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English Literature, Mary Beth Rose. Chicago:
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Dan Mills

Mary Beth Rose's new book *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* offers a unique look at four sets of very diverse texts in the context of the much debated topic of gender. The four essays in this book attempt to deconstruct the typically male-oriented characteristic of heroism as it is exemplified in Renaissance drama, Queen Elizabeth's personal writings, seventeenth century female autobiography, and three works concerning slavery. While each of these essays can stand alone very well, there seems to be a lack of cohesiveness running through all of them, and a reader might wonder if Rose might have attempted to cover too much in writing this book.

As Rose points out in her preface, heroism is typically associated with masculinity, and masculinity is typically associated with action, thus the prevalence of literature that portrays protagonists who are conquerors, political figures, or maniacal murderers. Rose asserts, however, that heroism of endurance wins out over heroism of action, thus contradicting male-dominated narrative. For Rose, heroism of endurance stems from an originary position of subservience, and, while it is never invoked, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic waits in the wings to strengthen her argument. Rose also points out that the change in social structure allowed men the ability to gain a place in society through hard work and education rather than by birth or military conquest. The increasing influence of Protestant doctrine also contributes to this heroism of endurance by turning spiritual focus inward. Stating that "heroism is part of a process by which culture assigns meanings and determines values" (xviii), Rose concludes her preface with the assertion that by the end of the seventeenth century heroism of endurance has supplanted heroism of action through the portrayal of suffering embodied by female characters. This suffering, according to Rose, plants the seed for the prevalence of the novel in post Restoration English literature.

The first essay to apply Rose's theories of heroism addresses four early modern plays: *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *Volpone*, and *Macbeth*. Early in the essay Rose states that Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare are all as "unconcerned with, disgusted by, and eager to marginalize, demonize, and exclude women and the female as it is possible to be and still write plays" (2). It is curious that Rose waits until the first essay to use such feminist language; it would have

been more appropriate in the preface. After laying the groundwork for a feminist critique of these four plays, Rose starts with *Tamburlaine* claiming Zenocrate's role to be that of an impediment to the progress of the title character. Labeling Tamburlaine's seduction of Zenocrate as rape, Rose concludes that Tamburlaine occupies both a male and female subject position, as his descriptions by other characters objectify him in the manner one might expect in the description of a female character. This simultaneous occupation of male and female space plays a recurring role in Rose's book, but she does not apply it to all of the plays discussed in the first essay. For instance, she uses Lacanian language to discuss the identity formation of Faustus, and she discusses Anthony and Cleopatra as much as she does Macbeth in the final section of the essay ostensibly reserved merely for a discussion of Macbeth. *Volpone*, on the other hand, portrays a character who seeks to occupy all subject positions, including male and female, master and slave, and prince and pauper.

While the first essay leaves a slight sense of organizational confusion, the next essay on Queen Elizabeth's personal writings and speeches hits closer to Rose's intended mark. According to Rose, all of Elizabeth's speeches were "concerned with establishing Elizabeth's royal authority [...] in gendered terms" (28). Citing Louis Montrose's assertion that Elizabeth's image resulted from English Renaissance culture, Rose convincingly demonstrates that Elizabeth cultivated this image as both mother and virgin, thus embracing traditional female roles while at the same time bending the rules of the gender hierarchy by being a female in power. Elizabeth used her unique male position as a source for power while at the same time refusing to emphasize her divine right to rule as was done by both her predecessor and successor. Toward the end of this well-structured chapter, Rose defines the essence of heroism as the need "To kill or die well" (38), setting up a gendered binary opposition.

The third essay in Rose's book discusses autobiographies by four women in the seventeenth century. These autobiographies demonstrate, for Rose, a common desire among the authors to find a spiritual identity through sexual relationships and social life. Rose lists several reasons for the advent of female autobiography, including an increased realm of privacy for women, the lack of formal constraints of the genre, the infrequency of publication, and the shared experience of living through the English Civil War, the chaos of which had a liberating effect on their gender positions. Margaret Cavendish, on the other hand, specifically wrote her autobiography to be published; the result is apparently a "run-on narrative" (64)

riddled with hyperbole and contradiction. It is unclear how Rose's discussion of this particular autobiography fits in with the rest of the book. Labeling her a hero of endurance, Alice Thornton lived through fire, revolution, smallpox, near-drowning, and rape to the age of eighty-one; this particular author appears to have more relevance in the context of the discussion of heroism. Ann Fanshaw similarly displays heroic characteristics as she stood beside her husband through a great deal of misfortune; Rose asserts that this gives her a male position of heroics, while her endurance of fourteen pregnancies and nine miscarriages gives her the trait of endurance.

The final essay is the most disjointed of the book; it discusses three works (Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Behn's *Oroonoko*, and Mary Astell's *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*) that Rose brings together by their portrayal of slave characters. The master-slave dialectic again looming large behind her argument, Rose demonstrates that Samson's phallic victories over his enemies leads to his fall from power to an enslaved female subject position; she writes, "the deconstruction of his [Samson's] hypermasculinity [...] represents a shift in the mode of conceptualizing heroic experience itself" (101). Oroonoko similarly occupies a female subject position as an enslaved individual. The essay breaks down, however, when Rose discusses Astell's work, stating that it is also about a slave (the married woman). Labeling her Milton's political opposite, Astell states in her work that marriage is unsuitable to any woman, thus undercutting the bases of male heroics of action and proposing an alternative female subject position of heroic endurance. All three works, according to Rose, begin with a failed heroics of action that proves ineffectual and proposes the female alternative. While the discussion of each text works in and of itself, the essay exhibits the lack of cohesion from which the entire book seems to suffer.

Rose has several other publications concerning the role of gender in early modern literature; she previously published one of the essays in *Gender and Heroism in Milton Studies* (1997). The University of Chicago Press typically puts out innovative work, and this one, although somewhat troubled, is no exception. Although lacking in an overall cohesiveness, her new book adds useful insight to the more recent directions of gender role studies; it is most likely a must read for anyone attempting to stay current in the field.

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