

importance of what he has found. Oddly, his argument stands as a confirmation of E. G. Wakefield's fears, even if it tries to prove the failure of Wakefield's system. Any social historian, concerned by the discipline's fragmentation, will find Mr Fairburn's attempt to write the history of an entire society both instructive and stimulating.

Erik Olssen

MCCALMAN, IAIN. *Radical Underworld. Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle 1988. xvi, 338 pp. Ill. £ 27.50.

Deeply resentful over gibes in the loyalist press about their proclivity for riot and anarchy and their ragged dress, the working men and women who gathered at St. Peter's Field, Manchester on 16 August 1819 were determined to make the mass meeting of that fateful day a display of order, sobriety, and decorum. Such concerns were of limited interest to most of the "old blackguard" Spenceans" of Iain McCalman's brilliant study. For over forty years, from the mid-1790s to the late 1830s, a small band of ultra-radical Spenceans lived and laboured in London's radical underworld, "a loosely-linked, semi-clandestine network of political organisations, groups, coteries and alliances", where radical politics intersected not only the world of the degraded artisan and the labouring poor but also London's notorious underworld of petty criminals, blackmailers, pimps, and pornographers (p. 2). Key figures in this shadowy world, the followers of Thomas Spence sought to spread their leader's views on land reform and politics through their connections to the rough and very masculine culture of London's workshops and tavern free-and-easies; these often thoroughly unrespectable radicals grafted "humour, escapism, sex, profit, conviviality, entertainment and saturnalia" (p. 234) onto the radical tradition and turned to blasphemy, burlesque, and a form of "obscene populism" to ridicule aristocrats, "arsebishops", and royal parasites. This ribald, vigorously anti-establishment culture of Thomas Spence and his disciples acted as a magnet for the impoverished journeymen, bankrupt tradesmen, and failed professionals of the metropolis. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's work on French artisans of the 1830s, McCalman suggests that Spenceanism offered the jobbing tailor and marginal professional an alternative to the demeaning world of work and provided them with a sense of camaraderie and hope as well as an outlet for their intellectual and literary activities.

In the opening chapters, McCalman introduces the reader to London's radical underworld through the lives and careers of Thomas Evans, Robert Wedderburn, and George Cannon. He has selected these three men as the "focal-points" of his study because they were "ideal types", each broadly representative of separate but convergent radical traditions" (pp. 3–4). The twists and turns of the life of Thomas Evans, the best known of the three Spenceans, embodied the contradictory impulses of the marginal, restless artisan. An influential leader in London's radical circles from the days of the London Corresponding Society of the 1790s to the mass

radicalism of the postwar years, he passed through a succession of handicraft occupations and dabbled in radical blackmail and smut peddling; at the same time, Evans was also a devoted father, a moderate Westminster reformer, and a firm believer in the virtues of self-improvement. The illegitimate son of a sugar plantation owner and an African-born house slave, Robert Wedderburn spent his early years on the margin of the slave and free worlds in the British West Indies; deeply influenced by Methodism and millenarian prophecy, the ex-sailor and journeyman tailor joined the radical underworld as a working-class prophet and blasphemous preacher. The freethinking editor and aspiring solicitor and philosophe George Cannon appeared, at first glance, to have little in common with his future associates. But, despite his ties to the Shelleys and Timothy Brown's circle of wealthy freethinking literati; his true home was London's literary underworld of Grub Street hacks and *philosophes-manqués*.

Turning to the years of insurgency, McCalman ably winds his way through the complex and fissiparous world of London ultra-radicalism during the period 1815 to 1821. Critical of the tendency to focus on the revolutionary activities of the flamboyant "Dr" James Watson and Arthur Thistlewood, he emphasizes Thomas Evans' contribution to the development of the tavern debating club as a "radical strategy and cultural form" (p. 112) and argues that historians have underestimated the significance of his Spencean society as an alternative to the mass platform of Henry Hunt and "Dr" Watson and to the insurrectionary plotting of Thistlewood's circle. Apart from its role as a form of entertainment, the tavern debating club also served as a means of disseminating radical and rational knowledge and as a "mock tribunal". At the weekly meetings of the convivial dining clubs, Thomas Evans and his fellow Spenceans raised their cups of porter to blasphemous toasts, sang revolutionary songs and ballads, and frequently lampooned the ceremonies and sacred offices of the Church. The raucous debates and lectures at Wedderburn's "blasphemous chapel" in Hopkins Street likewise mixed together infidelity and anti-clericalism with scriptural language and symbolism.

The infidel sermons, coarse language, and buffoonery of the debates at the Mulberry Tree and the Hopkins Street chapel demonstrated not only the radicals' reliance on humour and biblical language and imagery but also the role of obscenity in the political idiom of Spence's followers. Although the worlds of respectable radicalism and Grub Street obscenity were never completely separated, the tradition of combining radical politics with scurrilous attacks on the ruling classes probably reached its zenith in the early 1820s during the radical campaign in support of Queen Caroline. At the height of the affair, radical journalists and publishers produced a steady stream of pamphlets, squibs, and broadsides which blended together burlesque and obscenity with a radical critique of "Old Corruption". Over the next two decades, various "Grub Street Jacks" continued this tradition of "obscene populism" (pp. 205–206) by exposing and holding up to public ridicule the vices and crimes of assorted lords, clergymen, cabinet ministers, and, of course, members of the royal family. Other radical pressmen, like George Cannon and William Dugdale, dropped out of politics altogether and concentrated on the lucrative market for books on "the philosophy of birch discipline" and other pornographic works. Pointing out that even Dugdale and Cannon produced a genre of bawdy, anti-establishment (but not pornographic) publications, McCalman ar-

gues that London's radical pornographers, like the Grub Street *canaille* of Robert Darnton's prerevolutionary Paris, were " 'carriers' of cultural strains which deserve closer scrutiny from historians" (p. 219).

In most accounts of London radicalism, even in I. J. Prothero's excellent study, William Dugdale and company rarely put in an appearance. By drawing attention to the contributions of these "Grub Street Jacks" and to the vitality of the culture and politics of the radical underworld, McCalman challenges accepted wisdom about the triumph of respectable radicalism in the early Victorian period. In the late 1820s and 1830s the taverns, chapels, and theatres of the metropolis continued to resound with the now familiar blend of millenarian prophecy, blasphemy, and infidelity. Held together during the difficult years of the 1820s by their participation in the tavern debates and convivial dining of this alternative culture, a small group of veteran Spenceans emerged during the next decade as organizers and leaders of the National Union of the Working Classes and later of the London Democratic Association and used their new found influence and prestige to shape the program and strategy of London radicalism during the years leading up to Chartism. The old guard of the ultra-radical underworld in fact disappeared as a political force in metropolitan radicalism only after the failure of the LDA in 1839–40 to win mass support for its Jacobin ideals and insurrectionary tactics.

Displaying a rare tenacity in tracking the "traceable spoor" of this tiny band of ultra-radicals, McCalman follows the trail from archive to archive and pursues his leads as well through the pages of radical newspapers, "bon ton" periodicals, bawdy chapbooks, and pornographic novels. While he makes good use of these sources in his exploration of the often overlooked world of unrespectable radicalism, he passes rather quickly over other aspects of London ultra-radicalism. He barely touches upon Spence's land plan, the central feature of the program of Thomas Evans and his circle, and limits himself to about a dozen pages on the insurrectionary plotting of the postwar years. Nevertheless McCalman's book is a valuable and very impressive contribution to the ever expanding body of work on the culture and ideology of early nineteenth-century radicalism. Apart from his contribution to the literature, McCalman manages to achieve a far more difficult task. For a historian, the rarest of all accomplishments is to write a truly fascinating book. With the publication of *Radical Underworld*, he joins this very select group.

Robert G. Hall

HERNÁNDEZ PADILLA, SALVADOR. *El magonismo: historia de una pasión libertaria 1900–1922*. Segunda ed. ampl. [Colección Problemas de México.] Ediciones Era, México 1988. 255 pp.

This book is an impassioned libertarian's history of "una pasión libertaria". The author has invested years of research in the radical newspapers of the epoch of the porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution, in interviews and secondary literature to offer the most detailed political history of the Magonistas heretofore available. Despite the detail, however, the new information is of marginal significance. It fills