Ryan J. Stark. *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England.*
Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009. vii
+ 234 pp. $69.95. Review by JACOB A. CEDILLO TOOTALIAN, UNIVERSITY
OF WISCONSIN, MADISON.

    In *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*, Ryan J.
Stark recasts the Restoration shift toward an ideal of rhetorical plain-
ness as an ontological, rather than a syntactical, event. Scholars since
R. F. Jones have identified the new plain style as a phenomenon that
manifested in sparse, unornamented language. However, attempts to
define the structure of this rhetorical mode have been hindered by
the apparent hypocrisy of plain texts that use "metaphorical styles to
critique metaphorical styles" (2). Stark contends that, due to the inher-
ently tropological nature of language, elaborate expressions necessarily
persist in the plain writings of the late seventeenth century. However,
these expressions lack the valences of meaning they once had. He
suggests that a change occurred not in the choice or arrangement of
words, but in how those words were understood to signify.

    Turning the focus to a distinction in philosophies of language,
Stark diffuses the critical impasse surrounding the new plain style by
tracing the "paradigm shift from enchantment to plainness," which
he characterizes as the "most significant linguistic happening in
seventeenth-century England" (3). His study underscores the con-
trast between plain expressions that only mark out representations
and the turns of phrase "capable of transmogrifying reality and, in
certain configurations, transporting audiences into metaphysical states
of mind" (10). He locates the impetus for this disentanglement of
words from things in an anxiety about the influence of diabolical
rhetoric, an influence detected in the discourses of zealous religion
and nefarious magic. Denying the users of enchanted language their
ontological claim to power, experimentalist philosophers used the new
plain style to ensure that language could not be turned to demonic
purposes. The result was a disenchantment of the world that Stark
laments. Grounding his study in a critique of the Enlightenment ma-
terialization of language, Stark seeks to undermine modern linguistic
assumptions by revealing the moment in the history of rhetoric when
language was stripped of its metaphysical force.

Chapter 1 articulates the challenge that rhetorical plainness posed to enchanted philosophies of language. Following earlier scholars, Stark figures Francis Bacon as the progenitor of the new plain style. Bacon's advancement of learning was underwritten by a rhetorical reaction against Renaissance mysticism, a reaction affirmed in later works of the new science like Daniel Sennert's *Chymistry Made Easie and Useful* (1619). By the second half of the seventeenth century, "a mainstream philosophical attitude toward rhetoric" (24) was emerging, which Stark defines using the views of Thomas Browne and Thomas Hobbes as foils. Experimentalist philosophers rejected both Browne's charmed philosophy of language and Hobbes' skeptical attitude toward spiritualism. Thus, the emergent rhetorical consensus discarded enchanted language while retaining a spiritual metaphysics. Stark argues that Joseph Glanvill, in revising *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661) into *Scepsis scientifica* (1665), sought to conform to this point of agreement. Since the stylistic debate between R. F. Jones and Morris Croll in the early twentieth century, Glanvill's revision has been seen as an important component of the consolidation of the new plain style. Stark interprets Glanvill's omission of an example of rhetorical magic as a sign of his assent to plainness as a linguistic philosophy, as well as a style.

In Chapter 2, Stark emphasizes the institutionalization of the plain philosophy of language with the Royal Society's stylistic program. Acknowledging that experimentalist philosophers largely implemented the plain style reform—the crux of R. F. Jones' thesis—Stark asserts further that they were motivated by the need for a prophylactic against diabolical rhetoric. The most prominent work to make the case for the plain philosophy was Thomas Sprat's *The History of the Royal Society* (1667), which Stark defends against charges of hypocrisy on the grounds that it uses "plain tropes to challenge bewitching tropes" (51). John Locke also championed linguistic reform as a defense against demonic seduction in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) in which he argues that plain language serves as both the *tool* and the *proof* of human rationality. Under the influence of plain philosophers, Restoration poets adhered to a utilitarian sense of the imagination. Stark demonstrates that Abraham Cowley's "To the Royal Society" (1667) and Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1662-3) employ plain tropes

that contrast with the metaphysical conceits of earlier poetry like George Herbert's *The Temple* (1633). Concurring with Jones' assertion that the plain sensibility found wider circulation through preaching, Stark demonstrates that such Royal Society-affiliated bishops as John Wilkins, John Tillotson, and Gilbert Burnet helped turn the plain sensibility into the rhetorical plank of mainstream Anglicanism in its opposition to nonconformist zeal and Catholic transubstantiation.

In Chapter 3, Stark explores natural magic, the rhetorical domain of those "magicians, sages, and spiritualists" (9) who believed they derived their powers from the spiritual valences of nature. Stark undermines, on linguistic grounds, the argument put forth most famously by Frances Yates that Renaissance magic evolved *into* modern experimentalism. Emphasizing the debate surrounding the rhetoric of Rosicrucian sorcery, Stark shows that, rather than emerging from Rosicrucianism, the experimentalist philosophers reacted against the mystical movement's claims to linguistic magic. He insists that the plain philosophy of language was irreconcilable with the occult notion that "[r]hetoric is a cosmological architectonic" (96). Stark uses the controversy between Henry More and Thomas Vaughan to animate that point of conflict. While natural magicians insisted on the mundane essence of their power, the plain philosophy made their charms difficult to distinguish from witchcraft.

Chapter 4 examines the nature of diabolical rhetoric, delving into the body of witchcraft and demonology literature neglected by scholars unaware of its relevance to the history of rhetoric. Stark lays out a taxonomy of tropes associated with the inversions of demonic eloquence, especially irony and antithesis. The danger of the devil's language is that it comes in the guise of goodly words, so it takes a tropological and spiritual sensitivity to discern the morality of language. The rhetoric of those who assumed divine guidance outside of orthodox Church authority was seen as vulnerable to devilish bewitchment. Just as mainstream Anglicans viewed nonconformists with suspicion, Protestants more broadly saw Catholics as effectively compromised by witchcraft. Yet, despite the demonization of the Catholic priest, the commonplace figure of the witch remained female because her empowerment constituted a diabolical reversal of the early modern social order. Stark analyzes the demonic inversions

depicted in dramas like *Macbeth* and employed by Satan himself in *Paradise Lost*. The deceptive commiseration between humanity and Satan is based upon the false premise of a common state of fallenness, which Stark argues is belied by the Christian redemption of human-kind. Thus, with the power of rhetorical training as a shield against demonic influence, experimentalist philosophers became "exorcists of an informal type" (145).

In Chapter 5, Stark introduces Meric Casaubon as an Interregnum precursor to the language reformers of the Royal Society. His *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm* (1655), though syntactically unlike later plain writings, nonetheless advances the plain philosophy at the height of nonconformist zeal, affirming a set of values consonant with Angli-can theology and the new science. Casaubon asserts that enthusiastic rhetoric threatens to mislead audiences and authors alike. The rejec-tion of formal rhetorical training in pursuit of an intimate connection with God leaves believers without the rational mechanisms to guard against devilish deception. For those who understood the English Civil War as a conflict "promulgated by mass demonic possession" (152), bewitchment appears to endanger society at large. Stark also examines Casaubon's preface to the spiritual diary of John Dee in a brief epilogue to the chapter.

Chapter 6 considers John Dryden, a figure more familiar to the rhetorical tradition and well-known for his rejection of the "idioms of Renaissance magic and mystery" (175). Stark extrapolates Dryden's philosophy of rhetoric from such works as *Of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) and *Defense of the Epilogue* (1672), the prefaces to *Annus mirabilis* (1666) and *The Mock Astrologer* (1671), and his revisions of Shakespeare. Breaking from what he called "all those credulous and doting ages" (176), Dryden employs plain versions of figures like ekphrasis and paronomasia, which Stark distinguishes from the metaphysical tropes of Richard Crashaw and George Herbert. With the rejection of enchanted language, tropes become nothing more than ornamental devices, and modern rhetoric is born.

Stark concludes the book with a brief statement on the import of his project. Seventeenth-century experimentalists reacted to the dangers of rhetorical bewitchment by creating "a philosophy of style, by which the esoteric could be talked about, but not invoked,

intimated, or otherwise involved" (204). Stark criticizes this reformulation of language from a "spiritually minded" (206) philosophical position that seeks to restore something of the charmed Renaissance worldview in order to affirm the possibility of spiritual rhetoric. He voices regret that

> the truth of prayer and the truth of demonry … fall by the wayside in the world of deism, the theological crescendo of the Enlightenment trajectory, which presupposes a material world, and which has as its most insidious rhetorical consequence the trapping of the human voice in a realm of dusty bric-a-brac, spokes and gears, linguistic rubble. (207)

Scholars sympathetic to materialism, skepticism, and deism will likely take issue with Stark's critique of Enlightenment values. Yet, his critical perspective facilitates the book's key insights into the nature of the plain philosophy and contributes to the liveliness of his prose. By marking this moment in the history of rhetoric, Stark hopes to prompt the reemergence of an enchanted sense of language "in new and timely configurations" (206). This is a welcome intervention, whether or not we find his particular agenda persuasive. Stark's reconsideration of the shape of the rhetorical tradition in the seventeenth century draws attention to neglected bodies of literature and inspires productive questions about metaphysical rhetoric. In particular, his suggestive readings of *Macbeth*, *The Temple*, and *Paradise Lost* point up the inadequacy of modern theories of language to comprehend the signifying structures of the Renaissance. If the modern landscape is indeed dominated by linguistic rubble, then *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*, at the very least, encourages us to take a second look at the enchanted artifacts that remain.

Scott L. Newstok. *Quoting Death in Early Modern England: The Poetics of Epitaphs Beyond the Tomb*. New York: Palgrave, 2009. Xiv + 228 pp. + 13 illus. $80.00. Review by GREG BENTLEY, MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY.

Individual and cultural responses to death were varied and numerous in early modern England, and the commentaries on death since then have been equally varied and numerous. So much so that the