

‘reinforcing patriarchy by engaging in an unfair gendered analysis’ (p.162). There are, indeed, some problems with trying to apply the same methodology to girls, especially when it comes to careers. At a time when it was considered unsuitable for middle and upper class girls to undertake paid work, there is relatively little to be said about female careers, but more research could be undertaken into the unpaid work of both single and married women outside the home, which might include positions of influence in local government and philanthropy. As O’Neill notes, a significant number of girls opted for the religious life, possibly as a response to limited marital opportunities. However, it is possible to see such vocations as a positive choice and recognise that the religious sisters who taught in these convent schools may have inspired some of their pupils to opt for the single life and active service. O’Neill suggests that the main function of these schools was to create ‘young ladies’ and enhance the marriage opportunities of their pupils, however, when it comes to education there may well be a conflict between the desires and aspirations of parents, teachers and children. This study focuses principally on the wishes of parents, but these could be confounded by the children’s response to the education on offer, while the motivation of teachers may have differed from that of parents.

Despite these reservations I consider O’Neill’s book to be a fine study of a complex issue—the formation of a religious elite within a national and transnational context. The Introduction provides an excellent discussion of the methodology and historical literature and there is a wealth of empirical information to support the arguments made. There are two or three typos/spelling mistakes but it is a well-produced volume with good illustrations.

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T. A. Birrell, *Aspects of Book Culture in Early Modern England*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, pp. xii + 296, £85.00, ISBN: 9781409455691

Over the last twenty years, two of the biggest growth areas in early modern scholarship have been Catholic studies and the history of the book. Many of the young Turks working in these areas may not realise how much they owe to a modest man who forged his scholarly career outside the Anglo-American nexus, at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. T. A. Birrell—‘Tom’ to his associates—resourcefully blended old-school bibliography with a newer emphasis on the reception of texts, particularly with regard to the history of reading, book collecting

and library formation; the volume under review, which reprints many of his pieces, testifies to this. But he also has a particular claim on readers of the rebranded *British Catholic History*, since together with David Rogers and Antony Allison, he revived the Catholic Record Society after the Second World War and, from 1958, helped to organise the CRS's annual conference.

Birrell's published writings were extensive. *Studies in Seventeenth-Century English Literature, History and Bibliography* (ed. G. A. M. Janssens and F. G. A. M. Aarts, 1984), a festschrift published to celebrate his 60th birthday and impending retirement, has a copious list of his works; a more up-to-date bibliography, chronologically arranged, figures in the volume under review. But even within his time, it was unusual for a scholar of Birrell's stature to undertake so few book-length projects. These do exist: his Panizzi lectures of 1986, delivered at the British Library and published under the title *English Monarchs and their Books: From Henry VII to Charles II* (1987), describes his reconstruction of the Royal Library, one of the largest ever feats of bibliographical detective work. But his more usual forte was the article. Many of the pieces in this volume might well have been expanded to book length, but are none the worse for their brevity. At Birrell's frequent best, they achieved the elegance, clarity and concentration of a master-chef's consommé.

The pieces selected for this anthology fall into four groups. 'The Significance of Book Auctions' examines seventeenth-century auction catalogues, both for what they can tell us about the history of ideas and as sources for information about readers. The latter preoccupation continues in the next section, 'Book Collectors and Reading Habits', which evaluates the libraries of Isaac Casaubon and Dame Margaret Nicollson, and also includes the ground-breaking 'Reading as Pastime,' the first ever scholarly consideration of early modern light literature and its readers. This has an appropriate lightness of touch, with moments of genial acerbity: Birrell writes of the miscellany genre, for instance, that 'it testifies to a genuine upper-class taste for reading time-wasting rubbish in all languages'. The essays in 'Publishers and their Influence' discuss, *inter alia*, seventeenth-century publishers' presentation of English literature, and the journals of the bookseller John Petheram. The last section, 'Bibliographers and Libraries', returns to the British Library, addressing its Scottish collections, its late 18th- and early 19th-century sales of duplicates and the unique items that it holds. The last-named topic invites Birrell to demonstrate his fondness for unconsidered trifles: "Like Richard of Bury, in the *Philobiblion*, a work with which you must surely all be very conversant, 'panfletos exiguos phaleratis praetulimus palfridis'—freely translated, 'we have preferred paltry pamphlets to pampered palfreys.'"

There were several points of intersection between Birrell's Catholic interests and his bibliographical ones, and a number of these articles

are of particular significance to readers of this periodical. The article on John Dryden's purchases at book auctions, for instance, exploded the notion that Dryden's conversion to Catholicism was undertaken for opportunistic reasons, demonstrating that the poet had been buying Catholic books for several years before he went over to Rome. Interestingly, Birrell singles out this article as one of his favourites in a foreword to this collection, composed just before he died. I must declare a fondness for his article on the library of the seventeenth-century Catholic scientist Sir Edward Sherburne, since it was one I commissioned for the first volume I ever co-edited (*The Book Trade and its Customers, 1450–1900: Historical Essays for Robin Myers*, ed. Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote and Alison Shell, 1997). Two articles on the early 19th-century Catholic antiquarian John Gage, author of *The History and Antiquities of Hengrave* (1822), demonstrate the wider chronological reach of Birrell's research.

If one had to pick out a running theme of this collection, it would be Birrell's valorisation of antiquarians. In an article which first appeared in the volume *Pioneers in Bibliography*, edited by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (1988), Birrell comments of the antiquarians Anthony Wood, John Bagford and Thomas Hearne that they were 'three very attractive human beings, and ... three men who, from their own times to the present day, have been undervalued and denigrated, or else, which is worse, condescended to and patronised.' The comment is noticeably forceful, and may have autobiographical resonance: Birrell certainly shared many of these elder antiquarians' virtues—an omnivorous fascination with primary sources and an urge to reclaim the forgotten—and was writing at a time when 'antiquarian' remained a negative term.

Also like them, he was a very attractive human being. I first met him as a young and ignorant D.Phil. student who had bitten off more than she could chew on the topic of post-Reformation English Catholicism and drama, and remember with gratitude how he read my thesis draft through and sent me fifteen pages of astute commentary, handwritten and perfectly penned. He was one of the most brilliant academic speakers I have ever experienced, with perfect comic timing and the ability to send people away caring passionately about something they had never even heard of before the lecture. I fondly remember his wisdom, his piety and his invariable pumping handshake. For me, and for other people who knew Tom, this volume is a wonderful way of keeping his memory alive. For all its readers, it consolidates an antiquarian's scattered legacy, and secures his place alongside his illustrious predecessors.

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