

less flattering view. In the end, this volume contributes much to the overall understanding of Melville as a man and a poet, even if ‘what is emerging is a life of under-achievement’ (10).

Brandie R. Siegfried and Lisa T. Sarasohn. *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014. xvi + 257 pp. + 8 illus. \$109.95. Review by KAROL KOVALOVICH WEAVER, SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY.

*God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* is a collection of essays that investigates the religious and scientific ideas of seventeenth-century intellectual Margaret Cavendish. The authors consider Cavendish’s concepts of God and Nature, her use of a variety of genres to explore issues of faith and science, and her examination of a variety of spiritual traditions including Christianity, natural magic, Judaism, and the Jewish Cabbala. As with all collections of essays, some contributions stand out because of their fascinating subject matter and outstanding writing.

One of the main themes of the book is Cavendish’s understanding of God and Nature. She affirmed the power and knowledge of God as well as the authority and vitality of Nature. She clearly ranked the Divine in relation to Nature, but stressed that Nature was eternal and active. She also differentiated between the two by gendering each. Cavendish defined God as masculine while Nature was characterized as feminine. In so doing, she connected natural philosophy with real-world female practitioners and spaces. Several essays directly speak to these topics. For instance, Sara Mendelson’s “The God of Nature and the Nature of God” investigates Cavendish’s religious ideas. Mendelson states, “By surveying her use of religious language as well as her comments on a wide range of theological issues, we can begin to explore the complexity of her views on questions concerning the Supreme Being and his relationship with the universe he created” (27). Similarly, Brandie Siegfried’s “God and the Question of Sense Perception in the Works of Margaret Cavendish” approaches these subjects, noting “Cavendish believed Nature to be infinite and agential, made up of preexistent matter; matter, in turn, is both rational and sensitive; and

finally, the world as we know it emerged from a mutual regard between God and nature” (67). A final example is John Shanahan’s “Natural Magic in *The Convent of Pleasure*,” which considers Cavendish’s ideas about natural magic and the creative potential of Nature and her assertion that a feminine and creative Nature should force thinkers to recognize the innovative capacity of women and womanly spaces and discourage them from forming exclusionary scientific spaces outside the home.

The book’s contributors mine Cavendish’s works to show how she employed a variety of genres to work through her ideas about religion and science. They consult her plays, her autobiography, her poetry, her fantasy works, her scientific books, and many other publications to discover Cavendish’s notions about God and Nature. An example is James Fitzmaurice’s “Paganism, Christianity, and the Faculty of Fancy in the Writing of Margaret Cavendish.” This contribution highlights that, by analyzing different sources, readers can come to understand how Cavendish defined the nature of God in multiple ways. Specifically, Fitzmaurice compares her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* with her plays. He concludes that Cavendish’s “fancy” or imagination allowed her to “range freely, regardless of any consequences to her reputation for lack of consistency. She really was not interested in working out grand schemes that perfectly cohere” (92). Cavendish’s willingness to utilize multiple “narrative features” (111) is discussed in Line Cottagnies’ “Brilliant Heterodoxy: The Plurality of Worlds in Margaret Cavendish’s *Blazing World* (1666) and Cyrano de Bergerac’s *Estats et Empires de la lune* (1657).” Cottagnies writes that Cavendish’s narrative choices “include a deliberate blurring of references between reality and fiction, especially with the intrusion of fictional autobiography, narrative fragmentation and openendedness (in particular through the device of the unfinished narration), the celebration of friendship, parodic citations of other literary texts; the ubiquity of dialogues” (111). Both essays stress Cavendish’s wide-ranging theological and scientific interests, her tendency to analyze them by various narrative means, and her inclination to resist system building.

In addition to exploring Cavendish’s religious and scientific ideas and how she thought through them using a variety of genres and styles of writing, the authors look at how she studied diverse spiritual

traditions. She interrogated Christianity, examined natural magic, and delved into Judaism and the Jewish Cabbala. An outstanding treatment of Cavendish's foray into natural magic is the aforementioned Shanahan's "Natural Magic in *The Convent of Pleasure*." Shanahan reveals that "my aim... is primarily to excavate a feature of her work not hitherto noted: the preservation in its eclecticism of a variety of elements from natural magic and domestic secret books and, more generally, from occult models of the cosmos" (143). Another well-written account of Cavendish's sweeping religious interests is Sara Mendelson's "Margaret Cavendish and the Jews." Mendelson contextualizes Cavendish's allusions to Jews and Judaism in relation to the philosemitism of the seventeenth century, her friendship with the *converso* Duarte sisters in Antwerp, and the Jewish Cabbala.

Besides the excellent essays already noted, "Darkness, Death, and Precarious Life in Cavendish's *Sociable Letters* and *Orations*," written by Joanne Wright, deserves special mention. This contribution is an outstanding analysis of Cavendish's literary and philosophical views on death as informed by social and historical circumstances that speak to her views on power, namely gender relations. Wright clearly shows that "Cavendish's frequent and thoughtful references to death and mortality point to her philosophical inclination to contemplate the meaning of life, the relationship of the body to soul, and the concept of a lasting legacy" (43). The essay is highly recommended.

*God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* will appeal to a variety of readers. Historians of science will appreciate the contributors' works on Cavendish's views of Nature and their relationship to the development of early modern science. Religious studies scholars will find a fine collection of essays about theology and diverse spiritual traditions. Finally, literary theorists will read excellent analyses of different genres and narrative forms.