References

Budge, Gavin, ed. *Romantic Empiricism*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2007. Print.
Cairns, Craig. *Associationalism and the Literary Imagination*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print.
Gibbons, Sarah L. *Kant's Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgment and Experience*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.
Gigante, Denise. *Life*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009. Print.
Heinzelman, Kurt. *The Economics of the Imagination*. Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1980. Print.
Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. Ernest Mossner. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1984. Print.
Jorland, Gerard. "Value Theories in Economics." *Biographies of Scientific Objects*. Ed. Lorraine Daston, Chicago: U Chicago P, 2000. 117–31. Print.
Kneller, Jane. *Kant and the Power of Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.
Makkreel, Rudolf. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1990. Print.
Pyle, Forest. *The Ideology of Imagination*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. Print.
White, Deborah Elise. *Romantic Returns*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Print.

Richard C. Sha
American University

Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny at the End of Early Modern England, by David Collings, Lewisburg, Bucknell UP, 2009, 332 pp.

David Collings has given us a superb study of Britain's struggles – in the literary, political, and economic thought of the Romantic period – to come to terms with its own rapid social transformation. Rather than offering a material and social history of the period in question, *Monstrous Society* traces a crucial shift in the understanding of social order by focusing on Britain's evolving self-description of its social practices and class relations. In what amounts to a consistently lucid and valuable critical reappraisal of the volatile phase of modernity between 1780 and 1830, Collings approaches Romantic political thought and (Gothic) literary writing as an occasion for a type of critical thinking that is alternately wary, contemplative, and self-critical; the later Heidegger had called it *Besinnung*, a kind of all-encompassing reflection. Something of the sort is indeed needed since, as Collings notes, modernity's excessive utopian aspirations and its peremptory, leveling demands on individual and society alike make it exceedingly difficult to achieve a truly critical outlook on it. In fact, modernity cannot properly be "thought" at all unless we achieve a measure of distance and detachment from the conceptual, methodological, and disciplinary assumptions about the nature of knowledge, most of which this self-certifying epoch has bequeathed us since the seventeenth century. Focusing a good deal of his attention on the transformation of political and economic thought after 1789, Collings sees modernity – rather than the older absolutist, feudal, and ecclesiastic regimes that it stigmatizes and eventually supplants – as the truly monstrous creation.

Being obviously indebted to a great deal of material and social history – in particular the left-leaning or neo-Marxist historiographical projects of E. P. Thompson, John Barrell, and Raymond Williams – any study of socio-economic relations and transformations during the Romantic era faces the challenge of investigating a subject

already explored from by a wide and formidable array of scholars. Yet rather than offering us merely another, differently inflected social history, David Collings establishes a substantially new and compelling focus for his study by taking up the pivotal shift of how the social imaginary is itself being reconceived during the period in question. In other words, we are treated to a meta-commentary on some of Romanticism's most ambitious attempts at "modeling" what Hegel in 1807 had characterized as the present period of "transition and innovation." The "crucial interpretive problem," and the guiding focus for his entire study, Collings locates in the concept of "reciprocity." Broadly speaking, that term is taken to signify a wide "range of more immediate and embodied exchanges, whether on marked occasions such as local festivals or campaign rituals, … the typical encounters of everyday life" or indeed something more conspicuous, if no less symbolic and ritualized, "such as food riots" (12) in late-eighteenth-century England. Well aware of the conceptual and methodological challenges that a study of this nature must confront, Collings opens his argument by suggesting how, during the period from 1780 through 1830, the early modern, ritualized, embodied, and regionally inflected relationship between the gentry and "plebeian" class was gradually being supplanted by a modern, governmental, abstract, and procedural model of social relations. In framing matters thus, Collings is well aware that the overwhelmingly textual orientation of modern social historiography renders that discipline rather ill-equipped to grasp and articulate "a sense of the broad ensemble of material relations, popular practice, and discursive history" (13) that accounts for the distinctive reciprocity in social relations prior to about 1790. The same holds even more true for the prevailing model of literary (and Romantic) Historicism, which likewise clings with obstinate naivety to the supposed primacy of the Real – be it under the heading of "History," materiality, sexuality, or yet some other pseudo-immediacy.

In a series of chapters that focus on Burke, Bentham, Matthew Lewis, Malthus, and Mary Shelley, Collings unfolds a story of what he calls "the end of early modernity," that is, a "shift from customary to constitutional right, from local crowd to national movements, from conventions of mutual recognition to those of modern ideological debate" (15). The objective here is not to offer a standard linear history, but rather to show the ultimate impossibility of predicating social "progress" on purely abstract, procedural, and impersonal values and concepts. Dissenting (21) from both the Marxist orientation of British social historiography over the past half-century and Foucault's critique of that model, Collings reads the emergence of modern rational government as a project equivocal not only as regards the values (of efficiency, transparency, uniformity, legality, etc.) that it imposes, but also as regards its ultimate claims to success. In Collings's account, neither Burke nor Bentham and Malthus succeed in their attempts to curb or positively expunge the older model of reciprocity that had accounted for the malleable, embodied, and often carnivalesque quality of class relations in early modern England. In pursuit of what he calls a "history of antagonism," Collings seeks to counteract our own disciplinary implication in the modern bureaucratic and governmental conception of social relations and knowledge. The best (perhaps the only) remedy, he suggests, is "to adopt a nonmodern historiography, one that does not rely for its premises on the notion of the revolutionary break from the past" (19). Collings's first chapter further probes the conceptual and methodological challenges faced by any study that scrutinizes the transformation of old England into a modern nation; to do so requires us to recover a perspective not already prepossessed by modern disciplinarity and its peremptory restriction of admissible evidence to the textual and officially documented realm. "Once one shifts from volatile custom, one enters a domain where the

legitimate basis for social practice is less codified and more difficult to capture within the terms of modern political theory" (29). *Monstrous Society* does a terrific job of reminding us that to grasp the emancipatory powers of romanticism (or indeed its occasionally reactionary tendencies) requires a thorough analysis of the social dynamics and material practices that had shaped the idea of community during the preceding century and a half.

Moreover, to articulate "the shift from symbolic practice to discursive articulation" from within our contemporary disciplinary landscape, which sharply "separates discursive histories from the history of social practices" (31), also means gaining some distance on key concepts on which modernity has long relied for purposes of self-authorization; the language of social contracts, individual rights, or supposed constitutional settlements will not do here. It is inapplicable not only because it prejudges Romanticism's gradual transformation of social relations from ritualized and embodied reciprocity into abstract governmentality, but also because the latter turns out to be an impossible, utopian vision. For "no such thing as a congregation of sovereign and calculating individuals is conceivable" (37). Arguing that "society is not a whole, never in fact a 'society,' but a self-contesting collective" (39), Collings persuasively re-focuses our attention on the dynamics of the crowd and its contestatory powers vis-à-vis the gentry:

> Just as the collective never entirely grants legitimacy to its institutions, in part because that of instituting never ceases, so also, . . . it never entirely believes that social differentiation is real. Conversely, the gentry's awareness that the crowd must dissipate and that social differentiation must return leads it to believe that popular sovereignty is an illusion as well. Neither can relinquish the motivating fantasy, and thus the partners are caught in an interminable dance of mutual contestation. (39)

Given this compelling dialectical account, it is perhaps surprising that Collings should have not engaged the original and highly self-conscious modeling of such reciprocity: Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage. Like Hegel, Collings also insists that every relationship between distinct social groups or formations – no matter how settled it may present itself in legal and bureaucratic terms – presupposes an element of reciprocity and, thus, implies its own potential reversibility. And like Hegel – ever alert to how an individual's or a social group's claim to authority and self-possession inevitably frays and unworks itself as soon as it is cast in propositional form – Collings's analyses also expose the peculiar insistence of a pre-modern intellectual stance within modernity's legal and bureaucratic quest for transparent, impersonal, and efficient governance. Thus he persuasively remarks that "the self is not generated from itself, but from others; as the in-dividual, it is that portion of the commons that cannot be divided further" (41). A Thomist would speak here of the active and participatory nature of all being, that is, of the fact that being can realize its essence only in the domain of practice and action, which is to say by communicating and sharing itself – and that the truth of being lies in its "operation" rather than in a primordial and supposedly incontestable act of self-positing and self-possession of the kind advanced by Descartes, Fichte, and others.

Here and throughout the book, one is struck by the precision and generosity with which Collings draws on, and often imaginatively extends, a wide array of theoretical and anthropological work, such as Victor Turner's account of carneval and its "inversion ritual" (42–49) and similarly oriented work on the gift and social exchange by Marcel Mauss, Claude Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Mikhael Bakhtin, and numerous

others. Of strategic importance here is Collings's analysis of inversion rituals and of the gift – that is, those improvisational and temporary suspensions of social hierarchy that lay bare the artificial and contingent status of social, political, and economic arrangements. Emphatically, though, the point in such rituals is *not* the overthrow of existing arrangements. Rather, they "are oriented toward the reversal of norms without reference to their individual transformation; they inhabit a reversible present, not a revolutionary history" (46). During such moments we are treated to the eruption of the grotesque, the purely imagined or, simply, fiction from within the deceptively settled domain of quotidian politics. Carnival or any ritualized enactment of disorder and protest thus amounts, in Collings's eloquent, almost mystical phrasing, to "a cosmic process against a biological definition of life, against a world shaped by the logic of need" (48).

Bentham's and Malthus's occasionally rhapsodic depiction of human life as nothing more than the balancing of material resources and biological desires, yet also a century of literary Realism wrestling with how to respond to such a reductionist vision, have at times occluded from view the intricate collusion of so-called real politics and economics with the work of fantasy, ritual, and fiction. In ways reminiscent of some of Slavoj Žižek's more responsible work from the 1980s and early 1990s, Collings offers compelling, quasi-forensic readings of reciprocity and inversion in daily political life. Take, for example, the following analysis of political struggle between the gentry and the plebeian crowd, which comes on the heels of a masterful analysis of gift exchange:

> The collective takes shape precisely in its submission to *the imperative to exist as a collective*. Strangely enough, it cannot take shape when it interprets this command as emerging from within itself, for that notion can easily tip over into the demand to do without institutional mediations at all; it seems it can emerge only when it obeys this imperative as if it were a command from elsewhere … [T]he two parties in this rivalry share common ground: the wish to sustain the life of the collective. In demanding that the magistrate enforce the laws regarding food supplies, thereby making clear its sense that officials failed to protect the collective good, the crowd does not repudiate the overarching Law of the social bond but attempts to enforce it, reminding officials of the role they must play if they are to hope for future submission. It does not regress from deference to violence, but enforces the relations of mutual submission; it *polices mutual deference*, attempting to restore it where it has fallen into disarray. (56–57)

If the second chapter, on Burke's *Reflections*, seems an obvious and sensible point of departure for Collings's historical argument, the reading presented surprises and intrigues in multiple ways. For on the face of it, Burke's advocacy of local, irregular, and quasi-kinship-type social relations would appear to position him as a defender of the early-modern model of reciprocity whose apparent loss Collings's book charts and, to some extent, even mourns. Yet the reading of the *Reflections* that unfolds persuasively presents us with a Burke who sternly delimits the moral authority and political legitimacy of the crowd and whose "traditionalism [is] characteristic of a conservative modernity … based on the negation of the very customs it attempts to invoke" (61). One problem not fully addressed by this reading has to do with the starkly different conception of political and social relations in absolutist France. Unlike England where, as E. P. Thompson had shown, local and temporary challenges of the plebeian crowd to the magistracy were an accepted and quasi-ritualized occurrence, France (and other absolutist monarchies, such as Prussia or Spain) had never achieved the subtle and fluid culture of reciprocity between rulers and ruled that Burke, thinking of Britain, had troped a "mysterious incorporation." Faulting Burke

for being "insufficiently figurative" and "insufficiently political" (69), Collings may be applying a standard of argumentative cogency and consistency to which Burke – so obviously responding to urgent matters at hand – never really aspired. Moreover, there is the discomfiting fact, never quite addressed by Collings, that Burke's dire and seemingly paranoid projections of revolutionary chaos and homicidal mayhem would, in just a few years, actually come true. Ultimately, it wasn't so much Burke's high-strung imagination but the course of political events – culminating in Napoleon's exporting the French Revolution all over Europe – which irreversibly "alter[ed] the landscape of reciprocity, making it into an interplay not within familiar conventions but between society and its dissolution" (72). Still, the central claims of Collings's readings, and much of the subtle interpretive work that sustains them, are acutely persuasive. Always alert to the underlying tendency of a work as it emerges from its rhetorical habitus, Collings aptly sums up Burke's idea of tradition as a framework that "continually subsumes historical change through the reinterpretation and renovation of its own terms, substituting its mediated, internal dynamic for the potentially devastating mode of historical immediacy" (82).

Of the remaining chapters, those on Bentham and Malthus arguably are of pivotal importance for Collings's argument, which is particularly convincing in its richly detailed analyses of Bentham's aggressive, albeit inherently doomed quest for a friction-free, literal, and blandly impersonal procedural model of national administration. Bentham's obsessive quest, "his zeal to eliminate the taboos surrounding death, based on superstition and 'Hallelujah', . . . inadvertently creates another kind of unaccountable object, in which the literal attempting to represent itself, reveals its inadequacy to what it represents" (100). The project of a purely procedural, systemic, and impersonal management of social relations fails, not because of its imperfect executions but because of an unacknowledged fantasy that lies at the very heart of it. If, in Collings's variation on Latour, "we will never be modern" (97), this is so because the modern project seems to have peremptorily cut off or repressed all access to its own, underlying desires and motivations – that is, to the contingent, figural, and uncontainable element of life that Collings's later reading of M. Shelley's *Frankenstein* thematizes as the Gothic specter haunting Romanticism's modernizers. By "deliberately avoid[ing] any reference to the development of moral interiority" and showing himself fiercely opposed "to the inculcation of a value-ridden interiority" (110), Bentham "sought to capitalize on desire by removing its orientation to a reversible conception of sovereign power and placing it on a field of abstract equivalence of similarly producing and predictably desiring subjects" (107). Collings's account of Bentham offers a much-needed counterpoint to the attempted reclamation of utilitarianism for a genealogy of modern liberalism and, indeed, as a supposedly exemplary version of it (see 107ff.).

With its tone and conclusions growing steadily darker, *Monstrous Society* culminates in the late chapters on Malthus's *Essay* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Malthus in particular seems a veritable goldmine of evidence for Collings's thesis about the monstrous shape of the modern social imaginary. Turning the weapon of Enlightenment "demystification against those who had originally wielded it" (162), Malthus effectively collapses the nature/culture divide and, by implication, erodes the very notion of the political itself. Yet if, for Malthus, there are only "demographic" questions and nature has resolved itself into the inexorable laws of subsistence and reproduction, this dystopia "creates a horrific mythos of its own." Collings is right to draw attention to the strange, "brutal grandeur" (170) of Malthus's prose; in his repeated appraisal of life as little more than a carbon-churning, instinctually driven,

and unself-conscious tropism, Malthus's *Essay* echoes a similarly elated (and pernicious) rhetoric found in Hobbes and Mandeville, which, in due course, has found itself echoed at a higher pitch yet by contemporary evolutionary biology and psychology of the kind proselytized by Richard Dawkins, Joseph Carroll, E. O. Wilson, Daniel Dennett, Steven Pinker, and others. Like Bentham and even Burke, Malthus "ruthlessly depersonalizes" (175) the human being. For the argument of the *Essay* to take hold, it is presupposed that embodied agents will rarely ever achieve a reflexive outlook on the unrelenting "law" supposedly governing all embodied life. Along with the demise of reciprocity and reversibility in social relations, then, we also appear to be witnessing the end of transcendence, ideation, and the disestablishment of the category of the "person" at the hands of Bentham's and Malthus's materialist sublime.

If there is anything to quarrel with in this compelling study, it is the relatively narrow spectrum of literary works (Matthew Lewis's *Monk* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) explored by Collings as he probes the counter-position to the dystopia of modern conservatism's and utilitarianism's social imaginary. Particularly in the case of *The Monk*, Collings's claim that it "it carries out several critical interventions" by offering "a theory [!] of sexual transgression and a reflection of the uncanny" and also "constructing a notion of *jouissance*" (137) do not convince. Leaving aside whether a novel should ever wish to set forth a "theory" of anything, such an encomium would seem more befitting of works by Goethe, Stendhal, or Flaubert than the lurid and overwrought imaginings of *The Monk*. Notwithstanding Collings's earnest protest against the long-standing dismissal of Lewis's juvenile production "as a pastiche of conventions borrowed from elsewhere" (134), the work ultimately cannot support an otherwise sound case for Romanticism's quest for an aesthetics of insurrection. It is not that a different reading of Lewis's (or Mary Shelley's) novel could have succeeded better here; rather, it seems that Collings – who noticeably refrains from quoting or reading *The Monk* as closely as he tends to engage with his materials elsewhere – would have found far more complex and informed challenges to the materialist and utilitarian sublime of Bentham and Malthus beyond the Gothic, particularly in the lyric and balladic oeuvre of the early Wordsworth, John Clare, or Shelley, or in Austen's fiction, and especially in the near-inexhaustible corpus of Coleridge's poetry, prose, and notebooks. Even so, *Monstrous Society* impresses throughout with critical and focused analysis at a very high conceptual level, exceptionally compelling local readings, and with paragraphs (especially at the beginning and end of individual sections and chapters) that are of uncommon, almost hypnotizing eloquence and cogency.

Thomas Pfau
Duke University

Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity, by David Simpson, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009, viii + 278 pp.

At the height of what David Simpson aptly calls "the unappealing certitude" of his "emphatically resolute personality," the Wanderer in Wordsworth's *The Excursion* tries to impart to his despondent interlocutor, the Solitary, the "tidings" (news indeed