

of texts in which these figures typically appear (e.g., Jacobean tragedies and satiric comedies), and the particular social and economic tensions informing female same-sex relationships that they typically express. Traub might not have exhausted the subject of Renaissance *lesbianism*, then, but she has undeniably given us a wealth of knowledge about its history and a model of scholarship for interpreting its significance that cannot be ignored.

Linda C. Mitchell. *Grammar Wars: Language as Cultural Battlefield in 17th- and 18th-Century England*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. viii + 218 pp. + 10 illus. \$74.95. Review by MELISSA MOHR, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

Mitchell sets out firmly new historicist aims for her book. She wants to explore the ways in which seventeenth- and eighteenth-century grammar texts—long regarded as nothing more than straightforward guides to conjugations and declensions—are actually implicated in key social, political, and religious issues of their day. These texts also come to shape contemporary ideas about the teaching of grammar and, to some extent, even the politics of gender and class in the contemporary classroom. She bases her conclusions on readings of over 300 early modern grammar texts—one of the book's primary values is as a compendium of these works. If you want to know what Thomas Blount thinks about the education of women (fine, within narrow limits, as long as they are not “loose” (144), or how Charles Butler defines grammar (the “art of speaking and writing well” (2), Mitchell is sure to provide a few paragraphs summarizing their points of view.

The book is organized—somewhat loosely, as Mitchell is wary of pinning herself down—around five grammatical controversies that have wider social implications: standardization of the vernacular, pedagogy, writing instruction, universal language schemes, and social position. She begins with the triumph, by the end of the seventeenth century, of the vernacular over Latin as the language of the learned, and the debates this engendered over the teaching

of grammar and the status of the English language itself. Should grammar be taught in English or in Latin? What are the dangers of a living and changing language, one, unlike Latin, not “fixed” (31) and governed by strict rules? Should attempts be made to fix English, and who should be given authority to do so? Mitchell summarizes arguments made by grammarians on both sides of these disputes; history has declared the winners those who, like Bishop Robert Lowth in 1762, argued for the teaching of grammar in English, even while using Latin models to standardize English usage. She provides interesting examples of the ways in which grammarians “corrected” English by making it conform to the rules of Latin grammar—“it’s me” had to become “it is I”; “different to” and “different than,” both previously acceptable, became “different from”; and, of course, “the centuries old double negative” was declared “incorrect and illiterate” (33-35).

The triumph of the vernacular was enabled by the increasing societal importance of the middle classes. Their greater role in “a newly developing mercantile economy” (46) also led, Mitchell argues, to changes in the educational system. Pedagogues were faced with new kinds of students—those of the middle, even lower classes, as well as foreigners—in larger numbers than ever before. In order to address an increased demand for literacy and for vocational training that would be useful to young merchants, teachers had to abandon the traditional early modern model of education, with its emphasis on the trivium, Latin, and classical texts. Mitchell addresses these changes mostly through summaries of the work of Samuel Hartlib and Johann Amos Commenius, two of the most vocal advocates for pedagogical reform in seventeenth-century Europe.

Writing was an important component of the new vocational training, and two types of writing skills were especially sought after: letter writing, for both business and personal correspondence, and writing “commercial documents like receipts, contracts, and purchase orders” (74). Mitchell devotes some space to the differing writing styles taught in grammar and rhetoric texts, categories that have been somewhat confused in her book up to this point.

Rhetoric texts “favored the eloquent prose of the aristocratic tradition, a prose that had flourish and style. Grammar books, on the other hand, promoted functional writing that would serve the most basic of purposes” (74). These styles fitted the needs of their respective target audiences—rhetoric texts were used largely by the “privileged class” (74), while grammar books were firmly middle class. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, rhetoric became the more important subject for all classes, as it “subsumed grammar and logic to form the basis of the rhetoric handbook that is still used for composition today” (85).

A chapter on universal language schemes shows grammarians using what they had learned about Latin and English to try to create a perfect language. Ideas of what would constitute this perfect language varied widely from scheme to scheme. Some grammarians wanted to return to the language Adam invented, spoken world-wide before the Tower of Babel divided the earth’s tongues. (Mitchell glosses over how they hoped to reconstruct this language—more information about this seemingly impossible project would have been interesting.) Others wanted to invent a philosophical language with symbols that somehow embodied the nature of the things they represented. All agreed, however, that a universal language spoken by people in all nations would advance the cause of true religion, promote commerce, and allow the faster spread of scientific ideas. When, in the late seventeenth century, grammarians realized that a universal language was not practically possible, former “universalists” began instead to compare existing languages, looking for similarities among them in attempts to define correct grammar across a spectrum of examples—the basis for modern linguistics, according to Mitchell.

The last chapter, on “social position,” is the least successful—oddly, given Mitchell’s new historicist aims. It investigates how grammarians “had the power to create, assign, and reinforce identities for marginal social groups While foreigners and women had an identity thrust upon them, the middle class, by contrast, generated its own identity . . .” (133). Foreigners were both encouraged to learn English as a way of proving their loyalty to their

new home, and feared for their propensity to corrupt the language. Many grammarians argued that women should be taught grammar, that they might instruct young children before they went off to school and into the hands of more capable (male) tutors. Underlying this relatively permissive attitude to women's education, however, was a deep suspicion of women's intellectual and even physical capacity to learn. (Benches in the schools were too hard for frail women to sit upon, and the reading of Latin might "upset their stomachs" (142).) The middle class, by which Mitchell presumably means middle class *men*, saw "morals"—read "religion"—and "literacy" (133) as key elements in its identity and found grammar texts an ideal way to instill both.

Mitchell avoids pursuing the tantalizing issues she raises here to any great extent. She never explains, for example, what she means by her claim that foreigners and women have an identity thrust upon them by grammar texts, while "the middle class" creates its own. Certainly grammar books would seem equally prescriptive to *all* readers, whether instructing middle class men in the proper form of a business receipt (and thus indirectly in their societal role), or women in what they should be reading to best educate their children. If she means that many authors of grammar texts were middle-class men, what about female authors of grammars, such as Bathsua Makin and Ann Fisher (whom she does mention)—might they not be seen as "creating" an identity for their female readers? And why lump female readers together, when women of different classes were expected to study very different things? The wife of a merchant, for example, might very well learn to write the same receipts he did, while an aristocratic lady might spend more time perfecting her personal, or, like Anne Clifford, household and legal correspondence.

These faults—overgeneralization and an unwillingness to flesh out and support grand but vague claims—are present throughout the book. It ultimately falls short of its author's stated aims. But its details are insightful and useful in that they provide copious exposure to an understudied genre. *Grammar Wars* goes a long

way toward making early modern grammar texts, considered dry and boring even at the time of their printing, *interesting*.

Joan DeJean. *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xii + 204 pp. + 10 illus. \$45.00 cloth; \$18.00 paper. Review by MELISSA MOHR, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

DeJean's book is more ambitious than its title suggests. She traces the history of obscenity from ancient Rome to late seventeenth-century France, touching along the way on attitudes towards four-letter words and other kinds of indecency in the middle ages across Europe, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy and England, and in the present-day United States. The book, not surprisingly, given DeJean's areas of expertise, is most successful when it deals with France, as three of its five chapters do.

In these chapters, DeJean argues that obscenity was reinvented in France between 1550 and 1663, and that it spread in its new form to England and Italy. This reinvention occurred when obscene literature, previously the province of elite male readers (and previously not identified as "obscene" *per se*), began to circulate in an uncontrolled fashion among a broader population of bourgeois readers, both male and female. As its readership expanded, the obscene changed in character. It became strongly identified with what we today would call four-letter words and began to focus almost exclusively on female genitalia. DeJean contends that the latter change signals the cultural imposition of heterosexuality on male desires—and on the literature that represents them—which were formerly "polyvalent, desiring all that was desirable" (55). The key cause and sign of obscenity's reinvention, however, was that obscene texts became subject to systematic secular censorship. These contested texts in turn played important roles in the development of mass-market print culture and of "modern censorial machinery" (4). The modern concept of "the author" thus originates in obscene discourse, since, as DeJean argues, following Foucault, books