

OTHER REVIEWS

Writing the English Republic: poetry, rhetoric and politics, 1627–1660. By David Norbrook. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xiii + 509. ISBN 0-521-63275-7. £40.00 & £15.95.

Plato, in the tenth book of the *Republic*, argued that poetry should be banned from the *polis* because of its tenuous connection with truth, and its congruent tendency to inflame and corrupt through the passions. This attitude has often been taken as typical of republicans and those concerned with the promotion of virtue in a state: republicanism, in its concern with equality, becomes prosaic. This accusation has carried great weight for the years of the Civil War and Interregnum, as a result partly of contemporary royalist accusations, and partly the assumption that puritan iconoclasm and plainness precluded an interest in poetry and the sublime.

Revisionist narratives of the Civil War have emphasized the complexity and conservatism of motives for participating in the war on either side, and most especially the contingent nature of the regicide, which thus renders the republicanism of the 1650s itself contingent and reactive. Historians of republicanism itself, notably Blair Worden and John Pocock, have gone along with this perception in their accounts of the period. Republicanism was therefore shallow, and its structures unsuitable for artistic or poetic creation.

It is these perceptions that David Norbrook wishes to unpick. He does so by reading the poetry of the years in a way that is both contextual and sensitive to metaphor and allegory. The obscure material he recovers, and the familiar he reinterprets, contribute to a history of poetics that defies the traditional narrative of the triumph of royalist Augustanism after the Restoration, against the heroics and structures of which he finds even *Paradise Lost* to have been judged and found wanting, as if Dryden's *Aeneid* were the correct model. With the Augustan synthesis, poetic unity and beauty reflects that beauty and unity given to the world by a glorious monarch, possibly described, as Louis XIV most famously was, with the solar metaphor. Yet the ambiguities in Virgil himself could and were employed to undermine such straightforwardness, although Norbrook highlights an alternative model in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a lament for Pompey and liberty after the triumph of Caesar. His analysis of this text, and Tom May's 1627 translation, serves at once to illustrate the depth and complexity of the republican tradition in Britain, and to describe a sort of poetics that could celebrate republican ideals.

The triumph of Caesar is not met with a simple republican alternative, and Norbrook demonstrates that what Lucan celebrates is not the unity of republicanism but its very diversity and difficulty. Lucan subverts the simple harmonies of Augustan poetry and Augustan politics, as the cosmic and the civil order do not have any direct relationship: it is the monarchist Caesar who brings anarchy. Liberty is elusive and sublimated from any of the main protagonists—Pompey becomes its representative only in death. This text and this analysis reverberate through Norbrook's account of mid-century poetry,

not just through Tom May's translation and continuation, but as providing inspiration for those attempting to construct a republican poetics.

Norbrook's subtlety of analysis reveals itself as he demonstrates the ambiguities in Caroline courtly poetry, rather than simply opposing the genre to the work of republicans. Waller's *Upon his majesties repairing of Pauls* has Charles as ruler and architect, constructing harmony in stone and in the state. His task is also to preserve, and even, in resonant language, to 'reduce' what he inherits to its original greatness. In the turbulent years of the seventeenth century, the architectural metaphors of construction, reconstruction, and restoration could, Norbrook demonstrates, move between royalist and republican messages. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Waller revealed a fear for the destruction of the political architecture, while republicans such as Henry Marten celebrated the restoration of liberty.

In his analysis of *Areopagitica*, Norbrook shows Milton not merely examining the restoration of liberty, but a renewed public sphere. Despite its conservatism, it celebrates the freedom of language possible in the new situation with distinctive linguistic energy. This energy could result in a fever for the body politic: but this would be a cleansing and restoring fever. Norbrook introduces here a key theme to his book: the sublime nature of republican language and poetics. In a protest against specious harmony, the *Areopagitica*, the transcendent order achieved through liberty and disorder becomes sublime. This sublimity contrasts with both royalist politics, where monarchy is order and the republic disorder, and with Augustan poetry, which claims sublimity for the monarchic order. The forces mustered on the republican side in this literary battle have, for Norbrook, been too long ignored.

The protean nature of the republican *concordia discors* operates within and relies upon a vibrant public sphere, and thus Milton appeals for its freedom. In the *First defence*, the openness of the regime and its actions — most notably the regicide — to the public sphere reinforce the sublimity of those events and their significance in restoring liberty. In *Eikonoklastes* Milton argued that the beauty of *Eikon basilike* is specious, and in a typically republican move argues that instead of admiring this structure it is necessary to become 'self-architects' (p. 209). Harmony becomes insufficient as a criterion by which to judge political architecture: to have true beauty it must be constructed by those who have to live within it. Milton accuses monarchy of corrupting not just men but language, closing off potential for the sublime by subservience. His citizens must restore their language as they restore their liberty. Norbrook thus attempts to reveal how the conflicts of the Civil War and its aftermath had a linguistic and poetic counterpart, while also attempting to show how truces and compromises were effected by poets on different sides.

Norbrook turns his attention to how under Cromwell poets adapted republican language and Augustan forms, such as the ode, to the new situation. This does not merely demonstrate compromise, but that figures such as Cromwell, or the man Cromwell could have been, were central to republican ideas. He shows Marvell to be experimenting politically and poetically, as the questions raised by Lucan return with ever more force: is Cromwell Caesar, Pompey, or the right man to restore republican liberty to these islands? The chapter which covers material from Cromwell's death to Charles II's restoration is perhaps the weakest, possibly because the material itself is weak, and lacks the conceptual unity Norbrook brings to other chapters. He ends the book with a subtle analysis of *Paradise lost*, and how it portrays the relationship of politics and language in various contexts: hell, Eden, and earth after the fall. Lucan is restored to the pantheon of Milton's influences, and after Norbrook's work a simplistic analysis of Satan's republican language will no longer be possible.

It sometimes seems as if Norbrook is trying to read too much, and the veritable cornucopia of material presented can obscure his argument, for instance in chapters three and seven, where Harrington and others seem squeezed in. This is perhaps the result of one of the themes of the work being the nature of the public sphere, and there is an uneasy but productive methodological combination of Jürgen Habermas and Quentin Skinner: the size of the book is a testament to the difficulty of such an enterprise. It remains the case that his larger pieces of criticism, such as those of *Pharsalia* and *Areopagitica*, remain the most impressive parts of the book. Norbrook makes a significant contribution not only to literary criticism but to any historical understanding of the nature of the events of Civil War and Interregnum. *Writing the English republic* is perhaps a *concordia discors* itself, but an enlightening one.

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To constitute a nation: a cultural history of Australia's constitution. By Helen Irving. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, first published 1997, updated 1999. Pp. xiii + 257. ISBN 0 521 66897 2 (pbk). £13.95.

A military history of Australia. By Jeffrey Grey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, first published 1990, updated 1999. Pp xi + 300. ISBN 0 521 64283 3; 0 521 64486 6 (pbk). £45.00.

On New Year's Day in 1901, the Australian Commonwealth was inaugurated. The new nation was ushered in by the staging of a series of massive public spectacles in Australian cities and towns that marked Federation and, four months later, the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament. In Sydney, thousands of imperial troops – including Australians who had recently returned from the Boer War – paraded through the streets, passing under several ornate and symbolic arches that had been erected by citizens' committees for the Inauguration. Helen Irving, in *To constitute a nation*, her assured and perceptive account of the evolution of the Australian constitution and its incorporation of definitions of citizenship, recounts a small but telling incident from the Sydney celebrations. According to Melbourne's major daily, *The Argus*, a fair-haired young girl, without stockings, shoes, or hat, was seen laughing and waving at groups of soldiers waiting their turn to join the celebratory procession. For the newspaper, in an allegorical style typical of the time, the girl was 'the embodiment of young Australia welcoming the armies of Empire'. Irving expands upon this image. 'Young Australia', she writes, 'was not stiff and military' (p. 9). Australians had, by the late nineteenth century, a reputation for being somewhat irreverent towards imperial pomp. Although the Sydney crowds treated the Empire troops with respect, their spontaneous affection for home-grown soldiers decked in comparatively plain 'workmanlike', and thus less militaristic, uniforms was obvious.

Jeffrey Grey, in his revised and updated *A military history of Australia*, begins his Introduction with a similar claim that 'Australians do not generally think of themselves as a military people' (p. 1). Yet, as Grey goes on to argue, the export of Australian soldiers to fight in overseas wars has been a prominent feature of twentieth-century social life and government defence policies. Australia's participation in wars resulted in considerable social upheaval and domestic division, especially in relation to the issue of conscription in the First World War and the Vietnam War. And, of course, to a loss of life that was to have a major impact at the family and community level, and was to give impetus to the strong political position of organizations representing ex-servicemen's

interests for several decades. The popular understanding of Australian history views the modern nation as being forged through a 'baptism of fire' at the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, rather than through the peaceful legislative processes that led to Federation. Indeed, Ken Inglis has argued, in his *Sacred places: war memorials in the Australian landscape* (1998), that the commemoration of war in Australia, particularly on Anzac Day, resembles a 'civic religion'.

The general question of how historical events have shaped a complex and often ambiguous sense of Australian identity underpins these two books. But the approach and aim of each author is very different, although both share a fine eye for historical detail. For Irving, the past is comprised of histories – of multiple tales and ambitions that twist and turn as they unfold, that sometimes flow in parallel streams, and sometimes create currents of conflict, and occasionally just dry up altogether. Therefore, the story of the achievement of Federation in Australia is built through the fusion of various cultural, social, economic, technological, and political elements. As a whole, these created 'a unique matrix, a distinctive political culture at the end of the nineteenth century out of which the Commonwealth could be imagined as a reality and then shaped' (p. 1). Irving's central thesis, then, is one that acknowledges differences of experience but none the less strives to define a unique and 'typical' Australian way of doing things. There is a tension in this argument, but one that Irving is able to balance and probe to very good effect.

To constitute a nation examines how a sense of nationhood could be achieved in the absence of any external threat. The author brings together readings from various literary, cultural, and political sources to discuss how a unified Australia, and an Australianness, was imagined. At one level this is about political imaginings, with a chapter on the ways that other constitutional models, including those of America, Canada, Germany, and Switzerland, were eventually rejected as inappropriate for Australia. There is due consideration of the issues of tariffs, defence policy, and the rights of each colony/state in the federal compact. There is an excellent analysis of the meanings of Britishness (for naturally Australia was a British nation), and – given the centrality of a federal immigration policy – Australian attitudes to race. This included perceptions of an Asian threat, but also the attitudes towards Aborigines, who were to be excluded from citizenship in the constitution. As Henry Parkes delighted in telling the English press in the 1880s, Australian Natives were *white*, not black; to be black was to be an Aborigine, while to be a Native was to be free, energized, and democratic (p. 124). Irving also discusses the emergence of women's organizations in the decades preceding Federation and the status of women as 'half the nation'.

In the steady stream of scholarly and general publications that mark the centenary of Federation, Irving's book is arguably the most sophisticated text on the topic, and her historical evaluation of the constitution and citizenship has been an influential source in the debates about the Republic and constitutional change during the late 1990s. In this updated edition (the first edition was published in 1997), Irving has included a judicious and open-ended Epilogue on the constitution at the end of the twentieth century, written prior to the defeated referendum on the Republic.

A military history of Australia has deservedly been a standard text since it was first published in 1990. Grey is less concerned with how the experience of war has shaped Australian mythologies of nation than with describing and analysing military campaigns and defence policies from the time of white settlement. This is less a history of ideas, than a narrative of military action. It is perhaps unreasonable to expect more

on the comprehensive impact of war on the Australian people in a single volume of this sort, but more attention to the role of women in wartime, both in the services and as civilians, would have rounded out Grey's account.

In this updated version, Grey has expanded his bibliographical section and generally integrated recent scholarship into his discussion. There are sections on frontier violence between settlers and Aborigines, and on the colonial period. In the twentieth century, the emphasis is on the Second World War and the Pacific, and Grey's text is well supported by useful maps and statistical tables. There is new material on Australia's role in the Gulf War, and its international peace-keeping activities in the 1990s. Grey also acknowledges that the culture of the Australian Defence Forces is under some stress. Changes have included the introduction of women into non-traditional roles and the removal of the ban on homosexual service personnel, and – more importantly – a reduction in the size of the force. At the same time, as fewer people in Australia have direct experience of war, there has been a substantial increase in the numbers attending commemoration activities on Anzac Day. Questions about the relationship between military exploits and national identity continue to be pertinent as Australia moves into the new millennium, and Grey's book provides a very useful guide to the former.

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