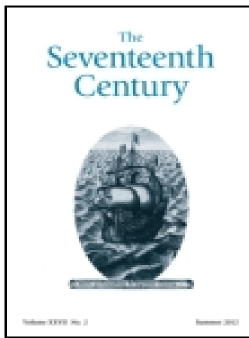

The Seventeenth Century

ISSN: 0268-117X (Print) 2050-4616 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rsev20

Reviews

Peter Maber, Jason Peacey, James Kelly, Aidan Clarke & Sarah Mortimer

To cite this article: Peter Maber, Jason Peacey, James Kelly, Aidan Clarke & Sarah Mortimer (2006) Reviews, The Seventeenth Century, 21:1, 184-194, DOI: 10.1080/0268117X.2006.10555573

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2006.10555573

Published online: 02 Jan 2013.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 36

View related articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rsev20

Reviews

Claire Preston, ***Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science,*** **Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. xiv + 250, hb £48.00, ISBN: 0521837944**

The chief difficulty of producing a sustained account of the works of Thomas Browne is the Norwich doctor's sheer diversity. Thus one of his many interests may be picked up as the subject of specialised enquiry at the expense of another; his works have proven a treasure trove – a 'thesaurus' – to the *curiosi*, generating esoteric articles which flash by with momentary brilliance, whereas larger-scale studies of any quality are hard to come by. The demands he makes on his critics result in a dearth of scholarship equal to the challenge, and this tends to exacerbate the popular image of Browne as a marginal and eccentric antiquarian who was neither true scientist nor literary author. Clare Preston redresses that image in *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science*, by situating Browne in and reading him as illustrative of many vital contexts and networks of exchange, and through scrupulous analysis which reveals the depth of his thought and the genius of his writing; and she confounds the critical dilemma in producing a sustained work of magnificent insight that is both wide-ranging and cohesive.

Preston demonstrates that a thorough grasp of the disciplines and practices of late-sixteenth and seventeenth century natural philosophy is the most reliable route into Browne's dense and idiosyncratic oeuvres. The overarching concern is with Browne's civility, his understanding of the importance of tolerance, modesty and sociability, and above all his concern with the Baconian ideal of cooperative learning and progress. Preston opens with a sparkling chapter which considers these notions with recourse to Browne's response to the pirating of *Religio Medici* in 1642, taking in such connections as printing history, the Republic of Letters, contemporary politics, and Browne's theology. Civility emerges as a regenerative process whose end is a return to innocent, Adamic knowledge.

It is rapidly established that there is no place here for those who would pigeonhole Browne for their own tendentious ends, or who would dismiss him 'for having no obvious designs on us'. Whilst promoting a wholly fresh outlook Preston has done a fine job of assembling and assimilating what has been said before, and nowhere is this

more evident than in the bursting footnotes, which are allowed extensively to 'tessellate further information', as Preston says of the open structures of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*. The attention to detail is microscopic, which might seem a precarious strategy in a relatively short book, but the close readings skilfully open out into the larger arguments, proving microcosms like Browne's own. She writes an elegant critical prose which adapts itself winningly to Browne's lexical wealth, incorporating such expressions as 'farraginous' and 'reindividually'. There is a faintly frustrating tendency to draw freely upon specialist terminology which is then fully fleshed out at a later point: it is not at all problematic to assume a prior knowledge, but the later explanations come as a double take, and occasionally impact upon one's grasp of earlier arguments, detracting slightly from the sense of linear progression through the chapters. Preston is not shy about drawing on a wide range of cultures to form her stimulating analogies: thus Thoreau, Jay Gatsby and Pip Pirrip, Borges, Samuel Beckett, Levi-Strauss, Derrida, and even a parody by Mark Twain engagingly find their way into the text and footnotes; there is even, admittedly in the relatively informal introduction, a catalogue of modern artists professed to be in the Brownean tradition, resembling one of the inchoate groupings which crop up in Browne's fugitive writings. But one would not want to begrudge Preston any of the live wit which is sensitively brought into play throughout her work.

Preston approaches *Religio Medici*, 'the junior endeavour', with a salutary mistrust. She rightly begrudges the fact that too often Browne's reputation seems to rest solely on this earliest, 'very immature' work, which was brought to publication without his knowledge; the elevation of this atypical work has distorted our understanding of Browne, and she attributes this at least in part to the current preoccupation with Renaissance concepts of the self which inevitably designates *Religio Medici* as an example of 'life-writing'. But Preston sees through Browne's hoary posturing to the 'inexperienced and youthful writer . . . unselfconsciously trying out ideas, playing with authorial personae'. She is acutely attentive to the competing voices of the circa 1635 original and the 1643 preface and additions, which results in a bold reading of *Religio Medici* as an early form of the dramatic monologue. This dramatic approach yields thoughts on youth and age, readership, and even the comical, intentional or otherwise. Most revealing, though, is the suggestion that the bivocalism is confirming Browne's eirenic message: two markedly distinct views can co-exist, can even engage in Senecan exchange, according to the bonds of civility.

Subsequent sections locate in *Religio Medici* the origin of many of the principal subjects and modes which dominate Browne's mature work: his natural history and natural theology, signaturism, resurrectionism, neo-Stoic humility, and Baconian mode of compilation all come under careful, anticipatory scrutiny. One of the greatest achievements is the re-assessment of *Religio Medici*'s form: in her willingness to acknowledge the work's messiness she proves herself *Religio Medici*'s most sensitive critic. In attending to Browne's casual digressions she discovers patterns of thought which take precedence over consistent organisation, loose thematic groupings, binarisms, and, in the brilliant section on the work's relation to the developing essay-form, an embryonic Baconian style of compilation combined with a speculative fluidity. Without detracting from the sense of *Religio Medici*'s unformed youthfulness, she nonetheless makes the case for its formal originality.

Though comprising the longest chapter, the discussion of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* slightly short-changes Browne's first mature work. While the expositions of vulgarity,

and of Baconian reciprocity and collaboration, are excellent, and the accounts of cabinets of curiosity are full and endlessly fascinating, ultimately too great a portion of the chapter is occupied by the contextual, with *Pseudodoxia* afforded little space of its own. The relation of the museums to Browne's text is compressed into a few pages which observe that their hierarchical arrangements function similarly, and that like the cabinets Browne distinguishes between 'naturals' and 'artificials', natural and human history. Though the proposition that taxonomic flexibility in the various cabinets carries over into the encyclopaedia is convincing, the case for probabilism creating a 'cabinet of ideas' in which 'all options are open' is surely overstated. The consideration of the contemporary nature of evidence and of Browne's discrimination between authority, experience and possibility is finely judged (she adds to this a glance at his 'experimented truths' at a later point), and the probabilist stance as a whole is productively explicated. In a final section the cabinet paradigm is abruptly rejected as the prevailing, triumphant means of arrangement, since Browne's compendium contains, after all, errors and not objects, occupying a kind of negative space; and the model falls flatter still when it is suddenly revealed that these errors 'have no ligature other than their mere incorrectness'. Though not on a natural historical basis, the case made for the influence of the cabinets' organisations on the structuring of *Urne-Buriall* is considerably stronger.

The insights into *Pseudodoxia* are mostly structural, and form an important element in the running argument that Browne's structures are rooted in empirical approaches; however, the lack of stylistic consideration comes at some cost: the work's tone is far from straightforward, and might indeed be seen to complicate the very subjects under scrutiny. Preston detects notes of modesty, but these are left undeveloped, unlike the full exploration of their meanings in relation to *Religio Medici* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, and there is nothing here to match her brilliant analyses of contradictions in *Urne-Buriall*. Only in the brief concluding section is there any consideration of tone, where the attention to anomalous stylistic effects in the first and last books, though sharp in its immediate focus, seems to suggest a homogeneity of style throughout the rest of the work, which is not the case. Browne's deliberate tergiversations and his hedged approach to his actual scientific practice are modes more subtle than this account allows. There is overall not a rounded sense of *Pseudodoxia* as a 'literary artefact'. Nonetheless we take from this chapter a valuable sense of the civil and restitutive function of the work, and the detection of notes of doubt in *Pseudodoxia*'s ending leads us forward to the darker aspect of *Urne-Buriall*.

This next chapter, and its foil, on *Musaeum Clausum*, find Browne a melancholy man, facing the futility of the antiquarian project. The correspondence with William Dugdale sets in relief Browne's 'possibilist' approach to antiquarianism, in which 'in points of . . . obscuritie, probable possibilities must suffice for truth'. Browne emerges as at 'obvious ease in the midst of . . . reliquary confusion', and it is equally clear that Preston is wholly at ease with Browne's ingeniously divergent interdisciplinary speculation. Browne is distinguished from the aggrandizing antiquarians, such as Dugdale, as more interested in antiquarianism as an 'aesthetic of loss, of incompleteness' that the antiquarian project itself seems to underline, than as a means of preserving and reconstructing (his particular form of antiquarianism is productively situated within the great English tradition of William Camden and John Aubrey). If Browne's willingness to admit competing explanations into his investigative prose is generous, it is also unsettling and points towards the fracture of the world and the impossibility of

complete restoration: the antiquarian can but hint at the recuperative moment of resurrection.

Browne's approach to antiquarianism is discovered in *Urne-Buriall* to be fundamentally equivocal: curiosity is both a virtue and the primary vice, ruining as well as restoring, and reminiscential knowledge compromises the grace of forgetting. Preston is especially sensitive to Browne's distinction between artefactual and textual evidence, and the uniqueness of his favouring the former over the later. As always, Preston offers trenchant insight into Browne's structural methods, which again enact their own subject. The design is seen to move from a strictly antiquarian methodology into a combination of observation, speculation, and the transcendental, generated by the third book's subjects of Ezekiel's vision and the relationship between order and chaos. The millenarian transcendentalism of the final two books is fleshed out: graves and monuments altogether are futile in the face of imminent resurrection. The decision to follow *Urne-Buriall* with a reading of *Musaeum Clausum*, the neglected late parodic catalogue, is inspired. Although the chapter is somewhat unnecessarily recapitulative, it adds to our understanding of the limits and dangers of antiquarianism as perceived by Browne, as well as to that melancholy sense of futility. Preston apprehends the tract to be not just a parody, but a meta-parody, sending up the numerous earlier cabinet-spoofs lengthily enumerated, in borrowing their nuances for its own, altogether more serious purposes.

'The epitome of the earth: *The Garden of Cyrus* and verdancy' proposes that Browne's quincunxical essay is at once his most playful and his most strictly scientific. A section delving in more detail into Browne's actual 'scientific credentials' offers a much-needed corrective to those who would curb Browne's scientific understanding, even if he was not the most pragmatic or original of experimenters. *Cyrus* is found neither to be exclusively hortulan nor horticultural; it is not explicitly Royalist or retreatist, and is not the natural counterpart to *Urne-Buriall*. It is something wilder altogether, 'a botanical lesson in unregulated, spontaneous, rampant procreativity'. In some of the work's finest scholarship Preston examines the quincunx as biological figure and, more importantly, as a natural signature, Edenic and millenarian, symbol of the redemptive project. The chapter concludes with an energetic assessment of the quincunxical structure of *Cyrus*, attending closely to Browne's paraliptic playfulness which serves only to heighten the importance of the work's digressions: it is the ostensibly digressive discussion of generation which is found to be *The Garden of Cyrus*' central subject. The work is also recognised as the most solitary and least civil of his works.

In a brief concluding chapter we are offered a glimpse of the vast and disparate array of Browne's working papers. Through sensitive selection Browne's compositional process is revealed as a progression from chaos into order through his arranging of the material, the development of his thought, and through his scrupulous stylistic revision. Though the subjects of the notes' enquiries are endlessly eclectic, often governed by chance *quaeres*, it is highly revealing that every section of Browne's published work finds its 'primitive or initial version' in the notes. Despite their sprawling and largely undateable nature, an excellent case is made for these papers as 'elements to be inserted in the completed compositions'.

We take away from Preston's scholarship the sense of a continual overlapping and synthesis in Browne's works of science and style, of the methods of investigation with rhetoric and structure; but it is ultimately Browne the literary author that triumphs.

Its scope, sustained argument, meticulous close analysis and constant sensitivity to its subject make this comfortably the most important critical work on Browne yet to be published.

Trinity College, Cambridge **Peter Maber**

Patrick Little, *Lord Broghill and Cromwellian Union with Ireland and Scotland*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2004, pp. 270, hb £50, ISBN 184383099X

'New British history' has rarely progressed from being a noble aspiration into rigorous scholarship, at least in terms of focused narratives of 'high politics'. Such a project requires detailed knowledge of politics and sources in all three kingdoms, not to mention a sense of perspective with which to establish the relative importance of each nation. Patrick Little's study of Lord Broghill is particularly welcome because it fulfils these requirements and focuses on the still neglected 1650s. Recognising that the biographical approach provides a useful means of achieving truly 'British' history, Little examines one of the few political grandees from the period who could genuinely claim to have been instrumental in the governance of all three nations.

Little clearly understands, however, that such a biography needs to be fully contextual, and offers a thorough analysis of Broghill's place within the Boyle family, his dynastic and personal interests, and English, Irish and Scottish politics. His particular concern is to analyse the Cromwellian 'union', with which Broghill was closely involved, but Little's holistic approach requires analysis of the period before December 1653, not least in order to support his claims regarding the cohesion of Broghill's life. Little's Broghill is a canny political operator who was nevertheless burdened by responsibility to his family and to his own religious faith.

The first part of the book analyses Broghill's early life, and relationship with his father, the first Earl of Cork, as well as his role in Anglo-Irish politics from 1643–9, notably his relations with Ormond, Inchiquin and the English Independents, and his emergence as 'the guardian of the Protestant interest' (55). Part two, dealing with 'the rise and fall of the Cromwellian union', traces Broghill's relationship with Cromwell in connection with Irish affairs from 1649, and his involvement in the work of the 1654 Parliament. Little argues that Broghill's Irish interests, as well as his religious concerns, were inextricably linked with support for the Cromwellian court and protectorate. The final stage in Broghill's emergence as a truly British grandee followed his appointment as Lord President of the Scottish council, and Little devotes a chapter to the period 1655–6. Once again, he combines analysis of factional politics and church affairs, in terms of Broghill's relations with Monck, Argyll and the 'Resolutioners', with a concern to locate this period within Broghill's broader political life and worldview.

These opening chapters are in many ways merely the prelude to Little's treatment of Cromwell's second Parliament – the 'union Parliament' – and of the kingship debates, where he develops an important argument which places Broghill at the centre of plans to offer Cromwell the crown. Kingship represented the ultimate manifestation of Broghill's British and Irish preoccupations, and the best example of his skills as a political operator, and Little's account challenges conventional wisdom, and much of the literature on Cromwellian parliaments. Questioning scholars who detect

mere chaos in the Commons, as well as those who perceive slick management, Little offers a nuanced account of Broghill's coalition, based on friendship, family, and political connections, as well as the mobilisation of the Scottish and Irish lobby. Without resorting to a crude model of behind-the-scenes string-pulling, Little teases out Broghill's influence beyond the Commons, through the activity of his allies, and his own activity in committees.

Little's well researched and elegantly written book thus strives to be more than a 'mere' biography, although this task is hard to achieve in a work of this length. Biographically, it represents a fascinating demonstration that grandees could display both pragmatism and principle, and as such is a wonderful example of 'post-revisionism'. Broghill was immersed in the shifting sands of factional politics, and yet Little descerns issues and values which structured his actions, even if some might question whether he has really demonstrated the primacy of religion in Broghill's life. Moreover, that Broghill's principles are explored in part through brief chapters on family, finance, and faith, in a concluding section to the book, demonstrates the difficulty of Little's task. This fascinating material ought arguably have been re-distributed throughout the volume, and the themes highlighted in greater detail in the introduction. That this has not proved possible reflects Little's ambition to offer a contextualisation of Broghill's career. Here, however, the biographical format precludes a thorough account of Cromwellian unionism, which would probably require cutting some of the material on Broghill's early career and later life. This would also have enabled a more substantial exploration of what some might consider a contentious methodological approach to Broghill's network, factionalism, and parliamentary management. These quibbles aside, however, Little's book is an extremely important contribution to the historiography of Cromwellian Britain, and a model for future research into British history.

History of Parliament **Jason Peacey**

Markku Peltonen, *The duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour*. Ideas in Context, 65, General editor: Quentin Skinner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. x + 355, hb £45, ISBN 0-521-820626

One of the problems posed by the recent surge in interest in the emergence during the Renaissance of the honour culture, which facilitated the introduction of the practice of duelling into England during the latter half of the sixteenth century, has been to establish precisely how this relates to the 'chivalric honour culture' that sustained the trial by combat in the middle ages. A further, no less complex problem is how duelling relates to the culture of politeness that emerged during the late-seventeenth and, as recent work suggests, established a commanding hold during the eighteenth century. These are the major issues Markku Peltonen seeks to address in this important study of duelling in early modern England.

More ink has been expended on the first of these two problems, as Peltonen's careful dissection of the now substantial literature on the subject makes clear. The interpretation currently in the ascendant with early modernists is that duelling emerged in Italy as a crucial element of 'the new renaissance ideology of courtesy and civility', and that

the duel of honour came to England, via France, 'as part of the Italian Renaissance notion of the gentleman and the courtier' embraced in the sixteenth century. However, this is not a conclusion that has met with total acceptance. Based on the obvious comparisons that can be made with various forms of single combat, particularly trial by battle, medieval historians have maintained that there is a clear line of connection between these forms and duelling, and this perception is reinforced by the location by some students of early modern society likewise of the origins of duelling in 'the ideology of the medieval honour community'. Mervyn James, for example, has argued influentially that the stress on 'competitive assertiveness' in the medieval concept of honour informed the adoption of the duel as an emblematic feature of the early modern code of honour. Meanwhile, in respect of the two problems identified above, the location of duelling within 'the new culture of politeness', which esteemed 'restraint, civility and refined public conversation', and which is now seen to have achieved pre-eminence in the eighteenth century, has proved still more problematic. The perception, informed by the extensive commentary on the matter, discussed with greater sophistication in this volume than elsewhere, that 'politeness' by disapproving of duelling sought its eradication, has failed to persuade since it is apparent to those with more than passing knowledge of the eighteenth century that the predisposition to duel endured with little evident diminution because it continued to possess the support of many of the polite. (Indeed, in Ireland, where the aristocratic elite was eager to imitate English mores, politeness included, the enthusiasm for duelling peaked in the eighteenth century.)

In seeking to provide tenable answers to these large questions as to the origin and development of duelling in England, Dr Peltonen engages in five substantial chapters with the debate on civility, politeness and honour in England from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. Commencing (chapter 1) with a detailed exploration of the introduction of 'civil courtesy and duelling theory', he argues persuasively that the duel of honour was introduced into England during the Elizabethan and early-Stuart period as part of the embrace of the Italian renaissance ideal of what constituted appropriate behaviour. This was not received with unanimous approbation, not least by the crown and the religious authorities, since the right to duel contravened when it did not directly challenge their claims to jurisdiction in matters of life and death. Ironically, much of the criticism targeted at duelling in the early seventeenth century sought to disparage the practice as foreign, by extolling traditional forms of combat (significantly, mostly now effectively discarded), and by denying that it possessed any entitlement to be considered as part of a code of conduct that could legitimately be deemed courteous or civil. Both James I and the Commonwealth took particularly firm stands, but such efforts as were then made to detach courtesy and civility from duelling proved unsuccessful. In keeping with his focus on the theoretical debate about civility and duelling, Peltonen rather glides over the significance of the failure of the efforts to proscribe duelling as a factor in its adoption in favour of a close engagement with the evolving arguments, *pro* and *contra*. Both sides demonstrated considerable intellectual flexibility; during the late seventeenth century, for instance, its proponents maintained that the right to duel was a bulwark of the liberties Britons enjoyed (chapter 3), while its opponents engaged in a redefinition of what constituted civility in support of their contention that duelling was antipathetic to any proper concept of polite behaviour.

Circumstances were thus tailor made for the adoption of a concept of civility that excluded duelling. This certainly was what politeness meant to many contemporaries, and more recently to many historians, but there was another perspective, which Pel-

tonen links to Bernard Mandeville (chapter 5), whom he ingeniously rereads, which sustained the tradition of civility in which duelling was very much a part. By demonstrating that, instead of rejecting duelling, it was possible for advanced thinking on the concept of politeness in the early eighteenth century to integrate duelling within their system, Peltonen has reconciled strands of public discourse and behaviour that seemed at odds. He has, more generally, in this admirable study, provided a convincing account of the development of duelling in England and offered a sophisticated reading of the contemporary debate on civility, politeness and honour.

St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Dublin **James Kelly**

R. E. Mayers, *1659: The Crisis of the Commonwealth*, Woodbridge, Royal Historical Society, Boydell Press, 2004, pp. xii + 306, £45, ISBN: 0861932684

Improbably, the title of this study is more expansive than its contents, which consist of a detailed, thematically organized reconsideration of the second session of the Commonwealth Parliament from its restoration on 5 May 1659 to the second 'interruption' on October 13. The immediate aftermath receives due attention. The antecedents receive none. Dr Meyers' thesis is emphatic. Everything that has been written about this episode in the history of the English republic has been so influenced by hindsight and so uncritically receptive to the calumnies of its contemporary opponents that it represents the reverse of the truth. The Good Old Cause had lost neither its appeal nor its vitality; its concern with freedom linked rather than divided those who disagreed on what that entailed; its proponents both defended the regime with vigour and constructively debated the shape of a future republican settlement. The Parliament, far from being an unmitigated failure, 'contended with remarkable success against considerable odds' and its demise, far from being an inexorable decline into chaos, was abrupt and adventitious. Its members – or, more precisely, sufficient of them – worked conscientiously, selflessly and effectively to establish the authority of the Commonwealth and were close to resolving its financial difficulties by October. Within the republican community divisions were contained and practical cooperation was achieved, both through the flexibility of the members in their dealings with one another and through their astutely balanced management of relations with the army and civilian supporters, and an intermediate course was followed between the demands of hardline and eirenic republicans. Relations with the wider English community reflected the reality that popularity was not a necessary condition of seventeenth-century government: control of force and an acceptable standard of efficiency could together suffice to elicit cooperation. Thus in the provinces the government's authority was accepted and order maintained partly with the assistance of the 'well-affected', but mostly by virtue of the reciprocal pragmatism of parliamentarians and local magistrates who were prepared to suppress their differences in the common interest of securing stability. The city of London, though fractious, responded similarly and its rulers, led by the Lord Mayor, John Ireton, were compliant. In the still wider community of the archipelago, for which the goal was union, significant progress was made in devising and giving legislative expression to the compromises

that the incorporation of Scotland required and to making arrangements for its civil government to be managed by commissioners. By contrast, Ireland received little attention after its civil government and military command had been dealt with as a matter of urgency: union was silently deferred and the land settlement proved intractable but even here, if time had allowed, Parliament 'would doubtless have remedied Ireland's disorder in due course' on the basis of recommendations for systematic measures of anglicization made by its commissioners in October. In Europe the goal was peace, but not without honour, and though specific objectives were not achieved the outcome was broadly satisfactory: recognition was gained, an active presence was established, entanglements were avoided and prestige was maintained.

This case for the defence is closely argued, thoroughly grounded in the sources and largely convincing. If it is conceded, Dr Mayers argues, the explanation for the October breakdown must lie in contingent circumstances rather than in underlying causes. Her account of the gathering crisis largely conforms to the received view that the successful suppression of Booth's rising boosted the confidence of parliament and restored the army's self-esteem and, in doing so, heightened the sensitivities of one and the ambitions of the other. In this rendering, however, misunderstandings were the precipitants. The officers were emboldened to make requests, not demands; Parliament was firm, but conciliatory; the officers, imperfectly attuned to the suspicions they were arousing, modified rather than withdrew their requests and unwittingly overstepped the bounds of acceptable conduct. They were not intending to challenge Parliament's authority, merely taking it for granted that their wishes would be attended to with the goodwill that had previously informed the partnership. Their presumptuous insistence convinced moderate parliamentarians that the hardline republicans' 'near-pathological' distrust of the officers was well founded and that a coup d'état was imminent; with majority support, Arthur Haselrig implacably pursued confrontation in the mistaken belief that the lower ranks would remain loyal to Parliament and the second 'interruption' on October 13 was undertaken in self-preservation. After it, there remained the potential for reconciliation and efforts to repair the breach continued: 'if there was a moment that sealed their failure, it was Haselrig's exit from negotiations with the officers on 15 October'. This is less convincing. As Dr Mayers acknowledges, the end of parliamentary harmony had become evident early in September and factions already clustered around Haselrig and Vane before they adopted their competing hard and soft responses to the army initiative. It is surely compatible with Dr Mayers' revised reading of the Parliament's achievement to perceive a period of voluntary restraint before Booth's rising, when disagreements and conflicts of interests were consciously contained in the interests of the survival of the Commonwealth, followed by one in which the fact that it had survived eased the constraints, encouraged the freer expression of differences and the pursuit of adjustments in the regime's internal balance of power and tempted the officers to strengthen their position.

This is a challenging and important book, which compels a reconsideration of the resurrected Rump, but it is not without its defects. Not least, the manner is unwontedly adversarial. Since the recent historiography is thin, the available whipping boys are few and Davies, Woolrych and Hutton take a steady, and wearisome, beating. More importantly, the combination of a thematic arrangement and a discursive approach relegate events to incidentals (so that, to take the example to hand, there is no other reference to that fateful meeting on October 15), and no coherently

integrated account of what actually happened during these months emerges. The irony is that less informed readers in search of the raw information that will enable them to weave the themes together will need to have recourse to the works that Dr Mayers has so strenuously, and in many respects so effectively, set out to supersede.

Trinity College Dublin **Aidan Clarke**

Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630–1660*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 230, hb £47.00, ISBN 0-19-926051-6

Thomas Edwards' descriptions of the illiterate mechanical preachers of the civil war period have often been echoed by historians, most notably Christopher Hill (however opposed his ideological agenda to that of Edwards). McDowell's work emphasises the weakness of this characterisation for understanding the strategies of many of the radicals in this period, particularly when considering their writings as literature and in a wider literary context. Central to the thesis is McDowell's demonstration that many radical authors were educated in the universities during the 1630s and, crucially, that it was the learning they obtained there which they used to undermine this culture. Whereas ministers sought to assert their own authority through their learning, radicals parodied the formal devices of scholarship in order to ridicule such claims. McDowell begins by showing how the stereotype of the unlearned heretic was created in early Stuart England and was then deployed during and after the civil war against the heterodox. Through a detailed study of the works of several radicals, he demonstrates how these authors both adopted and criticised those stereotypes by satirising the academic pretensions of the ministers themselves. The implication is that these authors were not the passive victims of their critics' imaginations but were actually engaging with them, in what could be an extremely complex and sophisticated way. McDowell then uses ths evidence of erudition to argue that the ideas which came to light in the mid century were not those of an underground and unlearned subculture, but the distinctive product of the university environment of the 1630s. Much of the radicalism of the time can then be explained as a specific reaction to the contradictions of Calvinism and the scholasticism with which it was associated.

McDowell deals with particular radicals in the subsequent chapters, using a close reading of their texts to substantiate his claims. Thus he situates Richard Overton in the Cambridge dramatic scene of the 1630s, arguing that this is an important context for both the message and the rhetorical style of *Man's Mortalitie* (1644). He can then suggest that Overton was utilising a style of parody common in theatre, in which the excesses of academic discourse were caricatured. Whereas the original purpose of this was to strengthen true learning, Overton used it to show the sterility of all clerical pretensions, arguing instead that spiritual truths were obvious to all. It is through the lessons learnt from student theatre, threfore, that Overton is able to deny the value of the exclusive education which is undergone by the clergy. McDowell then suggests the continuity between such egalitarianism in Overton's politics, his theology of universal redemption and his monism. The most successful chapter deals with Abiezer Coppe, outlining his place in the circle around the Earl of Warwick as a promising

young linguist. After the civil war, Coppe used his grammatical learning to contest the authority of traditional structures, parodying the conventions of formal language in order to expose the hollowness of the doctrines they were used to defend. Coppe's unusual and apparently anarchic syntax and structure were based upon the rhetorical strategies prescribed in academia, but with added and often comical twists. The satirical and deeply comical effect of his pamphlets came, therefore, from his ability to engage with academics upon their own terms. This raises the question of his readership, and McDowell's work suggests that Coppe wrote for a more sophisticated reader than has often been assumed. This is not a book about reception, however, and this question remains unanswered. The final chapter is more ambitious, connecting these subversive tactics to the later deist movement via the Quaker Samuel Fisher. Fisher had cloaked his erudition in a mock rustic style to absorb and to dismantle the image of illiterate Quakers, but his satire extended beyond formal grammar to the philological tools of contemporary biblical scholarship. The implication of Fisher's writing was that not even the text of the Bible could be standardised and stabilised; in the final analysis learning could not suffice without the gift of the spirit. Again, McDowell is much stronger on Fisher himself than the reception or impact of the work. Overall, the author opens up new perspectives upon the texts with which he deals, demonstrating the limitations of both contemporary and more recent stereotypes. With further work on their readership and reception, it will prove possible to appreciate the significance of these texts more fully.

New College, Oxford **Sarah Mortimer**