Reviews

Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. xiv + 252, £35.00.

The reign of Henry VIII saw the rise of a kind of absolute monarchy in England. The 1530s in particular have all the characteristics of a totalitarian regime: arbitrary arrest, trumped-up charges, show trials, the ubiquitous informer. Seth Lerer is well aware of this in his discussion of a representative selection of the writing produced by the Henrician court. His selection is wide-ranging and – in a way that is now quite customary – includes both canonical and noncanonical texts: the work of Hawes and Skelton together with the correspondence of the Spanish ambassador Luiz Carroz and the popular verse romance *The Squire of Low Degree*; the letters of Henry himself to Anne Boleyn in the late 1520s; the manuscript anthology of poems compiled by the recusant Humphrey Wellys; the Devonshire manuscript of the 1530s containing, among other things, early versions of Wyatt's poetry; and Wyatt's prose *Defence* of 1541 written after his arrest by Henry on suspicion of treason.

Lerer's discussion is alive to the issues of dissimulation, betrayal, and anxiety attendant upon absolutist rule. But his account is vitiated by a tendency, at once formalist and residually poststructuralist, to see his texts as essentially self-referential and – especially in the case of Wyatt – as disabled by an inherent instability. The result is that the human and social significance of the writing is constantly deferred, despite occasional references to its (unspecified) transgressiveness. Wyatt's *Defence*, for example, written when his execution was effectively imminent, is seen not as a courageous and classic assertion of the principle of personal integrity in the face of tyrannical power but, rather absurdly, as a disquisition on the principles of textual emendation.

Lerer's interest actually lies elsewhere: in the identification of close, local intertextualities, especially between his chosen texts and Chaucer, in particular *Troilus and*

Criseyde which – following Raymond Southall (*The Courtly Maker*) [Oxford, 1664]) – he sees as central to the literary production of the early Tudor court. Humphrey Wellys's anthology is accordingly seen both as typical of the personal anthologies put together by the London and provincial gentry and as containing a complex and coherent reworking of passages from Chaucer's poem.

This certainly has its value but, in the context in which it is presented, is also misleading. There is a propensity in the book to read the 1530s back into the earlier decades of Henry's reign, whereas for certain elements in English life his accession was an occasion for optimism and social hope. The figure here, of course, is More whose *Utopia* appeared in 1516 and who is virtually absent from Lerer's discussion, even though alongside Wyatt he makes up what most people would consider the other major writer of Henry's court. Chaucer does not play the role in *Utopia* that he does in the verse anthology, and despite the characteristically humanist wit of its presentation – which elsewhere Lerer shows himself unable to pick up – the second book of the work embodies a visionary idealism which looks to the new monarch in England for implementation. In other words, the earlier sixteenth century is a more complex moment in English history than Lerer allows for, and has more to teach us about individual and collective agency than he is able to envisage.

University of Hull **William Zunder**

Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (eds), *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. xii + 292, £35.00.

In her Introduction to this collection of essays emanating from the University of California, Los Angeles, Claire McEachern states that one of its aims is to move beyond new historicism. Unfortunately, the way it attempts to do this is by moving away from history almost entirely. Not in every case, though. David Scott Kastan, for example, in an eminently sane contribution, shows how the early history of the English Bible is a complex, yet perfectly comprehensible, dialectic between textual innovation on the one hand and the interests of royal absolutism on the other. Similarly, Jesse Lander, in a carefully ordered discussion, shows how the paratext and the abridgement of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* altered the meaning of the text in response to the demands of the controversies of the time.

Nevertheless, the characteristic tendency of the collection is towards particularism and formalism. Thus, William J. Bouwsma argues that Hooker was an unsystematic, pragmatic thinker concerned with ensuring a moderate social order, an affective rhetorician rather than a philosopher. Janel M. Mueller traces a protestant rhetoric of self-transubstantiation from the human to the divine through martyrdom from its early appearance in Foxe to its presence in Milton's *Paradise Lost* via its occurrence in Donne and Herbert. More provocatively, Robert N. Watson suggests a protestant subtext in Shakespeare's *Othello*, with Desdemona as a Christ-like heroine, Iago as a Jesuitical devil, and Othello as an imperfectly reformed infidel given to a notion of justification by works rather than the Lutteran notion of justification by faith alone. And Debora Shuger, in another provocative essay, argues that Hooker, while supporting the Elizabethan religious settlement, nevertheless proposed a concept of the

church as the *visible* mystical body of Christ that opened up a potentially radical space of difference within the national church.

The interest of the book lies less in its individual contributions than in its appearance at this juncture in the history of English studies almost exactly thirty years after the delivery of Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' which, more than any other single event, heralded the end of traditional literary criticism. There are signs that the grip of postmodern theory on English studies is now loosening, and this collection is one of them. What it is proposing, however, is to reinstall liberal humanism, in a minimally historicised version, as the way forward. There is, in fact, one consciously postmodern contribution to the volume. In a discussion of readings of the stigmata, principally in John Fisher and William Perkins, Lowell Gallagher not surprisingly finds evidence of the textuality of all discourse and reasons for a nonfoundational ethics. Characteristically, though, the other contributors have no doubts about the grounding of discourse in an objective reality anterior to it or about the integrity of the individual subject or about the autonomy of religious experience. Indeed, this last point is emphasised by McEachern in her Introduction (7). In fact, the implication of the volume is that *all* human experience is autonomous and so beyond the need or possibility of explanation, which accounts for the move away from history and towards idealism that is the defining mark of the book. It is certainly true that any move beyond postmodernism must involve a recuperation of earlier humanisms, but the liberalism that once ruled English studies with its face set against historical causation and larger narratives cannot be one of them.

University of Hull **William Zunder**

Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. xii + 271.

Departing from the more conventional analysis of Shakespeare's 'Roman plays', this book makes an intriguing grouping around the idea of the 'translation of empire' by studying the transmission, appropriation, and contamination of the Troy legend in *Titus Andronicus*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. As Stephen Greenblatt and others have demonstrated, source criticism can involve more than the gathering of raw material that may have been absorbed by the individual author. James, like Greenblatt, does not relegate sources to the status of inert historical and textual background. She is interested in the institutional contexts for the active transmission and ideological appropriation of sources. Focusing on the relation of ideology and form, this book provides a compelling examination of the contribution of the stage to an emerging national identity in Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

In her analysis of the ideological contestation over the Troy legend, James synthesizes a great deal of current research to help illuminate the cultural politics of the theatre. We discover how Shakespeare 'contaminates' the legend of Troy by playfully 'quibbling' with the conservative nature of the Vergilian account, appropriating the legend in a more sceptical manner than the stately pageants of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The book looks carefully at the political metaphors of drama,

suggesting that the experiment or 'iconoclasm' of the contamination of the *translatio imperii* does not imply a connection between radical meanings and political practice. Many assessments of the political context of Shakespeare's plays often carelessly assume that radical meanings are an expression of a desire for radical political praxis. James' analysis of the complex and flexible transmission of the *translatio imperii* shows how scepticism toward authority related to debates on absolutism, the republican tradition, and the notion of a mixed constitution.

The chapter on *Titus Adronicus* engages in a kind of thick description of Shakespeare's complex appropriation of Ovidian and Virgilian sources. The rich detail on the iconographic and dramatic sources for the play raises a variety of questions about the political metaphors of drama, especially the role of rape in the foundations of empire. *Troilus and Cressida* has perplexed critics for a long time and James' analysis of the disorderly appropriations of sources and genres helps shed some light on the murky historical context for the unstable signification of the play (the fall of the Earl of Essex, for example, relates in intriguing ways to the figure of Achilles in the *translatio imperii*.). The chapter on *Antony and Cleopatra* offers a now rather commonplace argument on the unstable relation of masculinity and empire but breaks some new ground on the play's reflexive translations of gender codes from the Roman sources. Of the remaining two chapters on *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, the latter is noteworthy for its coverage of an extraordinarily wide range of social and political concerns surrounding the play, including the court of James I, domestic patriarchy, class, and the Virginian as well as Virgilian contexts. The reading of William Strachey's letter (one of the crucial sources for the Virginian contexts of *The Tempest*) will add considerably to current research on the play's resonance with the encounter with and conquest of the new world.

James is not concerned with larger theoretical debates in literary studies. Instead, the book 'cheerfully appropriates methods from cultural studies and source studies, strange bedfellows that they are …' There is no attempt to explain what constitutes 'cultural studies'. What distinguishes 'cultural studies' from 'cultural history' or the 'new historicism'? I find such vagueness disappointing. Yet those who are less interested in theory may find this kind of approach refreshing for its pragmatic use of a diverse range of methods. Although this exploration of 'political Shakespeare' surely lacks the high drama of new historicist, feminist, anthropological or Marxist studies of state-formation and the 'place of the stage', it will be an important contribution to historical research linking formal and ideological aspects of Shakespeare's drama.

University of Southern Maine **Benjamin Bertram**

Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (eds), *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture*, Macmillan, 1997, pp. xii + 264, £45.

Much virtue in 'and'. Only the first four of the dozen essays that make up *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture* directly take up the fundamental issue of reference to Ireland in the plays. A useful catalogue of Shakespeare's mentions of Ireland heads Andrew Hadfield's contribution, '"Hitherto she ne're could fancy him": Shakespeare's "British" Plays and the Exclusion of Ireland', preceded by the assertion

that 'Shakespeare was clearly aware of Ireland and referred to its inhabitants regularly – albeit usually briefly – in many of his earlier works' (47). With equal accuracy, one might write that Shakespeare's plays refer to Ireland only occasionally and then in passing. Hadfield's lead sentence is a very mild instance of the background noise experienced by the reader of this volume, a ceaseless straining to push Ireland nearer the centre of Shakespeare's vision and Shakespeare nearer the centre of Irish history.

The logic that drives these essays goes something like this: 1) after *Henry V*, Shakespeare refers to Ireland only twice, in *Macbeth* and *Henry VIII*; 2) it is unthinkable that Shakespeare should be uninterested in Ireland; 3) therefore, Shakespeare's plays after *Henry V* really do refer to Ireland, if only we have the ingenuity to discern in them 'displaced allegories of Irish events' (52). Fear of censorship is the motive alleged for this displacement. *Henry V* makes a fitting watershed for Shakespearean allusion to Ireland, since the method of these essays is precisely anticipated by Fluellen in that play, when he enumerates several parallels of the 'salmons in both' variety to prove beyond a doubt that Henry is a second Alexander the Pig. The arguments made by Lisa Hopkins, Willie Maley, Andrew Hadfield, and David Brown for the shadowy presence of Ireland in plays like *Henry V*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest* are not without merit, especially insofar as they recognize (to paraphrase Lisa Hopkins) that in such plays the issue is not so much Irishness 'but *foreignness*, and the whole problematic of othering' (15). This recognition is subverted to some extent by special pleading for Ireland as principally or even exclusively the key to the plays' concealed political references, as in David Brown's essay, which struggles to deny *The Tempest* an American context that rests on exactly the same kind of analogic reading as the Irish one that he would prefer.

Of eight other essays, four consider Shakespeare's influence on Irish writers. Again, the essays must strain to find anything truly distinctive about the uses made of Shakespeare by such authors as Yeats, Heaney, and Hughes, or by Irish republicans. The most successful of these investigations is Richard Brown's study, which relates Shakespeare to Joyce not adversarially, in the predictable role of cultural oppressor, but sympathetically, through Joyce's fondness for popular burlesques of Shakespeare. The volume's third and final section lumps together miscellaneous essays on Shakespeare in Sheridan's Smock-Alley Theatre, Irish language and the plays (more arguments for oblique encoding of Irish material), the politics of editing (as revealed in the 'four captains' scene of *Henry V*), and the teaching of Shakespeare in Belfast today.

Southern Oregon University **Alan Armstrong**

Robert Mayer, *History and the English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 260, £37.50.

In a collection of ten essays, Mayer sets out to reexamine the origins of the English novel. He dismisses legendary stories about Brut and Arthur and concentrates rather on historical writing such as Bacon, Camden, and Gough. Story-writers like Thomas Nashe, Thomas Deloney, Aphra Behn and De la Rivière Manley are the connecting links down to Daniel Defoe who made the nexus of history and fiction which Mayer

regards as key elements in the theory of the novel as it emerged in the eighteenth century. The long and complicated history of the reception of Defoe's 'novels' signals the fact that the historical-fiction problematic became a key feature of the emerging discourse of the novel.

Deloney claimed that fiction could be historical and treated popular chap-book material neglected by other writers as the 'long-hidden history' of the 'most worthy clothiers of England' (148). He claimed to have assembled his work from gossip and anecdotes in the manner of a popular historian whose 'pleasant histories' are rooted in jest-books as well as being based on personal accounts narrated by Behn and Manley at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries (149). Defoe's novels 'laid the basis for a sustained attempt by subsequent non-historians and readers to elaborate, comprehend, diffuse and domesticate the dialogue in the novel between historical and fictional discourse' (3).

The History of Myddle was written by Gough between 1700 and 1709, though he died in 1723 and his text did not appear until 1834 (54). This Mayer sees as 'largely assuming features of historic practice at the beginning of the eighteenth century' (56). Camden, Mayer assures us, laid the basis for rejecting the traditional view of *The British History* but then declined to write it himself; his decision not to repudiate English history before the Norman Conquest was endorsed throughout the seventeenth century and on into the eighteenth century. *The British History*, then, which has been seen as a test case for demonstrating the emergence of historical modernity, reveals instead that, although 'modern' historians distinguished between fact and fiction in historical writing, they also accepted a modicum of fictional material when practical considerations – questions of national honour, or the power of tradition – pressed them to do so. In other words the commitment to base historiography on 'established matters of fact' was subject to revision for rhetorical purposes in the name of tradition, or because it seemed the honourable thing to do.

Sibford Ferris **Christopher Hill**

Sean Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic: The Political Culture of the English Commonwealth*, Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 254, £29.95.

If only because there was no king, the regime in England between 1649 and 1653 can be called a republic. 'Commonwealth' is a fair translation of 'respublica'. Dr Sean Kelsey, casting a kindly eye on those few years goes further. He concludes – one might say, starts – with the view that there was much more to their political culture and activity than lack of a monarchy. Rather, there was a move towards the invention of a genuine formed republic, making the Commonwealth an enterprising experiment in identifying and meeting the requirements of a new way of things. Even so, he is not inclined to discuss possible theoretical bases for republicanism, whether classical or contemporary. Indeed, he points out 'a relative lack of republican theory in government'. Yet in their different ways J. G. A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, Stephen Pincus and others have responded to republican principles in the 1650s air. Kelsey's stress is on practicality and pragmatism in 'a vernacular republicanism'. Consequently much of what he presents in support of his case lacks the innovatory drive which

invention would imply. Change there was, of course, but mostly in the form of continuity – change in a linear direction.

A keynote of the Rump and its executive was the maintenance of stability in 'a hierarchic society', confronted by threats from all sides, external and internal – not least from radical demands awakened by claims made even before the demise of monarchy. So 'a fundamentally revisionist impulse' actually made for the rule of law (always a convenient slogan), the authority of most existing institutions and all the features of a working bureaucratic state, which the 1640s had enhanced rather than weakened. A symptom of that was the Council of State's concern for the preservation and augmentation of the state's archives, from which could be drawn not novelties but appropriate precedents. For all the hints of a new start in 'the first year of Freedom … restored', these men, mostly moderate, even conservative – a heterogeneous lot, in fact – were not ready or willing to sweep clean. If the House of Lords was abolished the peerage survived. Whitehall, heart of royal rule, remained the seat of government, a highly secured compound, not entirely stripped of its aulic trappings. There was a solemnity of ceremonial, with a Master of Ceremonies supervising activity with plangent echoes of the regime of Sir Oliver Finet, in charge from 1628 to 1641, though the lack of a single person as a focal point must have been a decided drawback.

A chapter on icons demonstrates how readily royal symbols could be adapted rather than thrown away. New insignia could make maces all over the country as well as in parliament look republican, but a mace is a mace is a mace, a traditional symbol put to no really novel purposes. The new Great Seal was hardly an invention. Parliament had had one since 1643, designed by Thomas Simons, who would undertake assignments for Charles I, the Protector and the restored monarch, a real professional loyal to the powers that were. 'The first year of Freedom … restored' might suggest the introduction of a revolutionary calendar, but that was not to be. All this hardly points to 'an entirely new representation of politics and symbols'. But given the circumstances from which the new regime emerged that was hardly to have been expected.

Kelsey devotes an absorbing chapter to the great concern of the regime to maintain its 'honour' in relations at home and abroad. Due deference was expected from the representatives of foreign powers who, facing up to the reality of the Commonwealth's military and naval strengths, found themselves obliged in the pursuit of their own interests to overlook its unpleasant origins. The Rump was not inclined to let them off lightly. Internally, Kelsey notes, sensitivity about honour produced a competitiveness making for 'an almost permanent state of agitation' in a pluralistic system where 'no one individual inherently stood out'. Though Sir Arthur Heselrige would, so he said, look upon the Speaker as 'the greatest man in England', that sometimes unhappy officer's position was far from presidential. No doubt had the Commonwealth not been thrown out by a really outstanding individual, inventiveness and the accretion of time would have brought a solution. But as always Providence stepped in. Until then, what the Commonwealth might be for was a question only fitfully asked and cursorily answered. We may go along with Kelsey that it cannot be written off as merely 'a feckless, shallow and unconvincing expedient'. Yet for all his thorough and thoughtful exploration, evaluation and deployment of the sources, he leaves us still with an expedient, though certainly one that might claim a few more positive and appreciative epithets.

University of Exeter **Ivan Roots**

Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, Penguin Books, pp. 384, £20.00.

Irony, it is said, was originally the respect sustained in the presence of one's superiors – before tilting semantically towards the disrespect one might have felt before and after. Jane Austen's family, frightened of such fame as she managed to command, put her 'irony' back into the frame of respect. In a parallel process, D. W. Harding's notion that she was not a simple celebrant of her *milieu* has been sidelined by Marilyn Butler's chastening attempt to establish that Jane Austen entered the discursive fray as a slashing opponent of progress.

Biographies generally push towards the latter emphasis, but Tomalin's unobtrusive originality in this one recreates something of Harding's insight: there is, for example, the matter of Jane's relative unpopularity at Godmersham (particularly when compared with Cassandra, ever in demand, apparently). The penurious but 'cultivated' and 'artistic' '*Jane*' (Fairfax) of *Emma* – perceived as somehow threatening or 'irrecuperable' – perhaps originated in Jane's own feelings about how she was perceived. Tomalin demonstrates that Jane could be an unbridled critic of what might have been taken to be shared assumptions and accepted practices in an environment which liked to make a kebab of worldly wisdom and religiosity. For example, a rather startling letter to Cass, down in Kent yet again, enquires whether rich brother Edward has managed to cheat one of his small neighbours out of his farm as yet. This suggests someone with quite mixed feelings about the social dispensation and the biography makes clear that she had a personal predilection for hard-working women like servants and governesses. In the novels, however, her treatment of her world was highly mediated, though she remained something of a 'radical romancer' in a world of jobbery and acquisitiveness. In its way, this biography too makes ideology visible. Certainly Jane and Cass were made to 'see it feelingly' on the (early) fading of their matrimonial hopes, possibly a consequence of what Auden, speaking for Austen with huge admiration in his *Letter to Lord Byron* (1937), called 'the amorous effects of brass' where neither had any to speak of. Indeed, after the death of Cass's fiancé Jane and Cassandra became an 'odd couple', so dependent on each other as to form a kind of innocent 'structural lesbianism' of mutual complementarity, probably of an uncarnal kind – though, Cass's posthumous claim reported here that she acknowledged 'the justice of the hand that struck [the] blow' which took 'Jane' from her might well make the reader wonder a little.

Jane Austen was far from being 'nothing herself', yet a life of 'Jane' seems fated to become notes on figures surrounding her. In this patriarchal world of Hampshire Tories, daughters, as Lady Catherine de Bourgh pointed out, were generally of less consequence to mothers, and, it may be, to fathers. As Claire Tomalin remarks, George Austen fairly early took to referring to Cass and Jane as 'the girls'. Indeed, when her parents reached the age of *retraite*, eldest son James and his second wife were greatly enriched and rewarded while the parents retired to Bath with their unmarried daughters, a devastating move for the dependent, Jane. She already had three outstanding novels in manuscript, but the trauma, no less, of being ousted from Steventon in 1801 seems to have caused her to fall silent for a decade.

Yet, finally, if in general Claire Tomalin's biography runs parallel to those discourses on Jane Austen which re-emphasize her ideological unpredictability, her sense of the importance of the body of sophisticated critical writing about her is

typically weak. Perhaps this is due to the fact that as it grows more incisive, critique, quite properly, begins to challenge the idea of 'biography' itself.

Middlesex University **Edward Neill**

Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. xiv + 274, £35.00.

Kevin Gilmartin's well-researched and well-written work on *Print Politics* is yet another example of recent interdisciplinary scholarship published by Cambridge University Press as part of its series, *Cambridge Studies in Romanticism*. Readers of *Literature & History* who are familiar with Leonara Nattrass' earlier work in this same series, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*, will find Gilmartin's literary study of the culture of radical reform movements in early nineteenth century England to be another major contribution to our understanding of this period.

While his own work focuses on the radical press in the early part of the nineteenth century Gilmartin makes clear in his introduction to *Print Politics* that he is 'interested in the way print resources developed in relation to other aspects of radical culture (meetings, clubs, debating societies, petition campaigns, boycotts), and in the way that broader problems of radical organization (leadership, communication, assembly, open organization) were worked through in the press' (3).

Gilmartin is quite effective in analyzing the reform movement's antagonism to corrupt institutions and its polarized structure of 'radical reform' and 'independent opposition'. In his chapter, 'A rhetoric of radical opposition', Gilmartin suggests that 'The point of independent opposition was to influence without being influenced, to parody corruption without being corrupted' (54). In this same chapter Gilmartin analyzes the contradictions found within the radical reform movement including his important point that the radicals believed that the 'System and countersystem would eventually collapse under the accumulated weight of their internal and reciprocal contradictions' (60).

Gilmartin effectively discusses the language and strategies of writers and editors of weekly newspapers in shaping radical opinion and the reform movement of the early nineteenth century; these writers and editors include William Cobbett, Richard Carlile, T. J. Wooler, John Wade and Leigh Hunt.

In his chapter, 'Reading Cobbett's contradictions', Gilmartin makes a convincing case for an understanding of the systematic response of Cobbett to 'the system' which was for Cobbett 'a powerful and potentially oppressive means of ordering the world' (159). In his final chapter on 'Leigh Hunt and the end of radical opposition', Gilmartin analyzes and discusses Hunt's accommodation to the system as a 'ministerialist' writer and editor. According to Gilmartin, 'Hunt's willingness to associate peaceful reform with the rhetorical and cognitive system of the middle class became his point of departure from popular radical opposition' (223).

Kevin Gilmartin, who teaches literature at the California Institute of Technology, has produced an outstanding work of scholarship in this literary study of the culture of radical reform movements in early nineteenth century England. My only criticism

is the lack of a bibliography which typically would include a listing of the primary and secondary sources consulted in researching and writing this book. Although I found the annotated bibliographical notes for each chapter at the end of the book to be quite helpful, I still would have preferred a full bibliography following these chapter notes. In spite of this minor criticism, I believe that readers of *Literature & History* will find Kevin Gilmartin's *Print Politics* to be a major contribution to the literature of this period and an excellent example of quality interdisciplinary scholarship.

Southern Oregon University **Neil Kunze**

Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789–1824*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. ix + 292, £35.

This is one of the most stimulating and thought-provoking studies of the major Romantic writers to have appeared for years. Its strengths are that it deals with a range of authors and a variety of genres in its attempt to explore the relationship between Romantic writing and religion, and in so doing asks us to reformulate our understanding of the religious views of some of the leading figures of the period. Ryan starts from the premise that when Romantic authors wrote about religion they were not retreating from an engagement with the political and social issues of the day into an obsession with individual and self-absorbed concerns – as is so often said about Wordsworth, for example – since, in the era of tension over Catholic and nonconformist emancipation and the evangelical revival, religious issues were arguably the most significant political issues of the time. Moreover, he suggests that it was their religious writings which enabled the Romantic writers to exert whatever political impact they had. His major achievement is to show that writers who have usually been termed 'atheists', 'free-thinkers' and 'heterodox' were in fact motivated by a concern with the spiritual and moral reformation of their country, and that what was important was not their scepticism but their belief. While other scholars have explored the religious pre-occupations of individual writers, this has usually been to highlight their anti-Christian sensibilities. Ryan's contribution is to argue that – rightly understood – Romantic authors can be seen as urging a purified religion, and, more importantly, they should be seen as perpetuators of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For Ryan, the relationship between Romantic writers and the Reformation operated on a number of levels: they believed that there was a special affinity between their own time and the period of the Reformation; they felt that they were restoring true Christianity; they assumed that imaginative literature could participate in and shape religious and political change, and hence their admiration for Milton; and some of them saw the English Reformation as a continuing process, in which they had a role. Ryan's method of procedure is to devote a chapter to each of his writers (Blake, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Mary Shelley and P. B. Shelley) to establish that their apparent atheism and unbelief was in fact an attempt to redefine Christianity, which usually took the form of criticising the established Christian hierarchies and formulations of the day. He considers 'Blake's orthodoxy' and argues that Blake's critique of rational religion

was not motivated by atheism or heterodoxy so much as a reformer's endeavour to purify and restore Christianity. Ryan suggests that although Blake's articulation of Christian doctrine was unconventional, religious eccentricity is not the same as heterodoxy. The discussion of Wordsworth hinges on an analysis of *The Excursion*, written in 1814 and often marginalised from the Wordsworth canon. He maintains that Wordsworth should be seen as a religious poet, and whereas scholars have tended to see the Wordsworth of 1793–98 as the 'real' Wordsworth, these are in fact atypical years. *The Excursion* articulated the poet's endeavours to express a more tolerant and humane religion, which he hoped would foster a more benign social order. Ryan tries to locate Byron as someone who wanted to reform national religion by exposing its discrepancies, and Keats is shown to have used classical mythology to express a modern conception of what religion should really be like. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley criticised both conventional religion and Godwinian ideas, and Ryan argues that the Monster's appeal to the Christian ideals of love and compassion indicated that in a truly Christian social order the cruelty and injustice he has suffered would not be possible. In some ways, Ryan's task might seem to have been hardest with P. B. Shelley, who, expelled from Oxford on the grounds of atheism, would seem an unlikely candidate to be called a religious writer. But Ryan demonstrates that the God Shelley despised was the God of superstition, and that Keats fought against the monarchical conception of a Christian God (as being anthropomorphic), but came to feel an increasing admiration for the person of Jesus. If, at times, Ryan seems to strain the evidence, he is largely convincing in his case studies, although it is perhaps odd that he chose to leave out Coleridge. All in all, he has done a valuable service in arguing for the religious context of the Romantic writers, and for demonstrating that religious (and Christian) concerns could lead to liberating and challenging political positions, as well as to the reactionary standpoints often associated with this period.

University of Northumbria **Jeremy Gregory**

Ian Dennis, *Nationalism and Desire in Early Historical Fiction*, Macmillan, 1997, pp. viii + 203, £35.

Since the author of this book is a literary scholar writing for other literary scholars, it seems reasonable for a reviewer in this journal to ask primarily what insights it contains for historians. They will not find it easy reading. Faced at the outset with novels they are unlikely to have read, discussed with reference to a body of literary criticism they have probably never encountered, they may well be tempted during the more obscure passages to give up. It would be a pity if they did so, for the account given of the various novels under discussion establishes them as important texts for the understanding of Romantic nationalism. The psychological theory with which Dennis seeks to elucidate them may not be immediately convincing from a historical point of view, but it would be worth further investigation.

Historians usually attribute the growth of Romantic nationalism in early nineteenth-century Europe to the need felt by the many dislocated people at that time (groups severed from their homeland by Napoleon's constant shifting of boundaries,

or individuals drawn away from their familiar countryside into the industrial towns) to find something to which they could still belong. The idea that, wherever they felt, they were part of an indestructible entity called the nation, to whose character they contributed, was actively promoted by artists, poets, song writers and novelists. *Nationalism and Desire* deals with novels which on a first reading seem designed to promote the theory in Scotland, Ireland and America as a result of their union with England. The study begins with two little known works, Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810) and Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), then moves to more familiar ground with Scott's Waverley novels and Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, combined, however, with less popular novels by these two authors – *The Pirate* (1821) by Scott and *Lionel Lincoln* (1825) by Cooper. Meeting again and again with standard Romantic themes – the appeal to history and folklore, the delight in wild scenery and unrestrained behaviour, the stress on difference, the glorification of Death for the Cause – we may well wonder why Dennis required some special explanation for this group of novels. The reason appears to be that, on closer examination, they are promoting not separatism but an accommodation between greater and lesser nations, perhaps in a federal structure.

The novels, it is pointed out, are mostly love stories, arising out of a mutual passion between a visiting male from the more powerful (and more 'civilised') nation and a girl from the hitherto despised nation. The attraction of opposites, and hence the need to emphasise their difference is strongly felt. An obsession in this direction, however, can lead to tragedy for lovers and a continuing round of violence between nations. Instead, these novels recognise the desire on the part of the less powerful partner to emulate the other. A solution put forward by Scott is a marriage between partners who have abandoned their prejudices for the sake of a fruitful companionship. Dennis forbears to pursue historical analogies: an attempt to do so might be rewarding.

University of Liverpool **Irene Collins**

Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich (eds), *Remaking Queen Victoria*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. xvii + 279, £40; pb. £14.95.

Americans, perhaps because they are such ritually deprived republicans, are endlessly fascinated by the British royal family. Their obsession with Princess Diana, before and after her death, rivalled that of the British themselves. Even the eminent contributors to this volume of essays, unromantic post-feminist women's historians, seem to have caught the virus of royal voyeurism. The book deals with Queen Victoria as icon, less with the living person in a domestic family life – a vein which has been fully explored in reams of biographies, memoirs and volumes of letters – than with her image as model for her female subjects and as emblem of empire.

Rejecting the familiar concepts associated with 'Victoria', 'Englishness', and 'Victorianism', they offer as good post-modernists, in Elizabeth Langland's phrase, a 'radical destabilizing of every element in this iconography' (30). Taken together, the editors claim, 'the chapters remake Victorian social history' (2). If so, it is difficult to see how this remaking differs from traditional views of the Queen and her subjects'

perceptions of her. The notion of a 'middle-class family on the throne', admittedly a contemporary if profoundly mistaken trope, pervades the whole volume. Indeed, the term 'middle-class' with reference to monarchy occurs so often that one worries that the printer might run out of hyphens.

In fact, despite her expressed preference for domesticity and marital bliss, Victoria was as far from the middle-class 'angel in the house' as she could possibly be. A grand lady brought up from birth as the heir presumptive to the throne, who from her accession was a domestic virago ('She is very haughty to the household,' remarked Lady Salisbury), who made Prime Ministers stand in her presence, whom the well-informed Creevey described as 'a resolute little tit', who at twenty faced down Sir Robert Peel over her choice of ladies of the bedchamber and postponed his accession to power for two years, was hardly the shrinking violet of the Victorian feminine ideal. Her well-known intimate friendships with handsome un-English males like John Brown, Duleep Singh and the Munshi were hardly standard bourgeois housewifely practice. Margaret Homans' notion that Victoria found in representations of her marriage 'an effective strategy both for handling the public relations problem of female rule and, perhaps more important, for completing England's transition to parliamentary democracy and symbolic monarchy' (5) belies all we know of her determined and very public opposition to both feminism and majority rule.

Various contributors dwell on the sycophantic public reception of her portraits and photographs and the adulatory reports of her daily doings but, apart from a passing reference to 'Mrs John Brown' – much better covered in the recent film – none of them seems to be aware of the rumble of underground literature in the street ballads and the scurrilous press making fun of her and her misbehaving offspring, which rivalled the modern tabloids on Diana and Fergie in their prurient lack of deference. One ballad celebrating Victoria's fourth baby had the refrain:

> So don't be forsaken, Sing fried eggs and bacon,
> The Queen and Prince Albert, AND DO IT NO MORE!

Another typical screed exposed the sexual liaison of Margaret Slack and the twenty year-old Prince of Wales.

The coverage of empire relies too heavily on Rudyard Kipling and even misinterprets him. Dagni Bredesen's notion that Kipling's affectionate 'poor beggars' in the Indian Army (a euphemism for 'poor buggers', a nuance an American academic misses) were expressing 'an underlying class- and gender-related antagonism toward the female monarch' (223) is one of those bits of humourless 'feminist nonsense' that (unfairly) rejoice the tabloids and give (especially American) feminism a bad name.

Parts of this curate's egg, to quote Mr. Punch's most famous Victorian cliché, are excellent, but the parts that are not make it a disappointing, not to say unnecessary, rehabilitation of the much misunderstood Queen-Empress.

Northwestern University **Harold Perkin**

Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 205, £35.

The place of sensation novels is now well established in literary critical discourse. Winifred Hughes' book *The Maniac in the Cellar* constitutes a wide-ranging survey of the genre as practised by male and female writers; Lyn Pykett sees links between sensation and 'new woman' fiction; and Kate Flint includes the readership of sensation novels in her work on the woman as reader. Pamela Gilbert acknowledges her debt to predecessors in the field and defines her project as identifying the social forces which generated the 1860s sensation novel. She adopts an eclectic theoretical approach: her dominant stance, social constructionism, is enriched by psychoanalysis and by Lakoff's and Johnson's *Mataphors We Live By*. Unlike Hughes, she concentrates on women writers, arguing that popular sensation fiction was perceived as feminine. In the second half of her book she analyses an early and a late work by each of three prolific women writers – Braddon, Broughton and 'Ouida'.

Gilbert's exploration of metaphors of disease and the body and of transgression generates complex formulations. She has an impressive ability to pursue nimbly the effects of converging discourses, as when, for example, she examines the implications of writers' use of the language of social surveillance in literary reviews. She pinpoints sharply the contradictions and paradoxes in society's attitudes to authors who both challenged and reinforced cherished orthodoxies. She brilliantly explores the relationships between eating, popular fiction and sex; the way in which the body functions as text; the social construction of genre; and the role of popular fiction in taking the reader across boundaries. She analyses metaphors of reading as sexual intercourse and as ingestion of drugs or adulterated food; she traces the relationship between the sensation text and disease; she assesses the impact on popular fiction of the commodification of literature; and she explores the subversiveness of the 'sensual' reader/author/text relationship. Detailed analysis of six texts highlights the variety within the genre. Within a common theoretical framework, each text is approached in a way which allows its distinctiveness to speak. In writing about *Lady Audley's Secret*, Gilbert reinstates Robert Audley's centrality, a refreshing counterbalance to some feminist readings; and there is a particularly fascinating analysis of the complex narrator/character/reader relationship in Broughton's *Not Wisely But Too Well*.

There are some frustrations for the reader. Gilbert is not always successful in developing a strong, non-repetitive line of argument. In a book with a plural focus – disease, desire, the body, popular fiction, the social formation – there is a need for reflective, consolidating moments. The final section (carefully labelled 'Afterword', not 'Conclusion'), links the material in the book to current issues around AIDS, but does not provide conclusions and resolutions to the book as a whole. It is also disappointing and surprising to find the terms 'Victorian' and 'nineteenth century' used when more specific definitions of time would be appropriate. Nevertheless, Pamela Gilbert's book is a stimulating and challenging addition to existing work in the field of popular fiction.

Addingham, Ilkley **E. Carol Miles**

Henry Schwarz, *Writing Cultural History in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. x + 199, $32.50.

Dr Schwarz's starting-point is the negative effect of British conquest on Bengal, disruption of its old agrarian pattern of life, and failure or reluctance to initiate a new economy in its place. Nothing new was coming in except ideas of the Liberal kind spreading in western Europe; a small elite of Bengalis was taking them up and trying to adapt them to Indian needs. Western superiority in this field could be held by the rulers to justify their holding of power; Indians could feel that achievement of cultural equality would entitle them to self-rule. A number of outstanding writers emerged before long, Ram Mohun Roy leading the way; they were seeking in one way or another to renovate a stagnant society. They were soon joined by a surprising number of histories of Bengali literature, by Bengalis writing in English. A weighty review was that of R. C. Dutt (1877, 1896). He held, with some qualifications, that English cultural influence had been 'almost entirely beneficial' (40), and he believed that Bengal had entered a new era of enlightenment and progress.

Chapter 3 is devoted to 'Marxist and materialist' histories, whose 'immense contribution' was their fusion of cultural with social or political influences (80). An early outcome was the pamphlet *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*, of 1946, by 'Amit Sen' (Susobhan Sarkar). It was far more laudatory of what had been achieved than most of its successors; Schwarz finds it a symptom of 'a broader malaise within Marxist thought' that Sen was really recapitulating a good deal of the old Liberal thinking (86), and seeming to credit the Bengali intelligentsia with the leadership of India to freedom. J. C. Ghosh in his *History of Bengali Literature* (1948) admired English cultural influence as progressive, but laid much stress on an ingrained Bengali conservativism, a handicap to any process of assimilation. Very unlike Sen, he found all the supposed pathfinders among the nineteenth-century writers no better than hangers-on of the foreign government. For him the premier novelist Bankimchandra Chatterjee was a 'smug, sentimental, didactic and conservative' bourgeois (102).

Schwarz's last phase covers the years since about 1970, with a communist Chief Minister in Bengal, and more sophisticated forms of Marxist analysis coming up. Chapter 5 is on the movement, launched in 1982, which has taken the name of 'Subaltern Studies', with Ranajit Guha its most prominent theorist. Its attention has been concentrated on struggles of the lower classes, such as the numerous but long-forgotten risings of the peasantry. Schwarz shows the influence of Gramsci at work, but points out that Gramsci was always aware of the constant interaction between higher and lower social strata, whereas Guha sometimes seems to see them permanently locked into attitudes of hostility.

This book can be profitable reading for those interested in history and culture, but they will not find it always easy to negotiate. It is written in the stilted dialect that now seems obligatory for academic work in America, as heavily Latinized as any Johnsonese, with occasional intrusions like *third-worldization* (106) or *boondoggle* (155).

University of Edinburgh **V. G. Kiernan**

Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. xiii + 257, £37.50.

Literary as well as historical theorists of American exceptionalism have frequently used the revolutionary 'beginning' of the United States to differentiate the cultural life of the new Republic not just from the Old World but also from the continuing colonial inheritance of Latin America. Accounts which find difference rather than identity between North and South America have slotted easily into both critical and celebratory accounts of the literary heritage of the USA. As Zamora shows, these have often been reinforced by plausible accounts of other wedges between the intellectual development of the regions. The interest of the North in Hegel and German idealism more generally as well as its more direct reception of early nineteenth-century European romanticism is contrasted with the survival in Latin America of a preference for Vico's *ricorsi* over Hegel's *synthesis*, for positivism over idealism, and its continued infatuation with the Baroque.

However, it is precisely such comfortable preconceptions that *The Usable Past* sets out to question and then succeeds in shattering. Selected United States and Latin American writers from the mid-nineteenth century to the present are shown to share both a concern for and an irresolution about the past that underwrites her central thesis about an 'anxiety of origins', North and South. This is shown to be captured in a bewildering array of narrative devices: journalistic realism; magic realism, intertextuality; synecdoche; use of popular language; and post-modernist fragmentation. What is more, the two traditions are seen to overlap in a wide geographical, racial and political borderland (centred in writing from and about Texas, the American South West and parts of Central America) that physically encapsulates the philosophical and cultural project.

The detailed analysis normally proceeds through productive pairings: Gabriel Garciá Márquez and Nathaniel Hawthorne; Carlos Fuentes and Willa Cather; Jorge Luis Borges and William Faulkner; Angelina Muñiz-Huberman and Sandra Cisneros, to name just a selection. But it also moves well beyond empathetic and thematic convergence. Zamora makes a convincing case for the magical, the playful, and the 'totalizing' (but not politically hegemonic) vision that is popularly imagined to be especially constitutive of Latin American writing as equally present in her North American Pantheon. The *corpus* shares what William Carlos Williams called in 1939 'the aroma of the whole' – 'Every masterwork liberates while it draws the world closer in mutual understanding'.

Her final position is unjustifiably modest: 'these are the beginnings of a flexible model for comparative American cultural criticism'. In fact, in the course of an enthralling display of both *exegesis* and evaluation, she succeeds in closing several key arguments: about the wider scope (colonial and post-colonial) of 'the American historical imagination'; and the contribution of even the most determinedly experimental writings of 'privileged bearers of a culture's history'; and about continuing continental concerns with questions of race, of power, of justice and of identity.

University of Brighton **David Watson**

John Hellmann, *The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK*, Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. xvi + 205, $34.

John Hellmann's previous book concerned the Vietnam War, and here he turns his attention to that other prime subject of the Sixties, John F. Kennedy. It has been estimated that Kennedy has been the subject of over 1,000 books since 1963, and the tide shows little evidence of turning – recent months for instance have seen the publication of Seymour Hersh's controversial exposé *The Dark Side of Camelot*. As Hellmann suggests, this places Kennedy – his life and his death – into the ranks of myth and even obsession for American culture, and the strengths of Hellmann's book lie in its examination of the dimensions and the meaning of this collective cultural project; its weaknesses come from a somewhat narrow, even classical, scope for its study and therefore some of the conclusions which are drawn, particularly about the assassination.

Hellmann bases his study on an examination of John F. Kennedy as myth, most particularly perhaps as a myth for Kennedy himself – in effect the book is a thesis about the creation of someone called 'JFK' by someone born John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Much of this is refreshingly original, and to this end, Hellmann interestingly evaluates the young John Kennedy's life – his schooling, his health, and particularly his reading habits – to produce an argument which convincingly shows how the young Kennedy looked to heroic models in literature (particularly an Anglo-American literature from Walter Scott, through Kipling to Churchill – one of Kennedy's favourite books was David Cecil's *The Young Melbourne* (1939) in order to (re) build himself. Kennedy's life is therefore seen by Hellmann as a set of inscriptions and re-inscriptions of myth, and the author moves through the events of his life – PT-109, his illnesses, his romantic entanglements, his political career, the events of the Presidency, and finally his death – with narrative skill and detail. As such, the book is particularly insightful for its efforts to rescue Kennedy from the shadow of his father – Hellmann convincingly demonstrates motives and desires in John Kennedy which operated significantly in independence of his family and the general desire for dynastic success which are usually identified as the driving forces behind his political career. One of the book's other strengths is its attention to detail and within this are Hellmann's careful (and at times quite sly) attempts to steer away from the too obvious features of Kennedy's life, evident for instance in his discussion of Kennedy's 1960 'debate' – not the famous TV performance with Richard Nixon, but his televised press conference replying to Harry Truman, following the criticisms he had made of Kennedy's politics as style over substance. Hellmann also realises the affinities between Kennedy's personal myth project and that of the star and celebrity – the book does not mention it, but an interesting comparison to Marion Morrison/'John Wayne' suggests itself – and therefore provides valuable and insightful material on Kennedy's relationships with Hollywood, and his growing sense and command of the image. Concerned with myth-reading and myth-making as it is, the book is excellent in its close readings of *Why England Slept*, *Profiles in Courage*, and of Kennedy's speeches and policies – an original reading of the inaugural is offered. As such, the collective identity and authorship of 'JFK' is dealt with in a context which offers original perspectives on the well established charges of fakery, falsehoods and fantasies in Kennedy's life and Presidency.

Where the book has weaknesses lies in the discussion of myth. Myth has long been

a troubled concept in American Studies, and at times Hellmann's discussion is frustratingly limited – one can wish that he had rejected some of the rather classical operations of myth he proposes – for example Joseph Campbell, and gone further in his discussion to examine the more ideological meanings of Kennedy's popularity, and indeed question more that popularity – Hellmann does not discuss Victor Lasky's *Kennedy: The Man and the Myth*, a book severely critical of Kennedy and a best-seller in November 1963. Perhaps I just desired a little more post-modernism in Hellmann's discussion, but these limits are most evident in his final chapter on the assassination, where a rather mechanical discussion is mounted, one which I found did not fulfil the rich potential of some of the material he discusses – for instance Don DeLillo's *Libra* and Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Also, there is an enormous range of literature on the assassination, much of which serves to question safe definitions of fact, fiction, and therefore myth, and it would have been fruitful if Hellmann had looked more at some of the material produced by the assassination, both from conspiracy theorists and in representations such as Mark Lawson's contra-history *Idlewild* in which JFK survives the assassination. Finally, it is a shame that the book lacks a final chapter to offer its conclusions. Perhaps Hellmann meant the last chapter (on the assassination) to serve this purpose, but to this reader, this means that the book stops rather abruptly. Overall, this is a valuable and informing book, an important text for anyone interested in Kennedy, the American Presidency, and the history of images in politics.

King Alfred's College, Winchester **Alasdair Spark**

Frederick M. Holmes, *The Historical Imagination: Postmodernism and the Treatment of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction*, University of Victoria (E.L.S. Monograph Series), 1997, pp. 93, pb. $9.50.

Frederick Holmes' intention is to write a critical study of eight British novels (John Fowle's *The Maggot*, Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, Nigel William's *Star Turn*, Jeanette Winterton's *The Passion*, Julian Barnes' *A History of The World in Ten and a Half Chapters*, A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* and Graham Swift's *Ever After*) all of which, according to Holmes, 'purport to narrate portions of the historical past while also paradoxically exhibiting their "seams"; in the process exposing not only the thinness of fictional illusion but also the difficulties attending all attempts to investigate and represent experience' (11–12). All these novels are categorised by Holmes as 'Postmodern' or, using Linda Hutcheon's term, examples of historiographic metafiction, that is, novels which are both highly reflective and 'inventive' and yet which, paradoxically, also 'lay claim to historical events and personages'. The influence of Hayden White is also writ large in Holmes' theorising, and apt quotations from White help structure the five chapters which constitute the book.

In Chapter 1 (Theoretical Considerations) Holmes outlines what he calls the relationship between historical significance and the 'narrative patterning' of the novels, concentrating on the way they cast light on the whole problem of historical representation (with its myriad enplotments and tropical figurings validating White's claim that historical interpretations are as much invented – the whole, the contexts, the significance – as found – the 'facts' etc.). In Chapter 2 (Textual Fragmentation and

the Proliferation of Genres: History as Dialogic) Holmes discusses the way his chosen novelists subvert that 'wholeness' and 'purpose' historical novels (like history texts) aim to construct so as to make their narratives correspond to the alleged (but actually non-existent) narratives inherent in the past. In Chapter 3 (Attitudes to the Past) there is a discussion of certain key assumptions held to constitute the 'Nature of History' variously at work in the novels, a discussion centred on whether or not they portray those aspects of the past they fictionalise as 'damaging or nourishing'. In Chapter 4 (History and Identity) Holmes picks up the 'widely discussed crisis of subjectivity in contemporary culture', and finally, in Chapter 5 (The Historical Imagination) the role of imagination and invention in both historical fiction and 'factors' are considered.

Holmes argument is, not least thanks to Linda Hutcheon's work (and those of the many who have followed her) fairly familiar by now, and Holmes' treatment of his chosen novels adds little to the sorts of understandings we already have. Nor is Holmes' method new either. It is, of course, a highly reflexive and 'personal' voice, and in his Introduction he lays open his approach and his reasons for writing his text. But, that said, the 'lit-crit' approach in the pages which follow are conventional – this is no postmodern reading. It is also a little light, not least because the text itself is actually less than ninety pages, and whilst Holmes claims he had been able to treat each of the eight works and his theorising 'extensively enough' to 'generalise about an evolving sub-genre', much of the argument depends upon readers bringing to the book considerable knowledge of the novels in question, their genre, and the ideas of White *et al.* On the other hand, Holmes' text is not 'difficult' and so it can be assumed that such readers are already *au fait* with its thesis, all this opening up the question of who is his text intended for. In the end I think the answer has to be, the keen newcomer; the student who, knowing some of the arguments, may need to have an introductory text of some specificity. For such a reader this would be an excellent introductory survey and can be strongly recommended as such, but for others its use-value is, arguably, much more problematic.

University College Chichester **Keith Jenkins**