

Adam Fox, Peter Lake, Joad Raymond, and Tessa Watt have all made significant contributions to the study of the content and reception of pamphlet literature, but again, other than an article by Fox, this historiography is notable by its absence.

Most importantly, Kietzman places Carleton within the study of female subjectivity at a halfway point between Stephen Greenblatt's ideas of Renaissance self-fashioning and studies of the self in relation to the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. To this reader Kietzman appears to have been aspiring to write a work of new historicism by recreating the life of an early modern celebrity author through her writings. Considering the title of the book, it is somewhat perverse that Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) was absent from the bibliography, and it might have been beneficial for Kietzman to consult Bernard Capp's fine study of another self-publicising early modern writer, *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet* (1994).

Kietzman's attempt at an interdisciplinary approach is unfortunately unsuccessful. As a work of social history, there is insufficient engagement with issues of audience and consumption of printed texts, and Kietzman admits in chapter four that her archival research was not as fruitful as she hoped it to be. Literary scholars will likewise find the book a disappointment. The texts being examined do not appear to have been subjected to either a particularly close reading or presented within a sufficiently sophisticated theoretical framework. Ultimately, this is a missed opportunity. Although the idea of self-serialisation is an interesting one that deserves further investigation, it remains to be seen if this study will convince historians or literary critics to pursue it further.

Marta Straznicky. *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 175 pp. \$75.00. Review by NANCY M. BUNKER, MACON STATE COLLEGE.

Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700 historicizes and contextualizes early modern women's closet plays: plays explicitly written for reading, rather than public performance. Marta Straznicky's study reveals that these plays are "permeated with traditions of commercial drama," grounded in an "aristocratic . . . private" literary culture (1). Closet drama, an alternative

tradition, was understood as intellectually superior to and politically more radical than commercial drama. Utilizing texts by Jane Lumley, Elizabeth Cary, Margaret Cavendish, and Anne Finch, Straznicky illuminates their works and authorial positions in relation to concepts of playreading and privacy. Further, she investigates the texts' physical properties, either in print or manuscript, and suggests such detail marks the plays' theatricality. The Introduction notes feminist scholarship's role in collapsing the boundaries between public and private works; Straznicky's study foregrounds the "extrinsic circumstances that have either prevented or facilitated" (2) closet play performance. She argues, "understanding the cultural position of closet drama and its accommodation of female authorship" must address the private works and "public" theatre (3).

Straznicky's first chapter, "Privacy, playreading, and performance," establishes that the culture viewed privacy as a "construct rather than a social fact" (7). She examines the playreading tradition at court, in academia, and in religious instruction and suggests this dramatic expression endows the "acts of reading and writing with the force of public action" (14). Playreading is a type of "public engagement"; to that end, closet drama "participates in the construction of such a concept" (18). As Straznicky notes, playreading practices engendered writers reluctant for public exposure but intent on reaching an elite literary and political audience. Their plays "focus on tensions and points of contact between public and private realm in a way that simultaneously involves retreat and engagement in public culture" (3).

"Jane Lumley: humanist tradition and the culture of playreading," Chapter 2, explores a translation of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* (c.1553), an "exercise" (19) conducted as a gift for her father. Despite Lumley's legacy as a translator, Straznicky argues this translation demonstrates the playwright's liberal reconfiguration and distance from humanist translation principles. Lumley revises the verse into vernacular prose, generalizes the tragic Iphigenia sacrifice, and minimizes the historical and political in exchange for conflict between public and private duty. Technically, *Iphigenia* shows Lumley deleting metrically complex choruses, cutting lengthier speeches, and conflating dialogues into single speeches, which show attention to reading rather than staging. Straznicky notes that the translation is unique among mid-century texts and argues that confining the text to a domestic audience freed Lumley's creativity (47). She showed both independence in her studies when learning challenging

Greek texts not taught to women and assertiveness in her presentation when working outside established translation boundaries. The “technically deficient translation” and “product of female pen—would have had no place in the broader world of humanist letters” (46), according to Straznicky. Her text represents a creative opportunity but not a public readership.

Chapter 3, “Elizabeth Cary: private drama and print” concentrates on *The Tragedie of Mariam* (1613), the earliest known original English play by a woman. A closet drama published for a reading market, Cary and her publishers sought to “situate the play in relation to elite discourse” (49). The format resembles most classical closet dramas, but attention to stage business links it equally with dramatic publications from private theatre (59). Straznicky argues that Cary’s work deliberately deploys a literary style already coded “private” (4) and heightened by the intimate sonnet dedication to her husband. The play circulated in manuscript, and eventually she wrote a second sonnet. Both dedicatory poems speak to Cary’s definitions of private; each text produces a unique version of the play: a domestic literary circle of personal acquaintances and an elite drama targeted to the educated public of play readers (66). With these versions, Straznicky argues, publishers manipulated the “cultural field” of Cary’s play as “private” drama intersecting with print (66).

Chapter 4, “Margaret Cavendish: the closing of the theatres and the politics of playreading,” addresses the closeting of plays due to the 1642 parliamentary ordinance closing theatres, and suggests reading as the only legitimate theatrical pleasure (70). Two collections of Cavendish’s plays (1662, 1668) take Straznicky’s focus, as she suggests writing, printing, and reading plays, even in private, became political acts. Cavendish placed her private texts into a reading public circulation (67) with an address to her husband in dedicatory epistle, and unlike Lumley and Cary, exerted no effort to limit readers on the basis of family, education, or status. She sought wide readership in dedicating the first collection to general and the second to future readers. Of special interest to Straznicky’s study, Cavendish’s significant textual specifics such as reading protocols, font changes for speech and stage direction, and instructions for reading the plays unite print and performance as well as public and private into the text itself (88). A play written for print alone frees an author to “rhetorically take part in banned public events without leaving the security of private space” (77); to that end, Cavendish’s printed plays buffer

the most extreme public critique. Straznicky contends the playwright respects closet drama's enclosed spaces as a site of "engagement rather than withdrawal" (83) for author and reader.

"Anne Finch: Authorship, privacy, and the Restoration stage," Straznicky's fifth chapter, examines women's closet drama after the theatres reopened. Finch actively pursued an amateur writing career and wanted her works to be read aloud; however, none were intended for performance. Two plays receive Straznicky's attention: *The Triumph of Love and Innocence*, a drama sensitive to particular demands of writing for performance with tight structure and heroic verse, and *Aristomenes; or, The Royal Shepherd*, a tragedy with a political theme. Although Finch explicitly states neither play is to be performed, both manuscripts show remarkable attention to staging. Examples include setting scenes, moving characters, marking and bracketing asides; the play page functions as a "virtual counter-text to spoken dialogue, shifting the reader's attention from spoken to visual content" (93). Finch's social rank required her to maintain amateur status, eschew serious intentions, and refute professional ambition. Since professional entertainment involved money and female pleasure for money exchange was sexualized (99-100), the playwright explicitly attempted control over release and reception of her work. She differentiated herself from those paid to write and erected a firm boundary between public theatre and private playreading.

Straznicky's conclusion, "Closet drama: private space, private stage, and gender" concentrates upon the plays as an alternative to commercial theatre, which was inaccessible to women. Lumley envisioned a household audience, Cary must have anticipated a "private" commercial stage, Cavendish desired readers to "simulate" performance, and Finch prepared a "thoroughly stageable" text (112). Because playreading belonged to the private domain, attention to the "closet" and other domestic spaces shows women's engagement with private drama as a strategic choice.

The playwrights studied in *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700* belong to a cultural elite with its unique circumstances regarding writing, reception, and self-presentation. Straznicky clearly shows the extraordinary combination of personal agency and technical skill exercised among authors whose commonality lies in their plays, each written from a private sphere for a reading public. Through her insightful analyses and historical grounding, Straznicky provides a fresh and thorough portrait of closet drama.

Women's writing scholars and English drama historians will benefit from her study.

K. J. P. Lowe. *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xvi + 437 pp. + 42 illus. \$90.00. Review by THOMAS WORCESTER, COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS.

Vernacular chronicles of three convents form the basis of this study: Santa Maria delle Vergini (Venice), known as Le Vergini; Santa Maria Annunziata (Florence), known as Le Murate; Santi Cosma e Damiano (Rome), known as San Cosimato. The chronicler of Le Vergini, a house of canonesses, was an anonymous member (or several anonymous members) of the community. The text was composed in 1523. Le Murate was Benedictine; Suora Giustina Niccolini produced its chronicle in 1598. San Cosimato was Franciscan; Suora Orsola Formicini composed a chronicle extant in three versions between 1603 and 1613. Lowe does an excellent job showing how each document is a far richer historical source than many scholars have supposed. In comparing and contrasting these chronicles of female religious life from three different contexts, she explores a broad array of questions about female agency, religious traditions and innovations in an age of reform, as well as social and economic life, the arts, and cultural production.

Lowe thoroughly explores both common features of three chronicles, as well as differences between them. Le Vergini restricted its membership to noble women, and their relatively high level of literacy and education is evident from the chronicle's form and content. Many of the noble canonesses could compose orations in Latin; these elite women brought their own private servants with them to the convent, a convent without restrictions of cloister or even anything like perpetual vows. But events in 1519 at Le Vergini had upset these traditional ways: the patriarch (bishop) of Venice took control of the convent, with the backing of the doge. Previously, Le Vergini had acknowledged only the pope as a religious superior, and popes generally left the canonesses to their own devices. The 1523 chronicle manifests the anger of the canonesses who now had to contend with close episcopal supervision as well as the introduction, by force, of a growing number of strictly obser-