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Reviews

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Stephen Bending and Andrew McRae, eds., *The Writing of Rural England, 1500–1800*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003. 276 pp. £55. 1 4039 1276 9.

In this new anthology, Stephen Bending and Andrew McRae have assimilated a splendid diversity of texts, including canonical works as well as obscure sources hitherto available only as manuscripts. Chronologically, these texts range from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) to William Gilpin's picturesque guidebook, *Observations on the River Wye* (1782). With popular and elite cultural forms placed in relation to each other, readers are encouraged to search for points of conflict and continuity between poems, novels, tours, topographical surveys, literary essays, political tracts, husbandry manuals, private letters, journals, ballads and, even, documents of social protest. At every turn, the low interpenetrates the high. The editors show, for example, how a satirical language of complaint against exploitative landlords was as much a staple of popular folklore, as it was constitutive of a literary tradition. They similarly emphasise the way in which marginalised voices emerged, not only from outside, but from within the dominant representations of the countryside they sought to contest. The plebeian poet, Stephen Duck, is the classic example here, since his great anti-georgic poem could only find an audience once his favourite author, Joseph Addison, had purified georgic poetry of 'the low phrases' associated with the agricultural arts. These, of course, are not new insights but the format of an anthology enables them to be presented in a particularly vivid and direct manner, with rewarding results.

Intriguing, too, is the way in which writers across the social spectrum deployed biblical imagery to give particular land uses divine sanction. Although Gerrard Winstanley's use of the Old Testament to argue for the abolition of private property is well known, his manifesto is revealingly included here, alongside a satire on the Ten Commandments, written by a disgruntled tenant. Women, too, are shown to dramatise their experience of the landscape by appealing to the private language of religious feeling, thereby constructing an alternative tradition of country house and prospect poetry. Indeed, one of the great strengths of this book is its attention to the gendered nature of landscape aesthetics. For the editors demonstrate how, by the late eighteenth century, aesthetics had become so infused with the language of sentiment that the landscape garden could, under certain conditions, authorise women's entry into polite culture while, at the same time, threatening to effeminise men. As is made continually clear, the landscape was always a site of contestation, even as it secured a consensus about how the countryside should be 'viewed' and what idea of Englishness it should uphold.

The thematic organisation of the book brings coherence to these conflicts, and charts the way they altered over time. Each of the seven chapters focuses on how perceptions

of rural life and landscape shaped specific aspects of the national imaginary, from the myth of 'Merry England' to the transvaluation of labour and commerce endorsed by the 'The Georgic Imperative'. These chapters are prefaced with useful introductory essays, supplying readers with necessary contextual details and acquainting them with the most recent scholarship. With its copious annotations, biographical summaries and guides to further reading, this anthology will provide students with an indispensable introduction to the cultural and literary history of the rural landscape. For specialist historians of literature, too, it will be invaluable, both for the variety of perspectives it offers and for the acts of synthesis it deftly performs. But it will also appeal to social historians interested in seeing how the concerns of their own discipline fit into a broader and more varied literary tradition than the one usually offered.

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Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England, 1700–1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003. 285 pp. £47.50. 0719061598.

This collection of essays provides a much needed focus on the 'economy of makeshifts', a range of coping strategies exploited by the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (the term was first coined by Olwen Hufton in relation to the poor in France). It is increasingly recognised that 'makeshifts' were an essential element in the economies of the poor, and that such incomes need to be integrated into the standard of living debate, and this book is perhaps the single most significant attempt to provide both a theoretical framework and empirical research. Essays are contributed by Steve Hindle, Margaret Hanly, Sarah Lloyd, Heather Shore, Alannah Tomkins, Sam Barrett, and Steven King, with an introduction and conclusion by the editors.

The contributors to this volume believe that the economies of the poor included a wide array of 'makeshifts'. Although work (day labour, by-employments and casual jobs, paid by cash and perquisites), poor relief, formal charity, and common rights are recognised as being at the core of this economy of expedients and welfare, other opportunities included exemption from local taxes, casual charity, gleaning and foraging on wastes, credit, loans, selling and pawning goods, barter, friendly societies, rent arrears, as well as kinship and neighbourhood networks. Heather Shore makes the case for including activities on the fringes of legality, as well as those placed firmly on the wrong side of the legal divide such as begging, vagrancy, squatting, defrauding the poor law, petty theft, poaching, petty unlicensed brewing, prostitution, and receiving stolen goods. Access to resources was often regulated and contributed to the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Tomkins's chapter on pawnbroking is especially important since it explores the only known example of a pledgebook (1777–8) for any period before the later nineteenth century. Those by

Barrett and King also present original evidence on those applicants for poor relief who were rejected. Previous work by Horrell and Humphries and Peter King has highlighted the role of women in the makeshift economy, and there are titbits of evidence to this effect here: mothers were key intermediaries between their children and the governors at the Welsh Charity School in London, while the majority of those pledging goods in George Fettes's pawn shop in York were women. On the other hand, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the likelihood of dependence upon the poor law centred around having, or not having, lateral male kin. At other times, however, the book states the obvious and labours the point, and can be rather more theoretical than empirical.

The essays make some inroads into what must be an essential teasing out of the relative importance of makeshifts, their economic value, and the 'hierarchy of resort'. In the slide into impoverishment, the poor pawned goods before they resorted to the poor law, while the kin-rich were more eligible for charity and the kin-poor had to rely more heavily upon parochial relief. While the authors stress the strong regional differences in makeshifts, the essays largely provide evidence from the north (rural and rural-industrial regions, and the urban centre of York), and from London. The volume does, therefore, redress the relative paucity of studies on the northern poor, but it does not provide a rounded national assessment. There is something of a Steven King flavour to the collection, such as this emphasis on the north and an insistence on the relatively minor role played by the poor law in many local makeshift economies.

This collection of essays is an important contribution to the history of poverty and welfare and I hope it will stimulate other historians to explore more fully the role of makeshifts in the lives of the poor.

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Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750–1870*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003. ix, 172. £16.50. 0 333 67193 7 hb. and 0 333 67194 5 pb.

The child worker stood pitifully at the centre of classical accounts of the first industrial revolution. More recently she has been out of fashion. In the last few years however, perhaps influenced by the persistence of children's work in the Third World, the resurgence of pessimistic interpretations of industrialisation and a new emphasis on the role of increased labour inputs, economic historians have revisited the classical preoccupation. How important was child labour in British industrialisation and what were its causes and consequences?

Kirby's scholarly but concise and accessible account summarises the historiography to date and explains why, after so long, historians still disagree about major aspects of children's work. In chapter one, 'the paucity of reliable quantitative evidence' (p. 11) is identified as a key obstacle. It was not until 1841 that census enumerators recorded

the occupations of individuals and even then the census abstracts do not provide an accurate count of child workers, giving only aggregate occupation statistics for those over twenty years of age. Moreover enumerators were not required to record the occupation of wives, sons, or daughters living with and assisting parents unless they were apprenticed or received wages. Not surprisingly, research at district level using other employment records has demonstrated chronic under-enumeration. The 1851 census, regarded as being the first reliable survey of occupations, counted only very small proportions of children aged five to nine at work although about a third of children aged ten to fourteen worked. Subsequent censuses documented the gradual decline of the participation rate of these older children and by 1881 ceased to record working children under ten on the grounds that numbers had become insignificant. However, these great mid-Victorian censuses are known to have undercounted female employment and may also have persisted in undercounting working boys. Growing disapproval of children's work along with its patchily policed prohibition probably means undercounting was not uniform over time and across sectors. But most importantly, by 1851 the industrial revolution as conventionally dated was seventy years old. The censuses are just too late to provide a full chronology of trends in children's work. This lag is all the more important in that many of the real bones of contention relate to developments in the eighteenth century, for example whether it was the early factories that saw the highpoint of children's work or whether domestic manufacture had employed them in even greater proportions. The historian of children's work has to turn to other sources to fill the gaps. Kirby lists alternative documentary sources, Government Reports and Reports of Inspectors, health records, business accounts, household accounts and apprenticeship and service records, and sketches their strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter two locates child labour in its social and demographic context. Since Britain industrialised first and at a low per capita income, it did so in a context where making children useful was deemed acceptable. In addition, industrialisation was accompanied by demographic changes that took dependency rates to new heights. At the household level older children had to work to help support younger children. Moreover Kirby is right to draw attention to the predominance in the child labour market of orphans and paupers, and hence to link trends in child labour to variation in family stability. Chapter three takes up the issue of how the organisation of production (sensibly not reduced to technological change) conditioned children's work, and chapter four deals with how protective labour legislation and compulsory schooling contributed to its demise.

Despite the data limitations, Kirby feels emboldened to draw four conclusions: first that the employment of very young children was never widespread; second that the ages ten to fourteen saw a passage from childhood dependency to remunerative labour; third that, for the period under review, child labour was concentrated in traditional sectors such as agriculture, workshop manufacturing and services; and fourth that the role of the state in eradicating child labour has been overestimated. While these points command general acceptance, I think there may be room for some qualification. For example, while the employment of children under nine might not have been 'widespread', my own research admittedly drawing on a source that Kirby himself thinks of as 'qualitative' (autobiography) – suggests that more that half of all working-class boys had started work

by age nine. And while I agree that traditional sectors contributed strongly to the demand for child labour, at key sub-periods in British industrialisation so too did mines and early factories. I hope alongside Peter Kirby that the growth of regional studies based on local sources might yet cast light on these ongoing disputes.

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