Book Reviews

John Beer, *Romantic Influences: Contemporary – Victorian – Modern* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. viii + 303. £40 hardback. 0 333 43915 5.

John Beer sees 'fluency' as a source of imagery which, from the Romantics onwards, 'suggested first a possible means of resolving contemporary contradictions, then – by way of the looser imagery of flux – the absence of easy solutions' (p. viii). Fluency is a flexible critical concept for Beer, allowing him to look from a decidedly un-Bloomian perspective at the cognate issue of influence and the question of authorial anxiety. Indeed, much of the book's value lies in its flight from an argumentative centre, in its avoidance of a bulldozing thesis; its mistrust of the ratiocinative is allied to a trust in the imaginative. Very much a collection of essays rather than a book with a big idea, it warrants brief chapter-by-chapter summary.

Beer argues that 'To read certain works on their own terms is to enter the imaginative world of their author; any information that throws light on that imaginative world can be important, changing one's estimate of the achievement.' (p. 4). He is aware that a Romantic poet's vision is likely to be complicated, citing the example of Blake and stressing the debate in his work between the visionary and the sceptical. Beer contends that later writers such as Forster, Woolf and Lawrence often replicate the struggle this debate gives rise to.

The second chapter, 'Prophetic Affluence in the 1790s', explores the resources available to writers in the last decade of the eighteenth century who were seeking to affirm human potential. Beer contrasts the emphasis laid by Wordsworth on personal experience with the recourse to 'ancient mythologies and foreign religions' (p. 34) made by Blake and Coleridge. He moves on to discuss Wordsworth's use of Nile imagery, then shifts from Abyssinia to Beulah, which leads him to consider the different directions taken by Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge after 1800.

The third chapter, 'Anxieties and Fluencies', swaps historical surmise for psychoanalysis. Paul McReynolds contends that 'anxiety can be shown

to result from exposure to a situation of unresolved ambiguity, where the conflicting terms make incompatible demands upon the subject' (p. 50). Beer is sceptical about this quasi-behaviourist position since it does not deal appropriately with 'the powers that are having to cope' (p. 51) with the anxiety-triggering stimuli. He sees fluency as anxiety's opposite yet he also sees anxiety as bound up with fluency, and *vice versa*. The use by Wordsworth and Coleridge of streams, rivers and springs shows 'fluency' in action, a metaphoric means of transcending anxiety since it implies a system of mysterious correspondences.

In Chapter 4 Beer's initial emphasis is laid on the political implications of 'fluency'. The role of the poet takes centre-stage in this chapter, and Beer writes intelligently about Blake as a poet who was less fearful 'of being influenced by others than of submitting to the dominant mechanical vision that seemed to have them under its control' (p. 84). This formulation not only shows appreciative involvement in the work of the author under discussion but also differentiates the critic's position from a prevailing orthodoxy (Bloom's notion of the anxiety of influence). Beer also discusses the often troubled personal and artistic relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth, pointing out that Coleridge valued Wordsworth for his stability whereas Wordsworth valued Coleridge's mind for its 'versatile subjectivity' (p. 92). The chapter concludes with a short account of the way Victorian poets – notably Browning and Arnold – went with or against the flow of fluency. Images of rocks and lighthouses are adduced as evidence of a Victorian suspicion of 'directionless energies' (p. 102).

Chapter 5 consists of a sympathetic analysis of Newman's spiritual and artistic career. Beer sees Newman as confronting crises of faith similar to those experienced by Coleridge. But whereas Coleridge sought to integrate revelation and reason through 'a proper language of symbols' (p. 117), Newman placed his trust in authority, as though sensing that the Coleridgean enterprise was doomed. The key to understanding Newman, for Beer, is to see him as a 'pledged pilgrim'. Yet Newman's opposition to 'fluency' is granted its own conflict-ridden authenticity.

Other Victorians could not follow Newman's path, and Chapter 6 considers 'Coleridge's Elusive Presence among the Victorians'. Beer draws attention to the significance of John Stuart Mills's famous 1840 review, in which Mill wrote: 'By Bentham, beyond all others, men have been led to ask themselves, in regard to any ancient or received opinion, Is it true? and by Coleridge, What is the meaning of it?' (quoted on p. 150). *Aids to Reflection*, with its attempt to reconcile reason and revelation and 'its stress on the nature of the spiritual' (p. 151), emerges as a major vehicle for the dissemination of Coleridge's thought. Beer is fascinating on intersections

between the byways and the main road of Victorian reception of Coleridge. His praise for Shadworth Hodgson might equally be given to himself: 'His strength as a reader of Coleridge was to appreciate the intellectual subtlety involved in Coleridge's attempts to distinguish without dividing' (p. 165).

Hodgson knew Leslie Stephen, and Beer's next chapter looks at the writings of Stephen's daughter, Virginia Woolf, which tackle the question of 'perpetual flux' that Coleridge addresses in the 'Conclusion' to his *Aids to Reflection*. Beer describes Woolf as attracted to yet debating Pater's impressionism. He relates the tensions which vitalise her work to those explored by the High Romantics who, as diary entries reveal, were in her thoughts towards the end of her life. So Shelley and Coleridge emerge as the avatars of a 'new critical method - something swifter & lighter & more colloquial & yet intense: more to the point & less composed' (diary entry for 22 June 1940, quoted on p. 191). Woolf's attempt, expressed in the same diary entry, 'to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact' (quoted on p. 191), phrases concisely the challenge posed to her by fluency's conversion into flux.

Chapter 8 explores the 'echo-theme' (p. 197) in Romantic and post-Romantic writing. The movement of the chapter is dexterous, and takes in Forster (there is a fine account of the Marabar Caves) and Woolf, each of whom belonged to a society which ceased to believe that there were 'valid correspondences' to be traced 'between human experience and the world' (p. 216): 'No echo comes back. I have no surroundings', Woolf wrote in her diary on 27 June 1940 (quoted on p. 216).

The book concludes with a chapter which concentrates on the way T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence responded to the 'anxieties by which they, and their society, were beset' (p. 219), anxieties foreshadowed by Hardy's novels. Beer sees Eliot as taking Newman's path, turning back to models of authority, and Lawrence as making 'a new resort to vitality in human beings and nature alike as the ultimate springs of civilization' (pp. 216–17). He teases out some of the contradictions in Eliot's 'paradoxically subjective manner of becoming objective' (p. 226). Beer allies Lawrence with 'the simplicity of the young Coleridge's feeling for the life in nature and his vitalist thinking' (p. 246). At the same time Lawrence's imagery in his poem 'Ship of Death' shows, Beer argues, a Shelley-like acceptance of death, seen as 'constituting a flow always present in the human consciousness' (p. 251).

Overall, this is a significant, wide-ranging study which looks at Romantic and post-Romantic writing and asks, in its own sinuous way, 'What is the meaning of it?' Beer eschews lemon-squeezing close criticism but his comments on poems and ideas (especially Coleridge's poems and ideas) illuminate. His style is too quietly estranged from the dominant post-

structuralist idiom to seem polemical, but its distinctive timbre – cool yet impassioned, undemonstrative and inward – communicates an argument of its own about the function of criticism. At times the book's procedures seem merely associative; more often their indirections generate insight. Above all, the book restores a salutary sense of the value of, and the difficult poise involved in, creative acts.

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David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790–1820*. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. ix + 236. $40 hardback. 0 7450 0960 3. **Iain McCalman**, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. xx + 338. £12.95 paperback. 0 19 812286 1.

When John Stevenson opened his introduction to *Popular Disturbances in England*(1979) by quoting a provocative apocryphal question – 'Why are you interested in these bandits?' – he was indicating something of the previous hostility directed at the popular history of subversive groups. It was Stevenson's belief that this hostility was by then largely dead, and since he was writing sixteen years after the publication of *The Making of the English Working Class*, his claim hardly seems unreasonable. Even so, nine years beyond Stevenson, Iain McCalman was to repeat the gesture in the introduction to the first issue of *Radical Underworld* (1988). No apologist he, but in briskly setting the question – 'Why write about a circle of radicals whom a variety of historians have dismissed as harmless cranks or destructive loonies?' – and answering with equal verve, McCalman, like Stevenson perhaps, betrays a limited but inevitable anxiety about the subject, an anxiety not restricted to historians of the radical underworld, but also to be seen in more general debates about popular history, such as those found in the pages of *Past and Present* between 1991 and 1993. Now, with the publication of the paperback version of his seminal book, the question comes round once more. For McCalman, the defence of his subject is of a broadly traditional nature: his interest in the Spenceans (also the main subject of Worrall's book) is as 'stalwarts of a small but *continuous* revolutionary-republican "underground" which runs from the mid–1790s to early Chartism'. This makes him more teleological in tendency perhaps, than recuperative historians like Stevenson, Iorwerth Prothero, Hobsbawm or Thompson, for whom the primary aim was, in Thompson's eloquent phrase, to rescue the object of study 'from the enormous condescension of posterity'.

Without a doubt, the scepticism directed at popular histories continues in some quarters, despite contributions like McCalman's that have instigated major reconfigurations in our understanding of the social order. Anxious defences therefore, are not anachronistic, even if they should be, and those histories which choose to work in the province of the popular therefore might expect their work to be the subject of some controversy. David Worrall's book, not so thoroughly materialist as McCalman's, makes a different kind of justification for itself however. Acknowledging his indebtedness to materialist historians, Worrall also distinguishes his methods from theirs by his use of discourse theory. This opens up a large methodological problem that is most conspicuous in his heavy leaning towards a materialistic history which he also wants to disavow. Before discussing that, the book's considerable virtues deserve first place. Above all, Worrall's book follows McCalman's pioneering work to make a substantial and welcome contribution to the accumulating history of the complex and multi-vocal radical networks of his chosen period. In this respect, McCalman and Worrall are not alone, and their books sit happily alongside others which have been concerned to reconstruct the artisan and radical movements of the Romantic period, such as Jon Mee's recent work on Blake, or Nicholas Roe's book on Wordsworth and Coleridge. Like those who have trodden this ground before him, Worrall begins by justifying his work as a recuperative history 'above all else' (although he doesn't leave it at that) and his claim is perfectly in order with the exciting way in which his book opens up a new vista on the strategies of radical communication and its surveillance.

Primarily, this book is about the Spencean ideology and its mechanisms of reproduction in the post-revolutionary era. The political system proposed by Spence and his followers is perhaps most tersely expressed in an anonymous poem which David Worrall quotes:

> Thus all the world BELONGS to Man,
> But NOT to kings and lords;
> A country's land's the people's farm,
> And all that it affords;
> For why? divide it how you will,
> 'Tis all the people's still;
> The people's county, parish, town;
> They build, defend, and till.

The simplicity of Spence's political creed is such that it would be difficult to imagine a more extensive rendering: the land belongs to the people and there is enough to sustain all. The belief extends widely across the history of radical movements in Britain, but at times, impelled by particular historical

conditions, it surfaces with new energy, most notably with the diggers in the seventeenth century, or the Chartist National Land Plan revived in the 1840s. Thomas Spence's land plan may not be so well known, and the author of this book is cautious not to suggest that his subject is a major and extensive political movement, with wide historical consequences, that has hitherto been largely ignored. The status of this movement, its significance in the wider political scene, is not the point of the enquiry. Rather, David Worrall is concerned with the nature of its discourse, its dominant modes of expression and the means of its circulation.

As a consequence there is a pointed avoidance of the old historical controversies of what is significant in which perspective. Equally, Worrall dispels the expectations that this might be a 'Romantic' project in providing a context for the better understanding of high cultural utterance or, indeed, its deep political co-ordinates. In this respect, the above stanza is as atypical in form as it is typical in purport. The discourse which serves as this book's primary subject and historical evidence consists largely of the records kept by government spies of meetings, riots or risings; handbills and posters; records of speeches at trials and executions; and the markedly counter-cultural discourse of Spence's publications.

One of the strengths of *Radical Culture* is the sheer amount of information it contains. There are chapters on familiar and unfamiliar topics, but in all cases the author brings new details from the archive to light, or offers a new inflection to the narrative. In addition – although his critical decorum never slips in this respect – his work attributes a meaningful dignity to the ideas of social justice with which the Spencean activists were so preoccupied. There is no piety or sentimentalism here, but the book is impelled, at a deep level, by a sense of the significance of a political movement whose strategies might seem bizarre or even curious in a playful sense to those whose historical imagination is bounded by the post-modern condition. So here we find chapters which reveal in some detail such former obscurities as the Panton Street Debating Club, the 'free and easies' (meetings of an informal kind in public houses mixing entertainment and politics), Wedderburn's Hopkins street chapel, or Spence's trial for sedition in 1801; in addition, new histories are proposed for Blake's trial, Despard's execution, the Spa Fields Rising and the Cato Street Cospiracy. Above all, a reading of this book enhances our understanding of how radical culture set about the task of reproducing and desseminating its materials and texts. Examples include Spence's publication of *Pig's Meat* which incorporated excerpts from Volney, Voltaire, Locke and Harrington; the house-to-house booksellers who 'recommended' Spence's pamphlets while selling volumes of Pope; the reading clubs formed out of the free and easies to assist in the understanding

of writers such as Godwin; and Thomas Evans publishing in the cheapest possible form pamphlet volumes of Spence's *Songs*, with – in one case – a cover recycled from the title page of a book on English law. The reader is likely to return to this book continually for details such as this, and what they tell us about this cultural enclave.

Beyond the detail, the book offers us some striking interpretations. Worrall is at his best when bringing an empirical historical understanding to the allusive strands of his selected discourses. There is for example a most telling reading of Spence's speech at his sedition trial of 1801, in which the precarious tone is traced to Spence's shifting perspective on his own situation, while the idiom is partly accounted for by reference to an encoding in which the language of millenarian prophecy speaks simultaneously of radical agrarianism. Further, he is able to inform the reader of the extent of such practice, of its precedents and replications elsewhere (thus suggesting, in common with so much of the evidence in this book, that the discourse of artisan radicalism amounts to a coherent symbolic system). Yet the touch is not so certain when Worrall adopts the language or terms of theory to give an almost specious authority to the analyses, so that (for example) the Hopkins Street Chapel is described as 'a forum in which the discourse of the emergent could be grafted over the discourse of the dominant' (p. 178) or, much worse, Colonel Despard's last speech is offered to the reader as 'a Foucauldian transitional moment' in which he 'stands at the centre of a series of textual events' (p. 56). The problem here is not one of accuracy, nor even of motive, but of representation, for the tacit allusion to Derrida, or that to the Foucault (presumably) of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, has large methodological ramifications. This is particularly so in the case of the latter citation, for the implication here is of discursive formations transforming at levels of relative autonomy, the study of which is primarily concerned to objectify their differences rather than situate them in relation to their empirical sources.

Radical Culture has far more to offer cultural and social history than that, and it is a pity that Worrall defers so readily to the powerful theoretical structures which from time to time serve his empirical sources so badly. In the introduction, he rests his claims for the significance of his achievement, and that of the movements which he brings to our attention, on what might be termed a 'strong' reading of Saussure. Reading his texts as '*parole*', or evidence of 'the availability of the system of *langue*', he argues that 'every ultra-radical utterance is already fully constituted elsewhere within the culture of its specific language system: there are no soliloquies'. By the same token, 'there are no discursively marginal figures' in this book. This is a novel – and I think awkward – claim that distinguishes this author

from those treading similar ground before him. David Worrall's preference for Saussure marks out his history as a synchronic rather than diachronic study, abjuring teleology and preferring the performative to the 'actual'; equally, it allows him to circumnavigate the quantitative problems raised by the familiar empiricist objection about representative status, found in parodic forms in the questions with which I began. Those who see history as accumulative, fluid and therefore provisional, would rightly refuse to be disturbed by the quantitative argument, and clearly David Worrall is drawn to this position. The aim nevertheless sorts unhappily with the method at times.

If it is perhaps a little unusual or even fundamentalist to cite Saussure as a precedent, the style of David Worrall's analysis carries the familiar features of the new narrativity that might equally be underwritten by other theoretical schools: if Foucault or Derrida might be cited then so too might the ethnographic or hermeneutic scepticism of the new historicism. Here history is rendered as a story. It embodies therefore the self-consciousness of its reconstruction; it is 'made' in the telling. As a condition of historical narrative, this fact – vastly overplayed elsewhere – is quite banal. In this book the issue is not laboured for a moment, and its consequence is a highly readable and informative account. Even so, I am concerned here as elsewhere for our sense of what history is, since the theoretical consistency and coherence of discourse analysis too easily overrides the flawed insufficiency of positioning – or objectifying – the real. After all, factitiousness, or the self-regarding irony of tropological narrative, abides perfectly by theoretical law. It acknowledges above all Derrida's sense of the textual: the act or mode of mediation cannot be neutralized or left unaccounted for. Thus, just as we mediate the past, so the *dramatis personae* of history mediated it to themselves, or had it mediated for them, through discourse. The logic runs like this: discourse is the grand determinant of 'reality' (which has no pre-existence) and the conscientious historian therefore must acknowledge how 'the real' inheres in discourse by drawing attention to its performativity.

If discourse theory allows us to recognise an overarching mode of discursive production in which texts and contexts are no longer separable, then Worrall is right to use Saussure to underwrite his synecdochical readings. But the flaw in the proposition is its insistence on a homogeneous system in which differentiations may be admitted as hypotheses, but in the event, *make no real difference*. Thus 'discourse' or 'langue' as homogeneous systems govern the reproduction of knowledge or consciousness. Everything is mediated, and dialectics, or simply interchanges of human agency in relation to mediating forms cannot be accommodated. But this

is where the popular historian meets a methodological *impasse*. For it is precisely that need to acknowledge the differentiations within the forms of communications encountered in a book such as this – posters, handbills, banners, poems, songs, spies' reports, pamphlets – that justifies the historical attention: these are specific historical strategies produced by human agency in relation to particular conditions. To put it more romantically, we are concerned with the actions of people, with their very particularised struggles. Reading history is harder than collapsing all into theories of textuality, and discourse theory all too easily becomes the 'enormous condescension of posterity.'

Thankfully David Worral's practice exceeds his earlier theoretical niceties, and if he very occasionally slips into citing the odd 'Foucauldian transitional moment', then only the most ungracious of readers will hold it against him. This is a fine book because it exceeds its methodological apology, not because it abides by it. There is so much information here, so much new knowledge, that no amount of narrative provisionality can subdue it. It is for this reason that Worrall's book complements McCalman's so well.

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Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips, Geoffrey Summerfield (eds.), *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994), pp. 313. £37.50 hardback. 0 521 445477.

Part of the task of introducing a volume of essays on John Clare must be, albeit unjustly, to introduce John Clare. No equivalent collection on Wordsworth would provide an account of the poet's life; but then, a book on Wordsworth is not equivalent. The editors of *John Clare in Context* have included a short life of the poet in an introductory chapter that, as well as setting an agenda for the following pages, is both a useful taking-stock of Clare's position and an eloquent and timely complaint against his continued neglect. The book is inclusive and rounded; in its twelve chapters it involves the whole length and progress of Clare's life as a poet, from his earliest experience of reading, through the trespass into Burghley with Thomson's *The Seasons*, the Helpston and Northborough periods, High Beech, and finally, the years in the Northamptonshire General Lunatic Asylum.

> Ive left my own home of homes
> Green fields and every pleasant place
> The summer like a stranger comes
> I pause and hardly know her face . . .

Whose words are these? An important achievement of the introductory chapter by Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips is to reveal what a tangle of competing voices and authorities is represented by the body of Clare's work, in its past and present incarnations. The idea of Clare's 'voice' is problematised by the incidence of various forms of ventriloquism. The editors describe both how the young Clare would pass off his own poetic endeavour for that of others in early readings to his parents and how, in the currently ongoing Oxford edition, the editors, Robinson and Powell, have actually 'corrected' what they take to be grammatical 'corrections' by Clare's doctor and transcriber, William Knight. Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips also indicate the possible dangers of such rigour in reaching back for Clare's 'own' versions. The consequently raw and bare verse may accurately reproduce Clare's composing hand, but may also fail to reflect his expectations for a printed volume:

> What is important[. . .] is to acknowledge that this too, for all its non-interventionist and primitivist methodology, represents an editorial intervention of a radical kind.

The editors are alive to the ways in which the stripping down of a text can also be a subtle palimpsest of methodological conditions. In any case, it seems that posterity remains trapped and tricked by Clare's exclusion from the editorial process both as 'peasant poet' and as 'mad poet', and by the lack of manuscripts for the asylum years, thus damned ever to sophisticate the supposedly naive; and this is not the least of Clare's fascinations.

Nearly all twelve essays in this book are concerned in some form with the idea of a home in Clare's works, whether it is the ambiguity of a specific locale, or the relations between literary centre and margins. 'The Flitting', quoted above, then becomes a crucial text, as it problematises and unsettles the issue of Clare's marginal 'sense of place', and its centrality to his work; discussion repeatedly gravitates to this poem which expresses the meaningful illogicality of feeling displaced, sick with alienation, some three miles from home, where the same birds nest and sing. The poem seems well able to sustain a variety of interrogations, and is confirmed as one of Clare's finest. The contributors seem united in the instinct that the over-riding impulse in Clare's work is to define, to hold on to, and to recapture a sense of place; home, habitation, nest, focus . . . the idea and its expression are reformulated throughout.

Mark Storey's chapter, 'John Clare and the Critics', provides a digest of others' attempts over the years to understand but also to place the poet. He traces the use of the word 'genius' in Clare's early critics, a loaded combination of praise, critical theory, and condescension to the 'peasant poet'.

Genius, and the rather automatic analogies with Burns and Bloomfield provide material for the construction of an unthreatening Clare.

In '"The riddle nature could not prove": hidden landscapes in Clare's poetry', Nicholas Birns's argument stands as probably the most sceptical reassessment of more recent constructions of Clare. The critical enterprise of reading Clare in relation to the current of high Wordsworthian Romanticism on the one hand, and the poetry of rural observation on the other, has resulted in a neglect of continuity between Clares. Attempting to re-establish links between the Helpston nature poems and the late, visionary asylum poems, Nicholas Birns argues for considerable depth and complexity of poetic gaze in the early work. Birns is sceptical about the uses of that 'often arbitrary' genre of interpretation, biography, which may construct and privilege meaning by virtue of Clare's life coinciding with a certain historical span; enclosure has been identified as both the formative crisis of Clare's life (specifically, the enclosure of Helpston), and a crucial symptom of modernisation. The sentimentalisation of enclosure in literary-historical readings of Clare has been an instance of too-readily sympathetic response to what is held to be Romantic in Clare, and consistent with a given view of Romanticism:

> There is a danger, when a critical tradition arising from (a socially sensitive version of) Romanticism is applied to a Romantic poet such as Clare, of an overly facile isomorphism between the interpreter and the object of scrutiny. This too-comfortable fit between method and text jeopardises the critical detachment that is a crucial companion to hermeneutic empathy in the process of literary analysis.

Birns goes on to give a valuable caution against the temptation to posit a putative paradise behind the catch-all crisis of the enclosure of the open landscape. Several contributors do not share his resistance to this use of the idea of enclosure, however, still broadly following John Barrell in this. There is implicit disagreement, for example, in the title of Douglas Chambers' essay, '"A love for every simple weed": Clare, botany and the poetic language of lost Eden', which does allow for a sense of unfallen nature in Clare.

Roy Porter's '"All madness for writing": John Clare and the Asylum' argues that thinness of documentation and the obstruction of mythology all point to the limited value of retrospective diagnoses of Clare. Choosing not to psychoanalyse Clare, or to psychologise his works, Porter gives an account of Clare's behaviour in confinement as a rational, although despairing response to his circumstances, and others' use of him as the figure of mad genius. Pointing to the futility of modern biographical diagnosis, especially

in view of comparative lack of analysis on the part of Clare's doctors, he sounds a wearily ironic note:

> It is sadly amusing to note that, in the first edition (1932) of their magisterial *Life*, the Tibbles called Clare schizophrenic, but by the second edition (1972), he has become 'manic-depressive': *sic transit* the glories of psychiatric diagnosis.

The accumulation of critical practices, old and more recent, is perhaps the foremost context which must be dealt with in re-reading Clare, and this volume must function, not only in Mark Storey's essay but more generally, as a review of Clare criticism, dated 1994 – what has been empowering or obstructive in the past, what is presently healthy or unhealthy. Given the small quantity of publication on Clare, the responsibilities are considerable: notes of caution and hesitation such as these, in shepherding future interpretation and assisting its progress, may be seen as among the book's most important statements. A fair amount of deviation and implicit difference between the essays is no bad thing; it will certainly never diminish the scale and multiplicity of Clare's achievement for their readers.

John Clare in Context provides various overlapping contexts for the poet's works, many problems and diverging discussions that reflect many of the aspects of John Clare. At times during his years in confinement Clare's unhappiness and confusion took refuge in a multitude of personalities. A major author is known by capaciousness; could it then be said that a modern reader now meets a multitude of Clares, each offering a belligerent challenge to the outside world, each with the defiant *I am* with which to outface denial (as Clare defied the world in the character of the prize-fighter Jack Randall)? It has become a feature of Clare studies to find metaphors for his relationships with language and literature in the physical phenomena of his singular and contagious story. Sometimes, as in 'John Clare: the Trespasser', the essay here by John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton, the analogue is sustainable, a rich means of opening up issues in Clare's works. But at other times it may be more pleasing than useful. Marilyn Gaull, writing of Clare's dislike for Linnaeus's classification of plant species, observes that this method would uproot them from their environment 'just as Clare was removed, first to Northborough and then to the asylum. Clare understood the definitive value of environment and context.' This includes a nice moment of self-reference, but, just as Mark Storey says of his essay, 'Clare and the Critics', 'The "and" of my title has a lot of work to do', the 'just as' here comes under some strain. Marilyn Gaull's essay, 'Clare and "the Dark System"', considers how changes in the character of contemporary science

affected a self-educated writer, how the astronomy of Herschel and the geology of Hutton exemplify a disturbing view of nature, and natural sciences increasingly hostile to human feeling. Clare and his generation, confronted with a de-moralised landscape, may well have wished to keep it partly at bay. The essay finishes with an evocation of arts and sciences seeping into each others' territory, artists encroaching on the sanity previously embodied by Newtonian science, the new sciences tasting the irrational in nature, and yet madness losing its association with genius and meaningfulness:

> In fact, it was a therapeutic commonplace to discourage the emotionally troubled from writing at all, to prevent them from overstimulating the imagination with fiction and poetry. If the poets were now 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world', it was the scientists who had become the madmen.

Does it matter that this therapeutic commonplace was the exact opposite of the practice of Clare's doctors, in High Beech and Northampton?

Hugh Haughton's 'Progress and Rhyme: "The Nightingale's Nest" and Romantic Poetry' is a unifying essay in the collection, gathering and focusing a number of currents in Clare studies. At the site of the nightingale's nest Clare is seen to address ideas both of place and habitation, and the phenomenon of song itself. If Keats's nightingale had been disembodied song, the quintessence of poetry, Clare's nightingale is once again a small brown bird. Clare's narrating naturalist watches as well as listens to it. The nightingale's song is conditional upon its dwelling-place, furtive, precarious, obstinately particular. Arguing for considerable poetic self-consciousness in Clare, Hugh Haughton broaches the whole question of Clare's simplicity – what his simplicity consists of, how apt are we to elaborate it, how much it may conceal:

> Critics have written Clare down because he does not seem, in their terms, to have adequately problematised his own poems when he 'only wrote then down'.

Unforgiveable in an author that he should not privilege complexity; and yet this very trait makes the case of Clare's reputation a fascinating testing ground for current critical presumptions and habits. The critic of Clare must always guard against the danger of 'revealing' how complex he has been all along, not only in the interests of accuracy and plausibility, but so as not to lose the very real simplicity in Clare's verse. The challenge is to find some equilibrium between the discovery of depth and subtlety in Clare's poems, and the resonance of that simplicity, the importance of keeping it somehow in place.

Douglas Chambers glosses some lines from 'The Flitting', when Clare's 'I' is moved to pity an unlovely trespassing weed ('And e'en this little shepherds purse / Grieves me to cut it up . . . '):

> Shepherd's Purse is a pernicious garden weed, often called Farmer's Ruin; to love it is to see something in it that the mere gardener never sees, not only its association with an old home, but with the weeds that have grown about men's habitations[. . .]since the dawn of time. Clare, in other words, historicises and encultures this weed as a text not only of himself but of a lost society. In doing so he creates a mythology of permanence in which his own isolation becomes part of a larger historical myth

The expansion here is ingenious and attractive; the proposition, that the lines are informed by a wide cultural intuition, persuades. But what may have been surrendered to this end is no less a part of these few lines – the very tininess of the observation and of the moment, a soft elegiac contraction that has everything to do with a shepherd's purse. There exists a challenge to educe enough, and yet to withhold enough ('We'll leave it as we found it', the motto-like phrase picked out by Haughton from 'The Nightingale's Nest').

Clare criticism is working well when it can perform this balancing act, and reveal the deceptive pregnancy of an image or a line, without disturbing the peace by too rude an intrusion into its stillness. John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton's essay on the significance of trespassing takes a simple motif and shows how deeply it runs, brilliantly evoking the complex of emotions surrounding ideas of trespass and transgression into literary territories as into forbidden land, a preoccupation with restricted ownership, free passage, and vulnerability that lurks implicit in even the most innocent-seeming description:

> Even that favourite Clarean theme, the coming of spring, can be symbolised by a broken fence and a decayed haystack, in the poem 'Young Lambs':
>
> The spring is coming by many signs;
> The trays are up, the hedges broken down,
> That fenced the haystack, and the remnant shines
> Like some old antique fragment weathered brown.

If Clare became a trespasser on literary ground, he became no less the dispossessed owner, prey to the trespass of others. The parallel between text and land runs deep through these essays; Haughton writes of the 'inexplicit

analogy' between the unenclosed landscape and Clare's unpunctuated, uncorrected poems, making itself felt especially in 'The Mores' ('Nor fence of ownership crept in between . . .'). In 'The Exposure of John Clare', Adam Phillips argues that to seek visibility in print is to make one's habitation manifest and open to theft, appropriation and claim.

Seamus Heaney's bicentenary lecture, John Lucas's 'Clare's Politics' and James McKusick's 'Beyond the Visionary Company: John Clare's Resistance to Romanticism' form a cluster of attention to Clare's movement between various dictions and registers. Heaney praises his stubborn resistance to displacement from his local usages; after the initial foray into orthodoxy represented by Clare's very accomplished pastiche and parody, the return, as it were, to Helpston. Lucas writes of Clare's ability to modify his political address according to his audience, either concealing or foregrounding the fervour of his political feelings; the great poem of displacement 'The Flitting' (of 1832) concluding in a tone of popular radicalism. McKusick proposes Clare as the user of a protean *heteroglossia*, crossing between and mingling various forms of discourse. It is a combined achievement of *John Clare in Context* to demonstrate the complexity and variety of registers available to Clare, and in doing so to reaffirm and reinstate the positiveness of his choice of register, and the security of the language for which he is famous. Clare's language is all the more centred, in the margin of its own choosing, for the continuous effort exerted in gently but firmly fending off the claims of propertied rivals, whether those of London gentility or of Linnaean taxonomy.

This is a valuable collection for being not only suitable for seasoned readers, but also well equipped to introduce a student to the riches of Clare's works and the problems in their reception; it must be hoped that its diffusion of interpretations will do much to encourage their reading and study. *John Clare in Context* is an elegant collaboration of differing styles united in being convinced and convincing of Clare's importance in Romantic studies; it makes a fitting tribute to the late Geoffrey Summerfield.

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Richard Bourke, *Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity: Wordsworth, the Intellectual and Cultural Critique* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. xiv + 353. £42.50 hardback. 0 7450 1318 x.

Wordsworthianism rather than Wordsworth is the subject of this impressive and ambitious study. Richard Bourke applies himself to the redemptive, restorative and consolatory qualities which Victorians as well as more recent critics have ascribed to Wordsworth's poetry. For Bourke,

the redemptive power afforded to the aesthetic in the case of Wordsworth has been at the expense of its legitimation. And those who have subscribed to this paradigm of the failure of the political imagination are, Bourke suggests, indicative of the larger historical failure of the intellectual within British culture over the last two centuries.

As Bourke's title indicates, Wordsworth figures here as a particularly significant site of modernity in the history of the aesthetic and in the formation of what, since Jerome McGann's 1983 study, has often been referred to as the 'Romantic ideology'. As a result of this history, Wordsworth's poetry – which is also at the heart of Bourke's argument – can only be approached through a complex detour. In order to uncover the turning point in Wordsworth's career where, he argues, the possibility of a community of feeling gives way to an immanent individualism, Bourke must approach the poems through a critique of eminent Victorians such as Arnold, Pater, Hutton and Keble as well as post–Second World War Romanticists such as Abrams, Bloom, Hartman, and Wellek. Bourke also offers an extended account of Hazlitt's politically perceptive view of Wordsworth; a trenchant analysis of how, in De Quincey, aesthetic sublimation 'supplies a myth of national culture, and a scathing attack on T. S. Eliot's abandonment of 'the possibility of a systematic critical expedition'.

Within Bourke's strenuously argued and wide-ranging historiography, Wordsworth represents a lost opportunity for civic humanism. He is depicted as fighting a valiant rearguard action in favour of 'a civic culture against the incorrigible progress of commercial history'. His is a 'throwback Harringtonianism' desperately struggling, and failing, to legitimate 'a republican ideal of civic participation'. There is a close affinity between Bourke's analysis here of the problem of legitimation in Wordsworth and Nigel Leask's *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought*, first published in 1988.

Alongside his narrative of the history of the aesthetic Bourke deploys incisive, detailed readings of individual poems: 'Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake', 'Tintern Abbey', 'Michael', 'Nutting', 'Resolution and Independence' and *The Prelude*. The effect is always stimulating, at times bewildering, as the necessarily elaborate retrospect is further complicated by a series of refractions through which Wordsworth is measured: Arnoldian aestheticism and eighteenth-century ideas of civic identity are perhaps the two most important. The intellectual vigour of Bourke's argument makes heavy demands on the reader and, despite his appropriate disclaimer that he is 'trying to describe a recurrent complication, not an intellectual or artistic movement', one could justifiably ask for a clearer narrative line.

It is a measure of this book's richness – its rigorous engagement with a complex historical matrix – that it stimulates one to look for counter arguments. More reference could have been made to different kinds of sensibility in relation to the idea of a community of feeling; Tennyson, particularly in the light of some of Alan Sinfield's helpful work, could have offered a sharper definition of the redemptive power the Victorians found in poetry. To understand more fully the contemporary response to Wordsworth, particularly as regards De Quincey and Hazlitt, some mention should certainly have been made of *The Excursion* and its nineteenth-century reputation.

More unsettling, however, are some of the book's sustained methodological assumptions. Wordsworth, like T. S. Eliot, is taken to task for not producing the theoretical rationalisation of his own cultural productions. Though he guards himself periodically against this tendency, Bourke repeatedly assumes too straightforwardly on Wordsworth's behalf the role of the intellectual, the theoriser and the political economist. (There are, in fact, times here when he is measured directly against philosophers such as Kant and Fichte.) This is not to suggest, of course, that Wordsworth had (or has) no connection with these roles and practices. Far from it. But Bourke could have been more helpfully explicit about the poetics of the political imagination and its manifestation in poetry. He argues impressively against what he refers to as 'the Coleridgean . . . inoculation of the artwork against historical contingency', but is rather more reticent about the connection between poetic and historical contingency. His historiographical position is in danger of producing a history of failures instead of allowing us to see the exciting, productive, even instructive, fault-lines in the cultural productions of the past. And it could be said that there are times here when Bourke's own historical narrative seems perilously close to describing (albeit in great detail) the point at which a dissociation of sensibility set in.

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