

but heroic” (59). In making the couplet their form of choice for satires, elegies, epigrams, and verse letters, Donne, Joseph Hall, John Marston, and others were reacting against stanzaic poetry as a pretentious European import, cladding their thoughts instead in the looser, lighter, naughty-but-native garb of Chaucer.

Marking a turning point in the history of the couplet, chapter 3 positions Ben Jonson as the poet who, following the Bishops’ Ban of 1599, “contributed most to snatching the couplet from the fires and bringing it into polite society” (83). The reader is reminded here that rhyme alone does not a couplet make; Jonson’s reform of the couplet largely hinged on his “regularizing its meter and pauses” (90). Bolstering the pursuit of rhyme not empty of reason, Jonson made the English couplet a more measured form whose steady pace was well suited to the task of expressing inner character and patterning virtuous living. Chapter 4 considers the impact of the English Civil War on verse form. Using Robert Herrick, Katherine Philips, and Abraham Cowley as case studies, Rush posits that the poets of the period sought “to retain the Jonsonian couplet but make it responsive to the passions,” not least to accommodate the “extreme grief of a mourning nation” (126).

Chapter 5 brings us full circle to Milton, who in 1668 took arms against a sea of couplets. While contextualizing Milton’s famous renunciation of rhyme in light of “his effort to craft a style distinct from the affective lyrics of the Royalists” (161), Rush looks back at the poet’s earlier use of rhyme in *Comus*, *Lycidas*, and especially the sonnets. Ironically, Milton appears to be a son of Ben: wresting Jonsonian formalism from the royalists, his metric regularity and reasonable rhymes connoted discipline, civility, and liberty within bounds.

It seems only fitting to close this review with a rhyme. In *Cooper’s Hill* (1655), John Denham mirrors the measured flow of the river Thames with lines that, while epitomizing the ethos of the heroic couplet, just so happen to provide proper praise for this book:

Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o’er-flowing full.

Katherine B. Attié, *Towson University*
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The Trials of Orpheus: Poetry, Science, and the Early Modern Sublime.

Jenny C. Mann.

Ancient World. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. xxii + 272 pp. \$39.95.

“Orpheus’s lute,” muses Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, “was strung with poets’ sinews” (3.2.77). In her new monograph, Jenny Mann links Shakespeare’s observation to a broader theory of the sublime force of rhetoric and poetry. Her

book recounts how Orpheus emerged from the shadowy realms of Greek antiquity as a legendary embodiment of poetic ecstasy before the writings of Virgil and Ovid gave his story shape and cohesion. During the English Renaissance these classical traces reemerged, signifying the activities of rhetorical *energeia*. The authors in Mann's study draw on the myth of Orpheus to imagine poetry not as created by the poet, but as seducing him, overpowering him, sounding notes from his plucked sinews and binding poet and audience together in lyrical thrall. The legend of Orpheus, and specifically Ovid's Orphic series in books 10 and 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, she argues, gives Renaissance authors a *topos*, a terminology, and imagery for conceiving the force of verbal eloquence.

By her own admission, the book is not organized around a central argument. Instead, Mann scaffolds an Orphic hermeneutics whereby various elements of the Orpheus myth are indexed to a cluster of interlocking ideas: the erotic charge of rhetorical persuasion, the sublime model of authorship and literary influence, and the "preternatural power" of rhetoric as object of epistemological study (69). The effects of Orphic force are enumerated in her chapters—Meandering, Binding, Drawing, Softening, and Scattering—underscoring her claim that for writers in the English Renaissance, *energeia* transforms language, poet, and audience in observable ways. This structure produces some pleasing constellations of classical and Renaissance texts, albeit by sacrificing more sustained readings. But this facilitates rather than diminishes the richness of Mann's argument by enabling her to adumbrate a sublime theory of early modern rhetoric and poetry that is simultaneously violent, nationalistic, and queerly seductive. Mann's link between Orpheus and the sublime is one of the work's central achievements. She builds on valuable recent work by scholars like Patrick Cheney and David L. Sedley by offering scholars a new lexicon of the sublime keyed to the Orpheus myth.

Mann's chapters can be read in isolation (and the reiteration of key concepts throughout suggests that she anticipates such readings), although the chapters build on each other in a way that rewards a full reading. But despite emphasis on the broader arguments, this is a ruminative work, studded with luminous moments in which Mann close reads archaeological sites as perceptively as she does epyllia. She excels at philology, unfolding the intellectual history of images and phrases that might strike others as merely tropic. A reading of Ovid's account of Orpheus's death in chapter 5 is a standout moment. Mann's command of Latin reveals the resonances of Ovid's line "Orphea percussis sociantem carmina nervis" (11.5), which in the original Latin conveys the violence inherent in the harmonious music Orpheus produces. Ovid's account of Orpheus's death, Mann notes, puts the lie to the Ciceronian account of Orpheus as the great civilizer of the savages, suggesting instead that "art *is* savagery, and it aims to subdue *us*" (164). This reading gestures toward the book's larger point that Orphic poetics often explores human nature on the knife edge between civilized and feral states of being.

While Mann often focuses on minor texts and forgotten moments, the sum of these parts is a bolder work than one might expect. Early on she declares “the story of Orpheus *is* the story of humanism” (17). This, it seems to me, is the larger claim Mann professes not to be making—the idea that all the captivating and terrifying tensions of human language and culture inhere in the figure of Orpheus, whose song could tame rocks and trees but could not save him from the savage fury of the Bacchantes. Indeed, she observes that “the moment words *fail* to persuade is precisely the moment that they become Orphic poetry” (186). This provocative and poignant claim is a reminder that Orpheus has much to say about poetry’s power, but also about its failures and limitations. It is one of the many reasons this book is sure to draw a wide and enthusiastic readership among scholars of Renaissance English literature.

Amanda Atkinson, *Southern Methodist University*
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Writers, Editors and Exemplars in Medieval English Texts. Sharon M. Rowley, ed. The New Middle Ages. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. xx + 360 pp. €114.39.

Writers, Editors and Exemplars in Medieval English Texts honors the scholarship of Christina von Nolcken through its attention to what editor Sharon M. Rowley describes as “the literary legacy of the Middle Ages” (2). Within the collection, this legacy comprises the cultural and material circumstances of textual production and consumption. The texts examined are divided between Wycliffite and Lollard texts, and texts that are invested in exemplarity, whether hagiography or its secular echoes. The “exemplar” of the title entails two definitions that straddle these interests: one describing a copy of a particular text, and the other pertaining to conduct. Rowley identifies a lacuna, which the essays aim to fill, by uniting the two in their study of texts and their “writers,” a designation that seeks to “blur distinctions between authors and scribes” through their common work of editing, translating, or redacting (3).

The collection is divided into three sections: the first addresses clerks and readers of Middle English texts, and the second, Lollard redactions of religious texts. The third section, “Old English and Its Afterlife,” is more conceptual, and considers how readers and writers across centuries negotiate the relationship among language, history, and memory. While the volume’s divisions mostly privilege the historical period of the texts, there are other, perhaps more intriguing, connections among the essays. For instance, Fein, Havens, and Peikola investigate writers who actively manipulate their exempla, whether through additions or wholesale changes to the substance of the text. The authors seek to contextualize these editorial decisions by examining the writers’ interests, belief systems, and anticipated audiences. Adams and Irvin both unravel the complex identity of their protagonists against a broader history of