

ing her, or the insistence that a pamphlet about her by her minister, Henry Jessey, be read as a popular masque. Some readers may remain skeptical about Gillespie's contention that, in asserting their rights to choose their own church or to choose to preach, Wight and Wentworth were theorizing a sovereign individual with full political agency.

Chapter 5 examines the writings of seamstress and Fifty Monarchist Mary Cary in the context of debates at the time about enclosure, property rights, and tithes, paying close attention to language about service and labor. Gillespie argues against socialist interpretations of Cary's work by Alfred Cohen ("The Fifth Monarchy Mind: Mary Cary," *Social Research* 31 [1964]: 195–213) and Jane Baston ("History, Prophecy, and Interpretation: Mary Cary and Fifth Monarchism," *Prose Studies* 21 [1988]: 1–18). Gillespie demonstrates, rather, an underlying "protocapitalistic" (216) impulse in Cary's insistence on the right of all the godly to preach. Gillespie contends persuasively that Cary "develops a subjective theory of value" (255) that allows her to postulate a market economy for preaching. This chapter will be of particular interest to students of seventeenth-century economic discourses.

Gillespie makes a convincing, even stirring argument that careful attention to the voices of these sectarian women writers revises deep-seated assumptions in feminist thought about liberalism's essential exclusion of women. Although at times succumbing to the temptation of scholarly jargon and occasionally stretching its evidence, *Domesticity and Dissent* is a stylishly written, intellectually lively book that contributes significantly to our understanding of midcentury religious and political radicalism; it is a welcome addition to the study of early modern women writers.

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Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson. Fred Parker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. viii+285.

"The Enlightenment" is a really bad nickname for the eighteenth century. It takes the century of Methodism, sentiment, and graveyard poetry and associates it exclusively with secularism, reason, and Newtonian physics. You sometimes get the impression that a typical eighteenth-century Englishman spent most mornings reading coffee-stained newspapers out loud to his fellows, most afternoons debating

the Spartan constitution at some learned society, and most evenings reforming English orthography while simultaneously measuring the transit of Venus. The great virtue of Fred Parker's *Scepticism and Literature*, then, is to remind readers that many in the eighteenth century were more interested in curbing organized thought than in shouting it from the rooftops. Scepticism, Parker argues, was central to eighteenth-century English letters, which continue to model for us a certain invigorating antirationalism, a mode of thinking not wedded to abstraction or the worn grooves of intellectual system.

Parker makes an important point, though it is worth noting straightaway that he uses the word "scepticism" where an older intellectual history preferred two others: empiricism and conservatism. The book's jacket explains "that radical scepticism is not the invention of the late twentieth century, and that its strategies and implications have never been more interestingly explored than in the eighteenth." This gives a good sense of what Parker is up to here: by rechristening Pope, Hume, and Samuel Johnson as skeptics, he is trying to lure post-structuralists and neopragmatists over to the old Tory canon. Burke, too, is one of Parker's regular reference points, but has been dropped from the subtitle for being insufficiently witty. This itself should signal how Parker imagines the writers he would have us celebrate: they are Burkeans with better punch lines. That Sterne makes the cut shouldn't much surprise anybody. Parker is following a respectable body of scholarship that reads Sterne in historical context—as an Anglican clergyman and Pyrrhonist—and not as a postmodernist *avant la lettre*. But Parker has done Locke, who gets a chapter of his own, no such favors, choosing to read him as a genteel eighteenth-century ironist rather than as the seventeenth-century radical that much recent scholarship has shown him to be, a thinker who so nearly got himself arrested by the Stuarts that he fled England into political exile.

The book's distinctive merits are most clearly on display in its reading of the *Essay on Man*. Parker makes the case that we misconstrue Pope if we slot him into the cubbyhole marked "neoclassicism" or give in to the almost claustrophobic feeling of order produced by his clockwork couplets. The poem's title gives the clue: essays were not a Greek or Roman genre, and Parker thereby discovers a Pope less interested in mimicking the ancients than in following Montaigne, a Pope who writes a poetry of startling directness and naturalness, an intimate poetry of human mutability, a poetry that tries to capture the mind in motion, and "a consciousness which copies and embraces . . . a more instinctual life" (137). There are echoes of F. R. Leavis in this argument, of the old Leavisite case that literature is to be preferred to philosophy because it trains our attention on what Parker calls the "fertile

multiplicities of experience” (95). But if Parker shares with Leavis a certain sense of vocation—Leavis’s last collection was called *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher*—he shares none of Leavis’s cranky agrarianism. Leavis once wrote that anybody lucky enough to be born in Kentucky had no need of literature because Kentucky still housed organic communities and the old Anglo-Saxon folkways. The rest of us would have to make do with literature; literature would be our Kentucky of the mind. For Parker, eighteenth-century literature at its best offers something very different: a lesson in urbanity, a patrician irony, the spectacle of gentlemen embracing all the codes of civilized life while still cracking wise about them. He calls this “one of the great lost strengths of eighteenth-century culture,” the ability to follow rules without having to believe in them (51). Skepticism, in this sense, is hardly the intellectual wrecking ball that many take it to be; doubt teaches us to give up the search for philosophical rigor and the forms of critique or alienation that such rigor usually engenders. It is thus a “yielding to the tide”—that is Pope in the *Epistle to Bolingbroke*—or “a willingness to live by appearances” (52). What Parker most loves about skeptics is this “sublime acquiescence” (122), which can take the form, equally, of Humean sociability or sheer Shandean oddness, but which amounts either way to a simple resolve not to think too hard about the conditions of your life.

When literary scholars even bother to pay attention to eighteenth-century skeptics, they typically transmute them into unconvincing proxies for pet theoretical positions: Sterne as Theodor Adorno, Swift as Edward Said. Parker’s book mounts a silent attack on this Left-skeptical eighteenth century. The very first eighteenth-century words he quotes are Samuel Johnson’s attack on “enthusiasm,” which immediately pitches skepticism against seventeenth-century radicalism and the surviving traditions of dissent (5–6). Some pages later Parker concludes, alongside Gibbon and Burke, that the only thing worse than superstition is revolution, against which skepticism is again an effective antidote (21–22). Such is the real accomplishment of this book: Parker is not much interested in literary form or philosophical conundrums, but he goes out of his way to emulate his subjects. The prose is elegant, the wisdom affably pedestrian and secondhand. He has a brisk way with summary. *Scepticism and Literature* is the graceful repackaging of earlier commonplaces. It has been almost twenty years since Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown published *The New Eighteenth Century*. You can, if you like, welcome the old one back.

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