

**Pilar Cuder-Domínguez. 2011**  
***Stuart Women Playwrights, 1613-1713***  
**Farnham: Ashgate**

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This sensitive and thoughtful volume looks at British women dramatists across the usual divide of the seventeenth century, following women's writing from the Caroline to Carolean period. This breaching of publishing boundaries bears fruit, allowing Cuder-Domínguez to chart the interconnections between writers actively engaged with the classical repertoire of their day, a repertoire that endured as a connective thread through the lived experience of the century, despite our desire to compartmentalise works on the basis of the macro political context.

Cuder-Domínguez offers a series of detailed and thought-provoking readings of women's tragedy and tragicomedy, picking up some of the shared concerns and linkages between their works. While eschewing the idea of an explicit construction of sisterly tradition, as Margaret Ezell so wisely warned us against, this strategy nevertheless allows the reader to trace themes, borrowings and overlaps emerging in women's tragedy.

Alongside the collating of key existing scholarship on the texts and women themselves, Cuder-Domínguez's thorough re-readings centre on the representation of gender relations and race within the political economy of leading tragedies. Her reading of Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* suggests that if we step beyond biographical, explanatory constructions of her text, Cary emerges as a writer closely involved in the representation of power and privilege in the transition between social orders, as Dympna Callaghan and Stephanie Hodgson-Wright have explored. Moving from the closet drama of the pre-Civil War and Interregnum era to the public stage,

and to closet dramas or unproduced dramas of the late seventeenth century, Cuder-Domínguez gently probes critics' desire for female heroines and heroism in the wide range of women's tragic writing from Frances Boothby through Aphra Behn to Mary Pix and beyond. She argues that there are no simple structures – such as competing pairs of female roles, one passive one active – and, that to limit interpretation to these tropes of femininity is to miss some of the complexity of the tragedies, particularly in their political applicability for readers and audiences of their day. This argument finds clearest expression in the chapter on Catherine Trotter, which takes three of Trotter's texts and examines the shifts in Trotter's Whig allegiance as expressed in the different resolutions to *Agnes de Castro*, *The Unhappy Penitent*, and *The Revolution in Sweden*. Trotter's articulation of women characters who “transcended the limits of women's conventional roles [... to] be a true leader and moral guidance for the whole country” (p. 119) offered a rational alternative to the more passionate investments in femininity with which tragedy of her time was littered. This lively reading of women's dramatic tragedies reminds us of the richness of these neglected works. Cuder-Domínguez's analysis reveals the rewards of paying close attention to the representation of gendered roles not only in terms of feminist recuperation, but also as politically resonant negotiations of power.

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*How to cite this review:*

Millling, Jane. Review of Pilar Cuder-Domínguez. 2011. *Stuart Women Playwrights*, 1613-1713 (Farnham: Ashgate). *SEDERI* 22 (2012): 173-174.

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