ladies included him in *Those Who Dared: Stories of Early Days in Our Country* (1951) or that Matthew Arnold made a disparaging comparison between Raleigh and Thucydides (1847).

Much that the reader of a bibliography wants to know is simply left out this book; a great deal that seems quite unnecessary is included; the indexing is little help; anyone wishing to use it will be driven to STC, Wing, and Beal, while the omissions compel the reader to doubt the information that is given.

As Armitage gives us less than we expect, Roberts gives us more, presenting a kind of object lesson to bibliographers.

E.J. DEVEREUX, *University of Western Ontario*

Sara Heller Mendelson. *The Mental World of Stuart Women. Three Studies*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. Pp. 235.

In spite of the growth of feminist scholarship in the last decade, seventeenth century literature remains an almost exclusively male preserve. The few women writers who are beginning to be included in the standard anthologies remain exceptional figures, noted for personal peculiarities uncharacteristic of their sex. It is precisely because literary women are so unique in this era that any publication which attempts to penetrate the dark obscurity of their creative sources and identify a commonality in their experiences is a welcome resource.

In the introduction to her book, Sara Mendelson attempts to sort out some of the peculiarities of women's roles and status during the seventeenth century. She finds that women are a subdued groups, mostly illiterate, while those who could write and dared to challenge the masculine dominion over writing most often chose religious subjects. For the most part, women were divided on class lines rather than those of gender, although "gender entailed certain common experiences which transcended class differences" (6). Not surprisingly, female culture was ultimately defined, then as now, in terms of its otherness. It represented the "non-literate obverse of literate male culture, almost as if women sought to compensate for their lack of literate skills through other modes of expression" (7). Some of these modes common to women of all ranks and classes were the knowledge of housewifery, child-bearing and rearing, as well as needlework and textile crafts (8). Women were also allowed to dabble as amateurs in medicine, music and piety. Thus, although there was a certain shared culture based on gender, there was no identifiable source within that female world to account for the literary aspirations of seventeenth-century women.

Mendelson does not provide a sufficient transition from the discussion of female culture in her introduction to the detailed biographies in the rest of the volume. Indeed, she admits to what can be regarded as a major flaw in the work, namely,

that the three case studies she offers do not "provide us with an exhaustive or even a representative picture of Stuart women" (11). Nor does Mendelson adequately explain why she has selected Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle; Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick; and Aphra Behn, other than that they "offer the opportunity to explore some prototypical feminine themes of the seventeenth century: female life stages, patriarchalism in theory and practice, the control of female sexuality, the limitations inherent in women's conventional role and the reactions provoked by those who sought to challenge them" (11).

In the three chapters which form the core of her book, Mendelson painstakingly recreates as much as possible the social context and personal background of these women based upon already extant histories and diary materials. Mendelson's academic approach throughout has the effect of making the lives of these three strikingly different women seem to be rather tediously similar. Unfortunately, while the factual details are all there, the intriguing speculations about these women's real mental lives are missing. Thus, the sense of the woman herself and her mental world, the ostensible subject of this study, remains elusive.

In her first study, that of Margaret Cavendish, Mendelson does attempt to tie together the numerous critiques of marriage that can be found in Cavendish's writings. Mendelson has also included a lively discussion of "Writing as a Vocation" for the Stuart woman and details the various social pressures that prevented women from appearing in print. Margaret Cavendish challenged those who demanded either women's silence or their self-restriction to certain acceptable topics. Yet, as Mendelson points out, Cavendish restricted herself to natural philosophy or science as the subject of most of her writings, since that field "did not require special qualifications" (36) and was inclusive, running "the gamut from atomic theory to unbridled fantasies about the fairies and other worlds" (37). Margaret's immersion in science is detailed sufficiently to reveal the way in which a woman writer is "drawn slowly into the orbit of learned men" (43) with the resultant mixture of hostility at the educational opportunities that have been denied her and resentment of the treatment her own discoveries received.

The discussion of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, is less rewarding than that of Margaret Cavendish. Mary Boyle was most interesting before her marriage when she challenged the patriarchy by refusing all the suitors her parents put forward. All rebellion ceased when she did marry, and she became more immersed in piety each year. Mary's writings detail the religious exercises she practiced daily in response to her unhappy marriage and the death of her young son. Mary's story is as atypical as that of Margaret Cavendish, and we learn little here about the mental life beneath the structures of her religious devotions.

The chapter on Aphra Behn suffers from the same central problems as the discussions of the other two women. Mendelson is on softer ground here, since as she notes, there are so few facts about Aphra Behn for the historian to seize upon. For this reason, Behn's active feminism and challenge to conventional expectations

about sex roles is better dealt with by a literary biographer approaching Behn's mental world through her voluminous writings. The bare facts about Behn's life – her employment as a spy, her career as a playwright and poet, the accusations of plagiarism against her – have all been documented elsewhere, and little that is new is added here. The discussion of Aphra Behn, however, like those of Margaret Cavendish and Mary Rich, serves as a useful thumbnail biography.

In summary, then, *The Mental World of Stuart Women* provides us with something rather different than its title suggests. Instead of offering profound insights into the development of the female self in a patriarchal society, we are given glimpses of the ways in which three very different women accommodated themselves to various kinds of social strictures. Their mental worlds (and they remain three different mental worlds) are explored through three different kinds of literary material as well – the expository “scientific” prose of Margaret Cavendish, the pietistic diary of Mary Rich, and the poems and plays of Aphra Behn. In the end, these case studies remain atypical and do not provide a view of a shared mental attitude among seventeenth century women. These studies are, however, useful as brief biographies of women who challenged masculine domination in various ways.

LORELEI CEDERSTROM, *Brandon University*