

or voices of the feminine (or, more often, of feminists). This book incorporates an overview of traditional scholarship into a fresh, critically sound, and accessible approach that speaks to feminist and indeed *post*-feminist needs and methodologies. It is a welcome and important addition to the growing library of studies on Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, as well as an extremely strong example of the applications of critical theory to pre-modern literature and culture.

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**Juliette Merritt. *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Female Spectators*. University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 154.**

**D**uring her lifetime, Eliza Haywood (1693?-1756) enjoyed a privileged position as a woman engaged in social endeavors and activities that placed her at the core of public life. She was an actress, a prolific author of plays, novels, and other literary works, as well as a publisher and bookseller. Arguably her experience as an actress may have influenced

her authorial voice and her perceptions of sight and seeing as well as her craving for a public persona. Juliette Merritt's close readings of Haywood's narratives argue that often her authorial position is that of spectator. Merritt explores the significance of the gaze at different levels to assert women's identity, the realms of their power, and how to influence their social condition.

Drawing from theoretical concerns with the visual and discursive dynamics of gender construction and identity, Merritt examines a selection of Haywood's fictions to illustrate how Haywood uses her work to influence and defy the binary stereotyping of the period: male as spectator and female as spectacle. It is within this exploration of the voyeuristic nature of the gaze that Merritt's key contribution lies.

She begins by examining desire and the gaze in *Love in Excess* (1719), Haywood's first novel. The eighteenth-century fascination with optical devices and visual effects is, as Merritt points out, evident in the Haywood narratives that are the focus of her study. Men voyeuristically viewed women as eroticized objects of desire. Alovisa, the protagonist of this novel, escapes this role and tries

to manipulate the male gaze. The desire to see matches the desire to know, establishing a link with a stereotypically feminine trait, curiosity. Alovisa will join the chorus of female characters punished for their desire for knowledge. She will die as a result of her own blindness when she flees the scene of the infidelity she has witnessed.

Conversely, in Merritt's second chapter, the unmanned aristocratic heroine of *Fantomina* (1725) succeeds where Alovisa failed. The world of performance and masquerade is exposed as a space where women can aspire to be spectators as well as spectacle. Here, desire and seduction are explored within the realms of sight and spectacle. Being seen is being desired with a twist. *Fantomina* will act on her desire by disguising herself, leading her lover to believe that he has made a new conquest. She, rather than he, is the agent in the power game of seduction. Freedom from gender stereotyping by virtue of masquerade has dangerous subversive potential. The mask allows for anonymity and provides women with a disembodied identity that flows between who is desired and who desire in a continuum where boundaries are transgressed.

In Chapter 3, Merritt examines other devices that facilitate desires

and its fulfillment: the power of amorous surroundings (the garden and its idyllic associations with paradise), transparent garments, love letters, and flattery. One of the most interesting aspects of Cleomira's story, in *The British Recluse* (1722), argues Merritt, is how the ambivalent nature of flattery is exposed. This act of seduction and self-discovery often leads to women's self-abandonment and exposes their vulnerability to praise. Cleomira has withdrawn from the gaze of the world and lives secluded after her seducer's betrayal. Unlike previous heroines, her story comes to life by virtue of her being unseen. Unsurprisingly her absence awakens a woman's, rather than a man's, curiosity. Here, female discourse solicited by female spectatorship opens the opportunity for female authorship. The language of adulation and sweet talk acts as an ambivalent subterfuge of desire. It allows men to delude and persuade unwary women to surrender; conversely it arouses a new sense of identity and self-esteem in women. However, the erotic connotations of the voyeuristic gaze overwhelms any cautionary sense that would prevent women from falling prey to men's enticements.

Chapter 4 explores further this tension between female desiring subject and female authorship

from an epistemological perspective that complements the previous exploration of sexual forms of woman's desire and aspiration. Haywood's willingness to exploit her image and persona in order to attain unrestricted coverage erases the line between her text and her body (p. 120). In this respect, Haywood resembles other female authors who draw upon their own lives and experience to explore issues of independence from social judgment, exclusion, and abuse, from Hrotswitha or Heloise to Sor Juana Inés or Saint Theresa.

Merritt argues that Haywood transcends the role of spectacle assigned to females by achieving the role of spectator, be it through masquerade, mistaken identity, spying, or other tactics. Haywood is aware that to exercise power the author needs to assume the "looker-on" position. She uses prefaces and dedications as vehicles to voice her concerns about social restrictions on women, in particular limits on female education, and social prejudice. This provides an opportunity for the boundaries between subject and object of the gaze to be blurred; similarly the relationship of agency and sight do not exclude each other. The relationship between language and female subjectivity is crucial to

understanding Haywood's effort to have a voice and make an impact.

As Merritt asserts, positioning the feminine self at the center of everyone's gaze, withstanding the social expectations of courtship and marriage, breaks the bipolar portrayal of man as agent and woman as object of desire (p. 116). Thus, reinstating a third way "the coquette" allows woman a privileged position, simultaneously center stage and able to cast her gaze and exchange glances, without abiding by conventional principles.

This title attracted me because of its reference to female spectators and spectacle. It was perhaps my own mistake to expect it to convey information on women as audience, literally theatergoers or spectators. Alas, this is one aspect that I have found lacking. Although Merritt addresses the significance of spectacle in Haywood's era, her focus is on Haywood's novels. Information is scarce about responses from the wider female readership or the contemporary average woman spectator of Haywood's productions. The refreshing and enlightening nature of these additional sources is illustrated by some references to Haywood's supporters and detractors briefly included in the last chapter. Exploring this data

and the interaction between the authorial voice and that of the readership may open insights on the construction of feminine authorship. Merritt's examination of Haywood's fiction has made me wonder to what extent the authorial position Haywood advocates corresponds to fellow women spectators' aspirations and/or experience.

Nonetheless, Merritt's examination of women's authorial position as instrumental in molding and counteracting gender stereotyping in the eighteenth century is a great addition to the literature on women writers and female narrative voices.

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***Caritas Pirckheimer:  
A Journal of the  
Reformation Years, 1524-  
1528, translated with  
introduction, notes, and  
essay by Paul A. MacKenzie.  
(Library of Medieval  
Women.) D. S. Brewer,  
2006. Pp. 189.***

**T**he Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century has been the focus of much scholarly attention.

However, study of its effects on religious women is fairly recent. Over the last two decades, significant attention has been focused on exploring the social, literary, and ideological contributions that women made to both sides of Christian reform. Paul A. MacKenzie's English translation of Caritas Pirckheimer's writings, published three years after his untimely death from leukemia, is both representative of this trend and necessary for its continuation. This is the first complete English edition of the writings of a woman who has attracted much recent attention (a detailed bibliography can be found in the Franciscan Women Database: [franwomen.sbu.edu](http://franwomen.sbu.edu)).

*Caritas' Journal* contains a personal account of the practical and ideological difficulties her community faced as a result of Christian reform. In Nürnberg, the secular authorities' acceptance of reformed principles caused difficulties for those in religious life. The few studies of female religious during this period cannot convey their problems as poignantly as the writings of one who experienced them as does *Caritas'* depiction of the difficulties of the Nürnberg Poor Clares during the period from 1524 to 1528. Instead of a literal rendering