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*Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640-1660*. Thomas N. Corns. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. xii + 333 pp. Includes notes, appendices, bibliography, index.

The title derived from *Areopagitica* might alert learned readers that over half of this book focuses on Milton. While two chapters analyze the poems of Lovelace, Herrick, Marvell and Cowley, and another the radical pamphlets of Levellers, Diggers, and Ranters, this book does not dwell on the political writing a historian would usually associate with the age of Baxter, Hobbes, and Prynne. Instead, it analyzes the "literature of controversy" as well as "the love lyric and devotional poem" (1). The virtue in these genres promiscuously read is that Corns, a noted Milton scholar, recaptures the ideological fire that often accounts for the surprising literary production of these divided decades. In its attempt not to expose unintended or buried conflicts within texts, but to "repoliticize" them (1), this book is most like Stephen Zwicker's *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689* (1993). Both focus on "major texts" (vii), such as *Eikon Basilike* and *Eikonoklastes*, without defining these belles-lettres.

Chapters on Milton's attacks on the bishops and on his developing heretical religious stance remind us how central Milton was to political thought during the 1640s. Corns stresses not Milton's ideological consistency, but his rhetorical or "polemical strategy" (13). Milton was aware of his audience and we should be too. Corns examines why Milton drafts his Puritan audience into a "we" against a dehumanized, episcopal "them." To stress his audience of conservative divines in the Presbyterian Assembly is to reveal the radical nature of Milton's divorce tracts. Though Corns would not claim Milton as a force for freedom and progress, to argue that Milton and the Independents stood outside "the narrower circle of Presbyterianism" (47) mistakes organizational freedom for popularity.

Two chapters analyze Cavalier poets. The political context of poems from the 1650s remains shrouded in interpretative mists, in part because of tentative reactions to changing political fortunes, in part because an "oppressed and largely clandestine Opposition" (266) was forced to adopt literary subterfuge. Several poems, arguably dating from the 1630s, are interpreted as Royalist blasphemous and erotic challenges to "Puritan morality" (76). Yet why would these poets adopt a polemic against a group not yet in power? Herrick's later poetry conjures may-poles and feasts, and (re)creates "images of vertical social cohesion" (111) in rural society. Corns whimsically suggests that royalist generals could have taken lessons from royalist poets about marshaling assets. But the degree to which defeat clarified royalist wit should be noted.

The chapter on the radical hydra does not make clear why their works should be added to the canon. The only Leveller works seriously examined are those of John Lilburne. Corns relates the distinct genres employed by the Digger Gerrard Winstanley to his developing sense of audience. Increasingly, Winstanley spoke "for the poor ...to the great ones": Fairfax, the Rump, Cromwell (161). The examination of playful and sincere Ranter language adds to our understanding of this quasi-group.

In a chapter on Milton's defenses of the new republic, Corns again emphasizes Milton's mastery of polemic rather than his philosophical coherence. Milton's address to Presbyterian laymen which paints their clergy as "rav'nous wolves" (*Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, cited 200), however, suggests an author more sure of his position than of his audience. In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton denounces Charles I's aesthetic or style. Cultural values define a readership which defines a party. In the last year of the republic, Milton's partisan pen remained caustic. But no amount of special pleading ("God hath yet his remnant," *Readie and Easie Way*, cited, 281) could revive a viable Commonwealth-men constituency.

The conclusion, "Revolution, Restoration, and the English Literary Tradition," compares briefly the 1660s with the 1630s. Two important theses are advanced: one, the role of politics in the creation of "a literature of abiding fascination ...in the middle decades of the century," and, second, that open politicization of literary genres during this period "transformed ...writing in

English" (299). But the leap from Dryden and Rochester to Coleridge will leave mere historians pondering the link with the 1640s and 1650s.

This fine attempt to repoliticize major literary works of the mid-seventeenth century should be consulted by historians attempting to conceptualize the political sphere during the English Revolution in ways which would not be anachronistic and unintelligible to those living through it.