# BOOK REVIEWS

Religion and the Decline of Magic. By Keith Thomas.
Pp. xvii + 716, index.
London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971. 8.00 cloth.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971. $6.95 paper.

Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. By A.D.J. Macfarlane.
Pp. xxi + 334, plates, maps, tables, bibliography, index.
London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970. 4.50 cloth.
New York: Harper and Row, 1970. $2.90 paper.

Review article by Catherina A. Shoupe.

## I Introduction

Two important books on religious beliefs and practices in 16th and 17th century England which appeared recently are Alan Macfarlane's Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England and Religion and the Decline of Magic by Keith Thomas. That the two works complement one another is not surprising in view of the fact that Macfarlane was a student of Thomas at Oxford. In a massive 700 page volume, Thomas treats a broad range of popular religious practices in England during the 16th and 17th centuries - astrology, witchcraft, magic healing, divination, ancient prophecies, omens, providences, and ghost and fairy traditions - dealing with them as manifestations of the social and intellectual climate of that period. The book is arranged topically with vast quantities of data presented both in the text and in footnotes and with analysis scattered throughout the chapters. It is a bulky work, but highly readable. Macfarlane, on the other hand, has written a smaller book which brings one aspect of the topic treated by Thomas into specific focus: witchcraft in the county of Essex between 1560 and 1680. By limiting his subject to witchcraft accusations, his locale to Essex, and his time to the Tudor/Stuart period, Macfarlane has produced a regional and comparative study of high quality based on solid documentary sources which points the way for other specific local historical studies which could develop and expand other aspects of Thomas' general treatment of the period.

## II Intellectual Sources and Stimuli

The two books under discussion exhibit an approach to scholarship which combines standard historical documentation and methods with a modern social anthropological framework, most notably the use of cross-cultural comparisons and an overriding concern for functional analysis. However, intellectual sources and stimuli

for the works can be traced to a variety of social scientific and humanistic disciplines of British scholarship which merit discussion here.

Perhaps the most obvious thread running through both Macfarlane's local study and Thomas' larger synthesis is a concern for the common man and his attitudes, a popular theme in modern historical scholarship aimed at reversing the elitist bias of previous scholarship. In his local study of witchcraft in Essex, Macfarlane relies heavily on court records for evidence, drawing his conclusions from the facts and figures culled from these sources. Another British social historian, Peter Laslett, has followed a similar procedure using tax records and parish registers as well as court records to analyze 17th century British social structure in The World We Have Lost (1965). The books are similar and significant in their attempt to gather social scientific data from historical sources to describe and analyze the lives of ordinary people in the past. Thomas, more the intellectual historian than the social historian, attempts a similar analysis of the multitude of popular religious and magical beliefs and practices of the period, likewise using standard historical documents as source material. In addition, however, Thomas has discovered a very useful source of information about the popular attitudes and philosophies of men in the past, i.e., folklore. He recognizes the fact that folk beliefs and practices reflect the popular world view of the culture, and he uses folkloristic data in his analysis of 16th and 17th century English social and intellectual currents on popular as well as aristocratic levels. This important use of folklore needs to be recognized by more historians. In the United States, it is at the level of local history that folklore and history have most successfully been combined (see Lynwood Montell, The Saga of Coe Ridge, 1972), while in England this overlap of interest has appeared most frequently in the field of folklife studies and local history (e.g. the works of George Ewart Evans, 1956-1971). The problems of the historian represented by the accusations of elitism and impersonality could be greatly alleviated by the use of folklore to elucidate the popular attitudes, prejudices and everyday habits of people in the past. (See Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore and the Historian, 1971).

From a chronological perspective, the earliest intellectual attitude which might be identified as a stimulus for the two books under discussion is antiquarianism. More evident in Thomas than in Macfarlane, this attitude pervades the style and organization of his book. The accumulation of a wealth of detail and examples is certainly in the style of the antiquarian's collectanea, though, to be sure, Thomas goes further than did his predecessors in analyzing the data. However, most of his book consists of accumulated data, and if his analysis were to be published separately it would be a slim volume indeed. In the context of the period

which Thomas is discussing in his work, the antiquarian impulse to record dying "superstitions" and "vulgar errors" as well as to locate physical "remains" provides him with a good deal of his source material in amateur collections. As Protestantism replaced the older Catholic religion which had become syncretized with earlier systems, both pagan and Popish beliefs and practices were abandoned and soon became the focus for scholars interested in preserving relics of the past from oblivion. Thomas also demonstrates scholarly interest in the topic similar to the enthusiasms of the antiquarians, like Henry Bourne's anti-pagan and anti-Popish exhortations, or the early functionalist concern expressed by John Brand in Observations on Popular Antiquities where he advocates the preservation of some of the "superstitions" and practices for the play element and recreational value inherent in them. The antiquarian notion of the past as sanction for the present is another strain found in Thomas' work which links him with 17th and 18th century scholarship.

It is not surprising to find a strong theoretical leaning towards the ideas of the 19th century British anthropological folklorists in the books by Thomas and Macfarlane who both acknowledge a debt to modern British anthropology derived from the work of E. B. Tylor Heavily influenced by social and biological evolutionism which had been developing in 18th and 19th century continental and British thought, the anthropological folklorists subscribed to a comparative methodology and survivals theory to explain peasant lore. In theoretical considerations, Andrew Lang, Edward Clodd or George Laurence Gomme would feel perfectly at home,especially with Thomas' work. He accepts the conceptualization of evolutionary stages in the development of magic, religion, and science following Sir James Frazer, modified, but not superceded by Radcliffe-Brown's functional definition of religion. Likewise, on p. 627, Thomas describes layers of "cultural debris" as the framework for the cultural history of a people in a manner that could have been written by G. L. Gomme describing pre-Aryan, Aryan, Roman and succeeding layers of folklore in the development of English history.

Thomas and Macfarlane owe their greatest debt to Tylorian anthropology in their methodological considerations. The survivalists' comparative method based on parallels and analogies between contemporary primitives and past peasant culture is precisely the method utilized by these two scholars in an attempt to explain 16th and 17th century beliefs and practices in England. Just as the 19th century British anthropological folklorists turned toward exotic primitive peoples under the rule of the British Empire for contemporary data to compare with past British peasant lore, so too do these 20th century historians look toward modern African parallels described by British social anthropologists in former British colonies to elucidate non-institutionalized religious

systems in Tudor and Stuart England. The method is no more successful now than it was in the 19th century; one must question the validity of the use of comparative data from African and North American Indian cultures, and the whole comparative method of the evolutionists, as will be discussed in the fourth section of this review.

The most obvious source of intellectual stimulation for both scholars, and one that is acknowledged by both of them, is modern British social anthropology and to some extent American cultural anthropology. Both Thomas and Macfarlane rely on British ethnographies of African cultures for data concerning witchcraft and related phenomena, and Macfarlane also draws on Clyde Kluckhon's material from the Navaho Indians for additional materials. All of Macfarlane's fourth section subtitled "A Comparative Framework: Anthropological Studies" draws heavily on African and Amerindian sources for comparative data on witchcraft, while in Thomas, references to African analogs are scattered throughout the text. In terms of analysis, the influence of British social anthropology can be seen in the emphasis on structural-functionalism in the manner of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, especially in Macfarlane's chapter 19, "Anthropological Interpretations of Witchcraft", and in both their discussions of the definition of religion. The practical value of the historians' concern with anthropological theory is clear in Macfarlane's section three, "Witchcraft and the Social Background". Here he has utilized anthropological theory, not data, to determine what the relevant questions are that should be asked about the phenomenon of witchcraft as a social, intellectual and cultural fact. His analysis based on these questions is his most valuable contribution, and the comparative data that follows adds little or nothing to his argument.

Contemporary American folklorists with anthropological training or background show concern with functionalism similar to that of British social anthropologists, but references to American folklorists are missing from Thomas' and Macfarlane's books. The most notable omission is William Bascom, who is a representative of two important themes in the two books as a functionalist and an Africanist. Bascom's 1954 article, "Four Functions of Folklore," states in effect the same interpretation discussed by Macfarlane. Bascom's interest in folklore is not restricted to witchcraft and sorcery and evidently for this reason has been overlooked by the British scholars. This fact is a comment on the rather unfortunate lack of communication among scholars in different countries who are dealing with similar phenomena and could benefit from mutual interest and criticism.

Another folkloric concept which is discussed by Thomas, but not recognized or placed in the proper context of scholarly literature

on the topic, is the idea of gesunkenes kulturgut, a concept that is complementary to the survivals doctrine of folklore evident in his book. The idea of an item of culture or folklore originating in the higher levels of society and gradually filtering down to the lower strata where it survives in a degenerate form is denied by Thomas in the case of popular vs. intellectual magic (which he sees as two separate, independent spheres of thought), but accepted by him with regard to the practice of astrology (which was an aristocratic phenomenon until the 16th century, after which it became popularized among lower social classes). However, no mention is made of Hans Naumann's writings on gesunkenes kulturgut nor is the term itself used, indicating a lack of familiarity with the relevant intellectual thinking in the discipline of folklore. Aside from the use of early antiquarian-folklorists' works as sources for data, the only references to the work of folklorists made in the two books are in Thomas' acknowledgement of debts to George Lyman Kittredge's work Witchcraft in Old and New England and Katharine Briggs' research on the literary background of witch beliefs in Pale Hecate's Team.

## III Significance and Contributions

When placing the Thomas and Macfarlane books in historical perspective in terms of folklore publications on religion and witchcraft, one notes a continuity of scholarship which seems to have escaped their eyes. Works on these topics by British scholars can be found dating from the Renaissance to the present time. Early volumes on "popular antiquities" which might be mentioned include a contemporary critique of witchcraft by Reginald Scot, Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584), William Camden's Brittania appearing in 1586, and the works of the 17th century antiquary, John Aubrey, Brief Lives and The Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme, which documented beliefs and practices along with other items of antiquarian interest. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the subject of popular religion reappeared again and again in print. Antiquitates Vulgaris by the Newcastle clergyman Henry Bourne made its first appearance in 1725 and formed the basis for an enlarged compendium by John Brand in 1777 under the title Observations on Popular Antiquities. This edition was again added to, rearranged, and revised by Henry Ellis who published it under the same title in two volumes in 1813, giving it nearly a century of existence and testifying to the interest of the reading public in the subject matter. During the 19th century, superstitions continued to be a topic of considerable interest, and collections appeared regularly. During this century, too, witchcraft as a separate subject came under scrutiny when Sir Walter Scott produced his Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft published in 1830. At the turn of the century John Gregorson Campbell, minister of Tiree and avid collector of folk traditions, issued Witchcraft or Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands (1902). Aside from

manuscript and published collections, the subject has also received treatment in recent decades from the literary viewpoint by Katharine Briggs in her series of books on the literary background and sources for fairy and witch beliefs from Shakespearean times. Finally, The Witch Figure, a festschrift to Dr. Briggs edited by Venetia Newall published only last year was devoted to articles on this topic. In the light of the continued interest in the subject of popular beliefs and practices, one welcomes the additions of the historians Thomas and Macfarlane to the literature. Yet one wishes that they were more aware of the treatment their topic has received from folklorists, since it is, essentially, a folkloristic phenomenon with which they are dealing.

Despite the fact that the two books under discussion are dealing with traditional materials with which folklorists have been concerned in the past and in the present, there is no awareness on the part of the authors of another important folkloristic concept that could be useful to their analysis, that is, the concept of genre. Although there is a good deal of debate among folklorists at the present time over the issue of the definition of genres, there are major categories of oral tradition and traditional practices that one can distinguish. In Thomas' book, the folklorist is constantly meeting familiar types of lore, though they are not identified as such and one must abstract them from masses of detailed individual examples. It is interesting to note that the historical documentary sources utilized by Thomas contain numerous items of folklore, and more importantly, genres of lore that rightly come under the purview of the folklorist who must often turn to documentary sources in dealing with past phenomena.

If we focus for a moment on the Thomas book, which covers a broader range of topics than the Macfarlane volume, we find some discussion of a genre of folklore or a closely associated class of traditions in almost all of the sections which are arranged according to subject matter. Following Thomas' categories or chapter headings, we first encounter a section on Providences including so-called cautionary tales, tales of prodigies and tales of portents which bear a resemblance to medieval exampla. They perform a similar function to their Catholic counterparts in serving as moral tales for the newer Protestant religion. Books of providences were published just as collections of exempla had been printed, and in them the Puritan believer describes God's judgments and deliverances performed for the elect. Sections containing material of more obviously folkloristic nature are the parts entitled "Magic Healing," "Ghosts and Fairies," and "Times and Omens". In these chapters one finds samples of the kind of folklore that regularly appear under the genre of folk beliefs, sometimes called superstitions. In the section on magic healing there are examples of prayers, charms, practices, and herbal

remedies used by cunning men for curing illnesses. Folk beliefs about omens and lucky times for performing tasks or going on journeys are common types of lore which receive brief mention in the final descriptive section. Likewise beliefs about ghosts and fairies are mentioned briefly without reference to the extensive literature on the topic by folklorists. All these traditions are firmly recognized by folklorists and, interestingly, are given the shortest treatment by Thomas.

A set of beliefs related to ghost and fairy traditions are those associated with witchcraft. Witchcraft was often linked with illness or death, and was thus an alternate method of dealing with the problem of disease and death opposed to cures and magic healing. Many traditions associated with the practice of witchcraft are folk beliefs like those discussed above, concerned with omens and times, and ritual activities based on sympathetic magic. Witchcraft, however, receives more extensive treatment, probably reflecting contemporary interest in the occult.

There is another genre of folklore that deals with the same topics of witchcraft, ghosts, fairies, healing and omens but in a different manner--that is, as narrative. Thomas only refers to the legend genre in relation to witchcraft, but legends exist about the other topics as well. In the witchcraft section he mentions the legend cycle about the figure of the devil and the devil as a trickster figure. He also discusses the figure of a black dog associated with the devil which folklorists recognize as an international motif of tales and legends. This section, especially, could be greatly expanded and enhanced with some knowledge of the tools and techniques available to the folklorist dealing with narrative. Instead, the motifs and tales are simply mentioned as isolated examples in Thomas' seemingly endless string of examples.

Two sections which deserve particular attention from folklorists are the chapters on astrology and on ancient prophecies. Both these topics involve a mingling of literary and oral traditions that is relevant to the discussion of the relationship between oral and literate levels of society and strata of folklore. Astrology boasts doctrines which are "essentially traditional" (p. 284) dating from the second century, while at the same time having practitioners who were mainly aristocratic until the 16th century. At that time the doctrines became popularized and practiced by village wizards as well as by literate sophisticates of London. During this period a subliterary genre of astrological almanacs arose, similar to the chapbook and other fugitive literature with which folklorists are concerned. Likewise, the ancient prophecies was an oral genre until the 16th century, according to Thomas, at which time it became a literary genre printed in similar fugitive publications as the almanacs and functioning mainly to

provide the sanction of the past on events of the present. In the context of the ancient prophecies, Thomas discusses the stories of "sleeping heroes," another folk narrative motif unrecognized by him. The discussion by Thomas could be vastly augmented by referring to works by folklorists dealing with this topic. The motif appears in ballads and tales about the magician Thomas Rhymer as well as in legends about Frederick the Great and King Arthur which ought to have been noted by Thomas. In addition, Edwin Sidney Hartland produced a study of the myth of the returning hero which deserves mention to place the motif in broader context. This access to international phenomena among folklorists can provide a useful and often needed antidote to the nationalism or provincialism of many historical treatises which rely solely on written documentation.

Turning now to the social anthropological questions and issues dealt with by Thomas and Macfarlane, one might first comment that although upon first glance the concern shown by the authors for contemporary social anthropological theory and analysis might be construed as an important positive step in British folkloristics away from the charges of antiquarianism and dilettantism which are frequently levied against it, the historians are in fact simply following the example set by the Victorian folklorists who borrowed and applied concepts of Tylorian evolutionary anthropology, the contemporary theory with which they were in sympathy. Thomas and Macfarlane are following the same practice, adopting a functionalist interpretation for the events and beliefs they are describing. But before dealing with the functionalist model they adopt, three other anthropological questions which Thomas briefly touches should be mentioned. First, the concept of the magical properties associated with divine kingship and the idea of the divine king are analyzed in connection with cures achieved by royal touch. The nature of divine kingship has been a topic of discussion among social scientists and historians, and folklorists might do well to note the traditionality of beliefs associated with the concept. Secondly, the issue of popular scepticism is raised with reference to the strength of the hold of the medieval church on the people, a topic which was investigated by the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim. This topic, too, has interesting implications for folklore which usually sees tradition playing a conservative role in society rather than the progressive role suggested by the idea of a strong feeling of popular scepticism towards institutions and beliefs. Thirdly, the question of pagan and Christian syncretism is alluded to in the section on magic healing. This issue is of interest especially in cultures with centuries-long histories and brings to mind the debate over the historical validity of oral tradition. The issues under consideration are the amount of retention achieved by former belief systems when they are replaced by another system in a culture, and the historical depth of oral tradition. These

topics are not discussed in Thomas' book, but they are suggested by his reference to syncretism (which he terms "assimilation") and by his reference to layers of cultural tradition in the final chapter.

Twentieth-century British social anthropologists of the structural-functionalist school provide the major theoretical framework for both volumes and deserve careful consideration, especially in Thomas' book in which the analysis is scattered throughout the pages of description. Macfarlane devotes a separate chapter to analysis in which structural-functionalism provides the model for analyzing witchcraft accusations in Essex during the Tudor and Stuart periods. An analysis of the social structure of the community provides the key to the individuals involved in the practice and accusations of witchcraft, that is, most frequently involved were people who were kin and neighbors. In Macfarlane's mind, the function of witch beliefs was to explain suffering that was unexplainable in any other fashion, and to provide a means for resolving conflict in social relationships brought about by the changes in the structure of the social system in a closely knit community under the pressures of religious and economic change. He presents a closely-reasoned argument, never outstripping his evidence with conjecture, and, by applying the functionalist model rather than simply comparing data, he achieves a stronger analytic base than does his mentor, Thomas.

The functional analysis found scattered throughout Religion and the Decline of Magic is just another aspect of the compendium rather than an essential part of the discussion. Because of the wider variety of phenomena considered, Thomas includes more functions for the traditions than does Macfarlane, and very closely approximates Bascom's four functions of folklore already mentioned. To cite some examples, on page 146 Thomas discusses the function of the wonder-working quality of religion as uniting the community in the face of crisis. Again in the section "Religion and the People" he sees the function of the church as helping men to cope with otherwise inexplicable events in their lives. Astrology plays a role in society by providing a method for obtaining advice about decisions to be made (p. 310), and witchcraft also functions to explain misfortune and to reinforce the community ethic and social solidarity (p. 476). In the discussion of ancient prophecies Thomas, borrowing a term from Malinowski, describes their function in providing the sanction of the past on present action as "validating charters" (page 423). He states in the conclusion that, indeed, magic and religion perform parallel functions in society.

The theses of the two books differ considerably despite the fact that Macfarlane is a student of Thomas and is concerned with one specific aspect of the broader topic covered by his teacher.

Macfarlane stays close to his chosen social anthropological model in his analysis and the thesis of the work can be stated in functionalist terms: the practice and prosecution of witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England functions to explain misfortune and suffering in the community and the actors involved can be identified according to kinship and social structure. He rejects previous analyses of witchcraft based on religion, illness, economics, or personality traits. For Thomas, more important than the functionalist anthropological considerations are the problems raised in social and intellectual history, that is, popular attitudes and the philosophy of the common man, and the contemporary world view that underlies the social and functional considerations. It is for this reason that he can leave his discussions of function strewn throughout various chapters along with the descriptive data. In a sense, to Thomas the functional considerations are no more important than other types of data. His major concern is the larger issue of philosophy or world view which he treats in the conclusions. His question is not so much the place in the culture of each of the individual categories and examples of tradition that he has described, but the broader notion of why one set of religious beliefs and practices (magic, Catholicism) declined after the Tudor and Stuart periods and were replaced by another set of beliefs and practices (witchcraft, Protestantism). The thesis of this work is that the changes which caused the decline of magic was a change in the fundamental world view of the people living in the period under discussion. Based ultimately on the Renaissance idea of progress and the ultimate perfectibility of man, he sees the change involving the replacement of an animistic world view by a mechanistic one, a rationalist attitude replacing a supernatural attitude toward culture, and the Protestant religion replacing Catholicism.

## IV Critique

In their analyses and conclusions, both books contribute a good deal to British folkloristics; Macfarlane in his recognition of the value of anthropological models in elucidating aspects of an issue such as witchcraft which might otherwise go unnoticed; and Thomas with his broad perspective and insight into the intellectual currents of thought and philosophy of an historical period which provide a fundamental basis for discussing specific manifestations of the culture of the period. Both works, however, have faults which are of varying degrees of seriousness and which deserve mention before a final appraisal is made of their worth in the realms of folklore, social science, and history.

The most serious and damaging charge that can be levied against both books is the authors' too facile acceptance of the comparative methodology of the Tylorian school of British social anthropology, apparently without considering its theoretical implications

or logical fallacies. Cross-cultural comparison can be a valid tool in some studies, but not in the blatantly survivalist fashion that it is employed by these two historians. Macfarlane nearly avoids the pitfalls of this comparativist fallacy by focusing on the theoretical questions raised by anthropologists studying witchcraft as a product of culture rather than the specific descriptions of acts of witchcraft and associated beliefs. His analysis of 16th and 17th century witchcraft cases in Essex presented in the section entitled "Witchcraft and the Social Background" demonstrates how fruitful this approach can be. But he carries the thought one step too far in the next section, "A Comparative Framework," which is no more than an accumulation of comparative data from various African cultures on specific aspects of witchcraft with the British data tacked onto the ends of the paragraphs in a sentence or two. Macfarlane's work is admirable as long as he is applying anthropological and sociological analysis to the British material, but as soon as he begins to dip into superficial comparisons with African societies the work degenerates into the same kind of survivalist-inspired show-and-tell attitude that characterizes Sir James Frazer's voluminous example of British evolutionary folklore, The Golden Bough. This comparison might even be more aptly made with Thomas' book for it is the same kind of massive collection of detail grouped simply around a few themes as Frazer's work. In terms of theory, Thomas' book lacks even the redeeming feature of Macfarlane; it simply scatters comparative analogies through the pages at appropriate intervals, juxtaposing this evolutionary methodology with functionalist theories.

The second major area of inadequacy in both books is the problem of terminology which is not confronted satisfactorily by either author. Again, this issue is a greater problem with Thomas than with Macfarlane because of the much broader scope of the former work. The question involves using words which are part of the normal vocabulary of ordinary people as connotative terms, in a technical or scientific description and analysis of cultural behavior. The folklorist is constantly confronting this problem since he uses words to denote specific classes of traditional expressive behavior which have a broader connotation to the layman, words such as "myth," "legend," and even "folklore." Macfarlane is mainly concerned with only one such word, "witchcraft," and he must be given credit for at least attempting to deal with the problem. In a three-page appendix he reviews some definitions of witchcraft but concludes that anthropological distinctions really are not useful for all societies. Figure 1 of the book sets out visually the categories of behavior defined by the variables of external/internal means and beneficial/harmful ends which have been termed witchcraft at some time, and he assigns terms to be used in the book - witchcraft, sorcery and white witchcraft - to their appropriate categories of behavior. His

use of the term "white witchcraft" to mean the opposite of "witchcraft" is confusing. An alternate term such as "white magic" would be more appropriate since "witchcraft" carries so heavy a negative connotation of evil.

In Thomas, the problem of terminology is more serious since he is dealing with a wider range of behavior and thus with more terms which carry strong popular connotations, such as "religion," "superstition," "magic," and "witchcraft." Yet, except for the slightly more technical word, "sorcery," which is explicated on pages 230ff, he does not attempt to deal with the problem of definition until the final chapter. It is disconcerting for the reader to have to wait until page 628 to discover what the author means when he uses these terms, especially if he is aware of the scholarly controversy which surrounds them, a problem of which Thomas is evidently unaware. The problem is aggravated by Thomas' use of such phrases as "subsuperstition" and "semi-religious," phrases which need to be defined even more because of the failure to define the terms from which they derive. Even when Thomas does finally define terminology, his definitions are unsatisfactory (see pp. 628 and 636). He falls victim to the popular fallacy which connects the word "superstition" with error and ignorance, the precise reason why folklorists have abandoned the term in favor of the more neutral "folk belief." This lack of concern is regrettable in a work of the high caliber of Thomas'. Other disciplines have created their own esoteric jargon with which to describe their subject. But in dealing with popular and folk beliefs and practices as Thomas and Macfarlane do, one must be aware of the popular as opposed to the scholarly implications carried by the terminology, and define one's terms clearly at the outset of the work.

These criticisms are merely indicative of some avoidable flaws in the two books; they do not deny the fundamental importance of these works as contributions to British historical and folkloric scholarship. The topic of 16th and 17th century folk beliefs and religious practices deserves the thorough treatment it has received, and the works add information to an important chapter in British folkloristics. It is a comment on the state of academic folklore in England that the books were written by historians rather than by folklorists, but perhaps their work will spur on and aid the cause of serious folklore studies in Britain.

## V Conclusion

There is a curious paradox that exists in the relationship between the humanities and the social sciences that is exemplified by the approaches of the authors of these two books. Although both scholars are historians, Macfarlane represents the newer social-scientific approach, and Thomas the humanistic viewpoint. In

point of fact, the two views complement one another, just as the specific study complements the overview. At the present time, when all disciplines are attempting to become more scientific, Macfarlane's work will be judged the more successful of the two. It is better methodologically, focusing on a small workable topic, not large and sprawling like Thomas' treatise. The analysis is accurate, scientific and safe; he makes no rash interpretations. But the book is dry almost to the point of dullness. It lacks inspiration. Thomas, on the other hand, as the humanist, is far more intellectually exciting, and, as has been obvious in this essay, more open to criticism. But in this weakness (according to the social scientific creed) lies his strengths. Thomas' statements are not pat, he is willing to go out on a limb in his analysis, and sometimes even to cut off the limb behind him. He gives his interpretation of the data he presents, not simply the analysis suggested by the modish theories of culture, and though he cannot always prove his interpretations, his analysis is more thought-provoking and exciting than is Macfarlane's safe commentary.

The difference between the two works epitomizes the conflicts between the hard versus the soft data approach to the study of culture; between the social scientist who seeks data that is measurable, solid and statistical, and the humanist who deals with the intangibles of culture which cannot be quantified; between those who feel the role of the student of culture should be a reporter of observations rather than those who would interpret ideas and events. For any discipline which has human beings and their culture as the object of its study, whether it calls itself a humanity or a social science, neither approach alone is sufficient; rather, one builds upon the other. The social-scientific and humanistic disciplines can and should complement each other in the analysis of culture, as Thomas' wide-ranging portrayal and interpretation of the intellectual milieu of 16th and 17th century England inspired Macfarlane's particular local study of one aspect of the world view of the period. Macfarlane tested some of the general hypotheses put forth in Thomas' book with limited, quantifiable data, and his specific analysis in turn will contribute to the revision of the broad interpretation of the period. We are not always so fortunate to have both aspects of an issue so well represented as they are by the works of Thomas and Macfarlane.