

few pages later one is in the thick of a discussion of Ramist ideas about “the confusion of dialectic and rhetoric.” Inevitably in reading a study of rhetoric, one must assess the rhetorical skills of the author, and I found myself wishing that Bennett expected either more or less of me. Nevertheless, the work as a whole is a fine piece of work that sheds new light on important literary work, while reminding us that it is foolish to neglect old approaches like rhetorical analysis. It is certainly worthy of its position in the Duquesne University Press distinguished series, *Medieval and Renaissance Literary Studies*.

Hero Chalmers. *Royalist Women Writers 1650-1689*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. xii + 228 pp. \$110.00. Review by ELIZABETH CLARKE, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK.

This careful study offers a re-evaluation of the benefits of royalism for early modern female authors, often seen as “paradoxical beneficiaries” (197) of a patriarchal ideology. Hero Chalmers sees no easy linear progression for women’s authorship established in the work of Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips, and Aphra Behn. Her book traces the interplay of retirement and political action, modesty and self-assertion, chastity and eroticism, which carries a different charge in each of the three writers. The volume begins in an attempt to understand the self-promotion of Margaret Cavendish in terms of an ethic of heroic femininity. In this discussion, a consideration of class is seen as essential, a welcome modification of statements about gendered authorship in the early modern period. Chalmers argues that female display is actually a necessity for royalist aristocrats, whilst remaining transgressive for lower orders. Her case, while detailed and interesting, would be more convincing if there were more evidence for the positive reception of Cavendish’s published texts: the well-known derogatory responses from contemporaries remain somewhat damning.

The substantial section on Katherine Philips focuses not on female friendship or Philips’ politics alone, but on the politics of female friendship. It offers a study of how female friendship was used by royalists, and even how female friendship could encode royalism. In the process it supplies a great deal of new literary and historical detail that illuminates the theme of female friendship in Philips’ poetry. Chalmers stresses the importance of manuscript circu-

lation to Philips, particularly with prominent royalists such as Francis Finch, Jeremy Taylor, Edward Dering and Henry Lawes. Chalmers identifies a circle of royalist men, the writers of dedicatory verse for Cartwright's 1651 volume, as members of Philips' Society of Friendship. In the context of other works which offer close parallels for Philips' verse it is possible to trace the cultural significance of much of her poetry: its significance in the Neoplatonic scheme which dominated the court of Henrietta Maria, for instance. Chalmers finds evidence of the location in Philips' poetry of an imaginative realm in which Charles II is king, and in which the rituals of the Anglican Church can continue without the existence of its external structures. She also finds similar patterns in Puritan borrowings from Philips, namely Robert Overton, disillusioned Cromwellian general and Fifth Monarchist. Philips, she asserts, "provides Robert Overton with representations of femininity which locate political agency beyond the material sphere" (124).

By contrast Margaret Cavendish's fantasy *Blazing World* offers a fictional realm of monarchical power distinct from political agency. In her plays, however, Chalmers concludes that Cavendish's vision of secluded female community demonstrates retreat as a feasible strategy of collective empowerment: "a voluntary occupation of the centre ground of true authority" (139). *The Female Academy* is discussed in the light of its influences, Jonson's *Epicoene* and her husband's *The Varietie*. In contrast to her sources Cavendish's closet drama shows the devaluation of men as spectators and performers, even compared with the closet drama of her stepdaughters, Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cavendish. Chalmers pursues a fruitful comparison between *The Convent of Pleasure* and Montagu's *The Shepherds Paradise*, and decides that for Cavendish, the public sphere is reconfigured within private space.

The book really comes into its own in the chapters which deal with Aphra Behn: the contrasts and comparisons that Chalmers makes between her three subjects reveal her sensitivity of critical response and the acuteness of her historical awareness. In the Restoration period, as political agency returns to conventional channels, authorial strategies for a woman continue to be indirect. Chalmers claims that Behn's concerns are both political and "feminist." She depicts Behn's self-construction as erotic and associated with Toryism, but also heroic and a challenge to libertinism as a male Tory stance. She sees the actress as a popular figure who often speaks on behalf of her sex and suggests that Behn to some extent characterises herself in the same way.

Actresses were of course explicitly sexualised, and Chalmers shows that sexual freedom in drama is linked with royalism and with Tory politics, although sexual freedom is not available to both sexes with the same impunity in Behn's plays. Taking on critics and paying attention to source material, she traces an unease with the cavalier heroes' treatment of women, an unease often linked to the female characters' economic dependency on men. Chalmers also analyses Behn's poetry, including a useful section on the gendering of the Pindaric, to show that in her verse Behn disentangles female eroticism from political agency. The book ends with a perceptive reading of Behn's prose. *Oroonoko* is seen as a demonstration of the failure of Western modes to assimilate other cultures, within which Behn is able to voice a veiled criticism of James II's Catholic policies.

The book has the academic carefulness and detail of an ex-thesis, but it is none the worse for that. It offers a careful construction of what "femininity" means for royalists in the Interregnum, and invests the concept with political importance, in contrast to studies which have stressed the importance of masculinity to an overwhelmingly male community of royalist poets. There are some original arguments here as well as some welcome nuance provided for studies of Cavendish and Philips by the detailed historical and textual analysis. This is an important new book that supplies much of the detail for which non-specialists have been looking for some time.

Jason R. Rosenblatt. *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. ix + 314 + 1 halftone illus. \$99.00. Review by WILLIAM E. ENGEL, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH.

Readers of this journal will be familiar with John Selden most likely because of his discourses on religion and the state posthumously published as *Table Talk* (1689). An eminent jurist and antiquarian who started his career in the house of Sir Robert Cotton, Selden gained notoriety initially for *Titles of Honour* (1614) followed by the *Historie of Tithes* (1618), famously championed by Lancelot Andrewes. His groundbreaking *De Diis Syris* (1617) was heavily annotated by Ben Jonson, and, as Jason Rosenblatt shows in Chapter Two of *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi* (while building on his previous scholarship co-authored with Winfried Schleiner on Selden's letter to the playwright con-