This collection of essays examines heroism in the context of absolute monarchy and the political superiority of princesses, queens, and aristocrats. Yann Lignereux shows that history nevertheless privileges masculine heroes and brings to light the effort of history to bury canoness Catherine de Saint-Augustin's exploits, to focus instead on masculine heroes. The texts examined in this collection depict heroism as requiring a superior soul and sense of morality, wherein feminine heroines represent marital devotion, courage, resistance, faith, culture, and energy. In "L'héroïsme féminin dans les *Historiettes* de Tallemant des Réaux," Francine Wild looks at aristocratic heroines whose depiction avoids idealization and underlines moral integrity and the capacity of resistance in the face of temptation, seduction, violence, sickness, and death. Resistance is key in the defense of women's dignity. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religion and faith represent the way to resistance and emancipation, whether this spiritual path takes place within society or apart from it, within solitude and silence. The collection, through the feminine rereading of the representation of heroines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, traces the origins of democracy and the modern State. Resistance and imitation appear as key concepts in the articles, especially in Enrica Zanin's essay about Semiramis, which directs our attention to imitation as a means to emancipation particularly when Zanin shows that the Assyrian queen disguised herself to look like a man, hence performing an imitation of masculine models of heroism. This collected work is a great contribution to gender and feminine studies, as well as the cultural history of the State and the context in which it appeared, in Europe in the seventeenth century.

Francesco Venturi, ed. *Self-Commentary in Early Modern European Literature, 1400-1700.* Leiden: Brill, 2019. xiv+431 pp. + 9 illus. €149.00 / $179.00. Review by Barbara A. Goodman, Clayton State University.

Self-Commentary in Early Modern European Literature, 1400–1700 is a collection of fourteen essays written by scholars in the fields of English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Polish, and Neo-Latin

Renaissance literature (4). The fourteen chapters are bounded by a thorough introduction by Francesco Venturi and a stimulating afterword by Richard Maber. In the introduction, Venturi describes self-commentary and its many forms as an "open genre" (8) that is difficult to define. As a genre, self-commentaries can encompass such material as authorial glosses, informal notes, prefaces, letters of dedication, and marginalia.

Venturi's introduction clearly details the many aspects and forms of self-commentary. Self-commentaries, he contends, "combine authenticity with ambiguity, and thus profoundly differ in their rationale from standard commentaries as we understand them today" (3). The subsequent essays that follow the introduction are in approximate chronological order, spanning three hundred years from "Latin humanism through to seventeenth-century literature [and] taking into account the shift from manuscript to print culture" (10). Certainly, this structure makes sense, given the wide-ranging genres and authors covered in the text. Venturi explains that this approach avoids dividing the material into fixed sections and patterns. With this organization, each reader can choose how to approach the text depending on her interest: *e.g.*, interest in self-commentary and its modes as a genre; in a particular writer's works; or in a particular region's writers. Most readers will dip into the book for material that will augment their own knowledge and research. Indeed, such an approach is recommended as reading the chapters straight through can be demanding, due to such a wide array of countries, genres, and authors.

Eight of the chapters focus on specific authors. Four of these chapters concentrate on single authors' specific works. Martin McLaughlin's chapter, "Alberti's *Commentarium* to His First Literary Work: Self-Commentary as Self-Presentation in the *Philodoxeos*," details how Alberti's self-commentary serves as a "literary calling card, presenting the author as a mature humanist, not a deceptive manipulator" (35). Alberti, McLaughlin states, uses his *Commentarium* to shape our view of him as an author as well as our view of the text. John O'Brien's "'All Outward and on Show': Montaigne's External Glosses" focuses on a very narrow aspect of Montaigne's *Essais*—the figure of Julius Caesar and Montaigne's mirroring of himself with classical figures such as Caesar and Alexander. Russell Ganim's "Blood, Sweat, and Tears:

Annotation and Self-Exegesis in La Ceppède" examines the copious annotations of La Ceppède's *Théorèmes* by focusing on annotations of Sonnet I and those annotations to the work as a whole. Gilles Bertheau's "Can a Poet be 'Master of [his] owne Meaning'? George Chapman and the Paradoxes of Authorship," discusses Chapman's poem, *Andromeda Liberata, Or the Nvptials of Perseus and Andromeda,"* which Chapman wrote for the wedding of the Earl of Somerset, Chapman's patron, to Lady Frances Howard. In particular, it examines *A Free and Offenceles Iustification, of a Lately Pvblisht and Most Maliciously Misinterpreted Poeme: Entitvled 'Andromeda Liberata,'* which Chapman wrote when some readers were offended by the poem's apparent allusion to Frances Howard's annulled marriage to the Earl of Essex.

The other four chapters that focus on specific authors explore those authors' works more broadly. Jeroen De Keyser's "Elucidation and Self-Explanation in Filelfo's Marginalia" is a comprehensive examination of Filelfo's extensive marginal annotations found in his handwritten copies of his manuscripts. De Keyser concludes that these manuscripts and their paratexts "be [they] prefaces or marginal notes" are intended to communicate one message: "the superiority of the uniquely qualified writer and translator Francesco Filelfo" (68). Colin P. Thompson's "The Journey of the Soul: The Prose Commentaries on His Own Poems by St. John of the Cross" discusses the extensive commentaries that St. John wrote for three of his poems. These commentaries, according to Thompson, "appear to inhabit a very different world from that of the poems" (231): the latter written in a first-person feminine voice, while the commentaries use an impersonal, third-person voice. A third essay that details an author's writings is Joseph Harris's work, "Critical Failure: Corneille Observes His Spectators"; Harris examines the lengthy prefaces of dramatic theory and short analyses of each play that Corneille wrote to accompany the three-volume edition of his plays. Harris focuses his discussion on how "Corneille's self-criticism is often mediated through a third party: the audience" (317) and how Corneille attempts to "come to terms with his audiences' sometimes unexpected responses" (318). Magdalena Ożarska's essay, "Reading the Margins: The Uses of Authorial Side Glosses in Anna Stanislawska's *Transactions* (1685)" introduces Stanislawska, believed by some to be Poland's first woman poet and by others to be the first Polish autobiographer. Her only work, *"A Transaction, or an Account of the Entire Life of an Orphan Girl by Way of Plaintful Threnodies in the Year 1685,* consists of seventy-seven Laments. More than 500 of the 745 stanzas are accompanied, "in the margin … by gloss-type notes, clearly written in the autobiographer's own hand" (369). Ożarska posits that these glosses, rather than being notes to clarify the text, could have been written before the text, serving as remnants of her original outline.

Two of the essays in this comprehensive text juxtapose two authors' writings and use of self-commentary. Ian Johnson's "Vernacular Self-Commentary during Medieval Early Modernity: Reginald Peacock and Gavin Douglas," explores how two "scholar-politician-bishops" (71) in mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries use self-commentary "not only for the purpose of re-voicing cultural authority, but also to give cultural authority to their own voices" (73). Johnson concludes, that while their number and types of writings diverge, both writers and their "works have much to tell us about what was possible and at stake in vernacular self-commentary" (95). Meanwhile, Carlo Caruso's essay, "Mockery and Erudition: Alessandro Tassoni's *Secchia rapita* and Francesco Redi's *Bacco in Toscana*" brings together two authors who are not usually discussed together; however, Caruso points out that each author "fitted his most famous work in verse with a commentary" (396) and that a playfulness with tongue-in-cheek attitude characterizes both works.

The remaining four chapters focus on specific regions and eras and explore multiple authors who wrote at that time and place. Federica Pich's essay, "On the Threshold of Poems: a Paratextual Approach to the Narrative/Lyric Opposition in Italian Renaissance Poetry," discusses the short prose headings (rubrics) that often accompany Renaissance lyric poems and how these headings might be viewed as self-commentaries. The chapter following Pich's essay also explores Italian Renaissance self-commentary, but a very different form of self-commentary. Brian Richardson's "Self-Commentary on Language in Sixteenth-Century Italian Prefatory Letters" analyzes two types of letters that often accompanied Renaissance Italian writings: letters addressed to readers in general and letters of dedication. Richardson examines how these letters function as a "crossroads between theory and practice" (161), by showing what the writers, translators, and editors were thinking as they prepared their manuscripts for publication and for sale. A third chapter deals with a group of early English Renaissance writers. Harriet Archer's essay, "Companions in Folly: Genre and Poetic Practice in Five Elizabethan Anthologies," examines five texts published between 1571 and 1579, in which "each text posits its narrative of composition as a form of anti-commentary, which deliberately obscures the inset poems' intellectual and social origins" (192). The five writers in this case create "pseudo-commentators" demonstrating a "lack of faith that their poetic personae may be trusted to make themselves understood" (194). The fourth chapter that deals with a specific region and time-period is Els Stronks "Self-Criticism, Self- Assessment, and Self- Affirmation: The Case of the (Young) Author Early in Modern Dutch Literature." Stronks explores forms of self-reflection in sources termed "instruments of self-growth" and then focuses her analysis on the self-criticism of young Dutch authors. She details that "specific prerequisites were suggested for young authors" (343), based on the writings of older poets about their earlier works and the writings of emerging writers.

Clearly, the self-commentary forms discussed in these fourteen chapters range widely, and, as Maber states in his afterword, "are, inevitably, very far from the whole picture" (420). Instead, Maber suggests that the essays may serve to stimulate the reader, "for example by considering other literary cultures … and also other forms" (420). Overall, the text is lucid and cogent. Different approaches and different arguments in the various chapters will appeal to different readers, each with her own interests or perspective. As Venturi states in his introduction, this is the first "wide ranging investigation of self-commentary in the early modern period" (4), breaking new ground in exploration of this genre and examining "the range, function, and nature of self-commenting devices in a number of key works" (5). This wide-ranging aspect is what makes this work thought provoking, demanding, and well worth the effort.