by Vermigli himself, but more so by his students after his death and not printed until 1576. The material of these commonplaces comes from his lectures and Scriptural commentaries and are thus intended as Biblical rather than political exegesis. Still, long passages discussing political issues arise especially from Vermigli's Old Testament commentaries. The *Loci communes*, analysed in a fashion illustrative of his scholastic training at Padua and built on Biblical, Patristic, Classical and Legal sources, enjoyed enormous popularity across Europe, seeing 14 editions before 1656. Obviously, Vermigli was indeed an important reference for generations of Reformed ministers who mined his text for material and *exempla*. For example, Kingdon notes John Milton's debt to Vermigli in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, indicating quite conclusively the authority of the Italian reformer.

Without any doubt, then, the editor's contention that Peter Martyr Vermigli's political thought deserves more attention is correct; and Kingdon's book provides an excellent introduction to this subject. The English texts are edited, although retaining the original spelling and punctuation. A brief glossary and notes are also provided. The Latin passages, however, consist only of photographically reproduced pages from the original sixteenth century editions with no scholarly apparatus attached. Very useful tools for further research are added at the end of the volume: a short title bibliography of the works of Vermigli, including the locations of extant editions; a list of partial works and extracts; a general bibliography; an index; and an index of Biblical references.

Therefore, Kingdon has not only made a persuasive case for further study of Vermigli's political thoughts but also has provided the necessary background information to begin the task.

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Michael Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in Its Rise and Decline*. The University of Chicago Press, 1980. Pp. 275. \$23.00.

Critical approaches to literature are in no small degree influenced by the critic's intellectual milieu. However scientific we try to be, however objectively we attempt to treat literary history, our methods are always determined by what are ultimately subjective frames of reference. Like it or not, the scholar, whether writing on Homer or Joyce, translates his material into his own idiom, makes it more contemporary, even if his goal is to preserve its historical context and character.

Recent studies in allegory are a case in point. A work such as Maureen Quilligan's *The Language of Allegory* is unmistakably a product of our times. Using methods and terminology of the structuralists to explore the relation between text, subtext and reader, she analyses allegory and some of the major examples of the form in terms of contemporary intellectual points of view. In their time, our proto-critics, the scholiasts and exegetes of later antiquity and the Middle Ages were doing the same thing with their principal texts – Homer, Virgil, and the Bible – and so, allegory was invented as a way of accommodating text to reader. Historically, allegory is first of all part of the critical rather than poetic process.

In his new book, Michael Murrin identifies these historical beginnings of allegory in the philosophical exegesis of Homer, and goes on to demonstrate its manifestations in the commentary of Landino and in major works which are in varying degrees allegorical: the *Aeneid*, *Orlando innamorato*, *Gerusalemme liberata*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost*. His conclusion, looking at the clash between neoclassicism and historicism, is a post-mortem on allegory. The book is of unquestionable importance for literary scholars and critics for its close analysis of the relation between poetic texts and the allegorical commentary which grew out of them. Moreover, it answers an important need, particularly for students, since there is no comparable work in English. Granting this importance, indeed because of it, I want to examine the book in some detail, consider some of Murrin's larger arguments, and explain my reservations about his methodology and some of his conclusions.

In his preface Murrin firmly announces his position as a literary historian rather than a critic or theorist. His methodology is in a quiet way polemical: "I have tried ... to present those allegories which can be recovered by the historian, an analysis of what some critics actually wrote in the Renaissance, or a direct reading of those poems where we have sufficient data to determine the kind and method of the allegory" (p. x). Rejecting the critical path followed by others currently working on allegory, Murrin is not concerned with "the modern or romantic definition of allegory, the play of personifications which express our passions," or with the "modern experiments which critics felt to be mythic or allegorical." *The Allegorical Epic* is meant to "complement" such studies as those by Greene, Durling, and Giamatti, and although he speaks of it as a "companion" to his *Veil of Allegory*, one half-suspects that it is a recantation of his earlier critical methods. His efforts to resist critical speculation and to limit his study of allegory to a kind of critical empiricism are not always successful, although they are also the source of much of what is good in the book.

The merits of historical criticism hardly require defense here, but Murrin occasionally falls short of his goal of "objective documentation." His illustration of the methods of allegory in terms of documentary evidence from the exegetes (in the case of Homer and Virgil) and from the poets themselves (as in the case of Tasso) results in chapters which are at once useful and original. But no less often his empiricism fails for lack of such "data," and he must make disclaimers which undermine his argument, such as those introducing his chapters on Boiardo and Spenser: "We have no documents which register interpretations of Boiardo's text historically, as we have for Homer and Virgil ..." (pp. 55-56); "We cannot therefore base our reading of Spenser on objective documentation of this sort. It does not exist" (p. 131). A similar problem arises with Milton, who of course rejected allegory. In such instances Murrin is forced to resort to the kind of critical speculation he has firmly rejected. In the case of Spenser he turns to the question of the poet's sources, and his hypotheses are historically no more (nor less) objective than other critics'. To off-set this he resorts to a strangely literalistic reading of the poem of Book Two. In the case of Milton he must move well out of the sphere of "historicism" as he has defined it. Murrin has imposed upon himself an unrealistic critical asceticism which he cannot live up to. When he tells us early on that "It is not the object of the literary historian to speculate about the mind" (pp. x-xi), he cuts himself off from a necessary critical tool, and in suggesting that such speculation is absent from *The Allegorical Epic* he shows that he

is not fully aware of the limits of his methodology and its appropriateness for much of his material. Sometimes he places too much faith in the "objectivity" of "data" and sometime he fails to notice that he has drifted from "documentation" to "speculation." Indeed, Murrin's last chapter provides a perfect example of how subjective our understanding of "truth" is. Here he describes how the exegetes' conception of literary "truth" is displaced by the historians' – one understanding of the word replacing another. Murrin, however, does not recognize how the lesson of this chapter applies to his own methods, which rely more on speculation than he seems to realize.

A more specific example of how these methodological problems apply to his treatment of his material occurs in his chapter on Tasso. Here, by chronicling Tasso's own remarks about allegory, Murrin hopes to reverse the critical opinion that "the allegory is an afterthought imposed upon the text" and to show that "the whole poem is allegorical and was allegorical from the very beginning" (pp. 87–88). To do this Murrin develops a very useful chronology of the evolution of the epic and of Tasso's emerging interest in allegory. But ultimately, Tasso's words are insufficient proof. They are contradictory and probably intentionally misleading, and Murrin's analysis of this data is unconvincing and demonstrates how documentation subtly merges with speculation. For example, in order to counter the well-known letter of June, 1576, to Scipione Gonzaga, where Tasso states that "When I began my poem, I had no idea of allegory," Murrin refers to letter seventy-six, written in the same month (and after the completion of the "*Allegoria del poema*" and of most of the revisions of the poem) to Scalabrino. Here Tasso says "But certainly, or affection deceives me, all the parts of the allegory could not be more internally consistent and correspond in a manner to the literal sense of the poem and also to my poetic principles, whence I wonder sometime if it were not true that, when I began my poem, I did not have this idea" (p. 102). The letter expresses his pleasure with the allegory and the way in which it conforms to the revised poem. Although his thought is veiled in conditional phrases, Tasso suggests clearly enough that, while he did not originally intend the allegory, it now is so persuasive that it seems as though he did. Murrin's statement, that here Tasso "implies that he thought allegorically from the start" (p. 102) is a rather dubious interpretation of Tasso's meaning and contradicts what is actually said. Letting all the documentation speak for itself, the most one can conclude about the poet's intentions is that "the essential basis for Tasso's allegorization existed in the original draft of the whole poem" (p. 89). That is, that the poet could have derived the allegory from a draft not necessarily allegorical in itself. This is very different from saying that the whole poem "was allegorical from the very beginning," and to get from one statement to the other requires some liberal interpretation of the documentation. The problem is aggravated by the fact that Murrin does not clearly distinguish between allegory and allegorizing – the "invention" of allegory through commentary, and the creation of allegorical verse. This makes his use of adjectival and adverbial forms ("allegorical" and "allegorically") here and throughout the book quite confusing. By thus making excessive claims for his "data" or by exceeding the limits of his methodology, Murrin mars what is otherwise an original and impressive commentary.

In more general ways as well Murrin's self-imposed limits of historicism exert restraints which occasionally detract from this important statement about the nature of allegory. Unlike the more critical studies of allegory, Murrin's historical view

emphasizes the pastness of the past rather than its presence: for him it is not a "genre or something atemporal," not a manner of expression or thought that is common to all ages, but an "historical phenomenon" (pp. x & 196) confined to a finite phase in our literary history. Its genesis lay in the need to reconcile poetry and philosophical truth, and its first manifestation is in the attempt to create a consistent "philosophical vocabulary" which would "standardize" the meaning of Homer (p. 3). Concentrating on Homer's representation of Hera, Murrin shows how the scholiasts, confused and often shocked by the poet's treatment of the goddess, created polyvalent allegorical meanings for the text which coincided with their philosophical beliefs.

Homer's critics, then, produced a complicated subtext explaining the meaning of particular episodes and deities; for example, for the scholiasts the poet "talks of Athena and Hera rather than of prudence and air" (p. 9). From this critical process emerges polyvalency, the distinguishing feature of the allegorical epic; Virgil first uses it to create the "polysemous" dimension of his epic, and letter writers use it in greater or lesser degrees to develop a consistent meaning for their work. As Murrin describes this evolution:

Polyvalency in Homeric criticism is rather a matter of historical accident. It comes from the bewildering variety of exegeses done by different people over a long period of time. The *Aeneid* is thus a unique achievement, and Virgil by his genius transformed a whole tradition and established a great model for creative allegory in the West. (p.23).

According to Murrin, not only was Virgil the first to make the polyvalency of his gods and goddesses consistent throughout his epic, but he also stimulated the development of "continuous allegory" in which the allegorical undermeaning is coextensive with the plot of the epic, as in the *Gerusalemme liberata*, for example.

Murrin's account of this relation between Homeric exegesis and individual allegorical texts and commentaries, while not especially original, is the best available in English. Nowhere do we have such a detailed exposition of the relation between text and meaning as understood by the poets and their contemporaries. His analysis, then, is directed at the ways that poets and critics create their allegories; his extensive scholarship is used to examine allegorical methods behind isolated figures and episodes in specific works: Homer's Hera, Virgil's Juno, Landino's Virgil, Falerina's garden in Boiardo, Tasso's enchanted wood, Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, and the war in Heaven in *Paradise Lost*.

Fine as these essays are, it is in terms of Murrin's larger argument about the rise and fall of the allegorical epic that his historicism is frequently disappointing. Individual works and their critical subtexts stand in isolation. The continuity that turns "historical accident" into tradition and convention is left undeveloped. We perceive the generic relation between Homeric exegesis and the *Aeneid*, but we must accept *ex cathedra* Murrin's pronouncement that Virgil invented polyvalency. The poet is not placed in the context of Lucretius, Ovid, or Lucan. Similarly, when speaking of the *Orlando innamorato* (p. 53), Murrin says that Boiardo "returns us to the tradition of discontinuous allegory." What was presented as an example of the scholiasts' readings of Homer has become a tradition. Likewise with the "tradition of the continuous allegory," of which Tasso is the only true exemplar: he has shown us how Tasso's allegory evolved, but has said nothing to justify historically a tradition of continuous

allegory, or to prepare us for his conclusions about its rise and fall. As a result, the reader feels uneasy about the overall argument, as though something promised had not been delivered.

This is all the more frustrating when we consider the narrowness of Murrin's definition of allegory, and remember that we have been told that it is not a literary genre. He sensibly excludes works which conform to a "modern or romantic definition of allegory," but also passes over those which use "personifications" to "express our passions" (p. xi). Trying to avoid one critical anachronism, he falls into another and rejects much that in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance would have been regarded as allegory. Thus the reader is confused when, in an appendix at the very end of the book, he is told that Landino's commentary "has the familiar ring of medieval allegory" with its "allegorical personifications" and that "This is part of my point. The interpretation of Virgil has a close interrelationship with medieval creative writing" (p. 201). We have moved from antiquity to the *cinquecento*, and on to Spenser and Milton, but we have heard nothing about "medieval allegory" and have been led to believe that its personifications were another thing altogether and were perhaps not allegory at all, properly speaking. Grateful as we are for Murrin's individual readings, we are left unsure of what he means by allegory and what might be included in the tradition of the continuous and discontinuous allegorical epic.

It may be that this sort of problem is to be expected in a work that announces itself as "essays" in the rise and fall of the allegorical epic, but the argument promises and supposes a greater degree of historical continuity than it provides. I do not want to be too much the Aristotelian, but the epilogue, pronouncing the end of Homeric allegory, does assume that we know something about its beginning and middle. Here too, Murrin's historicism leaves the reader frustrated, although, characteristically, the chapter is itself very interesting. Using Blackwell, Vico and Wolf as representative of intellectual changes in their century, Murrin argues that antiquated Homeric allegory dies in the clash between neoclassicism and historicism. The thesis, important as it is, is very hypothetical, especially considering neither figure has allegory as his primary concern (as Murrin himself points out). The speculative nature of this argument cuts across the historical methods that Murrin repeatedly invokes. Comparing the three as cultural historians having different approaches to Homer, he sees the death of allegory in the victory of Wolf's historicism. He reasons that "Allegory had been a medium of truth. It had died mostly with neoclassicism but lingered on in Homer because it was considered to be historical truth. It was appropriately removed by historical research, which at the same time undermined neoclassicism. Both assumed universals. Allegory conveyed truths about man and the universe; neoclassicism worked with generic rules. Neither survived a historicism concerned with change through time" (p. 196). As a concluding note this has a nice ring to it, but Murrin's argument fails to convince, largely because it lacks fuller historical documentation. It assumes a very rigid interrelation between general patterns in cultural history and literature. It is certainly very risky to pronounce dead any literary phenomenon with a history of over a millennium; this is all the more risky when one considers that allegory is a protean form generated by the pursuit of "truth" through polysemous argument and polyvalent symbols. Can such a beast die? Indeed, what Murrin's two books underscore, and what is most emphatically illustrated in the epilogue, is that our sense of what "truth" and "facts" are varies depending on our historical perspective, and that the historian's

concern for "change through time" does not end the quest, but makes us more, rather than less dependent on polyvalent forms of literary expression. Moreover, if allegory evolved as a "medium of truth" in literature, that is, from the intellectual stimulation that literature provokes, it seems impossible not only to pronounce it dead, but also to deny that it is something "atemporal" and accessible to the modern as well as the classical and Renaissance writer and thinker. Murrin's desire to regard allegory as an "historical phenomenon" is at odds with his critical instincts, which enable him to recognize the protean quality of a mode which "conveyed truths about man and the universe." His distinction between allegory as a "genre" and as an "historical phenomenon" seems unnecessary; there is nothing that makes the two exclusive of one another.

Considering these lengthy remarks it will perhaps seem strange to conclude that *The Allegorical Epic* will certainly figure among the most important works on allegory – along with *The Veil of Allegory*. The strengths of the book will stand out for any reader. It is a delight to see such careful scholarly work as that reflected in the chapters on Homer, Virgil and Landino. Each chapter, despite these and other reservations, shows originality. One suspects that Murrin's intention has been partly polemical and that he wanted this book to stand as a corrective to certain current critical trends. However, good historical criticism is its own defense, and in drawing up the ranks, and in disqualifying rather conventional and legitimate conceptions of allegory, Murrin has tied his own hands. His own best writing combines both scholarship and sound critical judgment, and he deprives his reader when he imposes unnecessary limits on himself.

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