Actresses were of course explicitly sexualised, and Chalmers shows that sexual freedom in drama is linked with royalism and with Tory politics, although sexual freedom is not available to both sexes with the same impunity in Behn’s plays. Taking on critics and paying attention to source material, she traces an unease with the cavalier heroes’ treatment of women, an unease often linked to the female characters’ economic dependency on men. Chalmers also analyses Behn’s poetry, including a useful section on the gendering of the Pindaric, to show that in her verse Behn disentangles female eroticism from political agency. The book ends with a perceptive reading of Behn’s prose. Oroonoko is seen as a demonstration of the failure of Western modes to assimilate other cultures, within which Behn is able to voice a veiled criticism of James II’s Catholic policies.

The book has the academic carefulness and detail of an ex-thesis, but it is none the worse for that. It offers a careful construction of what “femininity” means for royalists in the Interregnum, and invests the concept with political importance, in contrast to studies which have stressed the importance of masculinity to an overwhelmingly male community of royalist poets. There are some original arguments here as well as some welcome nuance provided for studies of Cavendish and Philips by the detailed historical and textual analysis. This is an important new book that supplies much of the detail for which non-specialists have been looking for some time.


Readers of this journal will be familiar with John Selden most likely because of his discourses on religion and the state posthumously published as Table Talk (1689). An eminent jurist and antiquarian who started his career in the house of Sir Robert Cotton, Selden gained notoriety initially for Titles of Honour (1614) followed by the Historie of Tithes (1618), famously championed by Lancelot Andrewes. His groundbreaking De Diis Syris (1617) was heavily annotated by Ben Jonson, and, as Jason Rosenblatt shows in Chapter Two of Renaissance England’s Chief Rabbi (while building on his previous scholarship co-authored with Winfried Schleiner on Selden’s letter to the playwright con-
cerning cross-dressing and bi-sexuality among the gods), the author’s presentation copy to Jonson documents their close relationship (63).

Although *De Diis Syris* secures Selden’s reputation as an “orientalist” (both the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and DNB list this among his credentials), thanks to the recent work of Paul Christianson, Richard Tuck, and J. P Sommerville among others, it is now more clearly understood that he was a rigorous legal thinker with a clear political agenda. Rosenblatt’s book ably demonstrates the extent to which Selden’s so-called orientalism can be used to shed new light on his juridical and historically-minded activities.

Situating Selden with respect to the branch of learning known as “Christian Hebraism,” Rosenblatt argues that his mature work on the Babylonian Talmud, which until now has yet to be studied thoroughly in its own right, provides a way to link Selden’s interests in statecraft to his skills as an antiquarian and legal historian. What stands out most along these lines is his rehabilitation of the terms “synagogue” and “Sanhedrin” to serve as positive and practical models respectively for church institutions and the parliament (267). Rosenblatt constructs a compelling case that, when seen as a whole, “Selden’s rabbinic works constitute a notable exception to those products of the English Renaissance that emphasize otherness and difference”; and that, moreover, his *De Jure* (1640), running 847 folio pages, is “one of the most genuinely philosemitic works produced by a Christian Hebraist in early modern Europe” (161).

The road Selden traveled to arrive at such a position—one which can be seen as a journey toward religious toleration that further paved the way for the readmission of Jews into England—began with what can be described as prison writings. He was arrested ostensibly for his role in the Parliament of 1629, though it must be remembered that the previous year he had played a leading role in drawing up the *Petition of Right* so vexing to King Charles because of its attack on royal prerogative. Rosenblatt thus begins his book with the letter Selden wrote to Robert Cotton from prison requesting he be sent the Talmudic volumes from Westminster Library (2), which, in effect, launched a course of study that “would occupy him for the rest of his life (276).

What attracted him in these commentaries on the laws and customs of the Israelites, and which eventually would figure significantly into his enormously influential *De Jure* (1640), was the Jewish conception of universal
moral imperatives (270).  De Jure was mentioned “respectfully and sometimes reverentially” (10) by some of the subtlest thinkers of the century who, like Selden, were drawn to the Noachide Law; those precepts derived from Noah’s code upon which later legal precedents were based.  The book’s admirers included Grotius, Newton, Henry Burton, John Lightfoot, Henry Stubbe, James Harrington, Edward Stillingfleet, John Tolland, and Samuel Pufendorf, as well as William Laud and Jeremy Taylor.  Regarding the latter two, Rosenblatt repeats a commonplace that underscores Selden’s ability to be friends with people of different political and religious beliefs: “the Commons came to him to learn of their rights and the Lords to learn of their privileges” (170).

The influence of Selden’s Hebraic scholarship, especially regarding etymologies and genealogies, was felt profoundly by John Milton.  The third chapter, “Selden and Milton on Gods and Angels,” is essential reading for any serious student of the Nativity Ode, Paradise Lost, and Samson Agonistes.  Here we find some startling revelations, for example, about the cherub Zephon, a “reminder of the first time that Satan changed his identity” (74); and about Moloch, the Ammonite god delighting in child sacrifice, whose name comes dangerously close to the Hebrew word for “king” (91).  Likewise, the following chapter on “Samson’s Sacrifice,” constitutes one of the finest sustained readings of the minor epic to date.  Rosenblatt disentangles Samson’s final act (“of my own accord”) from Reformation commentators’ pious interpretations to argue that, in its Talmudic context, it is Samson, and not Christ, “who is ‘the end of the law,’ and annihilation coincides with fulfillment” (111).

Ensuing chapters pertain to Marvell and Parker, to Grotius, and to Bowyer and Barlow; although, as Rosenblatt confides, many other possible comparisons could have served as well.  As a result the conclusion carries with it an implicit challenge for others to take up the baton: a parallel study could be written substituting Cowley for Milton, Jeremy Taylor or Sir Matthew Hale for Sir John Vaughan, Hobbes or Pufendorf for Grotius on natural law; Spinoza for Vico, and the Cambridge Platonist Henry More for Nathanael Culverwel (273).  This book, and any follow-up study along the lines indicated, is grounded firmly in the deft scholarly spade-work of Rosenblatt’s first chapter concerning Henry VIII’s solicitation of rabbinic opinion on his “great matter” of the royal divorce, this being the first important introduction of post-biblical Hebraica into English culture.
Among the many strengths of *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi* is its ongoing attentiveness to the irony, contradiction, and double vision inherent in Christian Hebraism. The complex matter of whether Selden served as a proxy for the rabbis or appropriated rabbinic scholarship for his own parliamentary ends is addressed head-on. Eleven magisterially orchestrated chapters evince the assertion that, indeed, in “the midst of an age of prejudice, John Selden transmitted an uncommonly generous view of Judaism” (9). And so, while Selden, like many of his contemporaries, rejected the biblical Decalogue as being intended only for Jews, “he accepted the rabbinic Noachide laws as binding upon all humankind” (181). In doing so Selden jettisoned the myth of Jewish xenophobia and underscored the humaneness of rabbinic exegesis. Not only has Jason Rosenblatt provided a more complete picture of John Selden and his wide, often divergent, circle of friends, but also he has succeeded in redrawing the boundaries of Christian Hebraism, Protestant exegetical reasoning, and English legal history. Grounded in profound scholarship and a lifetime of Talmudic learning, this book sets a new high-watermark for seventeenth-century literary, religious, and cultural studies.


Paul Cefalu’s *Moral Identity* makes the persuasive case that Reformation theologians were more or less incapable of developing a moral theory of practical ethics that would square with Protestant theories of salvation. Examining an impressive range of Conformist and Non-Conformist theologians from the late sixteenth century through to the Restoration, Cefalu demonstrates the conceptual deadlocks Reformation writers run into when they try to theorize a practical moral theory that is consistent with the Protestant order of salvation, specifically the relation between justification and sanctification. More interestingly, he maintains that the theological tensions between moral theory and soteriology are addressed in literary works by Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, George Herbert, and John Milton. By doing so, he successfully argues that theology does not constitute a static context which literary works allegorize, as an earlier generation of scholars