

Reviews

Clare, Janet. *Drama of the English Republic 1649-1660*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002. xix+311 pp.

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The drama of the English Republic 1649-1660 which traditionally has been somewhat neglected finds careful attention in this edition. Contrary to the traditional critical positions it shows how those years were a time of dramatic variety, innovation, and vitality when there was a cultural revolution in England. The plays are situated in their theatrical and historical context that was reflected in the theatre of the period. This ambitious book within the series of the Revels Plays Companion Library successfully proves that editions are meant to be more than mere textual reproductions as it includes not only texts but also new perspectives and approaches to guide the reader to a new and deeper understanding and appreciation of Commonwealth plays.

One of the strengths of this edition is its ability to explain the complex relationship between the historical situation and the survival of theatre in political circumstances where it was affected by social and political contradictions. Drama was used as a metaphor (23) to evade censorship and to respond to the political crisis. Such a detailed account of the theatrical context was needed to reinterpret and to update previous critical views on the this drama like those by Lois Potter and Dale Randall, among others. A broad ranging analysis and information about the theatrical, cultural and historical milieu is provided presenting the texts of the four plays in relation to the political moment as plays are also historical products. Besides the general introduction contains valuable documentation on the oppositional state of the drama of the English Republic questioning canonical readings and dealing with major cultural and intellectual developments that coincided with the political and religious tensions that led to the Civil War. The plays are set in the context of their involvement in crucial contemporary issues and debates on matters related to drama itself. They reflect the contradictions and variety of a drama which survived the turmoil of war. The edition as a whole is cogent and balanced, setting new standards in editing. It is innovative and modern in presentation and method. Its comprehensive introduction connects the plays to specific historical and cultural practices that took place in Republican England including recent trends in the critical study of Commonwealth drama. There is a major concern with the text as performance underlining the richness and diversity of the drama of the 1650s which was poor neither in theatrical production nor in dramatic activity in spite the political crisis of the moment.

In this context plays were considered a part of “the oppositional culture” (1) though they tried to adapt themselves to the new theatrical needs and techniques. “Resistance” seems to be the only means for the survival of drama in order to avoid its repression or suppression. Thus Janet Clare explores “the interaction between politics and dramatic aesthetics” (2) examining both their continuities and differences, as well as their particular choice of theatrical strategy and of dramatic forms. She finds the plays more challenging

than traditional views have allowed, making an important contribution to give a more positive presentation of this dramatic period that was not so barren and dark as is shown by its theatrical variety.

The dramatic survival of the theatre meant not only the invention of new strategies and forms but also the discovery of new theatrical space as drama became a marginal activity. However this was not an obstacle as new locations were set up to stage plays in noblemen's houses and other buildings associated with the theatre. In this way the politics of space became a big issue as both politics and space were constructed from the same contradictory, multiple discourses and practices that led to the question of the instability of human subjectivity and identity of place as "always unfixed, contested and multiple" as Doreen Massey has consistently argued. And it is precisely this correspondence -the one that frames the negotiations between public and private spaces revealing relations between authority and subjectivity, and the circulation of contradictory interests, anxieties and practices- that contributed to the survival of a theatre made of the blending of hybrid material and radical ideologies.

From this perspective Commonwealth drama cannot be said to be closet drama -as Harbage and Schoenbaum suggest- simply because there are no records of performances. It is true that plays of the period were written to be read following the English tradition started by Mary Sidney and Elizabeth Cary's plays. But the great bulk of the dramatic production of the period was meant to be staged in spite of the restrictions imposed by the Puritans. This underground drama should be distinguished from the official one that was informed by the Republic aesthetics and the exaltation of national values and identities.

There were other more popular and informal alternatives to the drama like the pamphlet play whose circulation was facilitated by the new printing regulations. Janet Clare stresses the importance of this hybrid dramatic form that meant an adaptation to the new theatrical needs in order to produce fresh subversive plays that dramatised recent news and events. Music played a significant role in the drama of the Republic. It was a means of reinforcing the aesthetic dimension of the dramatic action as seen in Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* that has been considered one of the earliest English operas. Theatre was, therefore, regarded as spectacle and entertainment which should incorporate other artistic forms to produce more spectacular performances. It seems as if literary and textual interests were superseded by dramatic ones.

There is a representative coverage of texts and of the new dramatic ways in which old forms and practices altered including a balanced selection of texts which reflect the complexity of the editorial procedure as they did not have a specific dramatic identity. Bearing this in mind some editorial adaptations were needed to preserve significant stage directions. Thus the entry of masques has been replaced by acts, a more suitable theatrical term. The reliability of texts meet the highest standards of scholarship. Detailed notes and critical commentary are given on the same page of the text, though the notes on the texts are rather short and incomplete. In both introductions -the general and the particular to each play- contexts and cultural practices as well as intertextual relations prevail over textual considerations. Two appendices that might be of help for a complete reading and

understanding of the plays are included. The first is a song from the second entry of *Cupid and Death* and the second additional passages from the enlarged version of *The Siege of Rhodes*.

The drama of the English Commonwealth not only continued the Shakespearean and Jonsonian tradition but also anticipated and facilitated the rise of Restoration theatre. Restoration drama would not have been possible without the dramatic variety and activity of the English Republic when new dramatic forms and conventions appeared. It was when English theatre spanned “From the irreverent treatment of Shakespearean text to the sensational political drama of the Exclusion crisis to the opera of Purcell to the classical ethos of Nathaniel Lee” (35). In this way the edition sheds new light on the plays of the 1650s that made a significant break with the past contributing to the theatrical growth and development of the theatre that followed the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.

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Martin Rodriguez, Antonio Maria. *Fuentes clásicas en ‘Titus Andronicus’ de Shakespeare*, León: Universidad de León, 2003, 283 pp.

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Titus Andronicus, “the black sheep of the Shakespearean canon”, is no longer “one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written” (Eliot, 82). Although Harold Bloom classifies it as an “Apprentice Tragedy”, contemporary criticism emphasises its importance in the Shakespearean canon for it is a sophisticated and modern play which should be frequently read and performed. Today the question of authorship has been displaced and critics have concentrated on a literary and theatrical analysis of the text. *Titus Andronicus* has been one of the most neglected plays of the Shakespearean corpus within Spanish criticism, theatrical productions, and translations, perhaps because it is problematic, controversial, and immoral. For this reason it is unusual to find studies devoted to *Titus Andronicus* or to the classical sources of Shakespeare’s plays in Spain. This book is really exceptional because it deals precisely with the classical sources of *Titus Andronicus* suggesting that “Shakespeare’s most shocking play [it] should be closest to the spirit of the

classics.” (Muir, 23)

A lucid book of the kind is always welcome as it can bring new readings and interpretations of the play in question. It concentrates on the analysis of the classical sources of this early Shakespearean play although it also explores its cultural and historical contexts. It provides a rigorous and scholarly account of sources and comments on Ovidian, Virgilian and Senecan hypotexts that contributed to the making and shaping of the play discussing the use Shakespeare made of them.

However it seems to me a rather contradictory and confusing work as, on the one hand, it is well-documented, has a survey of critical approaches and includes critical apparatus and a select bibliography of references and further reading, but, on the other hand, it is an informative updated guide which includes the plot and gives the translation of the text of the sources and of the play itself. The positive side is that the book can be used as a general introduction for undergraduate students and readers and can also be a useful tool for scholars who would like to know more about the classical background of *Titus Andronicus* and about the liberties Shakespeare took with sources in order to adapt them to his dramatic needs. Some of the comments are old-fashioned, even uncritical as when the author says Shakespeare wrote *Titus Andronicus* “to show his friends and fellow dramatists that he was able to write a Senecan tragedy” (28-29) or when he points out that Shakespeare’s use of classical material was due to his intention of showing “his learning before Marlowe or Jonson that were better learnt than him” (59). It is hard to see the justification for the chapter devoted to “the paradigmatic value of classical legacy and its utility for life” (21) and to “the topic of education in the play” (26). There other more relevant themes and aspects that have a contemporary appeal and urge closer examination like some of those that appear in the critical survey (30) to prove that it is “an important play and a living one” (Bate, 3). This reduces scholarly expectations on points that need further discussion and argumentation.

This work is successful in ascertaining where possible what sources Shakespeare used for the plot and the dramatic delineation of the characters, in discussing the use he made of them, and in illustrating how they are woven into the texture of his play in a descriptive manner. Thus intertextuality is a major concern as it is considered an essential part within the study of literary sources. By paying close attention to them, the author shows an impressive grasp not only of classical history, culture and mythology but also of Elizabethan and Shakespearean drama.

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 Muir, Kenneth (1977): *The Sources of Shakespeare Plays*. London: Methuen.

Spears Brooker, Jewel (ed.) (2004): *T.S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*. Cambridge University Press, 600 pp.

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This is the tenth volume in the American Critical Archives series, a collection of reference books that provide selections of contemporary reviews of major American authors. The series, which began in 1992 with a volume devoted to Emerson and Thoreau, has recently published volumes on Louisa May Alcott's (2004) and Eudora Welty's (2005) works. As Thomas Inge, the series editor, states in his Preface, this collection takes up the challenge of "document[ing] a part of a writer's career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public by reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals" (xi). The reviews collected in these volumes are essential reading for anyone interested in these authors' criticism and reception.

T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews is edited by Jewel Spears Brooker, one of Eliot's most prestigious scholars and the author of *Mastery and Escape: T.S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (1994). Although the editor acknowledges the value of earlier collections of reviews, namely Michael Grant's *T.S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (1982) and Graham Clarke's *T.S. Eliot: Critical Assessments* (1990), she claims her assemblage to be the most comprehensive one done so far (xxxviii). The book consists of twenty-three sections each of which includes reviews of one single work of poetry, drama or prose, followed by a checklist of additional reviews arranged in chronological order, which are not included due to space constraints. All Eliot's work is included, from *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) to his play *The Elder Statesman* (1959), except for a few brief pamphlets like *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, and late collections of previously published work. The reviews included have been published in Britain or/and the United States, to the exclusion of other English speaking countries like New Zealand or Canada. The criteria guiding Brooker's choice of reviews are varied, ranging from the reviewer's importance in Eliot's career or in the scholarly assessment of his work (Ezra Pound, Conrad Aiken; Cleanth Brooks, Helen Gardner), or their anticipation of subsequent opinion (Edmund Wilson, Gilbert Seldes); to the original, provocative or insightful character of the review itself. Reviews of specific works are preceded by a substantial introduction to the history of Eliot's critical reception and the main debates that have shaped discussions of his work. This introduction proves very useful to map out the vast gathering of reviews that follows.

The richness of Brooker's work lies in the fact that each review cluster displays different, often conflicting, responses to a given work. The *Prufrock and Other Observations* section features reviews by Conrad Aiken, Ezra Pound, Arthur Waugh, Edgar Jepson and William Carlos Williams, among others. These early responses to Eliot's work signal the debates that will shape subsequent criticism. Whereas Jepson sees his poetry as quintessentially American, "Mr T.S. Eliot is United States of the United States"

(15), Williams retaliates that Prufrock is too sophisticated and stereotypical to be a “New World type” (17). Whereas Aiken and Pound celebrate the newness of Eliot’s poetry, Waugh shows outrage at the “unmetrical, incoherent banalities of these literary Cubists” (4). Aiken describes his work as “psychological realism in a highly subjective or introspective vein” (9), questioning the objectivity and impersonality claimed by Pound and Eliot himself.

Throughout her volume, Brooker highlights the mixed nature of the responses to Eliot, probably making the point that critics have been unable to reconcile the different facets and skills of such a complex author. That Eliot spent much of the late half of his career writing plays and trying to reach an increasingly broader audience for them definitely enlarges our understanding of the author of *The Wasteland*. Not surprisingly, his revival of the poetic drama for the modern stage, specially his Broadway hit *The Cocktail Party*, generated mixed reviews. Generally praised for making poetic drama accessible to a contemporary audience and for adjusting it to modern themes, *The Cocktail Party* has been criticised for being “insufficiently poetic”, in the words of critic Brooks Atkinson (526). In the same vein, baffled by the play’s success in Broadway, William Barret argues, “the question is whether he has not succeeded by so sugar-coating his pill that very little of poetic substance remains” (532). Some critics like William Carlos Williams, however, have acknowledged the adequacy of Eliot’s poetic standards to his plays, as the title of his review “It’s About Your Life and Mine, Darling” (527) suggests. Intimations of such versatility can already be seen in the melange of styles and registers that Eliot features in *The Wasteland*.

The publication of *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews* shows that traditional scholarship still coexists with projects of a more deconstructive nature in the field of American Studies. The volume provides some ‘solid’ ground in a time when the work of T.S. Eliot, alongside with that of other major American authors like Henry James, is being recontextualised. As Malcolm Bradbury has said, critics of American literature keep interrogating its nature and origin “with a deep deconstructive passion” (1996: 55). In her own career, Brooker has been able to combine traditional scholarship of the type required by the American Critical Archive series with new trends in criticism as those reflected in her edition *T.S. Eliot in Our Turning World* (2001), whose contributors examine Eliot’s engagement with race, feminism, homoeroticism and popular culture in his work. Some of the contributors to this volume have subsequently published innovative studies such as *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2003), where David Chinitz dismisses Eliot’s elitism as a postmodern distortion of his work, questioning Modernism’s and Eliot’s detachment from popular culture. The volume’s front cover aptly features a picture of theater-goers standing in line to see Eliot’s Broadway hit *A Cocktail Party*. Cassandra Laity and Nancy Gish’s *Gender, Desire and Sexuality in T.S. Eliot* (2004) follows the same deconstructive trend. Even if at times the ongoing recontextualization of Eliot may tell us more about the new trends in criticism than about Eliot’s own authorial intentions, these works broaden the meaning of his work, increase its currency and make it appealing to twenty-first century readers. Yet traditional scholarship like *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews* continues to be essential for anyone seeking to understand Eliot’s work, cultural milieu, and to chart

the course of his reputation in the first half of the twentieth century.

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Editors' Note

In last year's volume, David Gold's paper was published with a wrong title. Instead of *Panama Canal Zone, the Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands!*, the article should have been titled as follows:

Record the Jewish English of Jamaica and the English the Panama Canal Zone, the Virgin Islands, and the Cayman Islands!

We apologise for the inconvenience this error may have caused.

The editors