

REVIEWS

Jonathan Smith. *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 349. £64.00.

Gowan Dawson. *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. 282. £50.00.

As the host university of the 2009 Darwin Anniversary Festival, which celebrates the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin and the 150-year anniversary of the publication of *Origin of Species*, Cambridge is busy rolling new Darwin scholarship off the presses. Two of its most recent offerings, Jonathan Smith's *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* and Gowan Dawson's *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability* reflect the ever-expanding attention to Darwin by literary scholars and cultural historians in twenty-first century scholarship. Both too reflect current concerns to eschew the concept of the 'Darwinian revolution' by avoiding discussions of *Origin of Species*, instead focusing on Darwin's earlier works or on sexual rather than natural selection and also, as Dawson especially does, by situating Darwin alongside other proponents of evolution such as T.H. Huxley, William Kingdon Clifford and John Tyndall. In the current climate of intensified interest in the already-thriving Darwin industry such fashionable preoccupations could prove to be a blessing or a curse: new books on Darwin will have to genuinely live up to their cutting-edge claims if they are to stand out from the thickening crowd.

Jonathan Smith's contribution is an excellent close study of Darwin's 'imagetexts', as he calls them, borrowing theoretical terminology from the art historian W.J.T. Mitchell. How, Smith asks, would Darwin 'get his readers literally to see in evolutionary terms what they had been trained to regard differently?' (50). Through a series of detailed case studies of barnacles, birds, plants, faces and worms Smith argues that Darwin modified rather than abandoned existing visual conventions which implicitly reinforced the establishment of taxonomical boundaries between species, or used textual glosses to encourage his readers to 'see' the same images differently. So in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* Darwin drew respectfully on the natural-theological work of Charles Bell, but included many illustrations of dogs and cats expressing emotions Bell had classified as 'human', denying through placement and content any fundamental difference between human and animal expression. Or, Darwin exploited moments of rupture between text and image ('image/texts' in Mitchell's terms) in the work of the taxidermist John Gould, who, in *The Birds of Great Britain*, had himself manipulated illustrations of the cuckoo to misleadingly suggest that the cuckoo's foster-siblings were ejected from their nest not by the cuckoo itself but by their own parents in an inexplicable act of 'nurturing and love' (112). Gould's problematic

domestication of natural violence, reinterpreted as an instance of parental benevolence in a divinely-ordered world, was easily exploited by Darwin, who saw the cuckoo's behaviour as evidence of the evolutionary instinct to survive. Though it is regretful that there are no colour illustrations in the book, nonetheless Smith reproduces a wealth of illustrations, diagrams, cartoons and photographs and analyses them skilfully and sensibly. His book will prove useful and fascinating to anybody working in nineteenth-century history of science, intellectual or cultural history, and art history.

But, given the wealth of the material on offer here, moreover, one wonders whether a bolder argument could have been evinced than that Darwin modified, explained or exploited existing visual conventions to support his reinterpretation of the records of biology and geology. The problem is partly a matter of organisation: the book's thematic structure leads to repetition, so that each chapter offers an illuminating and carefully investigated case study but does little to advance the argument. But it is also a matter of balance. Smith does in fact organise the book around a much more striking claim than that which emerges from his close readings of scientific images and their textual accompaniments: namely, that John Ruskin saw Darwinian evolution as a direct and deliberate threat to his own aesthetic system and to the cultural status of fine art. Unfortunately, the fact that this claim is largely unsubstantiated by any evidence means that Smith is often forced, despite the rhetorical weight he puts upon it, to relegate the discussion of Ruskin to the last few paragraphs of each chapter (or, in the case of chapter two, to defer discussion of Ruskin completely), and to regularly admit that Ruskin did not read or respond directly to the Darwinian texts or images under discussion. It seems rather that Darwin and Ruskin saw the world in different ways (as almost any two major nineteenth-century figures could be said to do) than that they were engaged in hand-to-hand combat over aesthetic terrain. Thus the book's most original arguments are largely extraneous to the material under discussion, and in fact hinder a more developed discussion of its most interesting sources. In a book characterised by meticulous research, it is certain that Smith could have told an even more important story had he organised his material more convincingly.

While Smith largely interprets the 'aesthetic' in the sense of appreciation of the beautiful or pleasing, Gowan Dawson situates Darwinian evolutionary biology within the context of the specific aesthetic movement associated with such writers and artists as Algernon Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater and D.G. Rossetti. Dawson was an indexer on the SciPer index to science in the nineteenth-century periodical, and co-editor of two book publications emerging from that project. Viewing science as a form of serial production, SciPer asked: What was the role of periodical publication on nineteenth-century science and how were its debates structured by the periodical form? Importantly, it also contended that scientific language and concepts permeated the entire range of periodical content, so that fiction or the political essay, for example, become

legitimate arenas for research into the active shaping of science across the periodical press. The evidence of this historiographical method is clear on every page of Dawson's book, which builds upon an essay he published in *Science Serialized*, one of the SciPer publications. Not least of all Dawson's own interests were reflected in contributions to the essay collections published by SciPer, and topics such as Tyndall's Belfast Address and its effect on his reputation (discussed by Bernard Lightman in *Science Serialized*), or Clifford's articles as published in the *Contemporary Review* (Helen Small), re-emerge here as joists in Dawson's own argument.

Under the editorship of John Morley, Dawson shows, the *Fortnightly Review* was fertile publishing ground for Pater, Swinburne, Rossetti and William Morris. It was also the periodical of choice for the exponents of evolutionary theory T.H. Huxley, John Tyndall, and William Kingdon Clifford. This connection between evolutionary science and aestheticism was condemned by the heavyweight quarterly the *Edinburgh*, which claimed that Darwin's sexual selection revived the Lucretian notion of reproduction and sexual passion as the driving force of nature, an attack it also made in similar terms on what it saw as the pagan licentiousness of Swinburne's *Songs Before Sunrise*, published in the same year. For the *Edinburgh* Darwin and Swinburne both promulgated a materialist and sensualist worldview the moral outcome of which was contemporaneously being played out on the bloody streets of Paris. That Darwin's respectable image (and the respectability of his theory) could be tarnished by association with Swinburne's widely-vilified verse presented problems for the proponents of evolution when the mathematician and evolutionary populariser Clifford actively embraced both Swinburne's poetry and its dubious moral implications, often quoting it extensively in periodical essays and lectures and outraging his bourgeois readers and audiences. As such, Huxley and Clifford's late wife Lucy, among others, used the periodical press to underplay Clifford's reputation as 'a vulgar and profane neophyte' (171), writing and encouraging sympathetic reviews, and suppressing evidence for his association with radical freethought and libertarian groups who promoted heretical ideas such as divorce and contraception. Similarly Tyndall's scandal-causing Presidential Address to the BAAS in Belfast in September 1874 celebrated the connection between his work and not only Lucretius but the Greek philosopher Epicurus, associated with hedonist ethics and sensual excess. Just as hostile reviews had associated sexual selection with Swinburne's poetry, certain of Tyndall's reviewers now levelled the charge of Epicureanism at him in terms which echoed their indictments of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* the previous year. For many, Pater's apparent endorsement of hedonism and the materialism of the scientific naturalists were flipsides of the same coin, a dangerous 'pagan revival' in the midst of the nineteenth century.

The periodical, then, emerges as the hero of Dawson's narrative: it is, variously, a forum for debate, for the forging of associations (wanted or

otherwise) between different groups of thinkers and writers and their ideas, and for the making and breaking not only of scientists' reputations but also of their theories and concepts through conflicts and alliances between editors, writers, and their readers. The periodical is a place where science happened. Perhaps most importantly periodicals walked the line between private correspondence and public showmanship, offering such devices as anonymity or the convenient cover of fiction to contributors, enabling multi-levelled dialogues to take place between those in the know and those who were not. The multivalence of these debates and their reception across manifold cultural realms revealed through close analysis of nineteenth-century periodicals enables Dawson to challenge the traditional emphasis on the public respectability of such men as Darwin and Huxley. Revealing in complex detail the strategising procedures which *produced* this image, Dawson's study of largely published writings runs parallel with the hidden meanings such texts included, accessible only to those with a classical education or who were otherwise in the loop. Evolutionists bowdlerised their texts to expunge overtly sexual references in Dawson's narrative. Sympathetic and unsympathetic reviewers alike drew back from direct reference to explicit material for fear it might taint the minds of unsuitable readers. Darwin used untranslated Latin footnotes to refer to material deemed unsuitable for any but the classically-educated gentleman. The reading of Darwinian texts was routinely associated with the masculine pleasures of tobacco and the club. Lurid jokes about masturbation or oral sex were shared in private correspondence between leading evolutionists. Several such men even claimed, at least in private, affinity with transgressive aesthetic poets in whose company it would certainly not do to be seen—including, as Dawson explores in his final chapter, the Huxley who is elsewhere seen to be the most tactical suppressor of this potentially inflammatory connection.

Finally, this partly-repudiated affinity between men of science and aesthetic poets would emerge in the direction of much evolutionary theorising itself, which in the last decades of the century diagnosed aestheticism as pathology in order to fully and finally distance evolutionary science from the troublingly sensuous, materialist, agnostic doctrines of aestheticism. This argument feels the most familiar to students of later nineteenth-century literature and the chapter draws more extensively on existing scholarship than the rest of Dawson's book, but it is freshly invigorated by the complex and nuanced materials that have gone before it. It is this level of complexity and nuance, indeed, rooted in his detailed knowledge of nineteenth-century periodicals, which Dawson uses to make fresh the somewhat unsurprising suggestion that evolutionary and aesthetic thought may have been perceived in parallel. The devil is all in the detail here, and the success of this book's reinterpretation of the figure of the nineteenth-century evolutionary scientist and its original analysis of the precise interconnections between aesthetic poetry and evolutionary scientists together constitute a powerful argument for the

integrated study of periodical culture as a site of scientific debate and intellectual engagement.

The rich vein of new resources tapped in both Smith and Dawson's books testify to the genuine vibrancy of scholarly work on Darwin even at a moment which threatens saturation in the run-up to the Darwin Festival. But they also demonstrate that the best new contributions to this field will rely on a careful attention to historiographical methods and procedures. In this, Dawson's book is the most successful.

Adelene Buckland

Matthew Bevis. *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 302. £50.00.

In this sharp-eared and eagle-eyed discussion Matthew Bevis takes his cue from an eager reporter who exclaimed in *The Times* of 1873 that, 'we are now more than ever a debating, that is, a Parliamentary people' (2). Yet, like those that he follows so intimately, scrupulously, beguilingly, Bevis does not spar with this enthusiasm head-on; rather, he comes in at an angle, listening out for the nuance of a phrase. Bevis's interest lies in how these four writers and their publics 'conceived the relations between political speech and literary endeavour' (3), and he pursues this through a series of attentive readings (and listenings) that densely interweave the procedure and phrasing of parliament with the cadence, emotion and observation of literary expression.

The question of distinction between literary endeavour and political efficacy is handled deftly and importantly by *The Art of Eloquence*. In the first instance the study's strength lies in its ability to sense the political in the literary, as in Bevis's vibrant catching at the 'hear hear' of parliamentary affirmation in Pip's laughter that spreads 'ear to ear' as he watches Mr. Wopsle's performance as Hamlet. It's a good place to begin, with Bevis offering a intriguing slant on the century's recognised fascination with that prevaricator: in this richly sideways view on (mainly) Victorian politico-cultural life 'that undecided prince' acts as talisman, a figurehead for those who strive for, and sometimes fall by, the principle of 'asking questions, stating doubts' (3). However, this is not a study of the ambivalent, a tedious list of the non-committal: it is a thoughtful, sometimes passionate, endorsement of the literary *as* political (and the political, therefore, as literary) precisely because the 'literary arena' hosts political questions that are 'raised, entertained, and tested—not only decided or "settled"' (8). In a stimulating introduction Bevis takes a route via Matthew Arnold's insistence on art's prompt to 'self-reflexivity' (12) and Theodor Adorno's notion of art as both 'autonomous' and '*fait social*' (13) to find a way of recognising the vitality and possibility of 'ameliorative action through art'

(13). This ameliorative action is primarily located not by determining a work's political content *per se*, but by finding these writers's openness to indeterminacy, two-sidedness, double-speak in their literary texts (which are stimulatingly considered for the aural and visual appeals they make to their audience). Implied throughout is the necessity of feeling this ameliorative action in our reading and study of such texts. In this sense, the book speaks to contemporary debates regarding the discipline of literary study, its methods, and its focus.

Bevis follows on from scholars such as Eric Griffiths (in particular) by attending to how nineteenth-century texts seem to understand themselves as entities that mediate between the ear and the eye; that contain the rhetoric of address, of aural stimulation, and yet are consciously presented in the hand and before the eye. However, he adds complexity partly by finding this silent speaking increasingly infiltrating further into nineteenth-century lived experience. In particular he draws attention to the effect of proliferating printed versions of parliamentary debate, written up as endless reports in *The Times* and in publications such as *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*. This, when brought together with complex and changing rules in debating etiquette, not only newly exposed Britain's reading classes to the wily rhetorical manoeuvres of state legislators, but also inculcated the special skills required to address both those within earshot and those who 'heard' such debates through the inky sheets of newspapers over breakfast.

First considered, perhaps surprisingly, is Byron, who emerges as having pursued moral integrity precisely by establishing as a point of principle his refusal ever to take sides. Bevis reads Byron's speeches in the House of Lords with the attentiveness of one sensitive to the layers of implication more usually found in literary endeavour; such readings are then brought to bear on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Corsair* and *Don Juan*. Reading Byron's poems in tandem with parliamentary debate allows Bevis to demonstrate, often very convincingly, how they act as facilitating crucibles that match, for example, the lofty classicism (for which read high-mindedness) of Edmund Burke with the wry gestures at inclusive 'low-banter' (35) of Richard Sheridan. Such a setting drives the development of a poetics of responsibility that uses 'verbal echoes' (especially resonant in the poem-as-echo-chamber) and formal properties (couplets that deliver a 'double take' rather than a 'punch-line' (77)) to engender a process of mediation and implied comparison, a method by which poems might use an emotional pull to think politically, and debate vexed questions that range from animal cruelty, to the threat of mob disturbances, to the complexities of colonial allegiance. Bevis sees classical oratorical principles such as *pathos* at work here, and this comparison works well to situate the poems within a vibrant political context, effectively finding a way of bringing Byron's often arch and idiosyncratic phrasing in from the cold. Yet, in this respect, Byron also begins to sound something like his contemporary Mrs.

Hemans (mentioned here in passing as the focus of Byron's denigration for her 'apostrophic' (39) style, constituting the founding use of that term). It is one slight drawback of this book's otherwise impressive tightness of focus that the potential for comparisons such as these are not always given room to breathe. The poems and the men considered here are circumscribed within a particular environment that may feel a little restrictive, but then this focus is especially effective in pursuing how parliamentary debate infiltrates poetic expression—not in the glib transference of content ('I heard a speech about cruelty to animals today and decided to write a poem about it'), but in the nuanced, even moving and poignant persistence of a phrase, which brings with it memory and nostalgia as well as political piquancy.

The book moves on from Byron to listen out for Dickens's echoing and remedying of political wrangling in his characterisation of novelised 'honourable gentlemen' (112)—*Bleak House*, *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist* are especially rewardingly considered. Bevis's important emphasis on form in this chapter produces an innovative and insightful reading of Dickens's increasingly free indirect style, which is found to exemplify an 'ethical and socio-political expansion—a way for a writer to seek out ways of speaking through and across political divides, acknowledging reciprocities as well as differences' (121). Having traced the permeation of accent into story-telling, the book continues on to Tennyson's various forms of address. This chapter makes good use of a potent source in the poet's acknowledged aural appeal, his habit of reading aloud, his affecting elegiac address and the framed speeches of the dramatic monologues. The strengths of the Byron chapter are developed such that Tennyson's liting between two meanings, two voices and double intentions are exquisitely observed and heard in the control of a line-ending, the delicate use of enjambment, the sometimes painful slip from intransitive to transitive verbs. The protagonists of 'Ulysses' and 'St. Simeon Stylites' appear as consummate politicians when Bevis places a magnifying glass over their circumspect posturing, tiny shifts of emphasis, their powers of persuasion through sound, their careful rhetorical transitions. Following reflections on *Maud*, the oddities of which are skilfully viewed as a 'form for debate' (181), the reading shifts to a consideration of the *Idylls of the King* that very specifically contextualises its composition and reception within the heated controversies of British colonial rule, as heard in parliamentary debate and press report of bloodshed abroad. Bevis's sensitive readings here do much to situate the sometimes perplexing tone of these poems, characterising them as a blend of 'the voice of the "Public Orator"' with that of the broken-hearted observer' (199), a perceptive summary of much of Tennyson's *oeuvre*.

The final chapter and coda deal with James Joyce, brought in here as 'the last writer who had persistent recourse to the styles of Victorian oratory in his work' (27). Joyce's recognised affinity with Parnell is traced in the 'shadings of his style' (209), which is found to absorb the distinctly anti-eloquent posture of

the quietly spoken leader. Where Dickens used free indirect style, Joyce responds to Parnell's habit of employing litotes as a means of 'withstanding while drawing on the stridency of . . . rhetoric' (210). Joyce's fascination with the orator figure then informs a chapter that imaginatively and engagingly recasts Joyce's evident classicism in rhetorical terms. That is, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* (*Finnegans Wake* forms the coda) are read through the prism of formal rhetorical method, such as *progymnasmata*, allowing Bevis to characterise Joyce's works as something between writing and speaking, even between poetry and prose. Here we are offered the striking notion of a man made through oratory (230), but are also afforded a model for seeing the cultural work carried out by literature's tropic and schematic innovation. The cleaving of text with speech makes history come alive as an oratorical perspective draws out the nuances and complexities of Britain's relationship with Ireland.

There is much to be valued in this study not only for its subject, but also its style. The significance of Bevis's many sharp observations seems to well up across a paragraph, convincing their reader warmly and acutely. Yet such distinction could also be more sustained: in the company of such a sensitive reader, you might want to know more, for example, of how Dickens's eloquence in *Hard Times* acts as economic critique (122), or of the connections between these writers, whose chapters are largely self-contained. This book is meticulously researched and perceptively matches images, phrases, sounds and timings together, but it generally restricts overview to its beginning and end, retreating from determining a particular significance for its powers of paying close attention. But, then again, this is a strength: the book's disinclination to engage in reductive demagoguery constitutes its own eloquent intervention in literary studies, alerting us to adopt a more engaged, fruitfully painstaking approach not only to reading this book but also in response to the multiple layers of significance in nineteenth-century texts. The book is dense and its chapters lengthy, but it is all the more rewarding for that.

As a final note, mention should be made of the title itself. The term 'eloquence' is surprisingly under-examined for a study that energetically attends to the meanings of 'literature', 'scrupulous', 'meanness', and so on. The two poles between which the term seems to tread ('demagoguery' and 'disinterestedness') are indexed, but 'eloquence' is not. Yet the term would seem to have a special aptness: although it contains the notion of 'force' (*Oxford English Dictionary*) 'eloquence' names how this serves passion, fluency, and feeling rather than posturing and immediate gratification. In this sense, the term usefully describes (in ways that may have been explored) what Bevis uncovers in these texts, but its relationship with silence (seen in the *OED*'s citations) seems especially fit for a study of printed speaking. 'Eloquence' might even name a method of literary study, the call to feel for a text's 'silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence' (William Hazlitt,

cited in the *OED*). Bevis's fine study should ensure that such eloquence will be heard.

Rhian Williams

Dinah Roe. *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination: The Devotional Prose and Poetry*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp. vii + 220. £48.00.

'The Faithful Imagination' of the book's title introduces Roe's central contention that 'Rossetti's poetic imagination was shaped by her faith, and her faith by her poetic imagination, in a symbiotic relationship that intensified over her half-century of writing' (1). Whilst for the modern critic the gap between 'religious faith and imagination . . . yawns wide', Roe suggests that for the Victorian it 'is bridged by Rossetti's association with the male imagination of the PRB' (98). Throughout her text, by highlighting Rossetti's concern to map the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with Romantic, Dantean and Petrarchan influences within a Tractarian framework, she establishes the symbiosis that exists between her faith and her imagination. Added to this, by stressing the literary significance of Rossetti's devotional prose and by taking into account her spiritual and intellectual development over 'her half century of writing', she avoids adhering to the 'critical consensus' which, she argues, freezes her in 'a post-Romantic/Pre-Raphaelite moment' (4). While her arguments are valid and highly illuminating, Roe's repeated mention of the 'modern critic,' the 'critical consensus,' and the 'reluctance to engage with Rossetti as a serious devotional commentator' (4) fail to take into full account the changes that have been taking place in Rossetti scholarship within the last decade. Although Roe recognises that 'Critics like Diane D'Amico, Lynda Palazzo and Mary Arseneau have recently made great strides in the rediscovery and rehabilitation of Rossetti's devotional work' (2), by insistently framing her criticism as a response to previous, twentieth-century critics, Roe misses the opportunity of effectively building upon their work. This said, there can be no doubt that Roe's continued focus on the claims Rossetti makes for herself as an artist, and on her patterns of interpretation, contribute significantly to the 'great strides' being taken in the analysis of her work.

In a chapter entitled 'Rossetti's Keatsian Heritage,' Roe suggests that Rossetti read the Romantics through the framework of the Tractarians, 'whose poetry reworked the Romantic sense of nature's relationship to the human imagination to imbue it with transcendent, explicitly Christian meaning' (30). Tracing her engagement with Keats, she speaks of how, as Rossetti incorporates elements of his poetics into her own writings, she 'elides certain truths' (51) and places his poetry within a biblical context. By noting how Rossetti conflates the idea of the Romantic trance with the Christian hope of resurrection, and links

Keats' literary immortality with spiritual salvation, she stresses the importance of understanding her faith and imagination in conjunction.

In the following chapter, developing her consideration of the effects of Rossetti's habits of reading upon her literary compositions, Roe suggests that the sonnet sequence, *Monna Innominata*, is so successful because its network of allusions allows it to act simultaneously as tribute and critique of both the motivations of its speaker and the poets of the past. While its speaker is silenced, the poem, like the poetry of Dante and Petrarch, still sings. Rossetti's philosophy of unity in multiplicity is woven into the contrasting textures of theologies, poetics, and emotions which make up the fabric of the sequence. The language, allusion, ideology, and themes of *Monna Innominata* interlace the various kinds of love which the sequence describes, structurally enacting both the Petrarchan and the Christian 'knot' of love (95).

The significance of Roe's study of the sequence lies in its detailed consideration of this structural enactment of weaving together biblical allusions with references to Dante's *Purgatorio* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Rather than privileging a study of one form of allusion over another, by following Rossetti's lead and contextualising each reference, Roe brings to her analysis several original insights which highlight major theological and literary concerns. However, in addition to tracing the Romantic and Victorian reception of Dante and Petrarch that Rossetti inherited, a discussion of how her writings actually contributed to their reception would have made Roe's argument significantly richer.

In her final two chapters, Roe offers an analysis of two of the five books of devotional prose that Rossetti published, *Time Flies* and *The Face of the Deep*. Both, she suggests, expand upon her 'poetics of arrangement' (178) and instruct readers 'how to read Christianity' (179). Transferring on to her prose the same intense concentration on structure, patterning and diction with which she read *Monna Innominata*, Roe acknowledges Rossetti's continued conflation of faith with poetic imagination.

To conclude, the main strength of Roe's book is that it puts Rossetti's networks of allusions into context and illustrates her simultaneous engagement with Medievalism, Romanticism, Tractarianism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In many ways, the exploratory nature of Roe's analysis provides a springboard for further investigation and for an examination of the other devotional texts. Indeed, her concern with investigating Rossetti's faithful and imaginative exploration of the contradictions and oppositions of heaven and earth makes a significant contribution to the increasing interest in Rossetti's devotional imagination.

Elizabeth Ludlow

Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer (eds). *English Historical Drama, 1500-1660: Forms Outside the Canon*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. 216. £45.00

Reacting against the influence exerted over studies of early modern historical drama by the Shakespearean history cycles of the 1590s, this ambitious collection of new essays seeks to redraw the boundaries of the canon to include previously neglected examples of history in performance. Dealing with lost Henrican entertainments, the biblical drama of John Bale, neo-Senecan plays, Samuel Rowley's Tacitean version of Tudor history, English versions of Ottoman history, and representations of regicide in Interregnum closet drama, the collection offers a set of essays that should each invigorate their diverse fields. In its introduction Grant and Ravelhofer are rightly sceptical about the existence of a 'pure' history play, and make the case that historical drama is almost always hybrid drama which must often take into account the formal concerns of tragedy, comedy, allegory, pedagogy and satire. The editors also draw attention to the complex temporal effects of much historical drama, pointing out that 'in many plays lessons of the memorialized past are played out in the present to create and validate the future' (7). The notion that history plays can possess ideological agency is not new, but the editors refresh the concept by expressing it in temporal terms, and the essays they include examine that agency in differing contexts.

Janette Dillon's chapter on early Tudor history plays begins the volume proper, and offers a fascinating account of three dramatic shows, unfortunately no longer extant, that were performed before various eminent international guests at the court of Henry VIII. The essay is well placed at the head of the collection because it immediately seeks to challenge conventional definitions of historical drama, taking issue with Benjamin Griffin's recent *Playing the Past* by contending that neither 'Englishness' nor 'pastness' are essential constituents of the form. Such an argument is necessary because Dillon's primary texts (accounts of which do exist) are allegorical versions of contemporaneous European events, each seemingly designed to comment upon the occasion that has brought Henry's guests to his court, be it wedding, alliance, or treaty, and all written in a language other than English. Enough information is available for Dillon to summarise the action of the plays and comment upon their relation to the political events in which they take part, and a number of remarkable details emerge, such as the fact that both Henry and Cardinal Wolsey attended plays in which they also appeared as characters. Dillon convincingly argues that the plays' 'shared focus on actual, historical events and the shared sense of representing those events for a political purpose' (41) entitles them to be considered history plays, and her chapter concludes with a discussion of Tudor attempts to censor similar politically allegorical drama on the popular stage.

In the third chapter Andrew W. Taylor gives an account of three biblical dramas written by John Bale in the 1530s. Focusing on *God's Promises*, *John Baptist's Preaching* and *The Temptation of Our Lord*, Taylor 'explores the workings of Bale's historical imagination' (58) to demonstrate how biblical narratives are de-allegorized and re-historicised in the plays. Taylor is also interested in showing how Bale's religious conversion is expressed, and he demonstrates that the plays work to reclaim biblical history for a Protestantism that, he argues, can be traced back to the prelapsarian era. With Eden marking the beginning of Bale's Protestant continuum and sixteenth-century England its culmination, the plays are shown to be deeply nationalist in orientation. However, Bale's biblical drama does not make its political points in a simple manner; in fact, according to Taylor, some complex effects are at work. Taking pains to reject any reading of the plays as allegorical, Taylor suggests that they are nevertheless historically remote, purposefully anachronistic, and applicable to the present. Underlying this strand of Taylor's argument is the desire to distinguish Bale's work from medieval religious drama, and while this is undoubtedly important, especially given the collection's interest in redefining neglected plays as historical drama, the relationship between remoteness, anachronism and contemporaneous application is not always entirely clear.

Chapter four considers Norton and Sackville's *Gorbuduc* and Legge's *Richardus Tertius*, perhaps the only works dealt with in the volume that may be familiar to the non-specialist reader. Both are Elizabethan neo-Senecan history plays produced under the auspices of prominent educational institutions: the Inns of Court and Trinity College, Cambridge, respectively. Michael Ullyot offers an eminently readable discussion of this material which places it in its literary, cultural and institutional contexts, and pays particular attention to Norton, Sackville and Legge's appropriation of Senecan rhetoric. An important touchstone of Ullyot's essay is the influence that these two plays had upon late Elizabethan historical dramatists, including Shakespeare, and he argues that the moralistic impulse present in them both explains their usefulness in academic contexts and accounts, at least in part, for their appeal to the playwrights of the 1590s. Given that the collection's entire *raison d'être* is to offer approaches to early modern historical drama that are not dominated by late Tudor history plays, it is a little surprising that Ullyot's discussion cannot quite escape the gravitational pull of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Perhaps this impression might have been avoided if the space devoted to a close reading of the plays (six pages of the seventeen that make up the main text) had been increased. But Ullyot is by no means the first to fall under the powerful influence of Shakespeare.

Next, Teresa Grant offers a reading of Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me*, a play notable not only for its striking title but also for its membership of a small group of pro-Tudor drama performed on the public stage during the early years of the seventeenth century. *When You See Me* reworks

aspects of the reign of Henry VIII, including the birth and early life of Prince Edward, the Protestant sympathies of Catherine Parr, and the fall of Wolsey, in order to suggest comparisons with the newly-crowned James I and his ill-fated son Henry. Grant persuasively contends that the play might have signified very differently when it was revived and reprinted in 1611–13 than it did when it was initially performed in 1604–5. She points out that what at first would probably have been understood as an expression of hope that James and his son might emulate their Tudor forebears could ultimately, when those hopes were proven unfounded, come to be read as implicit criticism of the king and his reign. This consideration of the play's changing meaning through time, as well as Grant's interest in the temporal effects created during the performance of the play itself, make this one of the most satisfying essays in the collection.

Including an analysis of what may well be the single most remarkable play considered by the volume, Mark Hutchings's chapter offers an account of how the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the assassination of the Turkish sultan in 1622 were seen through the eyes of seventeenth-century English dramatists. Hutchings focuses upon Lodowick Carlell's *Osmond the Great Turk*, showing how the play escapes its roots in anti-Turkish propaganda to convey instead a far more nuanced version of the historical events that figure as its inspiration. The play is structured according to a popular myth in which Constantinople is personified as Irene, a Greek woman captured and ultimately killed by the sultan who overthrows the city. But as Hutchings shows, Carlell is not interested in once again recycling this sensational tale to the glorification of Christendom. Rather, Despina, Carlell's Irene figure, 'acts not as an innocent victim of the Turks, but as a Jacobean plotter reminiscent of Middleton's Bianca' (162–3). Because of this the play becomes a complex testing ground wherein a number of opposing ideologies, among them Christianity, misogyny, revolutionary zeal and political conservatism, react with and against each other. Hutchings convincingly demonstrates that the play is both radical and reactionary, and I await his forthcoming edition of three Jacobean Turkish history plays with interest.

The final chapter of the collection introduces a further experimental type of history play, as Barbara Ravelhofer deals with royalist news drama—or 'satirico-political pamphlet plays'—of the Interregnum. Formal concerns are rightly placed at the forefront of the discussion, with a consideration of the degree of affect provoked by closet drama through the intimacy of the reading act proving particularly interesting. Ravelhofer's piece briefly recalls Hutchings's discussion of Turkish culture when she points out that in *The Famous Tragedie of King Charles I*, Cromwell's demonic nature is illustrated by the references he makes to himself as the author of a metaphorical English 'Alchoran' or Qur'an. Noting that 'a common rhetorical strategy of the period consisted in aligning the Christian convictions of a political enemy with Islam' (183), Ravelhofer illustrates once more the importance of Turkish themes in

drama of the period—and perhaps if the collection had gone to press slightly more recently she would have been able to show how this strategy is alive and well and being used against Barack Obama. However, a contemporary reference does conclude the essay, as Ravelhofer identifies satirical news drama published in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in 2005 as a modern descendent of the work being done by royalist dramatists in the mid-seventeenth century.

While all of the essays share an interest in exploring the alternative ways in which history was performed and conceptualised in the era, the length of the period under examination and the variety of forms encountered means that only a few of the chapters are complementary. But if what ultimately emerges is a sense of centrifugal rather than centripetal force, that is no bad thing: the collection is content to disseminate its enquiring energies widely, rather than draw unnecessary attention to itself as a pretended organic whole, and it is all the better for it.

Christopher Marlow