

Katey Castellano, *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837*. New York: Palgrave, 2013. Pp. ix + 219. \$90. ISBN 9781137354198.

Katey Castellano's title aptly sketches her argument, which she develops in a series of compact chapters on Burke, Wordsworth, Bewick, Edgeworth, Cobbett, and Clare. Sensing that green Romanticists have neglected conservative contributions to the environmental tradition (1-3, 15, 164), Castellano argues that Burke's *Reflections* initiated 'a strand of Romantic political conservatism that is committed to environmental conservation' (1). Burke makes no such commitment explicit; but in his emphasis on organic society, in his notion of 'life-rent', in his ideals of tradition, inheritance, habit, and 'second nature', and in his 'humility' and 'long views', Castellano finds expressions of an 'intergenerational imagination' that defers to the past and owns a correlative 'obligation to future generations' (19).

Each of Castellano's chapters explores a variation on this principle or, more broadly, on the 'conservative, conservationist ethos of Burke' (100). Thus, epitaphic poems like 'We are Seven' and 'The Brothers' illustrate Wordsworth's ideal of the grave-marker as a 'visible centre of a community of the living and the dead' (*Essays on Epitaphs*, qtd. 48); even Wordsworth's 'living memorials', such as the old Cumberland beggar, affirm 'a social ecology that reincorporates the abject back into the community', transforming 'loss into a common good' (59). Castellano's strongest chapter, on Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds* (1797-1804), identifies several aspects of environmental, counter-Enlightenment thinking – from Bewick's 'provincial folk taxonomy' (65) to his acknowledgment of the bird's-eye view (a 'reciprocal' and in fact superior seeing in his supposed objects) (74-5), to an interplay between Bewick's animal miniatures and human vignettes that renders animal life 'analogous to' and even exemplary for human culture (83). In general, Bewick's natural history 'encodes and naturalizes common rights': birds, for instance, 'are not restrained by the fences of enclosure' (87, 10). Castellano concludes that Bewick disseminates a 'rebellious conservative politics' and even 'practical tactics for the propertyless' (90) – though it is hard to envision the access of the propertyless to Bewick's engraved volumes. In Maria Edgeworth's Irish tales (primarily *Castle Rackrent*), in William Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*, and in John Clare's enclosure elegies, especially 'The Fallen Elm' and 'The Lament of Swordy Well', Castellano seeks further resonances with Burke (e.g., 91, 97-8, 119, 120, 151, 152) and his 'conservative, conservationist reaction to modernity' (163). Apart from the overarching thesis, all of these readings are rewarding in their particulars.

It is the thesis that should be questioned. Castellano's complaint that conservative contributions to environmental history have been neglected in the first place seems exaggerated. The two books generally acknowledged as having introduced green Romanticism, Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* and Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism*, oppose it to 'red' Romanticism (Bate 8-9, Kroeber 37-8). Bate's book focuses on Wordsworth – a conservative in Castellano's – while Kroeber's (overlooked by Castellano) praises Malthus and compares his 'population thinking' with Percy Shelley's. Whereas both Kroeber and Bate discourage aligning ecology with political left or right (see also Bate's *Song of the Earth* 39-40, 267-68, 276-9), Castellano would identify conservationism with conservatism, especially by repeating the phrase 'conservative, conservationist' (1, 5, *passim*). The semantic and historical complexity alone of the word 'conservative' renders this equation simplistic: in which sense, exactly, is conservationism conservative?

It is simplistic also to extrapolate polarized environmental characters for the 'conservative traditionalist' and 'liberal individualist' (3) from a narrow reading of the Burke-

Paine debate (163; cf. 8-9, 17-26). Having emphasized Burke's defence of tradition, Castellano infers that 'Burke recognizes the potential environmental danger of the mental disposition to consider only present generations [...] when making decisions about land use' (34). This *is* mere inference; no evidence of Burke's environmental views on land-use is cited. Nor is there any demonstration for claims, e.g., that Burke worried about our 'responsibility for maintaining a healthy environment for future generations' (8) or feared 'environmental collapse' (40-41). In 'Thoughts and Details on Scarcity' (1795), Burke defended laissez-faire principles, affirming that 'the laws of commerce [...] are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God' and that a farmer 'should be permitted, and even expected, to look to all possible profit'. Scholars have argued that he was not always so enthusiastic a 'laissez-faireist'. But as Francis Canavan has noted (*The Political Economy of Edmund Burke* 118-19), Burke did support enclosure acts, which Castellano generally acknowledges to be anti-environmental. In sum, Burke's rhetoric in the *Reflections* may resonate with an environmentalist 'intergenerational imagination'--and if so the point is worth pursuing -- but it does not follow that his conservatism was conservationist. Conversely, Paine's liberalism does not make him the Once-ler. Citing Paine's riposte to Burke on tradition, that 'every age and generation must be free to act for itself' (qtd. 8), Castellano infers that 'Paine's liberalism is built on the idea that humans are discrete individuals who have no obligation to the past or future' (19). But Paine's unit is the 'age and generation', not the individual, and though he does deny obligation to the past, he never denies one generation's obligation to the future. In fact, in *Agrarian Justice* (also dated 1795), Paine argued that unimproved earth is 'the common property of the human race' and proposed a progressive tax on landed estates as a way of enacting that commonality. Impracticable as this scheme was, it was meant to provide for future generations, and in its emphasis on 'common property' it makes Paine seem closer than Burke to the ideals attributed to most of the writers explored as environmentalists in this study.

Mark Jones
Queen's University, Ontario