

vivacious, porous, and contingent enterprise in the long Aristotelianism that flowers in Aquinas and deepens in the writings of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Crocker thus revises MacIntyre's thesis to argue that duty eclipsed virtue because the way that virtue derives strength from weakness reflects women's ways of being in the world.

Crocker's comprehensive introduction integrates contemporary philosophy with medieval and Renaissance texts read from a feminist perspective. Part 1 highlights the leprous legacy of Cressida, who materializes an unlikely dignity, "material, living, and literary," that beckons to readers beyond heroic *virtus* and public shaming in works by Chaucer, Lydgate, Henryson, and Shakespeare (42). Part 2 pursues the supplementation of virtue by grace in medieval theology and literature. In a moral world in which human virtue depends on the gifts of grace, female excellence "proceeds through relational, reciprocal enrichment" (112). When grace becomes social and aesthetic, as it does in Spenser, the collaborative symmetries of dance "interweave action and reliance to furnish a fuller picture of women's potential for embodied excellence" (190). Part 3 pairs patient Grisela with the recalcitrant shrew; usually occupying opposite qualities of rebellion and compliance, Crocker shows how these wifely types contribute to anti-absolutist inquiries into companionate marriage. Griselda's patience, Crocker argues, is not a passive submission to male rule but a voluntary comportment and creative fashioning of ethical commitment within scenes of labor and care.

The Matter of Virtue is courageous, temperate, just, and discerning, and it is also constant, faithful, patient, and full of hope. Crocker orchestrates the cardinal virtues, their theological addenda, and their feminine supplements to compose a renewed virtue discourse sustained by feminist philosophy, literary studies, and the history of ideas. Crocker has produced a major work that persuasively demonstrates the affordances of virtue across medieval and early modern studies, with implications for how we study, teach, and work, as well as nurse, heal, and love today.

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The Female Baroque in Early Modern English Literary Culture: From Mary Sidney to Aphra Behn. Gary Waller.

Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 288 pp. €105.

Some books feel as if they have always been there and when they appear we wonder how we did without them. This is one of those. In a wide-ranging study, Gary Waller explores the Baroque less as a historical period than as a sense of permanent disruptiveness that recurs throughout history, and "often cyclically" (19). Manifesting as a chronic restiveness—an inability to resolve the exaggerated extremes of its own making—the

Baroque is read as European culture's response to the seismic shocks of preceding decades: its tendencies toward religious extremism and political absolutism reflecting a scramble for the verities of a metaphysical universe that was fading fast. As a reaction formation, the Baroque is typified by a recursiveness, a secondariness, and nowhere more so than in kitsch, where the special is obsessively reproduced to the point of being indiscriminate, mass, and vulgar. Theoretically aligned with neo-Marxist traditions of ideological critique—including the Annales school and Lacanian psychoanalysis—Waller presents the Baroque as a distinct *mentalité* characterized as much by momentous swings between manic and depressive states (“hyperbole” and “melancholy,” in his taxonomy) as by an inability to exit the unbearable tension between the two (“plateauing,” with a nod to Gregory Bateson).

Waller zeroes in on the female Baroque, for, when ideological structures are identified as patriarchal—as a masculinist state apparatus based largely on the objectification of women—the struggles of the one against the other become an apt place in which to explore such tensions at their maximum. “Part of the originality of my study,” Waller states, is the determination to look beyond the victimizing and marginalization of women in order “to discover more distinctive and less oppressed voices” (49), and to this end he invokes Julia Kristeva, whose 2014 book on Teresa of Avila serves in large part as the inspiration for his project. There, Kristeva describes the “great exploit” of the female Baroque as “not so much to feel rapture as to tell it; to write it” (cited at 117), and the counter-hegemonic jouissance of that writing makes itself known, above all, in those moments when the semiotic (the rhythms and sonics of language in its pre-discursive, preoedipal aspects) breaks through the symbolic (the grammatical and logical structures of language in its discursive, disciplinary aspects). The parameters of his argument established, Waller examines the work of over a dozen women or groups of women from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, on both sides of the confessional divide. While the longest chapter of the book considers the (only superficially) paradoxical notion of a Protestant Baroque in Mary Sidney Herbert, Amelia Lanyer, the women of Little Gidding, Anne Bradstreet, and Anne Hutchinson, his close study of writings by and about Gertrude More and Mary Ward—two recusant nuns whose work is little known outside devotional studies—is greatly welcomed. Later chapters look at women's involvement in performing and writing masques in both the Stuart court and satellite courts, and at the prose and poetry of Mary Wroth, Margaret Cavendish, and Aphra Behn.

The book does present some issues. The degree of direct quotation is patchy, for example. While the Cavendish sisters and Hester Pulter are well represented, not a single word of Mary Sidney Herbert's is cited. What is presented as perhaps the volume's “purest example of the distinction between semiotic and symbolic” (91) is illustrated by only nineteen words of Gertrude More's prose. As the “most conspicuously Baroque narrative” (213), Mary Wroth's *Urania* is quoted numerous times, but in the case of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthis*—where we see the “characteristic Baroque contradictions

disrupting the surface as the ‘semiotic’ presses itself into the poem” (221)—no direct quotation is provided, exactly where it is needed. Texts tend to be described and their effects reported, rather than being treated to the direct quotation and close reading that would characterize a Kristevan analysis. There are also signs of certain familiar thought formations. An old chestnut like the Stuart masques “containing subversive . . . forces” (168) makes an appearance, for example; and, for all the care taken to avoid essentialism, dubious references to things like “the mysterious if suspicious depths” and “dark interiority of being female” (85, 193) slip through. That woke theoretical positions should continue to struggle with long-entrenched habits of thought, however, shows the Baroque is still with us, and thus neatly illustrates the fundamental argument of this wonderful book.

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Sidney’s “Arcadia” and the Conflicts of Virtue. Richard James Wood.
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Richard James Wood argues that Sidney’s revised *Arcadia* is informed by Philipp Melancthon’s philosophical ethos, which incorporates “religious piety, classical ethics, and also the behavior of individuals as part of a wider civil society” (6). Wood asserts that Philippist philosophy permits individuals to “cooperate with God in securing salvation” and stands in contrast to harsher Calvinist theories of predestination (8). Rather than reading the text within “the limits of the conventionally passive Christian Stoicism,” Wood contends that Sidney’s characters “engage with the vicissitudes of the world” (4), evincing “a commitment to public affairs” (5). As a consequence, Sidney’s characters, especially Amphialus, engage with the world and show their flaws, faults, and sins but with the hope that they may be redeemed or rescued from error; for Wood, Amphialus “most poignantly displays [Sidney’s] religious ethos” (4). Although Sidney writes in the *Defense of Poesy* that “right poets” should create a golden world, showing through narrative the nature of virtue, in the revised *Arcadia*, Sidney, following Philippist values, creates a “non-idealizing” romance that supports his “belief in the pre-eminence of poetry as a form of discourse in the public domain” (7).

The chapters that follow cover a broad range of topics including Sidney’s “consiliary” (24) relationship with his queen, evidenced in the lessons taught both in his *Letter to the Queen* and within his romance, which Wood asserts has a “peculiar suitability . . . for articulating a Philipist ethos . . . [and] show[s] how the *Arcadia* . . . can express a profound moral earnestness, indeed, can communicate a sincere and devout Christian message” (52). Later in the book, Wood asserts that the character of Amphialus be read as an example of Sidney’s Reformed Christian piety, a character capable of achieving