

satire" (814). Emphasis on a plain style and verification "united certain factions that were otherwise totally opposed" (827)—basically puritans and naturalists. "Compared to sleek performances . . . [of] canonical 'Restoration' dramas . . . the theatre of the 1660s looks quite heterogeneous" (831). Styles and modes were in flux.

Indeed, styles, modes, arguments, language, worship, modes of production, social status (the list could go on) were in flux from the Reformation through to the Revolution and beyond. Highlighting the fluidity of that flux is, in my view, a principal strength of this history.

Alex Davis. *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance*. Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 2003. viii + 263 pp. \$85.00. Review by EUGENE D. HILL, MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE.

Alex Davis tilts a lance at the traditional scholarly approach to chivalric practice in Elizabethan and seventeenth-century life and chivalric themes in the literature of the period—an approach (he contends) that both underestimates and misunderstands the significance of romance material. Davis quotes Sir Thomas Overbury on the "Chamber-Mayde" who "is so carried away with the *Myrrour of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to run out of her selfe and become a Ladie Errant" (26). Similarly, a contemporary (1615) satiric poem presents various clients at a stationer's shop: of the "Courtrey-Farmer" it is said that "King Arthur, Bevis, or Syr Guye . . . are the Bookes he onely loves to buye" (25). These satiric moments cannot, however, outweigh the abundant evidence adduced by Davis to establish that "chivalric romances—of both the 'naïve' and the 'sophisticated' variety—were consumed at all levels of society during the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, from the very top down" (28). This well-supported argument commands respect.

More debatable is Davis's second thesis: that what he calls "the trope of Quixoticism—the idea that Renaissance chivalry could only ever exist as an object of humour, as a comic anachronism" (37)—has seriously misled scholars. Reading Cervantes' Don in this

fashion, as “an icon of historical discontinuity” (109), misconstrues that character, applying (Davis claims) eighteenth-century constructions of the distinctively medieval (and non-Renaissance) nature of chivalry to a period in which chivalry remained in full flower. In fact, however, many of the literary texts this critic discusses fit rather more neatly into the Quixotic pattern than he might wish. Thus he writes that in Robert Laneham’s *Letter* (1575), “it is not always clear what is burlesque and what is not” and “this characteristic of reversibility if anything actually points towards the prevalence of chivalric forms in the Elizabethan world picture” (97). Perhaps, but the argument does afford only a “heads I win, tails you lose” sort of persuasiveness.

Particularly troublesome is the matter Renaissance chivalry is taken—and this represents the book’s third thesis—to be serious *about*. The point at issue is, without exception, social status: Renaissance chivalry is “a way of asserting and defending . . . individual interests and social mobility—and attacking those of others” (239). Rather than losing oneself in fantasy, the Renaissance figure is pointedly asserting his or her claim in the moment—no Knight or Lady Errant, but a resolute aspirant. Again, this sweeping claim does not receive persuasive support from the authors Davis studies, who include “Laneham” (who may not have existed), several early seventeenth-century dramatists, (including Francis Beaumont), Edward Herbert, and Katherine Philips. Instead, these texts would seem to indicate that chivalry is a way of talking about all manner of things, a coded language and practice with multiple applications. Status assertions can be at stake, but not uniquely.

Take for example Beaumont’s *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, which Davis discusses at the very middle of his book. Prior critics, he believes, have overstated the geniality of this play, which on his reading “is shot through with revulsion at the thought of other people’s bodies” (125); “Beaumont’s play mimes the outward forms of carnival, but uses them to induce repulsion, rather than to promote fraternal feelings” (126). The deliciously absurd (my view) wife in *Knight* “presents us [in Davis’s] with the trope of

Quixoticism stripped to its bare essentials; what remains is the desire to rise socially, produced as a ridiculous faith in fantastic narrative" (130). Of the grocer's boy the critic insists: "Time after time, Rafe is cut down to size" (122). Davis's reading is not so much wrong as overwhelmingly partial. No theatergoer who has seen a decent production of Beaumont's comedy will recognize the reading as close to accurate. Eroticism and the life of fantasy cannot be reduced to social climbing, or that to the two former. Beaumont knew that, and so should we.

So this learned study has much to offer students of the period, though its mono-causal account has to be taken with a sprinkling of the requisite sodium compound. The best things here are the rich background materials adduced, as on the nature of dueling and the social practice of asserting gentility, rather than the extended literary analyses.

William W. E. Slights. *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001. xiii + 298 pp. \$70.00. Review by JESSE M. LANDER, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME.

In sharply written prose that crackles with tart asides and vivid colloquialisms, Slights gives an undogmatic and lucid account of the printed marginalia in English books of a chronologically expansive Renaissance. Avoiding both vaporous theorizing and the magpie-like pursuit of granular facts, the book successfully connects the abstract theoretical issues raised by the marginal to a rich array of particular, and often fascinating, instances of margination. A fine contribution to the rapidly growing shelf of volumes devoted to book history, *Managing Readers* convincingly argues that the printed marginal note is an important key to understanding the textual practices of early modern England. Though the title trades on the ambiguous resonance of *managing*, this book is more concerned with the management of readers than with readers who manage. Slights tends to treat printed marginalia