

analysis. But these are minor quibbles: Andrea has produced an illuminating, important book that should be read well beyond its immediate field.

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*The Matter of Virtue: Women's Ethical Action from Chaucer to Shakespeare.*  
Holly A. Crocker.

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Gervase Markham's *English Housewife* (1631) advertises itself as a guide to the "inward and outward Vertues which ought to be in a compleate Woman." He quickly dispatches with "inward vertues" such as zeal for religion, modesty, and temperance in order to focus on the "outward vertues," those skills and knowledges required for "the preservation and care of the family touching their health and soundness of body." Outward virtue is "a phisicall kinde of knowledge" because it comprises the housewife's tacit intimacies with kitchen, buttery, brew house, and fishpond (Markham cited by Crocker, 148). The vibrant know-how of outward virtue takes shape in actions performed for others and often taps the special virtues or powers of herbs, oils, metals, and microbes. Markham's ensemble of inward and outward virtues composes an ethical ecology—cognitive, affective, social, and physical—in which women developed their person-affirming and other-relating capacities in concert with the things and processes of the world.

Markham is one of the many writers that Holly Crocker marshals in her wide-ranging study of the meanings and uses of virtue for women in late medieval and early modern English literature. Works by Chaucer, Lydgate, Spenser, and Shakespeare, among others, reveal the considerable powers enjoyed by women to organize their bodies, persons, households, and worlds under virtue's mingled canopy of skills and comportments. Crocker builds on Alisdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (first published in 1981), which established the impoverishment of virtue's semantic and practical range in ethics after Kant and Hume. Crocker also draws on feminist thinkers who have emphasized the gendered valences of virtue in both disciplinary and emancipatory projects. For Aristotle, the moral virtues always integrate passionate and rational faculties in participatory teleologies that infuse the affairs of daily life with aspiration and value. For women, Crocker argues, the situated qualities of virtue are heightened by the physical and affective environments of their labor and the special vulnerabilities of their sex. A feminine virtue like constancy solicits "a relentless openness to the world's contingencies" and initiates "ethical change . . . brought about by a collaboration of myriad and varied forces, human and divine, spiritual and material" (112). Modern ethics disavows the feminine forms of corporeal engagement that make virtue such a

vivacious, porous, and contingent enterprise in the long Aristotelianism that flowers in Aquinas and deepens in the writings of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Crocker thus revises MacIntyre's thesis to argue that duty eclipsed virtue because the way that virtue derives strength from weakness reflects women's ways of being in the world.

Crocker's comprehensive introduction integrates contemporary philosophy with medieval and Renaissance texts read from a feminist perspective. Part 1 highlights the leprous legacy of Cressida, who materializes an unlikely dignity, "material, living, and literary," that beckons to readers beyond heroic *virtus* and public shaming in works by Chaucer, Lydgate, Henryson, and Shakespeare (42). Part 2 pursues the supplementation of virtue by grace in medieval theology and literature. In a moral world in which human virtue depends on the gifts of grace, female excellence "proceeds through relational, reciprocal enrichment" (112). When grace becomes social and aesthetic, as it does in Spenser, the collaborative symmetries of dance "interweave action and reliance to furnish a fuller picture of women's potential for embodied excellence" (190). Part 3 pairs patient Grisela with the recalcitrant shrew; usually occupying opposite qualities of rebellion and compliance, Crocker shows how these wifely types contribute to anti-absolutist inquiries into companionate marriage. Griselda's patience, Crocker argues, is not a passive submission to male rule but a voluntary comportment and creative fashioning of ethical commitment within scenes of labor and care.

*The Matter of Virtue* is courageous, temperate, just, and discerning, and it is also constant, faithful, patient, and full of hope. Crocker orchestrates the cardinal virtues, their theological addenda, and their feminine supplements to compose a renewed virtue discourse sustained by feminist philosophy, literary studies, and the history of ideas. Crocker has produced a major work that persuasively demonstrates the affordances of virtue across medieval and early modern studies, with implications for how we study, teach, and work, as well as nurse, heal, and love today.

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*The Female Baroque in Early Modern English Literary Culture: From Mary Sidney to Aphra Behn.* Gary Waller.

Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 288 pp. €105.

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Some books feel as if they have always been there and when they appear we wonder how we did without them. This is one of those. In a wide-ranging study, Gary Waller explores the Baroque less as a historical period than as a sense of permanent disruptiveness that recurs throughout history, and "often cyclically" (19). Manifesting as a chronic restiveness—an inability to resolve the exaggerated extremes of its own making—the