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## Reviews

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### Europe

MICHAEL LESLIE and TIMOTHY RAYLOR (Eds), *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992. Pp. ix + 241. £35.00)

This remarkable book comprises a collection of essays which all deal, in various ways, with the relationship between “culture and cultivation” in early modern England: with attitudes to cultivated and uncultivated nature, and with texts concerned with agriculture, horticulture, and arboriculture. The contributors come from a diverse range of disciplines and cover a formidable range of topics: in consequence, while almost all readers will find something in the volume to interest them, most will also find material that does not.

The collection is divided into two main parts. The first, with contributions by Joan Thirsk, Andrew Mackie, Anthony Lowe and Alastair Fowler, deals with the general theme of “Agricultural Improvement and Cultural Change”. The second, containing essays by the two editors, Graham Parry, Douglas Chambers, and John Dixon Hunt, is principally concerned with the influential group of intellectuals in mid seventeenth-century England centred on Samuel Hartlibb. Thus, while both sections concentrate on the complex interplay between agricultural improvement and wider cultural and ideological change in the early modern period, the second has a somewhat more restricted scope than the first.

Perhaps the best essay in the volume—and, as usual, a model of clarity—is the first, by Joan Thirsk. This argues that the resumption of direct demesne farming by the English gentry in the sixteenth century cannot be understood simply as a response to changing economic conditions—to the increased buoyancy of agricultural markets—but must also be interpreted as a manifestation of the impact of Renaissance ideas, and specifically of the increased availability of classical texts on agriculture (Xenophon, Cato, Varro, Columella, and Virgil). These encouraged the idea that estate management and hands-on supervision of farming activities were proper concerns for a gentleman. In the following chapter Andrew Macrae discusses the proliferation of new vernacular manuals on agriculture during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, texts which were disseminated at lower social levels than the writings of the classical authors. In these Macrae traces the development of a new discourse of estate improvement which privileged a more individualistic ethos and emphasised the primacy of private property over older concepts of a static manorial economic order. The two following essays

over the concepts of a static national economic order. The two following essays maintain the high standard but seem, to this reader, slightly less relevant to the main theme of the volume. Anthony Low, in a lucid analysis of the work of Thomas Carew, argues that the emerging capitalist ethos, with its belief that private ownership and individualistic endeavour could serve for the common good, had an effect on the development of the genre of love poetry. Alastair Fowler concludes the first section

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