

## The Reformation

Sir, – I enjoyed Eamon Duffy's thought-provoking essay on the Reformation (Commentary, February 10) and particularly his generally positive reassessment of the writings of the late John Bossy, for which I share his admiration. However, I was dismayed to find my own work on the French Catholic Reform travestied by that familiar scholarly sin, the single quotation taken out of context. The sentence from *Communities of Belief* that he cites refers to the formal positions taken by French Catholic authors in the seventeenth century. The following paragraph emphasizes that "popular beliefs and practices proved immensely resilient, the combined power of church and state very weak at parish level". In several other essays in that volume any reader will see that the enormous gulf between theory and practice is repeatedly stressed, alongside the many ways in which the clergy modified or rejected rigorist positions in their actual dealings with the laity. In fact I have consistently taken pretty much the opposite view to that Duffy seems to attribute to me.

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## "Martutene"

Sir, – I note that in her letter Idoia Estornés Zubizarreta (February 17) only mentions the debate about whether the Basque Country was ever a matriarchal society or not. It is notably difficult to prove that there were ever societies that were unambiguously matriarchal, although the existence of goddess-worship is thought to be an indicator of at least non-patriarchal or egalitarian systems. So we can agree to disagree that Ramon Saizarbitoria's ambiguity in this area is warranted. My assertions about Saizarbitoria's novel *Martutene*, however, were not just to do with the debate around the matriarchal past of the Basque Country. The novel was problematic also in the author's treatment of female characters and in his failure to mention the names of any female Basque intellectuals in a book that mentioned hundreds of male intellectuals, artists and musicians. I agree with Dr Estornés that *Martutene* is a great novel but, in my opinion, it remains uneven.

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Sir, – I have read the correspondence about the perfections or imperfections of Ramon Saizarbitoria's novel with interest. I have been knee-deep in reading the contested work and find its depth and humanity astonishing.

Sir, – My own review of *The One "King Lear"* will not appear for another few weeks (in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*). But as the person Sir Brian Vickers holds responsible for his hypothesis that the Quarto's printer deliberately omitted many words, phrases, and over a hundred lines of text in 1608 because he was short of paper, perhaps I may be allowed to comment on one of the claims in his recent letter "Versions of *King Lear*" (February 17)?

In his second paragraph, Vickers asserts that "the so-called 'revisions' [in the Folio text] are entirely cuts", but that is palpably false. Vickers's belief that the 102 lines not found in the Quarto existed in 1608 but were deliberately suppressed is simply a product of his imagination, and is unsupported by anything one could reasonably define as "bibliographical evidence" in the Quarto itself. Our only evidence that they ever existed anywhere is found in the text printed in 1623. Not having been printed in 1608, they are just as much "additions" to the Folio version as the passages it omits are "cuts". Vickers may not find the facts palatable, or may want to brand them "alternative" – but facts they remain.

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Sir, – Brian Vickers's claim that the Quarto and Folio versions of *King Lear* both represent a single lost version might mislead readers into thinking that they are like two copies

ing. A grand book about seemingly small things has managed to repeatedly take my breath away. Saizarbitoria is a genius and his work, warts and all, deserves a large readership.

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## Stonehenge

Sir, – Ronald Hutton, who is neither an archaeologist nor a Celtic specialist, evidently entered on his angry review of my book *The Mysteries of Stonehenge* with a mind made up before he began to read (February 10). As there is not space here to respond to the misrepresentations with which his attack is replete, I cite an example which he correctly identifies as one of the more significant points in my book:

The lynchpin of [Tolstoy's] argument is that Uisneach may be regarded as the "Mount Killarus" [actually Killar-

## Versions of 'King Lear'



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of the same jigsaw, each missing a few different pieces, and that moving those pieces from one to the other will complete the picture. They are not. For instance, the play's last lines are spoken by Albany in the Quarto and by Edgar (with one verbal difference) in the Folio. These lines are differently shaped and coloured pieces of two jigsaws, each at home only in its own place.

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Sir, – Brian Vickers finds it compelling that with the 1608 Quarto and 1623 Folio texts of *King Lear* "If you complete either text by adding the passages preserved by the other, that produces two identical plays, with many verbal variants". How are we to understand "passages preserved by the other", and its implied complement, passages that are essentially the same? Strictly speaking, if we apply Vickers's operation to any two texts the result will be a pair of

identical hybrids. But Vickers cannot be speaking strictly, since he supposes that the outcome will be "two identical plays, with many verbal variants". The only way to make sense of this contradiction (identity with variation) is for Vickers to be thinking that the variants will appear in passages that he has decided are essentially (but not literally) the same in both editions, so that for these passages neither text has to be grafted with words from the other.

The problem here is that we simply have no way of agreeing what counts as significant variation, even at the level of the dramatic line. How many differences are there between Goneril's "Sir I am made of the selfe same mettall that my sister is" (Quarto) and her "I am made of that selfe-mettle as my Sister" (Folio)? In his 1997 Arden edition of the play, R. A. Foakes presented this line as variant only in the "Sir" omitted from the Folio, but others might reasonably assert that "the self same mettall" (Q) is not identical to "that selfe-mettle" (F), "that my" (Q) is not identical to "as my" (F), and "sister is" (Q) is not identical to "Sister" (F). Unless they quantify such differences (using, say Information Theory), scholars such as Vickers who see an essential unity in the two editions of *King Lear* cannot even express to those of us who instead see abundant variation how much of it they want us to disregard.

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aus, a form inconveniently closer to the original Irish cell áir] which the twelfth-century pseudo-historian Geoffrey of Monmouth identified as the original site of Stonehenge, from which its stones were brought to Britain. It is actually not certain that Geoffrey meant Uisneach when he spoke of Killarus; Aubrey Burl, for example, thought that he might have been referring to the much more famous religious centre of Kildare . . . Tolstoy however ignores this possibility and instead devotes the rest of the book to proving the hypothesis of the sacred centre with the assumption that Uisneach and Killarus were one.

In reality page 83 of my book provides a detailed exposition of Burl's argument, referring readers to his book under its full title, and explaining that his argument is vitiated by the erroneous assumption that Geoffrey, and Giraldus Cambrensis, refer to Kildare. It is only in a single inferior manuscript of the latter's work that the celebrated Kildare is substituted for the obscure Killair: clearly, the *lectio difficilior* is to be preferred.

The full nine-line passage from which this extract is taken appears on the same page as that on which Hutton read my discussion of Geoffrey's allusion to *mons Killaraus*. And the full title of Burl's book is listed in the bibliography on page 571.

It would take a response as long as Hutton's review to show that in every instance, his criticisms misrepresent or ignore what I actually wrote. Perhaps he was more irritated than he chose to reveal by my footnote criticisms of egregious errors contained in his 2009 popular book on the druids, *Blood and Mistletoe*. But then he is throughout at pains to omit the fact that at every stage I draw the reader's attention to contending arguments, which naturally include those differing from my own.

I cannot help feeling it a pity that a book primarily concerned with Celtic studies should not have been reviewed by an author familiar with the subject.

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## 'October'

Sir, – Zinovy Zinik's thoughtful review of the Royal Academy's Revolution exhibition (February 17) is especially welcome, after others that pay scant attention to what the show actually is and isn't. But as the adviser responsible for its film content, I am puzzled by his reference to Eisenstein having filmed the mass spectacle of storming the Winter Palace "for his *October*". Eisenstein certainly didn't film the 1920 "mass action" – he was still serving in the Red Army at this time – although when he came to make *October* in 1927, he could draw on a considerable mythology that had grown up around the largely peaceful 1917 events.

He may have seen the film of Evreinov's highly stylized spectacle, although there is little evidence in the dramatic scenes he created in and around the Winter Palace. But *October* also explores many meanings of "revolution", and its more abstract passages puzzled as well as infuriated many contemporary viewers.

I am advising on an exhibition at the Hermitage later this year which we hope will explore concretely how Eisenstein drew on the museums and architecture of Leningrad for his far from documentary *October*.

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## The alt-left

Sir, – Reading Louis Amis's Freelance column (January 27) brought to mind something that I hadn't noticed in the Obama era from the writers' community at large – a cynicism coloured by a willingness to judge future conduct by present appearances, and a thinly veiled sense of intellectual superiority. I don't mention moral superiority because that trait seems to be inherent in all writers. To Amis's credit, the writing is entertaining, witty and irreverent. I think that it works in this context because he has tempered his cynicism and prejudice with a sprinkling of self-doubt.

What I find disheartening is that for eight years the writers' community seems to have felt compelled by ideological deference to decline to apply that same sharp eye, wit and irreverence to the equally silly doublespeak and hypocrisy of the American "alt-left". So, to Mr Amis, I would say thanks for resurrecting your conscience with humour, doubt, cynicism and the recognition of the human condition which creates enjoyable reading, but it would be so much more delicious if you wouldn't hold back just because of ideology.

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