mystery of Scott’s marriage from which her family seem to have taken the unusual step of removing her. Mona Scheuermann’s close reading of Mansfield Park suggests that, like Johnson, Austen can do no wrong. Scheuermann misses the savagery in Austen’s representation of her “gentle“ class and hence the larger ironies of the novel: the Bertrams might be committed to moral decency but they fail — through indolence, malice, dinnedness or complacency — to achieve it. If there is something a little predictable about these topics, that is more than made up for by the late Gloria Sybil Gross, whose last piece is a wonderfully vigorous appreciation of the film of Stanley Kubrick, “Stanley Kubrick’s Love Affair with the Eighteenth Century”.

Robert Folkenflik reminds us of the joke about the convention of comedians who didn’t bother to tell jokes but just called out the numbers; everybody knew the punchlines and laughed. There is something of that here in the regular “revistings” of familiar themes. There are inevitable repetitions, elaborations and overlaps; also squabbles that run from year to year, not all of them conducted with decorum. Some years ago Aaron Stavisky, returning to the vexed question of whether Johnson had asked Mrs Thrale to tie him up, suggested that Walter Jackson Bate and Donald Greene had withheld evidence of masochism because it didn’t fit “their” Johnson. Vituperative exchanges followed. In Volumes 17 and 18 the matter in question is the Ossian controversy. Thomas M. Curry’s grandiloquent and misleadingly titled “Samuel Johnson and Truth: The First Systematic Detection of Literary Deception in James Macpherson’s Ossian” takes almost 100 pages to lay out the evidence against Macpherson which Derrick S. Thomson had already done in 1952 in The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson’s “Ossian”. Curley’s essay, showing that Johnson was right to suspect forger, is comprehensive and useful, an ideal reference for students; so is his further contribution, on Johnson’s friendship with William Shaw, the equally grandiloquently titled, "Their Last Stand for Truth in the Ossian Controversy”. But the terms on which he dismisses those who think differently give pause for thought: we are told, for example, that Nick Groom in The Forger’s Shadow “departs from Johnson’s dictates about truth and literature”, and that seems to be enough to damn an intellectually adventurous book.

Absolute truth matters to Johnsonians, which is perhaps why they are so exercised about forgeries. Groom contributes a brief response defending the study of forgeries and wondering (reasonably enough) why so much umbrage was taken. An essay on hoaxes, by the journal’s editor, Jack Lynch, continues the Ossianic theme in more speculative vein. His “Three Fakers of the 1760s” exemplifies the best of The Age of Johnson: it is written with profound knowledge of the period, eschews ad hominem attacks, and opens the matter up to modern critical thought.

NORMA CLARKE
ARCHIPELAGO
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A literary island often symbolizes individualism and isolation, but an archipelago suggests clustering and analogy. As lan Niall, whose memory presides over the new literary journal, Archipelago, once put it, man “doesn’t own the world . . . but simply

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In "Tynhybraich", Angharad Price celebrates the mountain where her family have farmed for centuries, but the recollection of her grandfather’s sheep farming is suffused with the same sense of loss as Wordsworth’s "Michael". Nicolas Jacobs’s "Above Crasswell" is as much a lament for the loss of an unspoilt rural idyll as it is for the twentieth-century visionary, David Jones.

But for all this, the volume is kept aloft by a shared conviction that nature is never spent. Despite its restless anxiety about the contemporary world, the volume is lifted by moments of intense delight, as in "Fragment" by Heaney, beginning "One summer night in Nain". Roger Deakin’s enthusiastic description of the sculptor David Nash, who spent years madly pursuing his huge Wooden Boulder downstream and into the sea, shows just how liberating perpetual change can be, and how new islands can be created as well as rediscovered.

The different parts of Archipelago speak to each other, as well as to their readers, and once the image of the Wooden Boulder is free to float across Mark Williams’s thoughtful essay on modern Gaelic poetry, for example, the "seemingly impending death" of Scottish Gaelic begins to appear less absolute. The cluster of work in this Archipelago derives great strength from what has been "left behind", but it also finds hope in what may still emerge so surprisingly from the darkness.

FIONA STAFFORD

Music

OPERA QUARTERLY

Oxford University Press. £48 per annum

As an academic subject separate from musicology, opera is a newcomer: journals such as The Cambridge Opera Journal and Opera Quarterly began publication only in the 1980s. Of the two, Opera Quarterly is more alert to performing aspects of the discipline ("Performance + Theory + History" is how it describes its mission, with performance heading the list). Interest in performance does not extend to the inclusion of reviews of performances (largely the preserve of the venerable monthly journal Opera), but reviews of recordings make up a substantial section of each issue. Singers such as Marilyn Horne and Regina Resnik are included in the list of "contributing and consulting editors", and book reviews are not confined, as they tend to be in Cambridge Opera Journal, to critical studies but also include biographies of divas such as Sybil Sanderson, Pauline Viardot and Renee Fleming. Performance is also addressed in the inclusion of "Notes from the Stage", a new feature in which opera directors, explicate specific productions, usually accompanied by performance or rehearsal photographs.

Theory, however, is central. With its tangential placing against drama, music, politics and philosophy, and the perennial reshaping of the genre itself, opera studies provides a tempting field for theorists. Many get by without bothering too much about musical specifics, though this cannot be said of the leading article of the "Echoed Elsewhere" issue (Autumn 2005), by Daniel K. L. Chua, which combines a close musical reading of Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo and Beethoven’s Fidelio and the Erotica Symphony with references to Adorno and Carolyn Abbate among others. Abbate herself also makes a spirited appearance in that issue, with her reflections on Wagnerian echoes in popular films of the 1930–50s. History is not much represented in the journal; there are a few articles along the lines of J. Q. Davies’s "Melodramatic Possessions: The Flying Dutchman, South Africa and the Imperial Stage" (an examination of the role of music in melodramas given on the London stage in...