of the king one step closer to divine right monarchy and absolute rule. These, and many other individual and connected themes, make Dr. Lerner's book a thoughtful and challenging work. Seldom will a reader find a book based on such a broad and penetrating examination of secondary and primary materials so clear, concise and cogent.

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Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women. Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama*. Harvester Press, Brighton, 1981. Pp. 234. £18.95.

The image of woman as warrior and huntress encapsulated in the idea of the Amazon has long fascinated poets and writers from Homer and Herodotus down to Bob Dylan, who envisaged his Sara as a 'glamorous nymph with an arrow and bow.' The ancient Amazons were a self-governing community of women, famous for their skill in battle, who worshipped the virgin goddess Artemis and despised marriage and the society of men; they were mainly associated with areas of North-west Africa or with the Black Sea region around the Thermodon River, although in the Renaissance groups were reported in South America. The still unsettled question of the historical reality of such a race of man-hating women warriors is less significant now than the imaginative potency of this androgynous figure, beloved of the visual arts as well as literature; she is variously depicted as a bare-breasted nymph in Doric tunic and sandals, helmeted fighter with crescent shield and corselet of mail, wild-haired Boadicean virago dressed in animal skins, and decorative martial maid of Renaissance epic and romance with embroidered buskins and golden hair. Amazons and warrior women appear frequently in English Renaissance literature, in *Arcadia* and *The Faerie Queene* and Yong's translation of Montemayor's *Diana*, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, in travel stories like *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, in Raleigh's *History of the World*, in Heywood's compilation of ancient worthies, *Gunaikeion: or, Nine Bokes of Various History Concerning Women*, as well as in masques, pageants and numerous plays by Beaumont and Fletcher, Heywood, and others. Queen Elizabeth herself appeared 'habited like an Amazonian Queene' at Tilbury in 1588, and it was no accident that the image of Britannia, which originated on Roman coins, asserted itself in English imperialist mythology at this time.

Simon Shepherd's book, *Amazons and Warrior Women. Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama*, addresses itself to a concept which had considerable topical currency; as his subtitle indicates, he is concerned to present a very specific approach to it, one which excludes considerations of either the history of the Amazon tradition or of its iconography. Even so, the title is a little misleading in suggesting a larger view of the subject than is provided. To begin with, the plays discussed come all from the pre-Civil War period, and largely from the first twenty years of the seventeenth century. It is easy to see why Shepherd confines himself in this way, since his theories about the political significance of the warrior woman concept relate mainly to the reign of James I and culminate in the feminist activities of the early years

of the Revolution; it is tantalizing to have the prospect of a discussion of feminist attitudes in, say, the plays of Dryden, Shadwell, or Southerne, where there would be much of interest, suggested but not undertaken. Then, as Shepherd admits in his introduction, 'feminism' in the seventeenth century is a far cry from the 1980s, and has little to do with questions of women's rights in a political sense; it is true, as Christopher Hill, Keith Thomas, and others have shown, that radical Puritan sects favoured religious and marital equality for women, and even in theory sexual freedom for both sexes, but little of this is reflected in the drama. I agree it is hard to know what other word Shepherd could have used but almost none of his texts truly count as 'feminist' in the sense of actively campaigning for more social or political rights for women. Finally, the Amazons and warrior women turn out, disappointingly, to be for the most part metaphorical rather than real, and although some of them, like Long Meg of Westminster, or Moll Frith, the Roaring Girl, are aggressive in a manly way and literally use men's weapons to fight, others, like the virtuous martyr-figure Lucina in Fletcher's *Valentinian* or Tormiella in Dekker's *Match Me in London*, assert moral superiority over men but otherwise share no observable characteristics with Penthisilia or with Spenser's Britomart. In the introduction, Shepherd distinguishes Amazons and warrior women as opposed types – Amazons are strong, or, to use his favourite adjective of commendation, 'tough' women who use their strength 'for non-virtuous, specifically lustful ends' (like Radigund), while warrior women are fighters 'whose weapon is their verbal wit or who are armed with the strength of their moral views' (like Britomart) – but the distinction is not consistently maintained. In fact, so varied is the collection of female characters related to their whole tradition, ranging from virgin martyrs and chaste heroines like the lady in *Comus* to the more predictable roaring girls and Boadicean viragos, that it seems as if almost any woman who speaks up for herself to oppose a man can be made relevant. This said, *Amazons and Warrior Women* is a valuable book and has a real subject, though it isn't quite what the title suggests.

Shepherd takes as his starting point the battle between Radigund and Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, and proceeds from there to examine the wider moral and political affiliations of the warrior woman figure during the reign of James I. He makes especially interesting connections between this kind of peculiarly female aggressiveness and the anti-Catholic anti-Spanish Protestant alliance for which Prince Henry was so vital a figurehead, and also the 'broad Puritanism' associated with various kinds of social change such as the abolition of the property marriage. The warrior woman is seen as a general image for woman as outsider or 'other' in a culture formed on and dominated by masculine patriarchal values; she challenges these values in many different ways, as by asserting her own right to choose a sexual partner, by expressing a commitment to marriage and to equality within marriage, by exchanging witty banter with men on equal intellectual terms, by literally beating up men who are disruptive or unruly within her sphere of influence, by taking the way of active martyrdom in order to stand up for the right to control her own body. He does not discuss either witches or prostitutes, both figures represented in a number of plays of the period, who might more truly be seen as outsider figures and challengers of male values than some of the female types he does include, and who could have been interestingly placed in the chapter on women and work. These modes of challenge he sees as political and not simply personal or sexual; they derive their meaning from the

actions of Spenser's Britomart, in whom the warrior woman was first invested with connotations of 'aggressive Protestantism,' and gather accretions of significance in the early years of the seventeenth century, where dramatists look back nostalgically to the days of that English Amazon, Elizabeth I, often identified with other armed maidens such as Artemeis and Astraea, as for instance in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*, Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon*, or, in Shepherd's radical and convincing new interpretation, the anonymous play *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*.

The vitality and excitement with which these ideas are developed come across strongly in the chapters on Roaring Girls, 'Popery, Politics and Purity,' and 'The Politics of Boadicea.' Sometimes Shepherd's enthusiasm to make connections gets the better of him, and in his impatience to have done with what he clearly regards as the dreary business of accumulating evidence and summarising plots ('It would be tedious and useless simply to assemble a catalogue ...' 'What I intend to do, in order to circumvent the boredom ...') he skips too quickly over necessary steps in his arguments. Sometimes the perfunctory plot summaries are misleading or inaccurate (as of *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Comus*). His style of writing is colloquial and racy, perhaps as a measure of defensiveness in a book partially devoted to what he calls more than once 'obscure texts'; at times it comes across as rather desperately up-to-the-minute, with joky references to Semprini and Margaret Thatcher, and an analogy likening the relationship of Elizabeth and Mary Stuart to that of Doris Day and Mae West. The colloquialisms can be obfuscatory; where, as often happens, women characters are described as 'sorting out' men one cannot always be sure whether Shepherd means picking out the good from the bad or beating the whole lot up. It is an exciting and often very perceptive book which reanimates some forgotten works and refocusses our attention on some familiar ones (with an interesting reading of *Measure for Measure* as a critique of the virgin-martyr play, for instance); it follows up the kind of thinking about Renaissance drama and seventeenth-century society pursued in Margot Heinemann's recent book *Puritanism and Theatre*, and although it promises what it cannot always deliver in the way of feminist studies, it has much to interest and provoke students of Jacobean theatre and its obscurer texts.

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