Interest in what the editor calls 'early women writers' (p. vii) is growing apace, and hence the need for editions of their work. This new edition of selected plays by Margaret Cavendish is timely considering the attention which this author (1623-76) is at present attracting. What is more, by any standard Cavendish's plays are easily good enough to deserve to be rescued from the oblivion which has for the most part been their lot. The selection offered in this anthology is gratifyingly diversified, and one would like to see an edition appear, now, of all of Cavendish's nineteen plays.

At this point, though, I feel I need to express some disappointment with the editor's presentation of the texts of the plays which she has chosen for this volume. Shaver explains (p. xi) that she has 'retained Cavendish's eccentric spelling, grammar, and punctuation because these are aspects of her works that have occasioned comment from the moment they appeared'. However, there are actually very few features of Cavendish's English as offered by Shaver which are not representative of other texts printed around 1660 (Cavendish's plays were published in 1662 and 1668). Some matters which puzzle the editor should not have done so, like the use of question marks instead of exclamation marks, which is in no sense uncommon for the period. Shaver in essence produces an 'old-spelling' text, which makes it impossible for a reader to see which features are truly 'eccentric' and which are not, and which provides modern readers with an impediment to ready understanding of Cavendish's English. It would have been wiser, and more helpful, to modernise the text systematically, and to draw attention to 'eccentric' usage only where that really needs to happen.

These are not trivial matters, for, although Cavendish's English is not as difficult or remote as it would have been if the plays had appeared a century or so earlier, it is not the case that a modern reader will not be confused by it. Let me take just one instance of punctuation which without comment is unintelligible to a non-specialist modern reader. On p. 38 one of the characters says: 'O that his eyes had that piercing faculty [of seeing through me], for then perchance he might have seen; I am not so simple as my behaviour made me appear.' What is meant here is, surely, 'If his eyes were piercing enough to look through me, he might have seen that I am not as simple as my behaviour made me seem'; but the semi-colon prevents an untrained modern reader from grasping the syntax of the sentence. Nor does the editor, whose comments on the specifics of the texts are all too rare, explain that the occurrence of the semi-colon here has no syntactical significance.

However, the reader who is used to reading seventeenth-century texts, or 'old-spelling' editions of them, and who is prepared to use the OED and other reference books with some regularity, will find much of value in the plays themselves, and in the editor's introduction (brief though that is). I concur
REVIEWS

with the editor's assessment that 'All four of these plays, like all of Cavendish's dramatic works, contain complex representations of gender roles and gender expectations. The characters are alive and distinctive, far more nuanced than their humorous names suggest' (p. 14). The Convent of Pleasure, in particular, strikes me as an artistic success, though, unlike the editor, I do not read it as expressing serious reservations about relations between the sexes, but rather as showing that, when all is said and done, men and women are attracted to, and need, each other. That, indeed, seems to me one of Cavendish's persistent concerns elsewhere too, as in Love's Adventures, where various obstacles to marriage are eventually triumphantly and satisfyingly overcome.

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In this book April London's aim is to provide the missing link in many scholarly approaches to the nature of property in eighteenth-century England by including the female stance. She sets out to do this in her painstaking investigation of the property theme in a representative group of novels from the 1740s to the 1790s by male and female writers. The 18th-century socio-cultural debate serves as framework for her wide ranging analysis of ideological and formal issues related to the rise of the novel and its impact on women's appropriation of social status through property.

The classical conventions of pastoral and georgic, contrasting colours in the 18th-century neoclassical ideological and aesthetic pattern, constitute the structural and thematic framework of London's study. The classical heritage is a stable norm but in its neoclassical form it is also prone to change. This duality is exploited by London in her analyses of the texts she has chosen and in the careful attention which is paid to the social and generic contexts of the novels. A key concept in her analysis is the process of continual transformation which pastoral and georgic undergo in the course of the second half of the 18th century. The georgic emphasis on labour, a male activity in the classical genre, is in Clarissa the domain of the heroine. The element of emancipation is toned down towards the end of the novel when after Clarissa's death the virtuous male takes over as narrator and editor of her letters. The pastoral yearning for leisure is shown to be at the heart of Mackenzie's and Sterne's novels in which the company of women is shunned. One aspect of conceptual transformation is the tendency we find in Richardson and other writers on London's list to confront stereotypical characters, standing for classical convention, and developing characters who act as agents of ideological change. Narrative conventions are confronted with formal experiment and change of narrative focus. In Part II colonial narratives are included in which the pastoral refers to the primitive so-