

memory experts and aficionados out there, this book is one to own and keep nearby.

Sarah C. E. Ross. *Women, Poetry, & Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. xiv + 249 pp. + 6 illus. \$90.00. Review by LISSA BEAUCHAMP DESROCHES, ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY.

In *Women, Poetry, & Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain*, Sarah Ross employs a variety of manuscript sources written by women to “redress the unrepresentative prominence of printed texts in our critical narratives of seventeenth-century women’s poetic history; at the same time, the manuscript culture(s) and practices explored here are multi-layered and variant” (218). In other words, Ross very deliberately addresses our critical biases regarding printed vs. manuscript sources, and in doing so “it [becomes] very clear that identifying a female political poetic and a coherent grouping of women political poets is no longer a matter of looking for those who speak in an assertively proto-feminist voice, or those whose work appeared in print” (218). This interesting correlation between the emerging importance of both manuscript culture and the differences among feminine voices is a refreshing and much-overdue correction to our critical approaches; it recovers otherwise “lost” material, while at the same time redefining the notion of female voices in such a way that masculine values do not continue to determine them.

Ross organizes her book into five extensive treatments of lesser known texts by women writers, without neglecting to trace the varieties of influences on them including other male authors in both manuscript and print. Notably, and interestingly, each chapter concludes with a brief overview of the material history of the manuscripts and their traceable transmission, along with commentary, that extends our sense of the contemporary reading of the work just discussed. The varied works of Elizabeth Melville, Anne Southwell, Jane Cavendish, Hester Pulter, and Lucy Hutchinson are all treated as components of networks, both literary and social as well as familial, and what emerges is the defining significance of families as the basis for networks—as

well as the centrality of these women within their networks. Indeed, they are in some ways the imaginative authors of the networks themselves, as Ross shows how family letters often point to less than ideal relationships than the poems construct. Such authority, in the sense of authorship, is significantly constitutive in a way that has been overlooked at times because it tends to cast itself in relationship to various patriarchal figures (fathers, husbands, brothers), but Ross also shows how important daughters, mothers, and sisters are in family and social networks, which corrects our view of patriarchal family structures as necessarily misogynistic. Families are made up of more than one gender, and adoring a husband or father does not necessarily make a woman poet subservient, regardless of her diction; she still writes herself within her chosen and self-determined form(s).

In Chapter One, “‘The right vse of Poësie’: Elizabeth Melville’s Religious Verse and Scottish Presbyterian Politics,” Ross begins her examination of the “female tradition” in manuscripts that she identifies not simply through the sex of the authors but through the common “poetic tropes, genres, and material forms” (6) that she finds. Unsurprisingly, religious and familial tropes articulate political ideas and ideologies; in the century following Elizabeth I, this is hardly novel. What is interesting is how Ross engages the “networks and communities that are neither private nor strictly public” through her engagement with the material manuscripts themselves (10). In the case of Elizabeth Melville’s *Ane Godlie Dreame*, for instance, “the dream vision genre enables [her] to extend the relevance of her dream to the community of the elect with a remarkable authority that escapes the constraints of gender” (29). Indeed, as Ross points out, “it is notable that while Speght and Lanyer use the dream vision to claim authority *to write*, Melville claims authority via the dream vision only for the authenticity of her spiritual vision. Her right to speak is assumed based on the authenticity of her prophetic vision or *visio*, the providential dream vision experience” (33-34). Furthermore, her poetic voice is notably and very deliberately not identified as female. Her gender is not significant for her message, so she speaks with the same authority as any other writer. Similarly, Ross’s examination of Melville’s lyrics “use the trope of the Puritan soul’s pilgrimage that appears in her *Dreame*, and they draw extensively on the Song of Songs and on the

language and structures of Petrarchism to construct Christ as the heart and soul's absent but only true lover" (42). Yet while Ross identifies this connection, she does not elaborate how, in traditional exegesis of the biblical love song, the soul's female status also overlooks the gender of the writer. Ross also neglects to note that the tropes that identify the soul in relationship to the community of the faithful (in Melville's case, Scottish Presbyterians) are derived not only from the Song of Songs, but also from the exegesis that links the lovers there with Christ and the Bride of Revelations. Ross does discuss the adaptation of the Song's biblical exegesis in Petrarchan lyrics throughout the seventeenth century constitutes a secondary and contemporary tradition that Melville draws on as she describes her intimacy with Christ, but again she does not address that this is a long-standing tradition dating back to the medieval period and courtly love tropes.

Here I must point to my only critique of this work, which is that, as with many books on the seventeenth-century corpus of literature, it neglects to incorporate the continuities and disruptions of manuscript traditions and culture that perpetuate from the medieval period. Especially in a book that focusses so steadfastly on manuscript sources, I find this particularly odd. I would have liked to have seen how Ross's arguments might have benefitted from a brief discussion or even occasional notes pointing to the exegetical tradition of marginal commentary in manuscripts; instead, there is a single footnote that refers to E. Ann Matter's *The Voice of My Beloved* (on page 47). From a different point of view, a brief consideration of Julian of Norwich, Christine de Pisan, or Marie de France as reference points and influences on her subjects would also give strength and context to Ross's work. The absence of these potentially enriching directions isolates Ross's approach and confines it, I would argue, too narrowly. Such narrowness runs the risk of making her subjects seem to have sprung up only in the seventeenth century, and without the authority of previous women authors—similar to how, until recently, many "History of Feminism" courses began with Mary Wollstonecraft, because she spoke with a recognizably proto-feminist voice. Ross's claim to promote a different kind of reading in order to see beyond our own critical concerns with authorship in print seems, in this sense, undermined by her own lack of context and precedent for the seventeenth century itself.

Chapter Two, “‘Thou art the nursing father of all piety’: Sociality, Religion, and Politics in Anne Southwell’s Verse,” addresses the attempt to broaden the scope of her project by incorporating Anne Southwell’s influences, many of whom were men. Guillaume de Saluste Du Bartas, Francis Qualres, and Roger Cox “require us to redefine biblical verse paraphrase as a mode in which poets male and female could—and did—speak on wide-ranging moral, social, and political issues” (67). This broadening of the sphere of an under-examined genre to include both male and female poets, again, might be usefully contextualized with reference to medieval manuscript exegesis, which is yet to be acknowledged properly as a precedent for biblical verse paraphrase in the Reformation. Ross’s engagement with Arthur Marotti’s notion of “social authorship,” however, is a fascinating development of how she employs the materials of manuscripts as constitutive of community: “Southwell adapts and reworks Gorges’s sonnet on the level of trope and form, using and reusing a poetic text that she treats as malleable in order to enact a kind of social authorship that is contextual and constitutive of community” (72). Southwell’s uses of biblical and secular sources, then, are continuous; each is “a pliable, malleable poetic form that can be rewritten, reworked, and readdressed to forge and foster social and political networks, as well as to address social and state political issues” (89-90). Tracing this common critical theme in the period through women’s manuscripts renders them as participants, and accomplished ones, in the larger cultural and political sphere in which they lived.

In Chapter Three, “‘When that shee heard the drums and cannon play’: Jane Cavendish and Occasional Verse,” Ross traces the ways in which the “familial forms” include and promote political identifications, namely between Cavendish’s (absent) father and her (also absent) king; her verse “evinces the intertwining of familial and kinship loyalties and political ideologies, and the emergence of female political articulation out of the discourses of the familial relationship. . . . [T]he authorizing figure of Jane Cavendish’s politicized occasional verse is, in every way, her absent father” (102). In troping her father and her king together as absent presences whose physical return she desires, she also, like Melville, invokes the Song of Songs, and triples the association with Christ as the soul’s absent lover. And as

Ross points out, this triple invocation—father, king, and Christ—is profoundly informed by the familial form, and all the intimacy that such a domestic relationship would bring: “it is this latter mode [of the character poem] that Cavendish adopts, writing in the brief form that is more modest and gives a stronger sense of intimacy” (113). In other words, what an early feminist approach might disdain as an imposed modesty can also be seen, in context, as purposefully conferring intimacy between the writer, her father, their king, and their God. This network defines each element as critically engaged to each other element, and “underscore[s] the extent to which it is Cavendish’s *imaginative* construction of a familial ideal in her poems that carries the greatest political import. . . . It is unlikely that Cavendish’s imagined community, the familial unit that she tropes in her poetry, corresponds exactly with a lived interchange between the Cavendish sisters and their male relatives on the continent. Rather, it is in the very ideal quality of the family and its literary culture that is imagined in Cavendish’s poetry and in her manuscripts that her engagement in the politics of the 1640s is most acute, the fantasized family unit becoming a trope—or even the emblem—of a familial and political *desideratum*” (133). In this way, Ross re-appropriates the “modesty” of women writers in the period as a rhetorical conceit, redefining it with a new and deliberate sense of authorship, one that participates in and depends on a larger circle or community of known readers or other writers, all of whom are identified by common domestic and political desires regardless of gender.

Hester Pulter’s grief, both familial and political, are the subject of Chapter Four, “‘This kingdoms loss’: Hester Pulter’s Elegies and Emblems.” Here Ross again examines how Pulter, like Cavendish, constitutes a figure of herself as mourning and secluded from society that is not necessarily matched by her “lived interchange” with her family and social circle: “her discourse of isolation notwithstanding, she is likely to have engaged actively with prominent examples of politicized verse that circulated in manuscript culture during the 1640s and 1650s” (138). Like many Royalist sympathizers during the Interregnum, she idealized solitude and isolation as figures that evoke pastoral complaints; both ideal and problematic, the paradox of retreat complicates the voice of desire. (Again we see the influence

of Song of Songs traditions: the enclosed garden, the spring shut up, the fountain sealed [Song 4:12]; yet Ross's commentary, while often interesting, neglects the extensive traditions associated with the biblical exegesis that linked the Song of Songs and Revelations in medieval and early Reformation periods.) Ross's reading of Pulter draws attention to how her "poetic and fluvial tears respond to political events in an explicitly personal and female way, one that is tied to her sexed female body, and so they provide a vital, female variation on the feminine, passive aesthetic that is seen to mark much of the lamenting literature of response to Charles's death" (154). This variation of an explicitly female voice distinguishes Pulter from Melville, the subject of Chapter One, who insisted on a non-gendered voice, and such variation within female writers' techniques is itself an indication of vibrancy and heterogeneity.

Finally, in Chapter Five, "I see our nere, to be reentered paradice': Lucy Hutchinson's 'Elegies' and *Order and Disorder*," Ross illustrates the trope of grief and loss associated with Republicans in the Restoration through an examination of the trope of Hutchinson's loss of her husband and her literal and literary isolation. And yet this educated and intellectual poet does not, in her "grief-stricken isolation," neglect to invoke more than her own grief: "Lucy mourns deeply and personally the loss of a beloved husband and the end of the Good Old Cause" (175). Again, Hutchinson draws extensively on the Song of Songs traditional exegesis, although Ross's discussion of it remains frustratingly under-developed. In particular, she describes how Hutchinson draws her isolation as the *hortus conclusus* or enclosed garden without her gardener, which is significantly political in exegetical terms as it echoes the figure of the Church without a head. As well, Hutchinson's suffering and grief for her husband echo the "dark night of the soul" which illuminates many female voices in the complaint genre: they speak the female voice of the Song of Songs, searching in vain for her absent beloved. Ross's discussion of Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder*, her retelling of the Creation and Fall, might have continued this connection as Ross distinguishes Hutchinson's work from Milton's to good effect: "Her discourse is one of rhetorical modesty and unadorned scripturalism, even as she insists on the Bible as a model of divine poeticization in 'psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs' ... [H]er discourse of contemplation and spiritual song, as she describes a 'ravished soul' that wishes 'To sing those mystic wonders it admires,/ Contemplating the rise of everything'" (192). While this discussion does much to establish and elaborate the female rhetoric of modesty, it again misses the point of the poet's direct influences from exegetical works that employ a similar rhetoric, and use a feminine pronoun to engender the human *anima* regardless of the writer's sex. Ross also confuses tropology with typology on page 198 when she compares Hester Pulter "read[ing] the biblical Esther as an emblematic *type for herself*, so Hutchinson reads Eve's creation as an emblem for seventeenth-century marriage, and Noah as an emblematic type of the dissolute English Restoration king" (198, emphases mine). The turn of tropology toward the self and present, everyday application is not the same as the allegorical sense of typology, when biblical types figure ideological echoes in the present day of history. Similarly, there seems to be an equivocal relationship between emblematic figuration and typological figuration; they are not always the same, especially in Quarles's work, which tends to emphasize the individual soul of tropology.

That being said, *Women, Poetry, & Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* is an important achievement for literary and feminist scholarship in a variety of fields: "Rewriting the narrative of women's political poeticization in the seventeenth century requires us to read less selectively, to read different genres and to read them differently, and to focus not only on 'the birth of the modern woman author' as she is recognizable to our twenty-first century tastes and literary-critical habits, but on more foreign and at times less pleasing modes of poetic authorship, and on poetic acts that were in some cases less successful" (213). In other words, Ross manages to shift our focus toward a different way to read that widens the context considerably and undermines the usual sense of isolated differences: reading manuscripts alongside print, and women alongside men as poets, is a re-imagined and more appropriate way to consider such early modern (and, potentially, medieval) texts, which did not privilege print as we do, and in many cases did not privilege gender or authorship in quite the way we do either. Indeed, Ross redresses "[t]he early feminist critical sense that women were 'silent but for the word' ... [which] was based on an as-

sumption that religious practice was a domestic and private affair in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that women's religious writings were ephemeral to intellectual and sociopolitical cultures. ... It is, however, a mistake to regard these writings as safe, acceptable, or marginal. Reformation religion was inherently the religion of the book, and it is now well recognized that a number of sixteenth-century women became 'influential agents of religious and political change' through their textual and interpretative activities" (11-12, qtg Femke Molekamp). Indeed, despite the problematic sense of English Renaissance women emerging out of nothing, Ross's focus on the book as a material manuscript directs our attention toward a new perspective that includes manuscript material alongside printed works. Such a wider ground from which to work gives us a renewed perspective: "If we are going to understand women's emergence as published political poets of state in the mid-seventeenth century, we need to read poetic genre differently – or, rather, we need to read different poetic genres" (17).

Owen Davies, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. viii + 310 pp. £25.00.  
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This collection of essays provides a rich discussion of Western witchcraft and magic, focusing mainly on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but often extending both forward into the present and back into the ancient past. It provides a reasonable overview, while at the same time includes detailed evidence and examples that help it avoid a sense of the over-generalized. Many chapters are accompanied by good quality images, as one would expect in a volume of this sort.

The collection begins, after a short foreword, with Peter Maxwell-Stuart's chapter on magic in the ancient world. He provides a definition of magic as "a constellation of what are officially regarded as deviant ritualistic or ritualized ways of dealing with an individual's immediate problems" (1). What follows is a survey of magic or ritualistic texts under the subheadings of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Jewish magic, Greeks, and Romans (early Christians and magic are included briefly under this sub-heading). A number of practices are described and the