

wellbeing, one's happiness and one's life?' (p. 136) might also yield worries over end of life? As is often the case, theodicies never intrude in these scenarios, and given that an anarchy of subjectivism prevails, with no qualifications by appeal to truth, might it be that the religion and the god so enthroned within could be more dangerous than the traditional forms they replace?

Worries on this point emerge in chapter 5, where five models, ranging from Habermas to Küng to Gandhi are presented as supplying a basis for civilising global religions. Pure forms of religion and a quest for these are treated as divisive. A curious idea of a commodified god (with no reference to its illusory basis for Feuerbach) emerges, one fit for a marketplace, which is pliable and can be bent to any individual need (pp. 150–154). As implied earlier, the final chapter entitled 'Peace instead of Truth?' is less than persuasive and presents a muffled end to the study. There is perhaps another dimension to 'the irony of unintended consequences', (which forms part of the title of chapter 5) that the unsettlements that generate individualisation might be those that facilitate a return to a reinvented Catholicism, one subtly fitted to the needs of cosmopolitization.

Perhaps it is a sign of the newly cast sociological times that Benedict XVI gets the last word in the study, that reason not force is the highest value for believers. This leads Beck to query whether this deference to reason permits faith to be 'civilised' (p. 200). By this he means religion should be domesticated to the needs of peace, toleration and reconciliation. The uncivilised aspects of religion lie in its claims to possess a monopoly of truth. Reason is the instrument invoked to presage civilised properties fitting for uncovering 'A God of one's own'. But that god legitimised by appeals to the absolute claims of reason can yield outcomes that are deeply uncivilised, facilitated as they are by appeals to civilised values. These difficulties find expression in Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

Beck ends the study, oddly. He asks 'how will the individual religions react to the individualization and cosmopolitization of faith? The answer must be reserved for another book-length poking around in the fog' (p. 200). One hopes that what emerges will be less foggy than this study, which, whatever, its demerits, blurs the divisions between religion and theology in ways that unsettle the sociological imagination which, at present settles for the term post-secularity. The term suggests that religion has returned, or rather, that sociologists have not taken sufficient notice of its persistence. Whether this is good news for theologians, or not, is another matter.

KIERAN FLANAGAN

**BRITISH ROMANTICISM AND THE CATHOLIC QUESTION: RELIGION, HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY 1778–1829** by Michael Tomko, *Palgrave Macmillan*, London, 2011, pp. vii + 224, £50

Michael Tomko uses this book to argue that the 'Catholic question' which plagued British politics at the end of the eighteenth century has been largely elided from our understanding of romantic-era culture, a mistake which he hopes to rectify here. Tomko provides a reading of the romantic writers which shows that the Catholic question fundamentally permeated romantic-era literature, challenging writers to engage with ideas of British national and religious identity. This book claims that the perceived dangers of Catholicism to "Britishness" (even by pro-emancipation writers such as Byron and Shelley), led to attempts to articulate a *via media* between religious enthusiasm and superstition.

The first chapter establishes a dialogue between poetic sources and political speeches and pamphlets. In doing so, this chapter also provides a brief but clear overview of the politics of the Catholic question from the Catholic Relief Act of

1778 to emancipation in 1829. This is a convenient reminder of the history for the non-specialized reader, making the book accessible to a fairly broad readership, and Tomko has a real skill in painting a picture of the era. The following chapters are divided by author and explore the work of Elizabeth Inchbald, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Sir Walter Scott. By using the filter of literature, Tomko draws out cultural anxieties that were often more complex than the political history would suggest. These anxieties, Tomko claims, reveal ambivalence towards the Catholic question that was felt by liberal supporters of the cause and conservatives alike. However, the ubiquitous use of this term is perhaps one of the drawbacks of Tomko's thesis. There is not a single author included in the volume to whom Tomko does not at some stage apply the term 'ambivalent'. Indeed, in the first chapter, Tomko introduces Byron over two pages as a strong and outspoken supporter of Catholic emancipation, who saw British anti-Catholic propaganda as that of a 'despotic modern empire'. No sooner has Tomko established Byron's stance, however, than he claims that Byron carried a deep-grained ambivalence over nation, history and Catholicism. The result is a survey of Byron's poetry which is not short of examples of both pro and anti-Catholic ideas, but which ultimately provides no clearer picture of Byron's thought, other than demonstrating Byron could sometimes be critical of Roman Catholic history.

The chapter on Inchbald brings a necessary balance to the survey, by focusing on a Catholic author, although occasionally Tomko's attempt to read the characters of *A Simple Story* as representative of national sectarian factions can seem a little forced. There is a danger at times that Tomko will over-do the allegory of Inchbald's characters as members of an unhappy 'national marriage', but he eventually concludes with an intriguing reading that Inchbald is instead calling for a social model based on a community of neighbouring sects. Wordsworth is examined next, followed by Shelley. The strong stances that both these writers claimed in regards the Catholic question (Shelley for, Wordsworth against), would suggest that there would not be much more to add, but Tomko rather skilfully dissects the work of the two authors to demonstrate the ever present ambivalence. The chapter on Wordsworth is of particular interest, as Tomko describes how Wordsworth attempted to recuperate superstition in such a way that religious extremes were kept in balance, creating an aesthetic *via media*. Tomko seems ultimately loath to decide whether this aesthetic balance is successful, but the chapter nonetheless adds an important dimension to Wordsworth's writings, which would be of interest to any scholar of romantic poetry.

After a chapter in which the works of Sir Walter Scott are seen to envisage the solving of sectarian problems through an ahistorical cultural transformation, Tomko concludes that despite the broad range of views represented by the writers in the book, each one was prey to the inevitable 'ambivalence'. By bringing a political rather than a purely aesthetic reading to romantic writing, Tomko reveals a complexity in which far from an ahistorical transcendent aesthetic, the romantics were deeply involved in a crisis of British national and religious identity. Such a reading adds an important dimension to any modern study of romantic poetry.

ZOE LEHMANN IMFELD

**SECULARIZATION: IN DEFENCE OF AN UNFASHIONABLE THEORY** by Steve Bruce, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, Pp. 243, £25 hbk*

In characteristically robust style, Steve Bruce describes, explains and clarifies the 'secularization thesis', consciously pitching its defence and elaboration into a notably altered register of debate. Once 'mainstream' within sociology (and often still referred to as such), the 'thesis' is now frequently regarded with suspicion.