that flourished both because of the accuracy of the reflection and because of the cultivated artificiality of high society and the stage alike. When Dryden claimed that the new 'refinement' of conversation was a direct result of the influence of Charles II and his court, he was in part thinking of the new 'naturalism' of the stage. The King, he argued, had 'awakened the dull and heavy spirits of the English from their natural reservedness' and had loosened 'their stiff forms of conversation, and made them easy and pliant to each other in discourse'. The 'wit' of the period certainly follows the lead of the court in its 'hard-heartedness'. It is in part a revolution against moral seriousness and the kind of piety that is worn on the sleeve, in part an echo of a new respect for clarity and reason. The world of the seventeenth century had been turned upside down; crowns and mitres had been knocked off heads only to be restored in a world that looked more cynically and questioningly at all forms of authority. Many of the private convictions which had been revolutionary in the 1640s seemed reactionary in the 1680s. The drama of the 'Restoration' period ought, however, to be seen as an essential element in the literature of a revolutionary age. Unlike much of its satirical poetry the comedies of the last forty years of the seventeenth century have retained an immediacy, a subversiveness, and an ability to provoke the prejudices of audiences. If scarcely revolutionary in themselves, the plays of the period are a response to revolution and to the seventeenth century's experimental reversal of values. The comedies do not offer anything so pretentious as redefinitions but they do continue to irritate and laugh audiences into reaching out for definitions.

5

Eighteenth-Century Literature 1690–1780

ALEXANDER POPE's epitaph for the monument erected to the memory of Sir Isaac Newton in Westminster Abbey in 1731 succinctly proclaims the extraordinary intellectual virtue of the greatest scientific innovator of the age. A Latin inscription witnesses to Newton's immortality, an immortality triply safeguarded by Time, Nature, and Heaven; a couplet in English, the sublime confidence of which has served to provoke later generations, unequivocally asserts that the systematized vision which he offered was divinely inspired. 'Nature and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night. | God said, *Let Newton be!* and All was *Light*.' Pope's epitaph is more than a personal tribute to a great man; it is a public statement displayed in a much frequented national church which sums up the gratitude of a proud civilization. Newton (1642–1727), 'the Miracle of the present Age' as Joseph Addison called him, had given his eighteenth-century heirs a carefully reasoned theoretical framework on which a whole range of additional theories could be hung. His *Principia* of 1687 and his *Opticks* of 1704 suggested that there were indeed intelligible laws in nature which could be demonstrated by physics and mathematics, and, moreover, that the universe exhibited a magnificent symmetry and a mechanical certainty. This universe, Newton had declared, could not have arisen 'out of a Chaos by the mere Laws of Nature'; such a 'wonderful Uniformity in the Planetary System' had to be the handiwork of an intelligent and benevolent Creator. To the many eighteenth-century propagators of Newton's thought, the great could be related to the less, the cosmic to the terrestrial, and the divine to the human by means of a properly tutored understanding of the natural scheme of things. By interpretation, Newton's heavens declared that there was order, law, and indeed design in creation. Largely thanks to the propagandist work of the Royal Society in London and European-wide advances in astronomy, mathematics, mechanics, physics, and optics, natural philosophy had shed the taint of forbidden knowledge. Religious mystery could be enhanced, and sometimes even replaced, by rational wonder. The revolution in scientific thought begun by Copernicus 150 years earlier was to be fulfilled as popular enlightenment.

The ideal of universal law, order, and tidiness which could be extrapolated from Newtonian physics proved to have widespread ramifications, especially when pursued in conjunction with arguments derived from the reasoning of contemporary philosophers. John Locke (1632–1704) and his one-time pupil Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), both provided an intellectual basis for easily digested theories of politics, religion, and aesthetics and for precepts pertaining to social happiness. Locke's epistemology and his crucial rejection of innate ideas in favour of the notion of knowledge based on external sensation and internal 'reflection' helped, it has been argued, to determine the tendency in many eighteenth-century writers to describe the observable world rather than offer a subjective interpretation of the workings of the psyche. For Locke, the mind was a *tabula rasa* at birth, a 'white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*'. When he rhetorically demanded how the mind acquired 'all the materials of Reason and Knowledge', he answered succinctly, 'From *Experience*'. If at one point in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) Locke famously compares the mind to a Newtonian *camera obscura*, at another he employs a palatial metaphor to suggest that ideas are admitted to the brain through an ordered enfilade of state rooms which lead steadily to the Royal Presence, the senses and the nerves acting as 'Conduits, to convey them from without to their Audience in the Brain, the mind's Presence-room'. The discussion of language in Book III of the *Essay* centres on the premiss that words are signs not of things, but of ideas, and on the related insistence that language is the creation of a society the members of which consent to the fact that certain words stand for certain ideas. Common usage and mutual consent provide an acceptable authority for regulating the use of words in ordinary conversation (if not a precise enough one for philosophical discourse). Locke's influential explorations of a theory of government are related to this concept of social consent. His *Two Treatises of Government* (probably composed before 1682, but published to coincide with the success of the 'Glorious Revolution' in 1689/90) emphasize that civil societies are bonded together by enlightened self-interest and by the dual necessities of securing individual liberty and the protection of individual property rights. Government existed as a trust conferred upon it by the consent of citizens; if that trust were abused, or if power became arbitrary, then citizens, the true makers of laws, had a right to withdraw confidence and authority from their rulers. Locke's *Two Treatises* reveal him to be the direct heir to the political and constitutional debates of the seventeenth century. As the reasoning advocate of a 'mixed constitution', which interfused monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy, he was also, to some degree, the validating spirit of the British political compromise of the eighteenth century.

Locke's faith in the rights of the citizen enshrined in the rule of law, and in law as the product of consent, is in part reflected in the easier philosophical arguments of Shaftesbury. Both philosophers were proponents of religious toleration, and indeed of a rational Christianity based on common sense,

virtuous action, and a perception of the nature of God through his creation rather than through revelation. To Shaftesbury the contemplation of the universe was 'the only means which cou'd establish the *sound Belief* of a Deity', and such 'sound Belief' in a blessed order could stand counter both to the Godless confusion of the atheists and the sin-infused, fallen world of orthodox Christianity. 'All Nature's Wonders serve to excite and perfect this idea of their *Author*', Shaftesbury wrote in his dialogue *The Moralists: A Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709), ''Tis here he suffers us to see, and even to converse with him, in a manner suitable to our Frailty; How glorious is it to contemplate him, in this noblest of his Works apparent to us, The *System* of *the bigger World*.' Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1711, revised 1714), a collection which includes *The Moralists*, is insistent in its expressions of the divine perfection of nature and of the interconnection of aspects of creation according to observable laws; it is also explicit in its arguments proposing the essential goodness of the human element in creation. Humankind, naturally virtuous and naturally sociable, finds its true destiny in acknowledging a correspondence between the harmony and the proportion evident in the macrocosm and the individual spirit. A sociable morality, which suppresses such unnatural passions as tyranny or misanthropy, itself derives from a reasoned observation of '*the Order of the World it-self*'. Shaftesbury's optimistic view of innate human benevolence did not go unchallenged. In his *A Search into the Nature of Society*, added in 1723 to the second edition of *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits*, the Dutch-born Bernard de Mandeville (1670–1733) bluntly complained that the 'boasted middle way, and the calm Virtues recommended in the Characteristicks, are good for nothing but to breed Drones'. To Mandeville, Shaftesbury's notions were 'a high compliment to human-kind . . . What a pity it is they are not true!' His moral system was, moreover, 'not much better than a Wild-Goose-Chase'. A far sounder picture of human society should be based not on flights of wild geese but, as his larger, controversial, and widely read *Fable* suggests, on a hive of bees, a mutual society which thrives because its individual members are acquisitive. This acquisitiveness, and a concomitant love of luxury, could, he indicated, be properly interpreted as a public benefit rather than as a private vice, selfishness and pride being the basis of commercial prosperity and therefore, ultimately, of social well-being.

Locke's concept of a virtuous citizen as a man of 'large, sound, round-about sense', Shaftesbury's almost bland assertion that 'to philosophize is but to carry good breeding a step further', and the popular immediacy of Mandeville's *Fable* variously serve to suggest something of the contemporary esteem accorded to reasoned argument, good humour, and common sense as opposed to the disharmony of superstition, spleen, and 'enthusiasm'. These moral and social ideals are also reflected in the broader culture of the period, most notably in its music and its architecture. Classical proportion in eighteenth-century music, embodied in the discipline of sonata form and in the need for resolution within a closed or framed harmonic pattern, imposed a convention, acceptable to

composer and audience alike, rather than a constricting strait-jacket of rules. 'Good breeding', in music as much as in the other arts, implied a shared education and shared expectations rather than an insistence on the personality or the eccentricities of the artist. In English architecture the principles derived from the study of ancient precedent and from the writings of the Roman theorist Vitruvius had dominated the style of the court since the time of Inigo Jones, but it was with the gradual triumph in the 1720s of the severer styles imitated from the works of the sixteenth-century Venetian architect, Palladio, that influential aristocratic patrons and the designers they employed found a common aesthetic language equally expressive of political and economic power and of the leisure and comfort to enjoy it. The linkage between what became an essentially Whig style and dominance of Whig politics is perhaps best evidenced in the dismissal of the ageing Tory, Sir Christopher Wren, from his official government post as Surveyor-General in 1718. Wren's dismissal effectively marks the end of the idiosyncratic English flirtation with the international baroque style. English Palladianism, with its emphasis on subdued good taste, balance, and a strict adherence to classical proportion, as opposed to exuberance, ebullience, and innovation, became the national style of the mid-century. The symmetry and order of English Palladianism, with its distant echoes of modern Venice and ancient Rome, became associated with the government of a liberal-minded oligarchy as opposed to royal autocracy. The baroque style suggested, on the one hand, the spiritual restlessness of earlier generations and, on the other, the suspect encroachments of continental tyranny in both Church and State. In its architecture, as much as in its politics and its literature, England took pride in being marked off from European norms and especially from those inspired by the centralizing tastes and the cultural and religious politics of Louis XIV of France.

English distaste for the policies of Louis XIV was not based purely on military and diplomatic opposition to French attempts to secure European hegemony or to the King's persecution of his Huguenot subjects; it was equally founded on the evolution of a distinctive theory of the government of Britain. By the 1680s it had become evident that the Restoration settlement had settled comparatively little in English and Scottish political life. James II, who had succeeded his brother as king in February 1685, managed, with a tactless ineptitude dangerously allied to religious arrogance, to alienate sections of influential opinion naturally loyal to the Crown. His attempts to secure toleration for non-Anglicans were received as an affront to the Church; his promotion of zealous Roman Catholics to positions of national and local power as an attempt to undermine the State. In June 1688 the birth of a son to the King precipitated events by provoking four Whig and three Tory peers to invite William of Orange to supplant his father-in-law and to deliver England from his royal oppression. On 5 November William landed at Torbay with a Dutch army, his fleet having been driven, it was fondly believed, by a divinely granted Protestant wind. William's rapid advance towards London was speeded by a

ground swell of popular support in the shires through which he passed. King James's failure either to rally his forces or to take control of the immediate situation later led Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury (1643–1715), to remark in his admixture of autobiography and anecdote, *The History of My Own Times*, that this was 'one of the strangest catastrophes that is in any history . . . A great king, with strong armies and mighty fleets, a great treasure and powerful allies, fell all at once'. James's escape from England at one o'clock in the morning on 11 December was deemed to mark the moment of his abdication of the throne. On 13 February 1689 William and his wife Mary, James's Anglican daughter, were declared joint sovereigns of England. The 'Revolution' had been bloodless; it was later also proclaimed 'Glorious'. The constitutional settlement which evolved in this period, and which was enshrined in the Bill of Rights of this same February, endured substantially unchallenged until 1829. A temporary expedient, designed to exclude James II and his immediate heirs from the throne and to secure a Protestant succession, was interpreted by generations of Whig commentators as a turning-point in the history of the British Constitution.

The Revolution and its subsequent legislation was designed to ensure the rule of law and the dominance of Parliament in England. In the northern kingdom in 1689 a Convention followed the English precedent in offering the Crown of Scotland jointly to William and Mary and in passing the Claim of Right. In 1701, however, when the Westminster Parliament voted for the Act of Settlement by which the English Crown was to pass to the House of Hanover, it was evident that Scotland would not automatically follow suit. The two kingdoms, united by Stuart inheritance but still divided by their distinct legal, religious, and parliamentary systems, remained mutually hostile. From 1705 onwards a terminal crisis in the relationship between the two nations and the two parliaments was averted only by a rare enough combination of diplomacy and vested interest on the part of the aristocratic agents of both sides. A Treaty of Union was drawn up which was extensively debated on both sides of the border in the winter of 1706–7 and on 1 May 1707 the 'Act for an Union of the Two Kingdoms of England and Scotland' came into effect. The Union made for the single kingdom of Great Britain with an agreed royal succession and a single national flag; it also united the parliaments into one and it opened 'to all subjects of the united kingdom . . . full freedom and intercourse of trade and navigation'. Scotland preserved her distinctive legal and religious traditions and won access to the lucrative trade with North America; England gained proper security on the island of Britain, free of the future threat of northern secession and of inconvenient or antagonistic alliances formed by its poorer neighbour. Thus an ideal of providential harmony, of co-operation, and of a political order reflecting that of nature seemed to many to be realized in the triumph of practical reason, liberal religion, and impartial law. Temperate kings would reign over a united nation in which individual liberty would be constitutionally guaranteed.

In many practical ways that ideal remained as much an illusion as it was a century before, more valid as propaganda or as an image of perfection than as an effective political or social fact. Real order proved to be as elusive in eighteenth-century Britain as in any other century. The intense political and religious passions of the Civil War may have gradually diminished but they were superseded by the equally fierce, if less bloody, antagonism of party and parliamentary faction. The years 1690–1725 are marked by some of the most urgent dialogue that the pursuit of high politics has thrown up in Britain and Ireland, and it was a dialogue which steadily drew committed writers into its vortex. Although Parliament passed a Toleration Act in 1689, 'their Majesties protestant subjects dissenting from the church of England' were, under certain conditions, freed from active persecution rather than actively 'tolerated'. Their Majesties' Roman Catholic subjects, unhappily regarded as the potentially treasonable tools of foreign powers, were still subjected to severe legal disabilities and, if not exactly harried, tended to retreat into political passivity. Such passivity does not, initially, characterize Anglican and Nonconformist apologists, as the divergent careers of Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe amply demonstrate. The fate of the talented hymn-writer and theologian, Thomas Ken (1637–1711), who persisted in maintaining his oath of loyalty to James II despite the change in regime, also suggests the force of the constitutional interrelationship of Church and State. Deprived of his ecclesiastical office, in common with other nonjurors, Ken withdrew from public life, leaving the Church open to the increasing influence of a dominant political party rather than of the will of the sovereign. Despite often principled protests, the post-Revolutionary Church of England, becalmed by the arguments in favour of 'natural religion' propounded by the disciples of Locke and Shaftesbury, settled into a period of relative complacency as the willing spiritual arm of the Whig political machine.

As the two great Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745, the violence of the so-called Porteous Riots in Edinburgh in 1736, and the Gordon Riots in London in 1780 suggest, religious, political, or simply popular opposition to the status quo was not far below the surface. If the Edinburgh mob of 1736 demonstrated both a ready and anti-authoritarian sympathy with the gallantry of a convicted smuggler and, more worryingly to the Government, an antipathy to decisions made in London, the two risings in support of the exiled Stuarts provoked a more determined policy of repression. Both risings made clear the force of Scottish dissent from the new regime, but both also suggested the limited degree of disaffection present amongst the English gentry with Jacobite sympathies. Horace Walpole's letters of 1745, for example, exhibit by their unaccustomed brevity both an urgent, if temporary, concern over the threat of a combined Scots–French invasion and a genuine enough relief that the Pretender's army found neither an English rising in its favour nor that ill-led backwoodsmen could properly confront the professional army of a modern state. The failure of the Stuart cause in the eighteenth century became a matter of

self-congratulation amongst those in England and Scotland who had invested in, or benefited from, the success of the Hanoverian dynasty. The incursion of rebellious Highland clansmen into Lowland Scotland and into the middle of England was a reminder of the existence of an alternative mode of government and of a distinct, if increasingly archaic, form of society.

The Gordon Riots, which devastated much of central London for a period of some six days in June 1780, provided culminating evidence of urban violence in the capital, the unreasoning violence of the dispossessed who had remained untouched by high-minded theories of order and symmetry. That the riots should have been occasioned by official moves to give relief to English Catholics also brought home the unabated force not only of bigotry but of 'enthusiasm'. The riots reinforced the steady awareness in eighteenth-century literature and painting that society, rather than being exclusively subject to orderly influence from above, was liable to disruption from below, and indeed that that disruption and anti-social behaviour remained endemic. It was not insignificant that, seventeen years after Captain Cook's first landfall on the unexplored eastern coast of Australia in 1770, the Government should feel pressed to colonize New South Wales by establishing a penal colony at Botany Bay for the convicted rejects of British society.

To see the culture of the period as exclusively a reflection of ideas of order and proportion is inevitably to see it partially, even distortedly. As the work of the most popular English painter of the age reveals, beauty did not lie solely in demonstrations of the grand style, in further refinements of classical precedent, or in an observation of nature according to Newtonian precepts. William Hogarth (1697–1764), who in 1745 painted an image of himself resting on volumes of Shakespeare, Milton, and Swift, saw himself as the pictorial heir to the dramatic, epic, and satiric tradition already established in English literature. In 1761 he added his own couplet to his satirical etching, *Time Smoking a Picture*: 'To Nature and your Self appeal, | Nor learn of others what to feel'. Hogarth's volume of aesthetic theory, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), had earlier attempted to define an equally personal concept of beauty according to a three-dimensional serpentine rhythm, arguing for the principle of intricacy in art. 'The active mind is ever bent to be employ'd', he wrote, 'Pursuing is the business of our lives; and even abstracted from any other view, gives pleasure.' This notion of 'pursuit' leads directly to a definition of intricacy or 'that peculiarity in the lines, which comprise it, that *leads the eye a wanton kind of chase*, and from the pleasure that it gives the mind, entitles it to the name of beautiful'. Hogarth's idea of 'intricacy', linked as it is to 'peculiarity' and 'wantonness' in the chase, manages to suggest a freer and less strictly regulated response to observed nature. The busy mind is stimulated by the diverse business of humanity, not simply by human pretensions to live out an elevated and rational image of universal order. Hogarth's most famous images—the narrative series showing the Harlot's and the Rake's progresses (1732, 1735) and the blighted marital relationship of *Marriage à la Mode* (1743)—achieved wide circulation by

being distributed as engravings which, to cite a contemporary witness, 'captivated the Minds of most People persons of all ranks & conditions from the greatest Quality to the meanest'. These modern moralities show London fraught with temptation, indulgence, violence, murder, disease, and the consequences of selfishness; they chart declines not simply from prosperity to destitution but from innocence to depravity. When Hogarth shows us a paragon, as in the series of engravings charting the divergent fortunes of the idle and the industrious apprentices, he also hints at an immoderate degree of smugness on the part of his serene model of industry; when he paints criminals, as in his portrait of the triple murderess Sarah Malcolm in Newgate (1732/3), he can be as probing of the outward traits of character as when he considers the features of a worldly Whig bishop such as Hoadly of Winchester (1743). If Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* propose the ideal of a consenting civil society ruled by law, Hogarth's four depictions of a corrupt provincial election of 1754 observe both an inherent ludicrousness in the political process and the untidy energy of humanity. In the last picture, *Chairing the Member*, the newly elected Member of Parliament is both supported and effectively toppled by the vitality of embattled life swirling underneath his precarious chair.

Jonathan Swift

In a letter of December 1703 Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) described the activity of ten days of 'the highest and warmest reign of party and faction' that he had either known or read of. This particular period of fractious political and ecclesiastical manœuvring at the court of Queen Anne was concerned with the privileges and exclusive influence of the Established Church in national life, but it had had such a universal effect on the nation, Swift whimsically added, that even the dogs in the streets were 'much more contumelious and quarrelsome than usual'. Throughout his career Swift remained in part compelled, in part repelled by politics; he also remained fascinated by reflections of, and parallels to, human behaviour in the animal world. Swift was born in Dublin of newly settled English parents; he was educated according to Anglican principles in Ireland, and was ordained into the Irish Church in which he held benefices throughout his priesthood. He also consistently, but unsuccessfully, sought promotion in the better endowed sister-Church of England. If much of his propagandist writing is dedicated to the cause of Irish independence from English interference, and if he has also often been viewed as the quintessential voice of the eighteenth-century Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, he seems steadily to have thought of himself as a stranger and an unhappy exile in the land of his birth. He was, however, equally awkward in identifying himself with England, or at least with what became the Whig mainstream of English politics in the latter half of his life. His writings—characterized throughout by a subtle ambiguity, by a troubled delight in oppositions and reversals, and by a play

with alternative voices, personae, and perspectives—are intimately related to the deeply riven political, religious, and national issues of the Britain and Ireland of his time.

The severe disruption of Irish affairs attendant upon James II's attempt to rally Catholics to his cause in the summer of 1690 obliged Swift to seek refuge in England and it was in the house of the distinguished diplomat and essayist, Sir William Temple (1628–99), that he composed his effusively celebratory ode on the success of William III's expedition against James, the aftershocks of which still unsettle Irish history. Swift remained an adherent of the principles of the 'Glorious Revolution', convinced, as he expresses it in his poem, that William's 'fond enemy' had tried 'upon a rubbish heap of broken laws | To climb at victory | Without the footing of a cause'. If in 1702 he insistently declared himself still a defender of the cause of the Revolution, 'a lover of liberty' and much inclined to be 'what they called a Whig in politics', he laid equal stress on another principle of the post-1688 settlement, the supremacy of the Anglican Church. He was a High-Churchman, he told Lord Somers, and he could not conceive 'how anyone who wore the habit of a clergyman, could be otherwise'. These loyalties, like so much in Swift's career as a priest and a writer, steadily came into conflict with one another, driving him, without obvious incongruity, towards an espousal of English Toryism and the nascent nationalism of the new Irish Ascendancy. His spiritual and political adherence to Anglicanism is spelled out in a further product of his years in the service of Sir William Temple, the prose satire *A Tale of a Tub* (written in part perhaps *c.*1696, published in 1704). This story of the diverging tastes and opinions of three brothers who represent Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Calvinistic Dissent, constantly seems to question its own shape through a use of multiple narrators and editors, through subversions, gaps, disjunctions, and long digressions on criticism, ancient and modern literature and, above all, madness. The core of the narrative, however, presents an effervescent attack on Catholic additions to, and Protestant detractions from, the fundamental doctrines of the Church, doctrines metaphorically expressed as a coat which the brothers alter according to the whims and fashions that they contortedly justify. The 'Anglican' brother, Martin, comes out, just, as the most vindicated of the three. The 'Author's Apology' prefaced to the work in 1709 attempts both to excuse its 'youthful sallies, which from the grave and wise may deserve a rebuke' and, far less tongue-in-cheek, to offer a clear celebration of the Church of England 'as the most perfect of all others in discipline and doctrine'.

This 'Author's Apology' concludes with the observation that 'as wit is the noblest and most useful gift of human nature, so humour is the most agreeable'. Swift's distinction between 'wit' and 'humour' is one which is too often glossed over by modern readers. It was a vital enough one in the eighteenth century. Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755 defines 'wit' as both 'the intellect' and as 'quickness of fancy', attaching to this second definition a quotation from Locke: 'Wit lying in the assemblage of ideas, and pulling these together with quickness and

variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures in the fancy.' For Johnson one pertinent definition of 'humour' entailed 'grotesque imagery, jocularity, merriment', and he illustrated this with a brief reference to Sir William Temple: 'In conversation humour is more than wit, easiness more than knowledge.' Swift had aspired to variety and to an intermixture of wit and humour, quickness of fancy and jocularity, both in *A Tale of a Tub* and in the satire on the pretensions of modern literature, *The Battle of the Books*, published with it in 1704. *The Battle of the Books* or, to give the allegorical squib its full title, *A Full and True Account of the Battel fought last Friday, Between the Antient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library*, originated as a complement to Temple's defence of classical literature as opposed to its modern vernacular rival. The real 'battle', fiercely fought over in the academies and salons of Europe, was once taken very seriously, not to say pompously, but Swift's allegory part ridicules, part supports the validity of the contention. In the midst of the dispute the animal-loving Æsop mediates between the claims of a pro-'modern' spider, who spins his dirty webs out of his own entrails, and a pro-'ancient' bee, who goes to nature in order to produce, in the now famous phrase, 'the two noblest of things . . . sweetness and light'. Although Æsop reaches a reasoned conclusion, his arbitration simply serves to heighten animosities. The consequent tumult spills over into a farcically confused disorder in which Aristotle tries to fire an arrow at Bacon and hits Descartes by mistake, and Virgil encounters his translator, Dryden, accoutred in a helmet nine times too large for his head. Dryden's attempts to soothe his opponent are diminished by the tenor of a voice which, 'suited to the visage', sounds 'weak and remote'. The published text of *The Battle of the Books*, purporting to be derived from a much-damaged manuscript, is broken up by *non sequiturs* and hiatuses and its end ends nothing, concluding as it does with an aborted new paragraph.

Swift's later satires play with the idea of a narrator who appears to have assumed a mask in order to strip masks from the men, the women, and the opinions which are the object of his attack. All draw more distinctly from his notion of 'wit' than they do from the ease of 'humour'. In a simple form, such as the early spoof, *Meditation on a Broomstick* (1710), he imitates the solemn style and manner of a primly pious moral essayist, but effectively undermines the tone of seriousness by the patent ridiculousness of the chosen subject (though the meditation is said to have taken in Lady Berkeley who, believing it was by her favourite author, Robert Boyle, remarked 'there is no knowing what useful lessons of instruction this wonderful man may draw from things apparently the most trivial'). The extraordinary force of *A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of poor People in Ireland, from being a Burden to their parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Publick* (1729) stems, however, from the very reasonableness, arithmetical orderliness, and modesty of expression of what is effectively a monstrous proposal for the human consumption of the surplus infant population. The Irish dimension, which adds a special piquancy to the

supposed argument of *A Modest Proposal*, reflects Swift's newly determined defence of Irish interests and sensibilities. *The Drapier's Letters* (1724) stem from a more obviously public and popular indignation at English indifference to Ireland. The five letters, purporting to be the work of 'M.B.', a Dublin draper, play on provincial pride and a specifically local grievance. The Draper's popularity with a wide cross-section of Irish opinion stemmed not simply from a general assent to his opposition to the relatively petty injustice which he addressed, but from a narrating voice which was carefully attuned to a broad audience: he is colloquial, mocking, denunciatory; he tellingly quotes Scripture as well as pertinent facts; he speaks in earnest and he occasionally rises to patriotic rhetoric when he knows that the rhetoric will hit home.

Swift's skill in selecting a voice appropriate to the form in which he is working is nowhere more evident than in his masterpiece *Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World*, familiarly known as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Lemuel Gulliver is an English surgeon who rises to be a ship's captain; he is well-educated, proud of his national origins, and informed both professionally and politically, but he is essentially *l'homme moyen sensuel* and it is by means of his limitations that Swift scores his finest effects. In each of the four books into which his narrative is divided Gulliver is faced with the extraordinary. He copes efficiently, even bravely; he masters foreign languages and he observes and reports scrupulously, but he judges partially and, as his name implies, he is all too readily 'gulled'. He seems to be oblivious to the parallels between the pettiness of the affairs of Lilliput and Blefescu and those of Europe, and having stoutly defended the history, belligerence, and institutions of Great Britain to the king of Brobdingnag he seems unshaken by the king's trenchant conclusion that the bulk of Gulliver's compatriots appear to be 'the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth'. Gulliver is, however, both fascinated and shocked by ordure and the evidence of physical decay that he encounters. His tact in disposing of his own excreta in Lilliput and his practical (if offensive) means of extinguishing the fire in the royal palace have tended to be edited out of bowdlerized versions of the story, but his fastidious horror at the smell, skin, and hair of the Brobdingnagian maids of honour, and his alarm at the sign of a gigantic decapitation, are integral to his overall reaction to the disturbing magnification of the human form. In the third book he detachedly confronts both mental aberration and the terrible anguish of the Struldbruggs, condemned to an immortality of slow decay, a 'mortifying sight' which quells his 'keen appetite for perpetuity of life'. The first two voyages deal with physical disproportion; the episodic third largely with mental imbalance; the fourth serves both to replay themes of physical and mental disorder and to demand a reordering of all Gulliver's, and by extension, his readers' preconceptions. In the land of the Houyhnhnms it is clear from the beginning that Gulliver is unwilling to associate himself with the abominable humanity of the Yahoos by his constant reference to them in animal terms and by his all too evident disgust at their proximity to him.

Nevertheless, his often desperate attempts to associate himself with real, if extraordinarily endowed, animals lead both to failure and to a mental state which can only be called aberrant. Though the Houyhnhnms have reason, stoic morality, sociability, and the outward signs of an advanced civilization based on qualities most admired by eighteenth-century theorists, they lack passion. In Lilliput or Brobdingnag Gulliver had quickly adjusted to the standards of the nations in which he found himself; in the land of the Houyhnhnms he passionately seeks to be considered an honorary horse rather than an honourable Yahoo, and it is this passion, a distorted, panicking reasonability, which leads to his final imbalance. In his voyage back to England he seems incapable of coming to terms with basic human goodness; at home he rejects human companionship and human relationships in favour of life in a stable where, he tells us, 'my horses understand me tolerably well'. Mind and body, reason and passion, seem to be angrily and disastrously disjointed.

Many commentators have wanted to see Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* as a dark howl of rage against humankind, a howl which somehow echoes the gloom of Swift's own last years. His Latin epitaph in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, composed by Swift himself, speaks of his final rest as relieving his heart from the laceration of 'savage indignation', but it also refers to 'one who strove with all his might to champion liberty'. To confuse Gulliver with his creator is to detract from Swift's greatness as a writer, a satirist, and a champion of liberty. The distaste for the human body and for female sexuality evident in the late scatological poems, such as 'The Lady's Dressing Room' (1730), 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going To Bed', and 'Strephon and Chloe' (both 1731), may well be related to the intermingling of beauty and disease and the human and the animal form in Gulliver's experience but mere reflection does not make an equation. Swift's striving for liberty, unlike his Drapier's, is directed not purely at freeing Ireland from her temporary political oppressors but at opening the broad vista of real freedom, that of self-knowledge, independence, and responsibility to humanity as a whole. Swift's misanthropy (if such it be), unlike Gulliver's, is based, as he explained to Alexander Pope, on a 'hearty love' for individuals as distinguished from a general hatred for 'that animal called man'. That 'general hatred' stems from an indignation against a race which refuses to acknowledge the need for harmony, proportion, and a balance between its rational capacity and its animal instincts. A traditional theologian would also recognize that Swift, as an Augustinian, abhors all those human defects generally included under the definitions of sin as original, venial, and mortal. His picture of humankind suggests not simply the depravity inherent in the very nature of life after the Fall, but also the continuing indulgence in the consequences of the Fall unchecked by reasoned self-discipline, an altruistic morality, or divine grace. Swift's professed aim to vex the world rather than to divert it stems from a particularly demanding morality, one which is both more ancient and more excoriating than Locke's or Shaftesbury's pleasant faith in the ethics of rational sociability.

Pope and the Poetry of the Early Century

Swift's increasingly shrill denunciations of human self-satisfaction and self-confidence may seem ostensibly to stand apart from the scientific optimism of many of the literary propagandists of his time. His awareness of depravity and his urgent stress on a general human failure to live up to ideal norms of behaviour and to embody natural or divine harmony ought, however, to be seen as an integral part of the often rumbustious eighteenth-century satirical tradition. That tradition, which drew as much on Roman models as it did on the newly established authority of Dryden, reached its apogee in the poetry of Swift's friend, correspondent, and fellow outsider, Alexander Pope (1688–1744). But Pope's careful cultivation of poetic technique, his concern with precision and propriety, and his ambitious determination both to define and to refine the tastes and ideas of his age render him more than an exclusively satirical poet. His lifelong experimentation, his scrupulous revisions and recensions of his poems, his varied modes and forms, his 'imitations' and his translations steadily won him the broad respect of his influential contemporaries that his relatively humble Catholic origins initially denied him. His position in society and his vision of himself as an artist always remained paradoxical. Though he could complain as late as 1733 that 'Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory', he seems to have moved into a firm sympathy with Tory politics because he found it congenial to stand to one side of the cultural mainstream. He used satire as his chief 'weapon' in a land full of what he saw as 'Hectors [bullies], Thieves, Supercargoes [merchants' agents], Sharpers and Directors', a land rife with political and economic exploitation. He railed against the corruptions of modern life and letters because he was goaded into speech by the shabbiness of his time-serving, second-rate rivals. Pope's satiric invectives are immediate responses to the almost universal acrimony of early eighteenth-century cultural discourse, but they consistently manage to outclass the often venomous provocations of his enemies, both real and imagined. Pope's poetry may be as splenetic as that of his rivals, but it has a range, a sophistication, an energy, and a precise delicacy which is quite unmatched by that of any other poet of his time.

Pope's career began with 'imitations' of those recent English writers whose work revealed a debt to the admired precedents of Greek and Roman poetry and which suggested 'the highest character for sense and learning'. If Milton's long shadow falls over all Pope's essays in, and variations on, the epic form, and if Dryden's carefully crafted couplets clearly inform much of Pope's apprentice-work, it was to the limpid poetry of Waller and Cowley that he first experimentally turned. He was not alone in looking to these particular models of Latinate chastity of diction and disciplined lyric form. Most prominent amongst the direct heirs of the Restoration court poets, and the one who rises most fluently above mere *vers de société*, is Matthew Prior (1664–1721). Prior's

early collaborative satire on Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther—The Hind and the Panther Transvers'd to the Story of the Country Mouse and the City Mouse* (1687)—is a boisterous enough political poem, indicative both of a hostility towards 'drudge Dryden' and of a determined interest in current affairs (he later pursued a successful career as a diplomat). The long, gloomy, couplet soliloquy, 'Solomon on the Vanity of the World' (1718), on which Prior's reputation once rested, provoked even its erstwhile admirer, Dr Johnson, to confess, damningly, that 'tediousness is the most fatal of all faults'. It is, however, for his 'light' verse, for his wryly polished observations on love, and for his frank delineations of sexual approach, erotic negotiation, and amorous conciliation that Prior has been more recently admired. The gentle melancholy of 'To a Child of Quality of Five Years Old, the Author Supposed Forty' (*c.* 1700), with its glances back to Marvell, is balanced by the bawdy narrative poems, 'Hans Carvel' (1701) and 'The Ladle' (1718), and by the pragmatic urbane analyses of sexual encounters presented in, for example, 'A Better Answer to Cloe Jealous' (1718) and 'An Ode' (1709). Prior's relaxed and almost colloquial elegy for his former housekeeper and mistress 'Jinny the Just' (written *c.* 1708, but not published until 1907) celebrates the uncomplicated practicality of a working woman. It is an unfussy poem in triplets which mingles affection with sharp scrutiny, praise with a ready tolerance of idiosyncrasy—'With a just trim of virtue her soul was endued, | Not affectedly pious nor secretly lewd, | She cut even between the coquette and the prude'. 'Just' remains the operative word throughout the poem.

In advocating the use of a circumspect and refined diction in verse, a careful selection of metaphors, and a tidy couplet form in which the weight of the sentence often fell on the governing verb, the poets and critics of the early eighteenth century were attempting to prescribe a norm for poetry in English. When, for example, in 1704 Pope 'improved' on Chaucer's Merchant's Tale by paraphrasing, and when he 'versified' Donne's Satyres II and IV in 1713 (revised 1733), he was both looking back with a certain respect to earlier proponents of the couplet form and attempting to smooth out what he saw as the metrically awkward and lexically archaic. In both instances, he was also placing the paraphrased work of English poets beside his own couplet versions (or 'imitations') of poems by Homer, Ovid, and Horace. English vernacular poetry, he was implying, had come of age, purged alike of medieval archaism and 'metaphysical' quirkiness. The one mid-seventeenth-century poet, apart from Milton, whom Pope and his contemporaries unequivocally admired and actively imitated was Sir John Denham (1615–69). Denham, a vigorous supporter of Charles I during the Civil War, had not only saturated his pastoral meditation, *Cooper's Hill* (1642, 1688), with royalist sentiment but had also established what Dryden saw as 'the exact standard of good writing', a due obedience to decorum and a correctness of form, imagery, and vocabulary. *Cooper's Hill* set a pattern for loco-descriptive poetry in English, a poetry which celebrated place as much as politics, national associations as much as classical

mythology. From his elevated viewpoint, the poet looks to the distant prospects of London and Windsor and down on the fields of Runnymede (where Magna Carta had been signed in 1215). Denham had, however, been concerned less with describing a landscape than with appealing to national sentiment and to patriotic good sense. The prospect from Cooper's Hill both inspires an advocacy of temperate kingship and melts into an Arcadian vision of a numinous England peopled with gods, demi-gods, nymphs, and tutelary spirits.

Denham's mode was much copied. His poem was quoted on the title-page of William Diaper's *Dryades: or, The Nymph's Prophecy* in 1713, and its structure clearly informs two further patriotic and local pastorals, Pope's own *Windsor-Forest* (1713) and John Dyer's *Grongar Hill* (1726). Diaper (1685–1717) is a far less dextrous craftsman than Pope, but his substantial and often extraordinary evocations of a subaqueous world of mermen in *Nereides: or, Sea-Eclogues* (1712), and his Virgilian prospect of an England rejoicing and prospering in the European peace which succeeded the Treaty of Utrecht of 1712 in *Dryades*, possess a formal, if sometimes artificial, charm. Pope's witty dismissal of an 'unhappy' Diaper (in the first version of *The Dunciad*) who 'searched for coral, but he gathered weeds' is less than generous (the couplet was deleted from all subsequent editions). Dyer's *Grongar Hill* is a work of particularly emphatic local piety, at once a panoramic tribute to his ancestral estate in Wales and a celebration of rural retirement. Dyer (1699–1757) is more concerned with the pleasures of a native landscape than with national politics, and his ascent of the hill overlooking the river Towy in order to survey the surrounding countryside inspires in him a sense of provincial contentment distinct from both the historic associations of the ruined castles he observes and the pursuit of power in the unseen, happily distant metropolis. Peace, he asserts at the end of the poem, 'treads | On the Meads, and Mountain-heads, | Along with Pleasure, close ally'd' and hears 'the Thrush, while all is still, | Within the Groves of Grongar Hill'. If the dispraise for Dyer's poetic investigation of the wool-trade in *The Fleece* of 1757 was once almost universal, it found a belated admirer in William Wordsworth.

Wordsworth was an equally convinced admirer of the work of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720), a selection of whose verse had first appeared anonymously as *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions, Written by a Lady* in 1713. Finch had found a comparable solace in retirement, albeit a retirement enforced on her by her husband's continued loyalty to the cause of James II. Her finest poetry stems from an appreciation of the seclusion of her Kentish estates and from a reasoned awareness of the distinctive role of an educated woman both within marriage and in a wider society. In writing of the natural beauty of her surroundings she aspired, she claimed, to 'soft and Poeticall imaginings' akin to those of the 'mighty' Denham, trusting that her hand 'Might bid the Landskip, in strong numbers stand, | Fix all its charms, with a Poetick skill, | And raise its Fame above his Cooper's Hill'. As a writer determined to demonstrate

that 'Women are Education and not Nature's Fools', she counters the stereotyping of women in poetry as sex-objects and mistresses by asserting the alternative dignity of married love. In 'The Spleen' she protests at the restrictions generally imposed upon women, restrictions flatteringly disguised as 'Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play', and she complains at the attitude of mind which insists that 'To write, or read, or think, or to enquire | Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time'. Her poems of retreat seem to delight in a world where social restrictions and conventions become happily redundant. The 'Petition for an Absolute Retreat', for example, espouses the principle of a withdrawal into a shady, verdant privacy where 'unshaken Liberty' quietly triumphs. A similarly placid mood informs 'A Nocturnal Reverie', a poem which opens hauntingly with a reminiscence of the fifth act of *The Merchant of Venice* and which recalls, with precise satisfaction, the sounds and sensations of a summer night in a wooded garden with a working landscape beyond it. The night brings an undisturbed calm of mind 'Till Morning breaks, and All's confused again; | Our Cares, our Toils, our Clamours are renew'd, | Or Pleasures, seldom reach'd, again pursu'd'.

On one level, Pope's *Windsor-Forest* also rejoices in the diffuse spiritual permeation of a southern English landscape by the Olympian deities; on another, it moves far beyond an Arcadian vision to a painful recall of the English past and to various projections of a far happier military, commercial, and imperial future. The royal demesne is first seen as 'the Monarch's and the Muse's seats', a Parnassus enlarged by particular historical associations and modern royal influence, but its paradisal echoes are drowned by an evocation of the savage past, or, more particularly, by reference to the lust for hunting of the first builders of Windsor Castle, the Norman kings. Pope recalls an England laid waste by its invaders, and preyed upon by 'Savage beasts and Savage Laws' and 'Kings more furious and severe than they'. The carefully established contrast between these dead 'sportive Tyrants' (William I and William II) and the living, Stuart queen, Anne ('whose care . . . protects the Sylvan Reign') may well be an indirect, Jacobite-inspired, hit at Anne's immediate predecessor, the unmentioned, 'usurping' modern invader, William III. Nevertheless, the vividly pictorial succeeding account of the pursuit of game in Anne's reign serves to suggest that hunting is now integral to the management of a working, fertile, and serene landscape. England is not only at peace with itself, but a greater destiny is opening to it. The last sections of the poem look forward to an energetic and triumphant exercise of power by the now united Britain, a power expressed in terms of a commercial hegemony in which trade replaces tribute and co-operation dispels subjection. It ends with a vision of a water-borne deluge of blessings in which the 'unbounded Thames shall flow for all Mankind, | Whose nations enter with each swelling Tyde, | And Oceans join whom they did first divide'.

Pope's first popular success was a far less pictorial poem. *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) is an exercise in aphoristic verse discourse which presents

criticism as a disciplined extension of common sense, clearheadedness, and neo-classical good manners. He adapted the mode in *An Essay on Man* (1733–4), an audacious attempt to illuminate and explain the premisses of contemporary moral philosophy in the form of popular and accessible verse. The four books that make up *An Essay on Man* variously explore the relationship of humankind to the Newtonian universe ('a mighty maze! but not without a plan') and they offer observations on human limitation, passion, intelligence, sociability, and the potential for happiness. Throughout the fabric of the poem, Pope lays an insistent, rhetorical stress on the concept of a pervasive order which links human beings to nature, creature to creature, and creature to Creator in a 'vast chain of being'. The epigrammatic quality of the verse has often, wrongly, led its detractors to suppose that the poem's tone is acquiescent and smug. If the now-celebrated, 'clear' summary of 'truth' with which the first epistle ends ('Whatever IS, is RIGHT') has all too frequently been condemned as an apology for philosophical and social complacency, this assertion has to be balanced against Pope's far from self-congratulatory observations on the dire effects of intellectual pride elsewhere in the poem. The perception of human ambiguity and human deficiency, neatly encapsulated in the description of man as 'The glory, jest, and riddle of the world', suggests the degree to which Pope the stringent satirist felt obliged to temper the confidence of Pope the optimistic, but often inadequate, philosopher.

The four *Moral Essays* of 1731–5 reveal a poet far less inclined to offer universal generalizations. The four Epistles are addressed to carefully selected figures; one of them, Martha Blount, was an intimate friend; the others, Lords Cobham, Bathurst, and Burlington, were prominent national figures or arbiters of taste. The Epistles are linked by a recurrent emphasis on the idea of balance, both within the personality and in public and artistic life. The first two poems deal with aspects of the passions, but in the third, addressed to Lord Bathurst, Pope shifts to an examination of the 'use of Riches' and in the splendidly inventive fourth Epistle to Burlington to a consideration of aesthetics. This last poem interrelates sense and expense, the rational harmony of the contemplative mind and architectural proportion. Burlington, the most gifted aristocratic proponent of Palladianism and a generous patron of the arts, is presented with a series of satiric vignettes which endeavour to expose the follies of excess. The central vignette is a fanciful account of a visit to the expensive vacuity of Timon's villa. 'Timon', whose name is derived from the Athenian voluptuary turned misanthrope, is a useful fiction. He is the flashy owner of a grandiose villa into which, as Pope sees it, moral and aesthetic errors are built. Its vast size, parallel to those of Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire, and, perhaps more appositely, to Sir Robert Walpole's Houghton Hall in Norfolk and to the Duke of Chandos's Cannons in Middlesex, brings 'all Brobdignag [*sic*] before your thought'; its gardens, lakes, and terraces suggest unnatural waste and inefficient show; its vast and pompous interiors bespeak inconvenience. Pope's verbal and moral detailing are exact and telling.

In its chapel, for example, a silver bell summons worshippers to the 'Pride of Prayer':

> Light quirks of Musick, broken or uneven,
> Make the soul dance upon a Jig to Heaven.
> On painted Cielings you devoutly stare,
> Where sprawl the Saints of Verrio or Laguerre
> On gilded clouds in fair expansion lie,
> And bring all Paradise before your eye.
> To rest, the Cushion and soft Dean invite,
> Who never mentions Hell to ears polite.

This pompous chapel, with its fashionable murals and its Handelian anthems, is quite up to date, but, as Pope subtly suggests by transposing the adjective 'soft' from the cushion to the obliging Dean, the values that it embodies have little Christian rigour. Timon's villa weighs heavily on its landscape, but, thanks to its very existence, its 'charitable Vanity' clothes the surrounding poor and feeds the hungry without actually intending to do so. Against Timon's example, Pope essentially poses the alternative principles of deliberation rather than accident, good taste and good sense, rather than waste and pretence. *An Epistle from Mr Pope to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735) equally catalogues a series of vexations and it attempts, with a new urgency, to define the nature of right action as opposed to wrong, good literature as against bad. The tone of the poem is initially more informal, but as it moves into embittered verbal assaults on personal and public enemies it develops into an indictment of a shabby and corrupt society from which the true artist remains detached and withdrawn. The *Epistle to Arbuthnot* splutters its protest with a controlled, disciplined, but none the less bitter wit. The specific objects of its attack, most notably Addison ('Atticus' who damns with faint praise, assents with civil leer 'and without sneering, teach[es] the rest to sneer') and Lord Hervey ('Sporus', a 'Bug with gilded wings' whose 'Eternal Smiles his Emptiness betray', and a Toad who 'half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad'), are perceived as symptoms of a general social and aesthetic malaise.

Pope's two most sustained narrative satires, *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, expanded 1714) and *The Dunciad* (1728, expanded and revised 1742–3), show the extent to which his savage verbal assaults on society and its shortcomings increased as both his reputation, and the objects of his acrimony, grew. *The Rape of the Lock*, ostensibly an undercutting of the 'dire Offence' which arose from 'trivial' things, takes on the weight of a criticism of the manners of aristocratic society as observed by an amused friend. His delight in domesticizing the epic and debunking the heroic is evident throughout. The mighty angels of *Paradise Lost* are diminished to the 'light *Militia* of the lower Sky', fluttering sylphs who complicate the amorous games played out by the human actors; the ceremonial arming of the heroes of Homer and Virgil is parodied in the description of Belinda at her dressing table, and the descent to the Cave of Spleen in Canto IV offers a sly and sexually knowing variation on classical

visions of the Underworld. If, superficially, the poem undermines pomposity, on another level it serves to expose false or inverted values. It sees the relations between men and women reduced by social conventions to a battle in which beauty is a weapon and reputation merely a defence.

The Dunciad engages in a far less courtly battle for souls and minds, a battle with often equally trivial causes but with far more serious and universal consequences. The first version of the poem, in three books, established its anti-heroic, mock-epic ambitions immediately by parodying in its own first phrase Dryden's translation of the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid*. As completed by the addition of a further book and by a radical overhaul of the text in 1743, this parodic element was expanded by the introduction of an up-ended and debunked heroic triumph. The symbolic implications of an epic procession, shot through with those of the Lord Mayor of London's annual ceremonial progress from the City to Westminster, are overturned in a heterogeneous vision of the coronation of the goddess of Dullness, the patron of dunces and the destroyer of order and the intellect. The poem as a whole offers an apocalyptic vision of the dire consequences of the union of the shabby literary values of Grub Street, the money values of the City, and the corruption of the court and its ministers. If elsewhere in his verse Pope had attempted to uphold the ideals of reasonableness, good sense, and balance, here each ideal is overturned and the dunces come into their own. He is neither sparring with personal enemies, nor simply sporting with human folly; he is contemplating the threat of a final triumph of Chaos brought about by human ignorance and desuetude. Dullness is more than the 'Mother of Arrogance, and the Source of Pride', the genius of pride, selfishness, and stupidity, she is also the anti-*Logos*, the disorderer of a divinely tidy universe. The last lines of the poem shudder with horror at the prospective undoing of heaven and earth:

> *Religion* blushing veils her sacred fires,
> And unawares *Morality* expires.
> Nor *public* Flame, nor *private*, dares to shine;
> Nor *human* Spark is left, nor Glimpse *divine*!
> Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;
> Light dies before thy uncreating word:
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And Universal Darkness buries All.

In his earlier dialogue poem, the *Epilogue to the Satires* of 1738, Pope had responded to questions about his motivation as a satirist with the assertion that his provocation lay in the 'strong Antipathy of Good to Bad' and in his personal reaction to general affronts to 'Truth' and 'Virtue'. The fourth book of *The Dunciad* explores what to Pope and many of his contemporaries was the most provocative, antipathetic, and affronting of concepts, the wilful undoing of the Newtonian universe and the eclipse of rational light by the darkness of ignorance.

Thomson and Akenside: The Poetry of Nature and the Pleasures of the Imagination

When Isaac Newton died in 1727 James Thomson, already celebrated as the author of *Winter* and *Summer*, produced what is perhaps the finest of the numerous adulatory elegies written to the memory of the man who 'diffusive saw | The finished university of things | In all its order, magnitude and parts'. Thomson (1700–48), the son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister and a former student of divinity at Edinburgh University, had migrated to London in 1725. In the metropolis he had become a tutor at Watts's Academy, a popular disseminator of Newtonian science. His poetry consistently intermixed expressions of a delight in physics and optics, a pleasure in observing landscape, a genial optimism, and the kind of vague but rational theology which drifts towards a creedless deism. Thomson is not a profound or original thinker. He is essentially an assimilator of current modes of thought, scientific, aesthetic, and philosophical, and a poet who found creative stimulus in a variety of received ways of observing both nature and society. *To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton* exhibits a subdued rapture in contemplating natural law and offers a view of Newton's perceptions as outclassing the visions of both poets and philosophers. The body of Thomson's encyclopaedic, moralizing masterpiece, *The Seasons*, however, suggests a poet variously indebted to the model of the Latin pastoral, to the weight and rhythm of Milton's blank verse, to the social philosophy of that 'friend of man', Shaftesbury, and to the generally received theories of the so-called physico-theologians.

As is the case with many other long eighteenth-century poems, *The Seasons* grew in size and scope over some twenty years. It was systematically revised and reshaped over the same period. Its revisions reflect Thomson's growing awareness of an overall poetic design, a design expressive not simply of seasonal progression but also of a grander, overarching and all-inclusive natural order. *Winter*, first published as a poem of 405 lines in 1726, was expanded later in the same year and again in 1728, 1730, and 1744; the most substantial of the sections, *Summer*, of 1727, was steadily enlarged in the same years; *Spring* appeared in 1728 and, with the addition of Autumn, was republished with the earlier poems in a collected edition of 1730. The last edition of *The Seasons* published in Thomson's lifetime, that of 1746, which contains some 5,541 lines, proved hugely popular and, in its numerous translations, highly influential on other European literature (in a German version it formed the basis of Haydn's *Die Jahreszeiten* of 1801). The distinction of the poem was recognized as lying both in the diversity and didacticism of its meditations and in its relatively novel foregrounding of landscape. Thomson's particular response to landscape is conditioned both by his acute sensitivity to the effects of light (a sensitivity shaped by Newton's *Opticks*) and by his sense of the economic centrality of agriculture. The wonders of the divine order are

implicit not simply in the detailed observations of the workings of nature and in imaginative evocations of diverse climates, contours, and tropics, but also in the frequent reference to the harmony established between human exploitation of the land and a divine plan for creation. Throughout *The Seasons* great emphasis is laid on the interrelationship, and not the conflict, of the interests of the country and the town; national prosperity is tied to pictures of agricultural well-being. Nature, the 'vast Lyceum', is a grand encircling theatre of education, but, as Thomson's frequent recourse to descriptions of happy, therapeutic walks in the rustic environs of London suggest, he is insistent on the co-operative functioning of civilization. London is in a sense framed by the working landscape from which its real fortunes are drawn. That working landscape is not simply that of the Home Counties, but includes all the fertile island of Britain.

As the opening section of *Autumn* stresses, human society has progressively evolved from a state of barbarity to one where it has become 'numerous, high, polite, | And happy', where there is a constructive balance of agrarian productivity and urban trade. Mercantile enterprise is confidently interpreted not as an interference with a natural organism but as the crowning achievement of the harmonious interaction of man and nature: 'All is the gift of Industry,– whate'er | Exalts, embellishes, and renders life | Delightful.' There is no room for noble savages in Thomson's landscapes; his retrospects and his prospects are equally conditioned by a sense of a modern civilization which is as inevitable as it is desirable. *Spring* concludes with a picture of a happy family compassed around by 'all various Nature pressing on the heart' and happily sustained by

> An elegant sufficiency, content,
> Retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books,
> Ease and alternate labour, useful life,
> Progressive virtue, and approving Heaven!

Thomson's choice of the adjectives 'polite', to describe human society, and 'elegant', attached to the idea of economic sufficiency, and his stress on retirement and the place of books in his account of family life indicate the degree to which he trusted to social as opposed to solitary virtue, to philosophy rather than to a creative impulse derived directly from nature. His responses to the natural world are related to the way it had been perceived by civilized and bookish observers. If the structure of the individual sections of *The Seasons* harks back to the intertwining of the pastoral, the patriotic, and the philosophical in Virgil's *Georgics* (the 'rural scenes, such as the Mantuan swain | Paints in the matchless harmony of song'), and if his idealization of individual figures in his landscapes remains both conventional and moral, Thomson's wide-ranging reference and his evident interest in classification suggest his immediate debt to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science. His frequent resort to periphrasis in, for example, differentiating between the 'wanderers of

heaven' and the 'household feathery people' (wild and domesticated birds) or his references to the 'milky drove' (cows) and 'finny swarms' (herrings) should be seen both as a reflection of Latinate convention and, more importantly, as an attempt to suggest the place of each creature in the natural system. Similarly, the periodically expressed criticism of a supposed lack of method in each of *The Seasons* ignores the ordering principles dictated both by Thomson's reference to a tidy cosmic scheme and by the steadiness of his own tone. What might appear to be digressions concerning the extremes of the torrid zones of Africa and Asia in *Summer* or the excursive glimpse of Russian snows in *Winter*, in fact serve as contrived contrasts which point up the blessings of the temperate climate of north-western Europe. His paeans to philosophy and English learning and literature are attempts to place his own work in a national and international context; his play with colour and the effects of light are intended to reflect a vital force, and even the very order in which the poems were finally placed (from *Spring* to *Winter*) serves as an extended metaphor of transience and sequence in the created order. Newton's science had proclaimed the importance of sight as the basis of intellectual and imaginative speculation. Thomson's poetry stems from trained observation and a blend of the didactic and the descriptive. It offers a broad view of the ultimate rightness of things by exploring images of the vastness, the delicacy, and the multifariousness of the cosmos.

Mark Akenside's poetry generally lacks the fluid dignity of Thomson's. At its worst, his style can be pompous and sententious, and his most substantial work, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744, republished as *The Pleasures of the Imagination*) is, despite its title, more an essay in poetic grandiloquence than a persuasive discourse on creative visualization. Akenside (1721–70), a physician by profession, is at his best when he writes with restraint. His nocturnal ode 'To the Evening-Star' (published posthumously in 1772), though larded with classical epithet and allusion, has a certain elegant regularity and self-conscious serenity, qualities evident too in his modestly learned 'retirement' poem 'Inscription for a Grotto' (1758). *The Pleasures of Imagination* is a lengthy, discursive, and often rhapsodic celebration of the imaginative faculty. It moralizes more than it defines and it delights more in the 'complicated joy' derived from the contemplation of grandeur than it really attempts to unravel imaginative complexity. It parallels the philosophy of *An Essay on Criticism* and the inclusiveness of *The Seasons*, but it lacks the poetry of both. Nevertheless, the poem contains passages of real clarity and steady invention, notably in its excursion in the third book in which Akenside attempts to expound a series of ideas associated with poetic creation (lines 312–436) and when, in his fragmentary fourth book, he dwells nostalgically on his early memories of the valley of the Tyne 'when all alone, for many a summer's day | I wandered through your calm recesses, led | In silence by some powerful hand unseen'.

Other Pleasures of Imagination: Dennis, Addison, and Steele

The older critic, John Dennis (1657–1734), proved to be one of the prime irritants to Alexander Pope's spleen. In *An Essay on Criticism* Pope had generally alluded to 'Some [who] have at first for *Wits* then *Poets* past, | Turn'd *Criticks* next, and prov'd plain *Fools* at last', and had, more specifically, insulted Dennis under the name of Appius (one of the characters in his recent dramatic flop *Appius and Virginia*). Not one to take such comments placidly, Dennis replied with the equally provocative, but more unpleasantly personal, *Critical and Satirical Reflections upon a late Rhapsody call'd, An essay upon Criticism*. Pope took further revenge by adding a note to his own poem referring to 'a furious old Critic by profession, who upon no other provocation, wrote against this Essay and its author, in a manner perfectly lunatic'. The feud continued up to the time of the revised *Dunciad*. Such vituperative, tit-for-tat critical sparring was not untypical of the period. Regardless of Pope's venom, and despite serious temporary fluctuations in his reputation, Dennis the critic, if not Dennis the poet and dramatist, has remained modestly influential. He wrote with a blithe confidence in his own cleverness and in the correctness of the strict neo-classical principles he had espoused, but much of the continuing interest in his work lies in its novel concern with the nature of the Sublime (though Pope mocked his overuse of the word 'tremendous'). His essays on poetry, notably *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), offer analyses of the processes of poetic creation and explore the idea of a creativity based in passion and emotion. Although Dennis insists that 'there is nothing in Nature that is great and beautiful without Rule and Order' he also speaks of the inspirational quality of 'delightful Horrour' and 'terrible Joy' and remarks that 'if the chief Thing in Poetry be Passion, why then, the chief Thing in great Poetry must be great Passion'. He was a convinced admirer of Milton and was one of the earliest writers to attempt a detailed, critical analysis of *Paradise Lost*. The *Three Letters on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare* (1711) offer a more stilted, erratic, even blinkered, view of an admired poet. He is happy to attack the anomalies and the historical inconsistencies in Shakespeare's plays, and he is perturbed by what he sees as deficiencies in their 'design', but he none the less responds enthusiastically to the 'raising of terror' in the tragedies.

To Dennis's younger contemporary, Joseph Addison (1672–1719), writing in one of a series of essays on 'the Pleasures of the Imagination' published in *The Spectator* in the summer of 1712, Shakespeare's 'noble extravagance of fancy' thoroughly qualified him to touch the 'weak superstitious part of his reader's imagination'. Addison's criticism shows him to be fascinated by the 'very odd turn of thought required' for what Dryden had earlier styled 'the fairy way of writing', the delineation of imaginary or supernatural beings. Although he

classes 'the pleasures of the imagination' at a mid-point between the grosser 'pleasures of sense' and the refined 'pleasures of the understanding', he insists that his contemporaries should begin to question neo-classical critical prejudices and grant precedence to the workings of the imagination in the writer and the reader alike. He allows, for example, that the complementary insights of Newton and Locke had altered modern perceptions of the relationship between the observed object and the apprehension of the imagination. With Dennis, Addison grants that greatness in nature inspires greatness in art, but he goes on to suggest that though 'the works of Nature [are] more pleasant to the imagination than those of art' they are 'still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of art' and that, conversely, works of art are more pleasant 'the more they resemble those of Nature'. These interrelationships, Addison implies, are self-evident in an educated observation of creation. The imaginative faculty has been implanted in humankind by a loving Creator 'so that it is impossible for us to behold his works with coldness or indifference, and to survey so many beauties without a secret satisfaction and complacency'.

The 1712 essays on the imagination, and the notable series of Saturday essays on the genius of Milton of the same year, are attempts to refine public taste by offering short, reasoned, and accessible articles on ancient and modern literature. They also aim to interlink the study of literature with scientific theory, with recent developments in philosophical, political, and moral thought, and with the pervasive religious optimism of the period. Addison defines taste as 'that faculty of the soul, which discerns the beauties of an author with pleasure, and the imperfections with dislike'. In other words, 'taste' is the result of the refinement of a susceptible natural faculty. 'Conversation with men of a polite genius', he further affirms, 'is another method for improving our natural taste' and it was in the role of 'the polite genius', the embodiment of the refined spirit of the age, that he habitually cast himself. Addison, the self-appointed definer of cultural rules and cultural boundaries for a broad spectrum of society, consistently returned to the idea of inner assurance contained in his expression 'secret satisfaction and complacency'. This assurance was essentially religious in origin. It has all too readily been confused with an easy, spiritual smugness. Addison's is an amiable religion, dually founded on a sense of the just proportions of the observed world and on a projection of private justification. It elevates morality over faith and Newtonian physics over revelation; it prefers 'strong, steady, masculine piety' to the kind of 'enthusiasm' and 'zeal' which Addison all too readily related to the anti-social spiritual vices of 'Pride, Interest and Ill-nature'.

Addison was an insistent popular propagator of what he took to be 'the best ideas' of his time. In the tenth number of the highly influential daily journal, *The Spectator* (co-founded with Richard Steele in March 1711), he published what is virtually a manifesto of his aims: 'I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses.' Clubs and coffee-houses, both the subjects of *Spectator* essays, had proliferated in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London. With the relative decline of both the court influence and a court culture they offered non-aristocratic male cliques an important focus for discussion and debate. These informal institutions never came to rival the salons of the French nobility as centres of intellectual life, nor did they ever serve to disseminate knowledge on the scale with which they were once credited, but their members did provide the kind of normative, influential model on which Addison and Steele based the assumed reader of their journals. The success of their assumption seemed proven in their calculation that each issue of *The Spectator* was reaching some 60,000 readers in London alone. 'Mr Spectator', who purportedly wrote these papers, was a man of broad education, well-travelled and politically alert. Around him there was gathered a small club representative of different aspects of modern English life, a club which included the Tory country squire (Sir Roger de Coverley), the rich, Whiggish, City merchant (Sir Andrew Freeport), the army officer (Captain Sentry), and the man-about-town (Will Honeycomb). Sir Roger's provincial idiosyncrasies are described with an amused tolerance intended both to divert a sophisticated London audience and gently to laugh eccentric Tory backwoodsmen out of their old-fashioned and benighted prejudices. The optimistic tone of the assumptions of 'Mr Spectator' is that of a thoroughgoing metropolitan supporter of the 'Glorious Revolution' settlement, though he rarely expresses a direct political opinion and generally prefers to avoid controversy. He interests himself in financial and international affairs, approvingly observing the actions and opinions of Sir Andrew Freeport at the Exchange and in his transactions in a London that has developed into 'a kind of emporium for the whole earth'. He is proudly patriotic, insularly confident about the opening future, and modestly progressive (though he tends to look down on women as frivolous, ostentatious, and ill-educated). Essentially he is Addison's ideal persona, the observant generalizer who seeks out the serenity of the middle way, the educated common man speaking directly to, and on behalf of, his less articulate fellows. He is the father of British journalism.

Addison's sometime fellow-student and later literary collaborator, the Dublin-born Sir Richard Steele (1672–1729), has often been unjustly relegated to a place in his shadow. Steele's professional life was complex, colourful, and often contradictory. If much that he wrote has failed to find a sympathetic audience in the twentieth century it is not for lack of variety. After a brief, but successful, career as a rakish officer in the Coldstream Guards he produced his worthy treatise, *The Christian Hero: An Argument proving that no Principles but those of Religion are Sufficient to make a great Man* (1701). The military life, he explained to his readers, was 'exposed to much Irregularity' and his principled tract was specifically designed to fix upon his own mind impressions of religion and virtue as opposed to 'a stronger Propensity towards unwarrantable Pleasures'. *The Christian Hero*, which steadily rejects stoicism in favour of Christian

morality, found relatively little favour with Steele's unregenerate brother officers; its appearance had, he wryly noted, 'no good effect but that from which being thought no undelightful companion, he was soon reckoned a disagreeable fellow'. Perhaps stimulated by this social ostracism, a strain of missionary endeavour ran through much of his subsequent journalism. Steele's *The Tatler*, which ran from April 1709 to January 1711, announced itself as a journal that was 'principally intended for the Use of Politick Persons who are so publick-spirited as to neglect their own Affairs to look into Transactions of State'. It did not really live up to these ambitions, choosing instead, with Addison's help, to amuse readers with 'accounts of Gallantry, Pleasure and Entertainment'. The editor's literary persona, spokesman and earnest advocate of ethical propriety, Isaac Bickerstaff, was borrowed from Swift but in Steele's hands he becomes an admonisher of dissolute London, the checker of 'Rakes and Debauchees . . . Thoughtless Atheists and Illiterate Drunkards . . . Banterers, Biters, Swearers, and Twenty new-born Insects . . . the Men of Modern Wit'. As a contributor to *The Spectator*, Steele proved a censorious critic of the drama, putting down the moral excesses of the Restoration stage in favour of the soberer joys of Terence. It is scarcely surprising that Fielding's Parson Adams should have found Steele's own later comedies, such as the highly moral *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), 'almost sober enough for a sermon'.

Gay and the Drama of the Early Eighteenth Century

Of the scores of classical and modern tragedies, comedies, pastorals, burlesques, and adaptations of foreign plays written for the London stage in the first half of the eighteenth century only one, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, has remained a standard repertory piece in the twentieth century. Although certain plays of the period retained both a high reputation as texts, and a popular appeal in performance, well into the Victorian age, their one-time fame has been virtually eclipsed by that of their predecessors, the sexually charged Restoration comedies, and by their immediate successors, the romantic comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith. The dramatic work of Colley Cibber (1671–1757), the prime butt of Pope's satire in the fourth book of *The Dunciad*, forms something of a bridge between the licence of the Restoration stage and the soberer values advocated by Steele. Cibber's early plays may parallel those of Vanbrugh and Farquhar, but, as his *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber, Comedian* insists in 1740, 'nothing is more liable to debase and corrupt the Minds of a People, than a licentious Theatre', a situation which, Cibber claimed, could be corrected only 'under a just, and proper Establishment' which would render it 'the School of Manners and of Virtue'. Largely through his example, first established in *Love's Last Shift* in 1696, a sentimental romantic comedy, shorn of harsh wit and rakishness, gradually emerged as an acceptable norm. Cibber's other comedies, notably *Love Makes A Man* (1700), *She Would and She Would Not* (1702), and *The Careless Husband* (1704), equally suggest a playwright determined to avoid coarseness and to proclaim the chastening merits of experience. His virtually unrecognizable adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe*—*The Non-Juror* of 1717—is little more than an anti-Jacobite squib centred on the devilish plots of Dr Wolf. Cibber's tragedies, *Xerxes* (1699) and *Caesar in Ægypt* (1724), could be said to justify Pope's elevation of him to the throne of Dullness, but his once popular, if very loose, version of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1700) suggests, by way of contrast, that he possessed a real grasp of melodramatic action.

Addison's once highly esteemed and financially successful venture into tragedy, *Cato* (1713), deals with the stoical principles of the Roman republican who determines to commit suicide rather than submit to the tyranny of the victorious Caesar. In the fourth-act crisis of the play, Cato prophesies that his son, sacrificed to the cause of the Republic, will not have died in vain: 'The firm patriot there, | Who made the welfare of mankind his care, | Though still by faction, vice and fortune cost, | Shall find the gen'rous labour was not lost.' This was precisely the kind of sentiment that assured the popularity of the play with those Whigs who sought historic justification for the Glorious Revolution that they had engineered in Britain. A similar proclamation of the patriotic virtue of liberty runs through Nicholas Rowe's tragedy *Tamerlane* (1701), a new interpretation of the triumphs of the all-conquering Tamerlane quite distinct from Marlowe's. Rowe (1674–1718) identifies his hero with the supposedly enlightened William III, casting him as a champion of liberty in opposition to the wicked machinations of Bajazet, all too readily recognizable as Louis XIV. Far more psychologically probing is Rowe's long-admired *The Fair Penitent* (1703), the story of the misfortunes of the 'false and fair' Calista and her seducer, the 'haughty, gallant, gay Lothario'. The play shifts away from the rhetorical flourishes and fustian declamations of established forms of heroic tragedy towards a greater delicacy of expression and a newly intimate exploration of complex and ambiguous relationships. This espousal of intimacy may well have been dictated by the more compact design of the new London theatres in which Rowe worked. Like his two later costume dramas, *Jane Shore* (1714) and *Lady Jane Grey* (1715), *The Fair Penitent* opened up heroic opportunities for a new generation of women actors and revealed a profound sympathy with historical women trapped in political or emotional situations over which they had little control. That Samuel Richardson should echo Calista's woes and Lothario's recklessness in his essentially bourgeois novel *Clarissa* (1747–9) is a tribute to Rowe's impact on the developing cultural consciousness of eighteenth-century women.

The comedies of Susanna Centlivre (?1670–1723) and George Lillo's domestic tragedy *The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell* (1731) suggest the degree to which the early eighteenth-century theatre responded to the values and preoccupations of the urban middle class as distinct from the manners and aspirations of an aristocratic or court culture. Centlivre had a

notable professional success despite the dominance of the male playwright and the male impresario over the contemporary stage. Her sixteen full-length plays generally reveal an adroit grasp of stagecraft, character, and incident, but even the two fine late comedies, *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714) and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), have received relatively little attention in the twentieth century. *A Bold Stroke* deals with the need for its heroine, Anne Lovely, to gain the consent of her four guardians to her marriage to Colonel Fainwell. The inventive Fainwell's impersonation of a preposterous Quaker preacher from Pennsylvania is finally exposed by the arrival of 'the real Simon Pure', an incident which gave a once-current phrase to the English language and established an archetype much exploited by later writers. George Lillo (1693–1739) created in *The London Merchant* a highly original, energetic, and dramatically powerful study of fatal obsession. George Barnwell, an apprentice to the London tradesman, Thorowgood, is seduced by a whore, and persuaded by her to rob his employer and finally to murder his own uncle. When the misdeeds of both are exposed, Barnwell earnestly repents, but his bolder, socially conscious accomplice goes to her death denouncing her accusers with the words: 'The judge who condemns the poor man for being a thief, had been a thief himself had he been poor—Thus you may go on deceiving and deceived, harassing, plaguing, and destroying one another. But women are your universal prey.' The play's urban victims, potential and real, are all endued with the kind of dramatic dignity associated elsewhere with noblemen. *The London Merchant*'s celebration of bourgeois values, through the figure and sentiments of Thorowgood, and its moments of proto-feminist defiance, have an idiomatic directness which contrasts vividly with the rhythmical posturing of much contemporary heroic tragedy.

The work of John Gay (1685–1732) suggests a more general restlessness with inherited forms, heroic assumptions, and imposed classical rules. Gay's steady attraction to theatrical burlesque was probably accentuated by his close association with Swift and Pope in the informal grouping of the Scriblerus Club, a gathering of like-minded, and predominantly Tory, writers who were determined to debunk pretensions to 'false tastes in learning'. *Three Hours after Marriage*, a collaborative satire jointly written by Gay, Pope, and John Arbuthnot (1667–1735) in 1717, is rich in passages of *double entendre* and in caricature, both direct and indirect. Colley Cibber, who played Plotwell in the original production, is said to have only belatedly realized that his stage role was a comment on his own literary pretensions, while Sir Tremendous, whose plays raised 'the pity of the audience on the first night, and the terror of the author for the third . . . and have rais'd a sublimer passion, astonishment', was a dig at the old enemy, John Dennis. Gay's earlier comedy *The What D'Ye Call It: A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce* (1715) had attempted to expose the falsity of heroic assumptions in drama both by mocking the diction of couplet tragedy and by suggesting the incongruity of the setting of its absurd play-within-a-play. *The Beggar's Opera* of 1728 quite transcends the contrived silliness of these two

earlier plays. Its continuing appeal to audiences may be due to its extensive borrowings of English folk and ballad tunes (originally introduced as a means of exposing the pomposity of contemporary Italian opera), but its real satiric bite lies in its exuberant reversal of political and moral values and in its undoing of conventional theatrical expectations. This so-called 'Newgate Pastoral', the theme of which was suggested to Gay by Swift, explores the corrupt ways of the criminal underworld while subversively suggesting parallels between them and the shady manœuvres of politicians. Incongruity thus becomes the key. If grand London society considered that its culture was enhanced by the posturing of operatic castrati, so Gay poked fun both at potent grandees and at the impotent objects of their admiration. To Gay's contemporaries, the character of the thief-taker Peachum (who is first observed 'sitting at a table, with a large Book of Accounts before him') stood both for the famous criminal Jonathan Wild and for that other arch-manipulator, the Whig Prime Minister, Walpole. The play consistently suggests embarrassing parallels between high life and low life. It represents the beggary, roguery, whoring, and thieving of the poor while implying that the same vices determine how power is manipulated by the ruling class. Power does not simply corrupt, it is seen as the stuff of corruption.

Gay's poetry has been comparatively neglected. *Rural Sports* of 1708 and *The Shepherd's Week* of 1714 suggest a writer experimenting both with the bucolic and with a burlesque commentary on Arcadian escapism and Arcadian moonshine (though he returned to Arcady in a more serious mood in his majority contribution to the libretto of Handel's *Acis and Galatea* of 1718). Gay's finest achievement in verse, *Trivia: or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), abandons the pastoral in favour of a novel urban 'eclogue', a gentle reversal of the taste for rustic idylls. The three books of the poem abruptly shift rural conventions to the town and they wittily exploit the disjunction of a mannered verse and the essential indiscipline of London. They blend a lofty, Latinate solemnity of tone with detailed topographic observation. Trivia, the pretended goddess of the Highways, serves as a Muse leading the narrator through familiar mazes and hazards, from back lanes to thoroughfares, from day to night, from the underworld to the world of fashion, and back again to the raucous, untidy lives of tradesmen and hawkers.

Defoe and the 'Rise' of the Novel

One theme in particular echoes through Daniel Defoe's great topographical account *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* of 1724–6. That theme is of pride in the steady and visible growth of the prosperity and well-being of the newly united kingdom. When, for example, he arrives in Reading he notes 'a very large and wealthy town, handsomely built, the inhabitants rich, and driving a very great trade'; he finds Liverpool 'one of the wonders of Britain'

which still 'visibly increases both in wealth, people, business and buildings'; Exeter is famous for its being 'full of gentry, and good company, and yet full of trade and manufactures'; Leeds, too, is 'a large, wealthy and populous town'; and Glasgow, since the Union of Scotland with England and the consequent opening up of the Atlantic trade, has become 'the cleanest and beautifullest and best built city in Britain, London excepted'. Defoe's evident satisfaction at this evidence of national economic success is not confined to the market towns of the south and the burgeoning manufacturing cities of the north, though it does tend to emphasize urban activity as opposed to agricultural enterprise. The view of London from its southern suburbs obliges him to seek for superlatives. London offers 'the most glorious sight without exception, that the whole world at present can show, or perhaps could ever show since the sacking of Rome in the European, and the burning the Temple of Jerusalem in the Asian part of the world'. As his *Tour* steadily reveals, Defoe is an informed, scrupulous, and sometimes boastful observer of an expanding nation, but he is systematically drawn back, both in imagination and in fact, to the magnet of his native London. London is his reference point and the gauge by which he measures the quality of the trade, the expanding merchant class, and the new architectural development of the provinces.

The claim made by successive generations of literary historians and critics that Defoe (1660–1725) is the first true master of the English novel has only limited validity. His prose fiction, produced in his late middle age, sprang from an experimental involvement in other literary forms, most notably the polemic pamphlet, the biography, the history and, latterly, the travel-book. His novels included elements of all of these forms. Nor was he the only begetter of a form which it is now recognized had a long succession of both male and female progenitors. He may, in *Robinson Crusoe* (probably his 412th work), have perfected an impression of realism by adapting Puritan self-confession narratives to suit the mode of a fictional moral tract, but he would in no sense have seen that he was pioneering a new art form. Nor would he necessarily have seen fiction as superior to, or distinct from, his essays in instructive biography such as his lives of Peter the Great and Duncan Campbell, the deaf and dumb conjuror. Defoe was merely mastering and exploiting a literary form of various and uncertain origins. He would probably not have recognized the kinship to his own fiction of *Crusoe*'s vast and diverse progeny.

That the art of prose fiction developed prodigiously in the years 1720–80, and that its potential as both instructor and entertainer was readily recognized by a new body of largely middle-class readers, are matters of little debate. Defoe's fascinated awareness of the increase in the population and the prosperity of Britain in the years following the 'Glorious Revolution' and the Act of Union can be related to his responsiveness to the immediate audience for his books. As a mercantile and manufacturing class grew, so, concomitantly, did literacy and leisure. The wives and daughters of tradesmen were rarely employed in any form of business; their marginally better educated sisters in

the professional classes and the provincial gentry were equally likely to have a good deal of enforced leisure. Those readers who had been alienated from courtly styles either by an inherited Puritan earnestness or by the simple fact of their social class and education, proved particularly receptive to an easily assimilated, but morally serious, 'realist' literature. If heroic prejudices were gradually rejected in the theatre by self-assured metropolitan audiences permeated by commercial, professional, and ethical codes of value, so the English novel appears to have developed in response to a demand for a new kind of literature which emphasized the significance of private experience. It cannot be argued that the central characters in the novels of the first half of the century are drawn exclusively from the middle classes, but few are aristocrats and none are monarchs. Tyranny and murder are domesticated; usurpation is replaced by disputes over title-deeds, entails, and codicils; courtship and marriage become affairs of the heart not of the state, and the death-bed enters the English novel as death on the battlefield exits. Even the panoply of the funeral, a major concern of Richardson's dying Clarissa, is democratized.

Defoe's long experience of the vagaries of official censorship and the book-trade clearly stood him in good stead when he began a vigorous new phase in his career with *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. The earlier stages of his career are marked by abrupt twists and entanglements which took him from his respectable origins as a Presbyterian tradesman in London, through an active espousal of the doomed rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth and the more propitious cause of William of Orange, to employment as a government spy. His first literary success, *The True-Born Englishman* (1701), an anti-xenophobic plea for the acceptance of a foreign king and his Dutch friends, was overshadowed by the reaction to the transparently ironic pamphlet *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702). Having attempted to win sympathy for his Dissenting co-religionists, in a particularly volatile political atmosphere, with the hyperbolical argument that Dissenters should simply be exterminated, Defoe found himself the immediate object of state persecution. His pamphlet was publicly burned and its author imprisoned and exposed in the pillory. After a period as founder of, and chief contributor to, the thrice-weekly newspaper *The Review* (from 1704), he became an undercover agent for the Government, monitoring Scottish responses to the proposed Union. This Scottish episode provided material both for his *Tour* and for his *History of the Union* of 1709. *Robinson Crusoe* differs from most of Defoe's earlier works in that it represents private moral zeal rather than a public plea for reform; propaganda it may be, but its emphasis is on spiritual rather than on political justice. Robinson Crusoe 'of York, Mariner' gives over only some two-thirds of his narrative to his life on his desert island, but the account of those twenty-eight years forms the most compelling section of his memoirs. He is an ideal choice of narrator given the extraordinary nature of his experiences. Crusoe is 'of good family' and because of his sound education 'not bred to any trade'. His decision to go to sea is an act of rebellion, determined on in defiance to both his mother

and his father, and from it he traces his withdrawal from grace and his embarkation on the slow, painful redemptive journey back to a state of grace. Although Crusoe's self-exploratory time on his island, his cultivation of the land and of his soul, and his later imposition of his codes of belief and action on Friday, have frequently been interpreted as a fictional enactment of the processes of European colonization, his story has both a particular and a more universal application. When his island is 'peopled' by Friday and by Friday's father and a Spanish sailor (both of them rescued from the cannibals) Crusoe thinks of himself as a king with 'an undoubted right of dominion', an 'absolute Lord and Law-giver'. As such, however, he establishes a principle which many contemporary Europeans would have regarded as offensively radical: a 'Liberty of Conscience' which tolerates pagan, Protestant, and Catholic alike. It was not a principle that was fully established in contemporary Britain. More significantly, Crusoe's earlier heroism is that of the ordinary human will pitted against an alien environment; as far as he can, he brings his surroundings under his rational and practical control not as a proto-colonist but as a lonely exile. He records his experiences and his achievements meticulously, even repetitively, because he is logging the nature of his moral survival. He is the methodical diarist delighted both by his own resourcefulness and by his awareness that a benign God helps those who help themselves.

Crusoe's *Further Adventures*, published later in the same year, do not live up to the promise of the earlier volume. Defoe's cultivated ease in exploiting the first-person narrative form, as an imitation either of a journal or of confessional memoirs, is, however, evident in the flood of fiction he published between 1720 and 1724. Both *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) and *The Fortunate Mistress* (generally known as *Roxana*) (1724) have much-abused, belatedly penitent, entrepreneurial women as narrators. Moll, born in prison, zestfully and practically recounts her dubious liaisons with husbands, lovers, and seducers, and her progress through thievery to transportation to Virginia and final financial and emotional happiness. Hers is a difficult, but none the less upward, social and moral progress which contrasts sharply with that of the *demi-mondaine* heroine of the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731). If Moll's memoirs somewhat awkwardly suggest a rather too meticulous retrospect on a period of personal disorder, those of Roxana reveal a duller process of self-description. Roxana declines from respectability, partly through the disgraceful treatment meted out to her by the men on whom she relies, partly through her own, highly selfish, sense of self-preservation. When she announces in her Preface that 'all imaginable Care has been taken to keep clear of Indecencies, and immodest Expressions' we sense not only the impact of her soundly Protestant penitence but also that her narrative might be disappointingly elusive and unspecific. The *Adventures of Captain Singleton* (1720) describes the career of a seafarer, initially possessed of 'no sense of virtue or religion', who becomes both mutineer and pirate before discovering the virtues of religion, honest money, and marriage. It is a restless and untidy book but its account of a

fraught journey across central Africa gives it many of the qualities of an adventure story. Defoe's announcement in the Preface to *Moll Flanders* that 'The Fable is always made for the Moral, not the Moral for the Fable' equally applies to *The History of the Remarkable Life of the truly Honourable Colonel Jacque* (commonly called *Colonel Jack*) (1722). Jack's struggles as a child pickpocket in the disorienting and claustrophobic slums of London are described with an almost Hogarthian intensity, an intensity which is strangely dissipated as his experience of the world widens. Much of the problem lies in the narrator's apparent unease with the sins in which he indulges and the consequent pressure to mould the fable as evidence of the ultimate moral. Nevertheless, as Jack himself acknowledges at the end of his narrative, 'Perhaps, when I wrote these things down, I did not foresee that the Writings of our own Stories would be so much the fashion in *England*, or as agreeable to others to read, as I find Custom, and the Humour of the Times has caus'd it to be'. 'One private mean Person's Life', he adds, 'may be many ways made Useful, and Instructing to those who read them, if moral and religious Improvement, and Reflections are made by those that write them.'

Defoe's two remarkable 'historical' narratives can be said to have pre-empted, in some significant ways, the development of the nineteenth-century historical novel. Both *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) and *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1724) are triumphs of the exercise of the historical imagination. The pretended author of the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, Colonel Andrew Newport, is a gentleman officer, first in the German campaigns of the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, during the Thirty Years War and latterly in the service of Charles I during the English Civil War. His descriptions of the siege and sack of Magdeburg and of the battles of Edgehill and Naseby are deliberate and often flatly descriptive (a proper failing, perhaps, in a soldier narrator), but a good deal of the interest of the narrative lies in the distinction Newport draws between his deep loyalty to the person of Gustavus Adolphus and the Protestant cause and his evident lack of fervour for the alliance of Church and King in England. As a rare enough gentleman narrator in Defoe's work, his moments of disillusion reveal him to be drawn more by the obligations of his class than by personal conviction. *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 'observations or memorials of the most remarkable occurrences, as well public as private, which happened in London during the last great visitation in 1665', purports to be written 'by a Citizen who continued all the while in London'. Though no one in Defoe's London realized it, the threat of the return of an epidemic of bubonic plague had largely receded in the eighteenth century. The book was nevertheless intended to serve both as a warning to the present and as an example of endurance and spiritual reassessment in the recent past. The constant citizen observes, records, and analyses; he is both ignorant of causes and disturbed by effects. His account is at once a series of anecdotes and an attempt at computation, but it also works as the narrative of an insider, and as the speculation of 'one private mean Person' faced with an incomprehensible public problem.

The citizen preaches Christian comfort and wonders at the nature of the divine visitation, but he also observes examples of Christian charity in some of his fellow-citizens and patently irreligious self-seeking in others. Despite its occasional randomness and the *longueurs* of its detailing, *The Journal of the Plague Year* remains a remarkable innovatory fictional experiment, an almost disconcerting interplay of voices and statistics, of facts and impressions.

The Mid-Century Novel: Richardson, the Fieldings, Charlotte Lennox

The novels of Henry Fielding (1707–54) and Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), written in the 1740s, form what Richardson himself called 'a new species of writing'. They do not so much reject the autobiographical model established by Defoe as amplify and finally supersede it. Writing in *The Rambler* in 1750, Dr Johnson spoke of works of fiction which 'are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind'. The 'heroick romance', Johnson implied, was now dead and in its place there had sprung up a new prose fiction whose province was 'to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder'. The fiction of the 1740s was ample both in its design and in its appeal. The phenomenal popularity of Richardson's work with readers at home and abroad is well attested. His *Pamela* (the first two volumes of which appeared in 1740) ran through six London editions in its first year of publication and was celebrated by parodies, by an early French translation and, in 1744, by a place on the Vatican's *Index* of prohibited books (where it remained until 1900). *Clarissa* (1747–9) also reached a large European audience in its edited French translation of 1751 (the work of the Abbé Prévost) and through versions in the German and Dutch languages. It was honoured by a fulsome eulogy from Diderot and by the unstinted praise of Rousseau. The ready availability of often expensive novels to the British reading public had been promoted in 1726 by the establishment in Edinburgh of the first circulating library, a move followed in London only in 1740. These circulating libraries, supported by subscribers, rapidly spread to most of the major towns of Britain in response to the needs of those who did not necessarily want to own books and of those who could not afford to do so. New literature in general, and novels in particular, circulated, for a moderate fee, amongst a wide range of readers and the popularity of a book with the customers of a library became, for some two subsequent centuries, a mark of true commercial success and a measure of its popular esteem. The libraries also helped to consolidate national taste by dissolving certain provincial and class distinctions in literature. When that great letter-writer, pioneer feminist, and intellectual snob, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), remarked of *Pamela* that it had become 'the joy of

chambermaids of all nations', she was not merely denigrating Richardson's achievement; she was also paying an indirect tribute to the classless appeal of a new art form.

Richardson came to fiction by an unpredictable route. He was a self-educated London tradesman with little practical knowledge of what would have been called at the time 'polite' society or of 'elegant' literature. He had been apprenticed at the age of 16 to a printer and had risen, by a steady application worthy of Hogarth's industrious apprentice, to two successive marriages to the daughters of former employers and, in 1753, to the Mastership of the Stationers' Company. He confessed in later life that as a boy he had stolen times for the improvement of his mind 'from the hours of Rest and Recreation' granted by a master who grudged them to him. He also took care to buy his own candles 'that I might not in the most trifling instance make my master a sufferer'. If his disclosure sounds more than a little Heepish, his claim to have been in correspondence with a gentleman, greatly his superior in degree, 'and ample of Fortunes, who had he lived, intended high things for me', offers clues as to the nature of Richardson's later fascination with class. In no sense, however, is he a social or moral iconoclast. As a printer and publisher in the 1730s he had been instrumental in the reissue of several of Defoe's works, but his own first publication *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum or Young Man's Pocket Companion* of 1733 is little more than a handbook of ethics for the aspirant lower middle class. The impetus to turn to fiction came, by his own admission, through a commission to write a further manual, a series of 'familiar letters' concerning the problems and circumstances of everyday life which could serve as models to prospective correspondents. Richardson provided ideal letters of consolation, excuses for not lending money, and formal recommendations for wet-nurses and chambermaids, but amongst them he included some seven letters developing the story of a virtuous servant-girl, embarrassed by the sexual attentions of her master, who finally succeeds in marrying her sometime persecutor. *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* sprang directly from this recall of the kind of true story likely to appeal to a self-made man with, what some might see as, a prurient concern with sexual rectitude. *Pamela* was not the first epistolary novel (there seem to have been some hundred earlier novels and stories told in the form of letters) but it proved the most influential. Pamela's story is told partly through long missives to her worthy parents and, when letters become difficult to send, partly through her recourse to her journal. Unlike Robinson Crusoe's, Colonel Jacque's, or Moll Flanders's ostensibly public and retrospectively instructive memoirs, Pamela's letters are private and immediate and a reader of them becomes something of an intruder into her confessions. The reward for Pamela's virtue is the respect, and ultimately the love, of her erstwhile employer, Mr B., but the slow process of the winning of this reward has, from the beginning, persuaded certain of her readers to see her as a calculating hypocrite and an upwardly mobile self-seeker well aware of the marital price of her virtue. These problems are only partly dispelled within a narrative charged

with frustrated sexuality and with the mutual incomprehension of master and servant, man and woman. At a mid-point Pamela can complain to her parents that 'poor people are despised by the proud and rich' and that 'we were all on a footing originally: and many of those gentry, who brag of their ancient blood, would be glad to have it as wholesome and as *really* untainted as ours'. It is both a proclamation of democratic principle and an admission of deference. A similar ambiguity lies at the heart of her proud declaration to Mr B. in Letter XXIV that she is 'Pamela, indeed I am: indeed I am Pamela, *her own-self!*' Despite Richardson's concern with the independence of the individual throughout his work, and despite the moral ennoblement that Pamela finally receives, selfhood, in Richardson's first novel at least, is defined largely through what his heroine is not.

Similar charges cannot be brought against Richardson's masterpiece, the huge but meticulously shaped *Clarissa: or, The History of a Young Lady*. The novel has four major letter-writers, Clarissa Harlowe and her friend Anna Howe, Lovelace and his friend John Belford, and, beyond these four, a host of minor correspondents or note-writers, perceptive and myopic, involved and detached, fluent and semi-literate. *Clarissa* is not merely multi-voiced, it also exploits the narrative potential of multiple viewpoints. If this multiplicity might seem to threaten to explode all attempts at imposed order, Richardson counters this explosive potential with a deliberate chronological discipline. Anna Howe's short opening letter to Clarissa both expresses concern 'for the disturbances that have happened in your Family' and announces a major theme. Although the novel appears to begin *in medias res*, with the news of a duel and 'public talk' of the affair, Anna's letter, which is dated 10 January, is essentially the initiator of a 'private ' expository process which stretches over nearly twelve months and which follows the cycle of the seasons. Clarissa is forced to escape from her home and from an unwanted marriage in spring; she is drugged and raped by her supposed 'deliverer', Lovelace, on Midsummer Night; she dies in December and her death is followed by the fatal wounding of Lovelace in a second duel.

The Harlowes are a successful landed family with recent connections to the City of London. The family is poised for further social promotion if the problem of the dowries of Clarissa and her elder sister can be disposed of; Clarissa's marriage to the physically repulsive, rich, if 'upstart', Mr Solmes therefore seems desirable to all except the prospective bride. Money, class, and competition thus lie at the heart of the manœuvres which serve gradually to isolate Clarissa from her self-seeking family; she is the object first of jealousy, then of personal and economic rancour, finally of active persecution. Her response is to assert her moral integrity as a defence against antipathy and marginalization. The novel's full title asserts that the story will show 'the Distresses that may attend the Misconduct both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage'. This principle is returned to in the Preface (added later) where parents in general are cautioned against 'the undue exercise of their

natural authority over their children in the great article of marriage' and, more significantly, women are warned against preferring a man of pleasure to a man of probity 'upon that dangerous but too commonly received notion that a reformed rake makes the best husband'. The novel consistently demonstrates how authority and power are misused, both by parents and lovers. Although Clarissa is the victim of parental strictures, sibling rivalry, and the physical and spiritual abuse of her lover, she emerges as a model of discretion and conscience and she endures her slow martyrdom with patience and intelligence. She is the first great bourgeois heroine and the first female Protestant saint of fiction. Her seeming protector, her would-be lover, and her diabolically gifted antagonist, Lovelace, is a direct descendant of the aristocratic rakes of Restoration drama. He rejoices in plots, hunts, stratagems, and sieges and he clearly derives a satisfaction from his admission to Belford that 'I love, when I dig a pit, to have my prey tumble in with secure feet and open eyes: then a man can look down upon her, with an, *O-ho, charmer! how came you there?*' Each assault upon the captive Clarissa demands new invention and new ruses; he supposing that she really, if secretly, desires him; she slowly gaining the tragic awareness that she has partly brought ruin on herself. Richardson's skill also lies in his tense, essentially pre-Freudian, perception that attraction and repulsion are not polar opposites in the emotions. Clarissa confesses to Anna Howe that 'men of [Lovelace's] cast are the men that our sex do not *naturally* dislike' and that she could indeed have liked him 'above all men'. As she further acknowledges, 'like and dislike as reason bids us' is not easily practised. Clarissa's emotions as much as her body are violated by Lovelace. The letters which succeed her rape show her reduced to a traumatized incoherence, to anecdotal or fabular attempts to grasp at meaning, and a whole range of typographical devices, dashes, asterisks, and printer's flowers suggest the degree to which her manuscripts are disturbed. When after a long-drawn-out death her last hours and her pious last words are witnessed by the now penitent Belford, further textual disjunctures and lacunae indicate the intensity of his emotional involvement. Clarissa dies a Christian death, having rediscovered the meaning of her sufferings. The narrative, which had opened with Anna Howe's reference to a duel between Clarissa's brother James and Lovelace, comes full circle with a further duel in which Lovelace is mortally wounded. He dies painfully, pronouncing the words 'LET THIS EXPIATE!'

Richardson's third epistolary novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), never satisfyingly emulates the tensions or sustains the anxieties so powerfully evoked in *Clarissa*. Its principal shortcoming lies in the character of its protagonist, the 'Good Man' about whom the novelist's friends had urged him to write. The novel begins promisingly with the world of high society opening to an *ingénue* (a theme which attracted Fanny Burney later in the century) but it is marred once the priggish virtue of Grandison breathes its petrifying breath over the narrative. The former *ingénue*, Harriet Byron, is rescued from an attempted abduction at the hands of yet another rake by the

upright Sir Charles, and she in turn proves instrumental in lovingly delivering him from the complications of an amatory obligation to an Italian, and worse, Catholic, lady. Everything remains deadeningly proper. *Grandison*'s strengths lie in its relatively fast movement and in its occasionally successful social comedy but these are not merits which sufficiently redeem it in the eyes of its many detractors (though it was admired above Richardson's other novels by both Jane Austen and George Eliot).

Henry Fielding, an early and contemptuous detractor of *Pamela*, found himself so overwhelmed by *Clarissa* that he was obliged to write to Richardson in 1749 to express his enthusiasm for its fifth volume. 'Let the overflows of a Heart which you have filled brimful speak for me', he gushed without a hint of his customary irony, 'my compassion is often moved; but I think my admiration more.' In sharp contrast to the staid, bourgeois Richardson's, the gentlemanly Fielding's literary career had begun in the theatre with *Love in Several Masques* of 1728, had continued with two adaptations from Molière (*The Mock Doctor* and *The Miser*) and with a successful series of sharp comedies, notably *The Author's Farce*, which satirically depicts the mouldy world of hacks and booksellers, and the sensationally titled *Rape upon Rape; or, the Justice Caught in his own Trap* (both 1730). His exuberant burlesque *Tom Thumb: A Tragedy* (1730) (a revised version of which appeared as *The Tragedy of Tragedies* in 1731) plays ingeniously with the effects of parody, literary allusion, irregular blank verse, bathos, and the mannerisms of academic editing. Fielding's flirtation with the theatre came to an abrupt end in 1737 when his political satires *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register for 1736* provoked Walpole's Government into passing a Licensing Act which introduced official censorship and restricted London performances to two approved theatres.

Fielding had, however, learned much from his practical experience of the stage. His novels reveal a grasp of idiomatic speech and dialogue, a sound understanding of the patterning of incident and a relish for a well-established denouement. His delight in burlesque also influenced the first of his two antipathetic satires on *Pamela, An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* of 1741. *Shamela* purports to set a record straight by exposing and refuting 'the many notorious Falsehoods and Misrepresentations' of the earlier novel; it also puts 'in a true and just Light' the 'matchless Arts' of a calculating female hypocrite. Shamela discourses on what she insistently and distortedly calls her 'Vartue', and proclaims that she is prepared to talk of 'honorable Designs till Suppertime'. Her employer and future husband, modestly referred to as Mr B. in the original, is exposed as the bearer of the name 'Booby', while the once sympathetic Parson Williams 'is represented in a manner something different from what he bears in *Pamela*'. *Shamela* systematically debunks both Richardson's moral sententiousness and the essentially subjective nature of his narrative.

When Fielding returned to the attack in *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend, Mr Abraham Adams* in 1742 he rejected the inward-looking epistolary form in favour of a third-person narrative. His narrator is talkative, clubbable,

knowing, and manipulative; he speaks urbanely, sharing jokes and educated allusions with the reader, shifting us into a world of sophisticated gentlemanly discourse quite alien to Richardson. Although *Joseph Andrews* begins as a parody of *Pamela*, by tracing the complications of the life of Pamela's brother in the service of another branch of the Booby family it rapidly transcends the parodic mood by experimenting with a new, neo-classical fictional form. In his Preface to the novel Fielding insisted that his was 'a kind of writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language' and he outlined the concept of 'a comic epic poem in prose'. His ambitions for prose romance were comprehensive; he proposed to take the wide range of character, incident, diction, and reference from the epic and to remould this material according to 'comic' rather than 'serious' principles. This stress on comedy made for a further insistence on the place of the 'ridiculous' in art. The true ridiculous, he affirmed, had a single source in a human affectation which proceeds from either vanity or hypocrisy. Prose fiction could successfully adopt a moral stance without resorting to the cant of a novel such as *Pamela*; it could, moreover, endeavour to laugh away faults rather than to preach against them. To justify his case, Fielding significantly referred to Ben Jonson, 'who of all men understood the Ridiculous the best' and who 'chiefly used the hypocritical affectation'. The implications of this prefatory theoretical discourse are explored in the subsequent narrative, or, more precisely, the two types of theoretical discourse, the epic and the comic, are interpolated within a single text. *Joseph Andrews* has, as its full title suggests, two heroes, the innocent Joseph and his equally innocent Christian protector, Parson Adams. Adams is a man of learning and good sense but he is 'as entirely ignorant of the ways of this world as an infant just entered into it could possibly be'. Joseph and Adams, cast out as wanderers, engage in an epic voyage of discovery during which they generally seem to encounter selfishness, villainy, and corruption. But the naughty world through which they pass is illuminated not simply by Adams's selflessness but also by the unexpected charity of the humble and meek. If the novel variously exposes hypocrisy, it also discovers simple honesty and ordinary generosity in the interstices of a corrupt society. It is a virtue that does not seek for a reward.

Fielding's *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great*, published as the third volume of his *Miscellanies* in 1743, further ramifies the novelist's experimental interest in the force of the ridiculous as an exposer of the hypocritical. It also reasserts the essentially social, as opposed to private, weight of his moral insistence. The narrative is shaped around a simple recurrent biographical formula: a 'Great Man' brings 'all manner of mischief on mankind', whereas a 'good' man removes mischief; the 'great' man exploits society, the 'good' man enhances it. In low life, as much as in high life, the 'great' are held up as examples; thus, if the professional criminal and thief-taker Wild can be called 'great', so a 'great' man, such as the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, can be equated with a thief. The steady, anti-heroic stance of *Jonathan Wild the Great* exerted a profound influence over Fielding's most dedicated nineteenth-century admirer,

Thackeray. In his longest and most articulate work, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), however, Fielding returned to the ambiguities of 'goodness' and 'greatness' and to the latitudinarian Christian balance of faith and works that he had earlier considered in his characterization of Parson Adams. In one important regard, the moral of *Tom Jones* hovers around the aristocratic principle of the nobility of 'good nature', a liberality of spirits which the novelist observes is 'scarce ever seen in men of low birth and education'. The novel's often wayward hero is told by his noble guardian, Squire Allworthy, that he has 'much goodness, generosity and honour' in his temper but that in order to be happy he must add the further qualities of 'prudence and religion'. That Tom is of gentle birth, and therefore of instinctively 'gentle' manners, is the half-hidden premiss of the story, but to see *Tom Jones* as a reassertion of old, élitist social and moral codes is to misread it. Essentially, it argues for the need for a broad reform of society, an ethic emphasized through the narrator's reiterated declaration that he is describing humankind as a species not as a group of individuals. Where Richardson had sought to examine the inner life of his confessional correspondents, Fielding's narrator insists that he must generalize and observe the evidence of external human characteristics. His moral preoccupation is not with a single class or with the individual ideal, but with the definition of a human norm.

Tom Jones is Fielding's most meticulous response to the challenge of classical epic and his most considered comic redefinition of the role of the epic hero. That Tom and his 'good nature' will be finally justified by the shape of the narrative is a basic assumption of the comedy; that his journey towards justification, 'prudence and religion' will be complex is dependent on the very nature of the epic structure. The novel is divided into eighteen books, the first six of which establish Tom's supposed origins, his education, and the nature of his fall from grace; the second six trace his journey to London, a journey paralleled by that of his adored, but often estranged, Sophia; the last six bring all the characters together amid the confused and morally suspect life of the metropolis. The symmetry of the novel's construction is not, however, merely a modern prose version of Homeric or Virgilian form; it is a tidy neo-classical shape which can contain within it a whole series of comments on other eighteenth-century forms: the satire, the pastoral, the comedy, and the mock-heroic. It is also a reflection on the work of modern masters: Cervantes, Rabelais, Swift and, through a steady stream of visual reference, Hogarth. The whole is interspersed with 'pauses' in which the omniscient narrator expatiates on his methods, on literary criticism in general, on philosophy, or on 'little or nothing', but it is also varied with reflexive, interpolated stories, with recapitulations and echoes, and with unexpected reappearances of characters. It is a *tour-de-force* of patterning, an assertion of the ultimate tidiness and proportion of the universe, and a working-out of a representative human destiny. Tom remains resilient despite his misfortunes; he makes mistakes, he is misjudged, and he is plotted against, but his triumph is viewed as a moral

vindication. For Richardson individual 'virtue', even selfhood, had too easily been equated with sexual purity. Fielding rejoices most in the representation of gentleman-like spontaneity, and as his narrative suggests, restraint is best acquired through experience, not imposed by the norms, laws, and codes to which his numerous hypocrites pay lip-service.

The benevolent figure of Squire Allworthy is believed to have been loosely based on Fielding's friend and sometime patron, Ralph Allen. It was to Allen that he dedicated his most sombre novel, *Amelia*, in 1752, announcing that the book was 'sincerely designed to promote the cause of virtue, and to expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public as private, which at present infest the country'. *Amelia* is a novel of married life which dispenses with the epic journey of his earlier fiction. It traces the fraught and uncertain career of Captain Billy Booth and the frequent distress and isolation of his prudent, constant, loving wife. It begins in a magistrate's court, descends to the squalid confinement of Newgate prison, and maintains an impression of the general oppressiveness and multiple temptations of London life. Only with the fortuitous final discovery that Amelia is an heiress does the couple manage to escape again to the purer pleasures and securities of country life. Despite its vivid depiction of urban tawdriness, its often savage exposure of trickery, tinsel, and vulgarity, and its suggestion of psychological intensity, it has always been Fielding's least loved work.

In 1744 Henry Fielding provided a short Preface to his sister Sarah's novel *The Adventures of David Simple in Search of a Real Friend* in which he reiterated many of the ideas he had already expressed in *Joseph Andrews*. It is unhelpful to see the novels of Sarah Fielding (1710–68) solely in relation to her brother's, for, though her characters may often seem thinly drawn, she is more keenly interested in feeling, more penetrating of motive, and generally more analytical of the nature of mutual attraction and friendship. *David Simple* and its sequel, *Volume the Last* (1753), consider both social naïvety and the equation of virtue and suffering. Having achieved a kind of emotional fulfilment at the end of the first part of his adventures, David faces financial loss, a devastating decline in all his hopes, and finally death in the second. Both stories show innocence exposing corruption and innocence tested; the second shows it crushed by circumstance and human malevolence. *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* of 1759 somewhat melodramatically considers the equally tragic theme of the moral corruption of a marriage between an older husband and a young wife, but the far more optimistic *History of Ophelia* (1760) describes the ultimate vindication of its ingenuous heroine despite abduction and threatened seduction by an aristocratic rake.

Charlotte Lennox (?1729–1804), the well-educated daughter of an army officer, spent her childhood in North America, marrying a shiftless and impecunious husband in 1747. Having attempted, unsuccessfully, to launch herself on a career as an actress, she turned, like Sarah Fielding, to writing as a profession. Lennox produced some five novels, a string of translations from the

French, and a pioneer study of Shakespeare's Italian sources. Her novels were directed primarily at a female audience as popular guides to manners and morals. Her first, *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1750), and her last, *Euphemia* (1790), toy with American settings, but her most sustained work, *The Female Quixote: or, the Adventures of Arabella* (1752), deals with an aristocratic Englishwoman brought up in isolation on her father's country estate. Its heroine's often fantastic perceptions are moulded by her avid reading of romances (hence the novel's title); she exaggeratedly confuses highwaymen with chivalrous adventurers and, more worryingly, mistakes honest suitors for ravishers. The novel satirically exposes the dangers of empty-minded reading, but it ends in proclaiming the instructive virtues of 'an admirable Writer of our own Time'. That writer was Richardson.

Smollett and Sterne

'A novel is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes for the purpose of an uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient.' Tobias Smollett's theory of the novel, formulated, in the manner of Fielding, in a Preface to his proto-Gothic story *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), is not always realized in the structures of his own fiction. The diffusion is certainly there, but clear evidence of a 'uniform plan' has often escaped his readers. When Smollett (1721–71) further insists that the 'propriety, probability, or success' may depend on the need for 'a principal personage to attract the attention, unite the incidents, unwind the clue to the labyrinth, and at last close the scene, by virtue of his own importance', he also seems to be sketching an ideal rather than summing up his own method. If Charlotte Lennox's Arabella receives distorted images of life from the predominantly seventeenth-century French romances that she devours, the Preface to Smollett's first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), stresses that there was now a real distinction between the 'romance' (which owed its origin to 'ignorance, vanity and superstition') and the new fiction of his own day. Although he praises the brio and the plan of Alain-René Lesage's rambling picaresque narrative *Gil Blas* (1715–35), and indeed translated it into English in 1749, Smollett distances himself from Lesage's deviations from 'probability' and from his sudden transitions which 'prevent that generous indignation, which ought to animate the reader, against the sordid and vicious disposition of the world'. His own fiction adapted the picaresque tradition both to suit a modern English taste for realism and in order to describe a recognizably modern world. It was also full of an indignation that was more often righteous than 'generous'.

Roderick Random has as its hero a well-born and educated Scot exposed to the 'selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind' in England

and the wider world. Roderick is often aggressive and combative; he is affectionate and sexually inquisitive; he is also a victim who, through singularly devious paths, fights his way back to money and respectability. Despite being a wronged and disinherited heir and a stranger in his wanderings, he never emerges as the kind of rebel and romantic outsider that later novelists might have made of him. Much of the 'randomness' had of course been implied by the title, but the novel's true originality lies in its inclusion of scenes of modern warfare as clear alternatives to the fantasy battles of earlier romances. Having been press-ganged into the navy, and having experienced the foetid horrors of the lower decks of a British man-of-war, Roderick is present at the disastrous siege of Cartagena of 1741 and later in the story, as a soldier in the French army, he fights at Dettingen in 1743. In neither instance does Smollett spare his reader the nastier details of combat, details which as a former ship's surgeon he had known at first hand. *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* of 1751 contains in the figure of Commodore Hawser Trunnion a further, if wonderfully exaggerated, reflection on Smollett's naval experience. The novel is centred on a wandering hero who even as a boy has shown 'a certain oddity of disposition'. Peregrine maintains this oddity as an adult, exhibiting a violence, an imprudence, a philandering, a savage coldness, and an arrogance which both alienates sympathy and attracts retribution. At various times he is imprisoned in the Bastille in Paris and in the Fleet prison in London where he languishes as 'the hollow-eyed representative of distemper, indigence, and despair'. His repentance, which coincides with rescue from prison and an inheritance, allows for a happy marriage and retirement to the country beyond the pull of metropolitan temptation.

The interval between the composition of *Peregrine Pickle* and the publication of Smollett's most satisfying novel, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), was taken up with diverse literary projects, which vary from a medical treatise on the external use of water, to a translation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; it also included the completion of a four-volume *Complete History of England* and two uneven novels, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (serialized 1760–1). *Humphry Clinker* is concerned with a family journey from the estates of Matthew Bramble in Wales, through western England to London, and then northwards to Smollett's native Scotland. It is told in a series of eighty-two letters, twenty-seven of which are by the elderly and often sarcastic Bramble himself (the title character, a servant acquired on the journey, does not appear until letter 28, and he will later be discovered to be Bramble's natural son). The letter form allowed both for an overlap in the accounts of the events, people, and places encountered during the journey and for a multiplicity of viewpoints and epistolary styles; it also helped shape the haphazardness of this particular 'large diffused picture'. Its topographical exactness and its sharp, if succinct, observation of social and geographical whims, particularly those of Bath, seem to have been calculated to appeal to an audience alert to the literary attractions of sentimental journeyings.

Laurence Sterne (1713–68) probably began his *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* in the summer of 1766 when he was still at work on the last volume of his vastly popular *Tristram Shandy*. It was not published until a month before his death in 1768. Whether or not the shadow of his impending demise hangs over the book has long been a matter of debate. There is little that could be called gloomy in it but there is a good deal of pathos, and its narrator, Mr Yorick, is much given to shedding sentimental tears. The 'grossness' of which some readers of *Tristram Shandy* had complained is diminished in favour of a new 'design' which, Sterne told a friend, was intended 'to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do'. Many original readers would have agreed that the cultivation of sentiment, under the guidance of a witty country parson, might prove beneficial to the heart. At its best, *A Sentimental Journey* is a wonderfully various parody of the conventional travel-book. It deliberately never lives up to its full title. The journey ends in Lyons without ever nearing the French border with Italy; Yorick almost mischievously declines to see the sights of Calais and Paris, and the often whimsical narrative concludes startlingly and ambiguously with an abruptly broken sentence. It is essentially an episodic collection of sketches and interludes, selected so as to give an impression of artful randomness.

The narrative playfulness of *A Sentimental Journey* modestly extends something of the extraordinary invention of the nine volumes of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, published between 1759 and 1767. Of all eighteenth-century novels it is the one that is freest of insistent linearity, the one that makes the most daring bid to escape from the models established by epic or by history. It glances back to the anecdotal learning of Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, to the bawdy ebullience of Rabelais, and to the experimental games of Swift and the Scriblerians, but it is ultimately an unprecedented, and still unrivalled, experiment with form. Its organization lies in the consciousness of a narrator who fails in the first two volumes even to get himself born. When Tristram refers to Horace's idea of a history that proceeds *ab ovo*, from an obvious beginning, he begs 'Mr *Horace*'s pardon;—for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived'. Tristram's world is neither traditionally regulated nor a reflection or a representation of a tidy, ordered Newtonian universe. It is, rather, a pattern of comic ironies observed in the 'Shandean' manner which Sterne defines as 'civil, nonsensical, good-humoured'. *Tristram Shandy* does not lead its central character forward towards a crock of gold, to a heaven-made marriage or to an ideal retirement. No predetermined comic expectations are set up as they are in Fielding's fiction; everything remains provisional and the sense of an ending is consistently denied both in terms of single episodes and in the overall structure. In the twenty-second chapter of his first volume Tristram celebrates digressions as 'incontestably ... the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading'. He goes on, typically, to shift his image from the natural to the mechanical, comparing his narrative to a complex working machine: 'I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going.' Everything—digressions, hiatuses, absences, lacunae, dashes, asterisks, and the famous black, blank, and marbled pages—is co-productive of the novel's peculiar energy and essential to its questioning of meaning. The title-pages of the first two volumes published in 1760 bore the epigraph derived from the Greek philosopher Epictetus: 'Not things, but opinions about things, trouble men.' *Tristram Shandy* suggests that all information is contingent, all interpretation relative. The very act of reading draws the reader into a participation in the creative process. If Smollett's novels have had a peculiarly fruitful influence on the development of the nineteenth-century novel, the impact of Sterne's liberation of narrative has been most fully appreciated in the twentieth century.

Sensibility, Sentimentality, Tears, and Graveyards

In 1749 Samuel Richardson's by now regular correspondent, Lady Bradshaugh, wrote to him asking: 'What, in your opinion, is the meaning of the word *sentimental*, so much in vogue among the polite ... every thing clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word ... I am frequently astonished to hear such a one is a *sentimental* man; we were a *sentimental* party. I have been taking a *sentimental* walk.' We do not have Richardson's reply to her question but he must surely have guessed that she already knew the answer. A year earlier Lady Bradshaugh had initiated the correspondence by writing pseudonymously to the novelist with the request that he save the 'divine Clarissa' from the threat of impending death and grant her a happy end with the penitent Lovelace. Despite being past what she termed her 'romantic time of life' Lady Bradshaugh blushingly admitted 'that if I was to die for it, I cannot help being fond of Lovelace'. Her tears over Clarissa and blushes over Lovelace are evidence of the emotional effect produced on early readers of Richardson's fiction; her wonder at the fashionable use of the word 'sentimental' equally testifies that such emotions were shared by others. The novelist himself had proclaimed that he had aimed to 'soften and mend the Heart' and he had stressed in *Grandison* that 'a feeling heart is a blessing that no one, who has it, would be without'. A literature that moved pity in its readers was viewed as morally instructive. A powerful evocation of feeling, or a shared compassion, it was held, made ultimately for a more humane society. Where Shaftesbury had proposed that benevolence be viewed as an expression of natural virtue, the fiction of Richardson and his sentimental successors could be seen as ducts for the emotional sympathy which bound a community together.

Dr Johnson's definition of 'sensibility' in his *Dictionary* as 'quickness of sensation', 'quickness of perception', and 'delicacy' indicates something of the

new prominence of a balance of 'sense' and 'reason' in the mid-eighteenth-century understanding of the processes of perception. Whereas Johnson defined 'emotion' as, on the one hand, a 'disturbance of the mind', he also offered the alternative idea of it as a 'vehemence of passion' which could be either pleasing or painful. Provided excess was avoided, emotion and spontaneity were seen as necessary complements to reason and deliberation, not as oppositions to them. Two singularly lacrimose descendants of Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*—Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1764–70) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771)—stress the importance of male emotion, as opposed to male rationality, in an often unfeeling world and a calculating society. Brooke (1703–83) presented his 'fool', Harry Clinton, as a product of a benign philosophical scheme of education, one which already shows the influence of Rousseau's *Émile* (1762); this education, which preserves rather than conditions his natural innocence, is both a buffer against the multiple misfortunes that befall him and a means of reconciling his awareness of human misery with his euphoric conviction of divine providence. Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* had an even greater currency. Its hero, Harley, is, like Clinton, a sentimental innocent who weeps uncontrolledly over the succession of unfortunates he encounters. Mackenzie (1745–1831), who was much given to asterisks as a means of expressing inexpressible emotion, exposes the unworldly Harley to those who are victims of the world's callousness in order to test the flow of his gushing fount of human sympathy. Mackenzie's later story *Julia de Roubigné* (1777) deals with a yet more tragic vehemence of passion, an account of a fraught marital crisis crowned by the murder of a supposedly adulterous young wife by her despairing, but otherwise virtuous, husband. When Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* appeared in translation in the 1770s, receptive English ground was already well watered with tears.

John Wesley (1703–91) devoutly recommended *The Fool of Quality* to his followers as an illustration of the 'religion of the heart'. Tears of remorse and of passionate joy were an essential feature of the great open-air missionary campaigns conducted by Wesley in the 1740s and 1750s. Despite the religious establishment's distrust of 'enthusiasm', this missionary work and the emergence of a separate Methodist Church had an immense impact on English, and, by extension, English-speaking, culture. Wesley's *Journal*, which began to appear in print as a devotional companion as early as 1739, animatedly charts a heroic progress through the island in defiance of ignorance, superstition, rain, mud, and hostile mobs. The first collection of psalms and hymns designed for the congregational singing which was an essential expression of Methodist religious emotion was published in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1737. Other, grander, collections of hymns 'for the use of the people called Methodists' rapidly began to circulate on both sides of the Atlantic, many of them the editorial work of Wesley himself and containing a wealth of popular and sentimental religious poetry designed for collective musical expression

rather than for private reading. The finest hymns are the work of Wesley's brother Charles (1707–88), the author, amongst many hundreds of others, of 'Jesu, lover of my soul', 'O for a thousand tongues to sing My dear Redeemer's praise', 'Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go', 'Love divine, all loves excelling', and 'Christ, whose glory fills the skies'. Each moves towards a prevision of eternal bliss and ultimate fulfilment in heaven. The Wesley hymns suggest a poet ravished by divine love and also deeply affected by the idea of a bloody cleansing from sin; they rejoice in the light and the sufferings of Christ and shrink away in horror from the profound darkness of a life without redemption. Though many retain the currency of popular classics, the now more neglected hymns in these collections dwell with an almost embarrassing relish on backsliding, mutability, human transience, physical decay, and death.

The work of Edward Young (1683–1765) and Robert Blair (1699–1746) reflects much of the Wesleyan concern with mortality if little of its Christ-centred ecstasy. Neither is anything but orthodox in his expression of Christian hope, but the mood of the major poems of both writers is predominantly sombre, reflective, melancholic, and moral. Both have latterly been seen as central members of a loose grouping of writers known as the 'graveyard poets'. Young's *The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* was published serially from 1742 to 1745. It is a 10,000-line blank verse meditation on a death-saturated life, on death itself, and on resurrection and immortality. Young divides his poem into nine sections, or 'nights', each of which responds to atheistic emptiness or deistic vagueness by arguing for the evident power of God in nature and for the inherent promise of eternity. The darkness of the night, Young affirms, aids 'intellectual light'. Much of the argument takes the form of an urgent, largely one-sided, debate with an infidel youth called Lorenzo but the debate has little real direction, pattern, or conclusion despite the ever-present reminders of the frailty of life and the imminence of divine judgement. Blair's *The Grave* (1743) is a dramatic evocation of the horrors of corruption and of the solitude of death. It is at its most vivid when it conveys a sense of mystery or of terror, as in its eerie opening sketch of a schoolboy 'lightly tripping o'er the long flat stones' of a moonlit graveyard before flying from a 'horrid *Apparition*, tall and ghastly, | That walks at Dead of Night, or takes his Stand | O'er some new-open'd *Grave*'. Its passages of religious consolation seem perfunctory by comparison.

The most enduringly famous, fluent, and diversified of all 'graveyard' poems is Thomas Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Church-Yard' (1751). Gray (1716–71) was by inclination and by cultivation withdrawn, vulnerable, and melancholic. His finest verse reflects a taste for meditation rather than action, for retired contemplation rather than for public jubilation. As the abandoned fragment of a tragedy *Agrippina* (1741–2) and the 'Ode on the Spring' (1742) suggest, Gray could at times be keenly observant of detail while lacking the tact and subtlety evident in his best work. The 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', also of 1742, is, by contrast, only ponderous when it briefly describes

the games played by the schoolboys, the 'little victims' who have no sense 'of ills to come'. The overall effect of the poem is of a recall of lost innocence which has delicacy uncloyed by self-indulgent nostalgia; the emotionally gasped 'ahs' of the second section ('Ah, happy hills, ah, pleasing shade . . . I feel the gales, that from ye blow, | A momentary bliss bestow'), however, seem to look directly forward to the plain lyricism of A. E. Housman at the end of the nineteenth century. When Gray addressed himself to the mock heroic in the 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat' (1748) he proved himself capable of both an equal delicacy of expression and a gentle, scholarly wit. The poem contains glancing reminiscences of Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Gay but it carries its learning lightly and moves with an easy, but distinctive, sophistication to its double proverbial moral conclusions ('A favourite has no friend'; 'Not all that tempts your wandering eyes | And heedless hearts is lawful prize; | Nor all that glisters gold').

Gray's 'Pindaric Odes'—'The Progress of Poesy' (1754) and 'The Bard' (1757)—show a different kind of ambition. They offer both a scholarly tribute to Greek poetic form and an experimental interest in a new kind of subject. Pindar's complex metric frameworks and his elaborate prosody had served as models to Cowley and Dryden, but Gray's Odes reveal a lyric poet experimenting both with an elevated mood and a weighty historical moral. 'The Progress of Poesy' traces a patriotic genealogy for English verse by suggesting a history of a poetic tradition that moves allusively from Greece and Rome to England, from Helicon, the watery inspiration of the Muses, to the inspired Shakespeare's Avon. Where the first Ode celebrates the continuity of poetry, 'The Bard' considers a discontinuity. The poem is based on the tradition that King Edward I, having ordered the extinction of the Bards of Wales, was confronted with a venerable survivor of the order who prophesies the end of the Plantagenets and the triumphant renewal of poetry under the Tudor dynasty (whose origins lay in Wales). Having delivered his prophecy, the Bard precipitates himself from the mountain top and plunges into 'endless night'. Gray boldly attempts to interfuse a Celtic tradition and an English inheritance within a classical framework. The modest sensationalism of the poem's setting, and the very weirdness of the Bard's incantatory curses, have often been seen as an anticipation of the Romantic fascination with the sublime.

His sense of tradition and of historical continuity found a more placid and contemplative expression in the famous 'Elegy written in a Country Church-Yard'. The Odes celebrate national literature, not national power or prosperity; the Elegy finally focuses on a solitary poet, a man of 'humble birth' and a stranger to national glory, to fortune, and to fame. The poem's broader meditation on the obscure destinies of the unknown and undistinguished villagers buried in the churchyard culminates in the celebrated comment on unfulfilled greatness; village Hampdens, mute inglorious Miltons, and guiltless Cromwells (all figures associated with the Republican cause) had both their talents and their potential crimes 'confined' by a lack of opportunity. Gray is not

making a political protest on behalf of the meek or the downtrodden; he is merely siding with the passive placidity of rural rhythm and rustic verse:

> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
> Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
> Along the cool sequestered vale of life
> They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.
>
> Yet even these bones from insult to protect
> Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
> With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,
> Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Thus the poetry of sophistication complements the unsophisticated rhymes on the grave-stones. The 'Elegy' intermixes the poetry of country retirement with a self-reflexive nocturnal musing on the egalitarian nature of mortality. The unnamed 'hoary-headed swain' of the end of the poem becomes the memorializer of an inconspicuous bard. He speaks not in 'uncouth rhymes', but in the smooth closing quatrains which form an epitaph, and renders the melancholy poet one with the dead villagers. Gray's brief prose epitaph for his mother's tomb in Stoke Poges churchyard notes that she was 'the tender careful mother of many children: one of whom had the misfortune to survive her'. It is a typically self-pitying comment, one accentuated by the fact that when Gray was himself buried in the same tomb no further reference was made to him on the stone. In sharp contrast, the monument later erected to his memory in Westminster Abbey, immediately under that to Milton, bore a far more assertive quatrain by his friend William Mason (1725–97): 'No more the Grecian Muse unrivall'd reigns, | To Britain let the Nations homage pay; | She felt a Homer's fire in Milton's strains, | A Pindar's rapture from the Lyre of GRAY.'

Gray's younger contemporary, William Collins (1721–59), began his literary career with the publication of his genteelly escapist schoolboy verses, the *Persian Eclogues*, in 1742. They are an early example of the growing fashion for the exotic, and particularly for the oriental. Despite Collins's whimsically expressed belief that 'elegancy and wildness of thought' characterized oriental poetry, the Persian settings and references are somewhat perfunctory and an English pastoral smoothness effectively counters any real leaning towards the 'wild'. The *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* of 1746 (dated 1747) reveal a more assured, if imitative, poet. Collins's debts to Milton, and to his 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' in particular, are manifold, but in the most purely 'descriptive' of his own Odes, that to Evening, he achieved an intensely delicate evocation of landscape, established through a succession of distinct scenes and images. The 'Ode to Evening's unrhymed stanzas and its impression of relaxed quietness partly disguise the extent to which it is the achievement of careful art. Five of the twelve odes in the 1746 collection have a patriotic theme and the longest and liveliest of them, the 'Ode to Liberty', traces the descent of British freedom from classical roots to confident modern fulfilment. The extraordinary,

but unfinished, 'Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry' (1749–50, published 1788) deals with an issue of some urgent contemporary interest to those English readers who had recently found their cultural values rudely threatened by the incursion of wild Highlanders under the command of the Young Pretender. The wild Scotland of the poem is both 'Fancy's land . . . where still, 'tis said, the fairy people meet', and an imagined landscape filtered variously through travellers' descriptions, ballads, and *Macbeth*. Collins's restlessness with received notions of literary decorum and proper subject-matter is evident in his clumsy title, but his rag-bag of a poem remains a fascinating experiment in opening up the range, style, and reference of contemporary poetry.

The Ballad, the Gothic, the Gaelic, and the Davidic

The three short essays on ballad literature published by Addison in *The Spectator* in May 1711 are a minor milestone in the revival of critical interest in popular and provincial literature. Addison centred his essays on an appreciation of the 'majestic simplicity' of 'Chevy Chase', a ballad probably produced in the fifteenth century on the then fraught border between England and Scotland. Despite his frequently forced parallels between the ballad and the epic sentiments of Homer and Virgil, Addison returns repeatedly to the directness of British ballad narrative, a 'plain simple copy of nature, destitute of all the helps and ornaments of art'. Similar, but more developed arguments inform two pioneer explorations of alternative literary traditions, Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) and Thomas Percy's great three-volume collection of ballad poetry, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Both writers were scholarly bishops, the last of a line of prelates who were able to indulge in dilettantism without feeling pressurized to concentrate their intellectual energies on theology. Both men had been educated to appreciate classical principles, but both also reflect the shift towards a new and receptive poetic sensibility. Hurd (1720–1808) argued that medieval romance could be seen as a northern European reflection of Greek perceptions of heroism and that chivalry embodied a code of values as influential to a literary culture as those of the ancients. His *Letters* offer both a preliminary attempt to deconstruct the span of literature which he loosely labels as 'romance' and a more developed appreciation of the 'gothic' elements in the work of Spenser and Shakespeare. His description of the Gothic as a 'latent cause' in the 'workings of the human mind', and his belief that his own rational age had lost 'a world of fine fabling' suggest the rumblings of a real revolution in taste. Percy (1729–1811) possessed a yet more defined and exotic relish for literature outside, or alternative to, narrowly defined canons. He published a translation (from a Portuguese version) of the Chinese novel *Hau Kiou Choaan, or The Pleasing History* in 1761 and two years later he produced his *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry Translated from the*

Islandic Language. His *Reliques*, largely based on a various seventeenth-century manuscript collection now known as 'The Percy Folio', reveal a careful scholar of a native tradition, but one prepared to tamper with texts as an editor and 'improver'. Percy's limitations as an editor derive from his awareness that 'in a polished age, like the present, . . . many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allowances to be made for them'; his distinction as a collector lies in his alertness to the fact that a plain mode of expression often possessed virtues beyond those which polish gives to the surface of civilization.

The contributions of James Macpherson (1736–96) and Thomas Chatterton (1752–70) to literature are essentially vicarious. Macpherson's pretence of having discovered and translated the works of the early Scottish Gaelic poet 'Ossian, the son of Fingal' created a widely received Romantic image of the primitive poet; Chatterton's publication of poems, supposedly by a medieval priest, Thomas Rowley, his relative lack of literary success, and his despairing suicide impressed an image of the suffering modern writer on the minds of the Romantic poets. Whereas Ossian was hailed as a master by Goethe, by Schiller, and (strangely enough) by Napoleon, and was depicted, parallel to Homer, as the Bard of the North on the proscenium arch of the rebuilt Covent Garden Theatre as late as 1858, Chatterton was to emerge as Wordsworth's 'marvellous Boy' in 1807, as the dedicatee of Keats's *Endymion* in 1818, and as the subject of Henry Wallis's painting of 1856 (for which George Meredith posed as the dead poet). Neither writer has had an enthusiastic body of readers since the nineteenth century. Some Gaelic ballad poetry is truly attributed to one 'Oisean', the son of the warrior Fionn, but Macpherson, who had only a limited command of Celtic languages, substantially invented both 'Ossian' and a corpus of works ascribed to him by cleverly adapting, re-creating, and expanding mere fragments of surviving verse. *Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books* was published in 1762 and a second epic, *Temora*, appeared, somewhat suspiciously, hard on its heels, a year later. Macpherson, who also produced an exceptionally stodgy prose version of the *Iliad* in 1763, gave a Homeric coherence and a classical solemnity to disparate ballad accounts of ancient Scottish feuds. Alert to current tastes, he also played with a whole gamut of sentiments, exploiting a new interest in primitive heroism and in the emotive associations of wild landscape. His fraud was not properly exposed until after his death. Chatterton's schoolboy fascination with the Middle Ages, fed by his reading of Chaucer, Percy's *Reliques* and, to a lesser degree, Ossian, produced an equally extraordinary fruit. Only one of his so-called 'Rowley' poems, the 'eclogue' 'Elinoure and Juga', was published in his short lifetime (a collected edition appeared posthumously in 1777). Despite his obvious borrowings, his deliberate use of archaic words picked out of dictionaries, and his anachronistic use of Elizabethan verse forms, Chatterton's mock medieval poems still have a certain flair which derives from an imagination utterly steeped in the artefacts and sounds of another age.

The work of Christopher Smart (1722–71) emerges from a sensibility rapt not

by the national past but by a religious ecstasy (some might call it mania) which drove him to imitate and adapt the Hebrew psalmody of King David. His verse has a simple directness of expression, and an imaginative fluency even within the constraints of the traditional quatrains and the bald sing-song rhythms of the metrical psalm form. Much of Smart's work does, however, possess a real complexity. *A Song to David* of 1763, for example, celebrates the psalmist ('highest in the list of worthies' and 'the minister of praise at large') in sections arranged according to the mystic numbers three, four, and seven and their multiples. When it was reprinted in 1765 in the awkwardly titled *A Translation of the Psalms, &c Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Fasts and Festivals &c*, the 'song' was surrounded by a considerable variety of metrical experiments with hymn-like forms. The hymn designed for the feast of St Philip and St James (anciently celebrated on 1 May) ecstatically contemplates a flowery, bird-haunted English spring, while those for the Nativity and Easter delight in a 'God all-bounteous, all-creative' who is expressed in the workings of nature and yet who mightily gives nature its meaning. Smart's most eccentric achievement, the fragmentary *Jubilate Agno* (*c.*1759–61, published 1939), was written in the period when the poet was confined in St Luke's Asylum in London. *Jubilate Agno* is an essentially private outpouring which cannot have been intended for use in public worship, but it retains the antiphonal, exhortatory shape of some liturgical canticles. Each sentence beginning with a 'Let' ('Let Shuah rejoice with Boa, which is the vocal serpent') finds a response in a parallel beginning with a 'For' ('For there are still serpents that can speak—God bless my head, my heart and my heel'). The poem interlinks Hebrew proper names with an international menagerie of animals, each presenting a distinct form of worship to its Creator. Sarah, for example, is bidden to rejoice with the redwing, Tobias to bless Charity with his dog ('who is faithful, vigilant, and a friend in poverty'), and Anna to bless God with the cat who, more obscurely, 'is worthy before the throne of grace, when he has trampled upon the idol in his prank'. Some of the versicles and their responses have a delightful oddity; others an elusive and probably personal bitterness; still others, particularly those pertaining to cats, an appreciative tenderness. Smart's work is by turns mystical and contemplative, idiosyncratic and hybrid, formal and obscure. Unlike the gloomy and now distant thunders of Macpherson and the adolescent lightning flashes of Chatterton, the full range of Smart's often bizarre but temperate poetry has found its most appreciative audience only since the appearance of *Jubilate Agno* nearly two hundred years after its composition.

Goldsmith and Sheridan: The New 'Comedy of Manners'

When Oliver Goldsmith (*c.*1730–74) dedicated his semi-autobiographical poem *The Traveller: or, A Prospect of Society* (1764) to his clergyman brother he praised his brother's choice of profession and his rejection of 'the field of

Ambition, where the labourers are many, and the harvest not worth carrying away'. In this same dedication he also took the opportunity of disparaging the confused state of contemporary poetic theory and practice. The themes of a rejection of male ambition and a desire for tidiness and philosophic harmony run through the range of Goldsmith's literary work. He was not without ambition himself, as his varied experiments in literature, his professional application, and his often pressing need to write for money suggest, but what he wrote reveals a systematic attempt to condition restlessness and to come to equable terms with passion. The dedication to *The Traveller* objects to the contradictory and disordered critical voices currently raised in favour of 'blank verse, and Pindaric odes, chorusses, anapests and iambics, alliterative care and happy negligence'; the poem itself employs the already somewhat conservative couplet form and it preaches the vanity of searching the external world for a bliss 'which only centers in the mind'.

The Traveller glancingly retraces Goldsmith's own earlier wanderings through France, Switzerland, and Italy before a return to an England caught up with a pursuit of political liberty and with a related, but less socially desirable, commercial ambition. It presents an impression of a morally educational journey rather than a sentimental one. In its strange insistence on the depopulation both of Italian cities and, more emphatically, of the English countryside it also contains the germ of *The Deserted Village* (1770). Where the earlier poem sees emigration as a result of laws that 'grind the poor' enacted by rich, self-seeking, and powerful champions of liberty, *The Deserted Village* indirectly attacks the enclosure system (by which peasants were deprived of common land by successive Acts of Parliament) and more directly protests against the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands and against the creation of a private 'luxury . . . curst by Heaven's decree'. 'Sweet Auburn', the 'loveliest village of the plain', has been destroyed by the effects of aristocratic, mercantile, or simply urban 'luxury'. Auburn is, however, unlocated (though some commentators have sought to place it in Goldsmith's native Ireland). Once a harmoniously working village which has now vanished, it seems bathed in the golden evening light of nostalgia. Most prominent amongst its lovingly recalled inhabitants is its spiritual guide and moral arbiter, a parish priest 'passing rich' on forty pounds a year, a man content to run his godly race remote alike from towns and from hopes of ecclesiastical preferment.

The figure of an unworldly priest recurs in both *The Citizen of the World* (1762) and the philosophical tale *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). The 'Man in Black', innocently observed by the 'Chinese Philosopher residing in London' of *The Citizen of the World*, is generous to a fault; he is exploited because of the very nature of his charity, but he proves to be no more gullible than the Chinese narrator he has taken under his wing. The device of using an alien innocent abroad as a commentator on the whims and hypocrisies of European society was scarcely new (it had been used by Addison in *The Spectator* and, more recently and more trenchantly, by Montesquieu in France), but Goldsmith's

oriental sage, Lien Chi Altangi, appears to be as fascinated by his fellow innocents as he is by the vanity, dress, law, literature, and cocksure pomposity of his English hosts. The appropriately named Dr Primrose, the freshly innocent 'priest . . . husbandman . . . and father of a family' of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, shares something of Lien Chi Altangi's calm, gentle, even fastidious, detachment in the face of confusion. Primrose's circumstances are, however, both more dire and more personal and he bears them with a Job-like patience. As the recounter of the misfortunes which befall him and his family, he is also required to defuse emotionally charged situations by asserting the comfortable virtues of temperance and faith. The words 'prudent' and 'prudence' recur throughout his extraordinarily symmetrical narrative. It is a tragic story concerned with sensibility not with sensation, with pity not with terror, and carefully restrains the tearful emotions which had earlier been indulged by writers such as Brooke and Mackenzie. In the eighth chapter of his second volume, Dr Primrose compares himself to a legislator 'who had brought men from their native ferocity into friendship and obedience'. Although he never really asserts himself, and never seeks to pose as a political or domestic tyrant in his little republic, he none the less attempts to act as a moral persuader, firm in his belief in the benign workings of divine providence. Despite his frequent ineffectualness, Primrose is one of the blessed meek whose inheritance is ultimately allowed to be a well-ordered patch of earth.

'Our taste has gone back a whole century, Fletcher, Ben Johnson (*sic*), and all the plays of Shakespear, are the only things that go down', remarks a 'poor player' encountered by Dr Primrose on his travels. The player later asserts that in his experience 'Congreve and Farquhar have too much wit in them for the present taste'. Goldsmith's two shapely and commercially successful plays, *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), only partially bear out the truth of the player's observation. In his 'Essay on the Theatre', also of 1773, Goldsmith himself had drawn a clear distinction between what he saw as 'laughing and sentimental comedy', that is between a satirical laughing away of faults and an emotional stimulus to sympathetic tears. If it is sometimes hard to recognize Goldsmith as a direct theatrical heir to either Jonson or Congreve, his plays suggest a more forthright moralist than do his poems and his fiction. He claims to have distrusted the kind of comedy which 'aims at touching our passions, instead of being truly pathetic'. Goldsmith's remarks in the 'Essay' are likely to have been directed, in part, against the plays of his contemporary Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), the author of the sentimental comedies *The West Indian* (1771) and *The Fashionable Lover* (1772). Cumberland was later caricatured by Richard Brinsley Sheridan as Sir Fretwell Plagiary in *The Critic* (1779). Goldsmith and his fellow Irishman, Sheridan (1751–1816), share a certain acerbity of wit and an ebullient criticism of affectation which is generally absent from the exploration of tearful neuroses by the proponents of sensibility. Both prefer the poignant to the passionate, the witty to the lacrimose. The plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan reveal a positive, but newly

refined, pleasure in the devices, the amatory intrigues, and the exposures of the 'comedy of manners' perfected in the late seventeenth century. Goldsmith's comedies also suggest a writer more happy to expose the social shortcomings of a generous nature than does either *The Citizen of the World* or *The Vicar of Wakefield*. When he wrote *The Good-Natur'd Man* he confessed to being 'strongly prepossessed in favour of the poets of the last century' and his story of the testing and curing of a generously credulous hero by the devices of a sensible uncle gesture both back to Jonson and forward to a new kind of comedy of 'nature and humour'. *She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night* is more complex, varied, and socially observant than its predecessor. Its 'bashful and reserved' central character, young Marlow, who only relaxes in the company of servants, is brought out of himself by the 'stooping' (in terms of class rather than sex) of a resourceful heroine, Miss Hardcastle, a 'stooping' dramatically complicated by a succession of misunderstandings and social *faux pas*.

Sheridan's comedies are equally full of action, reversal, confusion, and verbal wit. Like *She Stoops to Conquer*, they are also supremely *actable*. His first plays—*The Rivals*, the farce *St Patrick's Day*, and the 'comic opera' *The Duenna*—were all written in his early twenties and were all produced on stage in 1775 with a view to dazzling audiences with a new talent. *The Rivals*, in particular, harks back to the inherited conventions of the Restoration period, such as the booby squire and the father who requires 'absolute' obedience, but it also reveals a fresh and relatively chaste benignity. The play confronts the authority of an older generation with the success of the stratagems of its young lovers, but it also allows for an extraordinary linguistic variety which deftly embraces the inventive oaths of Bob Acres ('Odds blushes and blooms!', 'Odds triggers and flints!'), the inflated Irishisms of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and, above all, the wonderful misapplications of Mrs Malaprop ('Sure, if I reprehend any thing in this world it is the use of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs!'). If *The Trip to Scarborough* of 1777, a refashioning of Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*, reveals the extent to which Sheridan responded both to the attractions of a good plot and to the need to expunge what he recognized as indecorous expression and ambiguous motivation, *A School for Scandal* (also of 1777) reveals his own mastery of language and complex plotting. It is his most aphoristic and shapely play, one moved easily forward by its own exuberant momentum. What is basically a moral fable, playing in the manner of *Tom Jones* with the contrast between two brothers—Joseph Surface, a sentimental and sanctimonious villain, and Charles, a virtuous and generous libertine—is transformed by a clever exploitation of theatrical devices (such as the use of hidden eavesdroppers) into an unmasking of bluffs, prejudices, and disguises. It is, above all, a marvellously witty exposure of surfaces, of the affectations, petty hypocrisies, and peccadilloes which form the stuff of the 'scandal' bitchily relayed by characters called Snake (a writer and critic), Sneerwell, Candour, and Backbite. *The Critic: or, A Tragedy Rehearsed* of 1779, loosely developed from Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, is a clever burlesque on the problem of producing

a play and a satirical defence of Sheridan's own art against the hacks and detractors whom he considered to be unworthy rivals for public attention. After a modestly successful career as a politician and a parliamentary orator, he returned awkwardly to drama in 1799 with *Pizarro*, a drably orotund adaptation of Kotzebue's German tragedy. It was a disappointing gesture more characteristic of a politician given to wordy defences of the public good than of a playwright known for his verbal scintillation. Though its first audiences cheered its noble expressions of patriotism at a time of national crisis, it can also be unflatteringly seen as something of a belated justification of the affectations of Joseph Surface.

Johnson and his Circle

When Samuel Johnson (1709–84) proposed the young Sheridan for membership of the informal group of writers and artists known as the Club, he proclaimed *The Rivals* and *The Duenna* 'the two best comedies of the age'. Prospective membership of the Club and Johnson's praise were perhaps the highest accolades that a young writer on the make could earn. The Club, later known as the Literary Club, had first been formed in 1764 at the suggestion of the painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds. Its nine original members included Goldsmith and Edmund Burke, and it was later expanded to involve, amongst others, Johnson's former pupil, the actor David Garrick (1717–79), Bishop Percy, and, above all, the disciple whose name is still most immediately linked with Johnson's, James Boswell (1740–95). The fact that such a club had formed itself around Johnson, and that the wider circle of his friendships and influence, less circumscribed by male clubbishness, included another anecdotal memorializer, Hester Thrale (later Piozzi) (1741–1821), and the novelist Fanny Burney, is tribute to his considerable reputation both as a senior man of letters and as a galvanizing force in contemporary literature and society. That reputation had been painstakingly and worthily established over many years. The sparsity of the young Johnson's financial resources had obliged him to leave Oxford without a degree in 1731 (his famous doctorates were awarded in 1765 by Trinity College, Dublin, and in 1775 by the University of Oxford). His early career as a schoolmaster and his later as a journalist on the fringes of Grub Street had at times hovered precariously near economic and emotional disaster. That Johnson readily recognized both the potential and the real perils of the life of a young writer in London is evident in his own *Life of Mr Richard Savage* (1744). That he was later prepared to denounce the evils inherent in a writer's dependence on the patronage of grandees rings through the letter he wrote to Lord Chesterfield in 1755 (published posthumously in 1790), a letter which refers to the seven years of Chesterfield's neglect and bitterly defines a 'Patron' as 'one who looks with unconcern on a Man struggling for Life in the Water and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help'.

Johnson's various essays in poetry span his career. He had come to London in 1737 carrying with him his incomplete blank-verse tragedy *Irene*, a play performed twelve years later through the good offices of Garrick, but greeted with jeers by its original audience and with patronizing sneers by its first critics. Little has been done to enhance its reputation since. *London: A Poem* of 1738 has much more distinction. This verse satire, modelled on the splutteringly indignant third satire of Juvenal, reflects on London as a city destructive of artistic talent and of the physical and mental well-being of the artist. If there is a comic exaggeration in the disillusioned narrator's claim 'Prepare for Death, if here at Night you roam, | And sign your Will before you sup from Home', the poem also plays a dense English historical reference against a sombre view of 'these degen'rate Days' in which 'softer Smiles and subtler Art . . . sap the Principles, or taint the Heart'. *The Vanity of Human Wishes* in 1749 is also an 'imitation' of Juvenal (this time the tenth satire), but here Juvenal's acerbic laughter is tempered by a Christian stoicism which seeks to deflate human pride and to illustrate the folly of human aspiration. Johnson's interest in the moral art of biography is evident in his exploration of examples of blind confidence challenged by time or destiny: Cardinal Wolsey falls from his 'full-blown dignity'; imagined aspirants to knowledge, longevity, and beauty find themselves caught out by the inevitability of change and decay; and the once victorious Charles XII of Sweden meets defeat, exile, ignominy, and an obscure death:

> Hide, blushing Glory, hide *Pultowa*'s Day:
> The vanquish'd Hero leaves his broken Bands
> And shews his Miseries in distant Lands
> Condemn'd a needy Supplicant to wait
> While Ladies interpose, and Slaves debate.
> But did not Chance at length her Error mend?
> Did no subverted Empire mark his End?
> Did rival Monarchs give the fatal Wound?
> Or hostile Millions press him to the Ground?
> His Fall was destin'd to a barren Strand,
> A petty Fortress, and a dubious Hand;
> He left the Name, at which the World grew pale,
> To point a Moral, or adorn a Tale.

The poem's unrelenting exposition of the precariousness of secular hope as compared to patient submission to the will of God is conveyed through both an adjectival precision and a steadily reverberant rhythm. A related tribute to a far less elevated human victim, 'condemn'd to hope's delusive mine', was to re-emerge in the short, melancholy, quatrain elegy 'On the Death of Dr Robert Levet' of 1783.

Johnson's finest prose echoes the balanced and measured weight of his verse. In the wide range of his periodical journalism, in his criticism, and in his philosophical tale, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), his long, shapely, supple, and deliberate sentences serve to shape the cogent development of an

argument. *Rasselas* traces the wanderings of an African prince and his sister Nekayah as they escape from 'the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose' of the 'happy valley' in which they have been royally confined. The plot is minimal and incidental, but the tale presents a series of encounters, experiences, and discussions which serve as evaluations of the pursuit of human happiness. The extended discourse on the freedom to choose how to live allows both for the relative pessimism of the philosopher Imlac's conclusion that 'Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed', and for the Princess Nekayah's insistence that in viewing the 'contrarieties of pleasure' it is vital, when faced with 'the blessings set before you', to 'make your choice, and be content'. Her sagacity is spiced with an appropriately oriental metaphor: 'No man can taste the fruits of autumn while he is delighting his scent with the flowers of spring: no man can, at the same time, fill his cup from the source and from the mouth of the Nile.' Despite the pithy proverbiality of its wisdom, the tale ends with a conclusion 'in which nothing is concluded' and its last short sentences lead back to the point at which the story began.

Johnson's syntactical skill at both granting and gradually withdrawing assent to an argument, a proposition, or an aspect of character has both impressed and irked readers of his essays and his criticism. He can be dogmatic, but he can also present an impression of intellectual equilibrium by conditioning or undoing an initial proposition through a series of dependent clauses or a clever use of parallelism and antithesis. His mastery of lexicographical skills, evident in the range and originality of his compendious *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), also informs his stylistic play with definitions, his learned use of Latinate vocabulary, and his somewhat ponderous pleasure in the polysyllabic. The periodical essays published in the 200 issues of his own journal, *The Rambler*, between 1750 and 1752 introduce a wryly humorous, discursive, informed, moral narrator as opposed to the essentially middle-brow entertainer of *The Spectator*. Where Addison generalizes, Johnson seeks to give the impression of speaking from painfully acquired personal experience. *The Rambler* considers aspects of literature, biography, religion, philosophy, and ethics (notably in number 185 which debates the opposition of vengeance and the Christian duty of forgiveness). The *Idler* papers, contributed to the *Universal Chronicle* between 1758 and 1760, adopt a persona who is ostensibly both more genial and more facetious, but here too there is a steady underpull of sobriety. 'It would add much to human happiness', the Idler remarks in his seventy-third paper, 'if an art could be taught of forgetting all of which the remembrance is at once useless and afflictive, if that pain which never can end in pleasure could be driven totally away, that the mind might perform its functions without incumbrance, and the past might no longer encroach upon the present.'

Johnson's edition of Shakespeare, which he finally published in 1765, offered the public a substantial critical Preface, a carefully revised text, and extensive

explanatory notes to each of the plays. If the emendations of, and revisions to, Shakespeare's text have not always elicited the assent of subsequent editors, the Preface and the notes remain landmarks in the development of textual and critical study. Johnson not only extended a scholarly tradition which had been established in the century, but gave readers a new standard of interpretation, one received, according to Boswell, 'with high approbation by the publick'. The Preface's criticism is two-pronged; it seeks to consolidate Shakespeare's reputation as a national classic by rejecting the criticisms of those who had seen him as defective in both learning and dramatic tact, and to project an image of him as 'the poet of nature' who 'holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour of manners and of life'. In developing this supra-classical and patriotic thesis, Johnson singles out for praise elements, such as Shakespeare's admixture of tragedy and comedy and his failure to adhere to the 'unities', which had earlier been disparaged by neo-classical critics. Johnson's *ex cathedra* judgements, both flattering and fault-finding, fall thick and fast. His critical annotations offer a more sporadic, and more suddenly illuminating, form of comment. He may often be prescriptive in his treatment of awkwardnesses, embarrassments, or anomalies in Shakespeare's texts, but he unfailingly detects both particular problems and particular felicities. He balances an acknowledgement of the 'mean, childish, and vulgar' passages of *Love's Labour's Lost* against a full appreciation of the play's distinctively Shakespearian 'sparks of genius'; he weighs the redeeming wit of the 'unimitated, unimitable' Falstaff against his sins; he complains of 'too much bustle' in the first act of *Coriolanus* and too little in the last; and he notes of the 'artful involutions of distinct interests' in *King Lear* that they 'fill the mind with a perpetual tumult of indignation, pity, and hope'.

Johnson's last great undertaking, the *Lives of the Poets*, appeared from 1779 to 1781 as 'Prefaces, Biographical and Critical' to a new edition of English poets deemed by the book-trade to have achieved classic status. Johnson provided fifty-two such prefaces, all but two of which deal with poets of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The model for the longer essays came partly from his own early *Life* of Richard Savage, a study which combines a sympathetic appreciation of the struggles of a young outsider with an irritation at Savage's inclination to be 'petulent and contemptuous'. The *Lives of the Poets* intermix extended passages of literary criticism, biographical information (much of it acquired at first hand), and a limited delineation of a cultural context. Johnson expresses himself with an epigrammatic authority which can reveal an acute observation and an equally distinct intolerance. In the life of Cowley, for example, he famously defines the wit of the 'Metaphysical' poets which had so vexed him: 'The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions.' His otherwise adulatory and systematic study of the canonical status of Milton can still complain about the poet's 'acrimonious and surly' politics, a republicanism which was founded 'in an envious hatred of greatness, and a