

## Reviews

**John N. King**, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. xx + 227, £42.50.

It seems to have been several years since a major study of seventeenth-century political literature concluded without a discussion of *Paradise Lost* or since a significant study of Milton's epic passed over its political dimension. Among the former, one could point to the classic accounts of Michael Wilding and Neil Keeble, the recent work of Nigel Smith and David Norbrook, and to David Loewenstein's forthcoming volume; among the latter, monographs by Sharon Achinstein, Laura Knoppers and, again, Loewenstein well exemplify the dominant critical mode.

John N. King's intelligent and perceptive study carries political reading more deeply than most have done into one of the less attractive areas of seventeenth-century ideology, anti-Catholicism. In place of Milton the champion of republican values or Milton the harbinger of the American Revolution, we meet Milton the proto-Orangeman, the baiter of papists, the hammer of popery, appealing, not to the noblest sentiments of a virtuous vanguard but to populist prejudice. The ideological formation explored here leads not to the writing of the American constitution but to the blood-letting of the Popish Plot. This is a timely reminder of the dark, repressive side of English Protestantism and of the opportunistic ways in which anti-court agitation was, throughout the seventeenth century, inscribed in anti-Catholic discourse. (Anthony Milton's magisterial *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (1995) could have stiffened the argument considerably for the early Stuart period, though surprisingly King seems not to have drawn on it.)

By relating Milton's epic both to his own prose and to the broader Protestant tradition King demonstrates that both the tone and substance of anti-Catholic propaganda

are far more pervasive than had formerly been recognised. Of course, a satirical aspect is plain enough in the Limbo of Vanity towards the end of Book III; but King identifies that idiom elsewhere, in the depiction of the fallen angels, in the digestive transubstantiation of Raphael's meal with Adam and Eve, and in the prophetic books that close the epic. Most valuably, King ties the analysis to well-chosen examples of more populist satire, often engraved broadsides, which are reproduced in this well-illustrated volume. Often political readings of *Paradise Lost* link it back to the radical controversies of the 1640s and 1650s, producing interpretations which attribute to it an air of nostalgia for the Good Old Cause. But King demonstrates how the anti-Catholic tradition runs through the century, and is as significant in the 1660s as at any other time. Indeed, he illuminatingly analyses the role of *Paradise Lost* in Williamite propaganda, showing how the illustrations to the fourth edition (1688) function as anti-Jacobite political cartoons.

However, one aspect of this otherwise excellent study is irksome: the printer intermittently sets in a bold face words which someone (I assume the author) has decided merit particular emphasis, as in 'alliterative plosives contribute to the **fact** that concludes the implied triplet at the end of the poem' (pp. 101–2). Frankly, this is wearisome, and makes the reading experience rather like that of using a library book that a stolid undergraduate has worked through with a highlighter.

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Thomas N. Corns

**Barbara K. Lewalski**, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*, Blackwell, 2000, pp. xvii + 777, illustrated, £25.00.

'A shilling life will give you all the facts' wrote W. H. Auden. Barbara K. Lewalski's rather more expensive (but still remarkably cheap) *Milton* offers many of them, and much else by way of analysis, evaluation and speculation making for an impressive and, indeed, massive tome. Her John Milton is certainly one who had something to do in the world, his ideas and actions interacting directly with the intense controversies of his times. After a quarter of a century in the mills of Miltonic scholarship, Dr Lewalski is well-equipped to survey and comment upon the vast body, infinite in its variety, of the effusions of an itching pen and the nagging conscience of, first, the private man, then the public official and, at length, after the Restoration, a blind but still passionately concerned and articulate 'observer'.

The collapse of the Personal Government of Charles I coincided with the poet's decision to drop the self-appointed responsibility of composing for the English nation an epic *Arthuriad – Camelot Lost?* As relations of King and Parliament deteriorated into civil war, Milton, inclined initially to leave things to God and to those whom 'the people' had entrusted with power, was soon drawn willy-nilly into controversy through his anti-prelatical tracts. Lewalski follows him closely, well aware of recent historical warfare about the nature of 'the English Revolution' – 'classical' historians stressing big deep issues; revisionists finding little but contingencies; and both now confronting an as yet amorphous post-revisionism. The effect of her work is to establish that the civil wars and their aftermath, the Interregnum, were for Milton emphatically a time for working on uncomfortable religious, social and political differences.

From that position he would never withdraw, developing an aristocratic republicanism contemptuous of any sort of kingly government short of the ultimate sovereignty of the monarchy of God. All Milton's writings from the hack *Moscovia* to *Paradise Regained* had a contemporary connotation, implicit or explicit. Interestingly, the high-flying idealist reveals occasionally an inability to rise above current prejudices, accepting, for instance, that the native Irish needed English civilising as the ancient Britons had Roman. Lewalski herself naively sees Cromwell's army 'slaughtering and butchering in Ireland without quarter in a frenzy of hatred and revenge'.

Milton's claim to be 'tireless for the sake of liberty' is certainly valid. But it was for a particular kind of liberty, a Christian one, an acceptance of scripture alone as a rule of faith, interpreted by 'private conscience', 'an inward persuasion', as confirmed by the spirit's illumination, which meant that the magistrate 'defending true religion' must defend every Christian's right to his own belief and practice. In that respect he had hopes in Cromwell, but that 'chief of men', who might well refuse a crown, still hankered after a government – his own – 'with somewhat of monarchical in it'. Notably Milton did not join his colleagues in the Latin secretaryship, Marvell and Dryden, in penning funeral encomiums for the Protector. The disintegration of the Good Old Cause into the not so good old causes it had always been was a disaster; the Restoration a catastrophe. But there never was, nor ever had been, any ready and easy way to a Miltonic commonwealth. Yet somehow that urge of his to justify the ways of God to his Englishmen persevered, till at length it brought John Milton to 'calm of mind, all passion spent'. Tragedy or triumph?

A former President of the Milton Society of America, Lewalski is, of course, well able to keep her head above the choppy water of Miltonic scholarship, supported by her own work. Her historical context is reasonably adequate. (Cornet George Joyce would have appreciated the colonelcy.) But much of the nature of the unique human being hiding behind the works, as well as offering himself in them, proves, unsurprisingly, elusive. Little emerges, too, of those unsatisfactory wives and unkind daughters, and the man's rather unpleasant views on women generally are too casually passed over. Even so, this is a bold assault on the challenge presented by Blackwell's series of Critical Biographies, combining as it certainly does 'intelligent criticism' with 'well-researched biographical content'.

*Exeter*

Ivan Roots

**Crawford Gribben**, *The Puritan Millenium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682*, Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 219, £39.50; **Kristen Poole**, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. xiii + 257, £40.

A puritan is: (a) a pre-millenarian, (b) a post-millenarian, (c) one who wishes to purify the existing state church, (d) one who wishes to separate from the existing state church? Two recently published works on puritans suggest that, unfortunately, (e) all of the above might be the most appropriate answer.

Crawford Gribben takes issue with how historians have interpreted puritan eschatology, lashing out at Tawney, Weber, and a host of historians for failing to note 'the

centrality of apocalyptic thought in seventeenth century England' (p. 12). Histories of puritanism are likewise flawed. Given that William Lamont's *Godly Rule* (1969) and *Richard Baxter and the Millennium* (1979) not only discuss exactly this centrality of apocalyptic thought, but discuss it very well, one wonders what will be Gribben's contribution. Gribben insists that puritans distinguished themselves by their millenarianism, while 'Amillennialism has been the consistent norm of the Christian church' (p. 7). Gribben's study sits uneasily between a fairly traditional, careful exegesis of eschatological thought found in standard early modern literature, and a 'Derridean-soaked' literary analysis (p. 21). The mere historian will not derive much meaning from statements such as this: 'the aesthetics of apocalypse and the possibility of closure are foregrounded and interrogated in each of the texts and contexts' (p. 24). When the conclusions are of the order that 'the apocalyptic aesthetic was *puritan* – not Derridean' (p. 24), the reader will wonder whether to bother.

Gribben's beginning discussion of the apocalypse draws from standard Biblical and early modern sources. He discusses quite well Calvin's and Bale's uneasy affirmations that the first millennium is a past event. When writers like the Calvinist William Perkins can be seen as both pre- and post-millennial, the dangers of seeking too clear a genealogy of puritan millenarianism become clear. The Geneva Bible and Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' revived the millenarian tendency in Protestant and puritan thought. A chapter on the Marian exiles continues the useful exegesis of the 'robustly millenarian' Geneva Bible, its annotations, preface, chronological table to accompany Revelation, etc. (p. 68). The uncertainties of the exiles led, perhaps, to the idea of progressive revelation. A solid chapter examines James Usher and the collapse of the Genevan worldview, under attack from the early Stuart court and others. In 1643, English and Scottish (puritan) clergy in the Westminster Assembly debated how to rebuild the English Church, discussing the early Church at the time of the Temple's fall, as well as the timing and meaning of the fall itself. In other words, millenarian (pre- or post-) questions loomed large. Of course, current unrest could be seen as ushering in either New Jerusalem or the Anti-Christ, and, as the Civil War progressed, the Scottish presbyterians shifted their reading of contemporary events from the former to the latter.

The chapter on the Westminster Assembly leads nicely to that on Milton: *Areopagitica* is a clear response to the Assembly's concern with the behaviour of the 'elect nation'. Extended grappling with the weighty literary criticism already published on *Areopagitica*, however, deforms this otherwise strong chapter, as that work is not at the centre of Milton's own uncertain millenarianism. It is a relief to turn to John Rogers and the English radicals in Ireland in the next chapter, for here, certainly, is millenarian thought. And yet, is everything that sounds like eschatology really millenarian? Rogers actually interprets Hebrews 12: 26 to mean that though he, himself, had been shaken, 'yet it was to take way for what could never be shaken' (quoted, p. 162). Perhaps puritans (and others) used the language of final things to dramatize their own salvation struggles, without necessarily meaning the final things/days themselves? A final chapter on Bunyan suggests a 'common millenarian discourse' (p. 176) in *Grace Abounding*, but the quotes given don't prove it clearly. The four-page conclusion uses a framing device – that Calvinist theology let loose a millenarianism that in the end broke down 'Genevan hegemony' (p. 194) – that Christopher Hill set forth over thirty-five years ago. But the book does highlight an interesting component of puritan writing; their conversion narratives and self-consciousness reveal a 'continuing quest

to define the puritan: perhaps puritans were proponents of a worldview continually in pursuit of the transcendent' (p. 197).

Kristen Poole also seeks to define the puritan, although her index does not list millenarianism, except for the last chapter. Instead, Poole examines the writing of the anti-puritans rather than that of the puritans themselves. Early modern England feared disorder and discord, at least in print, and the label often given to this many-headed *Hydra* was puritan, although Poole seems more inclined than most historians to define this in terms of nonconformity and separatism. This book argues that 'the grotesque puritan' (p. 14) in woodcut and pamphlet changed between the 1570s and 1660s, from a figure of license (albeit hypocritical) to one of repression.

A second chapter highlights the 'bellygod' caricature of the puritans. The reformers had deployed just such a phrase to attack the carnality of the bishops and their opposition. Now the terms described the hypocritical separatists. Instead of ascetic fasting, feasting, Ben Jonson portrays Zeal-of-the-land Busy (*Bartholomew Fair*) as carnal and driven by gastronomic desire. Another chapter focuses on reactions to the 'perfectionist doctrine' (p. 78) and supposed licentiousness of the Family of Love. The literary treatment of the sect, such as the revel *The Family of Love* first performed between 1602 and 1604, often celebrated the group's overthrow of patriarchal and sexual order, while at the same time hinting at 'Incest, fornication, abomination' (quoted, p. 103) underlying such an exciting inversion of the Great Chain of Being. A chapter on Thomas Edwards's *Gangræna* (1646) interestingly comments on his and others' use of the beehive and other metaphors to describe the swarm of sectarian pamphlets and conventicles. Of course, Edwards himself was a presbyterian, and his attack on Independency might best be described as a struggle *within* puritanism. Poole wants to define puritan as a separating Protestant, but, as the bellygod chapter suggests, the puritan 'could ... neither be wholly expelled nor wholly assimilated' (p. 71).

Like Gribben, Poole devotes a chapter to Milton, who aided presbyterians in their attack on the bishops. Poole notes how Milton inverts the genealogies of heresy that attempt to trace radical religion to its source, the root of corrupt offspring. This is a fascinating look at attempts to define the *Hydra*, whether it is as the 'monstrous plurality of sources' in the past that episcopalians see as the origins of sectarianism, or as the modern monstrosities that presbyterians see the *faux* arguments of episcopalians as engendering (p. 138). Finally, millenarianism rears its (naked) head in a chapter Poole devotes to anti-sectarian pamphlets on Adamites, Quakers going naked 'as a sign', and other supposed incidents of 'the naked truth'. One might doubt whether any group of the English ever would 'pray naked, celebrate the holy Communion naked, hear Sermons naked' (Ephraim Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 1661, reproduced, p. 161). But there is no doubting Poole's argument that nakedness, in the mid-seventeenth century, 'pervaded the discursive and material fields of English culture' (p. 169), including the nakedness of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. (This exciting and amusing chapter includes a useful corrective to Stanley Fish.) An epilogue looks briefly at the puritan satirized in Butler's *Hudibras*.

Poole's argument is not without logical leaps. Radical sects had a huge cultural impact, she argues, because of the vast quantity of literature published against them. But, applied to witches, this argument would be ludicrous. And that tavern talk inspired by the emphasis on the individual conscience (surely a key feature of protestantism – radical and conservative – since 1517) might rearrange society seems most unlikely. Finally, Poole sometimes overdoes her associations. For example, she

suggests that the play, *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), 'invokes' (p. 68) Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572), although clearly it draws upon the carnivalesque feast and fair held in late-August in Smithfield market ever since the twelfth century. *Radical Religion* is, nevertheless, significant on a number of levels, not least for what it says about the interaction between elite and popular images of puritanism.

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Newton Key

**Gregory Dart**, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. xi + 288, £37.50.

In this slim volume, Gregory Dart has given himself a number of difficult assignments: namely, to show that Rousseau's *Confessions* was as important as his political writings in promoting the French Revolution; to elucidate Robespierre's interpretation of Rousseau; and to demonstrate the effect of this combination of influences on the few English Romantics who remained in any way loyal to their early Jacobin enthusiasm. Given the fact that Rousseau has been the subject of many conflicting analyses, that Robespierre is one of the most incomprehensible of historical figures, and that both Jacobinism and Romanticism took several different forms, his overall success is impressive. To follow the argument the reader is required to remember that Rousseau was opposed to the Enlightenment, whose ideas greatly influenced the members of the first revolutionary assembly. This involves dividing the Revolution into two distinct phases and seeing Robespierre's horrific regime as a reaction against the earlier policies rather than as a monstrous outcome of them. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, of which Dart reminds us in his Introduction, was not an allegory on the French Revolution as a whole but on the second part only, when Robespierre tried to achieve Rousseau's desire to restore primitive virtue by applying modern legislative techniques. In the same way Frankenstein tried to fulfil a dream from ancient days by means of modern science.

From a historical point of view, the most striking theme is the upgrading of Rousseau's *Confessions* to a position of importance in politics equal to that of the *Social Contract*. According to Dart, Rousseau's seductive prose convinced a generation of readers that liberty and equality were necessary to their personal identity. Robespierre, unfortunately, went further and convinced himself that his personal will was the sole expression of the general will described in the *Social Contract*. The result, in June 1794, was the notorious Law of the 22nd Prairial which enabled him to classify his own opponents as enemies of the Republic and send them to the guillotine.

A separate chapter of the book is devoted to each of four English writers whose radical ideas were shaped by Rousseau and the ensuing Jacobin experience in France. Dart has no difficulty in demonstrating their commitment to the *Confessions*. William Godwin saw Rousseau as a fellow anarchist; Mary Wollstonecraft and William Wordsworth emphathised with his professed love of solitude; William Hazlitt believed that the very strength of Rousseau's egotism drew sympathy from many different types of reader. The repressive policies advocated in the *Social Contract* were an embarrassing contrast. Wordsworth, surprisingly, condoned the execution of

Louis XVI, thereby remaining loyal to Jacobin policies longer than has hitherto been thought; but all four writers dissociated themselves from Robespierre's Terror. They nevertheless continued to applaud some aspects of the Jacobin legacy. Dart connects Godwin with their discrediting of aristocratic chivalry, Mary Wollstonecraft with their belief in cultural education, Wordsworth with their enthusiasm for primitive values and Hazlitt with a continuing desire for freedom. For the present reviewer, however, the most effective single chapter is devoted not to one of these Romantic writers but to Malthus and his views on population. The latter are shown to have had a shattering effect on English radicalism by prolonging fears of an uncontrollable mob and thereby playing into the hands of reformers who distinguished between the deserving and the undeserving poor.

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Irene Collins

**Philip Shaw** (ed.), *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793–1822*, Ashgate, 2000, pp. xii + 233, £45.

This volume is symptomatic of the deepening historicism which now pervades our understanding of British Romanticism, and its oxymoronic title, which twenty years ago would have raised many an eyebrow, will be recognised as a telling feature of a culture commonly perceived as being shot through with ironies and contradictions. It is the first volume of its kind, gathering together a series of essays to address the complex and intriguing relations between cultural forms (chiefly literary and visual) and the war-torn Europe in which the Romantic writers and artists worked. As Shaw's sharply perceptive introduction reminds us, the popular conception of Romanticism has been implicitly and habitually reliant on a notion that its cultural consciousness is one dominated by the spectre of the French Revolution, and that this – oddly perhaps – gives us a Romanticism that is backward-looking, and anxious. The version of Romanticism emerging here is very different: collectively, these contributors are depicting a movement that is politically alive, of the present, vitally concerned with the human suffering of warfare itself and the challenge of cultural reconstitution which follows its effects.

This is an excellent book, which will take its place as a critical touchstone for scholars investigating its broad subject; similarly, it will initiate further research and discussion. The contributors frequently open up powerful new perspectives on the cultural production of the period. Stephen Behrendt's investigation of British women poets' negotiation of warfare in rhetorical strategies that guard their own precarious position while developing the trope of the nation family is a case in point. He reveals this trope to be more than adequate in its capacity to contain a powerful critique of pro-war ideology, as well as opening up a vista on warfare's human cost. Jacqueline Labbe's essay on Charlotte Smith sits in fine complementary relation to this work, continuing the theme of women's position as granting a specific difference of vision, and reading this through the uncanny to demonstrate Smith's very particular reversal of the propaganda of English liberty, which simultaneously constructs a distinctive alienation of self. Elsewhere, Simon Bainbridge conducts a valuable reading of Byron's siege poems which draws out the different implications of the steady undercurrent of

military critique which inhabits them all, and also illuminates the significance of their contrasts: apocalypse and millennial republicanism; occident and orient; history as text and history as human action. Geoff Quilley provides a fascinating account of the representation of the British sailor in the closing years of the century; David Collings contests conventional accounts of the depoliticising Romantic turn in an essay which reconsiders the significance of the relations between Thelwall, Coleridge and Wordsworth in the late 1790s; Mark Rawlinson takes issue with Mary Favret's theory of the theatrical transformations of war in the English imagination of the period in his critically judicious consideration of the representations of invasion; Diego Saglia produces a subtle and historiographically sensitive account of Coleridge's 'Letters on the Spaniards'; Eric Walker ponders the relation between the end of war and accounts of marriage. Philip Shaw's probing and cogent essay broadens further the volumes concerns in its consideration of the fascinating relations between politics and aesthetics in Leigh Hunt's post-war liberalism. This volume demonstrates clearly and emphatically the multiple benefits of the academic *symposium*: it is well-conceived, intellectually of a piece though by no means uniform, and it gathers together a wealth of expertise.

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Philip W. Martin

**Watkin Tench**, *Letters from Revolutionary France*, ed. Gavin Edwards, University of Wales Press, 2001, pp. xxxviii + 186, £20.00, £9.99 pb.

In November 1794, *H.M.S. Alexander* was captured by the French, following a battle off the Brittany coast. Among those taken prisoner was Major Watkin Tench of the Marines. For three months, Tench was held on ships in Brest harbour; then he was moved to Quimper, where he remained until an exchange of prisoners was negotiated and he returned to Britain in May 1795. The following year, he published *Letters Written in France to a Friend in London, between the Month of November 1794, and the Month of May 1795*, describing his experience whilst a prisoner. Gavin Edwards believes that the *Letters* were really based on letters which Tench wrote in France, and sent, or attempted to send, to a friend, even if the writer subsequently revised them for publication. This edition contains Tench's twelve letters, an informative introduction and notes by Edwards, a bibliography, and appendices, including Mary Wollstonecraft's review of the *Letters* in the *Analytical Review*. The illustrations are both useful and attractive.

Tench was a fluent French speaker and a shrewd observer. A gentleman, he praised gentlemanlike, civil conduct when he encountered it, but detested *sans-culottism* in manners, language, and dress (a 'blackguard-looking fellow [was] close to me, whom I knew, by his uncombed hair, dirty linen, ragged attire, and contemptuous gestures, to be a *veritable sans-culotte* ... [p. 124]). His own politics – 'a limited monarchy [is] the best of governments'; '[much] as I hate despotism, I am scarcely less a foe to democracy' (p. 100) – naturally conditioned his account of the Revolution's politics. National differences were proclaimed: the French displayed 'national fickleness' (p. 122); the meat he was served after his capture 'abounded' with garlic (p. 9). But Tench was also keen to challenge, and not merely to confirm, his readers' prejudices. It was a vulgar English error that 'the lower orders of the French are puny debilitated

creatures, inferior to ourselves in physical powers' (p. 35). The 'bravery of the French is as unquestionable as the light of the sun' (p. 89). Tench praised French ship-building. He was well-read and the letters are studded with historical and classical and modern literary allusions and quotations. He wrote well: he had previously published *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789) (he had joined the 1787 expedition).

The period during which Tench was in France was an eventful one. Following Thermidor, the anti-Jacobin reaction was marked: Robespierre's memory, Tench noted, was universally execrated. Tench witnessed the removal of revolutionary inscriptions; shortly before, he observed, revolutionaries had obliterated armorial devices on snuff-boxes and the very spoons with which he ate. He saw an abandoned Temple of Reason; all that was left were 'a few broken posts and a little thatch' (p. 80). Religion was reviving. 'I went upon Easter Sunday to the cathedral,' Tench stated, 'and found a numerous congregation there.' But, in 'the most solemn part of the service, the *Marseillois Hymn* was heard from the organ ... (pp. 123, 124). Tench was hungry for political news from Paris, and commented intelligently on it; he was amazed when he was told evident political nonsense. He also watched the Chouans' campaigns. Brittany interested him. The Bretons 'are, indeed, a separate race from the body of the French, and have a language and customs of their own, to which they are tenaciously attached ... As to French, it is of no ... use to me among these natives, at a distance of half a mile from the town ...' (pp. 86-87).

In her review, Mary Wollstonecraft stated that the *Letters* 'afforded us more information and entertainment than the small size of ... [the] book led us to expect' (172). Today's readers will feel the same: the *Letters* were certainly worth republishing.

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Colin Haydon

**Owen Ashton and Stephen Roberts**, *The Victorian Working-Class Writer*, Cassell, 1999, pp. viii + 164, £45; **Ian Haywood** (ed.), *Chartist Fiction*, Ashgate, 1999, pp. xv + 200, £40.

These two complementary volumes reflect the continuing and still developing interest in working-class culture in the nineteenth century. They are interdisciplinary in their approach, as is necessary in this field, and each volume extends and deepens existing knowledge. One volume has Chartist in its title: the other has much to say about Chartism. It is interest in Chartism and related phenomena that has encouraged an examination of literature rather than the other way round. As Ashton and Roberts put it, 'Chartism did not represent only a political challenge to the established order. It was also a cultural challenge.' Nonetheless, there is one other major source of inspiration for these and other related studies. Since Nigel Cross published his revealing study *The Royal Literary Fund, 1790-1918* in 1984, to be followed a year later by *The Common Writer*, it has been clear what a magnificent date base the Fund provides both for literary and social historians. Ashton and Roberts have made good use of it. Without it their book could not have been written.

Their book is more than an introduction to a still somewhat neglected field. It consists of eight essays on particular working-class writers, essays of unequal length and, indeed, depth. This mode of presentation, which will make their book a valuable work of reference, inevitably leads to considerable repetition of themes, and the brief

introduction and conclusion are too short to pull everything together. The eight people chosen as part of a Thompson-inspired 'exercise in historical recovery' lived in different parts of the country, one of them William Thom, in Scotland. None of them was born in London, although many of them visited it, usually in search of work. Many of them tramped in search of work too. Each of them was associated, however, with what the Chartists called a 'locality'. Places like Kidderminster and Kettering serve as vantage points. Yet (almost) all the writers shared a common cause, proof that Chartism, like the railway, integrated a country in the course of economic transformation.

One of the eight, well named Robert Maybee, a casual labourer, born in the Scilly Isles, could neither read nor write, a remarkable circumstance which did not prevent a book of his songs and reminiscences appearing in 1884. The content and style of his verses invite comparisons with William McGonagall, comparisons of a kind that Ashton and Roberts never choose to make. They leave to footnotes most of their comments on the quality of the poetry and prose of the eight, mainly taking up and sometimes challenging what was said about it by other writers. The last paragraph in their book, however, quotes a highly apt comment by J. A. Langford, Birmingham printer-poet and editor of the valuable *Modern Birmingham and its Institutions*, who wrote (date not given) that 'we no longer tolerate the criticism which pronounces a song or a poem very good considering the circumstances of the author. We ask, is it good in and of itself ... In poetry, as well as in politics, and in social economy, we simply ask for justice'.

This is wise comment, although the authors do not totally concur, resorting instead to the dangerous judgement that 'even if artisan writers did not produce what the literary establishment deemed to be acceptable' they deserve to be revered for posterity 'in our democratic age.' Some of the eight writers were less good as writers than most of the others, and this is a legitimate topic for further examination. John Bedford Leno, 'a workingman to the backbone', does not need rescuing, nor does Ben Brierley, who had a statue erected for him in a public park paid for by local subscription. The most successful financially of the eight, Brierley, Lancashire through and through, was self-critical enough to acknowledge that there was much of his writing, including 'potboilers and sketches written upon the events of the hour' which he hoped 'never to see again'. Another of the eight, Noah Cooke, was sensible enough also to say for himself that he had 'no particular ambition to shine above his fellows ... He did not claim any superiority'. Another, Thomas Miller, patronised by the 'silver fork' novelist, Lady Blessington, wrote a novel, *Gideon Giles*, first published in serial parts in 1841, which Ashton and Roberts rightly say 'deserves to be reprinted'. It had a happier ending than Miller's own life story. So, too, did the life story of John Leatherland who ended up as owner of the *Wellingborough News*.

Ian Haywood reprints two Chartist novels which might otherwise have been forgotten, again somewhat nervous about making literary judgements concerning them. For him, it is enough to say that the two novels function like 'bookends' of the Chartist movement. Thomas Doubleday's *The Political Pilgrim's Progress*, 'a Victorian vision', first appeared anonymously in November 1839 in the radical *Northern Liberator*: Thomas Martin Wheeler's *Sunshine and Shadow, A Tale of the Nineteenth Century*, which was first published in weekly instalments in the *Northern Star* in 1849 and 1850, examines both the Chartist rise and the Chartist eclipse. 'The mood and method of the two texts', Haywood suggests, 'help us to plot the parabolic curve of Chartist history.' Do they? Is not the parabolic curve plotted already and quite

independently? What we get instead is an awareness of motivation and of the relationship between private and public history.

The Doubleday novel, interesting too, at least in the first instance, because it can be compared at many points with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, seldom coming off best, is more compact but less revealing than *Sunshine and Shadow*. In introducing it, Hayward deals only with limited aspects of the context and vantage point of the novel. Surprisingly, for instance, it does not mention Thomas Attwood or the Attwood family connections with Newcastle, which is important in the early history of Chartism. There is little sense of 'class' in the novel, less still of industrialisation. Industry is a human quality not an element in the national economy. Textual analysis is invaluable, even indispensable, in interpreting all prose and poetry – working-class, perhaps, in particular. For Doubleday the enemy is finance, not capitalism. Memorable contrasting passages are put into the mouths of 'Talkative' and 'Common-sense'. 'Mrs Radical', wife of the political Pilgrim, never lives in her own right, although the novel ends with Mr Radical, 'hair white as snow', surrounded by his children and grandchildren. The Utopia in the novel is material, not spiritual. In the City of Reform (given block capitals) 'every man ate beef, mutton, veal, pork or bacon every day, and every man brewed his own strong beer, from the labourer to the lord [this was no egalitarian city]; here the linen was spun at home, for the most part, and was so strong that it would outlast *one hundred times* the quantity of flimsy cotton.'

There is no utopia in *Sunshine and Shadow*. Although there is some utopian talk, this is a less conventional piece of writing, with the original weekly instalments, a triumph of scheduled writing for a Chartist newspaper, not always fully integrated into one text. The author of the novel, Thomas Martin Wheeler, would be of particular interest to historians of Chartism even if he had never written it, since he was first secretary of the National Charter Association and later of the Chartist Land Company. He was an insider, and his novel was dedicated to Feargus O'Connor, his 'brother Chartist', in a personal statement which included a phrase about time which was to be repeated in different versions at various points in his story. 'Time, the great arbiter, will do ample justice to both the Chartist party and their acknowledged leader.'

Nonetheless, Wheeler's fictional account of the vicissitudes of his leading character, Arthur Morton, is as much a part of the plot, which involves both politics and crime, as is Chartism and some of the passages in *Sunshine and Shadow* that relate to love, marital and otherwise, are as interesting as those relating to poverty – or politics. There are several passages that stand out as set pieces, which are only indirectly related to Chartism, including an account of London, more revealing if also more rhetorical, than Doubleday's account of 'the City of Plunder'. There is also a lively description of an Atlantic journey by sea (and the fare on offer at the table). Most interesting of all the passages – and in this case directly related to Chartism – is a totally unsentimental note on the House of Commons which he compared unfavourably not only with the American Congress but with the German Diet, the French Assembly and even the Spanish Cortes. 'Happy the day for Britain when its cold contracted views shall expand.' One of the special features of the novel is the inclusion of quotations at the beginning of each 'chapter', some of the best of them from John Richard Beste's *Cuma, the Warrior Bard of Erin* which was published in 1829, not only before the Charter was published but before the struggle for the Reform Bill began. It brings out many continuities. Beste surely deserves to be recovered for posterity. Hayward's footnotes, not always as complete as they might be, tell

us nothing about him. Both Beste and Tom Moore, a linking figure, were Irish poets published by Longman.

The somewhat stilted passages, in which the Author directly addresses the Gentle Reader, are unfortunately less communicative than other parts of the text, particularly when Wheeler, writing from experience, concerns himself with political apathy. 'Fortunate is it for our conventional system, but unfortunate for outraged humanity, that extreme misery begets apathetic dullness – that the body being unhealthy and debased, the soul of the victim becomes stupefied.' Yet beyond the apathy there is always hope. Time will bring 'a new organisation of the disjointed fragments of the gigantic past – a fresh breathing into the dying day of past existence, a resurrection of the soul of decaying humanity ... in a word, a new earth created from the ruins of a former world, purified by the fire of revolution, and rendered sacred by the blood and martyrdom of its founders'. Earlier Wheeler has used one word, not several, 'Communism', to convey this thought. As a Chartist he does not relate this to 'the Owenite or other communitarian philosophy' that Haywood mentions in the briefest of footnotes, nor, indeed, to the more limited world, strictly non-communist, of the Chartist Land Plan which he helped to manage. Wheeler was a resident at the Chartist settlement called O'Connorville, and there and at another Chartist settlement, Lowbans, he found hope not in 'the fire of revolution' but in the presence of holly in the one and mistletoe in the other, 'green and flourishing amidst the decay and rottenness with which they are surrounded'.

The novel ends with the Chartist settlements still intact, but with Morton and his wife in exile. The last paragraph in *Sunshine and Shadow* is far more interesting than the last paragraph in *The Political Pilgrim's Progress* where Mr Radical is happy and old. 'We might have made our tale more interesting to many', Wheeler writes, 'by drawing more largely from the regions of romance, but our object was to combine a History of Chartism with the details of our story. We might have made it more piquant, by delineating the portraits of the active minds in the movement but for this the time has not yet arrived.' It is sad that Wheeler, who travelled to Kennington Common in 1848 in the delegates' carriage alongside O'Connor, Ernest Jones and George Julian Harney, and who lived on until 1862, did not find time to paint the portraits. That was to be left to G. D. H. Cole in a century very different from Haywood's. Most of the Chartist Six Points had been achieved, but there remained just as many shadows as sunshine.

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Asa Briggs

Gillian Avery and Kimberley Reynolds (eds), *Representations of Childhood Death*, Macmillan, 2000, pp. 246, £45; Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 233, £35.

In many respects death seems set to replace sex as the lens through which twenty-first century western academics in cultural studies and humanities interrogate cultural, religious, medical and scientific discourses from the present and past. These two books both employ that lens to good effect though they use radically different methodologies.

The deaths of young mothers and children disturb contemporary western society. We regard such deaths as more tragic than the deaths of other persons. The reasoning behind this is not altogether clear although it must have something to do with our construction of childhood as a time of innocence and death as a natural event. These books demonstrate that whilst previous generations were also particularly grieved by the deaths of mothers and children their grief was constructed out of radically different cultural material than our own.

Dever explores the death of the mother in Victorian fiction. She demonstrates that such fiction ruptures the Victorian idealisation of the family by presenting the absence of the mother as the motivation for the search for subjectivity in the central character and in some work (for example that of George Eliot) provides a space in which sexuality and female subjectivity can be renegotiated. But maternal loss also provides a void in which a stifling form of idealisation can be constructed. Predictably Dever utilises Freudian psychoanalytic theory in her interpretations of the construct of the dead mother in Victorian fiction. Less predictable and more exciting is her thesis that Freudian psychoanalysis is itself dependent upon the narratives of missing mothers in Victorian fiction. Dever does not confine herself entirely to readings of Victorian fiction: one of the most engaging chapters in this compelling study examines Charles Darwin's autobiography. Dever argues that Darwin anticipates the Freudians in understanding himself as a subject constructed by a desire for an absent mother and a competitiveness with a present father which motivated his tireless search for 'origins'. Yet at the same time Darwin fills the void created by his dead mother with an understanding of woman as Other to the world of the science confined to a domestic ideal.

Mothers were not prone to die as often as might be suggested by Victorian fiction. Such fiction however did not exaggerate the fragility of infant life in pre-twentieth century Europe. Avery and Reynolds have collected together a diverse and wide-ranging collection of essays on childhood mortality in post-Reformation Europe. Several themes emerge from these essays, one of which is the ambiguous and liminal figure of the infant. Without name and unbaptised the dead child had not yet been integrated into society and hence was often an object of fear, returning to haunt the parents who failed to grant it personhood. The levels of subterfuge to which parents were often driven to secure their departed offspring a post-mortem baptism or a burial in consecrated ground demonstrates both the power of the Christian concept of personhood and parental resistance to it. Like Dever's absent mother, the dying or dead child has also been subject to idealisation in fiction and religion but the death of children has also been regarded particularly in folklore and fairy tale as necessary for the good of society and family. The concept of a 'good death', now almost totally lost to western culture, mattered intensely to previous generations and children as well as adults were prepared for this public display of spiritual health upon which their eternal destiny depended. The editors have made an impressive effort to relate the historical studies to contemporary culture and practice. The alienation of western society from the processes of dying and death is evident in the failure of even contemporary horror fiction to deal explicitly and graphically with the death of the child. A good death is a death at an advanced age because the contemporary self is a project which requires a future for completion and a privatised event. Far more wide-ranging than Dever's study in that the authors consider a range of evidence from grave-stones to diaries to film and only suffering from some inevitable repetition, this book is intellectually haunting not only in the pained historical voices it represents but in the questions it

raises for our contemporary, and largely ham-fisted, attempts to find meaning in the death of children.

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Elizabeth Stuart

**Colin Trodd, Paul Barlow and David Amigoni (eds), *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*, Ashgate Press, 1999, pp. xiv + 212, £47.50.**

This collection of stimulating essays, all specially commissioned, is packed with interesting ideas. It also has an impressive unity: every essay fits in well with every other. The authors are a team sharing a scholarly enthusiasm and interest. The 'grotesque', a word used surprisingly often by the Victorians themselves, is treated in the words of the blurb as 'a protean force working across different areas of Victorian life'. The editors suggest persuasively that Victorian culture cannot be understood unless account is taken of it whether in literature, history, social theory, art, design, aesthetics, science or popular culture. They treat it not as a dimension of Victorian culture, but as the key to an understanding of its modes of expression, indeed to that which distinctively constitutes 'Victorian'.

They rely upon what they call 'little known and under-researched' archival materials, visual and verbal, not all of them hitherto unknown – as they recognise – without claiming to exhaust their value, insisting throughout that their exploration has been 'intensive rather than comprehensive, dedicated rather than definitive'. It is an admirable note to strike. Not the least remarkable feature of the book is that the exploration penetrates territories far back in time long before the Victorians and looks forward, not at undue length, to 'post-modernism'. One of the best essays, by David Amigoni, focuses on Samuel Johnson, relating him in illuminating fashion to Rabelais as well as to Leslie Stephen. The footnotes chart a collection of books which have shaped the thinking not only of Amigoni and his fellow editors, Colin Trodd and Paul Barlow, the former with an impressive agenda to pursue, but of all the contributors. For this reason the footnotes, broad ranging, are as revealing as the text and some of them might well have been incorporated in it. Who recalls that the sub-title of H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* was 'a grotesque romance'? Sherlock Holmes is emerging in academic studies too.

The book, perhaps wisely, makes no attempt to relate its argument to other people's theses on Victorian culture, for example, that of John Burrow. Nor does it mention writers, like R. D. Altick, who examined both books and spectacles, readers and spectators at 'shows'. Of past explorers only Raymond Williams comes through. There is one uneasy passage in the introduction (p. 9) which needs sorting out. And it is irritating (if fashionable) to be told about 'the Victorian moment' when Victoria was on the throne for more than sixty years. There were changes, obvious and subtle, in a long period which in other countries was not treated as one. Such criticisms, however, should not detract from the power and thrust of this book which is something of a landmark in Victorian studies.

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Asa Briggs

Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920–60*, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. xi + 220, £15.99 pb.

This title will raise many an ironic smile. In this highly readable book, Langhamer challenges previous academic notions of leisure, highlighting its gender and age specific nature. Wide-ranging archival sources including the Mass Observation Archive, newspapers, periodicals and social surveys are supplemented throughout by material from the author's interviews with twenty-three Manchester women.

Langhamer initially teases out the ambiguity of the term leisure as applied to women. The simplistic notion of leisure as 'free' or 'spare' time, or as a reward for paid work, is problematised and discussed. Most women during this period spent a large part of their lives embroiled in domesticity, with no clearly defined working hours. Occupations such as knitting and sewing blurred the boundary between work and leisure. The use of interviews illustrates how women themselves perceived, not only the lack of leisure time, but their lack of a right to leisure. The question of men's attitude to women's leisure is raised and it would have been interesting to hear how the interviewees' spouses reacted to the comments.

Langhamer suggests that leisure for women of all classes is best analysed in terms of their life-cycle, and, in the second part of the book, she addresses notions of leisure in youth, courtship and adult life, without losing sight of historical contextualisation. The three phases were dominated by heterosexual frameworks. Lesbian and single women appear to have negotiated their own space when many arenas of leisure, such as the dance hall, were formulated on the premise of heterosexual behaviour.

For women, Langhamer argues, the period of youth most approximated existing notions of leisure as reward for paid work. Girls felt entitled to visit the cinema and dance hall once they started bringing home a wage-packet. Both of these activities required money and the oral evidence suggests that the custom of 'tipping-up' or handing entire wage-packets to mothers was more prevalent amongst girls than boys. Indeed, the interviews are used throughout the book to challenge, or mitigate, the documentary material. Long interview extracts demonstrate the problem that women themselves had with the concept of leisure. There is an overriding sense that leisure stopped at marriage; one interviewee went so far as to apologise for this.

In order to frame her work through life-cycle analysis, Langhamer acknowledges that she had to pay less attention to issues of class and ethnicity. The complexity of the notion of 'leisure', and the way that it was interpreted by the interviewees, is relevant for oral historians contemplating the framing of their research interviews. Most significantly, Langhamer highlights how specific leisure practices, both formal and informal (including 'just sitting'), may be viewed differently by the individual, their family and society as a whole.

The interdisciplinary methodological approach in *Women's Leisure in England* provides food for thought and further research, not only in leisure studies but also in gender and social history. The book usefully illustrates the employment of oral history in conjunction with, rather than in isolation from, documentary research.

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