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Review Essay: Hardin, Richard F. *Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarch in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton*

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one must wonder: after the failure of the Armada, did the Lillois ever think that they had backed a loser?

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Gajowski, Evelyn. *The Art of Loving: Female Subjectivity and Male Discursive Traditions in Shakespeare's Tragedies*. University of Delaware Press, Newark 1992. 153 pp. \$32.50.

Evelyn Gajowski, *The Art of Loving: Female Subjectivity and Male Discursive Traditions in Shakespeare's Tragedies*, is reviewed on pp 182.

Hardin, Richard F. *Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarch in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton*. University of Delaware Press, Newark 1992; Associated University Presses, London and Toronto 1992. 267 pp. \$39.50.

In *Civil Idolatry*, Richard F. Hardin sets out to chart the 'demythologizing of power' in certain literary works ranging from the end of the Middle Ages up to and including Milton. Drawing his title from Milton's charge that Englishmen are 'prone oftentimes . . . to a civil kinde of Idolatry in idolizing thir Kings', Hardin uses Erasmus to establish that dislike of ceremony was an important component of Christian humanism and argues convincingly that More, Erasmus, Lorenzo Valla, and George Buchanan in the next generation held deep reservations concerning the mythologizing of kingship. Hardin's chapters on Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton argue that the desacralizing of monarchy is an important theme connecting the works of these English Renaissance authors.

Hardin takes on a formidable body of criticism by challenging the importance of the idea of 'the kings two bodies', a concept explicated by Ernst H. Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957) and extended by Marie Axton in *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (1977). According to Hardin, confusion resulted from the uncritical extension of a continental concept of sacred monarchy into English political thought (pp 22-4). Hardin argues, for example, that in Spenser's well-known Letter to Raleigh, Spenser's reference to Elizabeth as bearing 'two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Emperesse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady', should be interpreted as an 'opposition between public and private person' and not complicated by attempts to 'identify it with a continental theory of kingship from the earlier Middle Ages' (p 28). Hardin's reinterpretation of Shakespeare's history plays admirably supports his claims.

In his very successful chapter on Erasmus, Hardin exhibits a broad knowledge of the important texts of More and Erasmus and a sensitive grasp of the need to differentiate the views of the younger More and Erasmus from the positions they later adopted. His analysis of Erasmus persuasively argues that

the great humanist had serious reservations concerning idolizing kings but remained appalled at the thought of popular rule. In Erasmus's scheme of things, a limited monarchy checked by the aristocracy most likely would preserve order and peace. Hardin also demonstrates that Erasmus was bitterly opposed to warfare, regarding it as 'antithetical to the spirit of Christianity' (p 71). He concludes this chapter with the observation that Shakespeare offers 'a clear-cut case of direct contact with Erasmus's political thought; but Spenser and Milton certainly knew him [Erasmus], and must have sympathized with his program for the reform of rule through the assertion of Christian liberty' (p 90). Hardin's thoughtful and revealing discussion of *Paradise Regained* in chapter 5 illustrates the political elements in the poem, demonstrating how Milton redefines *conquest* (pp 191-201). The importance of this section in the book cannot be overstated.

In the chapter entitled 'Spenser's Anatomy of Tyranny', Hardin wants to revise 'the general acceptance of Spenser as courtly flatterer and enthusiast for empire in the modern sense' (p 119) but fortunately stops short of arguing that Spenser shared Erasmus's hatred of war. That Mercilla represents a criticism of the excessive mercy the historical Elizabeth showed to Irish rebels is probable (p 121), but Spenser, who espoused the liberal Protestant politics of Sidney, Walsingham, Leicester, and Essex, would hardly have idealized Mercilla's rusty sword.

The principle difficulty, however with the Spenser chapter arises from an uncritical treatment of the texts of *A View of the Present State of Ireland* and 'A Brief Note of Ireland' (pp 93-5). Hardin quotes an agreement error from Spenser's *View*, 'to see her majestie so abused by some whom they [*sic*] put in speciall truste of those greate affairs' and then comments, 'a revealing slip, "they" for "she": it means either to identify the queen with her privy council, or to indicate her position as a corporate entity, a creation of the law' (p 93). Since Spenser's *View* was not printed until thirty-five years after his death, this kind of intentionality on Spenser's part cannot be assumed. The editors of *The Spenser Variorum* do not even claim to have collated all of the manuscripts that were extant when their text was prepared, and additional manuscripts have since been identified in Peter Beal's *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (1980). In addition, Spenser's authorship of 'A Brief Note of Ireland' is by no mean certain. In *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (1990) Ciaran Brady accepts Spenser's authorship of only the third of the three parts of 'A Brief Note of Ireland', rejecting the second part containing a letter to queen Elizabeth upon which Hardin bases his arguments.

Hardin's book is ambitious and challenges us to rethink our easy assumptions regarding the treatment of monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. This work will be very influential and merits the wide readership it will attract.

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