

On the whole, *The Hundred Years War: Cursed Kings* provides a detailed and refreshing narrative of the first quarter of the fifteenth century. It considers the personalities of the leaders of France and England and exhibits an excellent understanding of political, economic, and military events. This volume, along with the others in the series, promises to become a foundational text for scholars interested in medieval politics and warfare.

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LIAM LENIHAN. *The Writings of James Barry and the Genre of History Painting, 1775–1809*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. 206. \$133.96 (cloth).
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James Barry has dramatically returned to prominence. Relatively neglected since his death, his reputation revived following the 1983 exhibition at the Tate Gallery and scholarship by, among others, William L. Pressly and John Barrell. More recently, the Crawford Art Gallery's retrospective in 2005–2006 and Pressly and Tom Dunne's collection *James Barry, 1741–1806: History Painter* (2010) suggest that Barry is thriving.

In *The Writings of James Barry and the Genre of History Painting, 1775–1809*, Liam Lenihan effectively places Barry's writings in the context of aesthetic debates between the 1760s and 1790s. Lenihan makes a thoughtful and nuanced contribution to this scholarly reevaluation, exploring Barry's frequently complex and digressive writings on art and focusing on his contradictory relationship with neoclassical history painting. Barry invested himself in this elite genre, believing it the test "by which the national character will be tried in after ages" (15). He sought a receptive audience, struggling to accommodate ideal art to the commercial imperatives of late eighteenth-century England. Lenihan draws on Gabriel Josipovici's art-historical inflection of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" in *On Trust* (1999): the maker's relationship to his craft becomes inhibited by doubts. Barry's private voice "burst through the veneer of the civic-minded orator," revealing a "fragmented public" at odds with his aspirations to create neoclassical history paintings which would unite the nation (30).

The first chapter explores Barry's attempt in *An Inquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England* (1775) to foster an English audience elevated enough to appreciate history painting, connecting aesthetic taste to religion and civic virtue. Barry's *Inquiry* balanced whig optimism with cultural pessimism: aware of the contemporary public's contingent, subjective taste, his enthusiasm for history painting's supposedly ahistorical neoclassicism was "haunt[ed]" (45) by the fear that he was merely an individual producing art for commercial consumption by individual viewers. There are tantalizing discussions of Barry's fascinating commonplace book, though some merit further exploration; it would have been interesting to find out more, for example, about his transcriptions of Alexander Pope, whom Lenihan suggests was Barry's "arbiter of taste" (53–54).

The second chapter probes Barry's commentaries on his ambitious paintings *The Progress of Human Culture and Knowledge* (1777–1783). His allegorical aim and self-representation "to the public as a civic-minded man" (71) were compromised. He struggled to incorporate particular contemporary figures into lofty, generalized neoclassical allegory. The paintings reflected his own preoccupations. For Lenihan, "these seemingly disinterested *istoria* were deeply interested narratives of enlightenment" (62). He sensitively examines Barry's complex philosophical, aesthetic, and political aspirations but agrees with detractors who viewed the paintings as "an awkward agglomeration" of the general and particular (84).

Barry's lectures during his troubled tenure as professor of painting at the Royal Academy are the focus of the third chapter. Lenihan carefully situates them in relation to Barry's predecessor,

Joshua Reynolds, and his successor, Henry Fuseli. Barry, countering the former's urbane compromises and the latter's cynicism and irony, sought to spur Royal Academy students to high-minded endeavors, albeit with "intemperance" and a digressive style (96). Students, probably including William Blake, enjoyed his radical politics and swipes at the academy and its prominent members. Barry, however, struggled to encapsulate his aesthetic principles in his art, which turned the academy against him. Lenihan guides readers through the lectures' fault lines. Coverage can be uneven; the account of the third lecture is rather truncated. Nevertheless, there are fine insights here, not least the contrast between Barry, who pushed the neoclassic aesthetic "to its limit" (120), and Fuseli, who preferred to transgress its rules.

In chapter four, Lenihan compares Barry's relationship to the Miltonic sublime with those of Mary Wollstonecraft, Fuseli, and Blake. The "writings of Fuseli, Barry and Blake dramatize an encounter between Mary Wollstonecraft and John Milton" (129) and with Burke, Kant, and Derrida also featuring in *ménage*, the relationships can get somewhat confusing. It is worth persevering: Lenihan draws out valuable distinctions between the artists and writers. Fuseli and Barry deferred to Milton's masculine sublime and sought to "appropriate" its power, while Wollstonecraft was more skeptical, "asking it to justify its status" (134–35) and identifying instead with a postlapsarian Eve. Lenihan astutely discerns surprising affinities with Blake; Ololon in his poem *Milton* likewise voices resistance to the patriarchal poet's sublime authority.

Barry's *Self-Portrait as Timanthes* (c. 1803) and his tragic expulsion from the Academy are the basis of the final chapter. He came to see the failure of British history painting as "the failure of the culture that imperfectly supported it" (165). Lenihan makes a compelling case that *Timanthes* encapsulates the artist's recognition that isolation was the cost of commitment to elevated art. Unlike the *Progress*, the "jarring contrast" between the classical statue and painting and Barry in modern dress (155) is successful, emphasizing his integrity and heroic dedication. While the French state supported Jacques-Louis David, Britain left its idealistic artist unable to effect "positive change on the state of the nation" (169). Barry's aspirations were haunted by "anachrony": "Divisions, deviations and disagreements could no longer be contained within some imaginary republic of taste" (171).

Lenihan concludes the book with Barry's attempt in *The Birth of Pandora* (1791–1803) to encapsulate the history painter's full capabilities and his late etchings and engravings. His achievements included inspiring the young Blake and spurring readers and viewers into serious debates about art's relation to citizenship in enlightened commercial nations.

Lenihan carefully guides his reader through Barry's sometimes difficult criticism. The very contradictions that contributed to his declining critical fortunes register the cultural significance of his struggle against the tide of privatized commercial art. It can be hard work following such an eclectic, self-divided, and digressive writer; sometimes the sheer array of writers, thinkers, and theorists that Lenihan draws upon can confuse. But it is to his credit that he does not smooth over the complex fractures in Barry's endeavor. One of Lenihan's most interesting insights is the freedom Barry found in engraving and etching, which liberated his imagination from patronage and neoclassical canons of taste, expressing both his anger at the art establishment and the "chaos of the new post-revolutionary world" (184).

Barry's ambition and eclecticism are aptly mirrored in Lenihan's thoughtful analysis and range. Barry emerges as a critic and painter of real stature. It is surely time for a new academic edition of his art writings.

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