intervening in contemporary debates and hoping thereby to shape the future. Despite the occasional plangent note, Chedzgoy’s book celebrates the voices of the women she studies, voices that are often grieving and nostalgic, but also by turns witty, brittle, defiant, erudite, eccentric, and full of pluck. Women’s Writing in the British Atlantic World is a dignified and elegant monument and memorial to them, even as it encourages us to pursue similar memory work.

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This excellent collection provides a timely assessment of the relationship between feminism and Renaissance studies and should especially interest those working in the fields of women’s studies, English literature, and history. In her introduction, Dympna Callaghan explains in detail the differences between early ("exclusionist") and later ("revisionist") feminist approaches to the Renaissance (5-13). Highlighting what is valuable and what is oversimplified in each, Callaghan asserts the need for a new "post-revisionist" feminism that retains the critique of patriarchal institutions central to exclusionist feminism and the attention to exceptions to the rules characteristic of revisionist feminism. The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies "argue[s] that feminism is far from over, but it is much altered" (Callaghan, 13). The volume includes contributions by a diverse assembly of important scholars whose essays effectively model strategies for thinking critically about and reinvigorating the relationship between feminism and Renaissance studies. Including fifteen essays (plus Callaghan’s introduction) and divided into three main sections—"Theories,""Women," and "Histories"—this interdisciplinary book foregrounds multiple directions from which to consider how feminism intersects with Renaissance studies today.
While all of the essays are excellent, a few are especially illuminating. Jonathan Gil Harris’s refreshingly creative essay exposes affinities, or compelling contiguities, between Margaret Cavendish’s early modern meditations on bodies and matter, and Hélène Cixous’s French feminism in order to reflect upon theoretical oversights in recent studies of early modern material culture, to challenge simplistic notions of “adversarial alterity,” and to resist “the assumption of an absolute temporal difference between past and present” (35). Harris’s essay is particularly compelling because it shows how putting early modern women writers into dialogue with theoretical concerns central to Renaissance studies highlights the value of those women writers’ contributions during their own time and ours. Sasha Roberts, meanwhile, analyzes both Renaissance literary criticism addressed to women and Katherine Philips’s letters to Sir Charles Cotterell to make a brilliant case for the mutual significance of formalism and feminism. Roberts’s essay, which shows how Puttenham “articulat[es] [women’s] exclusion from humanist literary culture while assuming their participation and interest in it as writers and readers,” corresponds closely to Callaghan’s call for a postrevisionist feminism that critiques patriarchal limits imposed upon women while acknowledging some exceptions to those limits (72).

Jean E. Howard’s fascinating discussion of whores in comedies in early modern London is noteworthy for its nuanced demonstration of how merging feminist and historical approaches continue to produce significant new readings of Renaissance drama. Howard argues that “whore plays partly reference the actual social problem of prostitution in early modern London,” while they also use the whore “to examine troubling or novel aspects of urban life, such as the quickening and expansion of the market economy” (118). The clarity with which Howard explains her methodology is especially valuable, given the volume’s goals:

If feminism leads me to ask why this particular female icon appears so often in the London plays of the period, it also prompts me now to seek out answers that go beyond a preoccupation with subversion and containment or victimhood and empowerment to examine how discourses of the feminine, whether or not they directly address the condition of historical women, can speak to the stress points of the age in which they were produced. (118)
Frances E. Dolan similarly highlights the ways her feminist approach addresses today’s theoretical concerns. Her essay linking “undead Catholicism and undead women” (focusing upon Hermione in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*) is innovative in its methodological debt to revisionist histories that interrogate the so-called vanishing or last Native American (216). Dolan shows how feminist attention to intersections between the feminine and Catholicism exposes the historical process by which “Catholics did not vanish from the cultural landscape” but became fodder for “stories that erased them.” She also insightfully foregrounds how an analogous theoretical erasure threatens feminism itself (230):

The premise of this collection is that feminism is now so fully integrated into other knowledge-making projects that it is no longer as sharply defined or isolatable. This would make feminism like the Indians and Catholics who appear to have vanished but have instead intermarried, metamorphosed, adapted, and survived. Survival is a good thing; invisibility and dispossession are not. Rather than mourn, we need to seek out, herald, and demand space for feminism’s new manifestations. (231)

Finally, the collection concludes on a promising note with Gail Kern Paster, who proposes, “hesitantly because heretically,” that we consider “early modern female hormones in order to suggest the possibility of a new utility for the twinned ideas of the universal and the natural in a reconstructed feminist practice” (327). Paster thus confronts binaries between nature and culture, essentialist and constructionist perspectives, by focusing on how hormones—as an example of the biological—are “strongly affected” by “highly variant and class-specific cultural practices in birthing, wet-nursing, and contraception” (328). She rightly advocates for feminist scholarship that would “allow for the fluid interaction of biology and cultural practice in identifying emotional specificities for early modern women” (331).

As Callaghan admits, to illustrate effectively the precise differences between exclusionist and revisionist feminism, she caricatures each to some degree (5). Some of the traits she assigns to the postrevisionist feminism that her edition models have already appeared in other recently published works. Thus, a few of the collection’s essays might strike the reader as interesting
and valuable but not necessarily as new or different in relation to other recent feminist scholarship as the introduction would claim. Nonetheless, the volume clearly “demonstrate[s] beyond the shadow of a doubt that Feminist Renaissance Studies is more alive than ever” (Callaghan, 15).

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The culture and politics of the newly-established Medici duchy in sixteenth-century Florence have long fascinated scholars, and Gabrielle Langdon’s new book underscores not only the complexity of the portraits of its women but also their importance within the court of Duke Cosimo I. Cosimo well understood that women played a significant role within the family, and they figured prominently within his agenda to situate his court among the most powerful in Europe. He ordered an unusually large number of paintings from Jacopo Pontormo, Agnolo Bronzino, and Alessandro Allori to display the virtues of his mother (Maria Salviati), his wife (Eleonora di Toledo), his daughters (Bia, Maria, Lucrezia, and Isabella), and his wards (Giulia d’Alessandro de’ Medici and Eleonora “Dianora” di Toledo de’ Medici). Their carefully formulated portraits contain numerous emblems and references that refer to feminine ideals, cultural prowess, and, above all, Medici hegemony and dynasty. Langdon offers a thorough formal and iconographical analysis of the paintings and uses archival materials and other pertinent primary sources to build a nuanced context for her interpretations. In the spirit of Michael Baxandall’s “period eye,” Langdon tries to reconstruct what the sixteenth-century spectator would have understood from these portraits. A faithful reconstruction of the past is a difficult endeavor, as Langdon herself admits, but her in-depth study makes a determined effort. To set the stage for her interpretations, she