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High Victorian Literature 1830–1880

A GREAT deal of Victorian intellectual effort was spent in trying to hold together a universe which was exploding. It was an age of conflicting explanations and theories, of scientific and economic confidence and of social and spiritual pessimism, of a sharpened awareness of the inevitability of progress and of deep disquiet as to the nature of the present. Traditional solutions, universally acknowledged truths, and panaceas were generally discovered to be wanting, and the resultant philosophical and ideological tensions are evident in the literature of the period from Carlyle's diatribes of the 1830s and Dickens's social novels of the 1840s to Arnold's speculations of the 1870s and Morris's socialist prophecies of the 1880s, from the troubled early poetry of Tennyson to the often dazzled theology of Hopkins.

Like all ages it was an age of paradox, but the paradoxes of the mid-nineteenth century struck contemporaries as more stark and disturbing than those which had faced their ancestors. Despite the shocks to complacency occasioned by the 1851 religious census—which revealed that out of the now swollen population of 17,927,609 for England and Wales only 7,261,032 attended some kind of service on the census Sunday in March—there remained a high degree of Christian commitment. Even given the token nature of much of this commitment, religion remained a powerful force in Victorian life and literature. The census revealed that there were still large numbers who adhered to the increasing diversity of the Church of England, but the majority of them lived in the south and east of the island. In a burgeoning northern industrial city, such as Leeds, only 15 per cent of the population went to an Anglican church, while some 31 per cent attended a Dissenting chapel. Dissenters also formed a comfortable majority of Sunday worshippers in both Manchester and Birmingham, and in Wales they outnumbered Anglicans by four to one. In Scotland, where a similar census was held three years later, it was found, somewhat more encouragingly to the religious authorities, that just over 60 per cent of the population went to church. If the vast number of those who failed to attend public worship on the census Sundays were working-class men and

women who easily found alternative and more agreeable ways of spending the one day of rest allowed to them, there were also, amongst the educated classes, deep and growing doubts as to the very doctrinal and historical bases of Christianity. These doubts were often dryly rooted in German biblical scholarship (known as the 'Higher Criticism'); they were fostered and emboldened by the appearance in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection*, by the steady development of Darwin's theories by his disciples, and by an intellectual culture increasingly influenced by scientific materialism.

Mid-Victorian society was still held together by the cement of Christian moral teaching and constricted by the triumph of puritan sexual mores. It laid a particular stress on the virtues of monogamy and family life, but it was also publicly aware of flagrant moral anomalies throughout the social system. Although the supposed blessings of ordered family life were generally proclaimed to be paramount, many individual Victorians saw the family as an agent of oppression and as the chief vehicle of encompassing conformity. The period which saw the first real stirrings of the modern women's movement also received and revered the matronly model provided by Queen Victoria herself and acquiesced to the stereotype of virtuous womanhood propagated by many of its novelists and poets. It was not idly that Thackeray complained in his Preface to *Pendennis* in 1849 that 'since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN'. Many ladies, he claimed, had remonstrated with him because he had described a young man 'resisting and affected by temptation'. Thackeray did not actually use the words 'sex' and 'sexual temptation', but his readers would have known what he was talking about. Lest we assume too readily that Thackeray was a representative voice raised against English double standards, and against enforced limitations to his art, it is worth remembering that in the fourth chapter of Dickens's *David Copperfield* (which also appeared in 1849) David notes of the imaginative influence of his boyhood reading that he had 'been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together'. As David Copperfield seems anxious to point out, innocence too had its premium. It was, moreover, a tactful influence that most mid-Victorian novel readers seem to have appreciated.

The Victorian age had its continuities, its revivals, and its battles of styles in painting and architecture as much as in literature. It was as much an age in which the Greek, the Gothic, and the Italianate could vie with one another as advanced and inventive expressions of the *Zeitgeist* as it was an age of experimental engineering. It produced both the intricate Gothic of the new Palace of Westminster and the functional classical ironwork of the Great Exhibition pavilion (which the satirical magazine *Punch* dubbed the 'Crystal Palace'). As the Great Exhibition of 1851 proudly demonstrated, this was the age both of applied art and of the application of new technologies to all aspects of design and production. This first true 'machine age' reaped both the

material benefits and the social advantages of the factory system and of vigorous, unrestrained capitalism. New urban prosperity, and industrial enterprise, gave the middle and working classes alike a variety of small domestic comforts and ornaments which were once confined only to the very rich. They also led to a domestic clutter and to an eclecticism which is, to an interesting degree, reflected in the careful delineation, organization, and association of objects in the work of contemporary novelists.

The years 1830–80 were years of British self-confidence and semi-isolationism in terms of European affairs, but the illusion of peace in the 1850s was broken by the disasters of the Indian Mutiny and by the incompetent bungling of the Crimean War. The domestic political scene saw the sacredness of the principles of liberty of conscience and the freedom of the individual enshrined in law and in the writings of Macaulay and Mill, but these principles most benefited middle-class men and were of little immediate relevance to the many women who were still denied proper education and property rights and to all the women who were excluded from the franchise. They were often of even less relevance to those amongst the poor whose only real freedom was the freedom to starve. In society as a whole they were challenged not by an interfering state but by the pressures exerted by a 'moral' majority and by the debilitating freedoms of poverty, homelessness, and hunger.

If upper- and middle-class Britain congratulated itself on avoiding the revolutionary upheavals that shook Europe in the late 1840s, it should not be presumed that this relative social and political stability was easily won or easily maintained. In many senses the Victorian age was ushered in by a series of moderate political reforms which were specifically designed to avert the tide of more radical change. In 1829 a sobbing George IV had signed the Act of Parliament granting civil rights to his Roman Catholic subjects in Great Britain and Ireland. The King was sobbing because he believed that he was breaking his coronation oath to protect the constitutional rights of the Church of England. The Catholic Emancipation Act had become inevitable not simply because many liberal-minded Englishmen believed tolerance to be a virtue, but because the Parliamentary Union of Great Britain and Ireland had left the latter kingdom largely disenfranchised. If the 1829 Act threw down a civil and religious challenge to the constitutional settlement of 1688, the challenge was extended by the pressure for far wider reform of the Constitution. In March 1831 a Reform Bill was unsuccessfully introduced into the House of Commons. After a general election, a second Bill was passed by the Commons in September, but was rejected by the House of Lords. Under the threat of widespread civil unrest, and with King William IV's offer to create new peers hanging over their heads, the Reform Act was finally passed by the Lords in June 1832. The City of London cast a bronze medal showing the kneeling figure of Liberty, with Magna Carta at her feet, presenting the new Act to Britannia in front of an altar inscribed with the names of its main proponents (including, somewhat incongruously, the King). The Reform Bill abolished the so-called

'Rotten Boroughs' (where scandalously few electors had lived) and redistributed constituencies in the important new towns (such as Manchester and Birmingham). It extended the franchise to all male householders rated at £10 and over and to £50 leaseholders (who were generally rural tenants). Although the bill doubled the electorate by including many more middle-class voters, it still left twenty-nine out of every thirty citizens without a constitutional voice. It supposedly reduced the number of 'Pocket Boroughs' (once exclusively controlled by aristocratic or landowning interest), but it left many parliamentary seats still firmly in the voluminous pockets of the aristocracy. The struggle for, and the modest consequences of, the Reform Bill were to preoccupy and amuse many subsequent writers. The corruptions of an old-style election are memorably witnessed by Mr Pickwick at the appropriately named Eatanswill; Sir Leicester Dedlock in *Bleak House* (set just before 1832) 'delivers in his own candidateship, as a kind of handsome wholesale order to be promptly executed', and treats two other seats that belong to him 'as retail orders of less importance, merely sending down the men'; George Eliot's Mr Brooke comically fails to be elected to the new Parliament in *Middlemarch* and in *Felix Holt* her 'radical' protagonist, somewhat more dourly, contemplates the social unrest, the divided loyalties, and the feverish popular pressure for continued reform in a Midlands town of the early 1830s.

Felix Holt, published in 1866, had a particular relevance to a new wave of reform which culminated in a second overhaul of the electoral system in 1867 (when seats were again redistributed, and, more significantly, a million urban working men were added to the electorate). The 1867 Reform Act (together with its successor of 1884, which enfranchised a further two million working-class labourers) was the indirect consequence of continued working-class pressure for democratic representation, pressure which had first become vocal with the drawing up of the 'People's Charter' in 1838. This Charter, its articulate framers, and its many determined supporters (the 'Chartists') emerged as a significant, and to many unsympathetic observers, worrying new force in British political life in the 1840s. Although, to an important degree, they were the heirs to the radical Dissent of the French Revolutionary era, they were to another the vanguard of a newly self-conscious and expanding industrial working class. The Chartists, with their determination to press for change from below, struck many early Victorians as perhaps the most vocal and disconcerting of the signs of the times.

'The Condition of England': Carlyle and Dickens

The disconcertions and anomalies of early Victorian Britain are nowhere more trenchantly examined than in the pamphlets, essays, lectures, and books of its most noisy and effective critic, Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). Carlyle was a late product of the Scottish Enlightenment, and of the culture which had made the

Edinburgh Review (founded in 1802) an intellectual force to be reckoned with beyond the borders of Scotland. The power and effect of his own writings do not, however, derive exclusively from the classical rationality of late eighteenth-century Edinburgh philosophy. Carlyle's fundamental debt to the rhythms and the confident, prophetic utterance of the Bible is profound, as is his sense of himself as a latter-day Jeremiah, endowed with the urgent accents of a Presbyterian pulpit. He was also exceptionally well read in modern German thought which was already exerting a powerful cerebral influence over the literatures of other European nations. His own *Life of Schiller* was published in the *London Magazine* in 1823–4 and his translation of Goethe's seminal novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* appeared in 1824.

When, in 1834, Carlyle settled in London he was seeking a broader metropolitan base, and a wider audience, for his increasingly urgent commentaries on the times. The year before his move he had begun the serialization in *Fraser's Magazine* of his perplexing fiction, *Sartor Resartus*, a work which combines a theorizing German central character with a mediating, and explicitly English, editor. Much earlier in his career he had aspired to a fiction which would speak 'with a tongue of fire—sharp, sarcastic, apparently unfeeling' but which would nevertheless convey the central precepts of his philosophy: energy, earnestness, and duty. *Sartor Resartus* ('The Tailor Retailored') realizes that ambition in the form of a reflexive discourse moulded around a learned study of the philosophy of clothes. Carlyle's English editor describes the nature of this tract as made up of two undemarcated parts and of 'multifarious sections and subdivisions' in which each part 'overlaps, and indents and indeed quite runs through the other'. It is like 'some mad banquet, wherein all courses had been confounded'. The style in which it is written embodies this 'labyrinthic combination' by intermixing German and English, by echoing earlier literature, and by playing games with meanings and with translations from one language to another. Like all Carlyle's styles it works through a process of amalgamation and assimilation. Although *Sartor Resartus* has its English precedents in Swift's *Battle of the Books* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, it also looks uneasily forward to the experiments of James Joyce.

Sartor Resartus was more than simply game-playing. It also carried a message for the times in which it was written, a message which warned of the dangers of 'sham' in all its forms and which contrasted the undoing force of the 'Everlasting No' with the constructive imperative of the 'Everlasting Yea', an imperative which solves all contradiction. This 'Everlasting Yea' demands a submission to the will of God and an active commitment to work, though what Carlyle meant by 'God' and 'work' remained imprecise throughout his career (Nietzsche, for one, suspected that 'at bottom, Carlyle is an English atheist who makes it a point of honour not to be one'). This ultimate elusiveness does not appear to have diminished the effect of his writings upon his literary contemporaries. Those who responded to the urgency of his warnings in the 1830s and 1840s seem to have assented more to his analyses of historic and

modern ills rather than to his vaguer proposals for future remedies. In the essay *Chartism* of 1839 he confronted the growing threat of class war posed by the new political articulacy of industrial workers. In so doing, he glanced back to the formative events of the French Revolution and to their dislocating effect on all Europe, an effect which was 'full of stern monition to all countries'. But for England the warning was specific: 'These Chartisms, Radicalisms, Reform Bill, Tithe Bill, and infinite other discrepancy, and acrid argument and jargon that there is yet to be, are *our* French Revolution: God grant that we, with our better methods, may be able to transact it by argument alone!' This essay begins by offering definitions of what Carlyle styles 'the Condition of England Question', definitions which derive from the observation of the state of a nation attempting to come to terms with its parliamentary and social reforms aimed at deflecting revolution.

As in everything he wrote, history provides Carlyle with a pattern of precedents; his evident dread is a process of repetition and of an equally threatening fracture of patterns and precedents. In the series of six lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) he developed aspects of the thesis of *Sartor Resartus* by stressing that heroism manifested itself in a wide range of human activity and that the 'hero', whether king or prophet, poet or philosopher, was a challenger of convention and of sham and a reformer of the defunct and the empty. More significantly, the lectures outlined an idea of history which profoundly, if sometimes maladroitly, influenced the work of Carlyle's English successors. 'The History of the World', he insisted, 'is but the Biography of great men . . . Could we see *them*, we should get some glimpses into the very marrow of the world's history.' *Past and Present* (1843) juxtaposes the past—in the form of a highly sympathetic commentary on the recently published *Chronicle* of Jocelin of Brakelond which describes the achievements of the twelfth-century Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmunds—with the confusions and contradictions of the present. The form of the book both supports the Victorian medievalist idea of an organic, stratified, and securer social past and challenges it by acknowledging that modern industrialization and historical progress have utterly altered the nature of society and its institutions. Carlyle, like the pragmatic, 'heroic' Abbot Samson, has no place for sentimentalism or nostalgia. Despite the catalogue of modern ills described in the second half of *Past and Present*, and despite the satiric wit which sets up and demolishes the stock figures of Sir Jabesh Windbag and Plugson of Undershot, there remains room for a visionary optimism of the type indulged in elsewhere by 'prophetic' writers as diverse as Blake and D. H. Lawrence. At the conclusion, Carlyle reassembles and reshuffles the images and ideas he has developed through the narrative and looks forward to the sweeping away of the 'Sooty Hell of mutiny and savagery and despair' to allow for a benign heaven overarching the 'cunning mechanisms and tall chimney-steeples'. Even the world of the machine can be redeemed by human enterprise and confidence.

Carlyle's central and most sustained achievement is his great history of *The*

French Revolution (1837). The history opens with the death of Louis XV and with a scathing account of the deficiencies of French government, institutions, and culture under the *ancien régime* and it ends with Napoleon's bid for power as the Revolution declines into directionless anarchy. In a sense the 'hero' is set once again to sweep away sham, but the book is much more than a tribute to the heroic in history; it is, more significantly, a subtle and complex demonstration of the biographical approach to the writing of history. The biographies are rarely those of heroes or anti-heroes. Carlyle weaves and interweaves a variety of sources, notably biographical and autobiographical ones, but, with considerable novelty, he also exploits historical ephemera—letters, newspaper articles, pamphlets, broadsheets, and advertisements. His text is a remarkable amalgam, built around the evidence of a multiplicity of witnessing or interpreting voices, but moved forward by a dominant, didactic narrator. Words, phrases, and slogans, in English, French, and Latin, are played and replayed, turned on their heads, deflated, or suddenly charged with fresh energy. *The French Revolution* implicitly warns Victorian England of the nature, causes, and progress of civil disruption, but it also creates stylistic effects and presents carefully assembled, and highly individual, descriptions of characters and events which render it more than just obstreperous didacticism.

Carlyle's influence over an important group of early and mid-Victorian writers, notably Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, and William Morris, is of great significance to the social direction of much of their work. But none of his contemporaries was as well versed in Carlyle's writings as was Charles Dickens (1812–70) and none transformed that influence as spectacularly. Dickens, who once rashly claimed to have read *The French Revolution* five hundred times, shows his discipleship naturally enough in his own revolutionary novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, but echoes of Carlyle can also be heard in those of his novels which deal most directly with the 'Condition of England Question' (such as *Bleak House* or *Hard Times*) and in the most urgent of the Christmas Books of the so-called 'Hungry Forties', *The Chimes* (1844). Dickens learned, as did his literary contemporaries, to direct his fiction to a questioning of social priorities and inequalities, to a distrust of institutions, particularly defunct or malfunctioning ones, and to a pressing appeal for action and earnestness. If he cannot exactly be called a 'reforming' novelist, Dickens was prone to take up issues, and to campaign against what he saw as injustice or desuetude, using fiction as his vehicle. He was not alone in this in his own time, but his name continues to be popularly associated with good causes and with remedies for social abuses because his was quite the wittiest, the most persuasive, and the most influential voice. Dickens's success in propaganda lay not in the causes he espoused, in the changes of opinion he effected, or in the propriety or the logic of his arguments, but in the very nature of his writing and its appeal to an exceptionally broad spectrum of Victorian readers. He was faithful to the teaching, and to the general theological framework, of Christianity as a moral basis for his thought, his action and, above all, for his writing. Nevertheless, a critical awareness that there was something deeply wrong with the society in which he lived sharpened the nature of his fiction and gave it its distinct political edge. Like all great comic writers, Dickens allows humour to subvert assumptions, both general and particular. More significantly, the very vitality and variety of his comedy confronts, and to a degree subsumes, the potential anarchy he saw around him.

Dickens's novels are multifarious, digressive and generous. In an important way, they reflect the nature of Victorian urban society with all its conflicts and disharmonies, its eccentricities and its constrictions, its energy and its extraordinary fertility, both physical and intellectual. Whereas Dickens's fictional roots lie in the novels of Defoe, Fielding, Smollett and Goldsmith (as we know from the records of his own and of David Copperfield's early reading), he was uniquely equipped to transform eighteenth-century models into the fluid, urban fiction of a new age. His own first experiments, later republished as the *Sketches by 'Boz'* (1833–6, 1836–7), reveal a writer with an acute ear for speech, and for aberrations of speech, and with an equally acute observation of gesture and habit, of London streets and London interiors, of spontaneity and of misery. The *Sketches* are essentially anecdotal and descriptive. Dickens's first full-scale work of fiction, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836–7) (generally known simply as *The Pickwick Papers*), suggests the degree to which he gradually, but easily, adapted from the small scale to a larger narrative sweep. The origins of *Pickwick* lie in a commission for a series of linked anecdotal stories concerning the members of a London club, to be published on a monthly basis accompanied by illustrations. The peregrinatory and exploratory nature of the club, as Dickens initially defined it, allows him to move his characters around England and into various comic encounters, but its 'plot' achieves greater direction once Pickwick becomes caught up in the snares of the law and is briefly confined to prison.

This darker side to Dickens's imagination is also reflected in *Oliver Twist*, the shorter, tighter novel he embarked on while he was still serializing *Pickwick*. In *Oliver Twist: or The Parish Boy's Progress* (1837–8) he again glances back to the eighteenth-century, or more specifically Hogarthian, precedents, but he was also reacting to two contemporary stimuli, the propagandizing of the supporters of the New Poor Law of 1834 and the popularity of fiction adulating the careers and adventures of criminals (the so-called 'Newgate Novels'). His attack on the effects of the workhouse system is confined to the novel's opening chapters, but its stark juxtapositions, and the very blackness of its comedy, succeeded in damning workhouse abuses in the popular imagination, if not in eliminating them from physical reality. The scene of Oliver Twist asking for more, so graphically caught by Dickens's illustrator, George Cruikshank, rapidly became, and has remained, the most familiar incident in any English novel. Oliver's adventures in London, and the opposition of the insecurities of criminal life to the comforts of bourgeois respectability, are again rendered through a series of sharp contrasts of scene, mood, and narrative style, an effect

Dickens himself compared to 'streaky bacon'. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, which was serialized between April 1838 and October 1839, Dickens again took a particular abuse as the focus of his story. The description of Dotheboys Hall exposes the exploitation of unwanted children in a bleak Yorkshire school, but the novel also attacks a do-nothing and snobbish aristocracy, the creaking inefficiency of Parliament, and the aggression of market capitalism. *Nicholas Nickleby* is an untidy novel, rambling, excursive, and occasionally interpolated with short stories which have no real bearing on the plot; its strengths lie essentially in its comedy and in its brilliantly eccentric characters. Dickens's introduction in chapter 22 of the seedy theatrical company run by Vincent Crummles allows him to express something of his own fascination with the nature, the whims, and the mentality of Victorian actors (a profession which he had once, very briefly, considered joining).

The monthly parts of *Nicholas Nickleby* sold vastly well, firmly establishing Dickens as the dominant novelist of his time and as an unrivalled literary phenomenon. At a banquet to celebrate the completion of the book the painter David Wilkie made a speech noting that there had been nothing comparable to him since the days of Richardson for 'in both cases people talked about the characters as if they were next-door neighbours or friends'. Letters, he claimed, had been written to the author imploring him not to kill Smike, much as Richardson had been begged to 'save Lovelace's soul alive'. Dickens relished, cultivated, and honoured the intimate relationship with his readers opened up to him by monthly, and occasionally weekly, serialization. In his earlier fiction he readily responded to the evident popularity of certain characters and he carefully attuned himself to what his public demanded, in terms both of sentiment and of comic and stylistic variety. He nevertheless appears to have retained a certain restlessness about the burgeoning nature of his career and as to the particular form his future novels should take. The somewhat awkward origins of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, first published in his anecdotal weekly magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, in 1840, suggest something of this restlessness. The 'Master Humphrey' stories necessarily diminished as the pressing demand for a full-length story increased, but Dickens's control over a narrative inexorably following Little Nell to her rural death-bed rarely falters after the initial chapters. Little Nell's mortality, which so profoundly moved the first readers of the novel (including the lachrymose former editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Jeffrey, who had once damned Wordsworth's 'unlucky habit of debasing pathos with vulgarity'), gives direction, and a certain solemnity, to an extraordinarily diverse novel. Later readers have often, wrongly, balked at what has all too often been assumed to be Dickens's vulgar exploitation of sentimentality. *Barnaby Rudge*, which succeeded *The Old Curiosity Shop* in the pages of *Master Humphrey's Clock* in 1841, is amongst Dickens's most neglected works. It is a historical novel, set at the time of the Gordon Riots of 1780, which begins somewhat slowly and archly by establishing the concerns, origins, and obsessions of its characters; it comes

vividly and distinctively to life once these same characters get caught up in the violent progress of the Riots. Some of its descriptive passages show a mastery of rhythm and image that he never excelled. Both *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4) and *Dombey and Son* (1846–8) reveal the extent to which Dickens developed his mastery over the sprawling serial forms he and his readers enjoyed. *Martin Chuzzlewit* examines a wide range of selfishness, self-centredness, criminality, and exploitation, and allows for the title character's discovery that America contains as many shams, frauds, and delusions as does his native England. It did not, initially, please many American readers despite the real popularity Dickens discovered he had earned during his trip to the United States in 1842. *Dombey and Son* has an even greater degree of narrative tightness derived from thematic consistency and its almost symphonic use of motifs, repeated phrases, and images.

To those readers who prefer Dickens's darker, tidier, and less exuberant later fiction, *Dombey and Son* has often been seen as ushering in a new phase in his art. The use of semi-autobiographical material and the discipline imposed by the introduction of a first-person narrator in its immediate successor, *David Copperfield* (1849–50), suggest the extent to which he had moved away from the laxer, digressive, inclusive forms of *Pickwick* or *Nicholas Nickleby*. *David Copperfield* is central to Dickens's career in more than simply the chronological sense; its evocation of suffering derives directly from the novelist's acute awareness of his own boyhood reverses, but its wit, its detailed observation, and its description of the slow 'disciplining' of the heart give it a confident vitality and a progressive optimism which allow for the transmutation of tragedy. Although the novel examines a series of relationships and marriages, happy and unhappy, its satire and its treatment of social problems are marginal compared to those of the complex and demanding *Bleak House* of 1852–3. Here the use of a double narrative, one narrator employing the present, the other the past tense, helps create a sense of unfolding mystery, even confusion. The confusion itself reflects that of the main object of the novel's satire, the convoluted workings of the Court of Chancery, but the legal obliquity is in turn echoed and re-echoed in the words and actions of a succession of purblind characters muddling their way through a miry, fog-bound London. While private mysteries, lawsuits, and crimes are solved, the underlying problems of dirt, disease, and urban decay remain intractable.

Dickens uniquely transferred his concern with the modern condition of England out of London in his succinct and often bitter satire on the effects of the Industrial Revolution in northern England, *Hard Times* (1854). Private pasts, private secrets, illusions, and the corrupting power of possession equally haunt his most sombre novel, *Little Dorrit* (1855–7). It returns to the oppressive image, and the multiple ramifications, of a London debtors' prison, but it also has a broader European frame of reference. Two very different prisons, Newgate and the Bastille, dominate the first two books of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), set in London and Paris in the 1770s and 1780s. Its third section moves

to revolutionary France and to the penal consequences of the overturn of old oppressions and the introduction of new ones. *A Tale of Two Cities* has Dickens's most carefully constructed plot, and, by means of its charged and very public historical setting, particularly successfully dramatizes personal dilemmas, divisions, and commitments.

The idea of the divided self marks all Dickens's late works. From 1858, when he began to give the series of public readings from his novels which so mark his last years, Dickens intensifies his 'particular relation (personally affectionate and like no other man's)' between himself and his public. He had always been a talented and passionate amateur actor and it is likely that this new-found professional role-playing on public platforms added to his existing fascination with double lives and masks. Sydney Carton's 'dead life' is answered by his final self-sacrifice, but the careers of his male-successors are not always as providentially blessed. Pip in *Great Expectations* (1860–1) is manipulated and gentrified and left empty; John Harmon in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) is obliged to adopt the persona of a dead man; and, most disturbingly, the probably murderous John Jasper in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) agonizes over the chasm between his respectable life as a cathedral choirman and his London-based opium addiction. Each of the three last novels differs from the others, each suggesting a new experimentation on Dickens's part. *Great Expectations* again uses a confessional, first-person narrator, but Pip is of a lower social class than David Copperfield and lacks his ebullience and resilience and his final reward consists merely of a muted semi-fulfilment. To many readers, however, it remains the most completely satisfying and haunting of Dickens's works. *Our Mutual Friend* seems ungainly by comparison. The London of the novel is dreary, dusty, and unredeemed and it is only in the exploratory independence of the four central characters that any future hope appears to rest. Nevertheless, it contains some of Dickens's most fluently inventive dialogue and some of his finest gestures towards the variety of comedy which is properly called 'black' (notably in his picture of Mr Venus's shop). The unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* would almost certainly have been a murder story, though the fragment which we have leaves both the murder and the potential murderer unspecific. It has consistently invited much speculation as to how Dickens would have proceeded with such a tantalizing narrative. Perhaps fortunately, most attempts to provide solutions have proved less than satisfying. In some ways it is appropriate that Dickens's last work should be an unfinishable, obsessive, mystery story. He remained to the end 'The Inimitable'.

Despite the specificity of his detailing and the acuteness of his observation of the outward traits of character, Dickens cannot be properly defined as a 'realist'. He rarely speculates about the workings of his characters' minds and consciences, but he is perhaps the finest delineator in English of mental aberration and he is the creator of a surprisingly varied line of murderers, self-tormentors, and Gothic villains. Above all, Dickens both recognized and

exploited the relationship between character and environment, moulding them into a singular but always recognizable fictional world. Though he was neither born nor died in London, he made a protean, physical London, the greatest city of the nineteenth century, the centre of his work and its drab tangle of streets his major source of inspiration.

'Condition of England' Fiction

Dickens's *Hard Times* still remains the most vivid and familiar of the novels which deal with the social and industrial problems of mid-Victorian England but it was, in its time, neither unique nor necessarily the best informed. Dickens himself was well aware of the earnest propaganda disseminated by one of the most gifted of his women contemporaries, Harriet Martineau (1802–76), whom Carlyle had described as 'swathed like a mummy in Socinian and Political-Economy formulas'. Dickens may indeed have been provoked into writing *Oliver Twist* by her flatly factual, emphatically polemic sequence of tales, *Poor Law and Paupers Illustrated* (1833). Martineau was a highly educated and highly independent woman with a refined social conscience and a convincedly Utilitarian philosophy, but her best-selling early fiction, notably the twenty-three didactic stories uninvitingly grouped together under the title *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–4), lacks the substance of her occasionally penetrating novel *Deerbrook* (1839), and her fictional study of Toussaint L'Ouverture, *The Hour and the Man* (1841). She had, she claimed in 1855, long felt 'that it was one of the duties of my life to write my autobiography'. That dutiful call was finally answered by the posthumous appearance of the confident, self-justifying *Autobiography* of 1877. If scarcely a lovable work, it remains one of the pioneer classics of Victorian women's writing.

Martineau's innovative story 'A Manchester Strike' of 1832, one of the earlier *Illustrations of Political Economy*, prefigures some of the ideas and the open-minded tolerance of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*. Gaskell (1810–65) is still generally associated with industrial Manchester by her readers, though only two of her novels are actually set in the city. As Carlyle had recognized, Manchester was the urban phenomenon of the age; it was a 'prophetic city' in that it had pioneered the factory system and had harnessed and exploited huge amounts of human and physical energy; it was a 'sublime' city in that nothing really like it had been seen before. As Disraeli noted, without his tongue in his cheek, in *Coningsby* (1844): 'What Art was to the ancient world, Science is to the modern—the distinctive faculty . . . rightly understood, Manchester is as great a human exploit as Athens.' But the Manchester of the 1840s exposed the human problems of rapid industrialization as starkly as it embodied the commercial success of manufacture. Although she did not know his untranslated work, Elizabeth Gaskell observed the same divisions of class, labour, and quality of life as did Manchester's most exaggeratedly celebrated

critic of the period, the expatriate German industrialist, Friedrich Engels. It was, however, under the aegis of Carlyle that Gaskell felt impelled to write her first 'Tale of Manchester Life', *Mary Barton* (1848). It was Carlyle who was quoted on its title-page and whose *Past and Present* was half-echoed in its opening sentences. *Mary Barton* dramatizes the urban ills of the late 1840s, an era marked by industrial conflict, by strikes and lock-outs, by low wages and enforced unemployment, by growing class-consciousness and by Chartist agitation which reached its climax in the year of the novel's publication. The strengths of *Mary Barton* lie not in its political analysis, or in its suggested resolution, but in its detailing, its observation and, above all, in its careful establishment of contrasted ways of living, working, and perceiving. It also powerfully exposes ignorance, on the part of prospective readers who knew (and know) nothing of conditions in Manchester's slums, and the ignorance of characters who are severed from one another's daily lives and concerns. In the novelist's own terms it achieved precisely the effect she wanted. 'Half the masters [mill owners] are bitterly angry with me', she wrote of her novel in 1848, '—half (and the best half)—are buying it to give to their work people's libraries'. When Gaskell returned to industrial fiction in *North and South* (1854–5) it was as a result of a commission from Dickens to write for his journal *Household Words*. Her second Manchester novel (in which the city appears as 'Milton-Northern'), is radically different from *Mary Barton* in that it views class-conflict from a new, politically optimistic, viewpoint, that of potential compromise. There was much contemporary justification for the optimism. *North and South* does not, however, compromise on social issues. As its title implies, it contrasts the snobberies, chivalries, and artificiality of the country gentry of the South of England with the distinctive energetic anti-gentlemanly world of self-made manufacturers of the North. Its highly perceptive heroine, Margaret Hale, may at first be shocked by a market economy which works 'as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing' but she is later impressed by a dinner at which Manchester men 'talked in desperate earnest,—not in the used-up style that wearied her so in the old London parties'. The novel also points to the independence of industrial workers, a pride in themselves which survives despite the appalling working and living conditions which they have to endure, which is contrasted to the subservience, acquiescence, and superstition of the rural poor.

Margaret Hale is intelligent, humane, wilful, and independent. She also achieves an active mastery over her situation which is denied to Gaskell's other central women characters. Miss Matty, the focus of the easy, rambling narratives of *Cranford* (1851–3), has social status and true gentility, but her moral standing is based on decency and respect within the limited community of a country town. In *Ruth* (1853), which treats the problem of the unmarried mother with delicacy and sympathy, Ruth is none the less required to endure a process of redemptive self-sacrifice in order to win back respect from society at large. Gaskell's two finest novels, *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) and *Wives and Daughters* (1864–6), both trace the growth and development of their contrasted heroines; Sylvia Robson, a farmer's daughter, is barely educated, self-willed, passionate, and fatally divided between resolution and equally heady irresolution; Molly Gibson, the daughter of a respected, widowed doctor, is obliged to face a series of domestic crises in which her initial insecurity gives way to a resourcefulness, growing maturity and poise which serve to distinguish her from her flighty step-sister. Sylvia's marriage proves disastrous; Molly's prospective alliance with Roger Hamley is a meeting of equals. *Sylvia's Lovers* is set at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and its plot hinges on the disappearance of a lover who is carried off by a press gang enforcing recruitment into the Navy. The representation of northern speech throughout the narrative serves to reinforce emphatically the precision of its local detailing, but the novel is given a larger scope by its constant reference to the disruption and violence of war and to the romantically dangerous draw of the sea. It is one of the finest of provincial novels, indebted to the model provided by the Waverley novels, but drawing out and subtly amplifying Scott's example. It explores the lives of humble people with a sympathy and delicate power which had rarely been seen before in English fiction. *Wives and Daughters*, by contrast, examines family relationships and social class from an amplified Trollopian perspective. It is made up of a series of interwoven stories, but it is also an ambitious, careful, and delicate psychological study of an often fraught household and its social connections. In 1860 Gaskell had written of *Framley Parsonage*, then being serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*: 'I wish Mr Trollope would go on writing Framley Parsonage for ever. I don't see any reason why it should ever come to an end . . .'. Her pleasure in the slow and easy development of a largely uneventful plot and in the gradual interaction of upper-middle-class characters is evident in her own novel, also serialized in the *Cornhill* and abruptly concluded, but not left unresolved, by her untimely death.

Charles Kingsley (1819–75), a priest of the Church of England by vocation and ordination, and a determined preacher all his life, tended to use fiction as an extension of his secular and religious missions. In the late 1840s he had been sufficiently moved by Carlyle's imperatives to become actively involved in the Christian Socialist movement, established to wean Chartists away from the French-inspired, anti-clerical and often atheist Socialism into an alternative religious commitment to the reform of society. *Yeast: A Problem*, serialized in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1848, intersperses scenes describing rural degradation with a narrative discourse which entwines an advocacy of sanitary reform with dire warnings about the moral dangers of Roman Catholicism. Its successor, *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet* (1850), is a far more impressive achievement. *Alton Locke* purports to be the autobiography of a working man, stung into Chartist protest by his experience of sweated labour, London poverty, and fever-haunted London slums, but finally persuaded of the fitness of the Christian Socialist cause. Kingsley's frank descriptions of the effects of a cholera epidemic in the slums are particularly powerful. His later novels, with the exception of *Two*

Years Ago (1857), have historical settings and arguments tailored to appeal to modern sensibilities and modern sensitivities. The subtitle of *Hypatia* (1852–3), 'New Foes with an Old Face', underlines its religious relevance to Kingsley's contemporaries (the 'new foes' were clearly meant to be superstitious modern Catholics, successors to a dubious Catholic past). The story is set in an unhappily multicultural Alexandria in the fifth century AD and is ostensibly concerned with the decay of Hellenistic civilization in the face of an aggressive, and by no means sympathetic, monastic Christianity. Its contrasts of the empty Nubian desert and the confused culture of the city are effectively controlled, as are the novel's often compromised argument as to the necessary progress of enlightened religion, and its subdued, seemingly hollow, ending. *Westward Ho!* (1855) and *Hereward the Wake* (1866) are more bloodthirsty and untidy as narratives, suggesting the extent to which Kingsley had retreated into the cult of the hero as an explication of the historical process and into the worship of heroism as a literary creed.

Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (1804–81) was not the only British Prime Minister to have maintained an active literary career beyond his main political concerns (in 1953 Sir Winston Churchill was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his work as a historian), but he remains the only one to have begun as an escapist society novelist and to have continued writing fiction until the year before his death. Disraeli's first novels—*Vivian Grey* (1826), *The Young Duke* (1831), *Contarini Fleming* (1832), and *Alroy* (1833)—are fantasies of high society which fall into the loose category of 'Silver-fork fiction' so cleverly satirized by Dickens in chapter 27 of *Nicholas Nickleby*. It was with the development of a serious interest in politics, and with his success in being elected a Member of Parliament in 1837 (after three failures), that Disraeli's fiction took a new, but equally speculative and fantastic, turn. The 1830s and 1840s were a period of political experiment and realignment following the passage of the Reform Bill. If little had actually changed in the nature of Parliament, in its system of patronage or in the social complexion of its members, the time was ripe for new political ideas and intellectual initiatives. The trilogy of novels written in the 1840s—*Coningsby: or The New Generation* (1844), *Sybil: or The Two Nations* (1845), and *Tancred: or the New Crusade* (1847)—indicate the degree to which Disraeli was determined to involve himself in extra-parliamentary debate and in the contemporary discussion of the nature and progress of industrial Britain. Each of the novels shows a real grasp of historical precedent and of modern social complexity, but the solutions he suggests are often paradoxical or simply wishful. Disraeli can both play with the 'Young England' dream of an anti-bourgeois alliance between the old landed aristocracy and the new working classes, and yet acknowledge and celebrate the political, economic, and cultural sway of the middle classes. The opinions of the supersophisticated, multicultured Jew, Sidonia, who rides dashingly into *Coningsby* in a flash of lightning, in many ways provide the clue to the quality of Disraeli's own arguments. Sidonia is the romantic outsider who sees through things,

offers speculative analyses, and suggests ways out. None of the programmes outlined in the novels was ever truly espoused by the practical, pragmatic, and sometimes flashy politician that Disraeli became. The two later novels, *Lothair* (1870) and *Endymion* (1880), show no advance in style or characterization but both reveal a sharp satire and a continuing investigation of political possibility and political improbability. *Lothair*, in particular, considers the overlap of religion and high politics and the relationship between English idealism and Italian nationalism, and shows the occasional flair that characterizes Disraeli's best earlier work. For the once and future Prime Minister of 1870, however, the pressure to deal in fiction with what the 1840s had seen as the 'Condition of England' was evidently less urgent.

Macaulay, Thackeray, and Trollope

The most persuasive and influential Victorian advocate of gradual political evolution, firmly rooted in national history, was Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800–59), created Baron Macaulay in 1857. Macaulay first made his reputation through the essays on literature, history, and politics published in the *Edinburgh Review* between 1825 and 1844. These essays reveal a probing mind, with clearly defined tastes and antipathies. The same qualities mark the five volumes of his monumental *History of England* published between 1848 and 1861. The *History* had an immediate popular impact, selling three thousand copies of its first two volumes within ten days of their publication and thirteen thousand in four months. Its title has always been recognized as a misnomer, for Macaulay skims over medieval and Tudor history as a mere prelude to his real subject, the revolutions of the seventeenth century and, in particular, the origins and constitutional effects of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. Perhaps as a result of the impact of the Waverley Novels (which Macaulay saw as having 'appropriated' something of the province of the historian) his volumes are as much concerned with the affairs of Scotland and Ireland as they are with England. The Scott whom Macaulay so jealously admired also influenced the manner in which grand evocations of 'local colour', sweeping set-piece description, and careful character analysis are redirected back into non-fictional narrative, or, as many readers might still have seen it, into the 'higher' art of history writing. As a narrative *The History of England* is compelling; its heroes and its villains are placed and defined and the larger life of the nation, working and creating beyond the court and the power brokers, is steadily adumbrated. Macaulay's pellucid style, balancing long clausal sentences with punchy short ones and rhetorically inviting reader participation in the explicatory process, demands assent to his overarching argument. That argument, which insists that the history of England was 'emphatically the history of progress . . . the history of a constant movement of the public mind, of a constant change in the institutions of a great society', powerfully served to

reassure liberal Victorian England, and by extension, Scotland and Ireland, of the rightness of their historic evolution and of their constitutional singularity. It was an argument that opponents of the constitutional settlements of 1688 and 1832, and of the principles of Union and uniform cultural progress, were intended to dispute at their peril.

It had originally been Macaulay's larger intention to carry his *History* forward to the period of the French Revolution and to the Reform Bill. His death foreshortened the scheme. In 1863, shortly before his own death, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63) contemplated a continuation of the *History* into the reign of Queen Anne, but, perhaps typically, nothing was realized. Thackeray and Macaulay had earlier established cordial relations based on a mutual admiration of one another's books. The novelist's series of lectures, *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* (1851), is coloured not only by Macaulayan Whiggism but also by shared literary predilections. Thackeray came relatively late to novel writing, having served a long and valuable apprenticeship as an essayist and an intensely amusing comic journalist writing under the various pseudonyms of James Yellowplush (who purports to be a footman), George Savage Fitz-Boodle (a London club-man), and Michael Angelo Titmarsh (an artist). From 1842 he had also actively contributed to the newly founded *Punch* where his most notable pieces included the series of short parodies of leading writers of the day *Punch's Prize Novelists* (including a devastating skit on Disraeli's *Coningsby*).

Thackeray's earliest fictional experiments define themselves beside the great precedent of Fielding and against the excesses of the modern 'Newgate School' of criminal literature, especially those perpetrated by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–73) (whose truly dreadful, ponderous sentences he had wonderfully parodied in *Punch*) and William Harrison Ainsworth (1805–82). *Catherine* (1839–40) is a short anti-heroic tale in the manner of Fielding's *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great*, a work which also provided something of a model for the more ambitious *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, serialized in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1844 (revised in 1852 as *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon*). Thackeray's narrator is an Irish adventurer who is obliged to join the army at the time of the Seven Years War, who deserts, and who manages to establish himself as a professional gambler in the courts and spas of Europe. His upward social mobility and his dramatic changes in fortune are marked by the uneasy shifts in his own name, the final form of which derives from his unhappy marriage to a wealthy aristocratic widow. Barry is, however, a congenital liar and his narrative is a cleverly sustained exercise in unreliability, occasionally corrected, or commented on, by an editor who adds an extra layer to the fictional games in which Thackeray habitually delighted. The novelist seems to have held *Barry Lyndon* in relatively little esteem, unlike the popular *Book of Snobs* 'By One of Themselves' which originally appeared in *Punch* in 1847 and was revised for republication in the following year. *The Book of Snobs* ranges satirically over upper- and middle-class society, shifting its viewpoint and its moral

judgements, censoring, yet acknowledging the familiar addiction, even in the narrator himself, to the vices it observes.

Thackeray's facility for narrative disconcertion reached its zenith in the monthly-part serialization of *Vanity Fair* (1847–8). This 'Novel without a Hero' denies heroism to its characters and steadily questions all pretensions to vice and virtue. It playfully undercuts both military and civil greatness and it balances the unscrupulous ambitions of Becky Sharp, not with placid uprightness, but with the asinine complacency of Amelia Sedley. Its only solidly 'good' character, the much put upon 'honest' William Dobbin, finally wins Amelia, the woman he has always loved, but it is an achievement which is gently squashed by a narrator who rhetorically, and knowingly, demands in the novel's closing sentence: 'Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?' *Vanity Fair* is a varied, stimulating, and challenging work which is often as dark as it is funny. In it Thackeray allots to his narrator the complementary roles of showman and preacher, the one manipulating the puppets, the other drawing lessons from their often unpredictable and independent behaviour. The 'Manager of the Performance' of the novel's Preface self-deprecatingly announces that he has a general impression of things as 'more melancholy than mirthful'. Thackeray himself wrote to a friend in 1847 of having set himself up as a 'Satirical-Moralist' with 'a vast multitude of readers whom we not only amuse but teach'. 'A few years ago', he added, 'I should have sneered at the idea of setting up as a teacher at all . . . but I have got to believe in the business, and in many other things since then. And our profession seems to me to be as serious as the Parson's own.'

Thackeray's later, far more parsonic, novels have generally been denied the critical esteem which the twentieth century has accorded too exclusively to *Vanity Fair*. None of them has quite the same experimental ebullience and sharpness, and none expresses the same guarded fascination with the laxer morals of Regency England, but each in its way responds to particular aspects of mid-Victorian culture, to its earnestness as much as to the fascination with history, its sexual guardedness, and its prodigality. *The History of Pendennis* (1848–50) traces the development of a young gentleman by looking (as the subtitle suggests) at 'his fortunes and misfortunes, his friends and his greatest enemy'. The original paper covers to the monthly parts showed its protagonist torn between domestic virtue and the pleasures of the world, between a maternal brunette and a seductive blonde. Pen's 'greatest enemy' is himself, tempted by the ills to which adolescence and young manhood are heir—sexual awakening and exploration, laziness, indulgence, debt and immaturity. That he finally achieves success both in love and in the literary life is testimony both to a new geniality on Thackeray's part and to a Victorian seriousness (which is only partly tongue-in-cheek). Its successor, *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), is a radically different work. Set largely in the reign of Queen Anne, and narrated by a melancholic, self-doubting, fitfully romantic aristocrat, it both pays tribute to the fiction of the previous century and offers distinctly

nineteenth-century insights into the historical process. Like Scott before him, Thackeray intermixes the private and the public, but through his moody confessional, first-person narrator he allows for myopic perspectives and the expression of confused motives. The moral oppositions suggested by social pretences and a Jacobite Pretender to the throne, by honour and deception, by European war and London journalism, by shabby heroes and elusive lovers, by unsettling and divided England and an American Indian summer, make for a deeply disconcerting but profoundly fertile novel. In its final gestures of placid and passive withdrawal it not only qualifies the Whiggish confidence of Macaulay but also disturbs conventional Victorian notions of what might constitute a 'happy' ending.

The Newcomes of 1853–5, Thackeray's most obviously 'Victorian' novel, follows the vagaries of an extended genteel family (though there is a punning irony in his description of them in his subtitle as 'most respectable'). Only the upright Colonel Newcome, an Indian Army officer, bewildered by the ways of the world, maintains the virtues of true 'gentlemanliness' by which Thackeray and his class set such store (and which his many *déclassé* nineteenth-century contemporaries attempted both to refine and to redefine). In *The Virginians* (1857–9) the novelist returns to the destinies of the gentlemanly Esmond family in their Virginian retreat. The novel, which was partly inspired by Thackeray's visits to the United States in 1852–3 and 1855–6, re-examines the dilemmas posed by political division within a family in the period of the American Revolution. Despite its glancing, historically based, reflections on a nation approaching Civil War, and its evocation of the literary and fashionable worlds of eighteenth-century London, it is a broken-backed and often sentimental work, disappointing when set beside the intellectual stringency and narrative subtlety of *Henry Esmond*. *The Adventures of Philip* (which like *The Newcomes* purports to be told by Arthur Pendennis) loosely interconnects with its predecessors as if part of an expanding, loose family chronicle. It was first published serially in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1861–2 during the brief period of Thackeray's editorship of one of the most innovative periodicals of its day. It must have been obvious, even to his most devoted admirers, that the scintillation of *Vanity Fair* was now elusive.

Anthony Trollope (1815–82) was Thackeray's most determined and consistent admirer amongst his fellow-novelists. From the evidence of his brief but antipathetic characterization of Dickens as 'Mr Popular Sentiment' in *The Warden* it is evident that Trollope distrusted that writer's campaigns, prejudices, and tear-jerkings; the fact that 'Mr Popular Sentiment' is in league with 'Dr Pessimist Anticant' (a side-swipe at Carlyle) suggests that he also disliked a noisily committed literature. Trollope is the most informed and observant political novelist in English, but his politics are those of parliamentary and ecclesiastical manœuvres and scandals, of country-house shuffles and reshuffles, and of personalities in conflict and in mutual complement. When he describes himself in his often irritatingly misleading *Autobiography* (1875–6) as an advanced Conservative-Liberal he is not only using the new party terminology of the day, but attempting to point to his own aspiration to neutrality as a writer. Party politics fascinate him as an observer of human tribalism and ambition but particular policies and the high-minded pursuance of issues are of little consequence in novels which frequently touch on power and the delight in wielding power. When Trollope himself tried to enter Parliament, his campaign proved a disaster. When he developed the political career of his idealized gentlemanly power broker, Plantagenet Palliser, in *The Prime Minister* (1875–6) he revealed a thin-skinned but upright man whose ambition is merely to introduce a decimal currency. Power proves both elusive and hollow. What Trollope seems to have learned most from Thackeray is that heroes and ideals are constantly challengeable and that judgement is always conditional. He is a great political novelist precisely because, despite his outward easy-going tolerance, he distrusts both politics and politicians.

The *Autobiography* places an exaggerated stress on Trollope's supposedly miserable childhood. His humiliations, he argues, derived not simply from bad schooling but from parental neglect. His father, a barrister and unsuccessful farmer, struck him as a model failure, but his mother Frances (1780–1863), who had attempted to restore the family fortunes by writing professionally, seems to have inspired scant posthumous respect from her son. Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) caused offence amongst American readers but amused a domestic audience sufficiently to make it a best-seller. It was, however, the subsequent stream of novels and travel-books, notable amongst them the socially conscious Manchester novel *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* of 1840, that appears to have offended her son sufficiently for him to have caricatured his mother as a genteel scribbler, Lady Carbury, in *The Way We Live Now* (1874–5). Frances Trollope's very efficiency, if not her style and her subjects, was something that did impress itself upon her son's imagination. Anthony's forty-seven novels, his travel books, his biographies, essays, and critical works, were produced with an enviable dedication to his craft and by means of a determined daily self-discipline and an addiction to routine. He was also capable of writing on shipboard, on trains, and in his club, while loyally attending to his duties as an official of the Post Office. If the *Autobiography* often appears to diminish the art of literature and to side-step questions of inspiration and authorial commitment, it asserts the alternative proprieties of the pleasures of the craft of fiction.

As Thackeray's fiction had developed novel from novel, so had the idea of somehow linking his stories together as a loose family saga, suggesting interconnections across time and place and relationships of blood, acquaintance, and resemblance. Little effectively came of the plan, but it is possible that it is from Thackeray's proposed example that Trollope took his cue for the sequences of novels which have later become known as the 'Barchester' and the 'Palliser' series. In these sequences connections can be both as strong as the continuation of the parliamentary and amatory career of Phineas Finn from

one novel to another or as loose as the incorporation of *Doctor Thorne* (1858) into the Barchester cycle. Trollope's earliest works draw on his experience of, and affection for, modern Ireland, but after an unpropitious experiment with historical fiction in *La Vendée* (1850) he began what was to become the first of his novels set in a fictional English cathedral town and its surrounding countryside. *The Warden* (1855) is a short study of how the ripples of a local scandal broaden into a national issue and how an upright man becomes a victim of circumstances beyond his control. Its sequel, *Barchester Towers* (1857), centres not on Septimus Harding, the former Warden of Hiram's Hospital, but on the threat to the complacent security of the cathedral close presented by the advent of a new Bishop, and, moreover, of the Bishop's Evangelical wife, Mrs Proudie. It is one of Trollope's most successful comic observations of the political process at work, not on a national or a parliamentary scale, but as a series of petty ploys and manœuvres and as a clash of personalities. The upper clerics of these two novels figure prominently again in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867), the novelist's personal favourite amongst his books and a conscious conclusion to a sequence. It suggests the effects of ageing, death, and ill-founded suspicion on an estabished community. *Doctor Thorne*, *Framley Parsonage* (1861), and *The Small House at Allington* (1862–4) concentrate less on clerical politics and more on secular match-making and on failures in love. All three move slowly and delicately, firmly rooted in genteel provinciality and in an England of rural backwaters and stable, traditional systems of value.

The so-called 'Palliser' novels, loosely centred on the family connections of the Duke of Omnium, involve a more metropolitan consciousness and a cosmopolitan culture. Political interests are largely peripheral to *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864–5) and to *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871–3), both serving to justify Trollope's self-deprecating authorial ambition to relieve parliamentary concerns by putting in 'love and intrigue, social incidents, with perhaps a dash of sport, for the sake of my readers'. Both *Phineas Finn* (1867–9) and *Phineas Redux* (1873–4) concentrate on the advances and setbacks in the political career of an Irish Member of Parliament, an outsider to the British Establishment but one who is variously the object of female flirtation and the victim of male jealousy and suspicion. The real sharpness, and occasional disillusion, inherent in Trollope's vision of society and its corruption is also evident in the complex ramifications of *The Way We Live Now* (1874–5). This novel fits into no 'series', but takes a broad, critical view of a nation caught up in deceit, decadence, and financial speculation. It is Trollope's most quizzically disconcerting work and his most distinctive tribute to a Thackerayan precedent.

The Brontë Sisters

Charlotte Brontë (1816–55) admired Thackeray quite as positively as Trollope. She saw his early satirical journalism and his first works of fiction as moral

statements emanating from 'the first social regenerator of the day', and, provincially ignorant of the existence of Thackeray's insane wife, she somewhat gauchely dedicated the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to the none the less flattered fellow-author. Her own novels may lack the cultivated urbanity of *Vanity Fair* and the experimental role-playing of Thackeray's personae, but they are in no sense gauche or unsophisticated. Despite the intense privacy and relative seclusion of the Yorkshire parsonage from which her novels emerged, Charlotte Brontë shared with her sisters Emily (1818–48) and Anne (1820–49) a particularly informed, if somewhat detached, view of the wider world. As children, the three sisters had immersed themselves in the ideological debates publicized in the great journals of their time and in the late flickerings of European Romanticism. Their first collaborative fictions, the elaborate narratives concerned with the fantasy kingdoms of Angria and Gondal, are adaptations of, and variations on, oriental and Gothic extravaganzas heightened by modern political realities and personalities. In their adult fiction obvious escapism is diminished in the face of an oppressive, isolating present; the romanticism and the Gothicism are, however, creatively, forcefully, and sometimes threateningly, transmuted.

Charlotte Brontë's first mature novel, *The Professor*, was written in 1846, two years after she had returned from the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels where she had worked as a pupil-teacher. 'A first attempt', she later remarked of the novel in its Preface, 'it certainly was not, as the pen which wrote it had been previously worn a good deal in a practice of some years'. This reference back to the juvenilia and to the years of apprenticeship in fiction ('many a crude effort, destroyed almost as soon as composed') suggests the degree to which she felt that she was turning away from the 'ornamented and redundant' to the 'plain and homely'. Her choice of the word 'homely' here aptly suits the style and manner of her novel, though it tends to conflict with the Brussels setting and with the version of her own fraught and alien experience which she filters through the reminiscence of a male narrator. *The Professor* was rejected six times by publishers before it attracted the favourable notice of the literary adviser to the firm of Smith, Elder in July 1847. Although the story was held to be too colourless to sell independently, the literary promise it suggested inspired Smith, Elder to note encouragingly that the submission of another work of fiction from its pseudonymous author 'would meet with careful attention'. *The Professor* finally appeared posthumously in 1857, but the publishers' offer to consider a new novel was taken up by Charlotte with alacrity. The well-advanced manuscript of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* was completed within three weeks, dispatched to London, enthusiastically accepted, and published in October 1847.

Jane Eyre was, and remains, an extraordinary phenomenon: a totally assured, provocative, and compelling piece of realist fiction. To its first readers, and even its publishers, it seemed to have come from nowhere, being ascribed to the genderless figure of 'Currer Bell', the supposed 'editor' of an obviously

female narrative. It has not lost its power to surprise and provoke. However much *Jane Eyre* has established itself as a 'classic' and popular love-story, it in fact insists on independence as forcefully as it recognizes the importance of sexual and marital interdependence. It recognizes the virtues of self-discipline and rejection as much as it tests the probity of passionate commitment. Primarily through the example and influence of Helen Burns, it deals with submission and Christian resolution, but it also allows for successive explosions of wrath, misery, and despair. Jane never quite dissolves the iron that entered her soul as an unloved and unjustly persecuted child, nor does she gladly suffer fools or readily love her persecutors. She may profess to forgive the dying Mrs Reed, but her narrative periodically burns with a sense of injustice which is as much sexual as it is religious and familial. 'Women are supposed to be very calm generally', she explains in her twelfth chapter, 'but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer.' Jane never stagnates. Her quest is to find a partner worthy of her intelligence, her judgemental wit, and her determined selfhood, one who will learn to respect her integrity (as Mr Rochester, in their first courtship, signally fails to do) and her determination (which St John Rivers misreads). Jane's rejection of an adulterous, bigamous, and perhaps glamorous relationship with Rochester, is complemented later in the novel by her firm rejection of the far more sombrely respectable prospect of life as a missionary's wife (a proposal that some Victorian Evangelical readers might have assumed would have opened up the yet more glorious prospect of her salvation). In both cases Jane follows the dictates of her refined conscience. She finds it her 'intolerable duty' to leave Thornfield Hall, and she does so by solemnly echoing the 'I do' of the Anglican Marriage Service in reply to Rochester's passionate question: 'Jane, do you mean to go one way in the world, and to let me go another?' When pressed by St John Rivers to accept him she is equally firm in her strangely insistent 'I will be your curate, if you like, but never your wife'. The serenity of the novel's conclusion (in which Jane and the widowed and maimed Rochester are reunited) is qualified by its final references to the sacrificial ministry of St John Rivers in India. The novel's last sentences enforce the co-existence of alternative duties and vocations. Jane has chosen secular happiness as a means of salvation; as her narrative has so often demonstrated, free will and the due exercise of a God-given conscience lie at the core of the divine scheme of things.

Shirley (1849) lacks the intensity and the compelling narrative direction of *Jane Eyre*. It is, in many ways, a 'Condition of England' novel, one which offers a bold retrospect on the Luddite agitation and machine-breaking that had characterized the politics of the industrial North in the early 1810s. This retrospect allows for a certain distancing and for an examination of period details and assumptions, many of them culled from the first-hand witness of the Reverend Patrick Brontë and his acquaintance. The main interest of the story

derives from its particularly distinctive female characters, most notably that of Shirley Keeldar (whom Elizabeth Gaskell affirmed in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) was a 'representation' of Emily Brontë). Some of the local and thematic material of *The Professor* was strikingly reshaped into a far finer novel, *Villette* (1853). *Villette* may avoid touching on 'topics of the day' in a limited political sense, but it deals directly and often painfully with the pressing issues of women's choice and women's employment. The novel's narrator, Lucy Snowe, is an autobiographer denied the scope, the certainties, and the happy personal resolution of Jane Eyre. She is priggish and frosty where Jane Eyre was bold and fiery. Her English Protestant isolation, and indeed alienation, is stressed by the novel's unlovely, urban Belgian setting, by its frequent recourse to French dialogue and terminology, and by its variously intrusive, inquisitive, flirtatious, and restrictive Catholic characters. Lucy's circumstances and her hyperactive conscience oblige her to assert her separateness and to insist on the superiority of her own personal, moral, and professional sensibility. Her confessions, both to the reader, and, awkwardly and desperately, to a Villette priest, are restless and self-absorbed and played against an equally uneasy, not to say suspicious, background. Lucy's growing love for a waspish Catholic, Paul Emmanuel, ultimately allows her glimmers of real emotional happiness and professional achievement, but the narrative ends with an Atlantic storm and a profound uncertainty as to whether her love will ever be fulfilled.

Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* was co-published with her sister Emily's *Wuthering Heights* in 1847. Its first grudging reviews were inevitably overshadowed by the often bemused notices given to Emily's novel. All three sisters had maintained the use of the non-specific pseudonyms they had chosen for the unsuccessful publication of the *Poems, by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* in 1846. This very non-specificity originally gave rise to suppositions about single authorship or of collaboration and, even since the nineteenth century, *Agnes Grey* has remained firmly in the shadow of the work of Charlotte and Emily. Its governess-narrator endures loss of status, humiliation, snobbery, and insult, but her account of herself is characterized by a calm sense of her own moral justification. It presents an impressively harrowing picture of the restrictions on contemporary middle-class women seeking the only respectable form of paid employment, but it lacks the fire and anger which blaze up in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Anne Brontë's second novel describes the events surrounding a drastically unhappy marriage and the escape from that marriage by its heroine, Helen Graham. The story is told by means of a receding double narrative. It ends happily, but the graphic descriptions of the alcoholic Huntingdon's brutality provoked one early reviewer to complain of 'coarse and disgusting' language and another to deplore 'the tendency of the author to degrade passion into appetite'. To Charlotte Brontë, acting as her sister's literary executor, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* seemed barely 'desirable to preserve . . . the choice of subject in that work is a mistake'. This over-protective, censorious attitude may derive from an honest desire to cultivate the impression of Anne's 'meekness';

it may also, more revealingly, be an embarrassed response to the fact that Anne had based Huntingdon's language and behaviour on that of her singularly wayward brother, Branwell.

Charlotte proved to be an equally unsympathetic critic of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. She stresses its 'faults' and, most revealingly, seeks for an appropriately local metaphor to explain its 'rusticity': 'It is rustic all through. It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as the root of heath.' This 'knottiness' does not necessarily refer to the quality that subsequent readers have most admired in *Wuthering Heights*, its extraordinary narrative complexity. It plays with shifts of time and perception by balancing the complementary, but not really concordant, viewpoints of two major and five minor narrators. It juxtaposes the worlds of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights; the passive gentility of the Lintons and the restless, classless energy of Heathcliff; the complacency of insiders and the disruptive intrusions of outsiders. Above all, it opposes freedom and restraint, love and pain, while holding all oppositions in a very specific geographical area, in a tight community, and within an exceptionally neat dynastic pattern. The exposed ancestral house of the title is, as the opening sentences suggest, 'so completely removed from the stir of society'; it is subject to 'pure, bracing, ventilation' and to a wind that slants 'a few stunted firs' and stretches 'a range of gaunt thorns'. Nature, and phenomena within and beyond nature, remain 'wuthering' and turbulent throughout the narrative. In its last chapter, the parish church may lie peacefully under a 'benign sky', but its glass has been broken by storms, its roof-slates hang jaggedly, and there are reports that the 'phantoms' of Heathcliff and a woman have been seen 'under t'Nab'. Despite 'the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells' the churchyard provokes images of 'unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth'.

The phrase 'the quiet earth' is that of the prime narrator, the often impercipient, would-be misanthrope Lockwood. There is little 'quietness' either in the landscape or the society which he has observed. Both are marked by change, confusion, violence, and unpredictability. When Nelly Dean interposes as an alternative narrator, she speaks as an insider both to the family and to their environment, yet Nelly shifts not simply perspectives but loyalties and emotional alliances (Heathcliff accuses her of 'prying' and of 'idle curiosity'). It is she who conveys to us Catherine's stunning admission: 'My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he's always in my mind—not as a pleasure to myself—but as my own being.' But it is Nelly, never an unqualified adherent of Heathcliff's, who feels constrained to add: 'I was out of patience with her folly.' Where Catherine feels like the unlovely, underlying rocks, Nelly is as sharp, deceptive, and inconsistent as the northern weather. Throughout the telling of the story, readers have to work to interpret the information and the impressions that the tellers choose to recount. The seeming randomness of events and associations and the arbitrariness of what

and how we learn, fall into their proper place as readers explore the diverse and multilayered narrative through the very act of reading. If *Wuthering Heights* adjusts the conventional paraphernalia of the Gothic, its unquiet graves, its explosive passion, its illicit relationships, its wild landscapes, and its tempestuous climatic conditions, it remoulds them into an unconventional narrative shape that neither follows nor creates precedents. Despite its utterly assured mastery of form, it remains the most unconventional and demanding of all English novels.

Heathcliff's insistent claim that in opening Catherine's coffin he disturbed no one, but rather 'gave some ease to myself . . . I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep, by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers', suggests the degree to which Emily Brontë strained to move beyond necrophiliac *frissons*. Her novel is an evocation of freedom, a strange, tranquil, and compelling freedom which also haunts her poetry. The themes of the soul set at liberty by death, or calmed by the contemplation of death within a natural scheme, figure notably in the song 'The linnet in the rocky dells' where the sounds of the moors 'soothe' those lying under the turf. Death may be a troubling severer in 'Cold in the earth', but in the lyric 'Shall earth no more inspire thee' a voice, perhaps from beyond the grave, or perhaps (as Charlotte Brontë believed) of 'the Genius of a solitary region', insists on the enduring and inspiring beauty of wild and empty landscape. Her final poem, 'No coward soul is mine', speaks of a God who is both internalized within the human creature and who is evident in the creation which he continues to foster. This transcendent God animates 'eternal years' and 'Pervades and broods above, | Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears'. The lyrics, published from surviving manuscripts in the early years of the twentieth century, powerfully reinforce the mood of ecstatic intensity evident in the finest of the poems in the collaborative volume of 1846. Most of these poems date from the years 1837 and 1838. The landscapes recalled are vibrant both in summer and winter, in rain and cloud, or when lit by the last beams of 'the cold, bright sun'. It is a landscape which is both physical and visionary, both haunted and possessing:

> The night is darkening round me,
> The wild winds coldly blow;
> But a tyrant spell has bound me
> And I cannot, cannot go.
>
> The giant trees are bending
> Their bare boughs weighed with snow,
> And the storm is fast descending
> And yet I cannot go.
>
> Clouds beyond clouds above me,
> Wastes beyond wastes below;
> But nothing drear can move me;
> I will not, cannot go.

This acute, passionate attachment to place, one so akin to Catherine Earnshaw's self-identification with the rocks and the moorland, is not paralleled in the work of Emily's sisters. Anne's placid verse may reinforce the impression we have of a woman who was 'a very sincere and practical Christian' with a 'tinge of religious melancholy', but it is insipid in comparison. Even Charlotte's poetry, which occasionally flickers with the narrative assertiveness of her fiction, seems otherwise unexceptional and unadventurous.

Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelite Poets

Arthur Hallam (1811–33), Alfred Tennyson's intimate friend and his most immediate early critic, recognized the extent to which Tennyson's early poetry was derived from the emotional norms evolved by the second generation of Romantics, and especially from Shelley and Keats. These norms were still far from universally accepted by early Victorian readers, as the unfavourable reviews of Tennyson's second volume of verse proved. A poetry 'of sensation rather than reflection', Hallam argued, had been created by those whose lives had consisted 'in those emotions, which are immediately consonant with sensation'. But for his own time, an age now dominated by the 'diffusion of machinery', Hallam looked for a new poetry which would express a 'decrease of *subjective* power . . . and a continual absorption of the higher feelings into the palpable interests of ordinary life'. The 'melancholy' which he saw as characteristic of modern literature turned 'the mind upon itself', where it sought relief 'in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest'. Hallam's essay, which appeared in the *Englishman's Magazine* in August 1831, both publicly pressed the idea that Tennyson was the poet of the new age and privately served as a prompt to Tennyson to turn away from 'idiosyncrasy' towards an alternative interest in 'ordinary life' and 'community'. The process by which Tennyson became the most influential and admired poet of the Victorian era owed much to his intellectual and emotional debt to Hallam. It was a debt which was richly, but posthumously, repaid in *In Memoriam*.

Tennyson (1809–92) published three early volumes of verse, the last being dated 1833, the year of Hallam's untimely death in Vienna. The volumes published in 1830 and 1833 most clearly exhibit his quite extraordinary power, so much admired by Hallam, of embodying himself in characters, or moods of characters, and his 'vivid, picturesque delineation of objects, and the peculiar skill with which he holds all of them *fused* . . . in a medium of strong emotion'. That this emotion was still predominantly melancholic runs as a warning subtext through Hallam's criticism. Many of the poems, which include 'Mariana', 'The Kraken', 'The Ballad of Oriana', 'The Lady of Shalott', and 'The Lotos-Eaters', deal exquisitely with death-like states, or with death itself as a climactic and releasing experience. Emergence into a world of work,

action, sensation, or merely unsettling emotion seems to threaten or destroy the cushioned retreats forged by art or guarded by sleep. The hypnotic echoes, the repetitions, and the subtle, often lulling lyricism of the poems also reinforce the impression they convey of a protective and isolating artifice.

Following Hallam's traumatic death, Tennyson retreated into a period of mourning in which he seems to have indulged in a painful purgative process which was both personal and professional. Many of the short lyrics which date from this extended period of bereavement were later shaped into the elegiac 'mechanic exercises' which make up the early sections of *In Memoriam* (1850). Other, less direct tributes to Hallam appeared after a period of public silence, in the two volumes of *Poems* published in 1842. This collection, which reprinted much of the earlier verse as well as revisions of certain key poems, also balanced the old mood of narcotic drowsiness with the urgent simplicity of a lyric such as 'Break, break, break':

> Break, break, break,
> On thy cold grey stones, O Sea!
> And I would that my tongue could utter
> The thoughts that arise in me.
>
> O well for the fisherman's boy,
> That he shouts with his sister at play!
> O well for the sailor lad,
> That he sings in his boat on the bay!
>
> And the stately ships go on
> To their haven under the hill;
> But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still!
>
> Break, break, break,
> At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
> But the tender grace of a day that is dead
> Will never come back to me.

This is no longer simply an expression of debilitating melancholy or an imagining of restless complacency; it is an evocation of a desperate sense of exclusion, by private grieving, from a working, rejoicing human community. Although Tennyson conspicuously placed 'Break, break, break' as the penultimate poem in his 1842 volumes, their overall negatives were also decisively qualified by a group of new poems which suggest a far more positive social direction in his art. 'St Simeon Stylites' rejects ascetic escapism; 'Ulysses' emphatically embraces the idea of progressive development ('but something ere the end, | Some work of noble note, may yet be done . . .'), and the significantly titled 'Morte d'Arthur' ushers in what proved an enduring fascination with cyclic movement and historic renewal ('The old order changeth, yielding place to new, | And God fulfils Himself in many ways . . .').

The Princess: A Medley (1847) suggests both the extent and the frailty of Tennyson's new commitment to a poetry of social purpose and communal concern. It is a deeply ambiguous and cautiously ambitious narrative poem, one which moves uncertainly from a present-day prologue to a story set in an undefined medieval past and which attempts to explore the pressing modern subject of women's higher education. Despite its persuasive endorsement of Princess Ida's experiment, Tennyson's poem is ultimately both noncommittal and compromised. It does, however, contain a series of superbly evocative, and dramatically effective, lyrics, two of them, 'Now sleeps the crimson petal' and 'Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height', being amongst the most suggestively erotic poems of the nineteenth century. *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850) offers an utterly different view of love and education. It is a tribute to Hallam as friend and mentor which evokes both an enervating grief and an elevating grasp of an idea of spiritual and physical evolution. A shifting and developing perception of Hallam as a mortal victim and an immortal spiritual pioneer runs through the poem, but Tennyson also points its long, steadily ramified argument with recurrent images, with visits to specific places, and with seasonal and calendar events which suggest the movement and measurement of time. Time moves painfully for the mourner at the beginning of the poem, its passage through anniversaries, through Christmas and New Year being marked by comfortless recalls and anguished memorializing. But, as the second lyric ('Old Yew, which graspest at the stones . . .') powerfully suggests, nature has other rhythms, impersonal and unsympathetic:

> The seasons bring the flower again,
> And bring the firstling to the flock;
> And in the dusk of thee, the clock
> Beats out the little lives of men.

If, as here, Tennyson initially explores the notions of becoming 'incorporate' in the 'grasping' 'sullen' graveyard tree and of an impersonal time, these are views of growth and time which are not sustained by later perceptions. Tennyson's advanced and informed use of nineteenth-century scientific theory, theory which pertained to both the animal and the mineral universe, also broadens the poem's intellectual perspectives. In lyric 66, for example, a geological past in which 'A thousand types are gone' and in which 'dragons of the prime . . . tare each other in their slime' presents both a fearful retrospect on dinosaurs and a potentially disturbing prophecy of human viciousness and human futility. Answers may lie hidden behind 'veils', but they are also discovered in a now confident and active participation in the continuing evolutionary process which links the material to the spiritual, the animal to the divine. Hallam, like Christ, appears as a forerunner, an Adam transformed and resurrected, who quells the doubts associated in the poem with mortality and agnostic scientific theory. In lyric 123, for example, there is no longer a recoil from natural flux, from geological change, from death and decay:

> There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
> O earth what changes hast thou seen!
> There where the long street roars, hath been
> The stillness of the central sea.
>
> The hills are shadows, and they flow
> From form to form and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go.
>
> But in my spirit will I dwell,
> And dream my dream, and hold it true;
> For tho' my lips may breathe adieu,
> I cannot think the thing farewell.

God's time, and the realization of God's purposes in the human spirit as much as in the universe, have supervened. The poem's last gestures express a joyful acceptance of a far-off divine consummation in which evolution is clearly providential and the sense of God is mystically perceived in the totality of creation. Despite its climactic confidence, *In Memoriam* remains as much an exploration of doubts as it is an assertion of faith. It may insist on the benign inevitability of progress, but it also steadily acknowledges the stumbling nature of human advances in understanding. Most powerfully, it recognizes two conflicting validities, those of the reasoning mind, which comes to perceive ultimate purpose, and the agnosticism of the feelings, which continue to crave for present comfort.

In Memoriam, with its wide range of reference to modern thought and modern politics, suggests the extent to which Tennyson had moved away from his earlier self-absorption into the public realm. His appointment in 1850 as Poet Laureate, in succession to Wordsworth, struck many of his contemporaries as a fit confirmation of his stature. His first Laureate volume, *Maud: and Other Poems* (1855) contains reprints of two of his most famous public utterances of the early 1850s, the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington' and his vigorous, rhythmical combination of protest and celebration, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. This last evocation of a magnificence *qui n'est pas la guerre* (as Marshal Bosquet described the charge), and of a blunder which provokes an act of useless heroism, is linked by subject to the title poem in the volume. *Maud*, originally subtitled 'The Madness', is one of the most inventive and distinctively original poems of the century. It is a love-poem which opens starkly with the words 'I hate'. It is shot through with violence, opprobrium, and failure. The excited, various, and sometimes lurching rhythms manage to convey both an exalted passion and a sense of incipient breakdown, while the passages of lyrical imagining are countered by equally telling diatribes against social injustice and anguished accounts of mental distress. The narrator's painful and guilty dilemma is resolved in his final espousal of a war which destroys 'the long, long canker of peace', the flaming of a flower beyond those of Maud's garden, 'the blood-red blossom' of the thin red line.

None of Tennyson's long later poems rivals the verbal energy of *Maud*. From 1859 he began to develop the great Arthurian cycle, *The Idylls of the King*. In revising and republishing the earlier 'Morte d'Arthur' in 1870 as 'The Passing of Arthur' he removed its original framework and offered it as the tenuously optimistic climax to a series of poems about the failure of an ideal. The *Idylls* express something of his own dismay at the opening future, with Arthur's court presented as a paradigm and its decay, due ultimately to sexual betrayal, as a guarded warning to modern idealists, libertarians and politicians alike. Gerard Manley Hopkins announced to a friend in 1864 that he had begun 'to *doubt* Tennyson' after reading *Enoch Arden and Other Poems* in 1864. His doubt centred on the problem of expression; gone was the poet's inventive 'language of inspiration' which being 'the gift of genius, raises him above himself'. The new self-indulgent, cultivatedly artificial, 'Parnassian' language, running in 'an intelligibly laid down path', did not 'sing in its flight'. The justice of Hopkins's observation has perhaps been proved by the relative neglect of Tennyson's later work in the twentieth century, a neglect which derives not necessarily from the subject-matter of the poems concerned but from their lexical complacency. The *Idylls* are, more often than not, boring.

The indulgent and artificial 'Parnassian' mode (as Hopkins styled it) was also very much in evidence in the so-called 'Pre-Raphaelite' poetry of the mid-century. The original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of young, anti-Establishment painters (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, F. G. Stephens, and James Collinson) and one sculptor (Thomas Woolner) had drawn up a scheme for revolutionizing the pictorial arts in 1848. The scheme entailed rejecting the norms of painting current since the late Renaissance in favour of what they insisted was the superior directness of expression of those artists who worked before the time of Raphael. Their tastes were not especially novel, despite their own determination to shock a complacent British art world. In England a revival of interest in medieval painting had gone hand in hand with an often strident appreciation of Gothic architecture and design, while in Germany the Nazarene painters had begun to cultivate an affinity with what they saw as the pure, untainted Christian art of the period before the Reformation. What was special about the Pre-Raphaelite revolution was its frequent reference to cultural heroes who were not exclusively painterly. Christ, as for the Nazarenes, stood at the pinnacle of human aspiration to the divine in art and life, but other exclusively Pre-Raphaelite heroes included Chaucer, Shakespeare and, most radically, given his still unsteady reputation, Keats. These poets provided a stream of subjects for the young artists and their growing circle of associates. Chaucer and Gower stand admiringly by as John Wyclif reads his translation of the Scriptures in Ford Madox Brown's *The First Translation of the Bible into English* (1847–8) and Chaucer also assumes a central position in Brown's triptych showing *The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry* (1845–51, 1853). Millais's *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1850) takes an episode from

The Tempest, and in 1853–4 Brown painted a sleeping King Lear comforted by an attendant Cordelia. Holman Hunt's *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro* (1848) shows the final tableau of Keat's 'Eve of St Agnes' while Millais's *Isabella* (1848–9) takes as its subject a scene of tender love contrasted with sneering brotherly jealousy.

The group's short-lived journal, *The Germ*, an experimental amalgam of poetry, prose, and essay, also served to extend the range of their literary and pictorial predilections. Of the founder 'Brothers', only Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82) has any claim to literary distinction, although the poetry of Thomas Woolner (1825–92), a contributor to *The Germ* and the author of the sequence *My Beautiful Lady* (1864), achieved some critical success at the time. Rossetti's poetry is essentially decorative and descriptive. In some of his landscape poems ('A Half-Way Pause', 'Autumn Idleness', or 'The Woodspurge', for example) he can colourfully suggest momentary experience and an intensity of vision, but the majority of his verses deal with his fascination with the female face and the female body. In his best-known poem 'The Blessed Damozel' Rossetti develops a fleshly but heavenly vision of a transfigured beloved from Dante's Beatrice, a figure who endlessly haunts his paintings. He idealizes women both sexually and spiritually, and with the exception of his strikingly earthy address to a woman of the streets in 'Jenny', he distances them as objects of desire, even worship. The sonnet sequence *The House of Life* bears certain parallels to the work of a fellow-contributor to *The Germ*, Coventry Patmore (1823–96), the author of the uxoriously adoring long poem, *The Angel in the House* (1854–63). Where Rossetti yearns for the supreme and often elusive mistress, Patmore idolizes his wife, tenderly incarcerating her in her domesticity.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) briefly formed part of the extraordinary household Rossetti assembled round himself at Chelsea, a menagerie of artists, artists' models, poets, and animals dedicated to extending the frontiers of art and experience. Swinburne remained an outsider and a rebel, despite the steady popularity of his weightily adjectival poetry, throughout his life. His early attraction to the cause of Italian unification was partly moulded by his acquaintance with Giuseppe Mazzini, the apostle of Italian Republicanism exiled in England. The *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) express a thrilled passion for the Risorgimento with a political conviction rare enough in English poetry. Swinburne proved equally radical in his assaults on received morality and Christian teaching. Throughout his work there runs a defined paganism and an instinctive libertarianism, shaped both by his profound understanding of the forms and styles of classical culture and by his distaste for Christian narrowness. His finest collection, the once notorious *Poems and Ballads* of 1866, reveals both the subtlety of his metrical echoes of and variations on Greek poetry and his power to disturb convention. His 'Hymn to Proserpine' purports to be spoken by the dying anti-Christian Roman Emperor Julian (nicknamed 'the Apostate' by his enemies) while the erotic 'Dolores'

reverses the Catholic notion of the suffering Virgin by indulgently addressing 'a poisonous queen', a priestess desired for her power to inflict pain. Swinburne found his most receptive audience amongst the unconventional literary and moral rebels of the late century.

Rossetti's friend and artistic associate, William Morris (1834–96), was a rebel in quite another sense. Morris revolutionized English design (and attempted to revolutionize English politics) in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the same cannot be said of his contribution to literature. He saw poetry as an extension of craft and as a natural enhancement of the quality of life, but his own poetry is generally lifeless, derivative, and long-winded. He sought to create a popular narrative art akin to Chaucer's, and his most substantial work, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), loosely intermixes retold tales from classical and northern sources, drawing in particular on the newly rediscovered Icelandic sagas. Unfortunately, Morris lacked Chaucer's wit and variety; nor was he ideally equipped to adapt the blunt plainness of his Old Norse originals successfully. He attempted to unmake much that he saw as false and artificial in the culture of his time, but his very sophistication militated against his avowedly folksy aspirations. In the late 1870s and early 1880s Morris was drawn first to Liberal and then to Socialist politics (he was amongst the first appreciative readers of Marx in England) and he translated his new commitment into an awkwardly jolly sing-song ballad poetry in such works as the 'Chants for Socialists' (1885). His most impressive works of this period are in prose, the two polemical fantasies *A Dream of John Ball* (1886–7) and *News from Nowhere* (1890). Both use the past to project an ideal into the future, the latter being a particularly forceful vision of a world which has freed itself from machines and from mechanical ways of thinking in order to release individual creativity.

The most distinguished of the poets associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement is Christina Rossetti (1830–94), the younger sister of Dante Gabriel. Her earliest published poetry, in an escapist, dreamy sub-Tennysonian mode, appeared in the first number of *The Germ* in 1850, but her distinctive female voice is clearly heard in her first major collection, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). The title poem of the volume is an extraordinary achievement, accumulative in its imagery, rhymed and half-rhymed, at times languorous, at times aggressive, and always rhythmically restless. At its climax, the redemptive Lizzie is assaulted by the far from whimsical goblins who attempt to force her to eat their seductive fruit:

> Though the goblins cuffed her and caught her,
> Coaxed and fought her,
> Bullied and besought her,
> Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
> Kicked and knocked her,
> Mauled and mocked her,
> Lizzie uttered not a word;

> Would not open lip from lip
> Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
> But laughed in heart to feel the drip
> Of juice that syrupped all her face,
> And lodged in dimples of her chin,
> And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.

The poem has something of the strangeness of the work of Lewis Carroll, but its nasty ramifications and its implied spiritual message stretch far beyond childhood and childish fears into the realm of sexual threat and female self-assertion. When Christina Rossetti wrote directly for children, as in her *Sing Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872), she exhibits a direct simplicity which is equally distinct from the knowingness of 'Goblin Market' and from the playful narrative inventiveness of Carroll. *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, which was published in 1866, subtly develops the use of alliteration and assonance both in its title-poem, an allegory which describes the unhappy uncertainty of emotional commitment, and in a sequence of lyric poems, secular and devotional. Further lyrics were added to a new collected edition of poems in 1875 and the ambitious *A Pageant and Other Poems*, which contains the religious sequence of Petrarchan sonnets 'Monna Innominata', appeared in 1881. Christina Rossetti's devotional poetry derives much from the powerful influence of Dante which was shared by all the younger members of her Anglo-Italian family (her sister Maria is the author of the pioneer English analysis *A Shadow of Dante* (1872), and in 1861 Dante Gabriel Rossetti had published his study *The Early Italian Poets*, later revised as *Dante and His Circle*) but her piety is also distinctly English. Her own intense Anglo-Catholicism readily responded to Anglican precedents, most notably that of George Herbert whose influence is particularly evident in the question-and-answer 'Up-Hill' and in the dialogue poem 'A Bruised Reed shall He not Break'. In the shorter poems which deal with secular relationships she explores emotional evasion and the failure of human sympathy as human alternatives to religious consolation and heavenly consummation. A tentative *eros* may supplant *agape*, but *eros* appears to have offered no certainty and little security in the past; the present and the future (even one which embraces death) seem to hold no more optimistic prospect. These themes are variously investigated throughout her writing career, almost mockingly in 'Promises Like Pie-Crust', elusively in 'Winter My Secret', ambiguously and mortally in the sonnet 'Remember'. In the short and even more ambiguous Song 'When I am Dead my Dearest' human love is treated with a take-it-or-leave-it quality which serves to qualify its Keatsian metaphors and suggestions. Keats's distant shadow also haunts 'Autumn Violets', a poem which anxiously reverses the idea of autumnal fulfilment. Love in middle age, Rossetti implies, is as forced and inappropriate as spring flowers (however sensuous) in autumn, the season when 'A grateful Ruth' should be grateful for the 'scanty corn' that she gleans. This, however, seems to be a Ruth with no generous Boaz hovering at the edge of the cornfield.

The Brownings

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's passionate outpourings of love-poetry in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), addressed from a woman to a man, publicly recall a powerful, private emotional awakening. Despite the implications of the title, there are no Portuguese originals (the 'Portuguese' of the title being an esoteric reference to the sixteenth-century Portuguese poet Camoens and to Robert Browning's nickname for his wife). The sonnets were written during the courtship of the two poets, he junior to her both in years and in terms of publication, but her fourth poem expresses a deferential acceptance of the reversal of roles, she the senior now allowing that her 'cricket' merely chirps against his 'mandolin'. Since the time of their marriage Robert Browning's reputation has overshadowed that of his wife and it is only relatively recently that the real individuality, and quality, of the work of Elizabeth Barrett (1806–61) has been critically recognized. Her precocious early poetry, including a translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (1833) and the favourably received *The Seraphim and Other Poems* (1838), is relatively unadventurous compared to her later work. The translation of Aeschylus was, however, reworked for publication in the *Poems* of 1850, the volume that also contained the florid *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Following their decision to live in Italy in 1846, both husband and wife responded variously to the history, the tradition, and the effervescent politics of a nation experiencing a painful evolution into a modern state. Where Robert Browning generally retreated into historical perspectives, Elizabeth Barrett Browning confronted contemporary issues (as she had earlier done with English social problems) in her sequence *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851). The poems may lack the republican commitment of Swinburne and the vivid questioning of Clough, but they boldly and intelligently confront Italian political flux and the often contradictory nature of nationalist aspirations. Barrett Browning's most substantial work in every sense is her long blank-verse 'novel' *Aurora Leigh: A Poem in Nine Books* (1856). Its verse may not be consistently inspired, and its encyclopaedic show of learning may sometimes clog both its imagery and its narrative line, but it remains a vital, highly original and outspoken feminist statement. *Aurora Leigh* traces two careers, one male, one female, one philanthropic, one artistic, and it allows for digression into other lives and other circumstances beyond the comfortable world of the heroine. Aurora's autobiography is written for her 'better self', as a poet exploring experience, inspiration, and independence, knowing that she must 'analyse, | Confront, and question'. It traces processes of self-liberation which are related to informed confrontation and informed questioning. In Book I, for example, Aurora first amusedly, then ecstatically, recalls her discovery of poetry:

> I had found the secret of a garret-room
> Piled high with cases in my father's name,
> Piled high, packed large,—where, creeping in and out
> Among the giant fossils of my past,
> Like some small nimble mouse between the ribs
> Of a mastodon, I nibbled here and there
> At this or that box, pulling through the gap,
> In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy,
> The first book first. And how I felt it beat
> Under my pillow, in the morning's dark,
> An hour before the sun would let me read!
> My books! At last because the time was ripe,
> I chanced upon the poets.
> As the earth
> Plunges in fury, when the internal fires
> Have reached and pricked her heart . . .
> . . . . .
> —Thus, my soul,
> At poetry's divine first finger-touch,
> Let go conventions and sprang up surprised . . .

Poetry erupts volcanically and, like a geological rift, it releases 'elemental freedom', a freedom that Aurora here and elsewhere enthusiastically embraces. The poem ends confidently with a glimpsed vision of a new dawn reflecting its heroine's name, a new Day 'which should be builded out of heaven to God'.

Robert Browning's own verse 'novel', *The Ring and the Book* (1868–9), differs radically from his wife's. The viewpoint is multiple, the effect cumulative, and the narrative line, or lines, require exploration rather than mere imaginative sympathy or suspension of disbelief. Browning (1812–89) obliges his reader to play the role of an alert investigating magistrate, probing confessions and impressions and sifting a weight of contradictory evidence. *The Ring and the Book* is the culmination of his long poetic experiment with the dramatic monologue and of his fascination with the establishment of 'truth', a truth that can be both objective and subjective, external and experiential. In 1860 Browning had discovered the source for his poem, a collection of documents, bound together, concerning a sensational Roman murder trial of 1698. This chance find on a Florentine bookstall appealed to Browning's delight in exploring the self-justifying contortions of the minds of sinners and criminals; it also stimulated his intellectual and poetic curiosity. The finished poem is as layered as a texture of voices, each of the narratives qualifying and expanding on the one preceding it, each of his witnesses opening up freshly complex vistas and new questions.

The Ring and the Book appeared in four volumes over a period of as many months, thus signalling to its first readers its relationship to the contemporary serial novel. Browning's reputation as a major poet was already firmly established, based on what are still recognized as his four most important volumes of verse, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Men and Women* (1855), and *Dramatis Personae* (1864). As the titles of these

volumes suggest, the nature of drama, or rather the characters of drama, served to stimulate Browning's most distinctive writing. In spite of his early ambition to write for the stage, and the modest success of his play *Strafford* (1837), his real penchant was for scenes and for monologues divorced from the theatre. The characters of his poetry do not necessarily have to interact with others, for the majority are overheard in self-revelatory, if scarcely truth-telling soliloquy. The situations he presents, however, require a reader's complicity. In the case of Fra Lippo Lippi, a compromised painter in holy orders forces his confession on those who discover him, 'at an alley's end | Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar'. In 'My Last Duchess' participation is yet more uneasy. As the Duke of Ferrara gradually explains both himself and the select contents of his privy chamber, a reader is cast in the role of listening ambassador opening the preliminaries to the acquisition of the next duchess (the last one having been disposed of). The Duke's menace, like his cultivation, is established cumulatively:

> She thanked men,—good! but thanked
> Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
> My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
> With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
> This sort of trifling? . . .
> . . . . . .
> and I choose
> Never to stoop. O sir, she smiled, no doubt,
> Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
> Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
> Then all smiles stopped together.

In many instances Browning wrenches us into a troubled private history by making that history work itself out before us. It is the method of Sir Walter Scott returned to its proper origins in the drama of Shakespeare, and remoulded into single charged incidents recounted by single, expressive voices. Even when Browning's soliloquizers are not known historical figures, as in the instances of the unnamed monk in his Spanish cloister or of the Bishop ordering his tomb, he establishes a physical context through carefully selected details, references, or objects. None floats in the relatively unlocated realms of Tennyson's Ulysses and Tithonus. Each of the speaking voices is given an individual articulation, a turn of phrase, an emphasis, a pause, a reiteration, or an idiolect which serves to identify them. Significantly, most of them are connoisseurs (like the Duke), artists, musicians, thinkers or even, in the case of Mr Sludge the Medium, manipulators. A creativity, or at least an appreciation of the creative process, marks the individuality of each of them. Even Browning's theologians, from the worldly Bishop Bloughram and the earthy Caliban to the more spiritual Rabbi Ben Ezra and Johannes Agricola, speculate from a physical base in the world of the senses or from an appreciation of sensual experience.

Those poems of Browning's which dispense with an identified persona as narrator generally retain a conversational directness, even an easy familiarity between addresser and addressee. 'The Lost Leader', for example, may noisily explode in its vexation and may insist on a sharing of the indignation, but 'De Gustibus' gives a very different impression of emerging from quieter, amorous discourse shaped around the oppositions of England and Italy. 'Two in the Campagna' opens with a questioning voice reminiscent of Donne's, but it speaks of distinctness not union, of an agnosticism in love not of ideal convergence. The famous 'Home-Thoughts, from Abroad' opens with a gasped aspiration and refers possessively to 'my blossomed pear-tree' and to a 'you' who might think the thrush incapable of recapturing 'the first careless rapture'. The narrator of the children's poem 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' talks of 'my ditty' and ends addressing 'Willy' on the virtues of keeping faith with pipers. Browning's most elusive and suggestive poem 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' has a first-person narrator who draws us into his quest by suggesting an eerily Gothic response to an already posed question:

> My first thought was, he lied in every word,
> That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
> Askance to watch the working of his lie
> On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
> Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
> Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

The poem takes its suggestive title from one of Edgar's songs in *King Lear*, but the line provides merely a footing on which Browning builds a complex fabric, vaguely medieval in its setting but ominous and disturbing in its precise evocation of horror ('—It may have been a water-rat I speared, | But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek', 'Toads in a poisoned tank, | Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage'). In a sense the poem circles back to its title as the knight blows his 'slughorn', announcing both his presence and his recognition of how and why he framed his journey. Unlike the narrators of Browning's other poems, the very strangeness of the knight and his quest preclude the familiar; a reader is alienated, not by a character, but by an impersonality and by receding layers of 'truth' and 'lying' which look forward to the experiments of the early twentieth-century Modernists.

The Drama, the Melodrama, and the 'Sensation' Novel

Robert Browning's tragedy *Strafford* had been conceived and written in the mid-1830s at the earnest request of the great actor William Charles Macready. Macready was a determined and intelligent pillar of the English stage, a committed reformer and performer of the Shakespearian repertoire as much as a patron of new national talent. *Strafford* pleased him, though he confessed on

his first reading of the play that he had been 'too much carried away by the truth of character to observe the meanness of plot, and occasional obscurity'. It needed substantial revision before it reached the stage of the Covent Garden Theatre in April 1837. It has very rarely been performed since. Macready also directed, and took the leading roles in, other now-forgotten plays by Victorian writers whose reputations today are exclusively based on their work in other media. The most notable of these was the historical novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who wrote *The Lady of Lyons; or, Love and Pride* for Macready in 1838, following it in 1839 with the tragedy *Richelieu*. Both dramas remained standard repertory pieces throughout the century, attracting actors of the standing of Charles Kean, Helen Faucit, and later Henry Irving and Ellen Terry to its star roles. Irving, the leading Shakespearian actor of the second half of the century, was also instrumental in the honourable, if unacclaimed, staging of Tennyson's sprawling verse-drama *Queen Mary* in 1876. In 1893, after the poet's death, Irving took the lead in the more favourably received *Becket*, the second of Tennyson's three epic dramas concerned with turning-points in English history. The shade of Shakespeare haunts the theatrical work of all those Victorian writers, from Bulwer-Lytton to Swinburne, who attempted to evolve a modern equivalent to his tragedies and history plays. The scrupulous, scholarly, elaborate, and often admirable productions of Shakespeare which so mark the history of the theatre in the nineteenth century tended to smother all serious imitation under the weight of fussy period costumes, archaeologically correct properties, and an appropriately fustian language.

The Victorian theatre evolved a far more fluid and inventive comic style than it did a tragic one. Although Charles Dickens dabbled unprofitably with burlesque in the mid-1830s, he clearly sensed that neither his talent nor his power to make money lay in that direction. Where the dialogue in his early sketches and novels is vivid, that in his plays is stilted and contrived; the conventions that he transforms in his fiction remain irredeemably conventional in his stage-works. Dickens's friend Douglas Jerrold (1803–57) proved a far more successful writer of comedy. His farce *Paul Pry* (1827) and his popular nautical melodrama *Black-Eyed Susan; or, All in the Downs* (1829) established his once considerable reputation, but Jerrold was increasingly drawn away from the theatre and from theatrical management by his commitment to journalism, and especially to *Punch* (founded in 1841). The only mid-Victorian dramatist to have found favour with twentieth-century producers and audiences, and thereby to have been rescued from the semi-oblivion of 'theatre history', is Dion Boucicault (1820–90). Boucicault's Irish roots are evident in his three witty admixtures of comedy, crime, nationalist politics, and love-interest, *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1864) and *The Shaughraun* (1874). These brought the figure of the resilient 'stage Irishman' to the fore, quietening British fears of the new anti-British force of Fenianism and dulling the edge of much Nationalist aspiration (this same figure was rejected by the later playwrights associated with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin). Boucicault's earliest success was, however, the thoroughly English five-act comedy, *London Assurance* (1841), a play successfully derived in its plot, style, and setting from the models provided by Goldsmith and Sheridan. Boucicault was an unashamed plagiarist, cobbling together elements from existing plays (English and foreign), from history, from fiction, and from popular topics of the day to shape the 200-odd plays ascribed to him. The realistic domestic comedies of the almost equally prolific Thomas William Robertson (1829–71) remain comparatively neglected. Robertson came of a theatrical family, and like Pinero (who later represented him as Tom Wrench in *Trelawny of the 'Wells'*), intimately understood theatre life and theatre people (as his novel *David Garrick* of 1864 suggests). His best work, the six comedies presented at the Prince of Wales's Theatre between 1865 and 1870, also indicates the extent of his grasp of theatrical techniques. The plays, which include *Society* (1865), *Caste* (1867), and *School* (1869), proved innovatory in their rejection of bombast in favour of delicacy, observation, and an anti-sentimental presentation of love.

Bombast can still be most readily associated with the frequent excesses of Victorian melodrama, a form developed variously from a popular taste for spectacle, from folk-story and press reports, from accounts of criminal enterprise and criminal deviation, from Gothic and historical fiction, from continental romantic theatre and native romantic sentiment. Most melodramas were centred on fraught amatory interest and particularly on much-put-upon heroines. The influence of unsophisticated representations and misrepresentations of Shakespeare (of the kind that Dickens wonderfully describes in *Great Expectations*) was also considerable. Melodrama as an art form held sway over the popular imagination both as cheap fiction and as cheap theatre, but it also fed more would-be genteel and lofty forms. The absurdity of plots may have declined in the more prestigious theatres, the blood-curdling, the scenic sensationalism, the assertive patriotism, and the easy juxtapositions of good and evil seem rarely to have done so. Throughout the mid-century the novel fed the theatre and the theatre the novel, generally to the detriment of both. The fitfully impressive social and historical novelist and playwright Charles Reade (1814–84) adapted and readapted his prison story *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* (1856) for both media and in 1857 his novel *White Lies* became his play *The Double Marriage*. It has been estimated that there were some 750 Victorian stage adaptations of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and even by 1850 the stories of Dickens had been dramatized some 240 times, a process which continued until well after his death (and continues in very different theatrical circumstances today). These dramatizations sometimes presumed to offer endings to stories before the novelist himself had completed his serialization and had decided on his own conclusion. Unlike some of his fellow-authors, Dickens seems to have accepted the process sanguinely, readily recognizing the uses of the additional popular éclat it brought him.

Dickens's collaborator in the maladroit melodrama which eventually served to inspire *A Tale of Two Cities* was his friend William Wilkie Collins (1824–89).

The Frozen Deep, set in England and in the Arctic wastes, has been very rarely performed since the mid-1850s and then only at the risk of making an audience wince at its parade of hearts on sleeves and dizzily heightened emotions. Collins was, however, serious about the theatre. In 1855 he had collaborated with Dickens over another play, *The Lighthouse*, and in 1867 they jointly produced an acting version of Dickens's short story *No Thoroughfare*. Collins also provided in 1862 his own stage version of his novel *No Name*.

Despite his often flat and unexpressive style, Collins possessed an extraordinary narrative gift, one ideally suited to his pioneering interest in the evolution of the detective story rather than to the more immediate denouements of the theatre. His novels actively appealed to the demand in the 1860s for what has become known as 'sensation fiction', stories centred on theft, deception, or murder and during the course of which the nature of the crime and the motives of the criminal are revealed. Such sensationalism can be related both to the popular taste for melodrama and to the influence of the criminal fiction of the French writer Eugène Sue and his English imitator G. W. M. Reynolds (1814–79). In Collins's case, however, there is a refinement of the narrative invention of his fiction which is generally absent from the work of his rivals. *The Woman in White*, which was first serialized in Dickens's Journal *All the Year Round* in 1860, treats of insanity, selfishness, and guilty secrets. It also has perhaps the most colourful and suave of all Victorian villains, an Italian exile mixed up in secret societies and suspicious oath-takings (who has the singularly disconcerting habit of playing with white mice as he talks). The story is told through a series of cleverly juxtaposed eye-witness accounts. The scrupulous plotting and the control of suspense are also evident in *No Name* (1860) and the much admired *Armadale* (1864–5), the latter suggesting both a refined use of tension and suspense in its original serial divisions in the *Cornhill Magazine* and a careful manipulation of the discovery of evidence. Collins's masterpiece, *The Moonstone* (1868) (also first serialized in *All the Year Round*), is a multiple narrative which subtly explores the nature of detection and the vagaries of memory and observation. Its oriental background and its play with the effects of opium on the consciousness contribute an element of the exotic to an otherwise severely disciplined and steadily plotted pursuit of the science of detection. Collins remains the first, and undoubtedly the greatest, of the many English masters of the detective story.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835–1915) achieved immediate popular acclaim with her gripping, almost breathless novel *Lady Audley's Secret*, hurriedly written for serial publication in 1862. It is the story of an ambitious murderess intent on covering up both her crime and her earlier career. Lady Audley is a highly distinctive villain/heroine who, despite her beauty and her social grace, displays few of the idealized qualities, and none of the passivity, that many Victorian readers and most Victorian writers readily associated with women (and particularly with 'ladies'). None of Braddon's eighty other novels, mostly

written in response to the appeal of her first success, ever created the same sensation or have ever since been accorded the same prestige.

The New Fiction of the 1860s: Meredith and Eliot

The early work of George Meredith (1828–1909) created a sensation of quite another order. His first novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, was banned by Mudie's Circulating Library for its supposed moral offence, and his most substantial volume of poetry *Modern Love* (1862) tackled the still *risqué* subject of the disintegration of a marriage. *Modern Love* may have emerged from personal circumstances and a private crisis, but, as its very title implies, it also expressed a distinctive 'modernity' in the circumstances of marital breakdown and the incompatibility of unloving partners. The fifty 16-line poems initially record the failure of a relationship and the venom and irritation that has replaced passion. The tensions are strikingly evident from the very first of the poems:

> By this he knew she wept with waking eyes;
> That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,
> The strange low sobs that shook their common bed,
> Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
> And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,
> Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay
> Stone-still, and the long darkness flowed away
> With muffled pulses . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Like sculptured effigies, they might be seen
> Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;
> Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

The hypocrisy of the public pretence that all is well is countered at a half-way point in poem 25 by reference to the franker moral decisions described in a French novel; thereafter husband and wife lead separate lives, he actively consoling himself with a mistress.

It is, however, as Meredith himself proclaims, the 'Comic Spirit' that generally rules in his novels, a comedy that informs his representation of human discourse and his analysis of character. Meredith's female characters have a particularly distinctive quality, ranging from the calculated social mobility of Evan's sisters in *Evan Harrington* (1860) to the impulsive, restless independence of Diana Warwick in *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). His fascination with political manœuvre as an extension of amatory interaction (evident enough in the treatment of Diana's affair with a young politician, Percy Dacier) is considered more fully in the complex contortions and ramifications of *Beauchamp's Career* (1874–5). An interest in the political

tensions of contemporary Italy shaped both *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and its sequel *Vittoria* (1867). Meredith has long been most admired for the substantial dialogue scenes and the tense comedy of English upper-class manners in *The Egoist* (1879). His once startling free-thinking, free-ranging morality and his dense narrative style held a special appeal for those late nineteenth-century critics and readers who sought to break away from the supposed restrictions of mid-Victorian moral earnestness.

George Eliot (1819–80) is the most earnestly imperative and the most probingly intelligent of the great mid-Victorian novelists. Her seriousness was readily praised and acclaimed by the reviewers of her first published works of fiction, the three *Scenes of Clerical Life* (originally printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1857) and the greatly esteemed *Adam Bede* (1859). Queen Victoria read *Adam Bede* with such pleasure that she not only keenly recommended it to her royal relatives but also commissioned two paintings of scenes from the novel. On one level the appeal of the book lay in its detailed and sympathetic representation of a rural community in the recent past, a working community free of the confusions and contradictions of the industrial and urban present; it also allowed for a new kind of heroism, a heroic uprightness which emerged from the conditions and the morality of ordinary country life. Eliot was not escaping into a rural idyll, but remoulding the expressive provinciality of much of the best of Scott's work. Despite her deliberate, bluntly English, masculine pseudonym, and the ruse that her narrator had the tastes, opinions, and clothes of a man, Charles Dickens, for one, perceived that 'no man ever before had the art of making himself mentally so like a woman since the world began'. Acknowledging the quality of her work he later tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the now firmly established 'George Eliot' to write a new novel for him for serialization in his *All the Year Round*. The identity of the gender of the author hiding behind the pseudonym had at first been kept a close secret as a means of maintaining a public distinction between a highly moral narrator and a woman who, according to the narrow standards of her time, was an outcast, an adulteress and a religious sceptic. 'George Eliot' won respect as a writer on the merits of her work alone. That respect gradually eclipsed the affront to public morality presented by the Godless Marian Evans.

Marian Evans (or, as she generally preferred to call herself in deference to her unsanctified 'marriage' to the already married G. H. Lewes, Marian Lewes) was no stranger to controversy when she published her first stories. Her gradual loss of an intense girlhood Evangelicalism had been stimulated by her reading of the German 'Higher Criticism' of the Bible. Her first published work was a translation of *The Life of Christ Critically Examined by Dr David Friedrich Strauss* in 1846, and the only work published under her own name is her English version of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* of 1854. Her scrupulous and demanding process of self-education had included the study of religious history, of the ancient classics (she remained especially fond of the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles), of philosophy (especially that of

Spinoza), of modern science, and of pioneer works of continental sociology and politics (notably the work of Auguste Comte). Much of this learning touched her fiction, not only providing her with chapter epigraphs and narratorial reflections but also, and far more significantly, shaping the nature and arguments of her novels. Her political guardedness—some might call it a cautious conservatism—and her general avoidance of outspokenness on matters of faith, feminism, and sexual morality may at first sight seem to run counter to the radical commitments of her private life. Essentially, however, the patient and generally tolerant narrative voice of Eliot's novels advocates a slow, considered, and gradual evolution. This evolution would, she suggests, become evident first in terms of human perception and action; only latterly would its beneficial effects on society at large be felt. Eliot's narrative voice consequently calls not simply for a sympathetic intellectual and emotional response from readers, but, more insistently, for a flexible and demanding moral one.

In spite of the tragedy of Hetty Sorrel and the moral and social failure of Arthur Donnithorne, *Adam Bede* generally seeks to uphold the values of an old-fashioned, deferential, and stratified England. It explores a society on the edge of change, one potentially divided by war and industrialization, but one still held together by religion and class-interdependence. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), however, Eliot examines a very different pattern of loyalties and relationships. The novel shows provincial English society which, while it reinforces family values, serves to stifle aspiration and particularly its heroine's bids for personal liberation. Maggie Tulliver is both an aspirer and a victim; she is blessed with a singularly happy childhood, but becomes disoriented when the stable world around her, and her assumptions about it, are gradually demolished. Experience brings only a limited wisdom, and the deluge of the novel's ending offers a resolution in the form of a catastrophe which literally overwhelms its protagonist. The far more schematized *Silas Marner* (1861) transforms rustic tragedy into a more optimistic moral fable, albeit a fable which explores a series of dense ethical, social, and spiritual dilemmas.

Eliot's acute sense of historical conditioning and of progressive development, clearly evident in her historical novel *Romola* (1863), also determines the nature of the political discourse of the two novels set in the period of the 1832 Reform Bill. *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) is a highly sophisticated and analytical political novel, though one now far removed from the preoccupations of the 'Condition of England' fiction of the 1840s. It may evade the issue of the radicalism promised by its title, but it nevertheless presents a highly perceptive, retrospective view of popular agitation in an English country town and it both animates debates about conservative fears for the Constitution and observes the distinctly limited changes that the Reform Bill actually brought about. Eliot's studies of provincial life reached their apogee in the densely argued, carefully wrought *Middlemarch* (1871–2). The novel is built around a 'web' of individual destinies each of which is interwoven with others and closely related to the determining spirit of the age. Its setting in the years

1829–32, its patient delineation of aspects of contemporary economic, social, artistic, scientific, and religious life, and its vivid contrasts of public and private history (and particularly of the juxtaposition of the historic burden of Rome and the evolving modern history of an English town), all give it an ambitious, epic resonance that few other novels have rivalled.

The Prelude to *Middlemarch* opens with a reference to the 'history of man' and narrows immediately to the particular history of a remarkable woman, St Theresa. The sixteenth-century Theresa, we realize, had scope and an 'epos' which is denied to the central fictional character, the nineteenth-century Dorothea Brooke. Both women aspire to serve and to reform, but Dorothea is shown as lacking the 'coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul'. At the end of her story her destiny is likened to a broken river, its might spent in channels 'which had no great name of earth'. Dorothea's historical impact depends, ironically, on 'unhistoric acts', nameless and unremembered, and yet making for 'the growing good of the world'. Despite its epic potential, *Middlemarch* deliberately undermines epic by stressing that women like Dorothea are constricted, diminished, and silenced by the social conditioning inherited by the nineteenth century. Good deeds have to substitute for great ones. The only true feminist heroine that Eliot created is Romola de' Bardi. Romola's world is that of Renaissance Florence and her rejection of the narrow obligations of the Church and the State are observed within a framework of lost Renaissance values (albeit a framework shot through with Comtean prejudices about the futures of both Church and State).

Historical fiction generally seems to have offered Eliot an enterprising freedom absent from the novels set in periods nearer to her own time and in or near the landscapes of her own birthplace (the same is true of her ambitious, but ungainly, narrative poem *The Spanish Gipsy* of 1868). *Romola* can seem over-learned, stiff-jointed, and stumblingly expressed, but it has an experimental daring which is also evident in her much-criticized Anglo-Jewish novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876). It is her most truly cosmopolitan work, dealing not simply with a cultivated European world of artists and musicians but also with the contrast between the sensibilities of a pampered and limited English aristocracy and those of despised, but intense, Jewish outsiders. *Daniel Deronda* consistently looks at a culture in need of redefinitions. It represents a new and restless spiritual yearning in its characters and a yet vaguer sense of disturbance at the threatening ideological prospects opening for European civilization in the late 1870s (the implications of Darwinism being prominent among them). At the end of the novel, Gwendolen Harleth may also appear to be a broken river flowing several ways at once, but she lacks both Romola's determined purpose and Dorothea's moral resources. She is aware of the 'terrible moment' when 'the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind . . . enter like an earthquake into their own lives'. Eliot's geological metaphor does not imply that it is a moment of liberation. Gwendolen's is a crisis resultant from

'feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement' whose mystery remains unsolved, perhaps unsolvable. That movement does more than 'dislodge' her from her egotistical supremacy in her own world; it painfully unites her with an inevitable and not always welcome progress into an uncertain future, a future in which the destinies of both women and men are to be destabilized by the universal cultural earthquake.

The 'Strange Disease of Modern Life': Mill, Arnold, Clough, and Ruskin

From the late 1860s onwards, the prospect of radical change to society and to its political constitution was viewed with increasing unease by liberal and conservative-minded Victorians alike. The Macaulayan confidence concerning the benefits of progress had not exactly evaporated, but it had certainly been unsettled by an increasing awareness of the more disturbing implications of intellectual and social development. If the dual threats of revolutionary upheaval and of the imminent collapse of institutions which had so haunted the 1840s had receded, so too had the economic optimism and the spirit of compromise which mark the middle decades of the century. Significantly, the high tide of Victorian liberalism contained within it the understanding that tides both wax and wane. Matthew Arnold claimed that he heard the 'melancholy, long withdrawing roar' of the sea of faith on Dover Beach in 1867; others pointed to what they saw as the equally melancholy evidence of the sapping of the political status quo and of the stable foundations of bourgeois culture. The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) presented an argued rejoinder to long accepted beliefs about humankind and its place in the order of creation. As Darwin's arguments, and those of his more vocal disciples, gradually forced informed opinion to adapt to its challenges, a sense of dislocation infected established modes of thought. A steady stream of pessimism emerged in English letters, accentuating an existing scepticism and reaching its climax in the 1880s. Darwin had effectively scotched the idea that humankind stood at the pinnacle of the universe as the lord of creation and the master of all it surveyed; he had also effectively undermined easy assumptions as to the nature of progress. The theory of natural selection shook the religious faith of the susceptible; more significantly, it unsteadied a secular and materialist view of the future. Although a positive response to Darwin's ideas was far from universal, even amongst the educated, a fashionable 'modern' gloom and uncertainty hung over English intellectual life and the literature of ideas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, concentrating earlier doubts and uncertainties and opening the way to new, not always welcome, experimentation.

Much of the political despondency was related to the supposed consequences of the extension of the franchise by the second Reform Bill of 1867.

Although passed by a Conservative government in order to steal the thunder of its Liberal opponents, it was frequently presumed that the Bill opened the way to a future mass democracy and that the masses posed a threat to the present workings of democracy. George Eliot expressed her cautious support for an extended franchise for the educated in her 'Felix Holt's Address to Working Men', but she nevertheless urged restraint and an avoidance of class antagonism. John Stuart Mill (1806–73), the leading philosopher of liberalism of his day, had, by contrast, been an active supporter of Reform in the House of Commons and a steady advocate of the extension of democracy. Mill remains the most articulate and sympathetic apologist for the cause of individual liberty. His great essay *On Liberty* (1859) defines, for a bourgeois democracy, the principles of mutual tolerance, of the freedom of the citizen, and of the non-interference of government. It was written at a time when the British parliamentary system had virtually no parallels on mainland Europe and when constitutional guarantees of the liberty of the citizen were either non-existent or disregarded outside the spheres of influence of Britain and the United States. It also appealed to an anti-theoretical, anti-institutional streak in English culture. 'A State which dwarfs its men', Mill argues at the end of his essay, 'in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes—will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.' As he also crucially acknowledges, the democratic process had in the future to include women (his pioneer study *The Subjection of Women* was published in 1869).

Mill had emerged from a narrow Utilitarian background and from a strict educational regime which had virtually denied him a normal boyhood. Like one of the forced 'mental green peas' of Dr Blimber's school in *Dombey and Son*, Mill had been set to learn Greek at the age of 3; by 8 he was well versed in the classics; at 12 he was studying Aristotle's *Logic* and at 13 he was pursuing a course in political economy. As his *Autobiography* (1873) reveals, this educational forcing deprived him of a defined spiritual aspiration; not only was he untouched by religion (anti-clericalism had been as prominent in his training as had a hatred of aristocratic privilege), he was also unaware of the Romantic stress upon the creative power of the Imagination. Mill's discovery of Wordsworth's poetry in the autumn of 1828 delivered him, he claimed, from a nervous crisis and opened to him 'the very culture of the feelings' for which he had darkly yearned. His awareness of the rational as well as of the emotional, of the calculated as much as of the sensual, feeds his theoretical work. It also directs his libertarian and tolerant convictions beyond a Benthamite insistence on usefulness and happiness to an insistence both on freedom and on the propriety of constitutional safeguards in a free society.

In his provocative tract *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold (1822–88) offered definitions of a different kind. Arnold's argument intermixes a post-Carlylean irony and an often heavy-handed wit; it reiterates phrases, terms, and embodied ideas; it offers its readers what purports to be an investigative

moralism and it attempts to establish the nature of a broad and all-embracing notion of culture. The influence and the intellectual discipline of his remarkable father Thomas Arnold, the eminent headmaster of Rugby school in the 1820s and 1830s and the godfather of Victorian earnestness, can be felt throughout. Dr Arnold had reformed his school by means of a hierarchical system of moral responsibilities and by fostering in his pupils an awareness of mutual obligations and the promptings of hyperactive consciences. His system had produced a generation of restless, socially conscious boys forced into adult decision-making before their proper time and often exhausted by the process. Few, however, felt able to express a disillusion with the headmasterly influence of Arnold, as the lasting popular success of the boys' story *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), written by one of his less than star pupils, Thomas Hughes (1822–96), serves to suggest. Dr Arnold's boys were induced to take upon themselves the weight of a life-long struggle between truth and falsehood and between Christian independence and the atheistic tyranny of the mob.

Culture and Anarchy playfully divides English society into three constituent classes: a 'Barbarian' aristocracy, a 'Philistine' bourgeoisie and an unlettered 'Populace'. None of these classes either sympathizes with, or upholds, a truly refined high culture which could withstand further decay in the political and religious order. Arnold selectively cites ideas from the European cultural tradition in order to determine the nature of a new social and moral cement which could serve to bond classes together and also provide a fulfilling spiritual ethos capable of superseding sectarian religion. The narrow strictures of an inherited 'Hebraism', particularly in the Puritan culture of English religious Nonconformity, needed the balance of the softer and sweeter arts of the ancient Greeks in order to shape a more tolerant and fluent civilization which could do away with classes, sects, and élites. The book's satire is particularly barbed in its attack on the shortcomings of the pragmatic, anti-idealistic English present; its vision of the future offers an escape into a bright world which has abolished the tyranny of the low-brow. The spirit of universal enlightenment and of personal integrity could, Arnold held, transform mass democracy. Nevertheless, his argument suggests an earnest authoritarianism which both despises and suspects popular culture. It lays down rules and claims that it offers freedom; it enforces peace by effectively suppressing the inconvenient and the disruptive.

Arnold recoils from vulgarity throughout his prose works (he complains, for example, that the problem with the English Romantic poets lay in their provinciality and lack of wide reading). Nevertheless, his essays on Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats are models of their kind, probing and illuminating and defending their subjects even when Arnold himself seems more inclined to diminish them. His criticism of the culture and the institutions of his time emerges both from a professional interest in education (he was appointed an inspector of schools by the government in 1851 and worked hard

at the job for some thirty-five years) and from his own practice as a poet and as a student of the European poetic tradition. He tends to hold up the intellectual, philosophical, and educational enterprise of France and Germany to the decided detriment of a mentally foggy England. More significantly, he fatally ignores the real energy of the literature of his English contemporaries. He rarely mentions the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, he glances narrowly and unhelpfully at that of his friend Clough, and he generally implies that Dickens's novels are little more than classics of philistinism.

'The true basis for the creative power's exercise', Arnold noted in his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the present Time', was the fact that a poet lived 'in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing' to his creativity. At such epochs, he added, society was 'in the fullest measure, permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and alive'. Arnold held that his own age manifestly demonstrated that English society lacked the proper degree of intellectual permeation, or rather that its confusions and uncertainties militated against the achievement of an expressive modern poetry. His own five volumes of verse, published between 1848 and 1867, explore many of the negatives that he saw in the culture around him. The upright, God-centred struggle for truth of Dr Arnold celebrated in the poem 'Rugby Chapel' (1857, published 1867) still holds meaning in the 'hideous, and arid, and vile' modern world, but both the headmaster and God seem since to have withdrawn into silence. If his criticism seeks to counter negatives, his poetry embraces them, worries over them, and attempts to redirect them towards some glimmer of progressive hope. Arnold was well aware of a discrepancy between what he felt he had to say and what he aspired to express as a poet. His longest poem, *Empedocles on Etna*, first published in 1852, quickly struck him as too imbued with 'modern feeling' (despite its classical subject), too expressive of 'depression and overtension of mind'. He suppressed the poem a year later and apologized for its absence from a new edition of the poems in a long self-defensive Preface. He did not reprint it until 1867 when both the spirit of the age and the decline of his inspiration seemed to justify its reappearance in print.

Arnold's 1853 Preface to a sequence of poems, some new, some reprinted, some altered, argues that *Empedocles* had failed to 'inspirit and rejoice' its readers. As if in response, the volume included one of Arnold's most resolvedly 'joyful' longer poems, 'The Scholar Gipsy', a poem which celebrates the twin freedoms of an Oxford student's escape from routine and a poet's attempt to escape into a history unburdened by present confusions and uncertainties:

> O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
> And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
> Before this strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife—
> Fly hence, our contact fear!
> Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!

> Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
> From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,
> Wave us away, and keep thy solitude.

The student's escape is into an unattached, gipsy rejection of the consequences of the urban civilization of the nineteenth century (the Thames is still 'sparkling' as it had for Spenser and not the polluted sewer of Dickens's novels). Like Virgil's Dido, he can spurn the representative of the progressive and inevitable future because that restless future is not his. Arnold's essential ambiguity about the present, and his poignant nostalgia for an easier and idealized past are also evident in his elegiac monody for the dead Clough, 'Thyrsis' (1867). The poem returns to the same contours of the Oxfordshire landscape, but now imbues them with reminiscences of the Greek and Roman pastoral tradition which both Arnold and Clough had studied as schoolboys amid the old certainties of Rugby. 'Thyrsis' too is haunted by the 'stormy note of men contention-tost' and the restless soul of the dead poet is required to act as an inspirer, an elusive bringer of joy to a world which, despite its physical beauty, has lost its spiritual way. Arnold's determined, but none the less vague, directions to future progress, like his conjuration of the spirits of his father and of Clough, sound a note of desperate optimism. In the poem called 'The Future' (1853), the river of Time has swept humanity from mountain fastnesses to the grubby, industrialized plain of the nineteenth century, 'border'd by cities and hoarse | With a thousand cries'. The immediate prospect is only of 'blacker cities and louder din', and those on the river's 'flowing breast' will never see 'an ennobling sight, | Drink of the feeling of quiet again'. The poem ultimately offers a vision of a future oblivion, blissfully and vaguely lost in 'the murmurs and scents of the infinite Sea'. The capital 'S' for the sea here both suggests God's complicity and denies it. Arnold's image can be read both as implying something akin to a Tennysonian purpose in nature and as a passive drift into nothingness.

It is Arnold, rather than Arthur Hugh Clough, who was the true 'too quick despairer' of 'Thyrsis'. Where Arnold suggested the force of alienation, Clough strove for some kind of human and moral attachment; where Arnold sought to associate himself with the spirit of the times and then agonized over its defective joylessness, Clough detachedly accepted and exploited contradiction. Clough (1819–61) was described by another Rugby schoolfriend as having received 'into an unusually susceptible and eager mind the whole force of that electric shock which [Dr] Arnold communicated to all his better pupils'. Clough's later agnosticism retained a sometimes startling frankness and honesty; his disillusion was, however, generally shaped by a diffidence, a wit, and an acceptance of the failure of mission. He is a candid poet, rarely fretful but rarely confident; one who almost relishes the nature of doubt and the anarchy of multiple ways of seeing. In his greatest poem, the sequence of verse letters *Amours de Voyage* (1858), he announces its prospective irresolution in four brief epigraphs (in English, French, and Latin) which variously suggest

self-absorption, self-doubt, the elusiveness of love, and the freedom of travel. The poems, written in hexameter, are expressed in a relaxed, conversational manner and tellingly detailed with snatches of travelogue, dialogue, and gestures of self-analysis on the parts of the various correspondents. They are set against the background of the disruptions of Italian politics, and particularly the brief establishment of a Roman Republic in 1848–9. Claude, Clough's male correspondent from Italy, seems bemused by human relationships and bewildered by the violence which intrudes both into his Roman sightseeing and into his English political assumptions. In the seventh letter to Canto II he describes the messy, almost casual murder of a priest by a Republican mob:

> I was returning home from St Peter's; Murray, as usual
> Under my arm, I remember; had crossed the St Angelo bridge; and
> Moving towards the Condotti, had got to the first barricade, when
> Gradually, still thinking of St Peter's, I became conscious
> Of a sensation of movement opposing me,—tendency that way
> (Such as one fancies may be in a stream when the wave of the tide is
> Coming and not yet come,—a sort of poise and retention);
> So I turned, and, before I turned, caught sight of stragglers
> Heading a crowd, it is plain, that is coming behind that corner . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> and now the
> Crowd is coming, has turned, has crossed the last barricade, is
> Here at my side. In the middle they drag at something. What is it?
> Ha! bare swords in the air, held up! There seem to be voices
> Pleading and hands putting back; official, perhaps; but the swords are
> Many, and bare in the air. In the air? They descend; they are smiting
> Hewing, chopping—At what? In the air once more upstretched! And
> Is it blood that's on them? Yes, certainly blood! Of whom, then?
> Over whom is the cry of this furor of exultation?

Claude's conversational tone here, commas, dashes, questions, and all, allows for a sense of incomprehending urgency. Elsewhere, his detachment becomes almost mocking, variously shifting his tone from one of polite chit-chat to discussions of religion, from a disillusion with Roman monuments to sexual flirtation, from artistic discrimination to political nonchalance. As its title suggests, *Amours de Voyage* is a love-poem, or rather it is a poem about casual love-making and love-doubting. Its fragmentary nature and its revolutionary setting establish an awareness of the transitory and arbitrary nature of human contact and human experience, something which had been less successfully dealt with in Clough's earlier narrative experiment *The Bothie of Tober na Vuolich* (1848). Shifting perspectives and a fascination with religion and with the failure of the religious impulse also mark Clough's best lyric verse, such as 'The New Sinai' and 'Bethesda: A Sequel'. His real enough sympathy with the Italian Risorgimento is clear in politically committed poems such as 'Peschiera' and

'Alteram Partem'; his playful, mildly provocative wit shines through his jests about money, in 'Spectator ab Extra' (with its chorus 'How pleasant it is to have money, heigh ho!'), and his commentary on moneyed middle-class misinterpretations of the Ten Commandments in 'The Latest Decalogue'.

Clough's poems were collected posthumously in 1862 and 1869 when the impact of his religious and social agnosticism was heightened by sympathetic echoes in the work of other distinctly 'modern' writers. From the 1860s onwards the writing of the century's greatest art critic, John Ruskin (1819–1900) assumed an equally challenging new edge. Ruskin's 'agnosticism', if it can properly be described as such, consisted of a gradual rejection of the narrow, strident Protestantism of his childhood and early manhood and in a discovery of a puzzling multifariousness in the natural, industrial, spiritual, and human worlds. In 1860 he had begun publishing in the newly founded *Cornhill Magazine* a series of essays, entitled *Unto This Last*, concerning the economic and social integrity of mid-Victorian Britain, but the challenges he threw down to the readers of the journal proved offensive to middle-class palates and he was obliged to abort the series (the essays appeared in book form in 1862). The essays attempt to redefine value by moving beyond economic theory into moral speculation. Ruskin expresses himself with a bald, almost innocent, simplicity, steadily establishing his premisses and drawing conclusions which demolish a complacent economic and social *laissez-faire*. His basis is firmly Christian, deriving much of its language and metaphoric power from the parables of Jesus, but his definitions were intended to apply not simply to an ancient agrarian economy, but to a modern industrial society blinded by acquisitiveness. Definitions of value, he insisted, must be related to whatever 'avails towards life'. The 'real science of political economy' as he defined it, had to be distinguished from an existing 'bastard' science of economics in order that it might teach nations both 'to desire and labour for the things that lead to life' and to 'scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction'. Ruskin's moral teaching, like his art criticism, was not to be confined and defined by accepted dogmas, disciplines, and sectarian interpretations. *Unto This Last* applies basic Christianity to a mechanized and urban civilization that he increasingly found morally and aesthetically repugnant. It later became one of the pillars of a very English, untheoretical Socialism.

Ruskin's literary career consisted of a hugely expanding, but interconnected, series of experimental essays. He began in *Modern Painters* (1843, 1846, 1856, 1860) by ambitiously attempting to place the paintings of J. M. W. Turner in various contexts, most startlingly of all in relation to extensive and multifarious definitions of Truth, Beauty, Imagination, Representation, and Nature. The third volume of *Modern Painters* (1856) is broadly, typically, and somewhat disconcertingly, subtitled 'Of Many Things'. The vast learning and the range of literary references in *Modern Painters* still allows for substantial and carefully worked descriptive passages where Ruskin's wonderfully emotive mastery of a lucid style is most evident. The slow evolution of the often sprawling

arguments of *Modern Painters* was interrupted in 1849 by the composition of an influential treatise on the art of building—*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*—and by the three volumes of *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3). Ruskin's work has sometimes been seen as a series of digressions from a central concern with painting, digressions which lead him into increasingly arcane and voluminous analysis. His books are better seen as complements to one another, growing organically from related roots, stems, and branches, but developed in particular ways. His concern with the problems of modern society, for instance, is always implicit in his dissections of historic experience and achievement; once it emerges explicitly, as in the famous chapter on 'The Nature of Gothic' in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), he establishes certain leading ideas which he insistently develops in other essays, tracts, and lectures. His discussion of the triumph and decline of Venice links geography to geology, urban history to economic and social history, painting to religion, architecture to morality and to a perception of shape and colour. His Venice, though meticulously observed in its historic context, is always a paradigm for Victorian Britain. If its glory could potentially also be Britain's, so, he warns, could its decline into insignificance and its political extinction.

Ruskin's work requires multiple reading. Its encyclopaedic density is always related both to its complex structures and to its attempt to co-ordinate an often contradictory pattern of observations and understandings. His frenetic energy, his expository imagination, his exploration, and his attempts to hold a range of disparate elements together were, however, countered by the increasing strains of mental breakdown. From the 1870s his work is yet more miscellaneous, though often brilliant in the gestures which illuminate an increasing darkness and in an occasional clarity which balances a pervasive desperation. His digressive and evasive autobiography *Praeterita*, published serially between 1885 and 1889, marginalizes the painful elements in his experience and concentrates instead on formative traits and, above all, on his private and meticulous discovery of nature and art. His late prose has an extraordinary limpidity, rising to *crescendi* and melting away into contemplation. *Praeterita* suggests something of the force with which Ruskin helped his contemporaries to see and to analyse what they saw. He was ravished not simply by the Alps or by Turner's representations of the sublime, but by the delicate and the ostensibly inconsequential, by hoar frost and by the 'beautiful lines' of a small aspen tree against the blue sky near Fontainebleau, 'composed . . . by finer laws than any known of men'. He saw 'the thing itself' and communicated both a scientific enthusiasm and a semi-religious wonder to the vast and various body of his disciples.

The 'Second Spring' and Hopkins

In spite of the very public admissions of religious doubt, and the post-Darwinian accentuation of the so-called Victorian 'crisis of faith', the

nineteenth century remained a profoundly religious age, a period when the faith of Britain's numerous, and often mutually antagonistic, Christian confessions still managed to touch all classes and moulded both their social morality and their patterns of thought. If a substantial body of conscience-stricken intellectuals found themselves bereft of a comfortable faith and persuaded of the validity of arguments against a revealed religion, a considerable swathe of the working classes was reconverted by the energy, conviction, and respectability of the numerous Nonconformist chapels and reclaimed by the rituals of the Anglican and Roman churches. Very few Dissenting ministers found favour with Victorian novelists, however, their zeal being frequently confused with cant, their Puritan heritage implying that they were sympathetic neither to the arts nor to the existing social order. Upwardly mobile Dissenters were supposedly notorious defectors to the Established Church, while the more vociferously eccentric of their ministers were caricatured as Dickens's Melchisedek Howlers, red-nosed Stigginses, and oily Chadbands. Only with Elizabeth Gaskell's patient Quakers and socially conscious Unitarians and George Eliot's Methodists do the Nonconformist faithful find sympathetic delineators. George Eliot is also the most scrupulous and fair observer of the social impact of the Anglican Evangelical movement of the early 1800s, a movement deriving much of its own spirituality and drive from the earlier example of Methodism. Her representation of the mission of the Reverend Edgar Tryon to the backsliding community of Milby, in the third and longest of her *Scenes of Clerical Life*, forms a striking contrast to the very different antipathy provoked by the arrival in Barchester of Trollope's crusading Mrs Proudie and her protégé, Obadiah Slope (it is evident that Trollope shares much of his characters' dyspeptic reaction to the disruptive innovators).

Trollope's Barchester novels also touch on the other Anglican revolution, the Catholic revival within the Church of England known from its place of origin in the early 1830s as the 'Oxford Movement'. The Oxford Movement redirected an old-fashioned High Churchmanship into new channels of spirituality and reform; it was both a reaction against State interference in religious affairs in the 'Age of Reform' and a revitalization of the spirit of the great sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines, Hooker, Laud, Andrewes, Ferrar, Donne, Herbert, and Ken. It stimulated a new generation of hymn writers and poets, primarily John Keble (1792–1866), the author of the placid, but much reprinted, volume *The Christian Year* (1827) which offered meditations on the festivals of the Anglican church year. The new attention to liturgy and to liturgical celebration emphasized by the leaders of the Oxford Movement also encouraged the translation of Latin and Greek hymns, such as those of John Mason Neale (1818–66), and the considerable body of religious poetry of the pious Christina Rossetti (who was steadily and devoutly drawn to Anglican ritualism).

The dominant figure amongst the original leaders of the Oxford revival was John Henry Newman (1801–90), a theologian of great originality, an elaborately

persuasive thinker, preacher, and essayist, an elegantly fluent composer of prose argument, a poet of occasional subtletly, and the author of two creakily propagandist novels. Newman's probingly scrupulous mind led him inevitably away from attempts to justify the Anglican compromise into the newly energetic Roman Catholic Church, a Church romantically emerging in England from three centuries of persecution and enforced obscurity (Newman referred in a sermon to its new status and to its revived hierarchy as a 'Second Spring'). His conversion, certainly the most notable, even notorious, in nineteenth-century England, seemed to assert the renewed strengths and attractions of dogmatic and ceremonial religion in an age characterized by scholarly questioning and secular doubt. Newman's laboured but witty description of the process of conversion in his Oxford novel *Loss and Gain* (1848) is balanced by the detailed, if often evasive, account of his life and character later presented in the autobiographical *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864, 1865).

To Dickens, and other Victorian progressives, the assertiveness of the Oxford Movement and the magnetism of the revived Roman Church seemed to be dangerous examples of 'Ecclesiastical Dandyism', an undoing of national history and a self-indulgent withdrawal from more urgent modern concerns. The career of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89) might certainly have suggested the impropriety of such a withdrawal had the nature of his twin vocations to the Jesuit priesthood and to poetry been more widely known to his contemporaries. His conversion to Roman Catholicism at Oxford, and his decision to enter the Society of Jesus in 1868, effectively cut him off from the mainstream of contemporary English life. The failure of his Jesuit superiors to recognize and encourage his idiosyncratic poetic talent also severed him from the body of prospective readers to which he most earnestly sought to appeal. He burned much of his early work on his ordination and took up poetry again only in 1875 with the startlingly radical 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', a poem which the editor of the Jesuit periodical, *The Month*, decided that he 'dared not print'. No representative edition of Hopkins's poetry appeared until 1918.

Hopkins was fortunate in the poet-friends with whom he corresponded, Richard Watson Dixon and Robert Bridges (1844–1930), the latter his literary executor and editor. These non-Jesuit correspondents were the recipients of the theories that he attempted to articulate and of the often extraordinary poems that were developed in relation to these experimental ideas. After 1918 his work found the wide receptive audience which it had earlier been denied, but Hopkins's experiments, like the culture from which they emerge, remain essentially of the nineteenth century. As his Journals reveal, he observed nature in painstaking detail, patiently examining flowers and leaves, intently noting the effects of light and shade, and delighting in the gradations of texture and colour. Given the stringency of his Jesuit surroundings, his immediate culture may have been one of aesthetic deprivation, but his habits of observation and

recording had been long acquired. His attention to the exactness of things is indeed akin to that of the Pre-Raphaelite painters (if not to Pre-Raphaelite poets) and his methods of analysis indicate a scrupulous Ruskinian apprenticeship. Hopkins's intellectual disciplines certainly benefited from his study of theology, and in particular from his somewhat eccentric (given the prejudices of his teachers) pleasure in the thought of the thirteenth-century philosopher Duns Scotus ('who of all men most sways my spirits to peace'). His poetry may have been far too idiosyncratic to appeal to the somewhat saccharine tastes of his contemporary co-religionists, but his structures derive from highly disciplined and often traditional ways of thinking, seeing, translating, and writing.

Most of Hopkins's surviving poems are distinctly God-centred. His is a God who resolves contradictions as the fount of all that is and as the Creator who draws all the strands of Creation back to himself. Created nature is in itself immensely precious, for the glory and wonder of God is implicit in it. In 'Pied Beauty' Hopkins celebrates harmonized oppositions, dapples and 'all things counter, original, spare, strange' because they express the energy and vitality of the visible world, a world held together by a divine force which constantly regenerates it. Undoing, desolation, and the 'problem of pain' are, however, never eliminated from his most searching poems. At times it is humankind which mars the integrity of beauty by unfeelingly trampling 'the growing green', by felling the 'especial' sweetness of a line of poplars, or by caging skylarks, but Hopkins is never simply or naïvely 'green'. His poems also explore the presence of violence in the realm of the parahuman. Despite the wonder of it, the windhover's ecstatic swoop is none the less predatorial, breaking lines and straining words as it falls:

> I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
> dom of daylights dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
> Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
> High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
>
> In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
> As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
> Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
> Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing.
>
> Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
> Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
> Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
>
> No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
> Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
> Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The windhover's beauty is 'brute', yet its 'brutality' is of the essence of its animal perfection. Hopkins's poem gasps at the wonder of a creature whose free movement and concentrated strength stir an awesome sense of the

presence of the Creator-Redeemer (its subtitle directs it 'To Christ our Lord'). Elsewhere in his work, most notably in the complex theological frameworks of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and the parallel poem 'The Loss of the Eurydice', Hopkins ponders the mystery of human suffering by forging parallels with a paradoxical Christ, the Man of Sorrows and the Suffering Servant who is, at the same time, the Divine Judge and the Merciful Redeemer. He pulls dissolution into resolution by seeing patterns, not simply in the seasons or in the forms of nature, but also in religious imagery, in the observances of the Christian calendar, and in the ultimate meaning of the universe. The very intricacy of his verse is an attempt to express and record something of the multifariousness of the visible and aural world. The very 'difficulty' and the contortion of his poetry, its intellectual leaps and its violent 'metaphysical' yoking together of images, offer a momentary stasis and a fusion of divergent insights and impressions. Hopkins found order where other Victorians saw anarchy; he recognized purpose where many of his contemporaries began to despair over what they presumed was an increasingly meaningless fragmentation. Even in his dark, straining, disappointing, despairing last sonnets ('No worst, there is none', 'To seem the stranger lies my lot', 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day', 'Patience, hard thing!', 'My own heart let me have more pity on') there still remains the conviction that somehow a barely comprehended God comprehends all things.

Coda: Carroll and Lear

On 4 July 1862, a full year before Hopkins went up to Balliol College, Oxford, the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832–98), a mathematics don at Christ Church, Oxford, began to tell the story which he provisionally entitled *Alice's Adventures Underground* to the children of Dean Liddell. The 'golden afternoon' of fond memory was, according to the meteorological records of the period, a 'cool and rather wet' day in Oxford, but the narrative that emerged from that damp picnic on the banks of the Thames plays throughout its course with reversals, projections, upheavals, and dreams. Lewis Carroll, the name under which Dodgson disguised himself for the publication in 1865 of the revised story, now renamed *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, had managed to transcend the dry reserve demanded by his clerical and educational position. After a period of scrupulous hesitation, in which he had looked for a vocation amid what he described in his diary as the propounded 'nostrums' and the negative 'Babel of voices' of mid-Victorian England, Dodgson had accepted the dull stability of life as a mathematics don and had been ordained a deacon in the Church of England. 'It is a *good* thing', his bishop had remarked, 'that many of our educators should be men in Holy Orders.' The author of *A Syllabus of Plain Algebraical Geometry* (1860), *Condensation of Determinants* (1866), and *Euclid and his Modern Rivals* (1879) appears to have remained untroubled by the

scientific and religious controversies of his time, yet it is perhaps from a combination of a rapt delight in mathematical order and pattern and a perception of the workings of God in a shapely universe that the logic of his children's fantasies emerges. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872), and *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) have quite eclipsed Dodgson's professional scholarship, but all three suggest a pleasure in exploring nonsense because nonsense, like looking-glasses, offered an alternative way of viewing things. 'Lewis Carroll' recognizes the joy in disjunction, distortion, and displacement because they are mirror images of unity, shapeliness, and stability.

The emergence of an intelligent and whimsical children's literature was perhaps the most remarkable result of the revolution in sensibility which came to see children as distinct from adults rather than as adults-in-waiting. Essentially the work of both Carroll and of Edward Lear (1812–88) transformed adult assumptions by considering them through the eyes of children. Pomposity, pretension, and all conventional pieties have, therefore, to be radically rejudged and re-presented. This is not to say that Victorian children's literature rigorously excludes adult concerns, but that however gloomy and perplexing the grown-up world might seem to be, there remained a space in which the playful and the joyfully absurd could triumph. There is a wistful sadness about the work of both Carroll and Lear, both of them lonely and to some degree unfulfilled men, but neither dwells self-indulgently on the problems of the alienated adult self. For both, the recapture of childhood seems to offer release. Lear's world is full of terrors, errors, and misapprehensions (as his limericks vividly suggest) but the sing-song of his rhythms holds them (just) in their due place. If his longer poems ('The Owl and the Pussy Cat' and 'The Jumblies' of 1871 and 'The Dong with a Luminous Nose' of 1877) echo something of the nostalgic, elusive yearning of Tennyson, when Lear writes directly of himself (as in the lyric, 'How pleasant to know Mr Lear') his lightness of touch banishes melancholy almost as soon as it is evoked:

'How pleasant to know Mr Lear!'
  Who has written such volumes of stuff!
Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
  But a few think him pleasant enough. . . .

He weeps by the side of the ocean,
  He weeps on the top of the hill;
He purchases pancakes and lotion,
  And chocolate shrimps from the mill.

He reads but he cannot read Spanish,
  He cannot abide ginger-beer;
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,
  How pleasant to know Mr Lear!

For Lewis Carroll, poetry offered the opportunity to play rhythmically with the paradoxes and whimsically with philosophical propositions which clearly

fascinated him in his professional life. This is evident not simply in his parodies of Isaac Watts, Southey, or Wordsworth or in his jesting at Old English verse (in 'Jabberwocky') but also in his stretchings of logic in *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) and of sense in 'The Walrus and the Carpenter':

> The sun was shining on the sea,
> Shining with all his might:
> He did his best to make
> The billows smooth and bright—
> And this was odd, because it was
> The middle of the night.

In Carroll's narratives paradox finds resolution once there has been assent to the idea of an ultimate and alternative order in which the findings of science, philosophy, and religion are not in conflict. The two Alice books have a commonsensical protagonist, a child insistent on the rightness of the values of middle-class society and of the elementary education that she takes with her into landscapes which warp, overturn, and subvert ordinary perception. Alice survives her nightmares perhaps because she is only partly aware that they are nightmares; her self-confidence gives her a mental clarity which can counter the games, the formulae, and the twisted syllogisms which confront her. When the universe periodically threatens to explode or dissolve around her, Alice the representative child is rendered a survivor both by her own earnest assurance and by the circumambient, often riddling logic of the narrative. Alice wakes from her dreams, or crosses back through the looking-glass into what child readers are led to assume is an emotionally, physically, and intellectually secure world. Its securities proved far less certain to the generation of newly mature writers whose work dominated the closing years of the nineteenth century.