sullen desire of independence'. It is in the essays on Dryden, Swift, Addison, Thomson, and Pope, however, that Johnson offers definitions of the leading characteristics of his age, of his immediate literary inheritance, and of his own taste. 'Genius', the power which 'constitutes a poet', he notes in his study of Pope, is 'that quality without which judgement is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies and animates'. It is a definition which could very properly be applied to Johnson's own idiosyncratic genius.

Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* appeared in 1791. It projects the image of Johnson as the doyen of his age, generous, honest, compassionate, censorious, and devout; it avidly reports the words and the deeds of a public man, confident in his values and forthright in his opinions; but it also attempts to show a more troubled private man, one prone to self-examination and vexed by both religious gloom and divine hope. Some fifty years later the biography was to provide Thomas Carlyle with much of the material he required to claim Johnson as 'the Hero as Man of Letters', a new kind of hero who stood apart from the narrow confines of his time and who informed an essentially romantic awareness of the long sweep of cultural history. Johnson the humbly born outsider, the struggling young writer, the setter-aside of aristocratic patrons, and the maker of his own way in the world was to emerge, somewhat incongruously, as the challenger of what was seen as the smug, tidy, enclosed, and élitist values of an age that had set too much store by the power of human reason. To Carlyle, Johnson was not the summer-up of the virtues of his time, but the heroic redeemer of its faults. The decades that immediately succeeded Johnson's death in 1784 were to witness cataclysmic political and cultural change in Europe. The Revolution in France was to turn the world upside down again. It was to bring about not only a series of radical reassessments of the British constitutional settlement of 1688, but, perhaps more significantly, a profound reestimate of a rational world-order and of a culture which drew its inspiration from a perception of divine symmetry.

6

The Literature of the Romantic Period 1780–1830

'My temper is not very susceptible of enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm which I do not feel I have ever scorned to affect', Edward Gibbon noted of himself in his *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (posthumously printed in 1827). Nevertheless, when Gibbon (1737–94) recalled his first sight of the city of Rome some twenty-five years after the event, he admitted to having been troubled by strong emotions which had agitated his mind and which had led to a sleepless night and to 'several days of intoxication' before he could bring himself 'to descend to a cool and minute investigation' of the historic objects that he had come to Rome to study. Gibbon, the greatest English historian of the eighteenth century and the supremely reasonable and sceptical product of the European Enlightenment, felt obliged to confess to the kind of 'enthusiasm' which he scorned. His emotional excitement on seeing Rome may also suggest the degree to which he was the product of a culture which had come, not simply to appreciate the significance of 'sensibility', but actively to indulge it.

To one enthusiastic later visitor to Italy, Shelley, Gibbon seemed in retrospect to be the possessor of a 'cold and unimpassioned spirit'. To another, Byron, swayed by the kaleidoscopic beauty of Italy and by the massive splendour of the Alps, Gibbon was one of the tutelary spirits of Lake Geneva, one who, with Voltaire and Rousseau, had 'sought and found, by dangerous roads, | A path to perpetuity of fame'. Gibbon's 'dangerous road' had led him, in his monumental *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), to question both a providential reading of history and the assumption that modern Europe was singularly blessed in its inherited forms of government and religion. The principles on which his history is built may look back to the culture of the intellectual salons of pre-revolutionary Paris and to the world of the aristocratic Grand Tour, but they also hark forward to the ideals of republican restructuring which would haunt the nineteenth-century European mind. Although Gibbon would certainly have been unhappy at Byron's linking his name to those of the 'intolerant bigot', Voltaire, and to the self-absorbed social optimist, Rousseau, the influence of his iconoclastic rationality was to be

felt in the work of a new generation of writers who often distrusted reason and who earnestly sought to redefine the intellectual and political assumptions of its fathers.

Gibbon showed little sympathy with those who saw the Revolution in France as a new dawn for humanity. His picture of ancient Rome, meticulously observed as it slid into its decadence, had been conditioned by an awareness of a past loss of power and prestige, not by a feeling for future social regeneration. Nor did the new France which emerged in the years following 1789 assume the status of a political paragon for a man who had charted an earlier loss of republican virtue and a decline into demagoguery, innovation, and bloodshed. An empire, which had lost its integrity and its self-confidence, and whose failure was accentuated by the emergent Christian Church, seemed unlikely to be rebuilt by a society intent on merely demolishing the political structures of the Middle Ages. Gibbon's history looked back to a lost era of civic duty, military and patriotic service, and to the principle of public participation in national affairs but it did not seek to predict how the ideals of a new generation of 'patriots' and 'active citizens' might be formed. If he despised the 'oriental' despotism and the compromising politics of the later Roman emperors, and if he readily recognized the false pride and the unsteady claims of their latter-day Christian successors, he preferred to pose troubling questions about the past rather than to espouse modern causes. The essential tolerance of the original *pax romana* appealed more than the prospect of a new political puritanism disguised as revolution. Gibbon's vast historical narrative was intended to grate on modern Christian sensibilities, not to inspire new cults of the Supreme Being; its organized antitheses and its ironic set pieces were meant to challenge modern assumptions about progressive development, not to knock kings off their thrones and heads from kings' necks.

To see *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as the consummation of Enlightenment reasoning and yet to view the work of Gibbon's contemporaries, such as William Blake and Ann Radcliffe, as somehow belonging to a new age and to a new sensibility is both incongruous and the result of an over-categorical reading of literary history. Any determined attempt to define this supposed 'incongruity' derives from what can be seen as a proleptic historicism, one that determines that culture moves in ways which fit easily into progressive patterns. The period 1780–1830 is more open to conflicting interpretation than most others. It is an age obviously moulded by the impact of the revolutionary upheaval in France, but if neutrality was difficult to maintain at the time, the avoidance of taking sides, or silence, or a withdrawal of commitment, ought not to be interpreted as an inability to read what we loosely deem to be the signs of the times or as a failure of a proper response to a predetermined political or cultural alignment. It was an age of 'Romanticism', but the complex definition of 'Romanticism', or of 'Romanticisms', could be variously ignored, challenged, subsumed, debated, or simply questioned by writers who were not necessarily swimming against a contemporary tide. A variety of ways

of writing, thinking about, criticizing, and defining literature co-exist in any given age, but in this particular period the varieties are especially diverse and the distinctions notably sharp. Such distinctions were not, properly enough, those which were inevitably drawn by contemporaries.

The most persuasive, fluent, and antipathetic survey of the immediate consequences of the first stage of the French Revolution is Edmund Burke's tract *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event* (1790). As its long title suggests, these 'reflections' pertain to the uneasy state of political affairs on both sides of the Channel. Burke (1729–97), one of the most polished parliamentary orators of his day, was attempting to check and condition the libertarian optimism which had greeted the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' (enthusiastically promulgated by the French National Assembly in August 1789). From his firmly British constitutional standpoint (though he was by birth and education an Irishman), Burke stressed a need for tradition rather than innovation, for gradualism rather than radicalism. Having once stoutly defended the principles of the American Revolution in Parliament (again from a constitutionalist, traditionalist standpoint), he now attempted to explain the dangers of espousing a faith in a radical new order of things. Commonsensical American rhetoric was acceptable; French philosophism and Rousseauistic sentimentality were abominable. Burke's *Reflections* argues for a 'spirit of rational liberty', the reasonableness of which he saw as grounded in the legal compromises of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 and in the 'manly, moral, regulated liberty' assured by the English Bill of Rights. 'Metaphysical abstraction', such as was now determining policy in Paris, seemed contrary to the substantial 'ancestral freedoms' which he claimed were dear to English hearts. As Burke's sharpest contemporary critic, Thomas Paine, later observed, Burke is conservatively smug in his confident acceptance of the British constitutional status quo and in his belief in the 'perfectly adequate' representation of the British people in their existing Parliament. Nevertheless, his *Reflections* attempts to define a theory of government based on a reasoned fear of the disruption of revolutionary reform. 'Government', he argues, 'is a continuance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*', wants that were answered by the fundamental right to a sound government which both fostered civil society and restrained human passion. Burke may, in his most memorable paragraphs, have mourned the extinction of chivalry in France, but his main recourse was not to the spirit of the Middle Ages but to the eighteenth-century concept of an equable political balance, a balance which he finds evident in the existing order of things in Britain.

Paine, Godwin, and the 'Jacobin' Novelists

Burke's attack on the 'metaphysical abstractions' on which the evolving Revolution in France was based, and his related challenge to British apologists

for the French experiment, were readily taken up. Burke had extended his criticism to include comment on the Constitutional Society and the Revolution Society, both of them radical clubs supported largely by religious Non-conformists, men who saw themselves as direct heirs to the spirit of the seventeenth-century English Revolution and as victims of discriminatory laws. Prominent amongst members were the Unitarian minister, Richard Price (1723–91) (who had actually provoked Burke's riposte by preaching a sermon on the need to apply French lessons to Britain), and a fellow Unitarian, the chemist, Joseph Priestley (1733–1804) (who had his house wrecked by a Birmingham mob as a result of attempting to celebrate the anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille in 1791). Amongst the most committed of these radicals, in terms of both his writings and his actions, was the independent republican, Thomas Paine (1737–1809). Paine's support for both the American and the French Revolutions had made him friends in these revolutionary nations and powerful enemies at home (his books were burned by the Public Hangman, but, having been obliged to flee to Paris in 1792, he was granted the privilege of French citizenship). Paine's acclaim in Jacobin France was largely based on his reputation as the trouncer of the tyrant-loving Burke in his book *The Rights of Man* (1791, 1792). If his book lacks the elegance and the systematic argument of Burke's, its attack upholds a new faith in constitutionally defined rights and liberties and renders much of Burke's creaking pragmatism ridiculous. The 'poison' of Burke's 'horrid principles' is countered by a delineation of a despotism which extends beyond the person of a king into 'every office and department' whose petty reflections and abuses of royal power are founded on 'custom and usage'.

The circulation of *The Rights of Man* through a chain of British and Irish radical clubs openly sympathetic to France (and therefore increasingly hostile to the existing British Constitution) may well have reached hundreds of thousands. Paine's active political career in France was less propitious. It was while in prison (and under the shadow of the guillotine from which he was released only by the fall of Robespierre) that he completed what was once his most notorious work, *The Age of Reason* (1794–6). Here the 'age of Revolutions' bears a post-Voltairean and post-Jeffersonian fruit, one poisonous to Christianity and atheism alike. The 'Cult of the Supreme Being', propagated in Jacobin France, is developed with a no-nonsense English thrust quite free of Robespierre's posturing and ritualizing. Paine dedicated his tract to his 'fellow-citizens of the United States of America', but his blunt arguments have implications well beyond the Quaker libertarianism of Franklin or the non-sectarian aspirations of the American Constitution. Paine proclaims his theism and a faith in a broad egalitarian morality of 'doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy'. He rejects all forms of established, defined, or 'revealed' religion by treating the nature of 'revelation' as if it were little more than hearsay. Scriptural authority is disposed of with much the same verve. The books of the Old Testament are dismissed as a collection of 'obscene stories . . . voluptuous debaucheries . . . cruel and torturous executions and unrelenting vindictiveness'. The Gospels strike him as merely anecdotal mystifications. 'The Word of God', he proclaims in capital letters, 'IS THE CREATION WE BEHOLD', and God himself stands for 'moral truth' not 'mystery or obscurity'.

William Godwin (1756–1836), born into a strong Dissenting tradition, abandoned both his Calvinist theology and his Congregationalist ministry in 1783 and assumed the alternative career of journalist and pamphleteer. His interest in both the dissidence of Dissent and contemporary political developments led to his active participation in the debates of the Constitutional Society. In 1789 he formed part of the congregation that heard Richard Price's 'Discourse on the Love of our Country' and he was sufficiently provoked by Burke's response to it to begin work on what became his own treatise, the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). The *Enquiry* is Godwin's most systematic theoretical work. He views human happiness and social well-being as the sole purpose of existence, but unlike Rousseau (whose influence pervades the work) he looks forward to a gradual melting away of all government to be replaced by a new system of radical anarchy. A rigid adherence to the leading principle of reason is substituted for Rousseau's cult of sensibility and his innate religiosity. Law, government, property, inequality, and marriage would be abolished as part of a gradual process by which human perfectibility, conditioned by human reason, would transcend existing limitations and impediments to fulfilled happiness.

Godwin's revolutionary hatred of all forms of injustice, privilege, and political or religious despotism also informs his novel, *Things as They Are or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), a narrative centred on the problems of class perception and the nature of oppression. Godwin is less concerned with the authority of the state and more with the relatively petty, but no less damaging, exercise of power by a privileged class. 'It is now known to philosophers', he remarks in his Preface to the novel, 'that the spirit and the character of government intrudes itself into every rank of society', a factor exemplified in the story by the pervasive tyranny of a landowner, the once well-meaning Falkland. Falkland's tentacles are observed catching at the novel's hero, Caleb Williams, at every turn. Imprisoned by one of his persecutor's many contrivances, Caleb exclaims against the false assumption that England has no Bastille: 'Is that a country of liberty where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go, ignorant fool! and visit the scenes of our prisons! witness their unwholesomeness, their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates!' Such rhetoric forms part of a series of counterblasts to the complacent upholders of the idea of the free-born Englishman. If Caleb fails finally to confront his persecutor in public, a failure which he regrets, he is no passive victim. His escapes from confinement, his disguises, wanderings, and abortive attempts to flee from England, give the novel something of the quality of an adventure story, but his understanding of his predicament, and his articulation

of this understanding as a critique of the existing ills of society, give his narrative a truly radical bite. At the opening of his story the narrator identifies Falkland's attraction to the principles of chivalry. In concluding his memoirs, Caleb returns to the issue. Chivalry has, he claims, served to corrupt a noble mind and perverted 'the purest and most laudable intentions'. The survival, or worse, the revival of aristocratic codes, it is suggested, works both as a disguise to, and a justification of, class-oppression.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790) also forms a protest against Burke's nostalgia for the age of chivalry by ridiculing defunct, upper-class codes of behaviour. But her treatise goes beyond a mere attack on a system of aristocratic values which keep the greater proportion of humankind in subservience. For Wollstonecraft (1759–97), that greater part of humankind embraced the thraldom of women of all classes. Wollstonecraft was the most articulate of a small group of writers, all of them associated with Godwin's circle, who used fiction to propagate certain key aspects of the new revolutionary ideology. This group included two other women writers, Mary Hays (1760–1843), the author of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), and Elizabeth Inchbald (1753–1821) whose novel *A Simple Story* appeared in 1791. Hays's Emma Courtney is 'a human being, loving virtue', but one 'enslaved by passion, liable to the mistaken weaknesses of our fragile nature', and hers is a story of unhappy and unrequited love and of a suffering accentuated by a character insufficiently disciplined by education. Hays's later work includes the six volumes of *Female Biography, or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of all Ages and Countries* (1803). Inchbald's *A Simple Story* scarcely reveals itself now as a work of political or sexual radicalism, concerned as it is with a quiescent English Roman Catholic family, but it does manage to assert the pressing need for women's education in order to respond to a stifling lack of fulfilment. Inchbald's later literary career included the novel *Nature and Art* (1796), two unperformed dramas set in revolutionary France, and a string of comedies, one of which, a version of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows* of 1798, is the play disastrously rehearsed in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*.

The modest fiction of Hays and Inchbald shows a concern with the inconsistencies, limitations, and shortcomings of a contemporary society, but neither writer possessed the fire and the outspoken feminist zeal apparent in Wollstonecraft's flawed, rancorous, polemical, and radically original novels. Both *Mary* (1788) and the unfinished *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) deal with the evidence of a universal oppression of women by men. *Mary* is told in an unadorned, laconic, matter-of-fact way, a style which, despite its periodic recourse to irony, might almost be described as perfunctory. The narrative touches on a variety of issues which figure prominently in 'Romantic' literature, notably on the significance of the imagination, the nature of religious feeling, and the soul-expanding effects of travel, and it interestingly opposes the emotional security of female friendship to a loveless marriage and an unfulfilled love-affair, but it is ultimately a tragedy without real substance. *The*

Wrongs of Woman is a far more persuasive polemic concerning the need for a public recognition of women's rights. It is also a more impressive, if equally restless, work of fiction. Its heroine, Maria, is in many ways a development from the suffering Mary. She is acutely sensitive to landscape and ambience, but her Rousseauistic musings are balanced by her rejection of intellectual passivity and the kind of decorous feeling in which Rousseau himself ('the Prometheus of sentiment') patronizingly limited women's perceptions. Maria is also alert to 'the present state of society and government' and to what she sees as the 'enslaved state of the labouring majority'. To her alertness she adds the experience of thraldom within a loveless marriage. The novel opens with her literal imprisonment in a rambling madhouse, Gothic both in its architecture and in its *frissons*. The unhappy state of her suffering sisters is brought home to her through the melancholy catalogue of male oppression that she hears from her fellow inmates. If Maria's spirits are temporarily raised by the contemplation of Italy and 'the heart-enlarging virtues of antiquity', it gradually becomes clear that she is most inspired by the new virtues of revolutionary France. The judge who systematically rejects her pleas for independence and for the enjoyment of her own fortune recognizes that her motivation is, to him, a gross parody of all demands for political change. 'We do not want French principles in public or private life', he asserts in the novel's last completed chapter, 'and, if women were allowed to plead their feeling, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality'.

Wollstonecraft's most effective attempt to prize open the flood-gates remains her highly influential treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), an adaptation and remoulding of French revolutionary theory to the universal needs of women. It is dedicated to a French hero of the moment, the ex-Bishop and singularly devious statesman, Talleyrand. This dedication sets out the nub of the argument of the treatise as a whole: 'If woman be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue.' 'Who made man the exclusive judge', Wollstonecraft demands, 'if woman partake with him the gift of reason?' Her book is centred on these twin appeals to education and to reason: education to render the further subjection of women indefensible and reason applied to all future questions of gender. The relevance of her argument to contemporary political debate is carefully indicated by comparisons of the particular enslavement of humankind by tyrannical kings to the general enslavement of women by universally tyrannical men. In Louis XIV's France, she asserts in her fourth chapter, a nation and a sex were forced into a subjection which was disguised by a picturesque cloak of chivalric flattery. Similarly, in the ninth chapter, she complains of 'the pernicious effects which arise from the unnatural distinctions established in society', distinctions which divide nations into classes and ranks and which serve to deny both dignity and liberty to the suffering majority. The new order in France, she implies, has a vital relevance to all future attempts to define relationships between class and class, gender and gender.

Independent-minded women figure prominently in the novels of two further members of the Godwin circle, Robert Bage (1728–1801) and Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809). In the work of both writers, however, it is men who assume the burden of the fictional argument. Bage, a Midlands industrialist, wrote six novels, the last two of which, *Man as He Is* (1792) and *Hermsprong, or Man as He is Not* (1796), show the clearest evidence of the impact of revolutionary thought. Bage's earlier works are variously concerned with the prospects of regenerated humanity in communities freed of pretension and extravagance. In *Man as He Is*, however, he traces the moral growth of Sir George Paradyne, a young man torn between hedonism and earnest practicality, a practicality conditioned by experience of worthy manufacture in Birmingham. As *Hermsprong* also emphasizes, Bage is determined to uphold the propriety of hard work and the right use of earned wealth in opposition to inherited privilege. Essentially, he looks to a future, American-style property-owning democracy, the values of which will be determined by men of sense and not men of rank (though this premiss is partly undermined in *Hermsprong* by the final revelation that its supposedly 'savage' American hero is in fact an English aristocrat!). Bage is no sansculotte, but he does identify the ills of present society with its hierarchical composition and he also firmly recognizes that sexual egalitarianism must form a part of the process of human liberation.

Holcroft's *Anna St Ives* (1792) is a witty and various epistolary novel, one which shows its debts to Richardson in its scenes of confinement and in the threatened rape of its abducted title character. Anna is courted by two men, rivals contrasted by birth, station, and literary style. Frank Henley, the practically educated son of an upwardly-mobile gardener, expresses himself 'frankly'. Coke Clifton has a very different, rakish, inflated style which plays with Latin tags and affects a restless desperation. Clifton is, however, no Lovelace despite his emotional lurches between wrath and regret, convention and excess. Henley, of course, wins the battle for the intelligent Anna's hand. The novel's discursive development also allows for some pointed asides concerning the 'barbarity' of the Europe of the *ancien régime*. Holcroft's second revolutionary novel, *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor* (1794), was published in the year in which its author spent some eight weeks in Newgate prison on an indictment for high treason (he was acquitted without any charge being preferred). *Hugh Trevor* is a *Bildungsroman* which traces the unsteady fortunes of its narrator and a destiny which is almost Hardyan in its unhappiness. All occasions seem to inform against him, and his splenetic denunciations of the corruptions of the Church, the Law, and the State suggest a real bitterness founded on experience. Despite its occasional sensationalism (as when Hugh finds himself, by accident, in an anatomist's cadaver store) the novel provides a generally effective criticism of the body politic. Holcroft's plays, *Duplicity* (1781), *Love's Frailties* (1794), and the once popular *The Road to Ruin* (1792), are equally sprinkled with aspersions concerned with the injustice of a hierarchical society (appropriately enough, it was he who adapted Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* for the English stage in 1784). His posthumously published memoirs (1816), which describe his early struggles against poverty and rejection, later moved Charles Dickens to express the hope that his own autobiography (had he ever finished it) might one day stand on the same shelf.

Gothic Fiction

'When danger or pain press too nearly', Edmund Burke argues in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), 'they are incapable of giving any delight and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.' Burke's reference to the everyday delights evoked by representations of danger and pain is not merely an expression of relief from discomfort, or a gratuitous satisfaction in feeling 'There but for the Grace of God go I', but a tribute to the power of mimetic art. Aristotle's identification of the power of tragedy as lying in its evocation of pity and fear, and in its effective purging of these emotions, is shifted by Burke into new aesthetic territory. Pain and terror, he suggests, 'are capable of producing delight'; this delight was not pleasurable, 'but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror'. The sublime, the awareness of which produces 'the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling', he relates to ideas of vastness, infinity, and astonishment. The sublime could be experienced in the contemplation of nature, especially wild and mountainous scenery, or in the study of architecture, notably in the appreciation of soaring medieval cathedrals and rugged castle ruins. Such stimuli were to become the stock-in-trade of English Romanticism.

Burke readily recognized that certain kinds of literature also evoked a sense of 'delightful horror'. He specifically cited the instance of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but he was also evidently thinking of Shakespeare's tragedies. References to, citations from, and distinct structural and thematic echoes of the works of Shakespeare and Milton were heard throughout the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction which has long been typed as 'Gothic'. The strain begins, self-consciously enough, with Horace Walpole's brief novella *The Castle of Otranto* of 1764. It flourished in the closing years of the century, but ripples of its impact, and significant aspects of its sensationalism, have continued to be felt in English literature from the time of the Brontës and Dickens until the present day. 'Delightful horror' was bred amid historic ruins and in historical settings. It prospered by means of steady reference to crags and chasms, to torture and terror, to necromancy, necrophilia, and the uneasily numinous. It rejoiced in hauntings, sudden death, dungeons, dreams, diablerie, phantasms, and prophecies. Gothic fiction was, and is, essentially a reaction against comfort and security, against political stability and commercial progress. Above all, it resists the rule of reason.

Horace Walpole (1717–94), the third surviving son of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, began creating a mock castle for himself at Strawberry Hill on the western fringes of London in 1749, gradually filling his new residence with a choice, eclectic, and extraordinary collection of *objets d'art*. As its pretty name suggests, in no sense did Strawberry Hill attempt to evoke the defence-works or the sublime battlements of a genuine fortress. Nevertheless, its fancy, castellated domesticity, its fretted plaster vaults, and the catholicity of its contents, seem to have inspired something of the whimsy of *The Castle of Otranto*, a story which purports to be a 'translation' of an old Italian tale of improbable catastrophes in medieval Apulia. As a connoisseur and an antiquarian, Walpole remains a figure of considerable cultural importance (his *Anecdotes of Painting in England* of 1762–80 is still a prime source for the study of the early pictorial arts in Britain), but his Gothic *divertissement*, which he claimed had blended 'two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern', is by comparison a slight work chiefly remarkable for the quite extraordinary variety of its literary progeny.

The Castle of Otranto was the direct inspiration of Clara Reeve's short tale *The Old English Baron* of 1777. Reeve (1729–1807) produced what to all intents and purposes is an engaging fairy-tale of chivalric virtue and unlawful disinheritance, with a ghost standing in for a fairy godmother as the justifier of the righteous. Ann Radcliffe's work is both more expansive and more serious in its implications. Radcliffe (1764–1823) was, as Sir Walter Scott later acknowledged, the true 'founder of a class or school' which led the way 'in a peculiar style of composition affecting powerfully the mind of the reader'. In an essay published posthumously in 1826, Radcliffe herself drew a distinction between the representation of terror and that of horror; terror, she claimed, 'expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life'; horror, by contrast, 'contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them'. It was terror, and not horror, that was the source of her own fictional sublime. Her fiction, which may seem to some readers relatively tame, is more closely related to Burke's notion of a 'tranquility tinged with terror' than to the supernatural sensationalism of the later Gothic novelists whose works have inspired the literary, and cinematic, 'horror' of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Radcliffe's sensibility had been formed by the wild and perilous landscape paintings of Salvator Rosa and her sublime was centred on descriptions of imaginary scenery. It is to Salvator Rosa that she refers her readers in the third chapter of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) in her delineation of a scene of 'barrenness . . . interrupted by the spreading branches of the larch and cedar, which threw their gloom over the cliff, or athwart the torrent that rolled in the vale'. In *The Italian* (1797) her heroine, Ellena, is imprisoned in a convent the site of which overlooks a plain fringed with a 'vast chain of mountains, which seemed to form an insurmountable rampart to the rich landscape . . . Their towering and fantastic summits, crowding together into dusky air, like flames tapering to a point'. Such impressions of solemn or 'peculiar grandeur' serve both to elevate and to awe the spirits of Radcliffe's romantically susceptible heroines. Hers is an imagined

Italy (she left England only once, to visit the Low Countries and the Rhineland), informed by impressions and powerful visual stereotypes. Both Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Ellena in *The Italian* prove to be victims of long-drawn-out male threats, but they are threats accentuated by cultivated memories of *banditti*, feudal princes, Machiavels, and an encroachingly sinister Catholicism. Both heroines are decorous and sensible, and both find resource in their very reasonableness, but they also appreciate the sexual and moral dangers of their respective situations with a heightened and complementary sensibility. At the opening of *Udolpho*, for example, Radcliffe is at pains to suggest the quality of Emily's education at the hands of her refined, nature-loving father, an instruction which has taught her 'to resist first impressions, and to acquire that steady dignity of mind, that can alone counterbalance the passions and bear us, as far as is compatible with our nature, above the reach of circumstances'.

In his various anthology *Literary Hours* of 1798 the minor essayist the Reverend Nathan Drake (1766–1836) praised Ann Radcliffe as 'the Shakespeare of Romance writers', a novelist who had the tact never to 'degenerate into horror'. In his essay 'On Objects of Terror' Drake attempted to categorize such objects. Into a first category he placed 'those which owe their origin to the agency of superhuman beings, and form a part of every system of mythology'; into a second he put 'those which depend upon natural causes and events for their production'. An increasingly supernatural emphasis in Gothic fiction is evident in the work of Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775–1818) and Charles Robert Maturin (1782–1824), both of whom seem to have relished a degeneration into the world of horror. Lewis's *The Monk* of 1796 is set in a Capuchin friary in Madrid, a small world of repression, obsession, ambition, and intrigue which contrasts vividly with the calm reflection generally evident amongst the inmates of Radcliffe's convents. Ambrosio, the monk of the title, is seen steadily falling away from the false state of grace in which he begins and from his popular reputation as a saintly preacher. The novel lacks any real psychological depth in its investigation of a tormented soul, but it powerfully evokes, and semi-pornographically exploits, incidents and images which serve to suggest the labyrinthine nature of Ambrosio's buried life. Throughout the narrative structural play is made with hidden chambers, subterraneous passages, and sealed vaults; underground life, like concealed passion, breaks threateningly into the open or serves to undermine all pretension to chaste sobriety. *The Monk* is prefaced with an epigraph from *Measure for Measure*, and it later echoes and transforms the monument scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, but Ambrosio's explosive escape from repression goes well beyond anything suggested by Shakespeare's Angelo, and his attempted rape in a charnel-house quite outdoes Juliet's horridest imaginings. The termination of Ambrosio's Faustian compact with the Devil results in his being physically and spiritually broken and with his agonizingly slow death described in self-indulgent detail ('Myriads of insects . . . fastened upon his sores, darted their stings into his

body . . . and inflicted upon him tortures the most exquisite and insupportable. The Eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks'). What Lewis lacks in discretion and tact he makes up for in energetic verve and frenetic action. Desperate diseases are everywhere relieved by desperate appliances.

Charles Robert Maturin was a priest of the Church of Ireland, endued with a strongly Calvinist theology, who had found ecclesiastical promotion as elusive as literary and financial success. Before the publication of *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820 he had written one historical and two Irish-based novels, and had had his tragedy *Bertram* performed at Drury Lane thanks to the good offices of Scott and Byron. A feeling for the wild western reaches of Ireland, an acute appreciation of disappointment, and a gloomy sense of theological despair and incipient damnation inform *Melmoth*, a fiction shaped around a series of anguished attempts by its hero to shrug off the consequences of yet another diabolic compact. Melmoth seeks for more than sympathy for his situation; he needs to persuade a fellow-despairer to take his place. The effect of the novel is cumulative, built up as it is on narratives describing the unhappy destinies of the hero's potential substitutes and moving across both geographical space and historic time. The panoply of a deeply suspect Catholicism and the persecuting zeal of the Inquisition haunt the various stories as much as they had shaped the prejudices implicit throughout *The Monk*; the distinction of *Melmoth* lies in the variety and complexity of its psychology and in its examination of the grim isolation of its central character. In the Preface to his earlier novel *The Milesian Chief* (1812) Maturin had confessed: 'If I possess any talent, it is that of darkening the gloomy, and developing the sad; of painting life in extremes, and representing those struggles of passion when the soul trembles on the verge of the unlawful and the unhallowed.' Maturin's Wanderer is an archetype of northern European Romanticism, linked in the popular imagination with Byron's Childe Harold and Cain, with Goethe's Faust, with Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, and with the legend of the Wandering Jew. He is also peculiarly the product of an increasingly restless and marginalized Anglo-Irish culture, troubled by the cultural oppositions of guilt and detachment, of rootlessness and disinheritance.

The unlawful and the unhallowed also figure prominently in a further, if somewhat less exotic, Calvinist novel, James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Hogg (1770–1835) was best known to his contemporaries as a rustic poet of the Scottish Borders, the 'Ettrick Shepherd' who had supplied Sir Walter Scott with folk-ballads and who had gradually established a reputation for himself as a writer of verse and occasional prose. His novel was originally published anonymously, as if it were the genuine evangelical confession promised by its baldly Protestant title, but this title-page ruse serves as a merely temporary disguise to the challenging innovation of the succeeding fiction. *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* subverts the implications of the Calvinist theology of predestination by

pushing to an extreme the antinomian idea that the Christian elect is set free by divine grace from the need to observe the moral law. Robert Wringhim, the 'justified sinner' of the title, draws his assurance of belonging to 'the community of the just upon earth' from the religious culture of his adopted father, but the perversion of his 'sanctification' is very much his own, worked out as it is with the prompting sophistry of a figure whom he identifies as his *alter ego*, Gil-Martin. Wringhim commits a series of 'justified' murders, beginning, in a fit of pious indignation, with that of a preacher whose doctrine he finds unsoundly flabby, before coming to the horrified awareness that his prompter is the Devil and that an eternal retribution awaits him. The narrative, divided between a third person 'editor' and Wringhim's own 'memoir', suggests that Wringhim's problem is more internal than external, more an unnatural fragmentation of the self and a psychopathic case-history than a conventionally 'Gothic' play with the supernatural.

The critical umbrella of the term 'Gothic' has been taken to cover a number of anomalous texts which allow both for a convergence and for a conflict of the natural and the supernatural. The contrast presented by William Beckford's oriental fantasy *Vathek* (1786) and Mary Shelley's proto-science fiction *Frankenstein* (1818) is particularly pointed. Neither novel is narrowly 'Gothic', dispensing as they both do with medieval trappings and the diabolic in favour of an investigation of esoteric or forbidden knowledge. Beckford (1759–1844), the heir to a phenomenal fortune, was able, like Walpole, to act out his fantasies in the architectural pleasure-domes he built for himself and amid the extraordinary collection of artefacts which he assembled. Like Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Tower, his short, exotic romance *Vathek* (originally written in French) offered an escape from the plodding, orderly pleasures of the life of an eighteenth-century gentleman. The dissolute and disillusioned Arabian hero of the tale thirsts for power, both secular and material, and for a supernatural control over life and death, appetites which are sated only by entry into the caverns of the underworld, secret halls which belatedly force upon him the wisdom that his cravings are empty. Vathek and his hedonistic companions are finally condemned to lose the gift of hope and to 'wander in an eternity of unabating anguish . . . the punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds'. *Vathek* is a *Rasselas* bereft of much of its moral philosophy, a study of unhappy yearning and unfulfilment.

Frankenstein works on quite a different level. Mary Shelley (1797–1851), the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, and the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, conceived her novel as a *divertissement* during a wet summer in Switzerland with her husband and Byron. Talk in this literary circle had, according to the novelist's own introduction to her work, dwelt on philosophy and nature, on the origins and meaning of life, on the myth of Prometheus, and on the enterprise of modern science. The proposal that each member of the circle should write a 'ghost story' stimulated a sleepless night and a fertile, unconscious drift into 'terror' on Mary Shelley's part. *Frankenstein* is, however,

more than simply a recall of her 'thrall of fear'; it is a morally probing exploration of responsibility and of the body of knowledge which we now call 'science'. The tendency amongst Byron's associates to push ideas to extremes, and to test sensation and experience, is here developed as a study of the consequences of experiment and of moving into the unknown. *Frankenstein* is also an imaginative expatiation of the principles of liberty and human rights so dear to the novelist's parents. The interconnected layers of the fiction lead from one variety of intellectual ambition to another, from the first-person account of the solitary explorer, Robert Walton, to the confessions of Dr Frankenstein (the 'modern Prometheus' of the subtitle) and of his unhappy creation. Like the legendary Prometheus, Frankenstein's enterprise is punished, but not by a jealous heaven; his suffering is brought upon him by a challenge to his authority on the part of the creature that he has rashly made. A parallel is drawn not only between classical myth and modern experiment, but also between the story of Frankenstein's miserable creature and that of Adam. This artificial man, like the ruined, questioning Adam, turns to accuse his creator with an acute and trained intelligence (he has also grasped the theological and educational implications of *Paradise Lost*, a recitation of which he has overheard). Like Adam he insists on both his loneliness and, later, his wretchedness. He also comes to recognize how much he has in common with Milton's Satan ('When I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me'). Envy, defeat, and unhappiness express themselves in a course of jealous destruction which he sees as vindicating his separate existence. The novel ends where it began in a wild and frozen polar landscape, a wasteland which both purges and purifies the human aberrations represented by Frankenstein and his flawed experiment. The shifting ice is not only effectively placeless, it also allows for the opening of new perspectives and uncertainties. *Frankenstein* is no meditation on historical, pictorial, or mythological terrors; its fascination and its power lie in its prophetic speculation.

Smith and Burney

The modern view of the range of late eighteenth-century fiction has for too long been conditioned by an appreciation of its extravagant and political aspects to the detriment of its romantic realism. The life and work of both Charlotte Smith (1749–1806) and of Frances (Fanny) Burney (1752–1840) were directly touched by the French Revolution, but neither writer was to espouse radical causes in her fiction and Burney in particular increasingly emphasized the passivity of her female protagonists. The world may be viewed by both novelists as unstable and oppressive, it may stimulate Gothic sensibility or sentimental asides on war and revolution, but it is generally observed as providing an uncomfortable environment in which the moral maturity of men and women is tested and not found wanting. Fanny Burney's heroines enter society

at an awkward age or in unfavourable circumstances and they are obliged to learn through mistakes, embarrassments, and reverses, but they are equally allowed to enjoy the love of an upright suitor and the ultimate prospect of a happy marriage. Virtue is rewarded by a slow process of learning how to recognize the correct amatory and social signals. Women in the fictions of both novelists are not so much threatened victims as dependants, sojourners in the shadow of energetic men, and decision-makers only in so far as they are presented with moral choices.

Charlotte Smith, herself the far from passive victim of a miserable marriage, wrote to make money to support her children. Her contemporary reputation was based largely on her poetry, notably the *Elegiac Sonnets, and other Essays* of 1784. In her verse she cultivates the figure of a melancholy narrator, a narrator sometimes literally modelled on Goethe's Werther, who is responsive to seasonal change but equally alert to a disjunction between nature's outward harmony and a private restlessness (the 'tyrant passion and corrosive care' of her 'Sonnet Written at the Close of Spring'). Her distinctive power as a poet lies in a combination of detailed observation and recurrent evocation of misery. Smith's novels are far less personal and emotional, concerned as they often are with money, inheritance, and the world of the country house. In *Emmeline* (1788) she makes play with the Gothic by initially confining her heroine, an 'orphan of the castle', in a rambling Pembrokeshire fortress and by allowing her to elude unwanted suitors by escaping down labyrinthine corridors. In *The Old Manor House* (1793) she deals once more with seclusion in a mansion, adding what prove to be unfounded suspicions of ghosts and poltergeists (the bumps in the night are made by smugglers who are effectively undermining the house's foundations). *The Old Manor House* is, despite its title, preoccupied with the dilemmas, the politics, and the sentiments of the present. The manor's owner, Mrs Rayland, dwells on her family's ancient chivalric pretensions, and, as an old-fashioned Tory, pours scorn on those whom she terms 'the Rebels of America'. Her young cousin, Orlando Somerive, discovers less narrow political definitions when fighting with the British army in North America, berating the miseries of army life and 'the folly of mankind' in proceeding with such a war. Neither Orlando's daring pacifism, nor the nefarious activities of the smugglers, ever take on a major thematic emphasis in a story essentially concerned with romantic love and a proper line of succession. In *Desmond* (1792) Smith had made a limited attempt to defend the liberal principles of the first stages of the French Revolution, but her disillusion with its bloody progress emerges in her long poem *The Emigrants* of 1793. In the poem, the subject of which derives from her active sympathy with, and support for, French refugees in England, she mourns 'with swimming eye' the desolation of 'the Temple, which they fondly hoped | Reason would raise to Liberty, destroyed | By ruffian hands'.

Fanny Burney's sympathies were never swayed towards the Revolution. As a sometime lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte, and as the future wife of the

émigré General Alexandre d'Arblay, she noted in her Diary for 1792, for example, that 'the famous Tom Paine' was propagating 'his pernicious doctrines' in Suffolk. In her own county of Surrey she frequented 'a little colony of unfortunate . . . French noblesse' at Juniper Hall at Mickleham, a colony which contained her future husband and which gave her the opportunity of observing the complex amatory adventures of Germaine de Staël and her lovers Narbonne and Talleyrand (though Burney also admitted to being impressed by Mme de Staël's 'extraordinary intellect'). Her first novel, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), describes an English society far removed from that of flirtatious Paris and its dangerous liaisons. Its heroine is a girl with 'a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart', one who is initially ignorant of 'the forms, and manners, of the world'. What Evelina comes to learn is the value of decorum in fashionable society, but she also acquires a modest wisdom which transcends the limits of that society. Her letters to her clerical mentor, Mr Villars, reveal an occasionally witty discrimination as well as a protest against the ways of a world which both elevates and narrows the scope of women. She finally finds security as the wife of the worthy Lord Orville (a muted reflection of Richardson's Grandison).

Burney's more expansive later novels, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), *Camilla; or, a Picture of Youth* (1796), and *The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties* (1814) all re-examine the motif of the *ingénue* entering the 'world'. *Cecilia* is a substantial development of the themes of *Evelina*, whose popular success had established Burney's reputation, but its satirical edge is far blunter and its assertion of moral conventions both more emphatic and more verbose. In *Camilla* the comedy is yet more subdued, and the critical ebullience, which had marked Evelina's observation of society, is more tacit so as to present a firmer defence of social values in the face of revolutionary questioning. Camilla is obliged to win respect for her innate virtue and for her selfhood, but her unsteady relationship with her priggish suitor cum mentor, Edgar Mandlebert, consists of a series of misunderstandings, surmountable obstacles, and tearful reconciliations. It is a sombre novel which hovers close to tragedy and which insistently presses home its moral message about the importance of good conduct. The fifth chapter consists largely of a 'Sermon' addressed to Camilla by her father Mr Tyrold. This sermon puts forward an ideal of female action and provides a counterblast to Mary Wollstonecraft's demands for education, equality, and independence by insisting on the vaguer notion that 'the temporal destiny of woman is enwrapt in still more impenetrable obscurity than that of man' and that 'the proper education of a female . . . is still to seek, still a problem beyond human solution'. Tyrold's Christian stress on patience, self-conquest, and good sense as the means of controlling 'passion' evidently received Burney's own assent, for she later allowed his sermon to be separately reprinted as part of a conduct book for young ladies. The distinction between the control of passion and its free expression, between the operation of sense

and an indulgence in sensibility, provides the shape of *The Wanderer*, an investigation of the struggles of a disorientated and nameless refugee in England, a victim of French revolutionary persecution. Although by 1814, the year of the novel's belated publication, the Reign of Terror was long past, Burney was at pains to stress in her Preface that the 'stupendous iniquity and cruelty' of the period had left real enough scars. The unhappy wanderer, Juliet (known through most of the novel by her awkwardly acquired pseudonym 'Ellis'), is contrasted with an English enthusiast for revolutionary liberty, Elinor Joddrel, a girl 'inebriated . . . with the revolutionary beverage' and enthusiastically convinced that the epoch in which she lives 'lifts our minds from slavery and from nothingness, into play and vigour, and leaves us no longer, as heretofore, merely making believe that we are thinking beings'. Such high-minded confidence is shown to be misplaced; Elinor is both restless and reckless, unhappy in love and incapable of adjusting to the stodgy stability of upper middle-class English society. Burney's picture of that society is scarcely flattering, for it is variously seen as snobbish, selfish, insular, and cruel, but it is Juliet and her practical sense, cultivated under adversity, who finally triumphs and who profits from the unbroken English barriers of 'custom and experience, raised by the wisdom of foresight, and established, after trial, for public utility'. Such traditionalism and social conservatism is a keynote of the novel. *The Wanderer* is nevertheless implicitly marked by a genteel feminism which steadily emerges in Burney's careful delineation of the fortunes of her struggling, rejected, and often isolated heroine.

Cowper, Blake, and Burns

The conflicting, even contradictory, pulls of passivity and active commitment have often determined the subject-matter and mood of English poetry. This is as true of religious verse as of its political and secular counterparts. These tensions are especially evident in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period marked as much by evangelical religion as by international political engagement, by a moralizing spirituality as by a struggle for liberation. In some vital and effective ways, most notably in the battle against the slave-trade and, later, against colonial slavery itself, pious sentiment and moral conviction went hand in hand with campaigns for political action. In other cases, an insistent internalization of religious experience, and an emphasis on private and public morality, seemed to preclude a preoccupation with constitutional and legal reform. Whereas the various crises created by the evolving nature of French revolutionary politics presented a series of unresolved dilemmas and inspiriting impulses to sympathetic English observers, a contrary impulse towards contemplation and withdrawal also tends to mould intellectual and religious life in the period. To regard the poetry of these years as dominated by novelty, liberty, and experiment is to distort it according to

perceptions proleptically shaped by a fascination with a supposed progressive advance from a defined 'Romanticism' to 'Modernist' reaction against it.

No poet of the period better embodies these contradictory movements than William Cowper (1731–1800). Cowper was a man naturally subject to fits of depression, a trait accentuated by religious melancholia and informed with a strongly Calvinist sense of sin and potential damnation. Retirement from the pressures of work and of city life was enforced by his temperament and intellectually justified by recourse to an anti-urban, anti-courtly tradition dating back to the Latin poetry of Horace (to whose work he makes frequent reference). But for Cowper, retirement never implied a dissociation of himself from secular concerns, nor was it conditioned by a desire for solitary contemplation. In the 'Verses supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk, during his Abode in the Island of Juan Fernandez' he recoils with a conditional horror from the isolation of this 'monarch of all he surveys', the presumed original of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Selkirk's monarchy may deny him rivals, but it also entails a lack of 'society, friendship, and love', a loss which is balanced by a minimal assertion of divine mercy which 'reconciles man to his lot' in the final lines of the poem. Such reconciliation frequently informs Cowper's meditations on sin or misfortune, or on the general corruption of the world, but his poetry also allows for eruptions of anger at abuses and offences and for forceful denunciations of oppression. Throughout his verse there echo diatribes against slavery and colonial intrusion into non-European societies. 'The Negro's Complaint' turns arguments about 'civilization' on their heads and finally demands proof of slave-traders that their 'human feelings' are in any way superior to those of the Africans they exploit (a similar sentiment shapes 'Pity Poor Africans'). In Cowper's most substantial poem, *The Task* (1784), his complaints range over colonial oppression, the condition of the poor at home, the corruption of London and its commercial enterprise, the conduct of war, and, supremely, unjust imprisonment. The fifth book of the poem, 'The Winter Morning Walk', moves from an opening description of a snow-covered landscape, to a meditation on the ice-palace built by the Empress Anna of Russia and reflections on the 'playthings' of despots, to a forceful advocacy of pacifism, but the book centres on an imagined picture of a prisoner in the Bastille, a victim of Bourbon tyranny. 'There's not an English heart', Cowper prophetically announces of the Bastille, 'that would not leap | To hear that ye were fall'n at last; to know | That ev'n our enemies, so oft employ'd | In forging chains for us, themselves were free.' Cowper's passion for liberty is not, however, confined to a political construct ('the cause of man'), for he is equally determined to insist on a liberty of conscience and worship and yet more on the service of God which brings perfect freedom ('liberty of heart deriv'd from Heav'n').

The structure of *The Task* is essentially discursive, using ideas of provincial retirement and the active contemplation of nature as a basis from which other meditations open up. It is not a shape which has appealed to the kind of

modern reader conditioned by a demand for logical progression and a consequential process of argument. Cowper roots each book of his poem in his own natural surroundings and in the sequence of seasonal change, but as his choice of winter settings for three of his six books indicates, he also seeks to suggest the quality of contemplation both during a walk outdoors and in an evening's fireside assimilation of the day's thoughts and sensations. The arrival of the post and the daily newspaper described at the opening of Book IV ('The Winter Evening') allows for the secure consideration of a larger world-view, examined at 'a safe distance'.

> Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
> Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
> And, while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
> Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
> That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
> So let us welcome peaceful ev'ning in.

As so often in Cowper's work, a determined act of withdrawal from the world ushers in sober contemplation and peace of mind. The choice of blank verse, prompted, as was the poem's first title ('The Sofa') by Cowper's friend Lady Austen, also permits a general ease of telling and an echo of comfortable, refined, but relaxed, rhythms of speech. The work as a whole, he asserts, had one major tendency: 'to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.' Sophistication, urbane politicking, and noisy declaration are rejected in favour of a therapeutic absorption in the pleasures of stillness.

For Cowper, 'the cause of piety and virtue' demanded a response both to God and to humankind. His evangelical strictures on the wickedness of the world can be both political and intensely private, and his distinctive sensitivity to nature suggests an almost Franciscan awareness of a co-operative unity in creation. He recognizes in the fourth book of *The Task* that there is 'a soul in all things, and that soul is God' and that nature itself can be a name for an effect 'whose cause is God'. When he addresses his pet hare ('Epitaph on a Hare') or when he complains of the casual cruelty of a 'gentle swain' who has allowed a goldfinch to starve in its cage, he is essentially in the same frame of mind as when in *The Task* he views hunting as an unhappy consequence of the loss of Eden or when, seated on a felled tree, he contemplates the frailty of life ('The Poplar Field'). Cowper's shorter religious lyrics, included in the collection known as the *Olney Hymns* (1779), suggest a similarly delicate, if often tense, sensibility, one urged to express a public sentiment but constitutionally inclined to the form of the interior monologue. The *Olney Hymns* enjoyed a considerable popularity, passing through some twenty editions between 1779 and 1831. Their success with readers and singers alike is testimony both to the strength of evangelical piety in the period and to Cowper's particular evocation of an intimacy in responding to divine grace, a factor evident in the celebrated

quatrain songs 'O for a closer walk with God' and 'Hark, my soul, it is the Lord'. His rarer assertions of congregational unity (such as 'Jesus, where'er thy people meet'), or of professions of public faith ('God moves in a mysterious way'), stand as more affirmatively communal statements.

Cowper's steady popularity contrasts strikingly with the obscurity in which William Blake worked, his most circulated works amongst his contemporaries being the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* of which only some twenty-two copies of the first collection and twenty-seven of the combined volume were printed. Blake (1757–1827) died, according to one of his friends, singing 'Hallelujahs and songs of joy and triumph', impromptu songs which his wife described as being 'truly sublime in music and in verse' and performed with 'extatic energy'. If Blake's lyric verse can and ought to be seen as derived from a hymnological tradition in English verse, it has, perhaps fortunately, had only a limited impact on the subsequent compilers of congregational hymn-books. 'The Divine Image' has been awkwardly appropriated to certain hymnals, and 'Jerusalem' (the inductive preface to the poem *Milton*) has, in Sir Hubert Parry's setting, become celebrated as both a religious and a political rallying-call, but the very subtlety and elusive ambiguity of most of Blake's lyrics have generally denied them repetitive melodic musical settings and over exposure in narrow or sectarian contexts.

Blake, born into a Dissenting tradition (a tradition that sometimes encouraged extempore hymn-singing), remained a religious, political, and artistic radical throughout his life. From his childhood, when he claimed to have seen the prophet Ezekiel sitting under a tree, he insisted that he had been granted visions by God and that he could translate and interpret those visions as designs which interfused picture and word. Although the inspiration was visionary, the process by which these designs reached an audience was laborious. Blake, who had been trained as an engraver, would transfer the written text of a poem to an etched copper plate, accompanying it with appropriate illustration or decoration; when printed, the page was elaborately hand-coloured or, in some cases, actually printed in colour by a method of his own invention. Blake's works, if studied in their original configurations, interrelate image and text. The text does not simply follow a picture, nor does a picture solely represent a text; both demand interpretative or speculative readings. Together they form a total text in which different signs prove to be co-operative, manifold, even contradictory.

Blake's literary sources and inspirations range from the Bible and the Bible-derived epic structures of Dante and Milton, to the moralizing children's poetry of Isaac Watts (1674–1748), the hymns of Charles Wesley, and the records of the eccentric Swedish visionary and mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Blake's work is in many ways both eclectic and syncretic. It is pervaded with the symbolism, imagery, and prophetic utterance of the Bible, but, as the poem *Milton* (1804) suggests, Blake also identifies himself both with the author of *Paradise Lost* and with the angels, both fallen and unfallen, who

figure in Milton's narrative. It is Blake who, assuming a diabolic voice, declares in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–3) that Milton was 'a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it'. Despite his disillusion with Swedenborg's all-embracing 'Church of the New Jerusalem', and his parodies of the pompous declamatory style of Swedenborg's writings Blake remained fascinated with the celebration of 'contraries' and the opposed ways of feeling, seeing, and believing which he had originally evolved as a corrective to Swedenborgianism. In his complex, personal redefinitions of Swedenborg's cosmology, Blake approached more closely to the obscure mysticism of the seventeenth-century German theosophist Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) who had argued that God the Father was the undefinable matter of the universe, neither good nor evil, but containing the germs of both. This Godhead, according to Boehme, had two wills: one good, one evil; one loving, one wrathful. Though evil, as integral to the nature of God, was necessary, humankind could conquer on Earth, and ultimately assume the empty places of the fallen angels in Heaven, by faith in Christ. In his own prophetic books, Blake sees Heaven as forming part of a framework which must merge with the creative energy of Hell rather than stand in opposition to it. The 'doors of perception' are cleansed by an apocalyptic transformation of categories so that contraries meet in newly energetic formations. Thus the tigers and horses, the lions and lambs, the children and adults, the innocent and the experienced of Blake's symbolism ought to be perceived as integral elements in the dynamic of synthesis which he saw as implicit in creation.

The complex mythology and the heretical perversity of much of Blake's thought often runs counter to an easy appreciation, let alone an understanding, of his work as a whole. This, however, is far from true of the lyrics describing contrary states of feeling and seeing, published as the *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and linked with the *Songs of Experience* in 1794. The songs of both books are interrelated, not simply as reflecting oppositions, but as a series of shifting perceptions. The 'two contrary states of the human soul' of the work's subtitle form a kind of dialectic which suggests not only a falling away from Edenic innocence to experience, but also the possibility of progress towards a Christ-inspired 'higher' innocence and a future regain of paradise. Despite their hymn-like simplicity and their nursery-rhyme rhythms, the poems in both books assume ramifications from their contexts and their interrelationships. The *Songs of Innocence* frequently suggest challenges to and corruptions of the innocent state; children are afraid of the dark, brute beasts threaten lambs, slavery imprisons the negro and a vile trade the little chimney-sweep. In 'Holy Thursday' a multitude of charity-children march in under 'the high dome of Pauls' in order to sing praises to God, but what on one level is a poem rejoicing in infant joy is, on another, a condemnation of regimentation, exploitation, and the smugness of 'the aged men, wise guardians of the poor'. The 'wisdom' of the old is generally equated with oppression in the *Songs of Experience*, poems with a far greater satirical, even sarcastic, edge. Parents, nurses, priests, and the

calculating force of human reason serve to limit and confine what once was innocent. In 'London' the very shape of the city, with its 'charter'd' streets and river, marks its inhabitants with signs of weakness and woe and the 'mind-forg'd manacles' tyrannize and terrorize its poor. Mental, spiritual, and intellectual distortion is also suggested by the moral pillaging of the 'invisible worm' which destroys the sensual beauty of the rose in 'The Sick Rose' and by the destructive force of repression in 'The Poison Tree' (a poem which was entitled 'Christian Forbearance' in Blake's manuscript):

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine

And into my garden stole.
When the night had veild the pole;
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretchd beneath the tree.

'The Poison Tree' is both the forbidden tree of knowledge and a metaphor for repressed emotion, both an expression of the evils of a negative Christian hypocrisy and an exploration of the imperative and liberating power of Christian forgiveness. The 'Garden of Love' is also wrecked by a 'thou shalt not' in the shape of 'priests in black gowns' who have planted tombstones and who bind 'joys and desires' with briars. At the end of the *Songs of Experience*, the piper who had introduced the first sequence is superseded by an 'Ancient Bard' who sees the 'Present, Past and Future' and who seems to have moved beyond a past state of innocence into a present awareness of the Fall. But this same bard, as a poet, has heard the word of God. In his response to this divine voice he is aware that the fallen condition of humankind, exemplified by doubt, reason, disputes, and folly, need not be permanent. The daybreak with which the volume opens is darkened by the poems that follow, but in the final poem 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' (transferred, significantly enough, from *Innocence* to *Experience*) another morning opens after a night of stumbling 'over the bones of the dead'. A new age of spiritual liberty and regeneration is perceived, the Kingdom of God received by those who have become again as little children.

Blake's proclamation of liberty takes many forms in his later mythological work, generally known as the Prophetic Books. The figure of Urizen, the bearded representative of a negative God of 'thou shalt nots', functions as the prime oppressor in *The First Book of Urizen* (1794). The fragmentary *The Book of Los* (1795) traces the indignant rebellion against Urizen by the energetic Los, but it is Orc, the lawless embodiment of revolution, who is seen as both rebel and oppressor. In *America: A Prophecy* (1793) Orc precipitates the action as the incarnate spirit of the revolutions in America and France; in its sequel, *Europe: A Prophecy*, Orc's mother Enitharmon both breeds revolution and checks it as a queenly repressor and stagnator who is ultimately dismayed by her son's descent into 'the vineyards of red France'. Blake's 'prophecies' have been subject to much critical interpretation, contortion, and distortion; they remain, however, singular, fascinating, elusive, and at times infuriating works. A prophet, Blake himself once noted, 'is a Seer, not an Arbitrary Dictator'. As he also remarks in his prose exposition of a now lost picture, *A Vision of the Last Judgement* (1810), 'Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & governd their Passions, or have No Passions, but because they have Cultivated their Understandings'. Blake's search for new patterns of religious symbolism and experience, and his creation of an experimental mythology, was, despite his later fascination with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an essentially Protestant yearning for an imaginative faith free of dogmatic assertion. His insistent struggle to find metaphors of freedom was, despite the intensity of his own myth-making, an essentially antinomian expression of the heretical belief that Christians were set free by grace from the need to observe the old, restrictive, moral law. His anticipation of the dawning of a 'New Age' and of the concomitant regeneration of humanity has generated much sympathetic response in latter-day post-Christians, the myth-making of that other Protestant, W. B. Yeats, being notable amongst them.

Blake's passionate, visionary libertarianism contrasts starkly with the frankly secular democratic bent of the poetry of his Scots contemporary, Robert Burns (1759–96). Both poets were grounded in what Blake styled the 'book of liberty', the Bible, and both drew from its potentially revolutionary prophetic pronouncements, but Burns's egalitarian vision is effectively that of a Presbyterian tenant-farmer who suffered no fools gladly and who recognized something of the fulfilment of his ideal of human community in the classless brotherhood of Freemasonry. The 'heaven-taught ploughman', praised by the novelist Henry Mackenzie (whose sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling* Burns much admired), was toasted by the Grand Lodge of Scotland in January 1787 as 'Caledonia's Bard'. Late eighteenth-century Scotland, having put the Jacobite rebellion behind it (in spite of a lingering national attachment to the romance of the Stuart cause and a proper sense of grievance at the nature of the suppression of the Highland risings), had generally prospered under the Union with England and the opening up of its trade with the English colonies. Edinburgh had steadily won itself a position as a leading educational, intellectual, and artistic centre of Europe. Coupled with this achievement was an often self-conscious redefinition of 'Scottishness' and a revival of serious interest in the Scots

vernacular and in Scots traditions. Burns's first published volume, the *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, of which 612 copies were published in the provincial town of Kilmarnock in 1786, found a responsive enough local and national audience, attuned to the literary use of the vernacular by the pioneering work of the poet and editor of earlier verse, Allan Ramsay (1686–1758), and by the verse of Robert Fergusson (1750–74). But, as Sir Walter Scott later noted, Burns had 'twenty times' the abilities of his predecessors.

Burns's poetry always remained close to its vital roots in the oral traditions of Scotland. His work as a collector, editor, and adaptor of folk-songs and popular airs eventually received European acclaim, but his keen ear for Scots vocabulary, idiom, and rhythm also enabled him to transform folk-song into a poetry of his own. What he acknowledged in his Commonplace Book as a 'degree of wild irregularity' in the songs of Ayrshire also stimulated him to imagine that 'it might be possible for a Scotch Poet, with a nice, judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our favourite airs'. Many of his most circulated songs were set to old tunes, notably 'Scots wha hae' of 1793, and 'O whistle an' I'll come to you, my lad' and 'The Birks of Aberfeldy', both published in the volumes of *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803). Burns's aspirations as a distinctly national poet emerge most fully in his dialect poems. His verse in 'standard' English, even his musings on Scottish history and patriotism, is flat compared to his evocations of locality through the medium of local language. Much of his finest work is satirical or descriptive of the hardness of rural work, the uprightness of 'honest poverty', and the raucousness of country amusements. 'The Twa Dogs', which voices the opinions of two dogs—one (called Caesar) a rich man's, the other (called Luath) a ploughman's collie—concerning the respective lifestyles of their masters, stands in the tradition of Scots animal poems which dates back to Henryson, but it gives the tradition a new edge by exploiting the revolutionary questioning of class privilege:

> Our Laird gets in his racked rents,
> His coals, his kain [farm produce],and a' his stents [dues];
> He rises when he likes himsel';
> His flunkies answer at the bell:
> He ca's his coach; he ca's his horse
> He draws a bonny silken purse
> As lang's my tail . . .
> . . . . . .
> Our whipper-in, wee blastit wonner [wonder]!
> Poor worthless elf! it eats a dinner
> Better than ony tenant man
> His Honour has in a' the lan';
> An' what poor cot-folk pit their painch [stomach] in,
> I own its past my comprehension.

In 'The Holy Fair' and 'Holy Willie's Prayer', however, the satire is directed at exposing the double-standards which challenge the illusion of Presbyterian respectability and solemnity. 'Holy Willie', a Kirk Elder, is given a monologue expressive both of conventional moralizing piety and of a real, if only barely admitted, relish for the sins of the flesh (the poem was not included in published collections until after Burns's death). Burns's most celebrated long poem, the verse-tale 'Tam o' Shanter' (1791), contrasts the vividly sketched, welcoming interior of an inn with the unfriendly terrors of Tam's frenzied escape from a witches' coven. The contrast is rendered particularly striking by Burns's drolly ironic narrative manner.

Wordsworth

Burns's expression of human solidarity which could dispense with class distinction was substantially derived from his intimate understanding of the rural community from which he sprang. No poet of the period so effectively extended this grasp of rural communal relationships as did William Wordsworth (1770–1850). Wordsworth's admiration for Burns's achievement is evident both in the pilgrimage he made to Ayrshire in 1803 in search of sites associated with the poet and in a poem of his own addressed 'To the Sons of Burns after visiting their Father's Grave' ('Be independent, generous, brave! Your Father such example gave'). His real tribute to Burns's example lies, however, in his own poetry of place, of character, and of relationships. Although Wordsworth's contribution to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) consisted chiefly of his use of ballad form and in remoulding its traditional subjects, he also strove, as he later argued in the celebrated Preface, to find an appropriate language. He had chosen to describe 'humble and rustic life', he claimed, because in that condition 'the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity' and because they 'speak a plainer and more emphatic language'. Burns's vernacular poems drew their strength from the very vigour of a living dialect. For Wordsworth, no such alternative to 'standard' English seemed appropriate to poetry, however radical his desire to break with the artificialities of the tradition he had inherited from the poets of the eighteenth century. His viewpoint on 'humble and rustic life' may not be that of a ploughman, but it does nevertheless demand an expression of passions and values which stand apart from those of an exclusively aristocratic or urban civilization. It stands apart, too, from the language of the decorous shepherds of the pastoral tradition. Wordsworth's early poetry is radical not because it embodies revolutionary thought or theory, or because it voices the complaints of the poor, but because it attempts to shift a literary perspective away from what he saw as gentility and false sophistication. Burns's work may have suggested a precedent for this radicalism, but the very provinciality of its language militated against Wordsworth's professed ambition to begin a process of literary reform in the realization of which he might claim a place in a line of succession with Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton.

In Book VIII of *The Excursion* (1814) Wordsworth records his impressions of a manufacturing district of northern England, 'a huge town, continuous and compact, | Hiding the face of earth for leagues . . . O'er which the smoke of unremitting fires | Hangs permanent'. It is against the physically ugly and socially challenging background of the rapid pace of the industrialization of much of Britain in the closing years of the eighteenth century that we must judge both his poetry and his ideas about what he aimed to achieve through his poetry. His birth and early education in the mountainous north-western counties of England which contain the Lake District gave him, he believed, a particularly acute sensitivity to wild nature and to the co-operative workings of humankind and nature. If he defined himself through his perception of the natural, as opposed to the mechanical, world around him, he tended also to order his political and social ideas according to the patterns of mutual responsibility he observed in rural as opposed to urban contexts. His early poetry (or at least the portion of it that he was prepared to print) is marked by protest against unnecessary or imposed suffering, injustice, incomprehension, and inhumanity, though he declined to publish his radical *Salisbury Plain* (begun in 1793) and gradually revised the revolutionary aspects out of *The Ruined Cottage* of 1797 until it appeared neutrally enough as Book I of *The Excursion* seventeen years later. In the last poem printed in the various editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800, 1802), 'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798', Wordsworth offers a self-justifying explanation of his partial retreat from politics. Here it is the sensations of remembered natural scenery, 'felt in the blood, and felt along the heart', that bring 'tranquil restoration' to a once troubled soul, and the recall of the 'still, sad music of humanity' that makes for a chastening and subduing of restlessness. The intensity of his expressed love of nature and its teachings seems to preclude other perceptions, particularly those related to the acute class division inherent in urban industrialization, in the related depopulation of the countryside, or, most pressingly, in the explosion of social questioning presented by the French Revolution. What Wordsworth elsewhere in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* calls 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is an emotion uniquely stimulated by nature and then related outwards, and variously applied or illustrated, by moral and social incident. The understanding of society is essentially secondary to, and derivative from, the primary and essential experience of a natural world still largely undamaged by human mismanagement.

Although many of Wordsworth's contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* describe tragic or unhappy incidents in an unadorned language appropriate to the ballad form, other poems in the collection assert a happier, if passive, responsiveness to place and to sensation. This passivity, expressed both in the form of dialogue (as in 'Expostulation and Reply') or as a further injunctive response to a posed question ('The Tables Turned'), entails turning from books to nature as the teacher and as the giver of an 'impulse from a vernal wood' that may teach more

'than all the sages can'. 'Tintern Abbey', the longest poem, and the one which most obviously eschews the simplicity of the ballad, both crowns the collection and gives it a direction beyond the purely narrative; it moves from a process of telling or listening implied by a poem such as 'The Thorn' (with its insistent interplay of personal experience, speculation, and hearsay) into introspection and meditation. But even here the solitary and secluded narrator implies a listener in the form of the friend (Coleridge) and the sister (Dorothy) and the silent presence of a larger humanity represented by the wreathes of smoke sent up from distant cottages. The responsive recall within the poem of 'that best portion of a good man's life', his 'little, nameless unremembered acts | Of kindness and of love', also allows for an interaction of a personal morality and the larger tutelary power of landscape. Vision is translatable into action.

Wordsworth's insistence on the morally educative influence of nature, and on the interrelationship of a love of nature and a love of humanity, pervades his long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*. This poem (first drafted in 1799, expanded in 1805, revised at intervals until 1839, and finally published posthumously, with a title chosen by his widow, in 1850) records the 'growth of a poet's mind' and it also attempts to shape certain crucial incidents in a poet's life into an ideal pattern of self-representation. Its many revisions served to change not only its narrative shape but also the impression it gives of how Wordsworth chose to read his own imaginative history. If Keats, who did not know *The Prelude*, was able to detect in Wordsworth's work the element of the 'egotistical sublime', this autobiographical experiment of necessity renders the poet the hero of his own poetic life, or rather of the period of preparation for self-expression in poetry. The 'fair seed-time' of the soul, the boy's childhood in the Lake District 'foster'd alike by beauty and by fear', as much as his adolescent experiences in Cambridge, his sense of the teeming and overwhelming confusion of London, and his initial exultation at the progress of the Revolution in France are all shaped into an exploration of his destiny as a poet. Despite its vivid accounts of action, of learning, and of secular speculation, the poem constantly returns to the idea of the retired life where the imagination is at its freest and most creative and to the solitary figure, observant of his surroundings because he is not distracted by company. The poem contains some of Wordsworth's most striking descriptive blank verse, notably the accounts in Book I which mimetically evoke the actions of rowing or of the smooth, sheer, exhilarating freedom of skating on a frozen lake:

> All shod with steel,
> We hissed along the polished ice in games
> . . . . . .
> So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
> And not a voice was idle; with the din,
> Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud;
> The leafless trees and every icy crag
> Tinkled like iron; while the distant hills

Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the image of a star
That gleamed upon the ice . . .

The poem also periodically pauses to meditate, to assess, and to draw conclusions concerning what Wordsworth calls in Book II 'that universal power | And fitness in the latent qualities | And essences of things, by which the mind | Is mov'd by feelings of delight'.

The often ecstatic accounts of the awing grandeur of nature in *The Prelude*, the delicacy of occasional observation which informs poems such as 'To the Daisy', 'To the small Celandine' and 'I wander'd lonely as a Cloud' (all published in the 1807 collection, *Poems, in Two Volumes*), or the precise, incantatory recall of sight and sound in the 'Ode' ('Intimations of Immortality') with which that collection ends, all serve to suggest the extent to which Wordsworth's poetry had moved beyond the mere loco-description of his predecessors. His landscapes are no longer filtered through the Claude-glasses with which so many eighteenth-century seekers after the picturesque sought to order nature selectively, as if it were a painting. His representation of nature is dynamic, panoramic, variously lit, multitudinous, and shot through with the creative energy of God. The *banditti* and the displaced Italianate peasants of the painters and their literary disciples are superseded by English pedlars, leech-gatherers, farmers, labourers, and wanderers. *Michael; A Pastoral Poem*, published in 1800, which effectively undoes the fancies of the Arcadian pastoral and its English imitations, is carefully 'placed' in the poet's own Grasmere, beside 'the boisterous brook of Greenhead Ghyll', and it treats of a real shepherd (with a mind 'intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs'). Landscape in Wordsworth is at once useful and massive, historic and impersonal, peopled and empty, readable yet infinitely larger than its reader. In a sense *Michael* reads landscape archaeologically by interpreting signs and evolving a lost history from them. For his immediate successors, Wordsworth's work, like Scott's, re-created and revivified history. His redefinition of the proper subjects and objects of poetry, and his extraordinary lexical and metrical gift, derived in part from an awareness of the increasingly acute distinctions between urban and rural civilization, and between manual and mechanical labour, in his time. 'A multitude of causes unknown to former times', he wrote in 1800, 'are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind.' His later impact on English culture, and on a century of English literature from the time of Carlyle to that of D. H. Lawrence, is incalculable. He effectively completed the process of breaking

old prejudices and tastes and, by means of his pervasive influence, he moulded new ones.

Wordsworth's ambition to speak as 'a man speaking to men' implies not only a listener but a community of listeners. The solitary walker, or the poet who composed, according to Hazlitt, 'walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption', should not be seen as an isolated or self-centred speaker. Although one is sometimes left wondering to what extent his narrators actually *listen* to the people who talk to them, the interlocutors in his poetry are certainly not interrupters. The child in 'We are Seven', the leech-gatherer of 'Resolution and Independence', or the ragged soldier of Book IV of *The Prelude* are all engaged in conversation by a narrator, and the words of all three serve to alter and expand that narrator's perception. In Wordsworth's most obviously public declarations in poetry—the 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty' published in the 1807 collection, or the vastly inferior (but equally earnest) historical sequences of 'Ecclesiastical Sonnets' of 1822–45—he addresses his fellow countrymen, and beyond them the world, in a consciously Miltonic tone. Milton, for him the embodiment of the spirit of English (as opposed to French revolutionary) liberty, was a model to whom he regularly turned in his desire to address a 'fit audience'. If his sharpest early critics, such as Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, viewed Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge as representatives of a '*sect* of poets . . . dissenters from the established systems in poetry and criticism' who constituted 'the most formidable conspiracy against sound judgement in matters poetical', the poet himself sought to assert both his sense of literary succession and his right to move from solitary contemplation to public statement. Milton, of whom 'England hath need' to give it 'manners, virtue, freedom, power', helped him to articulate national, political, and moral sentiments. The 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty' range from meditations on the dire consequences of French policy abroad ('On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic', 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', and 'Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland'), to equally troubled comparisons of a selfish and corrupt English present, to the nobler passions of the Civil War. Modern revolutions are read through past experience, modern disillusion through historic principle. The older, yet more conservative Wordsworth, distressed by threats to the Anglican settlement, turned to the ideas of succession and continuity in the 'Ecclesiastical Sonnets', a long sequence which occasionally flares into poetic life and which seeks to find a pattern of divine inspiration and benevolent progress. The Recluse readily assumed the role of public orator.

Coleridge, Southey, and Crabbe

Despite his strong sympathy with the ideas and achievements of the Revolution at the time of his sojourn in France in 1790, and despite the passionate

radicalism of his unpublished 'Descriptive Sketches' of 1792 and the republican spirit of his unsent 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', Wordsworth remained, to the general public at least, an uncommitted radical. The same could not be observed of his friends Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and Robert Southey (1774–1843). Both poets planned the foundation of an ideal commune, on Godwinian libertarian principles, on the banks of the Susquehanna, but this American 'Pantisocracy' resulted in little more substance than a pair of sonnets composed by Coleridge in 1794 ('I other climes | Where dawns, with hope serene, a brighter day | Than e'er saw Albion in her happiest times, | With mental eye exulting now explore'). The same year saw the publication in Cambridge of the historic drama *The Fall of Robespierre*, signed by Coleridge but in fact a collaboration with Southey who contributed the second and third acts. This attempt 'to imitate the empassioned and highly figurative language of the French orators, and to develop the characters of the chief actors on a vast stage of horrors' has never been realized in a theatre.

Most of Coleridge's early work is tinged by a similar radicalism and by an urge to proclaim a political cause. The 'Sonnets on Eminent Characters' contributed to the *Morning Chronicle* in December 1794 and January 1795 are clearly partisan, defining enemies to the cause (the Prime Minister, Pitt, a 'foul apostate from his father's fame', and two further political apostates, Burke and Sheridan, 'by the brainless mob ador'd') and radical friends at home (Priestley, Godwin, and Southey) and abroad (the American and Polish patriots Lafayette and Kosciusko). When disillusion with France set in in the late 1790s, Coleridge viewed his own disaffection more as the end of a Wordsworthian educative process under the tutelage of true and 'Natural Liberty' than as apostasy. 'France: An Ode', published in 1798, distinguishes the 'spirit of divinest Liberty', which is to be found implicitly and explicitly in nature, from the false spirit in whose name the French now enslave their Swiss neighbours. France 'adulterous, blind, | And patriot only in pernicious toils' is a blasphemy. Coleridge had met Wordsworth at some point between August and late September 1795 when the former's political commitment was at its height and his denunciation of monarchy and aristocracy at its most fiery. For the next ten years the opinions of both worked co-operatively, coinciding initially in a revolutionary enthusiasm for change in society and literature and later in a compensatingly ready response to a nature charged with the glory and power of God. Whereas Coleridge helped Wordsworth to articulate his ideas, to examine their implications, and to explore unfamiliar intellectual territory (including a rejection of Godwinism), Wordsworth seems to have exhilarated Coleridge. In the period of their closest association, from the midsummer of 1797 to the end of 1798, Coleridge composed much of his best work, including the conversation poems 'This Lime-tree bower my Prison' and 'Frost at Midnight' and his two great visionary poems, 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan'. The much bruited close collaboration of the two poets on joint projects was, however, never properly realized.

Coleridge's conversation poems show a distinct movement away from the public declamatory style of the sonnets to a new intimacy, from the Miltonic mode to the Cowperian. 'The Eolian Harp', written in August 1795, traces a speculative transition from a pantheistic awareness of 'Life within us and abroad | Which meets all motion and becomes its soul' to an expression of a firmer Christian faith that inwardly feels the presence of the 'Incomprehensible'. Both 'This Lime-tree bower my Prison' and 'Frost at Midnight' suggest a Wordsworthian sense of the transcendental reality of natural phenomena together with an ease of expression which approaches that of relaxed conversation. 'This Lime-tree bower', ostensibly an address to his schoolfriend Charles Lamb, interlinks human affection, a sense of joy in the detail of the natural world, and a profound awareness of its unity, a power that transcends both separation and temporary confinement. 'Frost at Midnight' opens with an echo of Cowper's solitary fireside meditations on a larger world beyond the cottage (Coleridge's 'abstruser musings'), but it also radically leaps backwards from present contentment to painful schoolboy memories of displacement and loneliness. The contrast of town and country, of rural companionship and urban isolation, is reinforced by a further leap, this time forward to the prospect of the poet's growing son blessed by Nature's benevolence:

> But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
> By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
> Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds
> Which image in their bulk, both lakes and shores
> And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language, which thy God
> Utters, who from eternity doth teach
> Himself in all, and all things in himself.

In this blessed vision the influence of Wordsworth is most evident, suggesting the extent to which it is part of a larger discourse which also includes 'Tintern Abbey'.

Coleridge's most memorable contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*, and the most substantial product of his direct collaboration with Wordsworth, was 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The poem was planned jointly, with Wordsworth suggesting some of its most significant elements (though he contributed next to nothing to its actual composition). 'Our respective manners proved so widely different', Wordsworth later recalled, 'that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog.' Despite its metrical and verbal debts to the simplicity of the traditional ballad form, 'The Ancient Mariner' is distinctly in Coleridge's manner. The poem takes the form of a voyage of discovery, both literally and figuratively, but it is also a psychodrama concerned with the guilt and expiation of a Cain-like figure, the arbitrary 'murderer' of an albatross

which, we are told, appears through the fog 'as if it had been a Christian soul'. The poem defeats precise definition. The Mariner's experience is tangled and often bewildering; he is not a pilgrim who measures himself by definable spiritual milestones or who encounters and progressively overcomes obstacles; he is, rather, an outcast who witnesses an invisible action which interpenetrates the physical world. Despite its framework of Catholic Christian faith and ritual, the Mariner appears to discover a series of meanings concerning the interdependency of life, not merely the consequences of breaking taboos. His route back to the place from which he started requires suffering, but his pain is explored in the context of benevolence, and the truths he perceives stretch beyond mere religious formulae into an affirmation of universal harmony. 'Kubla Khan', written in the summer of 1797, derives much of its exotic imagery from Coleridge's wide reading of mythology, history, and comparative religion. The poem famously remains 'a fragment', because, as the poet explains in his prefatory note, he wrote it down immediately after waking from 'a profound sleep, at least of the external senses' in which he had composed 'two to three hundred lines' but was interrupted by a caller, 'a person on business from Porlock'. This 'Vision in a Dream' remains a riddle, a pattern of vivid definitions amid a general lack of definition, expressed with a rhythmic forward drive which suggests a mind taken over by a process of semi-automatic composition. Coleridge's third visionary 'Gothic' poem, 'Christabel', was originally intended to be included in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* but was excluded partly because of Wordsworth's distaste for its strangeness and partly because of Coleridge's own 'indolence' in leaving the poem yet another substantial fragment. It is in many ways a complement to 'The Ancient Mariner', not simply because it too echoes the style of old ballads, but because it appears to link the nature of Christabel's experience of the powers of life and death to that of the Mariner. The poem is concerned with the attempted penetration of Christabel's psyche by the daemonic force represented by Geraldine, but it also allows for a balancing contrast of two powerful aspects of nature, the sympathetic and the energetic, and for a symbolic investigation of what Coleridge later called 'the terra incognita of our nature'.

'Dejection: An Ode', written in April 1802, opens with an epigraph from, and a reference to, the ballad of Sir Patrick Spence. It is the last and most despondent of Coleridge's conversation poems, marked as it is by an acknowledged failure of response to the phenomena of nature and by an expression of the decay of an imaginative joy fed by 'outward forms'. The poet's former 'shaping spirit of Imagination', suspended by various 'afflictions', seems to be no longer subject to external stimuli; the alternative inspiration, a recognition of inward vision, remains as yet a dim positive to set against a series of negatives. During the early 1800s as Coleridge became increasingly aware of the desiccation of his poetic inspiration and the dissipation of his 'visionary gleam' he grew compensatingly more interested in the processes and implications of critical theory, an intellectual exercise which ranged over literature and

the workings of the mind to religion and the development of society. Despite the decline of his Pantisocratic ventures and his early revolutionary hopes, he continued to speculate around the central principle of his philosophy, the ultimate unity and indivisibility in Creation. Like Blake, he recognized contraries and complementary states of being; unlike him, he attempted to argue for interdependency, for wholeness, and for 'continuity . . . in self-consciousness' as the dynamic of human creativity. The 'shaping spirit' of 'Dejection' manifests itself throughout *Biographia Literaria* as the 'esemplastic' or unifying power of the Imagination. *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is a loosely shaped, digressive series of meditations on poetry, poets and, above all, the nature of the poetic imagination. Its complex philosophy draws both from Coleridge's fruitful relationship with Wordsworth and from a wide range of European thinkers; it is both original and plagiaristic, prophetic and profoundly indebted to tradition, at once a personal apologia and a public discourse on metaphysics. Its most influential attempts at definition concern the distinction which Coleridge carefully draws in the thirteenth chapter between 'Fancy', which merely assembles and juxtaposes images and impressions without fusing them, and 'Imagination', which actively moulds, transforms, and strives to bring into unity what it perceives. What Coleridge sees as the 'primary Imagination' is, moreover, nothing less than 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM', a reflection of the working mind of the Creator himself. It is, however, through a discussion of the 'vital' 'secondary Imagination' that he most develops the contrast with Fancy for here he describes the mind creatively perceiving, growing, selecting, and shaping the stimuli of nature into new wholes.

In the fifteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* this definition of the creative imagination is exemplified in a study of Shakespeare's work, a subject to which Coleridge had already addressed himself in his *Lectures on Shakespeare* (delivered in 1808) and to which he frequently returned in the casually diffuse *Table Talk* (published posthumously in 1836). He remains, with Dr Johnson, one of the most observant and provocative critics of Shakespeare, one who acknowledges distinctive qualities and yet allows for shortcomings, one who is both 'genial' and 'reverential' yet who shrinks from bardolatry. While he readily acknowledges that 'no work of true genius dares want its appropriate form', the form of his own criticism is often sporadic and expressed in bursts of perceptive energy. It is tinged with the 'abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical' which he recognizes as the essential characteristic of Hamlet, a figure with whom the poet readily identified. Coleridge's later philosophical writing is preoccupied with religious issues, with the problem of belief and the joy of believing, with a morality concerned with inward impulses, and with an informed criticism of the Scriptures (he was amongst the first to appreciate the work of those German scholars whose research so shook the foundations of Victorian belief). The impact of his attempt to free Christianity from fundamentalism was not, however, generally appreciated by believers responsive to a

culture imbued with Evangelicalism. *The Constitution of Church and State* (1829), the essay which brings to a climax his concern with dynamic unity, was also intended to form part of the national debate on reform. His vision of a Church doctrinally recharged and reinvigorated, and of religion itself as infinitely more than a social cement, is complemented by a new view of the state served and enhanced by a 'clerisy', those concerned primarily with education and spirituality. This clerisy would not be a disaffected intelligentsia, but a corporate body, integral to the proper workings of a co-operative nation state. As in all his later work, Coleridge attempts to bring together and not to diffuse, to develop tradition by a process of refertilization and not of deracination.

The arguments of Robert Southey's *The Book of the Church* (1825) and *Sir Thomas More* (1829) are similarly directed to the relationship between history and the present, between precedent and development, but both books lack Coleridge's political intelligence, originality, and integrity. To many of his younger and radical contemporaries, Southey appeared to have sold out to the Establishment in his contributions to the Tory *Quarterly Review* from 1809, in his acceptance of the post of Poet Laureate in 1813, and, above all in his toadying poem on the death of George III (which Byron mocked so devastatingly in his *The Vision of Judgement* in 1822). Southey's radical phase was as short-lived as those of Wordsworth and Coleridge, blossoming in the 1790s with his pro-revolutionary poem *Joan of Arc*, and with his plays *The Fall of Robespierre* and *Wat Tyler* (the latter published in 1817, much to his chagrin and embarrassment, when he had espoused quite different political causes). He nowhere reveals a talent parallel to that of the two friends with whom his name was originally linked under the pejorative description of a 'Lake Poet'. Despite the success of his ballad poems, such as 'The Inchcape Rock' and 'The Battle of Blenheim' (both once much loved by reciters), Southey's poetry, and particularly his ambitious long poems, such as his oriental verse epic *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), is beset with narrative dullness. What was once perceived as a radical plainness and frankness of style now suggests merely a flatness of expression which, at its worst, can approach the banal.

George Crabbe (1775–1832), though a near contemporary of Wordsworth and concerned like him with the relationship of character and rural environment, remained rooted in an earlier tradition of poetic representation and in established moral and religious prescriptions. His mentors were Pope, Goldsmith, and Johnson, and his generous and perceptive patron, Burke, introduced him to a London literary establishment attached to conservative norms in poetry. As a faithful and respected parish priest of humble origins (one who reminded Lord Chancellor Thurlow of Fielding's Parson Adams) he appears to have been more concerned with charity than with revolution, more with the relief and description of suffering than with political panaceas. Crabbe's essential conservatism is evident both in his tolerant analysis of human shortcomings—or of outsiders—in the context of stable communities and in his continued use of the kind of rhyming couplets which had provided

the normative poetic form of the eighteenth century. His narrative style can be as relaxed as Cowper's, but his acceptance of the variety and flexibility of the couplet form, as evolved by Pope, allows for both antithesis and qualification, and for an expressive and variable use of the caesura to approximate to the rhythms of speech. Throughout his work, from the didactic satire *Inebriety* of 1775 and the work that made his reputation, *The Village* of 1783, to *The Borough* (1810) and *Tales of the Hall* (1819), Crabbe reveals himself as a determined anti-pastoralist, as a representer of an observable reality not as an imaginative idealist. This aspiration to present 'the real Picture of the Poor', as he puts it in *The Village*, also entailed the new moral necessity of painting 'the Cot | As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not'. Village life, as represented in his work, is 'a life of pain'. His townscapes are dotted with human and architectural wreckage and haunted by the encroaching shadows of rejection, the poor house, and pauper burial. The poet whom Byron admired as 'Nature's sternest painter, yet the best' struck the far less sympathetic Hazlitt as merely a renderer of 'discoloured paintings of life' and as 'a misanthrope in verse . . . a Malthus turned metrical romancer'.

In *The Parish Register* (1807) Crabbe introduces as a narrator a country parson exploring 'the simple annals' of his parish poor, leafing through, and commenting on, entries in his register of births, marriages, and deaths. The three-part poem looks both back to Goldsmith's idealized representation of Auburn and forward to the interconnections between character and environment which were later developed in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. In the extraordinary study of 'Sir Eustace Grey', written in eight-line stanzas, he also explores the obsessed psyche of a hallucinating dreamer, an inmate of a madhouse who is troubled both by past guilt and by present religious mania. The poem illustrates Crabbe's skill in creating a poetry of mood, using dislocated images and details in order to suggest a mind whirled towards incoherence. Crabbe creates a related effect in his description of the isolation of Peter Grimes, perhaps the most impressive of the stories in *The Borough*. Grimes, an unhappy rebel against his rigid father, and a man known to be an abuser of the apprentices placed in his charge, is gradually driven out of his community to live in a boat on the dreary mud-flats where he views 'the lazy tide | In its hot slimy channels slowly glide'. If Grimes is the most notable of Crabbe's outsiders, both *The Borough* and the *Tales* of 1812 suggest a critical interest in those insiders who foster conventional moral and religious values, the unremarkable parish priests and their equally unremarkable curates, and magistrates such as the 'impetuous, warm and loud' Justice Bolt. In the first of the *Tales*, 'The Dumb Orators, or the Benefit of Society', Justice Bolt is shown as disconcerted and silenced by a group of free-thinkers, and then later as embarrassingly vocal in his triumph over a single supposed foe of order, the sceptical Hammond. In many ways, the poem allows for Hammond's moral victory as a representative of a free conscience faced with a blustering assertion of the status quo (albeit a status quo that Crabbe himself represented). Despite such gestures to religious

and social questioning, the moral sensibility of Crabbe's narrative poetry is generally derived from a loyally Anglican understanding of the nature of society, its ranks, relationships, and responsibilities. The representation of nature in his poetry is likewise confined to a picture of a co-operative working environment, conditioned by the shifting moods and patterns of the sea. It offers a picture of a peopled landscape observed, as Coleridge was prepared to concede, with a 'power of a certain kind', yet constricted by what many of Crabbe's younger contemporaries saw damningly as 'an absolute defect of the high imagination'.

Austen, the 'Regional' Novel, and Scott

Wordsworth, goaded by the high poetic standing accorded to Crabbe by the critics of the great early nineteenth-century journals, consistently denigrated his rival's work. In one of his sharper asides he even ventured to compare Crabbe's poetry to Jane Austen's fiction. Though he admitted that her novels were 'an admirable copy of life', he nevertheless insisted that he could not be interested in 'productions of that kind' and, he protested, 'unless the truth of nature were presented to him clarified, as it were, by the pervading light of imagination, it had scarce any attraction in his eyes'. Wordsworth's comment suggests something of the breadth of the gulf which seemed to separate the new poetry from the staid, older fashion of a literature which aspired merely to represent nature by copying it. The idea of the transforming power of the imagination, which was to become so much a commonplace of subsequent criticism, cannot uniformly be applied to the literature of the English 'Romantic' period, nor can the absence of visionary gleams or pervading lights be now seen as crucially detrimental to a substantial portion of the poetry and the fiction of the period. Jane Austen (1775–1817) was, according to her first biographer, an admirer of Johnson in prose, Crabbe in verse, and Cowper in both; she 'thoroughly enjoyed' Crabbe's work and would sometimes say 'in jest' that if ever she married at all 'she could fancy being Mrs Crabbe'. Such conservative tastes in matrimony and literature should not be viewed as inconsistent either with Austen's own work or with the opinions of many of her original readers.

J. E. Austen-Leigh's memoir of his unmarried aunt assumes that she shared the feeling of 'moderate Toryism which prevailed in her family'. Austen's novels ostensibly suggest little active political commitment or deep involvement in national and international affairs. The class to which she belonged, and which her fiction almost exclusively describes, had largely remained unruffled and unthreatened by the ructions across the Channel, but the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, the long-drawn-out conflict between Britain and France and the active risk of a French invasion, left few families untouched by the Napoleonic Empire and the domestic and foreign

policies of the succession of repressive Tory governments. Although a well-connected cousin of the Austens had died on the scaffold in France, and although the novelist's two younger brothers served as officers in the navy in the great campaign against Napoleon, any discussion of revolutionary politics is eschewed and the war remains a relatively marginal (or at least, largely male) concern even in novels such as *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* which introduce naval officers as characters. The desperate domestic measures introduced by British governments to counter political dissent, notably the frequent suspensions of the Habeas Corpus Act (which secured the liberty of the citizen against arbitrary imprisonment) and the emergency legislation aimed against all kinds of 'sedition' (such as the enforcement of the Combination Acts), are passed over silently. The agricultural depression which left many farm labourers destitute and the widespread evidence of rural pauperism is glanced at only as the occasion of genteel charity or, as in the case of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*, as an occasion for scolding the poor 'into harmony and plenty'. The vast advances in industrialization and imperial expansion, and the social earthquake consequent upon both, elicit mere allusions. The upper-middle-class world of Austen's fiction is seen as secure in its values, its privileges, and its snobberies. It is a society which defines itself very precisely in terms of land, money, and class and it accepts that rank is an essential guinea-stamp. Its awareness of geographical space is generally revealed only with reference to far-flung estates and to the incomes derived from them, and to forays into the fashionable society of London or Bath. Its attachment to nature and to natural scenery is expressed in transitory enthusiasms for picnics at Box Hill and trips to the seaside or for parkland disciplined and tidied up by landscape gardeners.

Jane Austen is far too subtle, challenging, and inventive a novelist to be usefully defined by negatives. Her work may seem to stand apart from the preoccupations of many of her literary contemporaries, but it remains very much of its time. It is, in many significant ways, defined in Christianly conservative, but not necessarily reactionary, terms against current radical enthusiasms. It should also be seen as standing in, and presenting variations on, an established fictional tradition. Where new writers who had espoused Jacobin libertarianism spoke of rights, Austen refers to duties; where they look for steady human improvement, she remains sceptical about the nature of the fallen human condition. The late eighteenth-century cultivation of sensibility and sentiment, and the new 'Romantic' insistence on the propriety of passion, are consistently countered in her novels by an ironic exposure of affectation and by a steady affirmation of the virtues of restraint. Austen chose her own literary limitations, not simply because she held that 'three or four families in a country village' were an ideal subject for the novel, but because her omissions were considered and deliberate. Her moral message is infused with an ideological insistence on the merits of good conduct, good manners, sound reason, and marriage as an admirable social institution. She never scorns love, but she balances its often

disconcerting and disruptive nature with a firm advocacy of the complementary qualities of self-knowledge, self-discipline, and practicality. Her heroines can be as vivaciously intelligent as Elizabeth Bennet and as witty, egotistic, and independent as Emma Woodhouse, but both, like the essentially introspective Elinor Dashwood or the passive and self-effacing Fanny Price, are finally brought to mature judgement and, by proper extension, emotional fulfilment. The narrative line of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), which balances maturity against impulsiveness, also systematically undermines the attractions of superficial glamour and contrasts conflicting value systems and ways of seeing. In the two other novels which were probably begun in the 1790s and later revised, *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), first impressions, illusions, and subjective opinions or prejudices give way to detachment, balance, reasonableness and, more painfully, to humiliating reassessment. Mere cleverness, wit, or spontaneity, though admirable in themselves, are never allowed to triumph without being linked to some steadier moral assurance.

The scrupulous pattern of education that Austen requires of her major characters (both male and female) is also required of her readers. Those who merely seek to escape into a delicately placid and undemanding fictional world wilfully misread her novels. Throughout her work, but especially in her three later novels, *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), and *Persuasion* (1818), she obliges readers to participate in the moral processes of disciplined learning, weighing, and judging, and in the gradual establishment of the principle that judgement is contingent upon understanding. This is not to imply that Austen is either priggish or stridently polemic (she is, it should go without saying, one of the most calculatingly amusing of all English novelists), but to suggest that her readers have to be constantly alert to her tone and to her supple narrative method. The relatively restricted world of her novels, and the social and physical confines of her settings, define the limits in which opinions are formed and within which her fools and snobs, her bores and gossips, her prudes and poseurs, must be both endured and accepted. The illusion of actuality which she so succinctly suggests also enforces a response to a society confident of its own codes and values. In *Emma*, for example, we follow the heroine in her often wayward exploration of manipulations, misapprehensions, niceties, complacencies, and lapses in judgement, but we also see her finding a personal liberation within the enclosure of the society whose rules she learns to respect and use. Austen's often astringent anti-romanticism is nowhere more evident than in *Mansfield Park*, a novel centred on a heroine suffering from what she admits are 'faults of ignorance and timidity', but also one who embodies, like the man she finally marries, a Christian forbearance which can be seen as informing her grasp of tact and decorum. If the values of the novel, most clearly expressed in the embarrassments surrounding the play-acting which so offend Sir Thomas Bertram, often seem to be at odds with twentieth-century preconceptions of character and social action, for Austen such values are projected as

essential to the happy development of human affairs. The relatively sombre tone of *Persuasion* also emphasizes the importance of the process of learning and judging through which all her heroines pass. Anne Elliot is not only Austen's most astute literary critic (she finds it 'the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely'), she is also her most discriminating woman character, the one whose intelligence most effectively balances the merits of conflicting opinions, ideas, impressions, and feelings. It is against Anne's sunny 'domestic' virtues that the world in which she moves so often seems shallow, worldly, petty, and vain. The freedom which all Austen's lovers attain is a freedom of action and moral decision worked out, not in a deceptively 'gracious' society, but in a post-lapsarian world often unaware that it is in constant need of grace.

Susan Ferrier's work, which often explores related comic themes, generally lacks Austen's economy and her intelligence. Ferrier (1782–1854) is also a distinctively Scottish writer whose novels seem raw and provincial beside her contemporary's confident urbanity. *Marriage* (1818) traces the responses to matrimony of two generations of women, those of Lady Juliana, the rash daughter of an Earl who elopes with a penniless Scots officer, and those of her twin daughters, the one brought up in London society, the other trained in the rougher, but honester, household of her Caledonian aunts. Ferrier plays throughout with contradictory attitudes to love, ranging from the old Earl's dismissal of the emotion as something 'now entirely confined to the *canaille*', to a final awareness that a woman can indeed be 'beloved with all the truth and ardour of a noble ingenuous mind, too upright to deceive others, too enlightened to deceive itself'. Despite the evidence to the contrary—the deceptions, the semblances of affection, the elopements, and the adulteries—the novel ends with the proclamation of a single 'happy Marriage'. Deceptions and semblances also run through the twists and turns of the plot of *The Inheritance* (1824), a novel which suggests the emotional dangers of an over-reliance on money as a determiner of the heart.

Ferrier's modest and often mocking use of the Scots dialect and of Scottish traits is to some extent mirrored in the work of a more determinedly provincial novelist, John Galt (1779–1839). Galt, well aware of the importance of the English market for fiction, was not, however, inclined to limit the circulation of his novels to an exclusively Scottish audience by an excessive use of the vernacular. Scotland, which was beginning to enjoy and exploit the international celebrity brought to it by the success of the poetry of Burns and Scott, had in 1822 been the object of a state visit by its new king, George IV (a visit partly stage-managed, tartan and all, by Scott). The King who was not a popular figure in London, was the first sovereign of the Hanoverian dynasty to visit Edinburgh and this trip to 'the venerable home of [his] Royal Ancestors' proved to be a considerable public-relations success. Galt recalled his own homage to the King at Holyrood in the somewhat obsequious royal dedication of his most Scottish novel, *The Entail* (1822). *The Entail* is also Galt's most

ambitious and carefully shaped work of fiction, darkened as it is by the tragedy which develops from the greed of Claud Walkinshaw and his determination to keep the estate of Kittlestonheugh together by entailing it on his male heirs. Galt was himself disinclined to refer to his three slightly earlier and more episodic works—*The Ayrshire Legatees* (1820–1), *Annals of the Parish* (1821),and the secular parallel to the *Annals*, *The Provost* (1822)—as novels, preferring to characterize them as 'theoretical histories of society, limited . . . necessarily to the events of a circumscribed locality'. This 'locality' is, in the case of the last two stories, a small town in western Scotland. In *Annals of the Parish* the minister of Dalmailing anecdotally traces the public and private history of his parish from the time of his induction in 1760 to his resignation in 1810. The second half of the narrative increasingly refers to the gathering pace of social and political change, from the construction of a cotton mill to the impact of international events on small-town perceptions. The minister, loyal equally to the Hanoverian throne and to the traditions of the Presbyterian Church, is troubled by the signs of dissent evident in the establishment of a schismatic chapel and in the seditious 'itch of jacobinism' which irritates the local mill workers. Where the minister accredits both bane and blessing to the workings of Providence, Provost James Pawkie (whose surname implies that he is 'sly') is confident of his own prowess as a self-made man and as the first citizen and chief landowner of Gudetown. As Coleridge, an admiring early reader of *The Provost*, acknowledged, the novel is masterly in its evocation of 'the unconscious, perfectly natural, Irony of Self-delusion', of a man 'cheating' himself into 'a happy state of constant Self-applause'.

Galt's royalism, and his ready acceptance of the historic fact of the Union with England, is paralleled from a quite distinct Irish angle in the work of Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849), a writer drawn by circumstance and experience to a depiction of the cultural divisions inherent in the land settled by her colonizing ancestors. Edgeworth had been born and educated in England and only returned to her father's Irish estates in 1782, the year in which the Irish Parliament won the right to legislate separately from the British Parliament. With her family she had been forced to flee from the abortive French invasion of 1798, and despite her father's initially spirited resistance to the Union with Great Britain, she, like him, acquiesced to its legal enforcement. Maria's understanding of Ireland was based on a firm, if partisan, grasp of history, both that of her family and that of the nation. She also possessed a ready enough sympathy with the oppressed Catholic majority and a complementary, but, to some modern perceptions, contradictory and Spenserian conviction of the superiority of English manners (Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* is one of the works which affords Lord Colambre 'most satisfaction' in her novel, *The Absentee*). Her culture was that of the still secure Protestant Ascendancy and her hopes for the future, as embodied in her Irish novels, appear to be founded on the faith that the landowning aristocracy might regenerate both itself and the nation it still dominated.

If Edgeworth's early work—*Letters to Literary Ladies* (1795), *The Parent's Assistant* (1796–1800), and her collaboration with her father, *Practical Education* (1798)—reveals an applied Rousseauism and a relatively radical feminist concern with the inadequacy of contemporary women's education, any hint of Jacobinism in her thought was later qualified both by the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and by family pride (her distant cousin, the Abbé Edgeworth, had attended Louis XVI on the scaffold). Edgeworth's Irish novels form subtle, comic discourses on the present state of society and establish their arguments through an interplay of voices (including that of the author as editor and annotator), each supporting or subverting a social or cultural viewpoint. Although there is scant advocacy of independence or Catholic nationalism, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *The Absentee* (1812), and *Ormond* (1817) all suggest the changing complexion of Ireland in the years immediately preceding and succeeding the Act of Union of 1801 and all explore the historic rifts in Irish society. All are concerned with succession and inheritance and all attempt to counter a potential alienation of the landowning class from its tenantry. *Castle Rackrent* is probably the first novel to represent society in a specific region and in a given historical period. It traces the varying and shaky fortunes of four generations of the Rackrent family, from the inheritance and conversion of Sir Patrick (né O'Shaughlin) to the failure of Sir Condy and his dislodgement by Jason Quirk, the son of the narrator, the Rackrents' steward. Thady Quirk's narrative gives the novel both its structure and much of its energy, but it is interestingly qualified by Edgeworth's pointed addition of a Glossary ('for the information of the *ignorant* English reader') which serves to interpret and condition both a way of speaking and a way of observing.

In common with a good deal of Anglo-Irish literature from the time of Swift onwards, *The Absentee* is in part written in a code which has to be interpreted by a knowing reader. Names, places, tastes, and glancing references suggest a system of signs related to the equally entangled history of Ireland. The novel is concerned with the return of Lord and Lady Clonbrony to their Irish estates and inheritance, a return manœuvred by their son, the perceptive and explorative Lord Colambre, who finally marries his probably Catholic cousin, Grace Nugent. Although initially concerned with the ready desertion of Ireland by an aristocracy drawn by the magnet of English fashion after the Union, the novel gradually establishes the necessity of return and the *mission civilisatrice* of those who have an obligation to mould Irish manners and mend Irish ills. Here, as in *Ormond*, Edgeworth evinces little admiration for the underlying Celtic civilization or for an alternative return to the idea of ancient Ireland, but she does suggest a new working-out of old antagonisms in her espousal of a progressive and civilized society. Count O'Halloran, the descendant of an exiled Jacobite ancestor and the holder of a foreign title, welcomes the English militia to Ireland and affirms that 'the two countries have the same interest' and that 'from the inhabitants discovering more of each other's good qualities . . . their esteem and affection for each other would increase, and rest upon the firm

basis of mutual utility'. This 'mutual utility' also consists in the rediscovery of the land of their breeding, if not always of their birth, by the new generation of voluntary exiles, the 'absentees' of the novel's title. Their absence has driven their tenants to the state of a 'wretched, wretched people', bereft of 'hope and energy' and living in a village of squalid cabins which once formed 'a snug place, when my lady Clonbrony was at home to whitewash it'. The new Ireland may be exemplified as much by a pushy, vulgar, rising bourgeoisie as by the beggars who assault Colambre's eye as he lands in Dublin, but it is Edgeworth's advocacy of revival and the resuscitation of principle, example, leadership, and good management on the part of an increasingly disenchanted ruling class that give the novel its political edge and much of its historical significance.

In the Preface to *Castle Rackrent* Edgeworth had recognized the fluid relationship between her fiction and the writing of history. In a way that prefigures Thackeray's suspicion of the elevation of fancy-dress heroes by historians, she states her preference for a history which looks beyond the 'splendid characters playing their parts on the great theatre of the world' and which begs to be admitted behind the scenes 'that we may take a nearer view of the actors and actresses'.

It was Edgeworth's ability both to puncture the pretensions of conventional historians and to establish a 'behind the scenes' picture of society in a state of flux which seems to have inspired Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) to return to the unfinished and abandoned manuscript of *Waverley* in 1813. Her Irish novels, he later maintained, 'had gone so far to make the English familiar with the characters of their gay and kind-hearted neighbours of Ireland, that she may truly be said to have done more towards completing the Union than perhaps all the legislative enactments by which it has been followed up'. It is an ambitious claim, but no more so than Scott's own professed hope 'that something might be attempted for my own country, of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland—something which might introduce her natives to those of her sister kingdom in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto'. What Scott managed to achieve for Scotland was a far broader popular understanding of the distinctive nature of Scottish history and culture, its divisions and contradictions as much as its vitality. If he can at times be accused of having sanitized much in the Scottish tradition of dissent from English norms of government and civilization, he did manage to explore and to explain swathes of northern history ignored by English cultural imperialists and Scottish social progressives alike. In choosing to eschew the Scots dialect, both as a poet and as a novelist, he rendered his work acceptable to a wide audience likely to be alienated by a merely parochial self-assurance. By varying, examining, and imagining vital aspects of national history he also managed to present an analysis of a historical process at work. In drawing on, and adapting for the purposes of prose fiction, something of the method perfected by Shakespeare in his two *Henry IV* plays, and by intermixing politics

and comedy with the fictional and the historical, Scott also shaped aspects of Scottish nationhood to suit his own Unionist and basically Tory ends. He both invented tradition and used it, and if he can be blamed on the one hand with exploiting an overtly romantic view of Scotland's past, he must also be allowed to have moved the British novel towards a new seriousness and a new critical respect. In developing the form beyond the fantastic excesses of the Gothic and beyond the embryonic shape moulded by Maria Edgeworth, Scott effectively created the nineteenth-century historical novel. His creation, fostered by the universal popularity of his work, was to have vast influence over European and American literature.

When he published *Waverley* anonymously in 1814 Scott already possessed a high reputation as the best-selling new poet of his age. Drawing on private research, on his considerable learning, and on memories of his youth spent in the Scottish Borders, he had published the influential collection of ballads, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3). The *Minstrelsy*, which went through five editions by 1812, interspersed previously uncollected folk-poetry with verse by the editor himself. Scott may have rigorously over-edited some of the original pieces, but his collection was a triumph of enterprise matched in importance only by Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). His antiquarian enthusiasms marked his entire career as a writer and collector, but his early translations of Goethe and of German ballads, and an attachment to the history of the Borders, served to stimulate a narrative poetry of his own. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) recounts the story of a family feud in the sixteenth century, replete with sorcery, alchemy, and metaphysical intervention. Scott's energetic, rushing metre, his varying line-length and wandering stress within the lines, and his highly effective introduction of shorter lyrics or songs into the narrative also mark three further long and involved verse tales: *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), and *Rokeby* (1813). These poems achieved an immediate celebrity and retained the high esteem of succeeding Victorian generations, even, despite their length, being learnt by heart. Their glamour has now faded and, despite occasional patches of still vivid colour, the passage of time has exposed them as threadbare in terms of their subjects and their style.

Scott's novels, an epoch-making phenomenon in their own time, retain more of their original impact on readers despite a relative decline in their critical and popular esteem. His initial, highly successful, impulse to concern himself with Scottish affairs, and yet always to include the observation and experience of a pragmatic outsider (often an Englishman), links his first nine novels together. The shape and theme of *Waverley*, which is concerned with the gradual, often unwitting, involvement of a commonsensical English gentleman in the Jacobite rising of 1745 and his exposure to the thrilling but alien culture of the Highland clans, are subtly repeated, with significant variation, in *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Old Mortality* (1816), and *Rob Roy* (1817). It is cleverly reversed in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), a tale set in Edinburgh in the period of anti-government

Porteous riots of 1736, by the device of Jeanie Deans's epic walk to London to plead for her sister's life and by the contrast drawn between the somewhat narrow puritanism of Jeanie and the sophisticated but worldly nature of the Hanoverian court. In all these novels Scott exposes his protagonists to conflicting ways of seeing, thinking, and acting; his Scotland is variously divided by factions—by Jacobites and Unionists, Covenanters and Episcopalians, Highland clansmen and urban Lowlanders—and in each he suggests an evolutionary clash of opposites, the gradual convergence of which opens up a progressive future. The fissures of Scottish history are allowed to point the way to a present in which Scotland's fortunes are inexorably bound up with those of liberal, duller, more homogeneous, shop-keeping England. The dialectic established by the narrative offers some kind of movement away from a mere nostalgia for the past and for past manners or factions. As Scott stresses in chapter 72 of *Waverley*, no European nation had changed so much between 1715 and 1815: 'The effects of the insurrection of 1745 ... commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time.' In order to suggest the nature and the implications of change to his readers, Scott opens up the past by carefully establishing a picture of men and women moving naturally in a historic environment. His characters are no longer represented in the fancy dress of Gothic fiction; they are shown at ease with the objects, furniture, and attitudes of their proper times. Fictional heroes encounter historical ones and are allowed to find them wanting, both being subject to the narrator's own imaginative and ideological interpretation of their development. Equally significantly, the novels present character as being shaped and determined by environment, an environment which is as much local as it is temporal, and as subject to geography as it is to history. If Scott's real sympathies lie in recording the steady triumphalism of the dominant culture, he is still a tolerant and often persuasive memorializer of lost causes and lost tribes, of dissent and of the alternative perceptions of minorities marginalized by those who hold political and intellectual sway.

In 1820, with the publication of *Ivanhoe*, Scott's fiction took a fresh, but not always happy, direction in moving abruptly away from Scotland and from recent, even remembered, history. *Ivanhoe* and two further, and far weaker, stories set in the time of the Crusades, *The Talisman* and *The Betrothed* (both 1825), form a continuous discourse which questions the origins and usefulness of the medieval code of chivalry and military honour and distantly reflects on the survival of both into the age of the French Revolution. All three novels, however, require turgidly lengthy explications of historical detail and resort to an often highly artificial dialogue in order to establish the authenticity of their twelfth-century settings. It is a fustian dialogue which contrasts vividly with the far easier evocations of home-spun, local speech which enliven the Scottish fiction. Similar faults mar the otherwise lively pictures of Elizabethan England

in *Kenilworth* (1821) and of the period of the Commonwealth in *Woodstock* (1826). *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822) and *Quentin Durward* (1823), concerned respectively with the adventures of exiled Scottish knights at the courts of James I of England and Louis XI of France, are both vigorous variations on the idea of the upright innocent abroad making his way through mazes of corruption, but the finest of Scott's later works is probably *Redgauntlet* (1824), an investigation of the dying flame of Scottish Jacobitism seen from the divided perspective of two heroes, the phlegmatic Alan Fairford and the romantic Darsie Latimer. Sadly, illness and financial disaster overshadowed the novelist's last years and his still phenomenal output bears the marks of the strain, declining as it does into rambling, but often highly charged, experiments with material which even the polymathic Scott had not properly assimilated.

Byron, Shelley, and Keats

Despite the anonymity of the 'author of Waverley', a ruse which was maintained on the title-page of all of *Waverley*'s fictional successors, the 'secret' of Scott's authorship was a thoroughly open one. In January 1821 Byron, an unstinted admirer, claimed, without a glimmer of doubt as to their authorship, to have read 'all W. Scott's novels at least fifty times'. Scott was, he noted in his journal, the 'Scotch Fielding, as well as a great English poet', and, he characteristically added, '—wonderful man! I long to get drunk with him'. It was Byron, properly George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824), who alone managed to eclipse Scott's primacy as the best-selling poet of the second decade of the nineteenth century, but he never attempted to rival him as a novelist. If the poetic eclipse was far from total, the appearance of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* in 1812 gave Byron an immediate celebrity, or, as he famously remarked, 'I awoke one morning and found myself famous'. Byron, like Scott, struck the appreciative hordes of his original readers as the most articulate voice of the post-revolutionary era, the writer who most fluently expressed the spirit of the age, its discontents as well as its often frenetic energy. But if Scott was the insider explaining the evolution of the past into the present and reconciling historic contradictions, Byron was, by his own choice, the outsider, vexed and amused by the anomalies of his own time and culture. Byron's least effective poetry may be 'modern', theatrical, and extravagant, but his best work is generally rooted in an established satiric tradition in which, as he himself acknowledges, it was better to err with Pope than to shine in the company of the contemporary writers that he despised and often deliberately undervalued. His poetry is informed not by nature or by the contemplation of nature, but by public life and by recent history, by British politics and by the feverish European nationalisms stirred by the French Revolution. It ranges in its geographical settings from Russia to the Mediterranean, from Portugal to the Levant, and it moves easily between different modes of telling and feeling, from

the self-explorative to the polemic, from the melancholic to the comic, from the mock-heroic to the passionately amorous, from the song to the epic. Byron the libertarian and Byron the libertine readily assumed the public role of a commentator on his times because he both relished his fame and enjoyed the later Romantic pose of being at odds with established society. His role-playing, both in his convoluted private life and in his poetry, had a profound impact on his fellow-artists throughout Europe, and the sullen, restless 'Byronic' hero took on an international currency as if all societies had universally conspired to complicate his destiny.

Byron's international celebrity helped to render his life a work of art which interrelated and interfused with his poetry and his plays. Despite this iconic status, in his own time and far beyond it, his verse is idiosyncratic. It is radical only in the sense that it exhibits a distinctively patrician individualism. If in 1820 he could blame 'the present deplorable state of English poetry' on 'the absurd and systematic depreciation of Pope', he never cast himself in the role of a latter-day spokesman for a received culture. He speaks instead as an outsider and an exile, an articulator of disdain rather than simply dissent. His first work, the precociously self-indulgent schoolboy exercises published in 1806 as *Fugitive Pieces*, was revised and expanded no less than three times. Its second transmogrification, *Hours of Idleness* (1807), was selected for a particularly scathing critical attack by the *Edinburgh Review*, an assault which in turn provided the impetus for Byron's explosive broadside against the accepted culture of his times, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). This verse satire, written in somewhat old-fashioned rhyming couplets, suggests a poet at odds with the present, with its literary innovators (such as 'turgid' Coleridge and 'simple' Wordsworth) as much as with the conservative literary establishment which he identified with the dogmatic Edinburgh reviewers. His praise, which is faint enough, is reserved for Scott and 'Monk' Lewis. Byron's departure from England in 1809 for an extended visit to Portugal, Spain, and the Levant signalled both a rejection of England and a determination to explore alternatives to insular attitudes. The multifarious impressions left by this tour provided the material out of which the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* were shaped. *Childe Harold*, expanded by two further cantos in 1816 and 1818, offers a view of the western Mediterranean scarred by war and of the 'sad relic' of Greece decaying under Ottoman misrule, but it also introduces as a central observer and participant a splenetic aristocratic exile, 'sick at heart' and suffering strange pangs 'as if the memory of some deadly feud | Or disappointed passion lurk'd below'. The memories of feuds and passions in the poem were as much historic and public as they were present and private.

In the 1812 Preface to *Childe Harold* Byron quotes James Beattie's praise of the flexibility of the Spenserian stanza which Beattie (1735–1803) had used in his once celebrated poem, *The Minstrel* (1771, 1774). 'The style and stanza of Spenser', Beattie had remarked, could be 'either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical'. Such flexibility is evident neither in

Beattie's own work nor especially in the often morose self-consciousness of *Childe Harold*. Nevertheless, Byron clearly aspired to experiment with a verse form which would allow for a variety of both expression and mood, for satire as much as for sentiment. He discovered such a form in the eight-line, eleven-syllable *ottava rima* of the Italian poets Tasso, Ariosto, and Pulci and he adapted it to his own English purposes by shortening the verse-line to ten syllables. In *Beppo* (1818) and in *Don Juan* (1819–24) he did more than simply relish the disciplined freedom that *ottava rima* gave to his verse; he also shifted his poetic focus away from Childe Harold's melancholy and incipient misanthropy. Taking leave of his 'sketch of a modern Timon', he proclaims to his readers in an 'Addition to the Preface' that it would have been 'more agreeable, and certainly more easy, to have drawn an amiable character'. Although the characters of privileged, intelligent, arrogant, and accursed heroes continue to fascinate him in his highly original and daring poetic dramas (notably in the two tragedies *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari* and in his superb 'mystery' *Cain*, published together in 1821), *Don Juan* introduces a new kind of central character, one who is at once more passive and more vivacious. The scheme of *Don Juan* allows for colloquy and polyphony, the voice of the often cynically droll narrator being the dominant one. Byron's narrator casts himself as relaxed and speculative, digressive and discursive—'never straining hard to versify, | I rattle on exactly as I'd talk | With anybody in a ride or walk' (Canto XV, 19). The ease of telling is matched by the hero's indeterminate peripateticism, an often disrupted, circuitous wandering across the Mediterranean world ending in a movement northwards to the Russia of Catherine the Great and finally westwards to the amorously frivolous world of aristocratic London society from which Byron had attempted to distance himself. Byron's perhaps fanciful notion of dramatically ending his hero's career with a guillotining in Jacobin Paris was never realized. Juan's adventures and misadventures, and the narrator's worldly-wise commentary on them, serve to debunk a series of received ideas and perceptions ranging from the supposed glory of war and heroism to fidelity in love and oriental exoticism. Byron is also undermining the myth of a picturesque and educative journey across Europe, the Romantic idea of a splendidly benevolent, fostering nature, and the Rousseauistic faith in basic human goodness. These challenges are especially evident in his vivid and varied description of a sea-storm and shipwreck and in the blackly comic account of the cannibalism of the survivors in Canto II:

> The lots were made, and mark'd, and mix'd, and handed,
> In silent horror, and their distribution
> Lull'd even the savage hunger which demanded,
> Like the Promethean vulture, this pollution;
> None in particular had sought or plann'd it,
> 'Twas Nature gnaw'd them to this resolution,
> By which none were permitted to be neuter—
> And the lot fell on Juan's luckless tutor.

He but requested to be bled to death:
  The surgeon had his instruments, and bled
Pedrillo, and so gently ebb'd his breath,
  You hardly could perceive when he was dead.
He died as born, a Catholic in faith,
  Like most in the belief in which they're bred,
And first a little crucifix he kiss'd
And then held out his jugular and wrist.

The poem veers easily, and often comically, between extremes of suffering and luxury, hunger and excess, longing and satiety, ignorance and knowingness, shifting appearance and an equally shifting reality. Both the art and the artfulness of the narrator are frequently concealed under a pretence of purposelessness and self-deprecation—''tis my way, | Sometimes *with* and sometimes without occasion | I write what's uppermost, without delay; | This narrative is not meant for narration, | But a mere airy and fantastic basis, | To build up common things with common places' (Canto XIV, 7). Byron's earnestness, evident enough in his earlier poetry and in the urgently fluent lyric 'The Isles of Greece' which he introduces into Canto III, is now steadily qualified, or, in the case of the lyric, framed by comments on the supposed 'trimming' nature of its imagined singer. The 'earnest' poet is reduced to the level of the despised, time-serving, pliable Southey, the chief object of ridicule in *The Vision of Judgement* (1821). Byron's poetry, like his letters and the surviving fragments of his journals, emerges from an energetic restlessness tempered by an amused detachment, not from a carefully formulated theory of literature, a determining philosophy, or a desire to enhance and improve public taste. 'I have written', he told his publisher in 1819, 'from the fullness of my mind, from passion—from impulse—from many motives—but not for their [his public's] "sweet voices".—I know the precise worth of public applause.'

Byron's friend and sometime companion in self-imposed exile, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), had an equally low view of 'public applause' and an equally distinct distaste for the British Establishments, literary and political. Unlike Byron's, his work derives from a consistent, if malleable, ideology, one determined by a philosophical scepticism which questions its Platonic roots as much as it steadily rejects Christian mythology and morality. Shelley's first public diatribe against Christianity, the undergraduate pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism*, so antagonized the authorities of University College at Oxford in 1811 that its author was expelled from the University. Although Shelley's rejection of 'revealed' religion and its dogmas remained a cardinal element in his thought, and though he systematically maintained his faith in the principle that 'every reflecting mind must allow that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity', his later work suggests both a steady qualification of arguments based purely on 'reason' and a search for the source of the mysterious 'Power' that he acknowledged to be implicit in wild nature and in the inspiration of poetry. This complex and intellectually demanding aspiration is paralleled by, and to

some extent married to, Shelley's abiding interest in the politics of revolution and evolution and to the idea of a gradual and inevitable social awakening.

Shelley's political thought, informed as it is with experimental scientific theory and with the social ideas of his father-in-law Godwin, elucidates more than simply an opposition of liberty and tyranny; it explores future possibilities and not past defeats and, in attempting to adduce the nature of egalitarianism, it moves beyond the general disillusion resultant from the defeat of the ideals of the French Revolution. As Shelley wrote to Godwin in 1817, he felt himself 'formed . . . to apprehend minute & remote distinctions of feeling whether relative to external nature, or the living beings which surround us, & to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole'. He recognized the significance of details, but as a poet and a theorist of poetry and politics he tended to concentrate on 'wholes' and on the possibilities of new perceptions and new orders. The radicalism, which led him with an almost adolescent enthusiasm to espouse a whole range of worthy causes from Irish nationalism to vegetarianism, was more than simply a reaction against the conservative triumphalism which marked post-Napoleonic Europe and more than an instinctive rejection of the restrictive political, religious, and moral formulae of his aristocratic English background; it was at once the root and the fruit of his intellectual idealism. The direct and graphic quatrain poem, *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), inspired by Shelley's disgust at the so-called 'Peterloo' massacre, is perhaps his most effective and unadorned statement of protest against contemporary British repression. Earlier, in *Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem* (1813), he had moulded 'the fairies midwife', the dream-maker of Mercutio's speech in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, into the midwife of a broader revolutionary dream and the instructor of the soul of Ianthe in the principles of historical change. 'Kings, priests, and statesmen', Ianthe learns, 'blast the human flower | Even in its tender bud; their influence darts | Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins | Of desolate society.' Society, consoled by a purgation of its historic oppressors, and the human spirit, freed from the taint of a despotic tradition, are finally allowed to see the prospect of following 'the gradual paths of an aspiring change'. Shelley's original notes to *Queen Mab* make explicit the particular aspects of the present tyranny which threaten the fairy vision of a regenerated future humanity.

Imperative hope also marks the epic poem originally entitled 'Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century' but discreetly and topically renamed *The Revolt of Islam* for its publication in 1818. The poem describes the doomed but heroic struggle for liberation of a brother and sister (originally also lovers) against the manifold oppressions of the Ottoman Empire; at the poem's conclusion the defeated and immolated revolutionaries take on the posthumous role of inspirers of a continuing and multilateral struggle. *The Revolt of Islam* is more than a condemnation of distant oriental despotism, for it reflects both on the temporary failure of the liberating

impulse of the French Revolution and on the present state of Britain. It was written, Shelley insisted, 'in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind'. Shelley's play with archetypes and with a syncretic mythological system by means of which he dramatizes a revolutionary process equally determines the structures of his two 'lyrical' dramas, both reworkings of, and developments from, Aeschylean models. Both *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and *Hellas* (1822) show a diminution of theatrical action in favour of a dramatic representation of imaginative motivation (the 'lyric' as opposed to the 'dramatic', a distinction which Shelley possibly derived from the German critic, August von Schlegel), and both form substantial and intense verse discourses on the nature of liberation. *Hellas*, inspired by the Greek rebellion against its Ottoman rulers, prophesies 'upon the curtain of futurity' the triumph of the Greek cause 'as a portion of the cause of civilisation and social improvement' but it ends with a far from triumphant final chorus which foresees the possibility of a return of 'hate and death' and of a cyclical succession of bloody revolution upon bloody revolution. *Prometheus Unbound* is ostensibly more confident in its view of historical necessity for it links the idea of revolution more closely to the radical reordering of human vision and to the processes of perceiving, imagining, and articulating thought as speech. To some extent the characterization of Prometheus derives from the figure of Milton's Satan, whom Shelley, like Blake, saw as 'a moral being . . . far superior to his God', but his is essentially a heroic struggle concerned with more than self-vindication. Prometheus is seen battling against despair and arbitrary tyranny, and his achievement is presented as a liberation of both body and spirit and as a heightened state of consciousness which implies a wider liberation from enemies which are both internal and external. With the summary overthrow of Jupiter at the beginning of Act III, and the reunion of the unchained Prometheus with Asia, the final act of the drama is given over to lyrical celebration; the triumph of the revolution is marked by the triumph of song.

Shelley's often passionate discussions of poetry are closely related to his idea of the interconnection of the process of the liberation of the soul, the growth of altruism inspired by love, and the ultimate extermination of tyrants. In *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude* (1816) he had presented an account of the quest of a young poet, led by idealism, who discovers 'the spirit of sweet human love' too late. The poem may also be a protest against the Wordsworthian egotism which Shelley so distrusted in *The Excursion*. In his Preface he outlines his scheme as showing 'the Poet's self-centred seclusion . . . avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion' and he adds that 'those who love not their fellow-beings, live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave'. He may have wilfully misread Wordsworth, but the protest against an indulgence in solitude derives much of its force from his unforgiving awareness of the older

poet's retreat from political action into an alternative contemplation of nature. The idea of recoil and recuperation which informs much of Wordsworth's finest lyric poetry is certainly absent from Shelley's two searching, if ultimately ambiguous, meditations on the natural world, the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' (both 1816). In the latter poem, the mountain seems to command action against 'large codes of fraud and woe' rather than represent a silent, God-imbued check to human activity.

It is, however, in his essay *A Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821 and published posthumously in 1840) that Shelley most confidently proclaims the essentially social function of poetry and the prophetic role of the poet. His assertions, like Sidney's before him, are large, even at times outrageous, but his examination of the idea of political improvement as a criterion of literary value and his idea of poetry as a liberator of the individual moral sense carry considerable intellectual force. The argument of the *Defence* opens with the development of a distinction between the workings of the reason and the imagination, with the imagination seen as the synthesizer and the unifier which finds its highest expression in poetry. Shelley dismisses as 'a vulgar error' the distinction between poets and prose writers, and proceeds to dissolve divisions between poets, philosophers, and philosophic historians. Thus Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton emerge as 'philosophers of the very loftiest power' and Plato and Bacon, Herodotus and Plutarch are placed amongst the poets. Essentially, the essay seeks to demonstrate that poetry prefigures other modes of thought and anticipates the formulation of a social morality—'ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life.' Love, 'or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful', is projected as the 'great secret of morals' and, by feeding the imagination, poetry 'administers to the effect by acting upon the cause'. Shelley's argument continues to circulate around these propositions; poetry enhances life, it exalts beauty, it transmutes all it touches, and it tells the truth by stripping 'the veil of familiarity from the world' and laying bare 'the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms'. The poet is priest and prophet to a world which can move beyond religion and magic; he is an 'unacknowledged legislator' for a future society which will learn to live without the restrictions of law; he is, above all, the liberator and the explorer. Shelley's projection of the poet as hero, as the leader and representative of society, is more than veiled self-aggrandizement, it is a reasonable assertion of the irrational power of the imagination against a purely utilitarian view of art.

Adonais (1821), Shelley's elegiac tribute to the dead Keats, pursues the idea of the poet as hero, here triumphant even in the face of death and 'awakened from the dream of life'. If Keats/Adonais is 'one with Nature' and has become 'transmitted effluence' which cannot die 'so long as fire outlives the parent spark', the earth-bound survivor yearns, almost suicidally, for a part in the same life-transcending immortality. The unfinished *The Triumph of Life*,

derived metrically and thematically from Dante and Petrarch, suggests an alternative, if phantasmagoric, vision of life. The poem opens with a dawn and an ecstatic evocation of the sublime amid a mountainous landscape:

> Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
> Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth
> Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask
> Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth.
> The smokeless altars of the mountain snows
> Flamed above crimson clouds, and at the birth
> Of light, the Ocean's orison arose
> To which the birds tempered their matin lay
> All flowers in field or forest which unclose
> Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day,
> Swinging their censers in the element,
> With orient incense lit by the new ray
> Burned slow and inconsumably . . .

This initial celebration of energy and renewal is countered by the darkness of the narrator-poet's 'strange trance', a 'waking dream' of a haunted past and an allegory of death in which the processing participants appear fascinated by their mortality. When the poet recognizes and confronts the figure of Rousseau, the central questions of the poem are raised. Rousseau, in a self-indulgent probing of his own memories, describes too a circuitous process of forgetting and erasing which necessarily evades answers as to the meaning of life. When, finally, the bewildered poet demands 'Then what is Life?' no answer is forthcoming. The poem breaks off, and with it the search for responsive definitions of the inspiring 'Power' behind creation; the fallacy of an egotistic solitude has been exposed, but the offer of alternative assertion remains a hiatus.

John Keats (1795–1821), ever sensitive to criticism and ever open to the influence of other poets, both living and dead, was also extraordinarily able to assimilate and then to transform both criticism and influence. In 1817 he had declined to visit Shelley on the grounds that he preferred to keep his distance, fearing a too immediate challenge to his 'unfetterd [*sic*] Scope'. His development as a poet was rapid, particular, and individual and it was articulated in the bursts of energetic self-critical analysis in his letters. Keats's background and education denied him both the social advantages and the ready recourse to classical models shared by those contemporaries to whose work he most readily turned (though not always favourably)—Wordsworth and Coleridge, Scott, Byron, and Shelley. The enthusiasm which marks his discovery in 1816 of George Chapman's sixteenth-century translation of *The Iliad*, a discovery celebrated in one of his finest sonnets, is notable not simply for its sense of release from the limitations of Alexander Pope's couplet version, but also for the very fact that Homer's Greek was not directly open to him. Throughout his

working life Keats had recourse to Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* and not to a classical memory fostered at school or university. He was, however, extremely well read and his letters record a series of new, excited, and critical impressions formed by his explorations of English seventeenth-century drama, of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Dryden, of Dante, Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Tasso (whose Italian he was beginning to master towards the end of his life) and, above all, of Shakespeare. It is to the example of Shakespeare that he habitually refers in his letters when he seeks to demonstrate a sudden insight into the nature of poetic creation, notably in 1817 in his definition of what he styles 'Negative Capability' ('when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason') and in his attempt in October 1818 to distinguish between 'the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime' and the 'poetical Character' that 'lives in gusto' and has 'as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen'.

In this same letter of 1818 Keats famously remarks that what shocks the virtuous philosopher 'delights the chameleon Poet'. The nature of this particular chameleon lay, for Keats, in its ability to assimilate impressions and temporarily, but totally, to identify with external objects, both animate and inanimate. He felt himself, he adds, 'a creature of impulse'. In some ways his development as a poet confirms his self-analysis, moving as he does from impulsive attraction to a dedicated absorption and adaptation of stimuli through a process of intellectualization and poetic articulation. He draws his immediate experience into his verse, finding metaphors in the natural world, in his responses to architecture, painting, and sculpture or in his magpie reading. His ambition to be counted worthy of a place in the English poetic tradition drove him as much into a succession of creative experiments with form and metre as into the high-flown essays in sub-Shakespearean historic drama so favoured by his contemporaries. To the end of his short career he seems to have experienced a dissatisfaction with his own achievement which stretched beyond its lack of public and critical appreciation; it was a disappointment which inspired the notions of self-denigration and disintegration implicit in his choice of epitaph: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'. The work contained in his first two volumes, the *Poems* of 1817 and *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* of 1818 was, in his own terms, transcended before it had made any impact on readers beyond the poet's own immediate circle. The 1817 collection contains much immature work, imitations of and reflections on *The Faerie Queene* as much as the somewhat shapeless effusions 'Sleep and Poetry' and 'I Stood Tip-Toe Upon a Little Hill', both chiefly memorable for the minute observation crystallized in their delicate imagery. In *Endymion* Keats's consistent ambition to move beyond the lyrical to the narrative and the epic finds its first significant expression, but it is an experiment with which he had evidently become restless before he had completed it. The strengths of the poem are most often occasional and lie chiefly in the introduction of the lyrical hymns and songs which enhance the meandering narrative line. Although he

was pained by the unfavourable reviews accorded to the poem, Keats himself readily recognized its shortcomings and what they had come to imply to him. 'I have written independently *without Judgment*', he writes in October 1818, 'I may write independently, & *with Judgment* hereafter ... In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea & comfortable advice.—I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.'

Keats's *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and other Poems* was published in July 1820 when his mortal sickness had fully declared itself. The majority of the poems in the volume had been written in a period of fertile hyperactivity between the spring of 1818 and the early autumn of 1819. Apart from the three substantial narrative poems named in the title, the 'other poems' include the five odes which have since become his best-known works and the fragmentary *Hyperion* which he had abandoned in April 1819 and which was printed, as the publishers were obliged to acknowledge, 'contrary to the wish of the author'. The earliest of the narrative poems, 'Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil', was originally intended to form a contribution to a collection of verse-tales based on stories by Boccaccio. Keats's version of the story of two tragic lovers elaborates on the original by introducing a complex scheme of natural imagery, an interpolated social and moral commentary, and elements of the Gothic. It became in the poet's own opinion 'too smokeable ... "A weak-sided poem" with an amusing sober-sadness about it'. 'The Eve of St Agnes', written some eight months later, shares a medieval setting with its predecessor but moves far beyond it in what it reveals of Keats's new mastery of dramatic and verbal effect and of narrative shape and tension. The poem is shaped around a series of intense contrasts, of cold and warmth, of dark and light, of hardness and softness, of noise and stillness, and, above all, of cruelty and love, but it is ultimately as ambiguous and uncertain as the superstition on which its heroine, Madeline, sets her hopes. As Madeline anxiously enters her chamber her taper flickers out and the moonlight falls on her through a stained-glass window:

> A casement high and triple-arched there was,
> All garlanded with carven imag'ries
> Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
> And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
> Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
> As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings;
> And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
> And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
> A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.

The poem is emphatically concrete in the variety of its clustered, sensual suggestion, but both abrupt and elusive in its final wrench away from the lovers' escape 'into the storm' and its return to suggestions of sickness, death, and penitence. A far greater ambiguity marks the retelling of a classical haunting in 'Lamia', an ambiguity which begins with Keats's omission of the associations of vampirism with the figure of his half-serpent 'lamia' (according to Lemprière such monsters 'allured strangers ... that they might devour them'). His serpent is beautiful, agonized by her transformation into a lover and enchanting rather than devouring. The narrative pits her against an aged, rational philosopher, Apollonius, in a competition for the attention of Lycius, but if Lycius is finally the victim of the piercing of the illusion on which his world becomes centred, the poem allows little sympathy with the reasoning dream-breaker. Lamia builds fairy palaces, Apollonius demolishes them; she fosters the imagination, his philosophy clips angel's wings and will 'conquer all mysteries by rule and line, | Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine— | Unweave a rainbow'. The poem does not manœuvre a reader into taking sides, but its juxtapositions of illusion and reality, of the ideal and the actual, of feeling and thought, remain tantalizingly unresolved.

A related debate about contraries informs the five odes included in the 1820 volume (a sixth, the 'Ode on Indolence', written in May 1819, was published posthumously in 1848 in a collection which also included a reprinting of Keats's most famous lyrical treatment of the idea of fairy enthralment, the ballad 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'). The earliest of the odes in terms of composition, that to Psyche, has often been seen as an enactment of a ceremonial dedication of the Soul—'as distinguished from an Intelligence'—and as a variation on the idea of the world as 'the vale of Soul-making' which Keats outlined in a long letter of April 1819, a letter which also included a draft of the poem. The odes to a Nightingale and on Melancholy, both of which slightly vary the metrical structure evolved in the earlier poem, were composed in May 1819. The former takes as its subject the local presence of a nightingale, and the contrast of the 'full-throated ease' of its singing with the aching 'numbness' of the human observer, the rapt and meditative poet. The ode progresses through a series of precisely delicate evocations of opposed moods and ways of seeing, some elated, some depressed, but each serving to return the narrator to his 'sole self' and to his awareness of the temporary nature of the release from the unrelieved contemplation of temporal suffering which the bird's song has offered. The more succinct 'Ode on Melancholy' opens with a rejection of traditional, and gloomy, aids to reflection and moves to an exploration of the interrelationship of the sensations of joy and sorrow. The perception of the transience of beauty which haunts the poem also informs the speculations derived from the contemplation of the two scenes which decorate an imagined Attic vase in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', one showing bucolic lovers, the other a pagan sacrifice. Both scenes are frozen and silent, images taken out of time and rendered eternal only by the intervention of art. The image of the sacrifice, in particular, has something of the sculptural patterning and spatial imagination of Poussin:

> Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
> To what green altar, O mysterious priest,

Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands dressed?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

The poem allows for the high compensations offered by art, but its vocabulary steadily suggests the loss, even the desolation, entailed in the 'teasing' process of contemplating eternity. The latest of the odes, 'To Autumn', was written in September 1819. Here the tensions, oppositions, and conflicting emotions are diminished amid a series of dense impressions of a season whose bounty contains both fulfilment and incipient decay, both an intensification of life and an inevitable, but natural, process of ageing and dying.

Keats's two extensive drafts of the fragmentary *Hyperion*—the second of which, known as *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, was published only in 1856—confront the problems of transience, transition, defeat, and progressive revolutionary change in an attempt to retell the story of the resistance of the last of the Titans to the coming new order of the Gods. In his reconstruction of his poem in the second half of 1819 he attempted to reduce the pervasive influence of Milton on his own blank verse, both because he sought a more personal expression and because he was beginning to suspect Milton's aesthetic ('Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the vein of art—I wish to devote myself to another sensation'). But the remodelling also entailed a radical shift in perspective by allotting the main narration of the fall of the Titans to Moneta, the veiled priestess and prophetess encountered in a prefatory vision. This vision, Dantean rather than Miltonic in its inspiration, explores the idea of the influence of suffering on the imagination of a modern poet, requiring the visionary to experience pain and the 'giant agony of the world' before being vouchsafed an understanding of both the power and the limitation of art; Moneta's tale of the past, as it begins to emerge, serves to illuminate and reinforce what the poet has already partially discovered in his vision. *The Fall of Hyperion* begins with the clear distinction between dreaming 'fanatics', the representatives of and apologists for the Christianity which Keats had rejected, and the figure of the poet-prophet seeking a new cosmology. The poem does more than counter Milton's example with a pagan scheme, or adjust Dante to suit post-Christian arguments about the nature of evolution; it seeks to balance the darkness, the misery, the ruin, and the disillusion with the still uncertain hope that the suffering and responsive poet may yet find his voice. It is Keats's most triumphant declaration of his independent self-hood as a poet.

The 'Romantic' Essayists

In the closing months of 1817 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* began a series of venomous articles on what the magazine styled 'the Cockney School of Poetry'. In these articles the name and work of the London-based Keats was linked to that of his friend and former mentor James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784–1859). Both writers were taken to be representatives of a gauche and vulgar group of poets whose every gesture betrayed their 'low birth and low habits'. Though at the beginning of his literary career Keats had needed Hunt's timely encouragement, he rapidly outgrew Hunt's purely decorative influence on his verse. Hunt is an occasionally diverting poet and a florid translator (his version of Tasso's *Amyntas: A Tale of the Woods* (1820) was dedicated to Keats), but his work as a journalist and essayist, a central expression of one of the great ages of English journalism, is far more enterprising. Between 1808 and 1825 he acted as editor of the anti-Establishment periodical *The Examiner* which he had founded with his brother John. In 1813, as the consequence of an extremely uncomplimentary article on the Prince Regent, he was obliged for two years to continue his editorial work from a not uncomfortable prison cell. *The Examiner* provided a platform for William Hazlitt's theatre criticism and through its pages Hunt was instrumental in introducing the work of both Shelley and Keats to a wider readership. In the years 1819–21 Hunt also edited *The Indicator* and in 1822, with the collaboration of Byron and Shelley, established the short-lived *The Liberal*. His gossipy later volumes—*A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* (1848) and his study of Kensington, *The Old Court Suburb* (1855)—are scarcely worthy of his former literary and political radicalism (he was by this stage the recipient of a state pension), but his *Autobiography* (1850, revised edition 1859) manages to rekindle some of the old fire in its reminiscences of lost friends and lost causes. The book and its penurious and effusive author are now most commonly remembered through their influence on Dickens's slanderous portrait of Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House* (1852–3).

William Hazlitt (1778–1830) is, with Coleridge, the foremost literary critic of the age. Both men recognized the importance of journals in disseminating information and in reflecting on contemporary issues, and both successfully responded to, and profitably indulged, the growing metropolitan taste for public lectures. Both were also acquainted with modern German thought and both proved to be discriminating hierophants in the now international cult of Shakespeare. Hazlitt was particularly alert to the significance of art and the creative imagination amid the political demands and disappointments of the post-revolutionary era. Although an early disciple of Godwin's and a democrat by principle, he became, and remained, an equally determined idolizer of Napoleon. Napoleon, as the radical hero, the champion of progress, and the vigorous alternative to the negatives and vacuity of modern Britain, was the subject of Hazlitt's last major project, a biography published in 1828–30, and he

perversely haunts the pages of the prose medley *Liber Amoris: or, The New Pygmalion* (1823), a scrapbook account of a fraught and unfulfilled adulterous affair.

It was, however, as a literary theorist and as a critic of Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama that Hazlitt most conspicuously influenced his own contemporaries. Keats, in particular, drew considerably from his reading of Hazlitt's *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805); he avidly studied *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* on its publication in 1817 and he attended the series of lectures on English poets delivered at the Surrey Institution in the opening months of 1818. *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* acknowledges a debt to the pioneer work of Schlegel, but the lectures are more often shaped by dissent from the English acting tradition and by vexation with earlier English critics, notably with the *ex cathedra* pronunciations of Dr Johnson. Johnson's prose in particular irritates him: 'He no sooner acknowledges the merits of his author in one line than the periodical revolution of his style carries the weight of his opinion completely over to the side of objection, thus keeping up a perpetual alternation of perfections and absurdities.' Hazlitt includes generous appreciations of the great actors he had seen (Mrs Siddons, Kemble, Kean), but he also distances himself from plays in performance. While freely admitting that *Richard III* may well 'belong to the theatre, rather than to the closet', he insists elsewhere in his lectures that he did not like to see Shakespeare acted and that performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* served only to convert 'a delightful fiction to a pantomime'. By way of contrast, he emphasizes Shakespeare's continuing political relevance. 'No reader of history can be a lover of kings', he notes in an aside in his account of *Henry VIII* and he discovers a 'store-house of political commonplaces' in *Coriolanus* which might save a student 'the trouble of reading Burke's Reflections or Paine's Rights of Man, or the Debates in both Houses of Parliament since the French Revolution or our own'. Hazlitt readily concedes that he prefers Shakespeare's tragedies to his comedies, but some of the most telling observations occur in the lectures on *The Merchant of Venice* (where he speaks sympathetically of Shylock as a 'good hater'), on *Measure for Measure* (which he finds 'a play as full of genius as it is of wisdom', if one lacking in 'passion'), and on *The Tempest* (where he recognizes the interconnection of all the parts of the play and in particular the fact that the drunkards 'share, in the disorder of their minds and bodies, in the tumult of the elements').

Hazlitt is an equally sharp and original critic of his literary and political contemporaries in the essays published as *The Spirit of the Age* in 1825. In this attempt to examine aspects of the *Zeitgeist* of a period that Hazlitt himself sees as 'an age of talkers, and not of doers', he deals with twenty-five prominent politicians, thinkers, and writers. He praises, discriminates and, when the occasion suits, damns with an aphorism or an image. Jeremy Bentham 'turns wooden utensils' as a relaxation from thought 'and fancies he can turn men in the same manner'; Byron 'lounges with extravagance, and yawns so as to alarm the reader'; Cobbett wields not simply 'a true pen, but a great mutton fist'; while Crabbe's *The Borough* is 'done so to the life, that it seems almost like some sea-monster, crawled out of the neighbouring slime, and harbouring a breed of strange vermin, with a strong local scent of tar and bilge-water'. Hazlitt is supportively generous to the Godwin whom he sees as having 'sunk below the horizon' of public attention, even though his works are 'a standard in the history of intellect', and he is kind enough to the much-despised Southey by praising his prose works while deploring his 'political inconsistency'. The essay on Wordsworth forthrightly proclaims his centrality in modern English culture and his genius as 'a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age'. Wordsworth's mind may well be 'obtuse', but, as Hazlitt explains, that is because 'it is not analytic, but synthetic; it is reflecting rather than theoretical'.

Hazlitt's short sketch of 'Elia', his friend Charles Lamb (1775–1834), acknowledges that Lamb had succeeded as a writer 'not by conforming to the *Spirit of the Age*, but in opposition to it'. Lamb the antiquarian, and Lamb the reflective exploiter of nostalgia had somehow turned his back on the issues of the day, preferring the byways of the past to the highways of the present. In his lectures on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists Hazlitt flatteringly highlights aspects of his friend's often cogent appreciation of classic English drama, citing notes and asides in Lamb's pioneer anthology *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the Time of Shakespeare* (1808). This anthology extracts scenes and speeches from the work of writers neglected and unregarded at the time, but it also reveals often surprising judgements in a man noted for his 'gentleness' in his own circle. Lamb admits to enjoying Elizabethan and Jacobean drama 'beyond the diocese of strict conscience' and, although he finds Marlowe extravagantly offensive, he delights in Webster's ability 'to move a horror skilfully' and to 'wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop'. Elsewhere, in an essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare', he notes of the happy ending contrived for the bastardized version of *King Lear* then current on the English stage: 'A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear has gone through,—the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him.' It was, however, as 'Elia', the author of a series of essays mostly contributed to the *London Magazine*, that Lamb achieved a real rapport with contemporary readers and a reputation testified to by numerous subsequent reprints of the two original collections first published in 1823 and 1833. The essays cultivate a form and a style that Lamb admired in his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mentors, Bacon, Browne, Walton, Fuller, Addison, and Steele. He plays with archaisms and with a familiar archness, but he superadds his own delight in whimsy, reminiscence, and digression. 'Elia' is self-evidently a Londoner, with a cockney's pleasure in London streets and institutions and an equally cockney attachment to a countryside situated at a convenient distance from the town, but he is rarely specifically topographical, preferring to cultivate aspects of the autobiographical or merely a taste for charm and serendipity. The *Essays* were

to find a distant echo in the general, short radio talks perfected in the mid-twentieth century by the likes of E. M. Forster and J. B. Priestley.

Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859) was obliged throughout his career to support himself and his family by contributing stories, essays, articles, and reviews to various prominent journals. His most celebrated and once notorious work, *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, appeared in two parts in the *London Magazine* in 1821 (it was subsequently revised and expanded in 1856). This study of addiction and hallucination, of the induction of dreams as much as of the impossibility of forgetting a personal past, moves far beyond a merely Gothic or Piranesian fascination with the dark and contorted architecture of the soul. It is a work of considerable psychological daring, prefiguring Freudian theories and preoccupations, as much as an intricate personal apologia which interweaves recollections of human kindness, nightmarish recalls of childhood trauma, and an equivocating justification of drug-taking. The indulgent, feverish clarity of De Quincey's accounts of his own exploration of memory, imagination, and waking dream is related elsewhere in his work to his profound appreciation of the 'moral sublime' in Wordsworth's poetry and to sometimes startling critical insights into other literature. *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* (1834–9) was written some twenty years after the period of his intimacy with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, and combines fulsomely admiring reminiscence with often seditious, malicious, or negative inferences about the less than sublime private shortcomings of the individuals concerned. De Quincey's journalism, which is often marked by a wry humour, ranges from the study in black comedy, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827) (which purports to be a lecture to the Society of Connoisseurs in Murder on the aesthetics of slaughter), to the remarkable fantasias on dreaming, *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845) and *The English Mail Coach* (1849). Both of these latter essays are highly digressive while at the same time justifications of digression. The short critical study, 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth' (1823), was originally one of a series of miscellaneous 'Notes from the Pocket-Book of a Late Opium Eater'. It has a logic quite lacking in De Quincey's more personal psychological explorations, moving as it does from an initial perplexity at the emotion aroused by the knocking at the gate, through a seeming digression, to a lucid answer to the opening question. It is none the less a characteristic work, both an explanation of emotional arousal and a perception of the nature of dramatic dynamism and opposition. The knocking at the gate is a crux, a moment of revelation in which murder and the murderer—'cut off by an immeasurable gulph from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs'—is juxtaposed with a reassertion of human value.

The seven compact novels of Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866) satirically explore the ways in which philosophical or ideological stances sever his characters from ordinariness and from ordinary human communication. Peacock generally models his fictions on parodies of Socratic dialogues or Platonic symposia, withdrawing his thinly, but deftly, sketched characters into the

relative luxury and seclusion of country houses where they have the leisure to make fools of themselves. Writing in 1836 on the nature of French comic romance, for which he had a particular relish, Peacock noted that there were 'two very distinct classes of comic fictions: one in which the characters are abstractions or embodied classifications, and the implied or embodied opinions the main matter of the work; another in which the characters are individuals, and the events and the action those of actual life'. His own satires tend to fall into the first category, based as they are on speech rather than action, on preoccupation and obsession rather than on psychology and motivation. Despite the historical setting of both *Maid Marion* (1822) and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), all the tales concern themselves with the ramifications of modern political, social, and aesthetic theory; history proves to be little more than a vehicle for witty discourses on the nature of government, on monarchy, and on the nature of revolutionary opposition to the powers that be. As Peacock himself remarks in a Preface to a collection of his first six novels in 1837, his first, *Headlong Hall*, had begun with the now defunct Holyhead Mail, and his latest, *Crotchet Castle*, had ended with an equally defunct 'Rotten Borough'. The books had taken up issues of the moment which the passage of time had rendered dated, but, he hoped, 'the classes of tastes, feelings and opinions, which were brought into play in these little tales remain substantially the same'. In many ways Peacock's own modest analysis of his work is at fault, for his novels are very much tied to the particular debates of the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and even his 'Victorian' tale of 1860–1, *Gryll Grange*, harks back to the mode, the debates, and the gourmandizing clergymen of his earlier fiction.

Peacock's intimacy with Shelley, and his acquaintance with the radical speculations of Shelley's circle, gave him an amused grasp of both a particular language and an innate inconsistency. His sceptical treatment of leading aspects of 'the Spirit of the Age' nevertheless extends beyond the whims of a radical chic into a general ridicule of the intellectual posturing of the first third of the nineteenth century. Shelley himself appears under various guises in Peacock's early stories, most notably as the crankily esoteric Scythrop Glowry in *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). He cast Coleridge as the transcendental Mr Flosky in the same novel, as Moly Mystic in *Melincourt*(1817) and, belatedly, as Mr Skionar in *Crotchet Castle* (1831). The self-dramatizing Mr Cypress of *Nightmare Abbey* is a projection of Byron and the political renegades, Wordsworth and Southey, are caricatured in *Melincourt* as Mr Paperstamp and Mr Feathernest, names which suggest the nature of their profitable association with the State. *Melincourt* is ambitiously shaped around an abduction (indirectly derived from both *Clarissa* and *Anna St Ives*), but the plot is rendered farcical by the bizarre introduction of a flute-playing orang-utan as the heroine's gallant deliverer. 'Sir Oran Haut-ton', educated in all things except speech by the idealistic primitivist Mr Sylvan Forester, is also, thanks to his patron's purchase of a seat for him, a Member of Parliament. The rival claims of progress and regress, of

reform and conservatism, of perfectibilians, deteriorationists, and statu-quo-ites variously figure in all the tales, but the contrived comic resolutions of the plots, the multiple marriages, the averted suicides, or simply the exposure of pretence, never effectively serve to resolve the ideological contradictions voiced by the characters. Peacock's last novel, *Gryll Grange*, partly concerns itself with the Victorian debate about the use and misuse of science but unlike most other mid-nineteenth-century novels it never comes down didactically on one side to the prejudice of another; in common with Peacock's other fiction it reveals a genial narrative pleasure in preposterous incident which works more on the level of entertaining diversion than as an ideological plot device.

Clare and Cobbett

Peacock's long life extended well into the Victorian period, in marked contrast to many of those whom he had satirized in his first six novels. Largely because the three major poets of the younger generation—Byron, Shelley, and Keats—were dead by the late 1820s, or because the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott markedly declined in quality and imaginative energy as the writers grew older, it has often proved difficult to determine precise literary continuities and influences from the first to the second third of the century, and convenient therefore to cite the beginnings of new careers (notably those of Carlyle, Dickens, and Tennyson) as evidence of a fresh literary sensibility in the 1830s. Victorian preoccupations seem to supersede rather than to accentuate the concerns of the 1820s. A systematic argument over the nature of the gradualist parliamentary and social reform replaced an active involvement with, or a distaste for, revolutionary politics (though the disruptive fact of the French Revolution continued to haunt all Victorian political thinking). Relative constitutional stability at home served to enhance the reputation of a temperate monarchy against the foreign principles of republicanism and absolutism. The question of growing class-consciousness, and the acute divisions between the rich and the poor, loomed larger than the ideal of a society purged of a semi-feudal landed aristocracy. Social and cultural commentators from the time of Hazlitt onwards tended to agree that the nineteenth century was a period marked by radical readjustment and that the French Revolution and its immediate consequences had forced on Europe changes in sensibility and belief as significant as those of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The present seemed as marked off from the century that preceded it as absolutely as the Protestant Reformers drew distinctions between their own times and Catholic ages of darkness. The major difference lay in a clear distinction between the evangelical confidence of earlier Protestants and the deep-seated doubts and scruples which infect so many nineteenth-century thinkers. The new century was also witness to unprecedented shifts in social and technological experience, most notably the rapid acceleration of industrialization and urbanization,

which seemed to many to demand fresh insights into human morality and renewed incentives to human action.

In their very different ways the work of two essentially rural writers, John Clare (1793–1864) and William Cobbett (1763–1835), heralds this period of reassessment and lost content. Clare, the son of a Northamptonshire labourer, and himself employed in various ill-paid agricultural jobs, was acutely aware of the changes brought about in the countryside by the extension of the estates of the gentry through the parliamentary Acts of Enclosure. He was also particularly sensitive to the relationship between landscape and human labour. Clare's *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, which appeared in 1820 (thanks to an enterprising publisher aware of both Clare's talent and his own likely profit from it), found an immediate response from readers already accustomed to the vernacular of Burns and to the work of the English 'peasant poet', Robert Bloomfield (1766–1823). Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* (illustrated with wood-engravings by Thomas Bewick) had sold 26,000 copies within three years of its publication in 1800. It is deeply indebted to Thomson's *Seasons*, though it observes nature from the distinctive perspective of a farm-worker. Unlike Bloomfield, Clare was determined not to have his own provincial voice manipulated into accents acceptable to upper-class or metropolitan tastes. 'I think vulgar names to the flowers best as I know no others', he told his publisher and pointed out on another occasion that 'Putting the Correct Language of the Gentleman into the mouth of a Simple Shepherd or Vulgar Ploughman is far from Natural'. In his best poetry Clare's language is neither tamed nor emasculated by gentility; it has a direct unfussiness rendered more exact by provincial words and turns of phrase. The practice of modern editors in returning to the quirks of grammar, punctuation, and spelling in the surviving manuscripts, rather than the over-tidied and expurgated original editions, has further reinforced the forthrightness of his verse.

Clare was never an untutored poet, for he learned readily and appreciatively from the work of other writers, as his poem to Cowper ('the poet of fields | Who found the muse on common ground') and his imitations of Byron attest, but he was always aware that his own experience of nature and his acute sense of locality gave him an individual voice. His often exquisitely detailed lyrics, popular with anthologists in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, have often been allowed to eclipse the achievement of his longer poems, and particularly the satirical couplet poem, *The Parish* (published posthumously) and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827). Clare's meandering survey of village society in *The Parish* contains much sharp and critical observation of petty-minded oppression and petty oppressors, ranging from squires, farmers, magistrates, and overseers to village politicians and ranting sectarian preachers. As its subtitle—'the Progress of Cant'—implies, the poem charts the advance of a new, self-propagating rural order which has broken down old responsibilities and corrupted old manners. Throughout his work Clare hankers for a lost Eden, a golden world of agricultural co-operation and mutual respect as

opposed to urban-based prejudices and snobberies and harsher economic regimentation. The old vicar, remembered in the central section of *The Parish*, is a figure from 'days gone bye | When pride and fashion did not rank so high', a man 'plain as his flock' and simple in his habits. Clare's Eden may be unlocated in a precise time past, but it is never a misty and sentimental pastoral. In the 'June' section of his masterpiece, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, a description of summer 'ale and songs and healths and merry ways' stirs the memory of a real community in a lost time of 'the old freedom that was living then | When masters made them merry wi their men | Whose coat was like his neighbors russet brown | And whose rude speech was vulgar as his clown'. Clare's poetry, for all its delight in the profuse variety of the natural world, is darkened not so much by reference to the cold, to leaking thatches, or to stark rural poverty and the threat of the workhouse, as by an awareness of, and variation on, the private and social ramifications of the Fall.

As William Cobbett's radical journalism developed after 1804 he increasingly found himself able to identify an English paradise and the precise date of its loss, even if his definition began as little more than a debating point. The largely self-educated Cobbett learned his politics through his personal experience of the corruptions of the ruling class and through a wide knowledge of the peopled, working landscape of England. He was a passionate patriot, but his patriotism, which embraced a dislike of Scots theorists as much as of foreign wickedness, derived from a deep faith in the virtues of the cottage economy and the old collaborative relationship between those who owned the land and those who worked it. His vision of a dying co-operative order and of radical resistance to the 'unnatural' advance of the machine and machine-oriented ways of thinking, which he consistently propagated through his vastly successful newspaper the *Political Register* (founded in 1802), served to influence the countryman Clare and to provoke the now metropolitan Coleridge (who in 1817 described Cobbett as a viper). Although he used London as his base, he insisted that he loathed the city's established social influence and its rapidly swelling physical proportions (he habitually uses the shorthand term 'the Wen'—the wart—to describe it); in his *Rural Rides*, which began to appear in the *Political Register* from 1821, he is vituperative about all the evidence of cockney 'tax-eaters' observed in his travels. *Rural Rides* reveals Cobbett at his most typical: arrogant, intolerant, and controversial on the one hand; observant, intelligent, and vigorous on the other. He confines his observations largely to the once rich agricultural lands of southern England—preferring them to the scant farmlands and the burgeoning industry of the North and the Midlands—but he makes them a vehicle both for a broad criticism of society and for often rapturous and detailed descriptions of the land, its people, and its agricultural and social archaeology. He can dismiss the new spa towns as resorts of 'the lame and the lazy, the gourmandizing and guzzling, the bilious and the nervous', but he can also wax lyrical over sights as various as that of industrial Sheffield at night ('Nothing can be conceived more grand or more terrific than

the yellow waves of fire that incessantly issue from the top of these furnaces') or remains of Malmesbury Abbey.

At Malmesbury in 1826 Cobbett reiterated the theme which runs through much of his later work; the medieval church in the town was built by happy, free, and prosperous Englishmen, 'men who were not begotten by Pitt nor by Jubilee George'. The English of the nineteenth century are a fallen race, ruled by inferior men and possessed of a distorted view of their great historic inheritance. The Reformation, in dissolving and ruining the abbeys, destroyed more than an architectural fabric; it wrecked what Cobbett sees as a perfected and heroic society. His rhetorical insistence on this loss of grace is explicated in the series of pamphlet letters published between 1824 and 1827 and provocatively entitled *A History of the Protestant 'Reformation', in England and Ireland: Showing how that event has impoverished and degraded the main body of the People in those Countries*. The letters are addressed to 'all sensible and just Englishmen' and attempt to demonstrate how 'the happiest country, and the *greatest* country too, that Europe had ever seen' had fallen victim to the reforming vultures let loose by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Cobbett was no Catholic, but his apology for a lost Catholic Merry England is as passionate as his distaste for the 'bloody cruelty' of the 'master-butcher' Henry which reduced England to 'a great human slaughter-house', and the '*pauper* and *ripping-up* reign' of the tyrannous Elizabeth (or 'Betsy' as he prefers to call her). Cobbett's *Protestant 'Reformation'* is more than simply a lament, it is a rumbustious outflanking of modern self-congratulatory readings of national history. For all its distortions and inaccuracies the book popularly introduces the idea of a stark contrast between the illusion of a medieval co-operative state, in which the rural poor were nourished by a Catholic Church and a Catholic nobility alike, and the untidy modern world of sectarian Dissent, of poor-laws, game-laws, parliamentary commissions, urban slums, and impersonal industrialists whom Cobbett had earlier characterized as 'Seigneurs of the Twist, sovereigns of the Spinning Jenny, great Yeomen of the Yarn'. If his battle to preserve a predominantly agricultural order of things was doomed by the advance of industrialization, his vision of a simpler, devouter, united nation continued to carry great political force as an alternative to the self-evident confusion of Victorian England.