Reviews

Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe 1500–1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 269, hb. £40, ISBN: 0521591198

In this book, Julius R. Ruff provides a useful synthesis of violence from the Reformation to the French Revolution in Western Europe. Excluding 'military violence of war', he centres on 'the more quotidian violence of a civilian population' (p. 5), considering it 'part of the discourse of early modern interpersonal relations' in all social strata (p. 2). Based on a wide reading of sources, he sets out 'to assess the nature and extent of violence …, to examine its causes, and to weigh the reasons for its generally decreasing incidence until the twentieth-century crime wave' (p. 2). Ruff begins his survey by exploring representations of violence, using sources which reflect both popular and elite understanding. He describes oral and print culture, various forms of print material and themes, and highlights the vital role of the growing press which stimulated fears and shaped perceptions of violence.

Ruff then investigates the relationship between state, arms and armies. He notes the decline of private armies, which had often posed immediate danger to the state's security. The growth of the state helped to control armies and regulate the use of arms. However, despite the state's efforts to monopolise violence, its control 'was tenuous' (p. 44). Private weapons and a lack of arms regulation remained a problem. Moreover, armies were growing larger, and the increasing number of soldiers posed a threat to civilians.

Chapter three focuses on the practice of justice and explores the persistence of various modes of regulating disputes outside the institutions of state justice. The crucial role of honour and vengeance is emphasised. The state's ability to control violence was limited and did not prevail against traditional measures. Violent and non-violent private dispute resolution outweighed official forms of justice, which were costly and often inaccessible. Ruff notes a decline in the use of capital punishment towards the end of the period, and of the earlier 'brutal theatricality of punishment' (p. 111); public executions became more infrequent while a new penology developed.

In chapter four Ruff explores 'the discourse of interpersonal violence' and draws on themes such as homicide, domestic violence, rape of young girls or marginalised women, and newborn-child murder. The fact that human interchange involved honour and 'face' is rightly emphasised. Most violent confrontations resulted from verbal or nonverbal communication, and the symbolism of these acts of violence has to be recognized.

Chapter five pursues the themes of symbolism and ritual, and shows how group violence was often part of carnivals, festivals, and games. Towards the end of the period, the authorities began to regard these activities as a threat to public order, patronage diminished and religious reformers objected on moral grounds.

Ruff then turns to popular protest and violence, protest as a means of intimidation, riots and rebellions. Protests remained mostly local and resulted from some drastic change or measure, food shortages, religious or political issues. Protests were generally directed at specific groups or a powerful citizen. Women also took part and sometimes emerged as leaders in crowd actions. Rebellions, however, were more complex matters. There were often vertical social alliances of peasants and aristocrats, so they cannot be simply understood in terms of class conflict. However, aristocratic participation diminished and the 'objectives and repertoires of popular protest' underwent change (p. 213).

Insufficient policing and law-enforcement, as well as judicial overlaps, made it easier for organised crime to survive. Religious or ethnic marginals, those socially and economically excluded or discriminated against, former soldiers, and the young were all prone to criminal band activities. Apart from Southern Europe, however, such bands seemed to have been active in rather small bodies, and the growing power of the state helped to free the countries from them.

This is a valuable and stimulating book, which succeeds in its goal. Ruff's arguments are clear, and the online bibliographical essay shows his grasp of relevant scholarship. However, the fact that violence is a relative, universal and trans-historical phenomenon depending on socio-cultural perception is not given enough weight. Ruff's thesis relies too heavily on broad theories: Oestreich's social disciplining, Elias's theory of a civilising process, Muchembled's idea of the division between elite and popular culture. Although their use is justified, these theories remain insufficiently problematicised in the main text. With regard to the teleological and linear-positive connotation and the concept of progress which both underlie Elias's theory, I doubt whether, as a main analytical tool, it is still suited to an analysis of violence. Elias's idea that violence was repressed through a civilising process is a myth. Instead, historical-anthropological evidence of universally existing violence should serve as a starting point. Throughout his book, Ruff makes comparisons between modern and early modern violence. This makes it difficult for the historian to forget his modern understanding of violence and to focus (more 'impartially') on the perception of early modern violence, and on the specific cultural surroundings which shaped and legitimised violent behaviour (Ruff deals with geographically and culturally very different areas all over Western Europe). Finally, apart from a few passages, statistical evidence remains mostly unquestioned; without any comment on the problems of quantitative analysis figures leave a distorted view. How far can we rely on quantitative source material from this period? How complete are the sources, and did jurists register crimes with the same method and meticulous precision all over Europe that it would serve the sense of a comparative study over such a long period? These and similar kinds of questions need to be addressed.

University of Warwick **Tobias B. Hug**

Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 290, hb. £45, ISBN: 0521006643.

This book promises to be a 'broad-ranging study' of Caroline Protestant culture. It is indeed broad-ranging in that it brings together material usually separated by genre (masques, meditations, sermons and plays) and in the very different aspects of religious thought and practice it explores. Barbour considers changing ideas of religious heroism in the 1630s as responses to England's failure to be heroic in the Thirty Years War; the counter-intuitive congruence between Laudian and Puritan ideas of the role of the imagination in worship; the religious and social discourses on the individual that are strained between a God who is not a respecter of persons (and yet who chooses individuals for salvation) and a deferential society searching for new ways to express social roles. Finally, two chapters on nature consider the impact of emergent Baconian ideas on the writing of theology and church history. Tying these themes together, the introduction says, is the argument that Caroline writers were taking stock of the 'circumstances' of their faith, these circumstances being 'the conditions and instruments mediating God's gracious dispensations' (p. 2). The many meanings of 'circumstance' provide an umbrella large enough to cover the different debates that Barbour discusses, but it is not clear that they all arise out of the same re-assessment of religious ideas and practices. Neither is it always obvious whether the study is meant to relate only and specifically to the reign of Charles I, as the dust-jacket says, or to the seventeenth century more generally, as the title announces. If this is a study of Caroline religious culture in particular, then the priciples of selection are rather odd: figures that did not live far into Charles I's reign (Francis Bacon, Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne) have considerable attention lavished on them, as do figures whose public impact really dates to the Civil War era (such as Samuel Hartlib and his circle) or after (for example, Robert Sanderson) while men who made a very definite impact on Caroline religious culture are given only a handful of passing references each (John Williams, John Buckeridge; Joseph Hall receives not a single mention). Beyond the Introduction's account of Caroline 'stock-taking' of the 'circumstances' of religion, there are few discernible links between the themes discussed. Indeed, within each chapter the links between the various sources used often seem to be created by, rather than described through, Barbour's prose. For example, in describing the circumstance of 'the person', Barbour considers Sanderson's *Pax Ecclesiae* and the schema for predestination found there, which Sanderson compares to 'pedigrees'. We are told that Sanderson's 'transformation of theological maps into family tress' means they 'intersect more or less intricately with the social and moral duties of Christianity' (p. 124). Sanderson's account, which Barbour quotes, explains that they were used to avoid suggesting that these eternal decrees happened in sequence; the schema allowed him to stress rather the *relation* between the decrees. They are in no stronger sense 'family trees', and only Barbour's wish to unite the social, soteriological and historical aspects of 'the person' can explain the claim that they 'intersect … with the social and moral duties of Christianity'. Likewise, I think it is inferring too much from Anthony Milton's description of the Laudian reliance on institutional succession in their anti-Catholic polemics on Church 'visibility' that 'the Laudian notion of church pedigree' was seen as 'ennobling the church in its ancestry, officers and worship'. Of the themes pursued by Barbour, that on religious heroism is the most interesting, and the comparison of Little Gidding and Great Tew in their approach to these questions (the former using Charles V to consider the rights and wrongs of retirement; the latter treating intellectual exploration as a better heroism) does suggest that 'stock-taking' can provide a fruitful way into elements of Caroline religious culture.

Nottingham Trent University **Mary Morrissey**

M. S. Robinson, *Writing the Reformation: Actes and Monuments and the Jacobean History Play*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, pp. 216, hb. £40, ISBN: 0754606147.

The idea behind this book is a commendable one. Robinson's professed goal, to examine those Jacobean history plays based on episodes in John Foxe's celebrated martyrology, the *Acts and Monuments* (popularly known as 'Foxe's Book of Martyrs'), and the ways in which they articulate 'a Foxean vision of history' (p. xv), if successfully implemented, would fill an important and neglected gap in literary studies. Unfortunately, this design is so poorly executed that Robinson's book does not appear to achieve any useful purpose whatsoever.

A number of conceptual and methodological flaws undermine the volume. One major conceptual problem is Robinson's failure to define properly the topic of the book, 'the Foxean history play'. Is this any history play which uses Foxe as a source, as Robinson seems to indicate at one point (p. xv)? Or is it, as she implies on the same page, plays which give dramatic expression to Foxe's interpretation of history? Apparently it is the former, since Robinson repeatedly discusses Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, which – despite Robinson's bizarre claim that it imitates 'the form of apocalyptic history itself' (p. 19) – cannot be claimed as a presentation of Foxe's interpretation of history. In fact, since Thomas Dekker, Thomas Drue, Thomas Heywood, Anthony Munday, Samuel Rowley, William Shakespeare and John Webster are all the authors of 'Foxean' history plays discussed by Robinson, her criteria for inclusion appear to be so loose that her book becomes simply an *omnium gatherum* of Jacobean dramatists. If these authors share similar religious beliefs, similar political convictions, a similar interpretation of history or even similar attitudes, Robinson has not revealed them.

This lack of discrimination is aggravated by Robinson's failure to consider, much less analyze, the different purposes these plays served and the different audiences for which they were written. Heywood's hugely popular *If You Know Not Me*, with its stock comic characters such as the prodigal nephew and the foolish but wealthy tradesman is a very different work on every level from Dekker's complex, detailed allegory, *The Whore of Babylon*; yet Robinson runs them both, and all the other work she discusses, through the same blender. Questions of patronage and performance are completely ignored, while the political circumstances in which the works were written are only mentioned very occasionally.

The chief methodological problem in the book is Robinson's reliance on one of the corrupt Victorian editions of the *Acts and Monuments* and her failure to consult the original editions. Since Robinson herself observes that the Jacobean history plays 'participate in the rewriting of Foxean history represented by the successive editions of the *Actes and Monuments* to which Foxe contributed, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century connotations of his history, as well as the abridgements and other appropriations of Foxe in the seventeenth century' (p. xvi), it is all the more surprising that she uses what is in effect a bowdlerized version of the 1583 edition, with sections of the 1563 edition interspersed. Given Robinson's recognition of the continual revising and rewriting of Foxe's book through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, why didn't she consult the Jacobean editions before discussing its impact on Jacobean playwrights? When discussing Heywood's use of Foxe as a source for *If You Know Not Me*, his drama about Elizabeth I, it is surely crucial for Robinson to also discuss the different accounts of Elizabeth in the different editions available to Heywood and his audience: the account eulogizing Elizabeth in the 1563 edition, the increasingly critical accounts of her in the 1570, 1576 and 1583 editions, as well as the mixed messages of the 1596 edition, in which the earlier critical account was printed along with a triumphalist description of her victory over the Spanish Armada.

Robinson also does a questionable job of relating Foxe's text to the plays she describes. For example, in analyzing Foxe's influence on Heywood's *If You Know Not Me*, she never mentions the very significant differences between Foxe's accounts and Heywood's accounts of the same events. Her use of secondary sources is also poor. Her bibliography contains a number of dated or unreliable works (including Alison Plowden's *Danger to Elizabeth* which Robinson uses as a source for Catholic polemic), while omitting some major recent scholarship (e.g. Alexandra Walsham's seminal study of providence in early modern England is never cited or mentioned by Robinson despite the constant discussion of providence in her book). Perhaps as a result of this, dubious, or even erroneous, assertions pepper Robinson's texts, among them: 'Foxe himself considered noble class as much as liability as female gender' (p. 127) and 'the English Reformation was marked by an overturning of socially constructed gender stereotypes' (p. 133).

No one connected with the production of this book emerges with much credit; not Robinson and certainly not Ashgate which has seen fit to charge £40 for a work of little more than two hundred pages, with cheap covers and binding, and inferior illustrations.

University of Sheffield **Thomas S. Freeman**

Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. xi + 225, hb. £22.50, ISBN: 0199247072

It is, perhaps, the most outlandish comment in all of the recent secondary literature on Spinoza. Jonathan Bennett says of Spinoza's perplexing doctrine concerning the eternality of the human mind that it is 'rubbish which causes others to write rubbish'. [1] This part of Spinoza's *Ethics*, says Bennett, is 'an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster'. So deliciously extreme is Bennett's verdict that quoting it has proved almost irresistible for subsequent defenders of Spinoza. Stephen Nadler, in his fine book, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind*, cannot resist this temptation. (And, apparently, neither can I.) But for all its overstatement, Bennett's prose is simply giving expression to a widespread frustration that readers have felt in trying to make sense of the most difficult part of one of the most difficult works in the history of philosophy. It is a tribute to Nadler's book that it goes a long way toward investing Spinoza's doctrines about immortality with comprehensible historical and philosophical significance.

Nadler begins with a mystery artfully presented. In 1656, 24-year-old Baruch de Spinoza was expelled from the Jewish community of Amsterdam. The proclamation effecting this ban was unusually harsh even for this close community which had a proclivity to issue such bans for any number of activities. Here is an excerpt:

> We excommunicate, expel, curse, and damn Baruch de Espinoza.... Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, ... and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.

And it continues in this vein, forbidding any contact with Spinoza. What could have prompted such a violent response? With genuine narrative flair, Nadler considers a number of possible explanations and methodically deems them inadequate or incomplete before turning to Spinoza's religious and philosophical views. Thus, as is well-known, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza denies that the Torah has a distinctively divine origin and that its laws have any continuing validity. He denies that the Jews were 'chosen' by God and, perhaps worst of all, he denies that there is any transcendent God who, as Hebrew scriptures relate, exercises providential control over the world. (This last theme is, of course, prominent in the *Ethics* as well.) Nadler observes:

> The leaders of any Jewish congregation in the seventeenth century...would have been most concerned had a member been publicly expressing any one of these opinions, let alone all three. And a community of former refugees [as was Amsterdam's] would have been particularly worried if any of those opinions were of a sort such as to give offense to their Gentile hosts. (p. 39)

So on the plausible assumption that Spinoza was giving expression to some of his mature views on these matters already in the 1650s, we have the makings of a good explanation for the vehemence with which Spinoza was banned.

But there is one of Spinoza's philosophical views that, Nadler argues, may have played the most significant role in Spinoza's ban. This is what Nadler sees as Spinoza's denial of any kind of personal immortality.

Why should such a view have played a key role in Spinoza's excommunication? After all, as Nadler correctly notes, there was no settled dogma in Judaism about the immortality of the soul. Nonetheless, Nadler claims that 'Jewish Amsterdam in the 1650s was simply the wrong place in which to deny the immortality of the soul' (p. 178). To see why, Nadler looks to debates raging in the Amsterdam Jewish community some twenty years before Spinoza's excommunication. The community became split over the issue of whether some Jews – those who committed particularly grievous sins such as apostasy – would suffer eternal punishment or whether instead all Jews would have a share of eternal happiness in the world to come. External authorities had to be brought in to help settle the passions that this debate raised. For Nadler's purposes, the significant thing to note is that a presupposition of all sides in this consuming debate was that there is some kind of personal immortality.

So it seems that the community – Spinoza's community – had a special concern about personal immortality, and this, according to Nadler, goes a long way toward explaining the harshness of Spinoza's ban. But why should immortality have been such a hot issue? Nadler offers three reasons.

(1) He correctly stresses that the Amsterdam community was largely made up of Sephadic Jews who themselves had fled persecution in Spain or Portugal and who had relatives still living there. These relatives would have been forced to renounce their Judaism and to live – outwardly at least – as Christians. Naturally, the Amsterdam Jews who had recently returned to Judaism would have been deeply concerned about the fate of the souls of their relatives who were committing the sin of apostasy.

(2) Nadler points out that, with one exception, all the Rabbis of the community had been raised and taught in a Catholic environment. It was only natural that this Catholic exposure would have 'coloured their approach to Judaism' (p. 179). Obviously, the strong Catholic doctrines of personal immortality would have been prime candidates for ideas that would have seeped into the Judaism of these rabbis.

(3) Finally, Nadler appeals to the familiar point that the political situation of the Jewish community led them to crack down on those in their midst – such as Spinoza – whose beliefs were likely to offend the municipal authorities. And certainly a denial of immortality would have been at least as much an object of concern to the Christian authorities as it was to the Jews in Spinoza's community.

While the first of these reasons is plausible, the second and third do not serve to justify Nadler's claim that Spinoza's denial of personal immortality was the root cause of the vehemence of the ban. After all, Spinoza's denial of a transcendent God and his denial of the distinctively divine origin of scripture would have also been targets for Rabbis who had grown up in a Catholic environment and who were concerned about the political status of the Jewish community in a Christian city.

There is a further question that Nadler addresses, a question that is, in a way, the most important one of all. Nadler's entire account is premised on the claim that Spinoza does indeed deny the immortality of the soul. But does Spinoza really do so? Nadler correctly points out that the eternal existence that Spinoza allows me to have is one that involves an eternal idea of the essence of my body. Also Nadler is clearly right in claiming that, for Spinoza, any kind of eternal existence that I might have would not involve memory of the goings-on in life. But Nadler goes on to make the stronger claim that this kind of eternal existence involves nothing that is distinctively mine. He says, for example,

> [T]here is nothing distinctly personal about this eternal idea of the body – nothing that would lead me to regard it as my 'self', identical to the self that I currently am in this life. (p. 115)
>
> [I]t is hard to see *how* one eternal mind – or, rather, the body of eternal adequate ideas that once belonged to a person's mind – could be qualitatively differentiated from another. (pp. 124–5).

But this is puzzling. For Spinoza, as Nadler recognizes, my eternal mind is the eternal idea of the essence of my body. What could be more individual than the idea of an essence that belongs to *my* body? Arguably, Spinoza sees the essence of my body as unique to my body. (This is plausible if one keeps in mind that, for Spinoza, the essence of a thing is to have certain causes.) If this is the case, then there is something distinctive about this idea of my body. My eternal mind is not, contrary to Nadler, 'generically no different from the idea of the essence of any other body' (p. 115).

Rather, there is a sense, for Spinoza, in which the unique 'I' eternally exists. After all, as Spinoza says, my mind is just the idea of my body (*Ethics*, Part II, Proposition 13), and this idea is, of course, distinct from ideas of other bodies. Thus the eternal idea of my body would be my mind as it exists eternally, and this eternal idea would be differentiated from other eternal ideas. Further, for Spinoza, this eternal idea of my body is a complex idea that constitutes an individual idea or mind different from other individual minds. This kind if eternality – though it may not involve memory – does involve the individuation of my mind and can be said to offer a sense in which *I* am eternal.

Nadler himself seems worried by this kind of objection I have raised when he says, 'I am genuinely puzzled about how to answer the question of the postmortem integrity of the "collection" of adequate ideas constituting an eternal mind' (p. 130). But he does not offer the deeper philosophical analysis that would be needed to answer this difficult question.

Still, these concerns should not obscure Nadler's impressive achievement in writing a thoroughly engaging book that rescues Spinoza's views on the eternality of the mind from Bennett's rubbish heap.

Yale University **Michael Della Rocca**

John Newton (ed.), *Early Modern Ghosts*, Durham, Centre for Seventeenth Century Studies, 2002, pp. 138, pb. £7.50, ISBN: 0953130010

Ghosts, fairies, goblins have long been treated with disdain by historians, abandoned to the folklorist or treated as peripheral characters of the supernatural world and subsumed within the historiography of witchcraft. *Early Modern Ghosts* is a collected volume growing out of a conference of the same name held in 2001, and is dedicated to providing 'a lively debate on the subject of ghosts'. This publication forms part of the current trend among historians of the early modern period to refocus interest in ghosts and to study them in their own right. Anyone wishing to monitor the current state of this research can make a start here. Contributors to this volume explore what happened to ghost beliefs (mainly in England) following the establishment of a Protestant Church that officially rejected purgatory and declared contact between the worlds of the living and the dead an impossibility. As this book illustrates, the processes of religious and cultural change were inconsistent and fragmentary. Ghosts were not easily expunged from the early modern imagination and were instead redefined and appropriated by a variety of different interest groups for whom these supernatural creatures still held deep cultural significance.

The book is divided into three sections which reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the volume and of the subject more generally. We are introduced to the complexities of belief in ghosts in the first part, which specifically examines treatments of the ghost in Renaissance drama and poetry. Some of the essays here use the ghost as a platform for discussing other ideas rather than concentrating on the creature itself but there are nevertheless some interesting offerings. Adam McKeown's account of the ghost of Old Hamlet usefully demonstrates the confused status of the early modern ghost and its displacement in the contemporary imagination. Epistemological and confessional conflicts of the day are reflected in microcosm here as the author draws out conflicts between verbal and visual representations of truth in relation to the ghost. On a similar theme, Carol Banks's analysis of the poem 'Shadow and Substance' reflects the fact that ghosts increasingly occupied a liminal space in this society, hovering between fact and fiction, truth and illusion. The uncertain and flexible status of the ghost-figure is again reinforced by Anna Linton's examination of Lutheran funeral poetry. Appropriated as an allegorical figure in the didactic literature of bereavement, the ghost retained emotional resonance for Protestant communities and was not simply abandoned as a relic of popish superstition.

Section two documents historical approaches to the study of ghost beliefs in this period. John Newton and Jo Bath continue to illustrate the disputed status of the figure by contrasting interpretations of the ghost as angel, devil or spirit of the dead. Peter Marshall and Belinda Lewis provide the most incisive accounts of the complexity of contemporary belief in ghosts across confessional, social and chronological divides. Lewis gives a sensitive portrayal of the syncretism of official, traditional and reformed ideas of ghosts and Marshall similarly highlights the persistent relationship between the worlds of the living and the dead through a micro-history of the ghost of Old Mother Leakey. This worthy case study is perhaps the most suggestive work in this volume as the author effectively links beliefs at the local level to a national context, demonstrating the limited impact of official theological interpretations of the preternatural and the non-linear timescale of religious and cultural change. The ghost offers key insights into broader religious, social and cultural processes and clearly establishes the historical relevance of studying this supernatural creature.

The final section of the volume contains just one essay, perhaps reflecting the fact that Ian Baker's work seems slightly out of place within the context of this publication. Baker takes us through the current state of psychological and parapsychological research into apparition experiences in modern society and asks if ghosts really exist or not. Although this work is fascinating in its own right, it is here that the interdisciplinary focus of this volume may have been stretched a little too far. If one of the aims of this collection is to establish ghost belief as a credible object of historical enquiry, then to include an essay on whether ghosts enjoyed an objective social reality may appear to somewhat undermine this aim.

Nevertheless, this work fulfils an important function by concentrating on a neglected area of scholarly analysis. It will undoubtedly be of interest to the growing community of scholars currently engaged in examinations of early modern ghosts, and it should also appeal to the more general reader wishing to dip their toe into this emerging field of research. Whilst it does not open up a completely new field of enquiry, *Early Modern Ghosts* is a good advertisement for interdisciplinary history, and is largely successful in amalgamating literary, historical, and psychological approaches. Though it is somewhat hampered by uneven content and lacks some cohesion, the book goes part of the way towards achieving its goals. The volume does indeed provide a lively debate on the subject of ghosts and can easily be justified as part of the effort to rehabilitate the early modern ghost as a credible and revealing topic of investigation.

University of Warwick **Sasha Handley**