

Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature*, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. x + 294, £45 and £15.99 pb.

'The conviviality of the narrative premise' is Steven Earnshaw's felicitous phrase for the theme that suffuses this book. It is 'a crawl through the drinking places of English literary history,' in the company of Chaucer, Langland, Shakespeare, Dekker, Jonson, Pepys, Ned Ward (author of *The London Spy*), Goldsmith, Gray, Fielding, Cowper, Crabbe, Dickens, Eliot (G.), Hardy, Eliot (T. S.), Coppard, Hampson, Hamilton, Orwell and Amis (M.). It also 'attempts to weave a pattern out of the strands of "pub", English literature and England'. It is a labour of love, the product of years of hoarded references and inspired cups and we must be grateful. It will become a standard resort for literary scholars seeking quotable material on pubs (*Piers Plowman* 'pissed a pottel in a pater-noster while'), and for anyone who likes to savour 'the pub moment' through the medium of print.

The book works as a series of linked essays. What is most useful will vary with the reader; I personally found it lively and insightful on Falstaff, Dickens and (in so far as anyone understands him) Amis, but descriptive and prosaic when it came to Pepys and Ned Ward. The selection of the material is (inevitably) questionable. Given the author's decision to write about 'pubs' rather than 'drink', why then throw in a chapter on the romantics, who on licensed premises scarcely pissed a pottle between them? Why not instead *Piers Egan's Life in London*, a much more appropriate comparison for Ward's *London Spy*? From this period the book strays off course into drinking and temperance, whilst missing (for example) the wonderful pub scenes in the autobiography of Samuel Bamford, which appears in the bibliography but is otherwise overlooked. So is Richard Boston, the pro-CAMRA essayist, whose memorable description of the old-style public bar as 'a symphony in brown' surely deserves a mention.

The main problem with the book is its historical context – or lack of it. Earnshaw begins with a sober discussion of whether a two-class or a three-class 'model' fits England better over the entire period. He pumps blithely for a three-class model, announcing that the two models are in any case 'overlapping'. What this has to do with the matter in hand is unexplained but in any case irrelevant as the issue is ignored for the rest of the book. He goes on to explain how his 'narrative' of drinking places has been 'shaped' and offers a three-paragraph sketch of the history of the pub based mainly on the first part of Peter Clark's splendid *The English Alehouse*. After all the insights of the new historicism in literature and text-based work in cultural history, it is disturbing to find the historical method apparently seen as a matter of picking some arbitrary 'model' or 'narrative' and then writing according to taste.

The book suffers from this lack of historical depth. Clark is relied upon, but the richly relevant work of Felicity Heal on hospitality, Paul Schlicke on Dickens and Ian McCalman on the radical underworld is ignored. Interesting facts (such as the alleged origin of the custom of toasting amongst Elizabethan Dutch immigrants) are reported on trust when they really need to be explored through the author's texts. Hair-raising generalisations are thrown about: what possible meaning can musing about 'tavern time and national time' (p. 47) have for an Elizabethan age before clocks, GMT or licensing hours? And do we really still need to be 'shown' that 'the drinking place ... represents a place inimical to the protestant work ethic'? Earnshaw has done an admirable job in bringing all this material together and in drawing out the concerns of some of the authors he discusses, but the off-the-peg, man-in-the-pub approach to history limits the insights it can generate.

Robert Poole  
St Martin's College, Lancaster