded realities of Renaissance studies and seek to establish a balance between symbolic and numerological structures, both lines of thought that today’s scholarship often finds rather marginal, while at same time steering clear of any risk of being considered unwarranted. The early modern world is indeed a foreign country, and sometimes today’s scientific thought and analytical thinking prevent us from seeing the complete historical context. Perhaps we should follow Røstvig’s advice and “learn to adjust our own vocabulary to Renaissance usage” (27).

Brian Lockey. *Early Modern Catholics, Royalists, and Cosmopolitans. English Transnationalism and the Christian Commonwealth*. Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. xi + 376 pp. \$129.95.
Review by JONATHAN WRIGHT, DURHAM UNIVERSITY.

It was unsurprising that Elizabethan Catholics, increasingly persecuted and marginalized at home, would turn to a long-established sense of a pan-European Christian commonwealth as a source of solace and identity. As Brian Lockey explains in his intriguing book, this provoked both tensions and opportunities. It was crucial for leading English Catholic figures, men like Edmund Campion and Robert Persons, to insist upon their fundamental loyalty to the Tudor regime but they also subscribed to a theological and, perforce, political worldview in which the papacy was entitled, indeed duty-bound, to criticise