

Revolution (1789–1798)

The 'Revolution Controversy'

The books, pamphlets, and essays written in response, pro and con, to the French Revolution constitute a vehement battle of ideas now called the 'Revolution Controversy'.¹ Leading supporters of the French Revolution were Thomas Paine, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Principle opponents included Edmund Burke, William Windham, Arthur Young, and, through the succession of *The Anti-Jacobin*, George Canning, William Gifford, and John Gifford. These alliances crossed party boundaries between Whigs and Tories; or, rather, the shifting alliances caused factional party divisions. After using his influence in the Whig party to rally support of the American Revolutionaries and Catholic emancipation, Burke surprised many of his constituency when he opposed the French Revolution. He thus became a leader of a conservative faction within the Whig Party. The repudiation of the events in France was articulated by Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Burke defended the rights of the landed gentry, who saw much to be risked and nothing to be gained in the overthrow of the existing monarchy. Burke represented a strong constituency, but nevertheless only a fraction of a large populace lacking property and therefore lacking voting rights as well. With Burke representing the 'Old Whigs', Charles James Fox was called upon as spokesperson for the pro-revolution 'New Whigs'. As the violence increased, more of the pro-revolution faction switched sides. A turning point came early in 1793 with the British declaration of war against France.

The first printing of Paine's *Rights of Man* (13 March 1791) quickly sold out. Burke's *Reflections* sold 30,000 copies; Paine's *Rights* sold nearly a million copies.² Aware of the government efforts to block further publication, Paine nevertheless proceeded with his *Rights of Man, Part the Second, Combining Principle and Practice* in February 1792. Potentially more volatile, this second part outlined the steps to put the changes into practice. Paine described the

formation of representative government, the establishment of schools and social programs, and the alleviation of excessive tax burden on commoners by means of progressive taxation, which would shift the burden to the wealthier. If a government resisted changes that would benefit its citizens, those citizens had the right to overthrow their government. The British government considered Paine's work a seditious threat. Both publisher and author were indicted for seditious libel. The trial commenced on 18 December 1792. Paine was tried *in absentia*, found guilty, and sentenced to be executed were he to be found again in his own country.

Advocates of individual rights – Thomas Paine, John Horne Tooke, John Thelwall – were joined by other groups campaigning for equality and freedom. Thomas Clarkson wrote on the injustice of slavery in 1785 as a student at Cambridge, and subsequently published his *Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788) and *An Essay on the Slave Trade* (1789). Women playwrights effectively dramatized the exploitation of women in factories as well as in the domestic workplace. Women novelists, too, boldly engaged feminist issues, as in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), and Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1804). Also, being launched in polemical tracts and essays was the vigorous campaign including Mary Hays in *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793), Catharine Macaulay in her *Letters on Education* (1790), and Priscilla Wakefield in *Reflection of the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798). The best-known contribution to this campaign was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

Fear of French invasion was a major factor in inhibiting the progress of the reform efforts. England's declaration of war on France made it difficult to declare the enemy as a model to be emulated. With the advent of the bloody Reign of Terror (September 1793 to 28 July 1794), sympathy with the cause of radical revision of government was effectively diminished. Former followers of Paine or of Godwin abruptly altered their allegiance. William Windham, once a supporter of the French Revolution, joined Burke and became a leading anti-Jacobin. Like Burke, Windham denounced Jacobinism, but he argued that Britain must make room for French *émigrés*. Expecting no long continuation of war, Windham favoured a return of the Bourbon monarchy on the model of Britain's Restoration of 1660 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. As is evident in his *Plain and Earnest Address to Britons* (November 1792), Arthur Young adopted the arguments of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Young's simpler prose was well suited for popular distribution. Again confirming his adherence to the principles of the 'Old Whigs', Young opposed the reform motion in Parliament from the second Earl Grey and issued his caveat, *Example of France a Warning to Britain* (1793), against the liberal policies of the 'New Whigs'.

The Civil War (1642–1651), the Glorious Revolution (1688), and the American Revolution (1776) were repeatedly cited as models for civic uprisings

to enforce reform. With each of these historical precursors came disparate records documenting the extent of destruction and slaughter assumed justifiable in realizing the change. Historical narratives were adapted to support one side or the other in the Revolution Controversy. The radicals argued that the revolution in France, as an endeavour to restrict the powers of the monarchy, was analogous to the Glorious Revolution. Burke, however, asserted that the more relevant analogy was the Civil War, which similarly chose regicide to achieve its ends. If citizens were to revolt against their government, argued Burke, the act would undermine not just the prevailing order, but the very norms of culture and civilization that make a peaceful coexistence possible. Governments evolve from centuries of social development and progress. Once prevailing political consensus and established traditions are rejected, anarchy will ensue.

Writing in the 1840s, Thomas Babington Macaulay was a Whig statesman and very much a Whig historian. He served as Secretary at War between 1839 and 1841, the years that saw the outbreak of the First Opium War with China, but also the end of the Afghan War and Britain's sovereignty in Hong Kong. Throughout a dozen ensuing years, Macaulay worked zealously on his *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (1848–1856). The label 'Whig history' implies a pejorative sense of convenient half-truths and an insistence on progress. Macaulay was indeed committed as historian to tracing the progress and continuing advancement of the liberal freedoms. Had he lived in the 1790s he would have stood with Burke in idealizing tradition and opposing radicalism. In describing the course of events as a national or cultural teleological drive towards ever greater liberty and enlightenment, Macaulay praises the Glorious Revolution for having prepared the way for constitutional monarchy and thus avoiding the bloody terror of revolutionary France: 'this revolution, of all revolutions the least violent, has been of all revolutions the most beneficent.'³ Macaulay's pronouncement that it was 'our last revolution' obscures the fact that injustices and factional strife were by no means resolved.

Well before the storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789), the elements of the controversy had already been voiced by Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and other dissenting clergymen and advocates of rights, reform, representative government, and the separation of church and state. Price's sermon defending the French Revolution, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), denounced the extravagance of aristocratic privileges in terms that were answered by Edmund Burke's *Reflections*, justifying monarchical tradition, a strong House of Lords, and the necessity of aristocratic government. Because Burke had previously been a critic of monarchical power and defended the declaration of the American colonists that 'taxation without representation is tyranny', many thought that he would support the French revolutionaries. In response to the American colonists, however, Burke had not called for the taxation to cease, nor had he advocated actual representation. In his Parliamentary speech *On American Taxation* (1774), Burke maintained that it would suffice that

America was ‘virtually’ represented in Parliament.⁴ Not Burke, but William Pitt, the Elder, upheld the American protest against taxation: ‘this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the colonies.’⁵ Burke had long affirmed aristocratic paternalism and hereditary rank and property. His *Reflections* were no belated reiteration of traditional values.⁶

British intellectuals appraised the early stages of the French Revolution in terms of its ideals of *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, the cry subsequently adopted as the national motto of France. Any attempt of citizens to overthrow their government, Burke reminded his readers, must be judged an act of treason. William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft developed the counterarguments which called for an increase in personal liberty and a larger representation of the people by limiting the authority of the House of Lords and expanding the House of Commons. Influenced by Price’s sermons at Newington Green, Wollstonecraft crafted a refutation of Burke in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). The following year, in *Rights of Man* (1791), Paine declared that a political revolution is justified whenever a government fails to safeguard its people and the free exercise of their rights. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin observed that political institutions had limited practicality and would be dismissed as mankind advanced. With his doctrines of necessity and perfectibility, he argued that individuals would use their reason to decide the best course of action, and thus render restrictive governmental control superfluous.

Newington Green Circle and Richard Price

Prior to the Revolution Controversy factional meetings were already forming to share ideas on social responsibility and change. Among these the Newington Green Circle, headed by Richard Price, gained considerable influence through the liberal-minded intellectuals who promoted and helped disseminate his ideas. The Unitarian Church, where Price had taken up his ministry in 1758, was the centre of the Newington Green Circle. Among the congregation were Samuel Vaughan and his family.⁷ In spite of his embarrassment in the Jamaican bribery scandal (1769),⁸ Vaughan subsequently counted George Washington and Ben Franklin among his American correspondents. In the 1780’s, several of the prominent radicals met at Vaughan’s house, including John Horne Tooke, who successfully defended Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall, and others charged with high treason in the trials of 1794. Also a visitor at Vaughan’s house was Christopher Wyvill, who called for moderation in his *Defence of Dr. Price and the Reformers of England* (1792).⁹ Price, too, was visited by Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, as well as by prison reformer John Howard, medical doctor and reformer John Jebb,¹⁰ and his wife Ann Jebb, whose reformist arguments appeared in the *London Chronicle*, the *Whitehall Evening Post*, and

the *Monthly Repository*.¹¹ The *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (1758, revised 3rd ed. 1787) contains Price's theory of moral action based on a rationally derived sense of duty or obligation, a theory which is allied to the 'categorical imperative' introduced in Immanuel Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785).¹² Price's classical sources were Cicero and Panaetius. His translations earned him recognition along with Thomas Taylor among the contemporary Platonists.¹³

With Theophilus Lindsey, who established in 1774 England's first Unitarian congregation in the Essex Street Chapel, London, Richard Price launched a campaign to end the exclusion and repression of those of non-Anglican faith. John Jebb, Christopher Wyvill, and Edmund Law assisted in preparing a petition to Parliament to repeal the Test Act. By relieving clergymen of the church and graduates of the universities of the burden of subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles, drawn up in 1553 and instituted in 1571, individuals would regain their rights of interpreting scripture independently. In spite of the support of 250 signatures, the petition was refused by an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons in 1772. When the attempt was made again in 1773, the adverse vote was repeated. In December 1789, Price persuaded the Revolution Society and the Society for Constitutional Information to combine their efforts in condemning the Test Act as an unwarranted restriction on religious freedom.¹⁴ Intended to exclude Roman Catholics and Nonconformists from the universities and from civil and church offices, the Test Act of 1663 was not repealed until 1828.

Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft, who moved from Islington to Newington Green in 1784, quickly adopted much of Price's philosophy. Through Price's circle she met Joseph Priestley, William Godwin, and Joseph Johnson. As editor of the *New Analytical Review*, founded in May 1788, Johnson encouraged Wollstonecraft to contribute her essays. And as publisher of women authors and many of the radical thinkers, Johnson offered to publish her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), knowing that it would arouse considerable controversy. Price's arguments about equality were shrewdly extended by Wollstonecraft to include women's education and women's active role in society. Largely self-educated, she regarded extensive reading and mastery of writing as essential to women's advancement. From the age of 18, she was required to support herself, finding employment as a lady's companion, a seamstress, and a governess; she was finally able to establish a school with her two sisters in Newington Green. Her first book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), was published by Joseph Johnson and addressed her ideas on female education to the women of the emerging middle class, who were destined to experience wage-earning obligations not familiar to women of previous generations. Johnson also published her

novel *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and her *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788). Johnson employed her as a translator, and as a reviewer for his newly founded *Analytical Review*. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) established her reputation and notoriety as foremost woman author among the radical reformers.

In December 1792, about the time that William Wordsworth was returning from his year in France and leaving behind Annette Villon pregnant with his daughter Caroline, Wollstonecraft arrived in Paris determined to observe at first hand the progress of the revolution. Her major work of this period was *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe*, published by Johnson in 1794. During this period, she also had an affair with Gilbert Imlay, an American sea captain, the father of her daughter Fanny, born in 1794. Wollstonecraft's passion was not reciprocated. She became suicidal upon discovering that Imlay was involved with another woman. Desperate to please him, she travelled to Scandinavia with her infant daughter in an effort to retrieve a portion of Imlay's losses in shipping. She gives an account of this venture in her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, published by Johnson in 1796.

Recovering from her failed relationship with Imlay, she sought the friends she had made in Price's Newington Green Circle. When Price died on 19 April 1791, the circle lost its centre. Priestley said farewell to Price in the funeral sermon he delivered on 1 May 1791.¹⁵ In 1794, Priestley departed from England to spend the last 10 years of his life in Pennsylvania. Two former members of Price's circle, Godwin and Johnson, had established their own circles, and Wollstonecraft was welcomed into both. Through Johnson's circle she met Mary Hays and Elizabeth Inchbald. Johnson had earlier arranged for William Blake to provide the illustrations for her *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788). In the meantime, Blake had written his illuminated prophecy, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) under the influence of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792); he may have based on her the character of Oothoon.¹⁶

The advent of the revolution in France was greeted in England with a surge of radicalism and the demand for constitutional reform. Following Paine's *Rights of Man* (Part 1, 1791; Part 2, 1792) and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Godwin's *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) was among the most influential arguments on human rights. In his *Spirit of the Age* (1825), William Hazlitt opened the entry on Godwin with an anecdote: "Throw aside your books of chemistry," said Wordsworth to a young man, a student in the Temple, "and read Godwin on Necessity."¹⁷ The anecdote is usually cited to argue that Wordsworth, at least for a time, was among Godwin's ardent followers. Hazlitt met Godwin in 1794, and was with Wordsworth and Coleridge in Nether Stowey, so the anecdote deserves some credibility. Beyond an endorsement of Godwin, the statement that Hazlitt attributes to Wordsworth raises other questions: Why 'books of chemistry'? and

why does Wordsworth deliver this advice to ‘a student in the Temple’? Ignoring a third question, why a student of law would have books of chemistry, it might be supposed that Wordsworth, like the Ancient Mariner, ‘knows the man who must hear his tale.’ The causal reasoning of chemistry has the advantage of repeated testing of empirical evidence. The causal reasoning of law is based on evidence and interpretation, but it also has responsibility to real human circumstances and needs. Law, not chemistry, is the arena of reform.

But each of the two modes of causality, the physical and the mental, contributed to the understanding of the other. Godwin was indebted to David Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) for this argument that inferences of causality were always conditional. All that we can observe of causality is the existence of certain regularities. Godwin also believed that science has examined these regularities in minute detail. The growth of scientific knowledge has continually expanded our ability to use the appearance of antecedents to predict the appearance of consequents.¹⁸ In the fifth chapter of *Political Justice*, Godwin’s discussed ‘Free Will and Necessity’, and in the sixth chapter he attended to ‘Inferences from the Doctrine of Necessity’. The reader is prompted to anticipate a revisiting of the problem concerning free will vs. determinism that had been debated since the time of Aristotle. That anticipation is not misleading, but the grounds of the debate have been changed. Free will is not the condition opposite to absolute causal determinism; rather, free will is available to all who make the intellectual choice to use it. Nor does necessity imply a universal scheme of unalterable connections of cause and effect. For Godwin, necessity is the operative condition of perfectibility. Godwin’s necessity is a moral necessity and therefore more closely akin to the Kantian Categorical Imperative than to mechanistic determinism. Godwin considered Necessity a more rigorous mandate than Price’s theory of moral action as a rationally confirmed sense of duty.

Causal necessity and moral necessity exist in two totally different contexts. The former is physical, the latter is mental:

He who affirms that all actions are necessary, means, that, if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not in any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted. According to this assertion there is in the transactions of mind nothing loose, precarious and uncertain. Upon this question the advocate of liberty in the philosophical sense must join issue. He must, if he mean any thing, deny this certainty of conjunction between moral antecedents and consequents. Where all is constant and invariable, and the events that arise uniformly flow from the circumstances in which they originate, there can be no liberty.

(*Political Justice*, Ch. 5)

Godwin argues against the notion that the will is a function of the mind separate from mental discernment. There is no distinction, he insists at the close of

Chapter 5, ‘between the intellectual and active powers of the mind.’ Once the intellect discerned what is preferable for survival, for advancement, for prosperity, there is no need for some distinct power of will to put the body in motion. Chapter 6 explains why will is not a separate function but simply the mental action in accord with necessity. Abandoning necessity is an abrogation of freedom. On the other hand, persistently acting in accord with necessity, with what is preferable for survival, for advancement, for prosperity, will contribute to the ongoing perfectibility of the human condition.

Although members of Johnson’s circle also took part in Godwin’s circle, the former were primarily authors, while Godwin also attracted a society active in other arts and enterprise. Through Godwin Wollstonecraft met Sarah Siddons, London’s leading actress, and Amelia Alderson, author of *Dangers of Coquetry* (1790), whose successful career as novelist commenced only after she married the artist John Opie in 1798.¹⁹ Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Godwin grew intimate, and when she found herself again pregnant, they married on 29 March 1797. On 30 August 1797, Wollstonecraft gave birth to her second daughter, Mary. Infection of the placenta resulted in her death on 10 September 1797. Godwin published her *Posthumous Works* and his *Memoir* in 1798.²⁰ His revelations concerning her private life damaged her public reputation, hindering the advancement in women’s rights that she had vigorously upheld.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld

In 1787, another advocate of human rights, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and her husband Rochemont Barbauld, moved to Hampstead where he was invited to serve as the minister at what later became Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel. Here Barbauld became close friends with Joanna Baillie, who would soon achieve fame as a playwright. Barbauld acquired a vigorous voice in her contributions to the radical press. From 1787 to 1790, Charles James Fox attempted to convince the House of Commons to pass a law granting Dissenters full citizenship rights. When this bill was defeated for the third time, Barbauld wrote her passionate pamphlets, *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*. After attending the funeral sermon for Price delivered by Joseph Priestley on 1 May 1791, she recollected his campaign to abolish the Test Act. She joined Priestley in praising Price’s unblemished character as ‘able to bear the severest scrutiny; neither slander, nor envy, nor party prejudice, ever pretended to find a spot in it.’²¹ In 1791, after William Wilberforce’s attempt to outlaw the slave trade failed, Barbauld published her *Epistle to William Wilberforce Esq. On the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade*, which not only lamented the fate of the slaves but also warned of the cultural and social degeneration the British could expect if they did not abandon slavery. In 1793, she continued this theme of national responsibility in an anti-war sermon entitled *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, which argued that each individual is responsible

for the actions of the nation. Not until 1802 did the Barbaulds take up residence in Stoke Newington, where Rochemont took over the pastoral duties of the Chapel at Newington Green. Although more than a decade had passed since Price's death, five years since Wollstonecraft's death, Barbauld acknowledged the residual influence of the Newington Green Circle. In spite of the benign atmosphere, residence in Newington brought torment into Barbauld's life as her husband's declining mental health was accompanied by fits of murderous rage.²² Subsequent years of Barbauld's career will be discussed in Part Two, the Napoleonic Wars.

Abolition Movement

John Wesley's towering leadership of the evangelicals cannot be overstated, but other leaders include George Whitefield and Hannah More. Under the leadership of William Wilberforce and his circle (often known as the 'Clapham Sect'), evangelical Anglicans led the campaign for broad social reform, fought to abolish the slave system, and published in organs of the movement such as the *Christian Observer* (est. 1802). The twenty-first century introduced reassessments of many early Romantic writers who either were educated within Dissenting communities (Price, Barbauld, Godwin, Hays, Wollstonecraft) or migrated into Dissent from the Church of England (Estlin, Dyer, Wakefield, Friend). In terms of assemblage, the Dissenters provided a major confluence for values, ethical and aesthetic, and modes of composition and communication. Whether in Newington, Warrington, Hoxton, or Enfield, Dissenters fostered thought and expression that might well seem governed by a uniform and pervasive 'spirit of the age'.

The Revolution Controversy created networks, mediated by the Corresponding Societies, of likeminded reformists. Similarly, the Newington Green Circle, as inaugurated by Richard Price, gave support to Unitarians, Baptists, and other dissenting religious sects suffering the repression imposed on all who declined adherence to the Anglican faith. Among other advantages, the networking brought strength in numbers, facilitated organization, and helped achieve desired change. Networking was effective, though provokingly slow, in abolishing slavery.

James Edward Oglethorpe, founder of the colony of Georgia, endeavoured legally to establish and enforce his reformist ideals. He gathered his settlers from those confined in debtors' prisons, and in promoting agricultural development he opposed the reliance on slavery. For a few years he was able to uphold that ban, but his farmers could not compete with those of the neighbouring colonies who relied on slave labour to operate their cotton-growing plantations. In Parliament, however, he continued to rally against the slave-holders. He established a circle of friends, including Granville Sharp and Hannah More, who shared his moral opposition to slavery.²³ After Oglethorpe's death (30 June 1785),

Sharp and More joined with William Wilberforce and a growing number of Abolitionists in forming the Clapham Sect.²⁴

More than other reform movements of the age, those who joined forces to bring an end to the slavery represented widely varied sectors of society. Those from the working class felt a personal kinship with the exploited Africans, who were treated as creatures of limited reason, capable of menial work, but not of independence. Among Nonconformists, the Quakers were especially concerned with rectifying the plight of the slaves. The Clapham Sect, from the Holy Trinity Church on Clapham Common, London, were wealthy evangelical Anglicans dedicated to the liberation of slaves and the abolition of the slave trade.²⁵ John Newton was the founder, and William Wilberforce was their most influential representative in Parliament, aided by three additional Members of Parliament (Thomas Fowell Buxton, Henry Thornton, William Smith), who were also part of the Clapham Sect. Because they emphasized religious feeling and emotional experience over liturgy and dogma, evangelical Anglicans were often associated with the enthusiasm practised by the low church and dissenting sects, in contrast to high church restraint and conformity. Their faith involved sharing through proselytizing, conversion, and baptism. Assisted by Charles Simeon, the Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, the Clapham Sect recruited many from Magdalene College, Cambridge, and gained new members as well from St Edmund Hall at Oxford. The group extended its networks through several missionary and tract societies, including the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Church Missionary Society. The Clapham Sect also published a journal, the *Christian Observer*, edited by Zachary Macaulay from 1802 to 1816.

Crucial to attracting support for the Abolition Movement was acquainting a British populace, the majority of whom had never seen a Negro, with an account of who these people were as well as first-hand testimony of their vicious treatment.

As a young man employed at a sugar plantation in Jamaica, Macaulay witnessed the cruel treatment of slaves, and those scenes of dehumanizing abuse continued to be echoed in his subsequent advocacy of Abolition.²⁶ James Ramsay was another witness to the cruelty of the trade, whose first-hand accounts were widely distributed. Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa), who took the name of the Swedish King as a liberator of his people,²⁷ was one of the most prominent Africans involved in the British debate for the abolition of the slave trade. His *Memoir* established the genre of slave narratives.²⁸ Abducted, transported in chains in a slave ship, forced to work under whip and flail as a slave, Equiano's first-person narrative became highly influential in the anti-slavery movement. Thomas Clarkson wrote to the Reverend Thomas Jones at Trinity College, requesting him to introduce Equiano to the Cambridge community and arrange for Equiano to lecture there. Clarkson secured as well Jones's help in selling copies of Equiano's life story.

Ann Yearsley's *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* (1788) tells of sons and daughters, kidnapped from their native villages, forced to work in

chains, to be whipped and tortured if their work is too slow. Responding to the claims of the plantation owners that their slaves are properly treated, Yearsley describes the torture of the innocent Luco, who begs for death in the agony of being roasted alive. She then denounces the slave-owners as hypocrites for daring to call themselves Christians, for acting without a sense of common humanity:

Is this your piety? Are these your laws,
Whereby the glory of the Godhead spreads
O'er barb'rous climes? Ye hypocrites, disown
The Christian name, nor shame its cause. (lines 315–318)

In the publication of her anti-slavery poems and stories, Yearsley was identified as a milkmaid of Bristol and her poems were read as the expression of a mode of life close, yet without the chains and the whips, to that of the enslaved agricultural workers whom she described.²⁹

The usual story of Yearsley's education as a poet, as told by Robert Southey³⁰ and by Hannah More herself,³¹ is that More had been impressed by Yearsley's natural instincts in expressive language and had guided her reading and encouraged her writing. The actual circumstances, as documented by Kerri Andrews, Yearsley's most recent editor and biographer, are more closely in accord with the prevailing thesis of this *History*: that literature arises from the complex networking within an author's social circle. Andrew's archival material indicated that Yearsley's circle of acquaintances was much wider than More had acknowledged. Yearsley may not have participated in the inner circle of Joseph Cottle's literary gatherings, but she met Thomas Beddoes and other Bristol radicals who were a part of the inner circle who assembled above the bookshop that Cottle had opened in 1791.

On the positive side, More promoted Yearsley's career by introducing her to literary friends in the Clapham Sect and arranging the publication of Yearsley's first volume of poems. Andrews describes how, instead of assisting Yearsley to gain independence as a professional writer, More attempted to keep Yearsley financially dependent by withholding the money earned from her literary efforts and the relationship dissolved into acrimony. Perhaps More feared that Yearsley lacked the skills of thrift, or perhaps she simply enjoyed her control over Yearsley as literary dependent.

As the patronage relationship broke down, their mutual admiration turned into rivalry and animosity. Yearsley included her account of this quarrel in an 'Autobiographical narrative' appended to a fourth edition (1786) of the poems. Even in this negative side, the two women inspired one another. Gaining the patronage of Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol, Yearsley published *Poems, on Various Subjects* in 1787. More's *Slavery, a Poem* and Yearsley's *Poem on the Inhumanity*

of the *Slave-Trade* were published within months of each other in 1788. Yearsley turned to drama with *Earl Goodwin: an Historical Play* (performed in 1789; printed in 1791) and to novel-writing with *The Royal Captives: a Fragment of Secret History, Copied from an Old Manuscript* (1795). Her final collection of poetry, *The Rural Lyre*, appeared in 1796. She was one of many prominent Bristol women who campaigned against the Bristol slave trade. Yearsley died in 1806 at the age of 53.

Eight years Yearsley's senior, More lived a long a productive life, and died the year that the Slavery Abolition Act (1833) was finally passed. Although she participated in the Blue Stocking Salons of Elizabeth Montagu, there was much in the Blue Stocking credo that More rejected. She invested her efforts and talents in women's education. As she makes clear in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), she never approved women's education as an alternative to women's responsibility as wives and mothers. She deplored an education that prompted women 'to study philosophy, and neglect their families to be present at lectures in anatomy.'³² She declared that she would never read Mary Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, and lamented that 'so many women are fond of government ... because they are not fit for it.'

Born in Bristol, she learned Latin and mathematics from her schoolmaster father and modern languages at a school run by her sisters. She began her literary career with various dramatic works, but turned increasingly to moral and religious subjects. The first among her many educational and moral works were *Slavery: A Poem* (1788) and her essay *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1788). In regard to the Revolution Controversy, she was very much on the side of Burke. In her concern with the poor and the lower classes, she advocated a conservative social consciousness in a series of tracts, which she collected as *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795–1798). Two million copies were sold in the first year of publication.

As an active member of the Clapham Sect, Hannah More dedicated much of her literary endeavour to supporting the Abolitionist Movement. Following *Slavery, a Poem* in 1788, More published *The Sorrows of Yamba; or, The Negro Woman's Lamentation* in 1795. William Fox's *Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum* (1791) had a print run of over 70,000 copies during the course of four months. Raw sugar or molasses from the West Indies was sold in England, where it was distilled into rum. Rum and manufactured goods were then taken on board to be shipped to West Africa, where they were bartered for slaves. This triangulation – Caribbean, England, West Africa – meant that the ships were laden for profit on every segment of their journey. 'Anti-saccharism', a national sugar boycott, stirred a grass-roots involvement in Abolition to which the entire population might contribute.³³ James Gillray's depiction of the royal family indicated that not all welcomed the abstention.



Figure 1 James Gillray, *Anti-saccharites, - or - John Bull and his Family leaving off the use of Sugar*. Source: *The Works of James Gillray, from the Original Plates*. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851.³⁴

If other nations had participated, the sugar market might have been significantly diminished by the boycott. The campaign, short-lived though it was, nevertheless increased public awareness of, and involvement in, the growing protest against slave labour. William Fox persisted in his Abolitionist efforts, emphasizing the role of the Wesleyan missionaries on the African coast, several of whom perished in the attempt to prevent the abduction of the black villagers by the ruthless slave-traders.

A member of James Dore's Particular Baptist congregation at the Maze Pond Meeting House, Martha Gurney lent her support as publisher to the anti-slavery pamphleteering, and kept in print the Abolitionist works of several women writers.³⁵ In 1792, Mary Birkett, a Dublin Quaker, published *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to her own Sex, in two parts*. Birkett reaffirms Fox's call for a boycott, and she appeals to the women of Britain as the proper agents to exercise that boycott, for they command the kitchen and can thus restrict the reliance on sugar and rum. Mary Birkett's poem gained resonance in the works by Mary Leadbeater, another Irish Quaker poet. In 1784 Leadbeater travelled to London with her father and visited Edmund Burke at his town house, where she met Sir Joshua Reynolds and George Crabbe. Five years later she published *The Negro: addressed to Edmund Burke* (1789), and another

five years passed before the publication of her history of slavery as school text in *Extracts and Anecdotes for the Improvement of Youth* (1794). During those years, she also corresponded with George Crabbe and Maria Edgeworth.³⁶

Clapham and Maze Pond in London and the Quaker Meeting Houses of Dublin were the vitalizing hubs of the Abolition Movement and their records provide insight into the ways in which Romantic authors engaged with slavery beyond their contributions to anti-slavery literature.³⁷ Entire congregations of Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, and Unitarians joined in the efforts led by John Newton, William Wilberforce, John Ramsey, and Thomas Clarkson. With such strength of numbers, such conviction of moral argument, it may seem curious that the Abolition of the Slave Trade was not passed until 1807, and the Abolition of Slavery not until 1833. The explanation was economical: the sugar plantations were tremendously lucrative so long as they could operate with slave labour. The rationale, endorsed by Maria Edgeworth in her story ‘The Grateful Negro’ (1804), is that the Negro requires the benevolent guidance of the plantation owner. As I shall show subsequently, in the relevant chronological context, Thomas De Quincey further elaborated that rationale in his essays, ‘West Indian Property’ (1828) and ‘Political Expectations’ (1830). Edgeworth and De Quincey opposed an abrupt end to the slave economy of the British islands in the East and West Indies. The best that can be said in their favour was that they believed that the slaves ought to be treated with kindness.

Networking was pursued at all levels of the social hierarchy. Sometimes the networks developed in concentric circles, like the rings within an onion. Or they existed as overlapping circles like the logo for the Olympics or the wet circles left by beer mugs on the bar. As an inner sanctum at the upper levels, the Freemasons advocated improved diet, hygiene, and education for the slaves. Hosted by a woman of prominence among the socially elite, the salon brought together politicians, philosophers, poets, critics, musicians, and artists. The salons corresponded to the teas and dinners hosted by Samuel Rogers, William Hayley, or by such publishers as Joseph Johnson or Joseph Cottle. A major difference was in the gathering of guests in positions of highest authority. The purpose was to discuss the challenging issues of the day and to debate the course of action. Although pledged to confidentiality, members often let matters of political and cultural agitation influence their decisions outside the salon. What happened in the salon did not necessarily stay in the salon.

Reconstructing the verbal exchanges and the personality dynamics poses a challenge for the historian of the table talk and the salon. The task is made easier when one of the participants attempts to record and recreate the characteristics of those involved and the dynamic interchange of their opinions. Such a reconstruction occurs in the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), the fictional autobiography in which Mary Hays describes events that apparently occurred during the teas hosted by William Friend. To reanimate the events that took place in the salons of Mary Berry at Little Strawberry Hill (the house provided her by Horace Walpole), Lady Holland at Holland House (political centre of the Whigs), and

the Countess of Blessington at Genoa and Naples, Susanne Schmid relies on diaries, letters, novels, satires, and travel writing. Attentive to repetitions and corroborations in these varied sources, Schmid recreates the lively scenes of the prominent salons from 1788 when Mary Berry first met with Walpole until the 1820s when Lord Byron and Walter Savage Landor were among the guests of the Countess of Blessington.³⁸

Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, gained considerable influence in the Whig party and supported Charles James Fox in the effort to abolish the slave trade. Georgiana enthusiastically embraced her husband's politics. Through her efforts, Devonshire House became the hub of the Whig party and Georgiana their leading hostess. In 1780, Georgiana appeared on the hustings for the general election beside Charles James Fox, leader of the Whig party. In 1784, when Fox was struggling to keep his seat in the Westminster election, Georgiana and her sister went amongst the electorate, canvassing for votes for Fox. Their actions were successful and Fox held his seat, but the press was humiliating, accusing Georgiana of exchanging kisses for votes and forcing her to seek more private or exclusive venues for her future political campaigns.³⁹



Figure 2 Thomas Rowlandson, 'THE DEVONSHIRE, or Most Approved Method of Securing Votes' (1784). Source: 1783–1784: Political caricatures, in Rowlandson *the Caricaturist: a Selection from his Works*, 2 vols. Ed. Joseph Grego. London: Chatto and Windus, 1880.

The gossip of the Duchess's promiscuity was fed primarily by details of her affair with Charles Grey (later Earl Grey), but that gossip was overwhelmed by revelations of her profligacy at the gaming table, where she exhibited a highly emotional temperament and fits of exhilaration. Her gambling debts were enormous.

White's, the eldest London establishment for gaming, was the club of choice for wealthy members of the Tory party. Almack's, which opened its gaming tables in 1764, attracted its clientele from high-ranking members of the Whig party. It also had the unique distinction in that era of gentlemen's clubs of admitting women members. Charles Fox, Horace Walpole, and William Pitt met with their Whig constituencies at Almack's. A generation later, Pierce Egan, in *Life in London* (1821), mockingly celebrated Almack's as 'the rally point of rank, wealth, talents and beauty ... the meridian of fashion, style, elegance and manners.' As Egan knew, this was precisely the image of an aristocratic gaming culture that Almack's sought to claim for itself.⁴⁰ Throughout the 1790's, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, would have been joined by other women of wealth and title as the night's hostess of a faro table. Lady Sarah Archer, Lady Elizabeth Luttrell, and Albinia Hobart (later Lady Buckinghamshire) were frequent participants.



Figure 3 James Gillray, *The Loss of the Faro Bank; or – The Rook's Pigeon'd* (1797). Source: *The Works of James Gillray, from the Original Plates*. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851.

These aristocratic women of the gaming tables were often associated with the Foxite Whigs. Lady Archer canvassed for Charles Fox, as did the Duchess's sister, and Lady Duncannon. Rivalling Georgiana Cavendish in her fanatic addiction to high-stakes gambling, Albinia Hobart too squandered huge sums on card games. In her home in Richmond, built in imitation of Sanssouci, the summer palace of Frederick the Great, Albinia recouped some of her losses by illegally operating faro tables. She continued to lose heavily, but her losses were paid into her house account, as were the losses of her gambling friends. Despite being fined, threatened with the pillory, and attacked in the press, Albinia persisted in her lucrative law-breaking.

Illegal in several of its activities, the private gambling house conducted by Albinia Hobart and other aristocratic ladies of the faro tables nevertheless provided a political forum and network that would not be extended with voting rights until Parliament passed the Qualification of Women Act (1918) and the Representation of the People Act (1928). Like the salon, the gambling tables provided a forum through which women gained a political voice, and could wager gaming strategy and discuss political opinion with both genders.⁴¹ Of course, when opinion defied the existing political consensus, chaos could follow, as occurred in 1784 when Albinia defied her Whig coterie in order to support her relative, Sir Cecil Wray, who stood for election in Westminster as the Tory candidate in opposition to Charles Fox. Albinia's entire consortium at Almack's and her guests in Richmond all turned against her. The newspapers and periodical press delighted in the scandalous squabbles among the finest ladies of the land. Sir Cecil Wray won the election, and Albinia returned to Almack's as a more discreet advocate of Foxite policies.

A year after providing her philandering husband with a male heir to the dukedom (born 21 May 1790), Georgiana became pregnant with Grey's child (born February 1792). She consented to a period of absence from English society during these months, from which she emerged a reformed person, attending her husband's illness, returning to her writing, and renewing her political commitment during the severe decline of the Whig party. Following her second (or possibly third) miscarriage, the Duchess suffered an eye infection, the treatment of which scarred her face. Rather than retreat into seclusion, she bore her scars as wounds from a battle she had won. She abandoned all anxious vanity, and in her late writing chose to focus on the face of nature. The Alpine Romanticism, which would later lend splendor to Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, canto three, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Mont Blanc*, was evocatively conjured in her *Memorandums of the Face of the Country in Switzerland* (1799) and *The Passage of the Mountain of Saint Gothard* (1803). The latter poem was dedicated to her children and gained pan-European popularity, translated into French, German, and Italian.

Thomas Beddoes, Pneumatic Institution

In December 1793, Georgiana offered her aid in promoting Thomas Beddoes's plan for a Pneumatic Institution in Bristol. Respecting her familiarity with recent developments in the conversion of solids, liquids, and gases, and the isolation of

constituent elements, Beddoes invited the Duchess to join in several experiments then underway. In 1789, Joseph Priestley had isolated oxygen and Henry Cavendish hydrogen. Because Joseph Banks, then President of the Royal Society of London, had produced carbon dioxide as early as 1754, Georgiana sought his support for an estate to be dedicated to explore the medical potential for the recently discovered gases. Her meeting with Banks in 1794 failed to gain his endorsement. Banks declared his doubts concerning the viability of gas treatments, but his actual reason for rejecting the proposal was probably political, for he was on the opposite side of the Revolution Controversy and decried Beddoes's sympathy with the events in France.⁴²

In spite of the response from the Royal Society, Beddoes was able to run the Pneumatic Institution in Bristol from 1799 to 1802. The financial advantage was secured by the production of nitrous oxide, described in the book Beddoes co-authored with James Watt, *Considerations on the Medical Use and on the Production of Factitious Airs* (1794). Inhalation of the 'Factitious Airs' could possibly alleviate consumption (tuberculosis) and other lung infections. Humphry Davy, who headed the Institution laboratory, continued to examine the effects of the gas on himself and others. Production was simple: ammonium nitrate is found in natural deposits; when heated it releases the gas. Davy prepared experiments in which patients or curious visitors would inhale measured amounts. The first important work of Davy was examination of the effects of nitrous oxide. He began by inhaling ever increasing amounts, spending hours in a specially constructed breathing chamber. He kept record of his own responses, but needed the corroboration of others as well. For this purpose, he called upon 18 volunteers, including Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, all of whom provided written accounts of their experience. Among Davy's subjects, a Miss Ryland was the sole female. Beddoes, however, enlisted another 21 persons, among whom were 10 women described as 'persons inclined to hysterical and nervous affections.'⁴³ Similar to the Brunonian thesis, to which he fondly adhered, Beddoes observed that the men generally emphasized feelings of excitement, the women feelings of relaxation.⁴⁴ These 'high' and 'low' extremes, as Coleridge and De Quincey attested, were also characteristic of their response to opium.

Most accounts of drug experimentation and drug addiction in the Romantic period describe the user in remote or isolated conditions, where the use is a furtive self-indulgence.⁴⁵ We are invited by Coleridge himself to think of him in 1797, the sole occupant of 'lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton', succumbing to the effects of an 'anodyne' prescribed for his 'slight indisposition'. The resulting 'Vision in a Dream' was 'Kubla Khan', published 19 years later as 'a psychological curiosity'. The poem was not kept hidden in secrecy. Hand-written copies were read, shared, and discussed by an ever-widening circle of friends, until Lord Byron urged its publication. The manuscript of the poem was itself the hub of networking. In the context of other events of 1816, I will discuss below the published version and its reception. Here I want to stress specifically the staging of privacy as a dramatic element in circulating the poem as

the testimony of drug experience. As introduced by Davy, the drug experience was communal rather than solitary, public rather than private. In keeping with a persistent thesis in this history, I invite readers to think of the Davy-like situation of documenting and publishing the details of drug usage, extending a ‘contact high’ to curious readers and reviewers who become the willing network.

Neither Beddoes nor Davy could keep laughing gas locked within their laboratories. Easy to produce, it soon provided recreational intoxication to the social events of the aristocracy. For Davy the networking was a necessary part not only of his role at the Pneumatic Institute but also of his lectures and demonstrations, which became major events at the Royal Institution. Again, Gillray was on hand to satirize the proceedings.

Even the theatres of London would offer giddy-inducing whiffs of the gas to their audiences. When William Bolwell Davidge assumed management of the Royal Coburg in 1824, he even had a special ramp built to accommodate members of the audience to ascend the stage to participate in the public exhibitions of the effect of nitrous oxide.⁴⁶



Figure 4 James Gillray, *Scientific Researches!! New Discoveries in Pneumatics!! or an Experimental Lecture on the Powers of Air*. Source: *The Works of James Gillray, from the Original Plates*. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851.

Although in many circumstances it remained concealed in the shadows, opium, too, had its moments in the light of public display. The lucrative opium trade was announced in the reports of the East India Company to the House of Commons.⁴⁷ The East India Company was not simply involved in the opium trade, it had entered into the production of opium in 1781.⁴⁸ By 1793 the East India Company had established a monopoly in the opium trade. Growers in India were forbidden to sell opium to competing trade companies.⁴⁹ When Parliament finally passed the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, slave-holding did not cease entirely but continued in order to protect Britain's largest investments. Slavery continued in 'Territories in the Possession of the East India Company', the Island of Ceylon, and the Island of Saint Helena. These exceptions were not eliminated until 1843. The slave trade and the opium trade had not been totally separate enterprises.

Slave Trade, Opium Trade

Coleridge and De Quincey became the best known of the early nineteenth-century opium addicts. Francis Thompson and George Crabbe were among other poets who could not resist frequent dosage. In an age when there were no legal restrictions, opium served as universal pain-killer and panacea. William Wilberforce could not overcome dependency.⁵⁰ Thousands were addicted, though few revealed their addiction through published confessions and revelations of visions of magnificent opulence. They formed a core of readers eager for insights into the mind-altering effects and addictive consequences of substances not understood by contemporary medicine or psychology.

Among the slave quarters on the plantations throughout the West Indies were occasional figures who aroused fear and awe among their fellow slaves, even among plantation owners. These were the Obeah, practitioners of medical magic with the power to raise the dead and to transform the healthy into zombies. Obeah spells intensified guilt, grief, and fear of death, and were sometimes directed against cruel plantation owners or the favoured slaves who served as their agents in torture.

In *Suspiria de Profundis*, De Quincey referred to Obeah as 'the ignoble witchcraft' but also as the 'sublimar witchcraft of grief'. Obeah gains its efficacy psychologically through the fear engendered by the very belief in the power of the spell, a spell that was often enhanced by a soporific potion. 'If left to follow its own natural course,' De Quincey wrote, the Obeah spell would 'terminate in the same catastrophe of death.' Once the Obeah man, as 'a professor of this dark collusion with human fears and human credulity,' had woven 'his dreadful net of ghostly terrors, and had thrown it over his selected victim, vainly did that victim flutter, struggle, languish in the meshes; unless the spells were reversed, he generally perished; and without a wound except from his own too domineering fancy.' De Quincey cites several instances of 'the Obi or Obeah magic' in the

literature of the time. Maria Edgeworth used it in Chapter 16 of *Belinda* (1801), and again in ‘The Grateful Negro’, from *Popular Tales* (1804), which was set in a Jamaican plantation during a slave revolt. Also with a Jamaican setting, Charlotte Smith’s ‘The Story of Henrietta’ describes the heroine’s terrors augmented by an Obeah spell of dread. The best known of the Obeah stories was John Fawcett’s pantomime, *Obi, or Three-finger’d Jack* (Haymarket, 2 July 1800),⁵¹ based on the novel by William Earle,⁵² and subsequently retold by William Burdett, a plantation overseer, in *The Life and Exploits of Mansong* (1800). As escaped slave, Jack Mansong became a Jamaican folk hero for his reputed mastery of Obeah, with which he could weaken his pursuers and strengthen his supporters. Charles Rzepka has made available online his thorough account of the stage performance.⁵³ Although concerns with the Obeah phenomena are expressed throughout subsequent decades of the nineteenth century, discussions in the 1790s were initially triggered by Bryan Edwards’s *History of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1792).⁵⁴

Prior to Fawcett’s pantomime on Jack Mansong, *Inkle and Yarico* (Haymarket, 11 August 1787) effectively stirred sympathies for the slaves by addressing racial prejudice. Written by George Colman, the Younger, with songs by Samuel Arnold, this play was a sentimental tale, supposedly a true one, first told in Richard Ligon’s book *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (1657). Richard Steele expanded the tale and published it in *The Spectator* (13 March 1711). Steele’s version remained popular during the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. Inkle, an English trader, and his servant Trudge are shipwrecked in the West Indies. They are fed and cared for by Yarico, a native, and her black servant Wowski. The two couples establish what passes for a convenient love relationship, but when Inkle returns to his civilization, he plans to sell Yarico into slavery to recover his financial losses, and to marry Narcissa, a woman of wealth and social rank. In the end, Narcissa marries another, and Inkle, declaring himself repentant, remains with Yarico. Performed as comedy, *Inkle and Yarico* derived much of its humour from Inkle’s blatant and clumsy attempts to disguise an ample range of faults: cowardice, hypocrisy, greed, and racism. At the outset of the play, his lust is sufficient to overcome his repugnance of miscegenation, and at the conclusion he is opportunist enough to repent when it becomes his only secure option. The moral highpoint occurs when Sir Christopher Curry, a stock character of curmudgeonly rectitude and gruff benevolence, vigorously denounces Inkle as a selfish cad. Depending on their stance towards the exploitation of the slaves and the profiteering of the plantations, the audience might well feel implicated in the play’s multifaceted exposé of current attitudes towards race, class, and gender.

William Wordsworth first met Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Bristol towards the end of August 1795. A friendship based on their shared interests in poetry and the power of imagination developed rapidly. Between November 1796 and June 1797

Wordsworth was engaged in writing a poem that he turned over to Coleridge. The stanzas that Wordsworth reserved for himself were reworked as ‘Inscription for a Seat by a Road Side’. In Coleridge’s reconception during the summer of 1797, the poem became a curse poem, *The Three Graves*. The composition took place very close to the time that he wrote ‘Kubla Khan’. Wordsworth’s graveside poems are elegiac. Coleridge examines extreme debilitation caused by a vindictive mother. As he revealed later in his preface to the poem as published in *The Friend* (1809), he was inspired by Edwards’s description of ‘Oby’ and similar mental/physical influence described in Samuel Hearne’s accounts of North American Indians.⁵⁵ Coleridge concluded that Obeah is principally a psychological phenomenon in which the practitioner, in the manner of a mesmerist,⁵⁶ achieves a powerful influence on the imagination by repeating with conviction the consequences he intends to conjure.

I was not led to chuse this story from any partiality to tragic, much less, to monstrous events (though at the time that I composed the verses, somewhat more than twelve years ago, I was less averse to such subjects than at present), but from finding in it a striking proof of the possible effect on the imagination, from an Idea violently and suddenly imprest on it. I had been reading Bryan Edwards’s account of the effects of the *Oby* Witchcraft on the Negroes in the West Indies, and Hearne’s deeply interesting Anecdotes of similar workings on the imagination of the Copper Indians (those of my Readers, who have it in their power, will be well repaid for the trouble of referring to those Works, for the passages alluded to) and I conceived the design of shewing, that instances of this kind are not peculiar to savage or barbarous tribes, and of illustrating the mode in which the mind is affected in these cases, and the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning.⁵⁷

The poem is set not in Jamaica but in England. In place of an Obi-woman of the West Indies, Coleridge has introduced an incestuous mother-in-law obsessed with sexual desire for her daughter’s husband. When she declares her love for him, he reacts in nervous panic and, in a fit of hysterical laughter, pushes her away from him. She delivers her curse on the young lovers when all are kneeling in the church for Ash Wednesday services. A wild wind howls outside. The vicar’s sermon can scarce be heard, but the mother’s voice rises above the raging wind:

‘Oh! may a clinging curse consume
This woman by my side!

‘O hear me, hear me, Lord in Heaven,
Although you take my life –
O curse this woman, at whose house
Young Edward woo’d his wife.

‘By night and day, in bed and bower,
 O let her cursed be!!!’
 So having prayed, steady and slow,
 She rose up from her knee!

And left the church, nor e’er again
 The church-door entered she. (lines 93–104)

In Wordsworth’s ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’ the curse has power because Goody Blake’s desperate theft of hedge twigs was entirely just, and Harry Gill’s vicious response was proportionately unjust. His sense of guilt and shame at his action renders the efficacy of the curse believable.⁵⁸ If that mode of explanation is appropriate, what rationale can be derived from Coleridge’s *The Three Graves*? The mother’s curse has power. From whose culpability does it derive? Edward’s? Mary’s? Ellen’s? All three, Coleridge hints, have guilty thoughts. As in two other master poems on the torments of guilt, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) and *Christabel* (1798/1816), Coleridge is concerned less with the sin, more with the consequences.

Without denying that narcotics could contribute to the receptivity, Coleridge emphasized that the imagination was the dominant and essential conduit to the Obi terrors. Responding to a passage in Edwards’s History,⁵⁹ Coleridge observes that administering drugs to fake a subject’s death, more drugs to wake the ‘dead’, is intended to mystify the witnesses, not to convert the subject. The Obeah’s magic exploits ‘that habit of speculative minds to turn all things into truth, as being all alike *falsehood*.’⁶⁰ The endeavour was intended ‘to convince the deluded spectators of the Obeah power to re-animate dead bodies.’⁶¹ By the imagination alone a subject becomes haunted, loses appetite and energy, is overcome with depression, ‘and gradually sinks into the grave.’

Crucial to the Abolitionist cause were the reports seeking to justify the slave rebellions and the Obeah practices. The former were reactions to inhumane subjugation; the latter were efforts to sustain religious practices disrupted by the forced African diaspora. Over time some aspects and symbols of Christianity were absorbed. Obeah had benign as well as malignant magic, good luck charms as well as debilitating curses. Opium was not an ingredient in the potions of the Obeah of the West Indies. An infusion of branched calaloe in rum would reduce a subject to a paralysed stupor for several hours until revived by a strong stimulant of ephedra, coffee bean, kola nut, kratom, or guarana. Among Benjamin Mosley’s medical papers a tract on *On Obi; or African Witchcraft* was his practical pharmacopeia of island herbs.⁶² In his recent attempt to replicate the Obi recipes, Wade Davis collected eight samples of zombie powder from four regions of Haiti. He determined that in addition to dried and ground plants, the skin of puffer fish was an ingredient common to all the mixtures.⁶³ The use of coca leaves was not exclusive to Obeah, for, just as with Andean natives, the coca leaf was chewed to increase stamina and relieve the aches of long hours of labour. The coca shrub is indigenous to

South America, Mexico, Indonesia, and the West Indies. Long before the British had settled and began importing slaves, the efficacy of the leaves had been discovered by the native Tainan peoples of the West Indies.⁶⁴ Later in the century, the Dutch colony of Java became a great exporter of coca. Other colonial powers, including the British in India, tried to grow coca.

The Abolitionists and slave-owners alike had to come to terms with the Haitian Revolution, 1791–1804. The rebel slaves were successful in their overthrow of French colonial rule in Saint-Domingue. The sovereign nation of Haiti was founded, ruled by liberated slaves who outlawed all future slavery. The ending of French rule and the abolition of slavery in the former colony by the former slaves was followed by their successful defence of the freedoms they won, and, with the collaboration of mulattoes, their independence from rule by white Europeans.⁶⁵ The effects on the slave-holders were felt throughout the colonies. Several plantation novels devised Obeah plots with slave rebellion. One was Uriah Derick D'Arcy's *The Black Vampyre: a Legend of St. Domingo* (1819); another was Cynric Williams's *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827).⁶⁶ Case histories of Obeah crimes were also circulated,⁶⁷ as were plantation poems, some pretending to be in the voice of the Obeah master or the Obeah victim.⁶⁸

Like slaves, sugar, and rum, like cocoa, tea, and coffee, opium too was among the most profitable of the transported goods of the trading ships. Coleridge's 'Lecture on the Slave Trade' (16 June, 1795) condemns the cruelty of slavery and recognizes the intellectual ability of the Africans. He regarded the Africans as equal to the Europeans in their intellectual capacity without the accompanying vices. Coleridge observes that the Africans are as culturally improved as the Europeans are, but they are without the corruption and vice of the Europeans. In 'Ode on the Departing Year' (esp. lines 84–93), Coleridge scathingly criticises England for its involvement with the slave trade and foretells the fall of Britain due to its atrocities committed all through Asia, Africa, and Europe. Similar description of British atrocities is found in 'Fears in Solitude'. The poet's focus is chiefly the suffering of the Africans in the hands of the Europeans, but it also describes other atrocities (lines 43–53).

William Wordsworth recalled that upon his return from a year in France (1791–1792), he discovered that the current discourse on liberty and rights had made the cruelty of the slave trade as significant as the revolution itself:

When to my native land,
After a whole year's absence, I returned,
I found the air yet busy with the stir
Of a contention which had been raised up
Against the traffickers in Negro blood

(*The Prelude* (1805 text) X:203–228)

William and Dorothy Wordsworth were sent to stay with their grandfather in Penrith, William Cookson, relatively often, and for considerable lengths of time.

William first stayed in Penrith when he was three years old and made long visits there from 1775 to 1776 and over the winter of 1776 to 1777. Ann Cookson, William Wordsworth's mother, died in March 1778, when Wordsworth was eight years of age. After her death, William and Dorothy spent most of their time with relatives in Penrith. When their father, John Wordsworth, died in December 1783, all five Wordsworth children were taken in by various relatives.

The year that William Wordsworth left Hawkshead to attend St John's College, Cambridge – 1787 – was also the year that William Wilberforce met with Thomas Clarkson and founded the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Wilberforce led the parliamentary campaign; Clarkson became the group's research historian, assembling the maritime statistics for the slave trade and interviewing sailors and former slaves at major British ports. By 1794, Clarkson's exhausting labours began to undermine his health. He withdrew to the Lake District for recovery, where he bought a home on the eastern shore of Ullswater. Here he met with Wordsworth and Coleridge.

There were two Abolitionist Movements, one to abolish the slave trade, the other to abolish slavery. The first brought about the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade that was passed in Parliament in 1807; the second resulted in the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. The Act of 1807 was ineffective in stopping the slave trade even to British colonies, for many rogue British ships continued transporting slaves for the high profits. If they were pursued by a ship from the Royal Navy, they could hoist a foreign flag and declare themselves independent of British jurisdiction, or they could dump their human cargo overboard. Ships from other nations were still engaged in slave transport. The Act of 1833, a quarter of a century later, would have been more effective if it had fewer clauses of exception. The plantation owner would argue want of housing or other essentials for the care of a slave if liberated. Not just the plantation owners, the British economy as a whole was dependent on the slave economy.⁶⁹

Slavery was justified with claims that negroes were sub-human, uneducable, incapable of functioning on their own. Against this greed-motivated hypocrisy, the persistent efforts of a few dedicated leaders gradually made progress. An influential abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson wrote on the injustice of slavery in 1785 as a student at Cambridge, and subsequently published his *Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788). He went aboard an African trading ship, *The Lively*. Not a slave ship, it carried African carvings and other artefacts. The craftsmanship made it obvious that the claims of the slave-traders were false. These were an intelligent and artistic people. Clarkson collected and began exhibiting more examples of their art. He filled his work with evidence of their creative skills, and with accounts of the cruelty to which they were subjected. From the sailors he interviewed, Clarkson published *An Essay on the Slave Trade* (1789), based on the narrative of a sailor who had served aboard a slave ship. Clarkson was also able to establish a network to provide communication among the local abolition groups throughout England.

Elizabeth Montagu and the Bluestockings

Networking of a very different sort, although with a few goals shared with the Nonconformists, took place within the bluestocking salons. Social reformer, patron of the arts, salonnière, writer, and literary critic, Elizabeth Montagu helped organize and lead the Blue Stockings Society. In London circles, she became a celebrated hostess. She organized literary breakfasts with Gilbert West, George Lyttelton, and others. By 1760, these had turned to evening entertainments with large assemblies. At the very time that the gambling houses were attracting many of the upper class, Montagu allowed neither card playing nor alcohol consumption. The bluestocking events took their name from the Parisian designation *bas bleu* (*bas*, stocking; *bleu*, blue) to describe women with literary aspirations.

By 1770, her home on Hill Street had become the premiere salon in London. Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, David Garrick, and Horace Walpole were all in the circle. Writers being introduced at the salon might appeal for patronage. Montagu supported a number of authors, including Elizabeth Carter, Hannah More, Frances Burney, Anna Barbauld, Sarah Fielding, Hester Chapone, James Beattie, Anna Williams, and Hester Thrale. Montagu held similar events at her residence in the centre house of the Royal Crescent in Bath, where she shared several guests with Lady Anna Miller's salon in nearby Bathaston.

Elizabeth Montagu was not the leading poet, but she was the leading financier among the salonnières, and respected patroness to many of her circle. As a literary critic, she endorsed Samuel Richardson, both Fieldings (Henry and his sister Sarah), Fanny Burney, and Laurence Sterne, whom she discovered was a distant relation. She also provided financial aid to Bishop Thomas Percy in collecting ballads for his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). In 1760, she joined George Lyttelton in composing *Dialogues of the Dead*, a series of conversations between the living and the illustrious dead. The contention that women in general and Bluestockings in particular lacked the cynicism and wit required for satire is effectively overthrown in Montagu's three dialogues for the collection. The genre, revived in eighteenth-century satire, dates back to Lucian (ca. 120–190 CE), who offered his *Dialogues of the Dead* to the Athenian public. His spokespersons were the Cynic philosophers Diogenes and Menippus. Lucian's account of *Timon the Misanthrope* was the inspiration for William Shakespeare's tragedy *Timon of Athens*. The genre was further developed later in the Romantic period by Walter Savage Landor in his *Imaginary Conversations* (5 volumes, 1824–1829). Landor combined Lucian's satire with Plutarch's *Lives* by engaging historical representatives of classical Greece and Rome in a conversation in which the author sustains historical awareness.

In her dialogues, Montagu introduced Charon, the boatman of the River Styx, to row her historical characters across the waters dividing the living and

the dead. In her third dialogue, Charon brings the author Plutarch, who developed a genre closely related to Lucian's *Dialogues*, namely, the *Parallel Lives* of famous Greeks and Romans, arranged in pairs to illuminate their common moral virtues and vices. Plutarch is immediately placed on the defensive in a confrontation with a present-day London Bookseller. Having purchased several remaindered six-volume sets of the *Lives*, the Bookseller observes that a few copies went to schools, a few more were purchased by fretting uncles in hopes of correcting the behaviour of wayward nephews, but more than half his bad investment remained unsold on his shelves. Plutarch should have written something marketable, like the *Lives of the Highwaymen*. The ensuing dialogue debates the merits of ancient and modern literature and the tastes of current readers.

In 1769, Montagu published *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769). In it, she proclaims William Shakespeare the greatest poet, not just of England but of all nations, and she faults Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765) for an inadequate account of Shakespeare's genius. Johnson addressed reception history, and the problems of establishing and editing an authentic text. Montagu ignored the alteration and focused instead on characters, plots, and dialogue in Shakespeare's plays. For Johnson, the great challenge was ridding the stage of altered versions and restoring the plays as Shakespeare wrote them. For Montagu, the revised versions were simply the damages caused by a more insidious enemy who insisted on a strict adherence to the 'three unities' (time, place, and action). This false doctrine, proclaimed by Pierre Corneille in his *Discourse on the Three Unities* (1660), adhered to as well by Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), Jean Racine, and other French playwrights of the seventeenth century, was still being wielded by Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) as a favoured weapon against Shakespeare.⁷⁰ In her *Essay*, Montagu dismisses the French neo-classical dictates for the drama, and emphasizes in their stead Shakespeare's to recreate thought and feeling in the characters on stage, and to engage the emotions and affective response in his audience.

The salon of Elizabeth Montagu was just one instrument in her manifold networking. She was an influential critic (anticipating risks in trying to refute her, Johnson chose not to speak to her after she discredited his *Preface to Shakespeare*). Through her daily letter writing she maintained close ties to family, friends, and literary circles. Her letters discuss personal matters of health, domestic arraignments, and travels, but also assert her opinions on history, philosophy, and religion, comment on social and cultural events, and offer critiques of the plays, opera, and concerts. Major partners in this exchange of letters were her sister, Sarah Scott, and her close friends, Elizabeth Carter and Gilbert West. Very much aware of the literary epistle as a genre, she and her sister read and imitated the published letters in the collections of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift. They seemed aware, too, that they were establishing a model for women's letter writing.⁷¹

Elizabeth Montagu may have become 'Queen of the Bluestockings', but it was her friend Elizabeth Vesey (1715–1791) who deserves credit as founder of

the Bluestockings. Adopting the salon mix of men and women, she steered the conversation into the realms of literature, philosophy, and the arts. Male members of her circle included Edmund Burke, David Garrick, Edward Gibbon, Samuel Johnson, Thomas Percy, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Richard Sheridan, Adam Smith, and Thomas Warton. Hester Chapone (1727–1801) joined Elizabeth Montagu's circle and is remembered primarily as the author of *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773). Also associated with the Montagu Salon was the classicist Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), who translated the *Works of Epictetus* (1758). In addition to classical Greek, she mastered as well Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic, language skills that she employed in her *Objections against the New Testament* (1807), in which she defends the Anglican reliance on the King James translation. In the following generation came Hester Lynch Piozzi, Frances Burney, and the salons of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Anna Miller, Mary Berry, Lady Holland, and the Countess of Blessington.⁷² Although Hannah More attended several of the salons, she asserts in *The Bas Bleu, or, Conversation* (1782) her reasons for affirming traditional domestic roles over the intellectual equality asserted by the Bluestockings.

Satire against the learned ladies and women's circles had already emerged in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene; or, The Silent Woman* (1609). The play involves Morose, a wealthy old man who hates noise and dedicates his efforts to sustaining silence in his household. He intends to disinherit his boisterous nephew Dauphine by marrying a silent, docile woman. Learning of his uncle's plan, Dauphine arranges for him to meet a young woman, Epicoene, who is instructed to maintain her silence and not to succumb to his uncle's efforts to make her talk. Convinced that she is indeed an exceptionally quiet woman, Morose plans their marriage. No sooner are they wed, however, than Epicoene reveals herself to be a ceaselessly nagging, scolding shrew. Matters are made worse when Epicoene joins with an alliance of women with intellectual pretensions called the Ladies Collegiates, married women who live apart from their husbands, discuss the goals of their liberation, and promote strategies by which women may use sex to control their husbands (recalling *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes).

Molière's *The Learned Ladies* (*Les Femmes savants*, 1672) was another satire on women's education and academic pretension. Two young people, Henriette and Clitandre, are in love, but their marriage is opposed by Henriette's family. Her sensible father and uncle are in favour of the marriage; but her father is ruled by his wife, Philaminte. Henriette's mother, in alliance with her aunt and sister, have decided that she should marry Trissotin, whose affectations as poet and intellect have enraptured them. Unable to distinguish his sham posturing from true learning and ability, these three 'learned' ladies have adopted Trissotin as the favoured mentor and guest of their literary salon. Clitandre realizes that to wed Henriette he must expose his rival as imposter.

The satirical attacks on intellectual women may have had a reverse effect, promoting rather than hindering the female authorship and the campaign for women's education.⁷³ The sensitive male ego was intimidated by the notion of

intellectual superiority among the Bluestockings. As arbiters of literary taste, men were losing ground to the women of the salons. By means of satirical ridicule, men sought to regain control as the proper judges of literary merit.⁷⁴ Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, revealed in her *Conversations with Lord Byron* that the hypermasculine Byron was sensitive to criticism and could be easily bruised.⁷⁵ Thomas Moore in *M.P.*; or, *The Blue Stocking* (1811) created a comic character, Lady Bab Blue, whose intellectual and poetic pretensions were expressed through her epic poem on the chemical blessings of Sal Ammoniac, used as a leavening in baking, as smelling salts to revive fainting females, and also dispensed orally in a tincture to prevent urinary or bowel incontinence.

In the first eclogue of Lord Byron's *The Blues* (1821), Inkel, a poet, advises his friend Tracy against pursuing his planned marriage to Miss Lilac, a Bluestocking:

- INKEL: The devil! why, man,
 Pray get out of this hobble as fast as you can.
You wed with Miss Lilac! 'twould be your perdition:
 She's a poet, a chymist, a mathematician.
- TRACY: I say she's an angel!
- INKEL: Say rather an *angle*.
 If you and she marry, you'll certainly wrangle.
 I say she's a Blue, man, as blue as the ether.
- TRACY: And is that any cause for not coming together?
- INKEL: Humph! I can't say I know any happy alliance
 Which has lately sprung up from a wedlock with science.
 She's so learned in all things, and fond of concerning
 Herself in all matters connected with learning,
 That –
- TRACY: What?
- INKEL: I perhaps may as well hold my tongue;
 But there's five hundred people can tell you you're wrong.
- (lines 63–76)

The second eclogue opens with Sir Richard's lament over his marriage with Lady Bluebottle and the constant presence of her bluestocking friends and their dilettante male guest. Sir Richard's appraisal is expressed more succinctly in *Don Juan*: 'But – Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,/ Inform us truly, have they not hen-pecked you all' (Canto I, xxii). As the plans go forward with Tracy's marriage to Miss Lilac, Inkel mocks the playwright Botherby, for whom he must write an epilogue, and he disagrees with Lady Bluebottle on the fate of Wordsworth and Mouthey [= Southey].

While Byron and Moore chose to ridicule the Bluestockings with wit and humour, William Hazlitt, apparently feeling an assault on his masculine superiority, resorted to harsh, half-jesting repudiation of female intellect.⁷⁶ 'I have an utter aversion to blue-stockings. I do not care a fig for any woman that knows even what *an author* means.'⁷⁷ His condemnation in the *British Critic* (1823)

was even more severe: ‘The bluestocking is the most odious character in society ... she sinks wherever she is placed, like the yolk of an egg, to the bottom, and carries the filth with her.’⁷⁸

Helen Maria Williams

An example of the sort Hazlitt so intemperately condemned is the committed pacifist Helen Maria Williams, who garnered considerable fame for her *Letters from France* in four volumes (1792–1796), a fame accompanied by admiration for her courage in risking her life by staying in France following the declaration of war against England on 1 February 1793, and England declaring war against France on 11 February. Imprisoned in 1793, Williams might well have been sent to the guillotine along with the hundreds of presumed enemies of the state who were executed during the Reign of Terror (6 September 1793 to 28 July 1794).

all perished, all –
Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks,
Head after head, and never heads enough

(*The Prelude*, X:360–362)

Williams’s *Collected Poems in Two Volumes* (1786) prompted 16-year-old William Wordsworth to respond with his first published poem, *On Seeing Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress* (1786). Pondering which ‘Tale of Distress’ Wordsworth had in mind, Richard Gravil acknowledged three possible sources: (i) the weeping heroine of her first poem, *Edwin and Eltrude* (1782), who learns that her lover fighting for York has killed her father, a Lancastrian in the War of Roses; (ii) the weeping heroine of *An American Tale* from *Collected Poems* (1786), whose lover, fighting for the Americans has killed her father, fighting for the British; (iii) Cora, in *Peru* (1784; 2nd ed. 1786), shedding tears at the feet of Pizarro, hoping he will spare the life of her lover.⁷⁹ All three tales might have prompted young Wordsworth’s raptures of sensibility, but all three involve a character weeping *in* a tale, rather than the author weeping *at* a tale.

Williams augmented her knowledge of Francisco Pizarro’s brutal conquest and exploitation of the Incas and their subsequent revolt against Spain by her reading of the pertinent chapters in William Robertson’s *The History of America*, but her greater debt was to Jean-François Marmontel’s *Les Incas, ou, La destruction de l’empire du Pérou* (1777). Echoes and departures from Marmontel’s *Les Incas* are carefully documented in the annotations to Paula Feldman’s edition of Williams’s *Peru*.⁸⁰ While Marmontel described the religious zeal of the Spaniards with emphasis on Pizarro’s greed for gold and his cruel treatment of the Incas, he gave less attention to the suffering of the natives. Williams chose to develop the emotions and sensibility of her Inca characters. Like Williams, August von

Kotzebue based his *Die Spanier in Peru* (1796) on Marmontel.⁸¹ Williams's *Peru* continued to be a relevant source for Richard Brinsley Sheridan when he adapted Kotzebue's play for the London stage. Primarily because the vicious foreigners were perceived to be French and the noble Incas British, Sheridan's *Pizarro* (Drury Lane, 24 May 1799) proved to be an outstanding success.

Beginning in 1781, Williams joined the circle led by Andrew Kippis, who brought her into contact with politically like-minded intellectuals. Opposed to the British military and maritime action in the American War of Independence, Kippis looked with favour on the American experiment in democracy. In her 'Ode on the Peace' (1783), Williams welcomed the treaty to end that war. No military triumph, no subjugation of an enemy, the treaty sought rather a reconciliation for mutual trade and commerce. Britain's future, she prophesied, would no longer be registered in the victories or defeats of national strife, but confirmed in mutually beneficial exchange. Williams acquired a significant advance in her education under the guidance of Kippis, tutor in Greek and Latin in the New College at Hackney. He became a fellow in the Royal Society in 1779 and published regularly in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Monthly Review*, and *The Library*. In 1780, he established the *New Annual Register*, a 'General Repository of History, Politics and Literature for the Year.' His major work was his edition of the *Biographia Britannica*, five volumes of which were published between 1778 and 1793. In writing the short biographies Kippis was assisted by William Godwin and by Joseph Towers, who served as minister of Newington Green Unitarian Church from 1778 to 1799, the years following Richard Price and before the unfortunate circumstances of Rochemont Barbauld's mental decline. Most frequently reprinted and widely distributed among Kippis's works were his several volumes devoted to the life and voyages of James Cook.⁸²

Following early guidance from Kippis, Williams shaped her career as an author and developed her interests and attitudes concerning colonialism, the slave trade, and political and religious dissent. Her *Poems* (1786) deal with social and domestic roles of religion but also with a critique of the despotism of the Spanish colonies, as in her epic on *Peru*. She emphasized the milder, gentler sway of a woman's sensibility, appealing to humanitarian virtue in opposing war, as in her 'Ode on the Peace' (1783), and in calling for an end to slavery, as in 'Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade' (1788). Her evocation of tears and sighs by no means indicated a retreat into a passive indulgence of the feelings. For Williams moral sensitivity was a driving force of reform. Richard Gravel referred to the former as an 'emotional susceptibility of an extreme and debilitating variety' and the latter as 'a kinetic mode of empathy'.⁸³

Pacifist though she was, Williams's humanitarian ideals and her concern with alleviating the extremes of poverty persuaded her that the revolution in France was fully justified. While studying French in London under the tutelage of Mme. Du Fossé, Williams may well have encountered Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie; ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). Her novel *Julia* (1790) adapted Rousseau's

heroine, introducing her to the much-altered circumstances of the French Revolution.⁸⁴ Rousseau's notions of an intuitive moral authenticity accorded well with her own confidence in inherent benevolence and the ethical priority of feeling over reason. Presenting Williams's thoughts on the French Revolution, before visiting France, *Julia* maintains optimism for a nation revived by the ideals of liberty. Among the several poems interspersed in her narrative, 'The Bastille, A Vision' applauds the promise of a constitutional government based on principles of equality.

Her interest in the revolution led her to visit France in the summer of 1790. On the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, she attended the *Fête de la Fédération* (14 July 1790) and was totally taken in by the grand illusion of peaceful reconciliation. She returned briefly to England to publish her *Letter Written in France in the Summer of 1790* (1790).⁸⁵ Returning to France in July 1791, she now identified herself as an advocate of the revolution. With confidence in a peaceful transition to reform, she persuaded her mother and sisters to settle with her first in Rouen and then Orleans. At the end of November, Wordsworth also arrived in France, reaching Orleans on 5 December 1791, bearing the letter of introduction to Helen Maria Williams that Charlotte Smith had given him in Bristol prior to his departure. As a young man of 21 with poetic aspirations but few accomplishments, Wordsworth had hoped to meet one of the most successful authors of the times.⁸⁶ The Williams family, however, had left Orleans and returned to Paris. Wordsworth travelled from Orleans to Blois, where he spent the subsequent months with Annette Vallon and was introduced to revolutionary ideals by Michel de Beauvau.⁸⁷

After the September Massacres of 1792, Williams allied herself with the more temperate party of Girondists. Once war was declared between France and England in February 1793, the Williams family was in jeopardy. The downfall of the Gironde and the rise of the Reign of Terror in September 1793 resulted in the Williams family being imprisoned in Luxembourg. Narrowly escaping execution, the family fled to Switzerland to escape the persecution under Robespierre. Her first volume on her experiences in France was expanded to four volumes as *Letters from France* (1792–1796), which found an avid readership among a British population eager for eye-witness news on the progress of the revolution. Williams returned to Paris where she produced *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798) along with more letters, sketches, and short fiction.

Wordsworth missed Williams in Orleans, but her influence is nevertheless present and persistent in his poetry. Wordsworth, too, adopted the 'tale of distress' and the rhetoric of sensibility that she had cultivated in *Edwin and Eltrude*, *Peru*, and *An American Tale*. Wordsworth, too, focused on lovers separated by war or family prejudices, and the woman brought to ruin by her fate, as in *The Ruined Cottage*, *The Female Vagrant*, and *The White Doe of Rylstone*. His most direct debt to Williams was the tale of divided lovers which she told at the end of her first volume of *Letters from France*, and which Wordsworth retold at the close of Book IX (lines 553–935) of *The Prelude* (1805). Williams's story is set

in the *ancien régime* and concerns a father who resorts to *lettres de cachet* to have his son imprisoned in order to prevent him from marrying a woman of lower class. The familiar plot of ‘star-cross’d lovers’ was easily adapted to expose conflicts arising from class, wealth, national, racial, or political differences. In a version entitled *Crime and Punishment* (*Verbrechen und Strafe*, 1800), August Lafontaine told of a French Count, an officer in the battalion stationed at a German village, who falls in love with the tavern-keeper’s daughter. Opposed to such a liaison, his family have him kidnapped and forced into a marriage to a woman of French nobility. Now charged with desertion, he goes into hiding for 20 years. In failing health, he risks returning to the German village, where shortly before his death he is reunited with the woman he loves and the son who had been conceived before the kidnapping.⁸⁸

At the close of Book IX Wordsworth rewrites Williams’s anecdote as the tale of Vaudracour and Julia, a story of young love blighted by the father’s intolerance of his son’s attachment to a commoner. Pursuing his love in defiance of his father, Vaudracour learns that Julia is pregnant with an illegitimate child. Outraged at this report, the father endeavours to imprison the couple. Julia finds refuge in a convent, and the son goes into hiding with the child. When the child dies, Vaudracour loses his sanity. Wordsworth’s tale, disguised as an indictment of the *ancien régime*, may also be an oblique confession of his affair with Annette Vallon and the birth of his daughter Caroline, a narrative otherwise omitted from his ‘Autobiographical Poem’. Even so, the tale too was subsequently omitted from *The Prelude* and published together with the *River Duddon Sonnets* (1820). Annette Vallon was in the final month of her pregnancy when Wordsworth left France at the beginning of December 1792. Caroline was born two weeks later. His intention may have been to earn money and return promptly, but the declaration of war made return a dangerous risk. Williams remained the sole British author to brave residence during the Reign of Terror. The extreme brutality of that event captured the imagination of many writers. Wordsworth devoted to the French Revolution two books of the *The Prelude* (IX and X in 1805; IX, X, and XI in 1850).

William Blake

The first and only of the seven books that William Blake projected for his prophetic poem, *The French Revolution* (1791), was set in type by Joseph Johnson and survives in a single set of page proofs. Even incomplete, the work is Blake’s most direct contribution to the Revolution Controversy. Blake would have been engaged on the work during August, at the time when he was regularly meeting with Mary Wollstonecraft at the dinners hosted by Johnson. The previous November had seen the publication of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and by the end of that month Wollstonecraft’s

A Vindication of the Rights of Men published by Johnson. By the beginning of September, 1791, Johnson had published the second edition of Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* with Blake's illustrations. In September, too, Wollstonecraft was writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Blake's *The French Revolution* is properly considered a prophetic poem, even though the temporal disjuncture may seem to render it a retrospective prophecy, for Blake is writing more than two years after the events described.

In the night of 20 June 1791, Louis XVI and his family attempted to escape the Tuileries Palace and flee France. He was captured and sequestered with all his royal powers suspended. In July the National Assembly refused to put the King on trial until a new Constitution was ratified. Paris was put under martial law forbidding demonstration. On 17 July the National Guard fired on the crowd, killing some 50 persons. In August, Frederick William II of Prussia and Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II pledged support in returning the King of France to power. Intervention by other European monarchies would undermine the hopes for a constitutional monarchy, which still seemed feasible on 13–14 September, when Louis XVI formally accepted the new Constitution. By December it had become obvious that the King had no intention of upholding the Constitution and that he would rally foreign monarchies to invade France. The alternative was regicide.

The events of Blake's poem hearken back to the period leading up to the storming of the Bastille, from the meeting of the Third Estate (19 June 1789) to the Fall of the Bastille (14 July) and the rise of Lafayette. Blake attributed to Lafayette the effort to protect Paris by leading the army to an encampment 10 miles distant (15 July). In Blake's poem, the darkness abides. The atmosphere remains filled with clouds, fires, and groans of despair: 'the dark night of oppression lingers and fades in the marble hall of the Old Order while the Sun of democracy rises above the city streets and the people's Assembly'.⁸⁹

First to be introduced is the King, whose 'strong hand' has turned 'aching cold', and whose sceptre has grown 'too heavy for mortal grasp' (lines 3–5). In his sick and feeble state, he calls first for his finance minister, Jacques Necker, who leads him to the Council of Commons. In every direction he confronts the howlings and groans of despair. He visits the seven towers of the Bastille: Horror, Darkness, Bloody, Religion, Order, Destiny, and the tower of God. Chained within each tower is the perpetrator of a trespass. In the tower of Religion is enchained the woman who 'refus'd to be the whore to the Minister'; in the tower of God is confined a man who once had hopes for liberty but whose reason has since decayed – his crime was a letter of advice to the king (26–51). Let it not be objected that parallelism is neglected in naming the towers. The point of Blake's allegory is that there is no even-handed exercise of justice. The stone walls crack and fall from the towers. The Commons convene (54), and monarchs throughout Europe tremble (62). When the nobles gather round him, the King tells them that they must hide (68–78). Similar to the Infernal

Council of Pandemonium in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book II, Blake has the last supporters of the monarchy consider what might be done. The Duke of Burgundy weeps that the grand empire is threatened (83–104). The King dismisses Necker, who had become too sympathetic with the reformers, too responsive to the 'cries of women and babes' (114–125). The Archbishop of Paris, described as rising 'in the rushing of scales and hissing of flames and rolling of sulphurous smoke' (127), tells of his vision in which a whispering 'like the voice of the grasshopper' revealed to him that God has departed like 'a lamp without oil'. The Archbishop urges the King to squelch the Assembly, take military possession of the city, and put the rebels in chains (128–157). The Dukes of Bourbon (168–174) and Orleans (175–194) declare themselves ready to lead their armies against the people. The Abbé Sieyès, anticipating an end of oppression, urges the King to withdraw all troops from Paris on the principle that an assault will be avoided if the people are not threatened.

Looking back in 1791 on these events of 1789, Blake might well have noticed his skewing of history departed from the facts.⁹⁰ The King had the royal army under the Duc de Broglie surround Paris. On 14 July, the Bastille was stormed. On the day following, Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, was appointed by the Assembly as commander of the National Guard with the commission to maintain order. Neither side fully trusted him. Those loyal to the King saw him as complicit with the revolutionaries; the commoners aware of his rank and station saw him as one of the aristocracy dedicated to keeping the King in power. In Blake's poem, however, the hero of the new dawn is Lafayette, who, 'inspir'd by liberty', leads the army 10 miles outside the city, leaving 'Paris without a soldier, silent' (284–285). In that silence, the work of peace commences: 'For the noise was gone up/ And follow'd the army; and the Senate in peace sat beneath morning's beam' (304–305).

Concerned with the causes and consequences of political upheaval, Blake wrote extensively on revolution, yet the word *revolution* is seldom evoked, nor the word *rights*. He may have deliberately omitted the keywords of the Controversy, in order to set forth his own concepts and convictions unencumbered by connotations already associated with these volatile terms. John Horne Tooke used a related strategy in discussing the word *rights* in the second volume of his *ἔπεα πτερόεντα* [Epea Pteroenta = winged words], or *The Diversions of Purley* (2 vols., 1786, 1805). More often than not, Blake used the word *revolution* to designate the turn of the earth upon its axis, or the cycle of time and the passing of ages. In Blake's *America* (1793) the spirit of rebellion first speaks through the character of Orc, chained by Urizen much as Jupiter had enchained Prometheus. Urthona's daughter brings food and drink to the chain-bound Orc until one day he breaks his bonds and embraces the 'shadowy daughter'. This act of liberation and union enables Orc to enter into 'the souls of warlike men', the patriots and leaders of the new America. He appears to them with the report that the King is under the dominion of Urizen and 'Albion's Angel'.

Elaborated more fully in *The Four Zoas* (1797) and in *Jerusalem* (1804), Blake's mythology relates the fall of Albion (humanity), and the resulting division and opposition among the four Zoas (life-principles): Urizen (reason), Urthona or Los (passive or active imagination), Luva (desire), and Tharmas (compassion). Further, each Zoa has a female counterpart or Emanation; and each pair can propagate further generations. Thus, Orc is born of Enitharmon, Emanation of Urthona/Los. Orc's task in America is to arouse the 'Thirteen Angels' (Colonies) to overthrow the repressive exploitation imposed by the King. In his impassioned appeal, he repeats again and again his battle cry: 'Sound! Sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my Thirteen Angels!' (*America*, plate 9, lines 1, 13, 21, 26). As elsewhere in Blake's prophetic poems, the warfare is conducted through the rhetoric actually reported in the newspapers. In terms of stylistic elegance, some of the most impressive language is voiced by those who promote the traditional conservatism that Blake's poem argues against. The elegant rhetoric, however, is typically subverted by a simpler and more direct communication. In *The French Revolution* some compelling ideas are expressed in a style that parodies Edmund Burke. The speech may be admired, but the argument refuted. Blake relies on the same strategy to support the American Revolution in *America*, or the defence of women's rights in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793).

William Blake created a number of plates illustrating John Gabriel Stedman's account of the slave rebellion in Surinam (1796); his 'Little Black Boy' (in *Songs of Innocence*, 1789) challenged notions of racial differences; and his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* dealt with issues of racism and slavery. But he witnessed an even more insidious drugging of the people taking place in Britain's own farmlands. In early engravings, Blake had represented Christ, not as the traditional 'good Shepherd', but as 'Christ, the good Farmer', who appeared among the peasants working the fields to urge them to bring in their crops before the arrival of an impending storm.

Although an entire community in Manchester fell victim to the nervous tremors and hallucinations of ergotism in 1927,⁹¹ as did 300 residents of Pont-Saint-Esprit as late as 1951,⁹² such outbreaks of ergot poisoning have been virtually eliminated in modern Europe. Throughout earlier centuries, however, epidemics were frequent. In Blake's time, widespread cases commonly followed when rainstorms felled the rye before harvest. While the lysergic acid in ergot fungus contributed to mental derangement, other ergot alkaloids caused muscular spasms and violent constriction of blood vessels.⁹³ Among the symptoms, then, were delusions and convulsions. Severe cases might even result in respiratory failure, permanent mental impairment, or, as happened in France and Germany, gangrenous loss of limbs.⁹⁴ Blake's concern with the blight that 'cuts the tender corn', evident as early as his sketches of the *The Good Farmer*, becomes an important motif in the prophetic works, where the hallucinatory blight provides an apt metaphor for Urizenic oppression and exploitation.



Figure 5 Blake, *The Good Farmer* (ca. 1780–1785). Source: Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

In the seven extant sketches of *The Good Farmer* (Butlin: 120r, 120Ar, 121, 122r and v, 123r, 124),⁹⁵ Blake progressively intensified the drama of the impending blight. In the last version, Christ offers the good grain to the people while a storm rages in the background. In the distance beyond Christ's head, Blake depicts the demon of the storm felling the grain. Blake's sketch of *The Good Farmer* has also been interpreted as representing Christ's parable of the wheat and tares:

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. (Matthew 13:24–30)

This parable, if indeed the source of Blake's drawing, might seem to depict the sowing of the tares as an evil very different from spreading the blight. But the difference begins to fade with the realization that the word 'tares' was translated in the King James bible from the Greek *zizania* (ζιζάνια), which designates

ryegrass, in particular the ryegrass known as darnel (*Lolium temulentum*), which looks much like wheat before the bearded grain matures to reveal its rye characteristics. Like the cultivated rye that could easily be toppled by rain and infected by ergot, darnel too was often host to a fungus (*Neotyphodium coenophialum*) that caused dizziness or hallucinatory rapture. Thus in Germany darnel is known as *Taumel-Lolch* (stagger-rye), *Rauschgras* (drunk-grass), *Tollkorn* (mad-grain), or *Schwindelweizen* (dizzy-wheat).⁹⁶

As Christ makes explicit in interpreting the parable, the darnel/tares are the offspring of the devil who sowed them (Matthew 13:36–43). In Blake's sketch, the demon is seen emerging from the storm clouds and spreading the blight to the fields of grain below. The communion of Christ, as 'the living bread' (John 6:35, 48–51), is contrasted with the maddening blight being spread by the storm demon.



Figure 6 František Severa, *Claviceps purpurea*: 1 blighted rye; 2 sclerotia; 3 germinating sclerotium. Source: A. Tschirch, *Heilpflanzen*. Leipzig, 1909.

The ergot fungus grows quickly in the wet, ripening grain. As the fungus grows within the kernel, it swells into a peculiar and distinctive shape, which gives the ergot-infected grain its name: *secale cornutum*, or horned rye. The swollen sclerotia, or corn-mother, splits and sends forth these spiralling purple tendrils. Only the poor suffered the curse of the blighted grain, for the fungus (whether *Claviceps purpurea* or *Neotyphodium coenophialum*) grows principally on rye. Bread made from rye was a staple for the lower classes. Wheat, which provided white bread for the tables of the wealthy, was, if infected, seldom marketed.⁹⁷ The fallen rye, however, might well be harvested by a desperate tenant farmer, whose livelihood depended upon the crop. The outbreak in 1762 occurred in Wattison, where the victims experienced hallucinations followed by bursting capillaries and gangrene in their extremities. The cause was traced to ergot in the bread prepared from ‘clog-wheat, or revets, or bearded wheat’.⁹⁸

Blake has not hesitated in *Europe* (1794) to provide scenes of violence and horror. He depicts malevolence (plate 1), the strangler and his victims (plate 2), the dying infant before the hearth (plate 6), and those stricken with pestilence (plate 7), imprisoned in chains (plate 13), and fleeing the conflagration (plate 15). In seeming contrast, the dancers of the blighted corn possess a dreamy detachment from the dreary scenes of human suffering. Throughout the grim torments of *Europe*, Blake sustains a visionary transcendence that enables him and the reader to bear the oppression, to escape the spider’s web of decay (plate 12), and to anticipate the new day of ‘enormous revelry’ (plate 14). The ergot dancers of *Europe* represent ‘the blighted corn’ as a source of visionary power. Citing George Cumberland’s identification of the dancers as ‘Mildews blighting ears of Corn’, David Erdman suggests that in spreading the blight these naked dancers ‘are trumpeting the apocalypse’,⁹⁹ an allusion to the seven plagues in the Book of Revelation 16:17–21. The blight is spread by naked male and female spirits who dance through the toppled stalks of rye blowing the ergot rusts as silent music from their curved horns. In Blake’s rendering of the *secale cornutum*, the spiralling tendrils of the sclerotia are transformed into musical horns. Albion’s Angel is to be ‘smitten with his own plagues’: thus, the harbingers of blight are beautiful. They are beautiful not just for the political liberation they prophesy, they are intrinsically beautiful in their capacity to expand vision and reveal ‘wondrous worlds’.¹⁰⁰

The narrative begins with the playfulness of Blake’s catching a fairy who then dictates the prophecy. Akin to this fairy, the naked dancers appear as effects in the very dream they cause. They are delusions in the blight they propagate. They are also dancers in Enitharmon’s dream. Enitharmon has slept and ‘Man was a Dream!’ For ‘eighteen hundred years’ she has dreamt her ‘female dream!’ It is a dream of Europe’s history since the time of Christ, a dream of division and war, a dream that now reveals ‘Albions Angel smitten with his own plagues’ and a looming cloud ‘Fill’d with immortal demons of futurity’ (*Europe* 9:1–10). In her dream she feels none of the paroxysms of the blight. As that futurity unfolds, however, she is awakened from her delusions. Orc descends from ‘the heights of Enitharmon’ to blaze in fury amidst ‘the vineyards of red France.’ The revolution rages and ‘Enitharmon groans & cries in anguish and dismay’ (*Europe* 15:8).

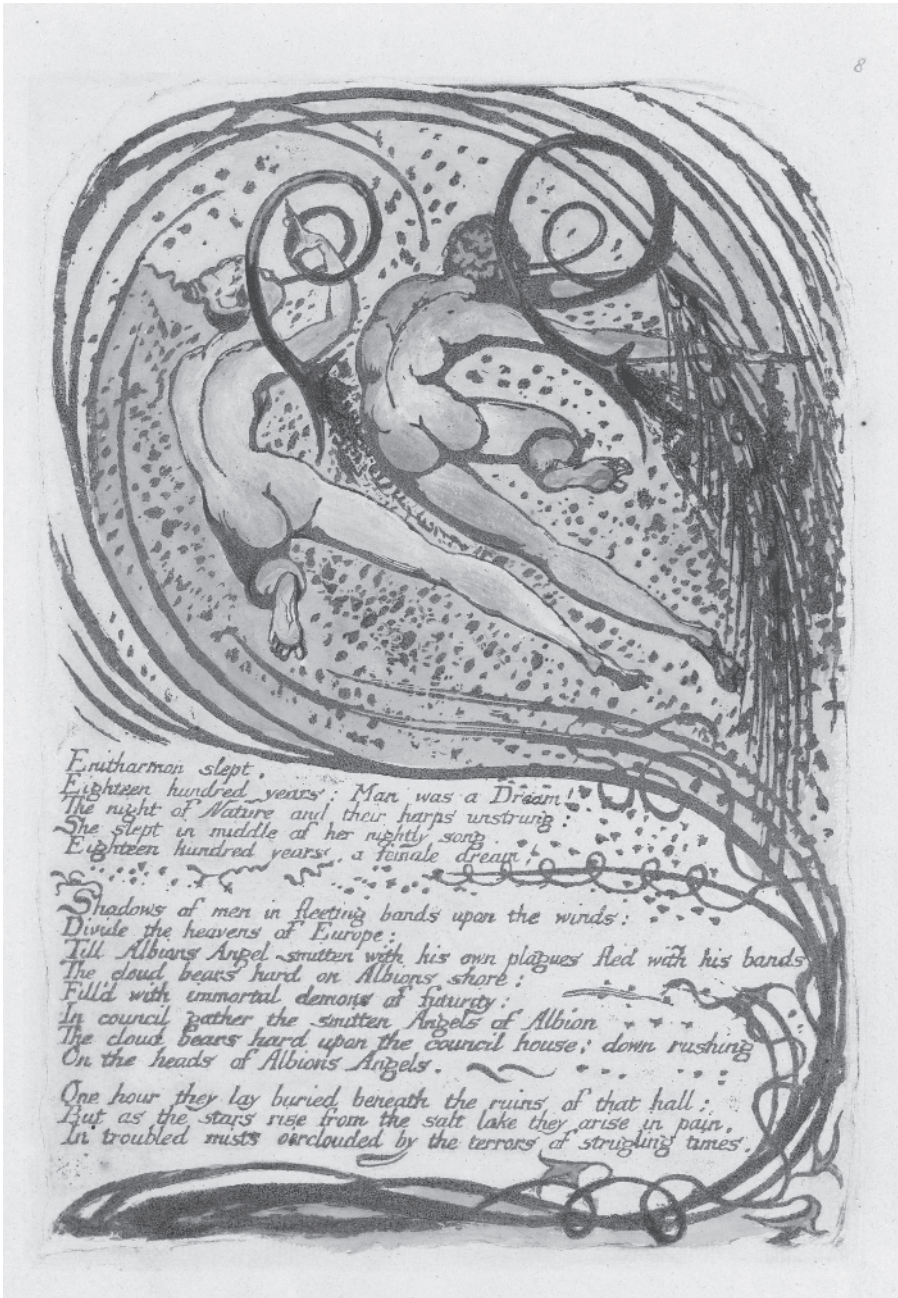


Figure 7 Blake, *Europe*, plate 9. Source: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

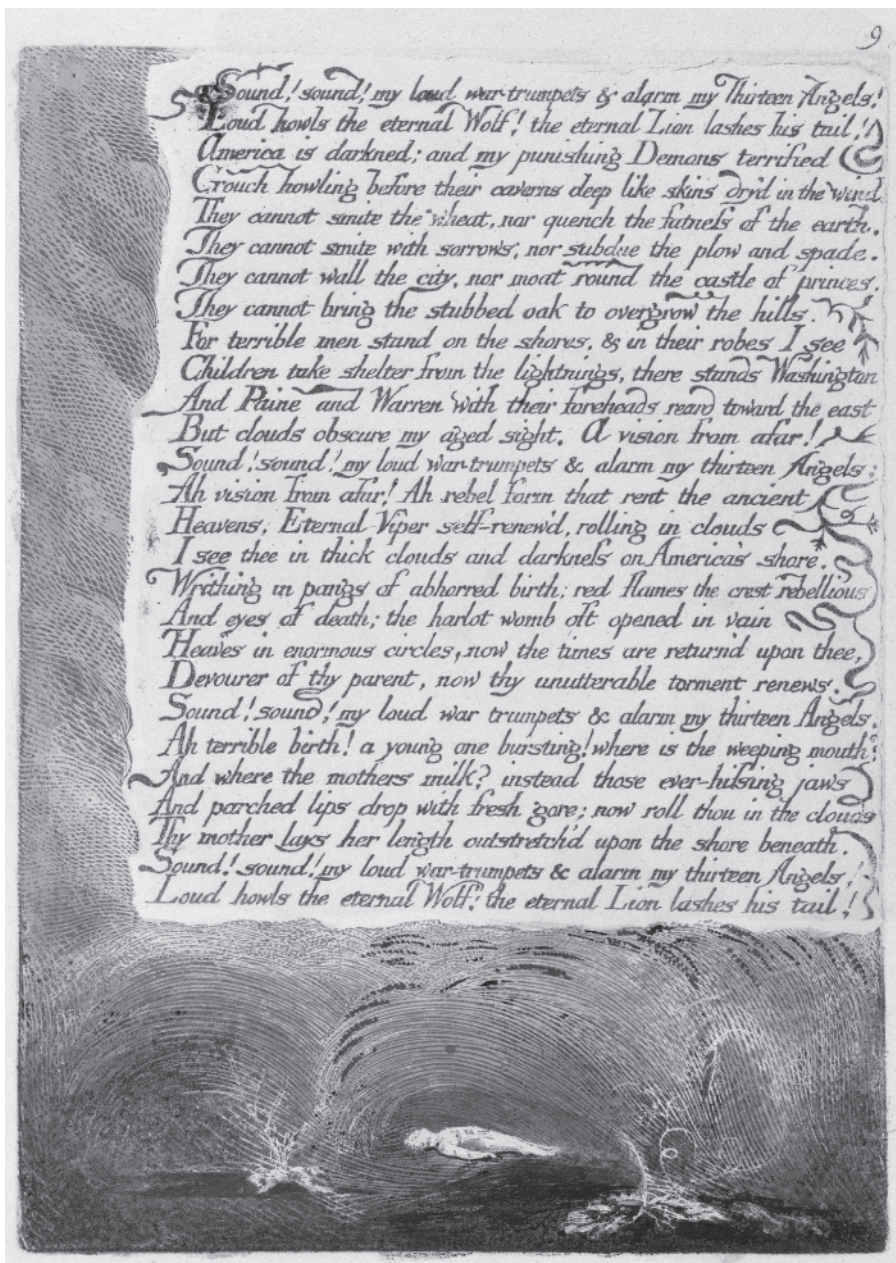


Figure 8 Blake, *America*, plate 9. Source: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Among his many images of entire fields and single stalks of rye (e.g., *Milton*, plates 49 and 50), none is more disturbing than the abandoned babe lying beneath the smitten grain: ‘Ah terrible birth! A young one bursting! Where is the weeping mouth?/ And where the mother’s milk? (*America*, plate 9). Has the ergot claimed another victim of oppression? Or is this babe a slumbering newborn, waiting to rise up as an Orc-child of revolution? In contrast to plate 9 of *Europe*, the fallen rye offers no hint of animation, whether hallucinatory or not. Instead, Blake has depicted the toppled grain as a cover concealing and smothering the babe. The image allows no hint of rescue or salvation.

Beginning with his sketches of ‘*The Good Farmer*’ early in the 1780s, Blake appropriated the recurrent threat of ergot blight into his artistic vision of redemption. With its hallucinatory effects, ergot poisoning expressed precisely those conditions which Blake sought to describe in the mental storms and fires of *The Four Zoas* and the political strife of *America* and *Europe*. Like the victim of ‘the blighted corn’, the Blakean redeemer – Orc, Los, Christ, Milton, Blake himself – knows both bliss and agony, ‘behold[s] the Angelic spheres arising night & day’ and ‘walks forth from midst of the fires.’

Anna Seward

The poet ‘must be mad’, wrote Anna Seward to Walter Scott (24 August 1807) in response to William Wordsworth’s poem ‘about his dancing daffodils, ten thousand, as he says, in high dance in the breeze beside the river, whose waves dance with them, and the poet’s heart, we are told, danced too.’¹⁰¹ If Seward judged Wordsworth as mad for describing the dancing daffodils, then she most certainly would have considered Blake a raving maniac for his description of the naked dancing fairies spreading the ergot blight in the fallen rye. Seward, ‘the Swan of Lichfield’, was a practical sentimentalist and, as a poet of place, strongly committed to naturalistic detail. Because her father, Thomas Seward, served as Canon of Lichfield Cathedral, she lived for most of her life in the Bishop’s Palace. Tutored by her father, her education consisted of religious instruction, mathematics, and extensive reading in British literature. Within his own family, Canon Seward put into practice his convictions on the education of young women as expressed in *The Female Right to Literature* (1748). A thorough knowledge of literature, he argued, would provide women with the intellectual and moral strength to thwart false presumptions of masculine superiority. Seward ventriloquizes the arrogant voice of male dominance:

‘Women, the toys of men, and slaves of lust,
Are but meer moulds to form man’s outward crust;
The heavenly spark, that animates the clay,
Of the prime essence that effulgent ray,
Th’ immortal soul, is all to man confin’d
Not meanly squander’d on weak woman kind.’¹⁰²

To counter their subordination as mindless, soulless sex objects, Thomas Seward proposed that women empower themselves with mastery of great literature. Encouraged by her father, Anna Seward was writing poetry and reciting the works of Milton as a child, and by the age of 17 was publishing in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Her father's tutoring may have influenced her decision not to marry; she nevertheless sought the company of both men and women, forming close relationships that appeared to be intellectual rather than sexual. She sought literary friendships and valued literary community to inspire creativity and poetic expression. Between 1775 and 1781, she participated in the salon of Anna Miller at Batheaston.¹⁰³ At the fortnightly meetings, Lady Miller promoted an effusive style in the manner subsequently adopted by the Della Crucians in the poetic movement launched by Robert Merry, Bertie Greatheed, and Hester Thrale Piozzi in *The Arno Miscellany* (1784). At each gathering the guests were invited to place a poem in an antique urn. The poems would then be read and discussed, with the authors of the three most favoured being crowned by Lady Miller with a myrtle wreath. In her *Poem to the Memory of Lady Miller* (1782), Seward praised her salon hostess for stimulating her efforts in poetry.

Not until her thirty-eighth year did Seward begin to attract many readers beyond her local circle. With the publication of *Elegy on Captain Cook* (1780), *Monody on the unfortunate Major Andre* (1781), and *Louisa: A Poetical Novel* (1782), she was welcomed in the literary circles of the metropolis. Even there, however, she was appreciated primarily as a regional poet. The literary circle at the Bishop's Palace in Lichfield included Erasmus Darwin, Samuel Johnson, and James Boswell. She also became friends with Sir Walter Scott, who later published with a prefatory memoir her posthumous *Poetical Works* (1810).¹⁰⁴ Her *Llangollen Vale* (1796) celebrated the female friendship of Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby. Her reputation grew with the publication of her *Original Sonnets* (1799) and *Memoirs on the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804).

Dissenters

As Sir Walter Scott repeatedly reminded readers of *Old Mortality* (1816), *Peveril of the Peak* (1818), *Woodstock* (1826), and other novels set during the turmoil of the mid-seventeenth century, the strong millenarian elements of Puritanism virtually exploded during the civil wars amid hostilities engendered by the millenarian sects – the Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Quakers, and Muggletonians. A similar movement was aroused by the French Revolution. Following the storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789), a reformist reaction spread rapidly throughout Europe. Calls for political reform were heard in sermons, lectures, and public speeches. The affinity between the dissenting religious sects and the protest against the existing monarchy is made evident by William Sharp, William Blake, and many others active in both groups. The millenarianism of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott found its justification in the Book of Revelation

that Christ will establish a one-thousand-year reign of the saints on earth before the Last Judgment. There was division, however, between the quiescent millenarians, content to suffer patiently while awaiting the advent of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 13:10), and the apocalyptic millenarians, driven by a sense of imminence. The religious dissent could become disruptive, resorting to riot to overthrow unjust authorities in an attempt to bring about the era of peace (Isaiah 35). Advocates of apocalyptic millenarianism assumed a divine mission to usher in the promised order.

From generation to generation new prophets claimed visionary power or divine inspiration. Among them a few possessed as well the power to convince others of the truth of their visions. Such a one was Emanuel Swedenborg, who was born in Stockholm and died in London (1688–1772). A scientist, philosopher, theologian, millenarian, and mystic, he is best known for his book on the afterlife, *Heaven and Hell* (1758). Abandoning his career as a scientist in 1741 at age 53, he devoted his efforts to understanding the dreams and visions he began to experience with increasing intensity. He reported that he was called upon by the Lord to recount his revelations. His most extensive work was *Arcana Cælestia, or Heavenly Mysteries* (8 vols., 1749–1756). In *The Heavenly Doctrine* (1757) he explained how the Lord had opened his spiritual eyes, enabling him to see into the portals of Heaven and Hell and speak with angels and demons. In this year, 1757, Swedenborg announced that the Last Judgment commenced. The following year he published *Heaven and Hell* (1758) and *The Last Judgment* (1758). Intrigued by Swedenborg's extensive study of subjective experience, Immanuel Kant observed the effort through his own vantage as a philosopher, in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, expounded through the Dreams of Metaphysics* (*Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, 1766). As will be seen below in the context of reform in the 1820s, Thomas De Quincey's translation (1824) served his purpose in reaffirming visionary experience as a countermeasure against the increasing mechanization of human occupations.

Swedenborg's theological teachings found a wider readership in England than in his native Sweden. In order to disseminate Swedenborgian doctrine, it was first necessary to translate the works from Latin into English. The translation was undertaken primarily by Thomas Hartley, rector of Winwick in Northamptonshire, and John Clowes, rector of St John's at Manchester. Although he remained within the Anglican Church, Clowes attracted a flock of adherents to Swedenborgian millenarianism throughout Lancashire. Swedenborg had never presumed to foster a separate sect, but in 1787 a Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem was established in London with 12 founding members. James Hindmarsh, who had served as a Methodist preacher, held the first services the following year in Great Eastcheap, London. The liturgy of the Swedenborgian Church followed the Anglican service, but the church organization was congregational. During the ensuing decade, Swedenborgian reading societies were established throughout England, and with them came a new

belief in communication with good and evil spirits in their afterlife. The revolutionary 1790s also saw the emergence of other millenarian prophets, principally Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott.

Declaring himself to be ‘Prince of the Hebrews’, descendant of the House of David, and ‘the Nephew of the Almighty’, Brothers advocated individual revelation. Having served as a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, Brothers resigned his commission in 1789 and devoted himself to his growing congregation of followers. In 1793, Brothers launched his campaign to gather all others who felt their ‘Jewish’ spirit in an affinity with the Old Testament. Brothers proposed to lead as ruler of Israel until the return of Jesus Christ. Because of his opposition to both the monarchy and the Church of England, he was charged in 1795 with treason and tried as a criminal lunatic. When Brothers was released after 11 years in a private asylum, he found his following diminished to a loyal few. Among the loyal was John Finlayson, who dedicated himself to printing a series of pamphlets reiterating Brothers’s views and introducing his own schemes for reading the divine messages communicated through the stars.

William Sharp, one of William Blake’s fellow engravers, had been like Blake a convert to the teachings of Swedenborg. In 1792, Sharp engraved Philip de Louthembourg’s *The Angel destroys the Assyrians* (2 Kings 19:35, Isaiah 37:36, 2 Chronicles 32:21) for Thomas Macklin’s *Bible* (1792). Prized for his sculptur-esque illusion of three-dimensionality, Sharp received commissions for nine of the plates for *Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery* (1805), including Benjamin West’s *Lear on the Heath*.¹⁰⁵ In identifying and interpreting the nodes of history, the historian is responsible for appraising the significance of recognized historical nodes and possibly alerting attention to the relevance of a previously unrecognized node.

Historical Nodes

The grand Shakespeare edition was conceived at a dinner at Josiah Boydell’s home in November 1786. The guest list itself is evidence of Boydell’s extensive connections in the artistic world: Benjamin West, painter to King George III; George Romney, a renowned painter; George Nicol, bookseller to the king and painter; William Hayley, a poet; John Hoole, a scholar and translator of Tasso and Aristotle; and Daniel Braithwaite, an engineer. Most sources also list the painter Paul Sandby. Although the initial idea for the edition was probably not Boydell’s, he was the one to seize and pursue it. He wanted to use the edition to facilitate the development of a British school of history painting.¹⁰⁶

As a friend of Thomas Paine and John Horne Tooke, whose portraits he had engraved, William Sharp was assumed to be complicit in revolutionary schemes. He became a member of the Society for Constitutional Information, founded to discuss and promote Paine’s *Rights of Man* and other radical publications. Government repression led to the treason trials of October 1794. Openly

supporting Paine and Tooke on the rights of citizens, Sharp was summoned before the Privy Council suspected of treason as an advocate of revolution. It was concluded that Sharp was merely an ‘enthusiast’ with no serious intention to overthrow the government. Without abandoning his Swedenborgian ideas, Sharp became an enthusiastic supporter of Brothers. When Brothers was declared insane and confined in an asylum, Sharp abandoned Brothers and promoted another visionary prophet, Joanna Southcott, whom he brought from Exeter to London to lead the cult that had formerly gathered around Brothers. This was a congregation eager to hear the visionary revelations, which Southcott related in incantatory verse and rhapsodic prose. She identified with the virgin mother sent to conceive and bear a new saviour. She wrote over 60 books, from *Strange Effects of Faith* (1801–1802) and *A Dispute between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness* (1802) to the *Book of Wonders* (1813–1814).

Beginning in 1792, when Blake was engraving his illuminated works, Southcott assumed the role of the ‘woman clothed with the sun’ beneath the ‘great red dragon’ (Revelation 12). Between 1805 and 1810, Blake painted several versions of this image. By contrast, Sharp depicted Southcott in maternally repose, displaying her Bible open to the prophecy of the New Jerusalem and the woman appointed to be ‘delivered of a man child’ (Isaiah 56). In her last book, *Prophecies announcing the Birth of the Prince of Peace* (1814), she declared that the time of birth had arrived. Blake for his part wondered how the miracle might be confirmed, should Southcott fulfil her major prophecy that she, like the Virgin Mary, would give virgin birth to the new Saviour.

Whatever is done to her she cannot know
 And if youll ask her she will swear it so
 Whether tis good or evil none’s to blame
 No one can take the pride no one the shame (from Blake’s Notebook)

On 29 October 1814, she fell into a trance from which she did not recover. Her followers, a sect of over 100,000 members, celebrated her passing as the advent of a new spirit of redemption for a new age.

Corresponding Societies and Treason Trials

Although Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791) had been banned and its author convicted *in absentia* for seditious libel, copies continued to circulate and Paine’s ideas were discussed among the many members of the London Corresponding Society and its affiliate organizations throughout Britain. On 11 April 1792, the Society of the Friends of the People was founded by a group dedicated to these very same principles of reform. In May 1794, under charges of high treason, Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall, and other leaders were arrested and were brought to trial. A dedicated reformer, Hardy was founder and

secretary of the London Corresponding Society. Thelwall, journalist and poet, attracted a following and had a reputation as a rousing orator and advocate for Parliamentary reform. Following the modest success of his *Poems upon Various Subjects* (1787), Thelwall accepted the post as editor for the *Biographical and Imperial Magazine* and began his career as orator in the debating societies. His political ideas attracted the many enthusiasts inspired by the revolutionary developments following the fall of the Bastille. In the course of his career, Thelwall was in contact with Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, and Henry Crabb Robinson.

After Thomas Paine fled to France on 13 September 1792, Thelwall was acknowledged as Britain's most effective spokesperson of working-class radicalism, explaining to his audiences the ideas Paine had set forth in *Rights of Man*. The trial against Paine for seditious libel was held on 18 December 1792. The second part of *Rights of Man* was submitted in evidence, and Paine was represented *in absentia* by Thomas Erskine, whose brilliant defence still stands as a model for freedom of the press.¹⁰⁷ Persuaded by prevailing fears of French invasion, the jury was ready with their verdict of guilty before the prosecution spoke. In frustration at the inability to execute the death sentence, Paine was repeatedly hanged in effigy.¹⁰⁸ Instead of using a straw dummy as their effigy, it was proposed that Thelwall would provide an appropriate substitute in the effort to stifle insurrection.

That possibility might have been realized when Thelwall and others were charged with treason. The arguments for rights and reform, however, had gained wider support during the two intervening years. Thelwall himself had been instrumental in clarifying that the case for human rights extended far beyond national boundaries. Thus, when he wrote his version of *The Incas* (1792), his purpose was to disseminate the precepts of radicalism by exposing the greed in all contrary exertions of conquering, colonizing, and exploiting. Like Helen Maria Williams's *Peru* (1784) before him, and August von Kotzebue's *Die Spanier in Peru* (1796) after him, Thelwall based his drama on Jean-François Marmontel's *Les Incas, ou, La destruction de l'empire du Pérou* (1777). Thelwall's subtle implication that Pizarro's quest for gold and power was parallel to the Jacobin usurpation also anticipated Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro* (Drury Lane, 24 May 1799) with its suggestion that the Spanish conquest of the noble Incas was akin to the cruelty in the French Revolution.

With John Horne Tooke in 1792, Thelwall took up an active role in the London Corresponding Society. As a frequent speaker at London's radical societies his arguments were similar to those in his published papers: *An essay towards a definition of animal vitality* (1793) and *The Peripatetic; or, Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society; in a Series of Politico-Sentimental Journals* (1793). In 1794, Thelwall, Horne Tooke, and Thomas Hardy were tried for treason following lectures protesting the arrest of other political activists. After spending some time at the Tower and at Newgate, the three were acquitted. Government officials were not mistaken in their assumption that Thelwall would

act upon his acquittal as if it were an official permit to persist in his agitation for reform. Published after his release, Thelwall sought public sympathy in his *Poems written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, under a charge of high treason* (1795), and in his paper *The Natural and Constitutional Right of Britons to Annual Parliaments, Universal Suffrage, and the Freedom of Popular Association* (1795) he reasserted his arguments on behalf of extending the vote and granting public assembly. During this period Thelwall also edited a periodical, *The Tribune* (1795),¹⁰⁹ for the express purpose of circulating print versions of his lectures, along with satirical pieces and political poetry, such as *Ode: On the Destruction of the Bastille*.

Also in 1795, at the very time that Thelwall was arguing for greater liberties, Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger was promoting legislation to further constrain radicalism and reformist criticism: the Treason Act (36 Geo. 3 c. 7) and Seditious Meetings Act (36 Geo. 3 c. 8).¹¹⁰ Thelwall would lecture in taverns and town halls, and his speeches were modulated to the local interests and concerns of his audiences. His political activism, although intense with revolutionary zeal, could be conveniently disguised by the same heterotopia he utilized in *The Incas*; that is, he shifted from contemporary political commentary to parallel events from some other time and place in history, with circumstances that Thelwall would make seem strikingly similar to Britain's here and now. To dodge charges of sedition, he would lecture on Roman history or Arthurian legend. In spite of such strategies, loyalists would disrupt his lectures so aggressively that he chose to leave London and lecture on tour. But even on the road, angry mobs would impede the gatherings.

The inheritance laws that favoured private and institutional accumulation of property and wealth were defended by Burke, but opposed in Thelwall's *The Rights of Nature Against the Usurpations of Establishments* (1796). 'In this excursive frenzy of composition,' Thelwall wrote of Burke's *Reflections*, 'there is much deep design and insidious policy.' The 'deep design' was to reinforce the position of 'that small proportion of the people of Britain whom he calls "the British public",' and 'doom to political annihilation nine-tenths of the adult inhabitants of a nation.'

In a letter to Thelwall (13 November 1796), Samuel Taylor Coleridge expressed his approval of Thelwall's ideas on 'the origin of property & the mode of removing its evils.' Except for Thelwall's repudiation of the church, Coleridge declared that he shared many of Thelwall's convictions: 'We run on the same ground, but we drive different Horses. I am daily more and more a religionist – you, of course, more & more otherwise.' In a subsequent letter (19 November 1796) Coleridge declared that he had acquired nearly all of Thelwall's works, but he devoted more attention to Thelwall's poetry than to his political prose, and he steered their disagreements into matters of religion rather than politics. He acknowledged, nevertheless, Thelwall's bold contributions to the Revolution Controversy: 'You uplift the torch dreadlessly, and show to mankind the face of that idol which they have worshipped in darkness.'

Erasmus Darwin

While lecturing in Derby in 1796, Thelwall met Erasmus Darwin, whose ideas concerning religion and politics he found closely in accord with his own. When Thelwall was invited to edit the Derby newspaper, Coleridge, who brought out his first issue of *The Watchman* in March 1796, warned Thelwall of the risks of publishing by subscription. He conceded, however, that Darwin was a brilliant man who commanded a wide circle of influence. In addition to the Lunar Society founded in 1766, Erasmus Darwin was also active in the Literary Society hosted by Canon Seward in the Bishop's Palace of Litchfield, and frequently attended by Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, and other prominent authors of the age. Incidents from these gatherings were reported by Anna Seward in her *Memoirs on the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804). Following 1783, Darwin also organized the Derby Philosophical Society to discuss ideas on natural philosophy such as those reported in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. The Derby Philosophical Society was established as a social and intellectual club to avoid the restrictions placed upon political meetings. Attracting many intellectuals and wealthy benefactors, the club members were soon able to assemble an institutional library that was open to a number of the public. Long-time members of the Lunar Society included Matthew Boulton and his partner James Watt, the engineers who manufactured the steam engines that ran the factories and the trains of Britain. Another associate of Boulton and Watt was James Keir, an enterprising chemist and inventor who established factories for glass-making and the production of soap. Also among the prominent members were the chemist and Unitarian minister Joseph Priestley and the chemist and porcelain manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood. The Lunar Society most often met at Erasmus Darwin's house in Lichfield or at Matthew Boulton's residence, Soho House in Handsworth, Birmingham. Their ideas were considered dangerous by the establishment as well as neighbours and led to riots at Lichfield.

While travelling from town to town to solicit subscription, Coleridge met Darwin in Derby in January 1796. He praised Darwin as a polymath, but was dismayed by his atheism.

Dr. Darwin possesses, perhaps, a greater range of knowledge than any other man in Europe, and is the most inventive of philosophical men. He thinks in a *new* train on all subjects except religion. He bantered me on the subject of religion. I heard all his arguments, and told him that it was infinitely consoling to me, to find that arguments which so great a man adduced against the existence of a God and the evidences of a revealed religion were such as had startled me at fifteen, but had become the objects of my smile at twenty. Not one new objection – not even an ingenious one.¹¹¹

In spite of Coleridge's admiration of other aspects of Darwin's intelligence, and their accord on political matters, Darwin's atheism remained an obstacle in

Coleridge's appraisal of his merit. Because Thelwall, too, advanced atheism along with his radical politics and atheism, Coleridge assumed that Thelwall would find congenial conversation in Darwin's circle. Just as Darwin, the man of intellect as radical atheist, provides one comparison to Thelwall, Joseph Gerrald, as one of the Edinburgh Martyrs sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay for sedition, provided another apt comparison to Thelwall's career. News of Gerrald's death on 16 March 1796 prompted Thelwall to claim him as kindred spirit, one who denied the Christian concept of a beneficent God. Gerrald argued for the responsibility of the people to construct the beneficence they seek in the forms of government they institute. Gerrald outlined his plans for empowering the populace in his pamphlet *A Convention the Only Means of Saving Us from Ruin* (1793).

Responding to Thelwall in a letter of 13 May 1796, Coleridge challenged the presumed disparity between patriot and Christian, and Thelwall's enlisting Gerrald as a fellow Atheist. 'Was he so,' Coleridge asked, 'when he offered those solemn Prayers to God Almighty at the Scotch Convention?' If an atheist, then Gerrald must also adopt insincerity as expedient, and reject sincerity as a folly. 'Ger[r]ald & Dr Darwin are polite & good-natured men & willing to arrive at good by attainable roads – they deem Insincerity a necessary virtue in the present imperfect state of our Nature.' Thelwall's *Poems written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, under a charge of high treason* (1795) established his claims as poet. Coleridge reciprocated by sending him a copy of *Poems on Various Subjects*, just published by Joseph Cottle (16 April 1796). 'I build all my poetic pretensions', Coleridge wrote, 'on the Religious Musings.' Anticipating Thelwall's atheism, Coleridge challenged him to 'read with a Poet's Eye' and without prejudice.¹¹² Thelwall's criticism did not entirely please him.

Your remarks on my Poems are, I think, just in general – there is a rage, & affectation of double Epithets – 'Unshuddered, unaghasted' [*Religious Musings*, line 79; omitted in subsequent editions] is indeed truly ridiculous – But why so violent against metaphysics in poetry?¹¹³

The 'metaphysics', of course, are those of the *Religious Musings*. While he accepted some of Thelwall's objections, he rejected others. Thelwall marked for deletion the line, 'Life is a vision shadowy of Truth' (*Religious Musings*, line 396). 'Why do you object to *shadowy of truth*?' Coleridge queried. 'It is, I acknowledge, a Grecism – but, I think, an elegant one.' Agreeing with Thelwall's appraisal of the frivolous use of adjectives as mere decoration in Della Cruscan poetry, Coleridge argues that essential harmony resides not just in individual words but in their associations. Milton's *Paradise Lost* exhibits that harmony at its best, Darwin's *Zoonomia* reveals its failure. Using the verb in its transitive active sense 'to reject or expel with loathing and repugnance,' Coleridge declares, 'I absolutely nauseate Darwin's poem.'¹¹⁴

The Economy of Vegetation and *The Loves of the Plants*, the two parts of Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1789–1791), may have amused Coleridge with their fanciful allegory and vegetable eroticism, but he did not find Darwin's *Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life* (Part I, 1794; Parts I–III, 1796) at all amusing. At odds with Coleridge's attempt to retain an alliance between Christianity and reform, this was a book that supported radical reform but also justified atheism. Darwin proposed a theory of evolution totally antithetical to the Biblical account of creation. The Catholic Church therefore listed it in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Life commenced with 'living filaments', which evolved first into plant forms, and from plant into animal forms: 'as the earth and ocean were probably peopled with vegetable productions long before the existence of animals, shall we conjecture that one and the same kind of living filament is and has been the cause of all organic life?' (*Zoonomia*, Sect. 39.4.8 of Generation). From the notion of the origin of life in primal fibres, Darwin was able to argue the interrelated equality of being rather than a hierarchical order. Nauseated or not, Coleridge would again call upon Darwin before a full year had elapsed. Charles Lloyd, Coleridge's house guest, succumbed to a series of fits and had to be placed under Darwin's medical care.

Charles Lloyd

In May 1796, after nine issues of *The Watchman*, Coleridge's accrued debt of £80 forced him to cease publication. With debts and a growing family, Coleridge considered income as a schoolmaster or tutor. An opportunity opened up for him in Birmingham on 19 August 1796. He was introduced to the younger Charles Lloyd, the eldest son of a Quaker banker and philanthropist. Relinquishing the hope that his son might assume responsibilities at his bank, the father realized the necessity of having his son educated by a private tutor. Following another meeting, the senior Lloyd agreed to pay Coleridge a suitable sum for room, board, and instruction only after the arrangement proved mutually congenial. A sum of £80 annually was subsequently offered. 'His Father told me,' Coleridge explained to Thomas Poole, 'that if he saw that his Son had formed Habits of severe Economy, he should not insist upon his adopting any Profession – as then his fair Share of his (the Father's) Wealth would be sufficient for him.'¹¹⁵

There was more than a small mix of folly in Coleridge's plan: Sarah Coleridge had just given birth to Hartley Coleridge, and before he had secured lodgings for his own family, Coleridge was preparing to take on a boarder. 'My dearest Poole!' he wrote in sweet supplication, 'can you conveniently receive us in the course of a week → We can both sleep in one bed, which we do now.' In the same letter to Poole, Coleridge copied two of Lloyd's sonnets and praised him in terms designed to please Poole as philanthropist:

his heart is uncommonly pure, his affections delicate, & his benevolence enlivened, but not sicklied, by sensibility. – He is assuredly a man of great Genius; but it must be in tete a tete with one whom he loves & esteems, that his colloquial powers open [...] His Joy, & gratitude to Heaven for the circumstance of his domestication with me, I can scarcely describe to you – & I believe, that his fixed plans are of being always with me.¹¹⁶

Lloyd was 21 and Coleridge not yet 24 when the two formed this student–teacher bond. The above letter to Poole on 24 September 1796, which also expressed his delight on the birth of Hartley Coleridge, was followed by a letter on 28 September to Charles Lamb, communicating his horror and grief on learning that one week earlier, 22 September, Lamb’s sister had stabbed their mother to death in a fit of insanity.¹¹⁷

Poole had not yet agreed to purchase a cottage in Nether Stowey for the Coleridge family, but in his letter of 15 October to Lloyd’s father Coleridge hints that they shall soon ‘reside near a very dear friend of mine’. He also reaffirms the compatible arrangement: ‘Your son and I are happy in our connection – our opinions and feelings are as nearly alike as we can expect.’¹¹⁸ The accord was not as congenial as Coleridge pretended. Early in November, Coleridge is taking heavy doses of laudanum for neuralgic pains in his face, and Lloyd can no longer conceal his fits, which recur with increasing frequency. By the beginning of December, Lloyd, in need of medical care, returns to his father. Coleridge informs the Lloyds that he can no longer provide tutoring to their son. The year comes to a positive end with the Coleridges moving into the cottage in Nether Stowey, and with the publication of ‘Ode to the Departing Year’ in the *Cambridge Intelligencer*.

Comfortably settled in Nether Stowey, Coleridge preaches in the Unitarian chapels of Bridgwater and Taunton, and with a commission from Richard Brinsley Sheridan, he commences writing *Osario*, a tragedy for Drury Lane. Lloyd returns to the Coleridge household in February, but by the end of the first week of March he suffers a severe onslaught of fits lasting for the next two weeks. In spite of exhaustion in caring for Lloyd, Coleridge manages to publish a second edition of the *Poems* of April 1796, now expanded to include 40 pages of Lamb’s poetry, and 100 pages of Lloyd’s. Coleridge’s ‘To a Friend’ and ‘To a Young Man of Fortune’ were apparently addressed to Lloyd. Coleridge did little to discourage Lloyd’s adulation, until he realized that Lloyd’s adulations were indecorously effusive.

My Coleridge, take the wanderer to thy breast,
The youth who loves thee, and, who Faint, would rest,
Oft rack’d by hopes that frenzy and expires,
In the long Sabbath of subdued desire. (lines 1–4)

‘Too warm by half’, Coleridge acknowledged in the marginalia to the copy he sent Thomas Hutchinson. With Lloyd, Lamb, and Robert Southey already in

his literary circle, Coleridge is soon joined by Thelwall and the Wordsworths. In the *Monthly Magazine* (November 1797) Coleridge, signing himself Nehemiah Higginbotham, parodied the poetic style of his friends, Lloyd most severely.

Nevertheless, Lloyd still referred to Coleridge as a friend in the preface to his *roman à clef*, *Edmund Oliver* (1798), in which Coleridge is ridiculed as the title character. Lightly disguised representations of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft also appear as characters. Lloyd's semi-autobiographical persona, Charles Maurice, assumes a portion of that dominance which Coleridge had described as his own in his letters to Poole. Oliver recognizes Maurice as his teacher: 'you opened to me the beauty of Christianity, shewed to me the necessity of evils we at present labour under.' Further, Lloyd had Oliver experience some of the youthful misadventures that Coleridge would have preferred to remain secret: especially his lost love of Mary Evans, his debts and depression, and his enlisting as Silas Tomkyn Comberbache in the Royal Dragoons, from which he was rescued by his brothers who arranged his discharge on grounds of insanity. These personal facts, Coleridge realized, must have been communicated by Robert Southey.¹¹⁹ Once again, Lloyd was sent for treatment to Erasmus Darwin's sanatorium in Lichfield. After his release he collaborated with Charles Lamb in a collection of *Blank Verse* (1798). As will be seen in subsequent sections of this *History*, episodes of hallucinatory fits and asylum confinement continue to disrupt his creativity later in his life. While in the asylum, he completed his four-volume translation, *The Tragedies of Vittorio Alfieri* (1815).

John Thelwall

In the meantime, Coleridge and Thelwall continued an amicable correspondence, which evolved into lively discussions when Thelwall met Coleridge and Wordsworth in person. Coleridge related a tell-tale anecdote in the *Biographia Literaria*. G. Walsh, a government agent, was sent by the Home Secretary to investigate the 'disaffected Englishmen' around Nether Stowey and Alfoxden. Coleridge tells of Walsh having misinterpreted their discussion of the philosopher Spinoza, which Walsh misheard as 'Spy Nosy' and considered to be a rude reference to himself and 'a remarkable feature belonging to him'.¹²⁰ Even if the skewed pronunciation of Spinoza were contrived simply for the pun's sake, the circumstance that the three were under scrutiny cannot be denied, for an agent's report was submitted to the Home Office (16 August 1797). 'The inhabitants of Alfoxton House' were identified as 'a Sett of violent Democrats', and Thomas Poole was implicated as 'the more dangerous from his having established ... what he stiles *The Poor Man's Club*'.¹²¹ Thelwall was certainly being watched, and it was likely that agents had followed him to Stowey. The anecdote ridicules the agent's ignorance of the subject being discussed, but it also reveals that Thelwall was at the centre of prevailing fears of seditious plotting.¹²² Because of their association, Wordsworth had been denied renewal of his lease at Alfoxden.

Fearing that ‘the whole Malignity of the Aristocrats would converge to him’, Poole was opposed to aggravating the alarm already stirring in the small community.

Very great odium T. Poole incurred by bringing *me* here – my peaceable manners & known attachment to Christianity had almost worn it away – when Wordsworth came & he likewise by T. Poole’s agency settled here – You cannot conceive the tumult, calumnies, & apparatus of threatened persecutions which this event has occasioned round about us. If *you* too should come, I am afraid, that even riots & dangerous riots might be the consequence – *either* of us separately would perhaps be tolerated – but *all three* together – what can it be less than plot and damned conspiracy – a school for the propagation of demagogy & atheism? (Letter to Thelwall, 21 August 1797)

In 1798, Thelwall withdrew from politics and found a new career as an elocution teacher, instructing others in the techniques of public speaking. Literary works that appeared during this juncture were *Poems chiefly written in retirement ... with a prefatory memoir of the life of the author* (1801), *The Fairy of the Lake* (1801), and *The Daughter of Adoption* (1801).

John Horne Tooke

The major player in the Treason Trials of 1794 was John Horne Tooke, who provided the legal defence. Having taken orders in the Church of England, he was ordained as a priest in 1760, but resigned his benefice in 1773 in order to prepare for practice in law. Concerned that the conservative hostility against Paine, who had escaped the death sentence, would determine the decision against Hardy and Thelwall, Horne Tooke had a friend write a carefully crafted letter affirming his association with ‘Citizen Hardy’ and asking, ‘Is it possible to get ready by Thursday?’ The authorities confiscated the letter and assumed it referred to a planned insurrection. Horne Tooke, however, had prepared other letters that clarified the question whether a list of sinecure places would be ready for publication. As he expected, he was promptly arrested.

As defence lawyer in his own trial for high treason, Horne Tooke’s first request of presiding Lord Chief Justice Eyre was that he address the court not from the prisoner’s box but as attorney from the inner bar. His second request was that the entire record of the Hardy case (‘sixteen hundred close printed octavo pages’) be read into his own case to ensure that they would all be found innocent or guilty on the same grounds. Horne Tooke provided the defence by discriminating between words and deeds, and the confiscated letter was principle evidence that words were subject to misapprehension and misunderstanding.¹²³ The trial lasted for six days (17–22 November) and ended in his acquittal, and with him the acquittal of members of the Hardy trial as well.¹²⁴

In 1782, John Horne added to his own surname that of his friend and benefactor William Tooke. Having taken up residence at Tooke's house at Purley, Horne Tooke was urged to respect one house rule: no discussion of religion or politics was to be allowed. Conforming to the house rule, Horne Tooke made language the lively alternative for discussion, recording the deliberations in his *Epea Pteroenta*, or *The Diversions of Purley* (2 vols., 1786, 1805). He argued in the first volume that while nouns and verbs were the words of substance and action, conjunctions too were verbal acts, and together with the prepositions and participles, conjunctions abbreviated attendant predication and thus gave wings to words (the Homeric *epea pteroenta* of his title). The second volume began with a chapter entitled, 'The Rights of Man'. Elected in 1801 as Member of Parliament for the pocket borough of Old Sarum, Horne Tooke brought a colleague to Purley during recess. Not apprised of the house rule, the guest proposed a discussion of Paine's work. Horne Tooke promptly redirected the discussion into the permissible philological arena, what is the meaning of the word 'rights'?

To silence the crowds clamouring for rights and reform, the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act 16 May 1794 (34 Geo. III, c. 54) had been passed by Parliament. The Act was extended and remained in effect until 1 July 1795 (35 Geo. III, c. 3). As a result of the Act, suspected radicals could be imprisoned without trial. No evidence was required. Suspicion was all that was necessary. Authorities exercised closer surveillance and imposed more severe punishments. Even as people were demanding rights, more rights were stripped away. Ever more zealous to suppress seditious activities, Parliament passed one act after another. Mentioned earlier as restricting Thelwall's public speeches, the Two Acts were enforced in 1795, one extending the treason laws with the Treasonable Practices Act (36 Geo. III, c. 7), the other the Seditious Meetings Act (36 Geo. III, c. 8). In March 1796, two delegates from the Birmingham Corresponding Society were arrested and imprisoned for denouncing the Two Acts as an infringement on free discussion.¹²⁵ Following the passage of the Unlawful Societies Act, 1799 (39 Geo.3 c.79), meetings of corresponding societies ceased except in covert gatherings. Although infiltrated by government spies, two venues still maintained a reform agenda: Church welfare committees and 'friendly societies' like the Freemasons, the Odd Fellows, the Foresters. For the working class, the latter provided a clandestine means of organizing in spite of the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 (39 Geo. III, c. 81; 39 & 40 Geo. III, c. 106) which prohibited trade unions and collective bargaining.¹²⁶ The threat of imprisonment still weighed on those who had 'escaped' the death sentence for treason. Hardy returned to his trade as cobbler. Thelwall still lectured on liberation from political oppression, but he deflected censorship by shifting his subject from contemporary Britain to ancient Rome, yet in a manner that suggested history might be repeating itself. And Horne Tooke managed to gain a voice in Parliament.

Nonconformists

A voice in Parliament, access to public office, a career in civil service, or a university degree were denied by law to Nonconformists and Dissenters. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but there are significant differences. Not to conform to the governance and practices of the established Church of England was a stance of passive resistance. Historically, the Nonconformists identified their resistance after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, and more particularly in response to the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Among the sects who opposed the Church of England were the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and other Calvinist sects, subsequently joined by the Baptists and Methodists. The Dissenters, such as the Puritans, took a more active role in violating the Act of Uniformity and frequently engaged in radical protest. In an earlier section of Part I, entitled ‘Dissenters’, I discussed the turmoil wrought by the millenarian sects following the Restoration in 1660 and the resurgence of millenarian dissenters following the storming of the Bastille. Less inclined to protest, the Nonconformists dedicated their efforts to improving the lives of those entrapped in severe poverty.

Although Church welfare committees provided temporary aid for the homeless and unemployed, charity was not reform. The old Poor Law established workhouses operated by the parish and required residents to work at menial tasks in return for food and clothing. Families were separated and conditions were as hopeless as those in debtors’ prisons. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (4 & 5 Will. IV, c. 76) was intended to improve care and to relieve the burden on the parish by assigning management to locally elected guardians. Improvements might have been more significant without the pervading greed and corruption. The reform came rather from the Nonconformist religious groups who were themselves the target of discrimination. By refusing to take communion in the established Church of England the Nonconformists were excluded from holding a public office or from receiving a university degree. Among the reformed sects of the seventeenth century, the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Calvinists had been identified as Nonconformists at the time of the 1662 Act of Uniformity (14 Car. II, c. 4). In the eighteenth century, Methodists, Unitarians, Quakers, Plymouth Brethren, and English Moravians were added to the list of exclusion.

Based on the teachings of John Wesley, influenced by the memorable hymns of his brother Charles and the inspiring sermons of the revivalist George Whitefield and his call to the ‘Great Awakening’, Methodism sought to enact reform within the Church of England. Because many of the Anglican clergy resisted and resented the emphasis on ‘social holiness’ and missionary work among the poor, the Methodists were compelled to separate after John Wesley’s death in 1791. Methodist preachers took the message to the ‘prodigal sons and daughters’ of the industrial regions of Britain. So many of the working class

were attracted to the Methodist Church that attendances at Anglican services were dramatically reduced. Add to their members the Baptists and the Unitarians, Nonconformists in many manufacturing areas soon outnumbered members of the Church of England. Moreover, their reformist goals were readily allied with the agenda of political liberals. In spite of their growing numbers, they met with conservative resistance to their efforts to abolish the Test and Corporation Acts. As originally passed in 1672, the Test Act (25 Car. II, c. 2) was intended to exclude Roman Catholics. Not repealed until the Catholic Relief Act 1829 (10 Geo. IV, c. 7), the Test Acts required proof of faithful adherence to the Church of England for anyone seeking public office or a university degree. The Anglican establishment, together with the House of Lords, strongly resisted until 1828. The extension of voting rights introduced with the Reform Act of 1832 added to the political leverage of the Nonconformists.

In addition to the emphasis on individual access to the divine, without the mediation of the clergy, the authority of the church and the stability of ecclesiastical hierarchy were shaken by the same forces of political and industrial revolution that were reshaping social structure. The parish system throughout Europe had developed under the rural economy of previous generations. The institutional structure of the church was slow in adapting to the massive shift of population from country to city. Mining and manufacturing towns grew rapidly, and a huge increase in urban populations brought about the squalor of overcrowded housing. With no legal constraints, factory owners exercised a ruthless exploitation of their workers. At a time when the church might have served as a moral force for improvement, the clergy was still ensnared in the anachronistic ecclesiastical structures of earlier days. Long hours, poverty-level wages, and crowded slum dwellings without water, heating, or sewers subjected the working class to the menaces of disease. Theft and prostitution were on the rise. Many poets of the period raised an outcry against the Church of England for its failure to remedy the abuses, even accusing the church of complicity in the exploitation.

William Blake: Vision and Prophecy

William Blake, in ‘Holy Thursday’ from the *Songs of Innocence* (1789), described the children from the Charity Schools being ushered by ‘wise guardians’ to St Paul’s Cathedral for Ascension Day services; then, in the corresponding ‘Holy Thursday’ from the *Songs of Experience* (1794), questioned whether it is ‘a holy thing to see/... Babes reduced to misery,/ Fed with cold and usurious hand’. He also told of abusive child labor in ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, of poverty and prostitution in ‘London’. The themes of self-righteous oppression emerge again in ‘The Garden of Love’, where ‘Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds/ And binding with briars my joys and desires.’ He authored an even more powerful indictment of the slave trade and the repression of women in *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). The millenarian transformation

announced by Swedenborg in *The Heavenly Doctrine* (1757) is mocked by Blake in the opening to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). Blake fully exploits the genre developed by Swedenborg, who declared in *The Heavenly Doctrine* that the Lord had opened his spiritual eyes, so that he could freely visit Heaven and Hell and talk with angels, demons, and other spirits. For Swedenborg, the Last Judgment occurred in 1757, 33 years prior to Blake's parody:

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent, the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is an Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise. (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 3)

From Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* (1771), Blake borrows the form of the interspersed 'Memorable Visions', transforming them into 'Memorable Fancies'. He also converts Angels into Devils, Devils into Angels, reversing the corrupt and hypocritical moral codes that condemn the body as evil and exalt the soul as good. 'The Voice of the Devil' asserts that there is no body distinct from the soul, and that the energy of the body is the source of 'Eternal Delight'. As an 'Angel sitting at the tomb', Swedenborg negates the body in order to affirm the spirit. He has no notion that in union with the spirit the resurrected body has departed from the tomb. There is nothing 'new' in this doctrine of negation:

Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new; though it is only the Contents or Index of already published books. A man carried a monkey about for a show, and, because he was a little wiser than the monkey, grew vain and conceived himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg: he shows the folly of churches and exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious and himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net. Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth. Now hear another: he has written all the old falsehoods. And now hear the reason. He conversed with Angels who are all religious, and conversed not with Devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable through his conceited notions. (*MHH*, plate 21)

Were a 'new' prophecy to be proclaimed, it must animate the physical body, not in some empty ritual of transubstantiation. It must excite the power of vision, not simply paraphrase or plagiarize:

Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further. Have now another plain fact. Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Boehme, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespeare, an infinite number. (*MHH*, plate 21)

After describing the cannibalistic folly of biblical exegesis in the fourth 'Memorable Fancy', Blake offers in the fifth and final 'Memorable Fancy' a

‘Bible of Hell’ based upon this counter credo of salvation through energy. As books in that Bible, Blake produced numerous prophetic works: *America a Prophecy* (1793), *Europe a Prophecy* (1794), *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Song of Los* (1795), *The Book of Los* (1795), and *The Book of Ahania* (1795). These works were followed by a longer exposition of the means to salvation, *Milton a Poem* (1804–1818), in which Blake endeavoured to redeem Milton from the constraints of his Calvinist religion by guiding him, as Virgil guided Dante, on an alternate course to redemption, through the body rather than through spiritual isolation.

Adapting the invocation of the muse to his epic purpose, Blake called upon the ‘Daughters of Beulah’ to descend from his brain through his nerves and into his hand.

Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song
Record the journey of immortal Milton thro’ your Realms
Of terror & mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delusions
Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose
His burning thirst & freezing hunger! Come into my hand
By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
From out the Portals of my Brain, (*Milton*, plate 2, lines 1–7)

Arising in the confluence of body and spirit, Beulah is at once the realm of inspiration and of sexual bliss. Just as the muse is physically animated in Blake’s body, so too Milton must be guided to redemption through Blake’s body. Milton’s Satan found his way into Paradise by riding the ecliptic. Milton falls from his Calvinist Heaven ‘as a falling star,/ Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift;/ And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, entered there’ (*Milton*, plate 15, lines 47–49). The journey through the body reaffirms Blake’s argument against the doctrine that denounces the body as physical entity dictated by appetites and subject to lust, perversion, corruption, and decay. That delusion of the ‘Self’ negates the dynamic contraries of the inspired/inspired body, and the consciousness of the body as outward manifestation of spirit. Milton attains his salvation by embracing the contraries rather than the negation:

There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries
The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.
To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human
I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
(*Milton*, plates 40, lines 32–37; 41, lines 1–2)

Blake's equation of 'Selfhood' with the rationalist denial of the essential unity of body and spirit led to the seemingly paradoxical dictum that self-annihilation was necessary to a liberation from the 'false Body'. The denunciation of the body and exaltation of the spirit, Blake argued, was the hypocritical pretense that justified the dehumanizing labor in the factories. That critique of the brutal exploitation of the Industrial Revolution and the horrors of the Napoleonic Wars became part of Blake's longest poem, *Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, engraved in 100 plates between 1804 and 1820. This work is discussed below in the appropriate context of the protest and riots in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars.

George Crabbe

Three years older than William Blake, George Crabbe was similarly a voice of the working class who sought to represent poverty and the struggles of those lacking the status of wealth and property. Crabbe's subject matter was rural life. Almost 30 years separate two of his major poems – *The Village* (1783) and *The Borough* (1810), the latter to be discussed in Part II. But here it is important to establish his role in transforming the old and overused genre of the pastoral idyll into a new mode of rural realism. Following his schooling in Latin and the Classics at Stowmarket, Crabbe was apprenticed to one doctor and then to another with the intent that he might pursue a livelihood as a surgeon. When that choice of career brought no success, he moved to London in the hopes of establishing himself in literature. Frustrated with finding no opportunity among the publishers, he sought the counsel of Edmund Burke in March 1781. Respected as a literary critic, Burke's endorsement of Crabbe's poetry persuaded the publishers to print three of his poems: *The Library* (1781), *The Village* (1783), and *The Newspaper* (1785).

All three of these poems use the heroic couplet form prominent in eighteenth-century poetry, and all three adopt a storytelling mode to describe the people who participate in, and are affected by, the institution represented. Crabbe makes this purpose clear by providing a synopsis of his account of the village:

Book I. The Subject proposed – Remarks upon Pastoral Poetry – A Tract of Country near the Coast described – An Impoverished Borough – Smugglers and their Assistants – Rude Manners of the Inhabitants – Ruinous Effects of the High Tide – The Village Life more generally considered: Evils of it – The Youthful Labourer – The Old Man: his Soliloquy – The Parish Workhouse: its Inhabitants – The sick Poor: their Apothecary – The dying Pauper – The Village Priest.

He begins by renouncing the fictions of pastoral, which he intends to replace with a truthful description. He cautions his readers that the truth will expose the

suffering and meanness of people struggling under the hardship of rural village life. In contrast to the traditional representation of the pleasures of labour in the open fields by day, and the feasts and merriment by night, Crabbe reveals the sordid conditions of a folk who endure deprivation and hardship.

Fled are those times, if e'er such times were seen,
 When rustic poets praised their native green:
 No shepherds now in smooth alternate verse,
 Their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse. (I:7–10)

Crabbe's poetic mastery lies in his capacity to conjure vivid images of rural life, and in his ability to communicate the emotion of characters and situations without indulging sentimentality of his own. He eschews, that is, the evocative sentimentality of Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* (1770). For Crabbe, the pathos resides not in the poet's narrative manner but in the scenes and circumstances he exposes. In Book II, he presents an argument for developing more humane conditions:

Book II. There are found, amid the Evils of a laborious Life, some Views of Tranquillity and Happiness – The Repose and Pleasure of a Summer Sabbath: interrupted by Intoxication and Dispute – Village Detraction – Complaints of the 'Squire – The Evening Riots – Justice – Reasons for this unpleasant View of Rustic Life: the Effect it should have upon the Lower Classes; and the Higher – These last have their peculiar Distresses: Exemplified in the Life and heroic Death of Lord Robert Manners – Concluding Address to His Grace the Duke of Rutland.

Crabbe grants that the misery of rustic life is not always miserable. There are moments which provide temporary relief and pleasure:

No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain,
 But own the village life a life of pain;
 I too must yield, that oft amid these woes
 Are gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose. (II:1–4)

The church may offer some relief. The nobility, too, may provide aid, especially needed when crops fail or disease runs rampant. The concluding section of the poem praises those who invested in the welfare of villagers through their charity.

Crabbe had good reason to affirm charity, for he had himself been rescued by timely aid. After receiving a letter and several sheets of *The Library* and *The Village*, Edmund Burke arranged to meet with him. Burke readily provided the money needed to meet his present needs, and he also pledged his efforts to promote Crabbe's literary career.¹²⁷ Impressed by his first meeting with Crabbe, Burke told Joshua Reynolds that Crabbe had 'the mind and feelings of a gentleman'. Burke welcomed him to his home at Beaconsfield, where he was provided with an apartment and given free access to the library. Burke introduced him to

a circle of influential friends, including Charles James Fox and Samuel Johnson. All this while Crabbe worked on his poetry, acknowledging a debt to Burke's criticism. Burke assisted with the anonymous publication of *The Library* (June 1781). The poem was not reviewed with enthusiasm, but Crabbe was pleased with adequate sales and modest praise from critics, and slight public appreciation.¹²⁸

Burke also persuaded Crabbe that he would find a calling as a clergyman personally congenial. Crabbe had the basic qualifications: a thorough familiarity with the scriptures, a sound knowledge of Latin, and a spontaneous natural piety. Following some preparations, he was ordained (21 December 1781) with Burke's recommendation. He returned to live in his family home in Aldeburgh, but encountered hostility from the community, who resented his rise in social class. Again, Burke rescued him from his difficulties by persuading the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire to appoint him as chaplain.¹²⁹

As chaplain at Belvoir, Crabbe was able to complete his poem *The Village* (May 1783), which attained a popularity that continued to grow with subsequent editions. Samuel Johnson described the poem as 'original, vigorous, and elegant'.¹³⁰ Pleased with his Chaplain's rising reputation, the Duke of Rutland decided that, as appropriate for his office in a noble family, Crabbe should have a college degree. He was entered accordingly at Trinity College, Cambridge, and through the influence of Bishop Watson of Llandaff, he was allowed to obtain a degree without residence and without apparent rigour. He received an LL.B. degree (1783), and with the degree two small livings in Dorsetshire (now Dorset).¹³¹

More good fortune followed with his wife's inheritance in 1792 of an estate in Parham, where he met regularly with a circle of politically active Whigs led by Dudley Long North. His name, relevant to Crabbe's future, requires explanation. Dudley Long's wife Mary was coheir with Dudley North of Little Glemham, Suffolk. On 2 May 1789, he changed his name to Dudley Long North as heir to Little Glemham. He had aligned himself with Charles James Fox, who turned to him for local support of Whig unity. Dudley Long North maintained his loyalty to Fox and the 'New Whigs' after the split with Burke and the 'Old Whigs'. Rather than choosing between two friends, Burke and Dudley Long North, Crabbe withdrew from active party involvement. After four years at Parham, the Crabbes moved to Great Glemham, offered to him by Dudley North. The family remained here until after the turn of the century.

Thomas Holcroft

Unlike the several Cambridge scholars in Frennd's circle, unlike Dyer and Coleridge who were educated at Christ's Hospital before Cambridge and had adopted the Unitarian faith, Holcroft was a self-educated offspring of the lower class. He was nevertheless welcomed into Frennd's circle because of his

impassioned zeal as a reformer and because of his formidable talents as a playwright, critic, and novelist. He assisted at the press with Paine's *Rights of Man* (published 13 March 1791). Holcroft's most successful play, *The Road to Ruin* (Covent Garden, 18 February 1792),¹³² was followed by Holcroft's most successful novel, *Anna St. Ives* (1792), unmistakably Jacobin in plot and character.¹³³ Also in 1792, he joined the Society for Constitutional Information, and in 1793 he took part in the London Corresponding Society. Because of their agitation for Parliamentary reform, he was among the 12 indicted for high treason in 1794. When Thomas Hardy and John Horne Tooke were acquitted, Holcroft was released in December 1794 without trial. Two months later, on 27 February 1795, he joined the gathering hosted by William Frend. Wordsworth, who attended expressly to meet William Godwin, would have recognized other ex-Cambridge acquaintances, especially John Tweddell, James Losh, and George Dyer. During the months to come, from February to August 1795, Holcroft kept up his association with Wordsworth.¹³⁴

Holcroft was a child of six when he commenced his apprenticeship in his father's shoemaker's shop, helping as well in the stables where his father kept horses for hire. No longer able to pay the lease for the shop in Orange Court, Leicester Fields (where in the 1780s the artist John Opie attracted crowds to his studio and gallery), the senior Holcroft was forced into street peddling. Working as a stable boy at Newmarket, the younger Holcroft spent his evenings reading widely in all the books he could borrow. He studied music and acquired a knowledge of French, German, and Italian. When his father was able to resume his trade as shoemaker, he returned to London to assist in the shop. When he was 20, Holcroft found employment as a teacher in Liverpool, but he failed in his effort to establish his own private school.¹³⁵ His involvement in the theatre began at this time, first as prompter in a Dublin theatre, then for a dozen years as actor in several strolling companies. His career as a playwright commenced with successful performances at all three of London's major playhouses: *The Crisis; or, Love and Famine* (Drury Lane, 1 May 1778), *Duplicity* (Covent Garden, 13 October 1781), and *The Noble Peasant* (Haymarket, 2 August 1784). The tension or antagonism between the lower classes and the aristocracy was already a recurrent theme in Holcroft's plays, when he first witnessed Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's *La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro* (Théâtre Français, 27 April 1784). During his stay in Paris as correspondent of the *Morning Herald*, Holcroft was determined to bring the script back to England. Because the play had not been published, Holcroft attended performances night after night learning one role after the other.

Under the *ancien régime*, comedy had typically represented the folly of the servants rescued by the wisdom of the aristocracy. Inverting that formula, Beaumarchais so ridiculed aristocratic privilege that the sympathies of the French Revolution were already anticipated in Figaro's relation to Count Almaviva, Governor of Andalusia.¹³⁶ Taken together, the plots of Beaumarchais's three Figaro plays chart the decline of the aristocracy. Georges Danton, the

revolutionary leader who was guillotined during the Reign of Terror for having been too lenient to the aristocratic enemies, declared that killing off the nobility had begun in Beaumarchais's play.¹³⁷ Two decades later, Napoleon Bonaparte agreed that *Le Mariage de Figaro* had put the revolution into action.¹³⁸ Representative of changing social attitudes in the years leading up to the French Revolution, Count Almaviva pitted the clever valet against the folly of his master. Beaumarchais attempted to dodge censorship by claiming to imitate 'the Spanish style'.¹³⁹ The dodge fooled no one, least of all King Louis XVI, who accused him of mocking the government. *Le Barbier de Séville* premiered in 1775. Its sequel, *Le Mariage*, was passed by the censor in 1781, but banned from being performed by the King, who objected to the ridicule of the aristocracy. After three years and several revisions, the King finally relented and lifted the ban in 1784.

Following its opening at the Théâtre Français, *La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro* ran for 68 consecutive performances, earning more at the box office than any other French play of the eighteenth century. Holcroft's translation/adaptation, *The Follies of a Day – Or The Marriage of Figaro* (Covent Garden, 14 December 1784), featured Holcroft himself as the shrewd servant Figaro and W. T. Lewis as the lecherous Count Almaviva. Holcroft's version was often revived on the London stage in the ensuing years, as late as 1811 and 1817.¹⁴⁰ Rightly cited as a crucial step in overcoming prevailing anti-Semitism, Edmund Kean famously provided a sympathetic interpretation of Shylock's character in the *Merchant of Venice* (Drury Lane, 27 January 1814).¹⁴¹ Many years earlier, Holcroft had avoided staging stereotype Jewish characters. Of the two Jewish money-lenders in *The Road to Ruin* (Covent Garden, 18 February 1792), one is conniving, the other scrupulously honest. In his plays *Duplicity* (Covent Garden, 13 October 1781) and *The Vindictive Man* (Drury Lane, 20 November 1806), he destabilized the caricature of the covetous Jewish money-lender by the simple expedient of exhibiting Christian guile and greed.¹⁴²

Among the 18 plays by Holcroft that were staged during the 1780s and 1790s, *The Road to Ruin* (Covent Garden, 18 February 1792) was by far the most successful, with a run of 38 performances in its first season, and repeated performances well into the nineteenth century.¹⁴³ A revival in 1873 ran for 118 nights. William Hazlitt gave special attention to the language of Goldfinch, the character who, as Hazlitt rightly said, 'contributed most to the popularity of the piece'. By Hazlitt's count, Goldfinch's catch phrase, 'That's your sort', is repeated some 50 times, 'and is just as unexpected and lively the last time as the first, for no other reason than because Goldfinch has just the same pleasure in repeating it'.¹⁴⁴ Dialect or language comedy, no doubt older than Aristophanes's *Acharnians* (425 BCE), provokes laughter with its comic reliance on puns, pronunciation, and word malformations. In *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), Shakespeare's Dogberry announces that he has 'comprehended two auspicious persons' (III.v); with similar linguistic confidence, Mrs Malaprop declares that 'she might reprehend the true meaning' in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play *The Rivals* (1775). As Hazlitt observed, Goldfinch's 'language consists entirely

of a few cant words; yet the rapidity with which he glances from object to object, and the evident delight which he takes in introducing his favourite phrases on all occasions, have all the effect of the most brilliant wit.’

By Hazlitt’s estimation, 9 persons out of 10 who went to see *The Road to Ruin* went for the sake of seeing Goldfinch. W. T. Lewis, who had played Count Almaviva as a lusting buffoon, transforms himself into a full-blown caricature of the racetrack enthusiast. Thirty years before Pierce Egan in *Life in London* (1821) crafted his character Corinthian Tom as a proficient speaker of racetrack slang, Holcroft had introduced a thoroughly amusing master of the jargon peculiar to gamblers, jockeys, and boxing and racing fans. As Corinthian Tom tells Jerry Hawthorne, ‘A kind of *cant* phraseology is current from one end of the Metropolis to the other, and you will scarcely be able to move a single step, my dear Jerry, without consulting a *Slang* Dictionary, or having some friend at your elbow to explain the strange expressions which, at every turn, will assail your ear.’¹⁴⁵

When Goldfinch first appears in Act II, he is announced by Sophia as ‘that great, ridiculous, horse jockey oaf Goldfinch’. His language is nothing more than a recitation of slang and catchphrases of the racetrack and stables. He is an inveterate gambler, ‘in the heigh-day of youth and thoughtlessness, and who is hurried away by all the vulgar dissipation of fashionable life’. Goldfinch serves as an example of what Harry or Milford may soon become. Harry himself recognizes this when he tells Goldfinch: ‘[the world] says you have got into the hands of jockeys, Jews, and swindlers; and that, though old Goldfinch was in his day one of the richest men on ‘Change, his son will shortly become poorer than the poorest black leg at New-market.’ With a moment’s reflection, Harry adds: ‘damn the world, for it says little better of me’ (II.i.421–425).

As the central character of the play, Harry is tested in terms of his relationship to each of the other characters: his love for and loyalty to his father, who is worried that his son has fallen into evil ways; his friendship to Milford, whose financial crisis resembles his own; his determination to break from the gambling which is Goldfinch’s only purpose; his love for Sophia, whose innocence he is determined to protect; his willingness to forsake Sophia and marry the amorous Widow in order to rescue his father from bankruptcy. The welfare of Milford and Sophia are threatened by an unscrupulous plot. In his plot summary, Hazlitt untangled the confusion of names that resulted in the will of Widow Warren’s late husband falling into the hands of Mr Silky, a character of ‘smooth, sleek, fawning knavery’, instead of the intended recipient, Mr Sulky, an honest executor and bank partner of the elder Dornton.

The success of *The Road to Ruin* in 1792 ought to have launched Holcroft on a career of subsequent successes. It did not. Although acquitted in the Treason Trials of 1794, his acquittal was a limited victory for the radical reformers, because many conservatives interpreted it as an act of the court’s leniency. He may have been exonerated in court, but as Leonard W. Conolly observed, Holcroft was nevertheless ‘convicted and condemned time and again

by the massed juries of Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres'. In part, he had himself to blame, for he persisted, as did Beaumarchais in his three Figaro plays, in ridiculing aristocratic arrogance, middle-class greed and corruption, and exploitation of the working class. His social critique, however, was tempered and modulated, so that it neither expressed revolutionary actions nor prompted civil disobedience. Conolly stresses that the theatre audience exercised a far more stringent censorship than did the Examiner of Plays under the Stage Licensing Act, who had reviewed and approved Holcroft's plays for performance.¹⁴⁶ The hostility to the plays of the 'acquitted' traitor became so severe that his only hope was to conceal his authorship in anonymity. He acknowledged the burden of his identity in his 'Advertisement' to *Knave or Not?* (Drury Lane, 25 January 1798):

The unrelenting opposition which the productions of the author of the present comedy have experienced for several years is well known ... Since the appearance of *The Road to Ruin*, his comedy of *The Deserted Daughter* only has escaped; and that, as he imagines, because it was not known on the night of its first performance by whom it was written. *Love's Fraillties*, *The Man of Ten Thousand*, and *Knave or Not?* have sustained increasing marks of hostility: so that the efforts made to afford rational amusement to the public, emolument to the author, and improvement to morals, have been rendered feeble and almost ineffectual.¹⁴⁷

As the titular 'Knave or Not', Monrose pretends to be a Count so that he may mingle with nobility and pursue his love for the heiress Aurelia. With the motives of a fortune-hunting scoundrel, he redeems himself by discovering that her guardians, Sir Job and Mr Taunton, have cheated her of her fortune. In the final scene, he exposes their theft. Aurelia marries her wicked guardian's son, and Monrose becomes a friend of the house. Like Harry Dornton in *The Road to Ruin*, whose gambling has brought his father to bankruptcy, Montrose is a flawed character, redeemed in the course of the plays. In his summary, John Genest lamented the undeserved antagonism that limited the performances to six nights: 'it is a pretty good play – it certainly deserved a better fate – strong prejudices were entertained by many persons against Holcroft, for his real, or supposed political opinions – this circumstance was very detrimental to his plays.'¹⁴⁸

One month later, at the opening of Holcroft's *He's Much to Blame* (Covent Garden, 13 February 1798), disruptive hostility was again triggered in the audience by a small group who hooted the playwright as an unrepentant Jacobin. Holcroft attempted to avert criticism by acknowledging Pont de Veyle's *Le Complaisant* (1732) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Clavigo* (1774) as his sources. The actual content has none of the radical propaganda for which he was accused; the play offers instead precisely the sort of witty satire in which Holcroft excelled. Gathered in a hotel, a setting convenient for social comedy, are a cross-dressing young woman, a dithering lord, a fickle young heir to a

fortune, a comic German physician, an honest gentleman, and his sister. Representing an array of vices and virtues and a cross-section of wealthy and poor, Holcroft ridicules the vanities and pretensions but also allows his characters to find their way to moral improvement.¹⁴⁹ Although in violation of the law, direct satire of government leaders was seldom brought to court, in part because the performance eluded scrutiny, but more significantly because a trial would create a larger audience and even more ridicule. As E. P. Thompson observed, ‘all parodies and squibs were immune from prosecution’ for the simple reason that ‘Persecution cannot easily stand up in the face of ridicule.’¹⁵⁰

Were it not for the fact that a successful play was more lucrative than a successful novel, Holcroft might have avoided audience protest and devoted himself to a career as a novelist. For Holcroft, the two endeavours were not mutually exclusive. Adapting the *Künstlerroman* to his own autobiographical experiences, he developed a narrative about the challenges and growth of a wandering player. A subgenre of the picaresque *Bildungsroman*,¹⁵¹ his narrative depicts a sensitive youth learning to deal with the values of a middle- and upper-class society. Much of his own intellectual development is fictionally transformed in his *Manthorn the Enthusiast* (1779) and *Alwyn: or, the Gentleman Comedian* (1780). The title characters in these two early novels re-experience Holcroft’s own adventures as a strolling comedian acting in the provinces.¹⁵² The novels tell of the hostility encountered by players and playwrights, who shared in the prevailing suspicion accorded more pervasively to politicians, preachers, and travelling orators. The character of the travelling player in the *Künstlerroman* was being developed by Goethe in the unpublished fragment, ‘Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung’ (1777–1785), which was subsequently reworked and published as *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795). Publication of Holcroft’s *Manthorn* and *Alwyn* also predates Karl Philipp Moritz’s *Anton Reiser* (1785–1790), which relates the title character’s fate as a runaway apprentice. Anton seeks his fortune as a playwright and player, first with a theatre troupe in Gotha and then with another troupe in Leipzig.¹⁵³

Although the German examples were soon to appear, Holcroft’s novels were the first to present the player as picaro. He reveals traces of Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1766),¹⁵⁴ but none of his British models were immediately relevant to his narrative. His major source was his own experience. Just as Holcroft’s *Manthorn* and *Alwyn* preceded Moritz’s *Anton Reiser* and Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* as novels of the wandering player, he also anticipated Godwin in writing the so-called ‘Godwinian novel’. Holcroft’s *Anna St. Ives* (1792) shares several elements subsequently developed in Godwin’s *Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). Characteristic of the Godwinian novel was the way in which the motives and actions of a character echoed the policies of the nation as a whole. These parallel structures were akin to older assumptions about the microcosm and macrocosm: that is, members of a family had a duty to the father, servants to their masters,

citizens to their king. Personal secrets had their counterpart in larger patterns of conspiracy and subterfuge. Holcroft and Godwin linked familial arrangements to larger political critiques.¹⁵⁵ Once the correspondences are established, a character's introspections can be read as a reflection on national politics.

Published two years before the Treason Trials, Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* investigated the familial responsibilities of children to parents.¹⁵⁶ The title character and the novel's heroine, Anna St. Ives argues that they are rescued by Frank Henley, who 'is but too sensible that a true father feeds the mind, and that he who only provides for the body is no better than a step-father'. As daughter and heiress of Sir Arthur, Anna's love for Frank, the son of the gardener on her father's estate, defies his arranged marriage within the landed gentry. Anna rejects her father's preference for a well-born but rakish suitor. No mere rebellion against a parent, the issues at stake distinguish what is good or evil.¹⁵⁷ Holcroft also shows his villain, Coke Clifton, rejecting his mother's advice. He has been so deluded by a credo of masculine superiority that he cannot recognize his mother's rational and moral truths. Holcroft's plot challenges customary sexual politics, and it also critiques the use and value of property. Sir Arthur is so obsessed with the aesthetics of landscape gardening that he has forgotten the farming necessary to the tenant farmers. In contrast to Sir Arthur's belief in marital arrangements among landholders, Anna and Frank advocate the value of land in terms of farm productivity.¹⁵⁸

Holcroft shared in the thought of Thomas Paine through *Rights of Man* (1791). He found a similar ideological link to Godwin through *Political Justice* (1793), but also through Godwin's *Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). Written as a fictional case study of Godwin's philosophical arguments, the novel shows how legal and social institutions may destroy innocent individuals. A self-educated orphan, Caleb Williams is employed by the wealthy Ferdinando Falkland. Usually mild-mannered, Falkland is subject to sudden fits of rage. Caleb learns of Falkland's past, and his indignation at the cruelty of his neighbour, Barnabas Tyrrel, who oppressed and tormented his tenants. Tyrrel was the opposite of Falkland, who was loved for kindness. The conflict between the two men became violent at the funeral services for Emily Melvil, Tyrrel's niece whom he had confined out of jealousy over her admiration for Falkland. Following his attack on Falkland, Tyrrel was found murdered. Based on his reputation as a peace-loving and generous land holder, Falkland was declared innocent, and two tenants of Tyrrel were convicted of the murder and executed. Suspicious, Caleb obsessively researches the murder case, convincing himself that his employer is secretly guilty of the murder. Confronted by Caleb, Falkland confesses the crime, but threatens Caleb to be silent.

Caleb flees, but returns to defend himself. Charged with libel, Caleb is brought to trial and convicted. After enduring the wretched conditions as prisoner, Caleb manages to escape. To survive in hiding from Falkland, Caleb joins a band of thieves. Caleb and the Captain later debate the morality of being a thief and living outside the oppressive restrictions of the law. Again attempting

an escape, Caleb boards a ship but is mistaken for another criminal and again arrested. He bribes his captors to buy his freedom. He makes a living by writing stories about notorious criminals, until he is again exposed and arrested. Taken to court, Caleb is released when neither Falkland nor his agents show up to present their accusations. Returning to Falkland's estate, Caleb finds his master aged and ailing. Falkland says that he did not appear in court, in order to give Caleb an opportunity to retract the charges of murder. Caleb refuses. Knowing that Caleb has no income, Falkland sends him money to try to bribe his silence. Further attempts to escape Falkland's control fail. The novel ends with Caleb finally persuading the magistrate to summon Falkland to court so that Falkland's guilt can be judged.¹⁵⁹

From his working-class origins into the ranks of accomplished men of letters, Holcroft's career might have been more successful if he had been willing to suppress his ideological convictions. Although the Treason Trials closed in the acquittal or dismissal of those charged, the stigma remained. Holcroft, throughout his subsequent career, remained under suspicion as a radical.¹⁶⁰ Performances of his plays continued to be disrupted by the anti-Jacobins. He was instrumental in bringing melodrama to Britain at the end of the decade with his *Deaf and Dumb* (1801) and *Tale of Mystery* (1802) (translated from Pixérécourt's *Céline, ou, l'enfant du mystère*). Despite a modicum of success with *A Tale of Mystery*, the remainder of the decade was marked by unsuccessful attempts to return to the public eye.

Charles Lamb was in the audience for the performance of Holcroft's last play, *The Vindictive Man* (Drury Lane, 20 November 1806). 'It died in part of its own weakness,' Lamb wrote, 'and in part for being choked up with bad actors.' The play's weakness, paradoxically, was what Holcroft intended as its strength, the resurrection of the most memorable character of his most successful comedy: Goldfinch the comic sportsman from *Road to Ruin* (Covent Garden, 18 February 1792). The idea, Lamb explained, was similar to Shakespeare reviving Falstaff from the history play and giving him a comedy of his own. 'As the devil of ill-luck would have it, half the audience did not know that Holcroft had written it, but were displeas'd at his stealing from the *Road to Ruin*.' Worse ill-luck occurred in the casting. Bannister was to have performed as Goldfinch, and Dorothy Jordan was intended for the role of Emily, the unfortunate daughter of Colonel Anson, the Vindictive Man of the title. Unfortunately, Jordan was in a 'squabble' with the managers, and Bannister 'shot some of his fingers off' by the going off of a gun', so the roles went instead to Maria Duncan and Vincent De Camp. Later performing as Corinthian Tom, De Camp was miscast as Goldfinch. He may have glibly spouted the slang, but he lacked the comic body language so spontaneous in the movements of Lewis or Bannister. The role of Harriet was played by Sarah Harlowe. In the *Road to Ruin*, Harlowe had played the Widow Warren, but in this comedy, she played a conniving whore. Her 'action in the play was gross', Lamb wrote, especially in 'wheedling an old man into marriage'. When De Camp as Goldfinch endeavoured to abduct Emily by

force, he ‘was hooted, more than hist, hooted and bellowed off the stage’. Lamb lamented the consequences for ‘Poor Holcroft’, who had been reduced to selling his possessions to stave off the poverty that had befallen his household.

Important to Holcroft’s journalistic career was his role as theatre critic and reviewer. His reviews in the *Monthly Review*, 1792–1796, reveal his own sense of the politics or ideological import of literature, but he also emphasizes an author’s moral responsibility. Thus, in a review of *The Castle of St. Vallery*,¹⁶¹ Holcroft objected to a tendency in Gothic fiction to infantilize its readers: ‘The most essential feature of every work is its moral tendency. The good writer teaches the child to become a man; the bad and the indifferent best understand the reverse art of making a man a child.’¹⁶² Because of its defining intention to arouse superstitious fears, Gothic fiction, in particular, seduced the mind into a childlike state of fantasy. Mary Hays shared many of Holcroft’s notions about women as readers. As she expresses it in her essay ‘On the Influence of Authority and Custom on the Female Mind and Manners’ (1793), if men prevail in limiting the education of women, treating them as ‘wayward children’, they will be rewarded with ‘sullen acquiescence’, but not with ‘the virtues of the woman (for virtue is not the child of constraint)’.¹⁶³ Addressing the problems of appropriate reading material for girls in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *The Female Reader* (1789), Mary Wollstonecraft argued that novel reading need not be detrimental, if the novels are selected as means to stimulate intellectual interests and appropriate sensibilities.

Holcroft’s goals in *The Theatrical Recorder* (1805–1806) were in many respects the same as those he had pursued in the *Monthly Review*, with an added concern in promoting the kind of theatre for which his own plays were best suited. Too, he featured profiles of foreign playwrights and their works, as well as discussions of foreign dramatic traditions in comparative perspectives. As stated in the advertisement to the first issue: ‘The plan of the *Theatrical Recorder* is intended to be complete, with respect to everything passing in the theatrical world, which is of a nature to be at all times interesting.’¹⁶⁴ All aspects of production are to be discussed, ‘without descending to practise any of the means which have but too frequently degraded periodical publications.’ His daughter, Fanny Holcroft, contributed translations of entire plays: Vittorio Alfieri’s *Philip II*, Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *From Bad to Worse* and *Fortune Mends*, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti* and *Minna von Barnhelm*. The translations from the German were accompanied by essays on the ‘Rise and Progress of the German Stage’, commentaries which Holcroft had abridged from Adrien Chrétien Friedel’s multivolume *Nouveau théâtre allemand* (1782–1884).¹⁶⁵ In order to further the interest in foreign plays, players, and playwrights, Holcroft also spiced his pages with lively anecdotes.¹⁶⁶

Holcroft’s wide-ranging career as novelist, translator, reviewer, playwright, and theatre critic everywhere reveals the formative relevance of his working-class background, his development as self-educated intellectual, and his commitment to the rights of the populace as a whole. Those very strengths aroused relentless

disfavour from an anti-Jacobin segment of the theatrical public. Audience opposition eventually triumphed. Not surprisingly, the connections between theatrical and political dissent were stronger in the illegitimate theatres that catered to the labouring class.¹⁶⁷ Holcroft died in London, penniless, in 1809. William Godwin, who had quarrelled with Holcroft, visited Holcroft on his deathbed to make amends with an old friend. The *Memoirs* that Holcroft had commenced but could not complete were finished by William Hazlitt and published in 1816.¹⁶⁸

Gothic, Domestic Violence, Sadism

As a reviewer of Gothic fiction and a critic of the aesthetics of superstitious fear, Holcroft acknowledged the shift in genre that accompanied the revolution. From its advent in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Gothic novels implicated a generic imitation of medieval romance and the superstitions of a bygone era. Among the most successful of its early practitioners were Clara Reeve in *The Old English Baron* (1778) and William Beckford in *Vathek* (1786), conceived amidst the decadent society of pre-Revolutionary France and indulging the fashionably exotic Orientalism of the time. The shift in the Gothic novel of the revolutionary years was evident in the more careful attention to atmosphere, character, and motivation, but also to implications for national and domestic conditions rendered corrupt and perverse. An example especially for the former is Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), for the latter Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).

Joseph Addison wrote in praise of 'The Fairy Way of Writing' (1712), naming Shakespeare as excelling all others because of 'that noble extravagance of fancy, which he had in so great perfection,' which 'qualified him to touch this weak superstitious part of his reader's imagination'. He succeeded, Addison declared, 'where he had nothing to support him but the strength of his own genius'. By the end of the century, that ability to conjure 'ghosts, fairies, witches, and the like imaginary persons', put Shakespeare ahead of the new trend of Gothic drama. Supernatural scenes in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard III* were elaborated to make the most of the audience predilection for Gothic melodrama.

In *The Italian* (1797) Radcliffe achieves a tone darker, more mysterious and sombre, than her rivals. She delineates, almost as a captive interloper, the fate of lovers amidst persecution by the Inquisition. She questions the morality of the issues currently challenged by the French Revolution. Religion, aristocracy, and monarchy are all being influenced and corrupted by insidious struggles for power. Radcliffe uses veiled imagery, ambiguous shapes and figures, and the uncanny (as later defined by Freud). Concealment and disguise are strategic to the plot. The heightened emotional states of Radcliffe's characters are often reflected through the pathetic fallacy. The novel is noted for its extremely effective antagonist, Father Schedoni.

Both national and domestic implications of Gothic narrative contributed to the popular appeal. On the national level, the Gothic portrayed an older world, once rich and thriving, now corrupted, decadent, falling into ruin. On the domestic level, the Gothic provided the necessary fictional distance and disguise to expose the otherwise unspeakable crimes of sexual abuse. Requiring little more than a depraved monk in a ruined abbey, the character and setting of the Gothic tale led to the ready engagement religious controversy. In *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Charles Maturin made full use of Gothic elements to develop his rigorous denunciation of Catholicism. With similar Gothic ingredients, John Banim was able to tell a sympathetic tale of the oppressed Irish Catholics in *The Fetches* (1825), which J. B. Buckstone transformed into melodrama as *The Death Fetch; or, The Fatal Warning* (1826).

In Lewis's *The Monk*, Ambrosio, abbot of the Capuchin monastery in Madrid, falls from saintliness into utter depravity. Matilda, female agent of evil, disguises herself as the novice Rosario and enters the monastery for the sole purpose of seducing the pious monk, which she manages by having her portrait painted as a nude Madonna. While he worships that image in his cell, Matilda enters, disrobes, revealing herself as the object of his worship. His sexual desires aroused, Matilda goads him into other conquests. The rape of one of his penitents, Antonia, is initially foiled by the intervention of Antonia's mother, Elvira, whom Ambrosio strangles. His second attempt, in which he succeeds, culminates in Antonia's fatal stabbing. As it turns out, Antonia is his sister and Elvira their mother. His pact with the Devil would allow him to escape. But the Devil is not to be trusted. In spite of his pact, Ambrosio is punished for his crimes of rape, incest, and murder. A corrupt clergy is set at liberty in the Gothic novel, where dissolute priests become sexual predators.

For many women writers of the Romantic era, the Gothic settings were transparent. The depiction of degenerate male villains, guilty of greed, lust, and cruelty, coincided with recurrent domestic conditions readily recognized by the female readers and fully exploited by Mary Wollstonecraft in *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), Charlotte Smith in *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), Ann Radcliffe in *Sicilian Romance* (1790), Eliza Parson in *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), and Charlotte Dacre in *Zafloya* (1806). In Gothic romance the fantasy of haunted castles masked but did not occlude the realistic description of the cruelty suffered by many women in their own homes. The revival of romance as a literary form and the imaginative impact of the French Revolution are acknowledged influences on English Romanticism, but their relationship has rarely been addressed. In his study of the transformations of genre, David Duff examines the paradox whereby the unstable visionary world of romance came to provide an apt language for the representation of revolution, and how the literary form was itself politicized.¹⁶⁹

The romance setting, typically in a dark forest, might well feature a castle or the Gothic ruins of an abandoned abbey. The plot, though not rigidly formulaic, often concerned the fate of a virtuous young maiden under assault by a

lecherous guardian or corrupt monk. Motives for the assault were often financial as well as sexual, involving a secret dowry or inheritance. The villain typically has the assistance of an older woman who resents the heroine's youthful beauty and thinks to gain favour as loyal accomplice. The hero is, of course, both courageous and virtuous, willing to brave dangers in order to rescue the young maiden. Finally, there is the supernatural element, arising from hell, from the tomb, or from the mind of one of the characters. Even if the ghost or demon is only imagined, the supernatural infuses its psychological charge of horror and dread into the shadows and dark corners of the Gothic setting.

Gothic melodrama gained increasing success on the stage. Following its premiere at Drury Lane, Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* (1797) was performed at Covent Garden, Haymarket, the Coburg, and throughout the provinces during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Osmond became the prototype villain for many melodramas that followed. The French playwright Guilbert de Pixérécourt gave the genre a shape well-suited to the London stage. Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale Mystery* (1802) was adapted from Pixérécourt, and soon dozens of imitators further developed a Gothic melodrama of music, mime, and spectacular stage effects for the supernatural apparitions. Shifting from the medieval past to contemporary life, the melodrama also found a suitable site for horror in the country inn, where a villainous or insane landlord could drug his guests, slit their throats, or abduct helpless maidens. Bates Motel in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is a more recent example of the melodramatic setting used by Richard Brinsley Peake in *The Haunted Inn* (1828) and by Edward Fitzball in *The Innkeeper of Abbeville* (1826) and *The Murder at the Roadside Inn* (1833).¹⁷⁰

Domestic violence was elaborated in the plots of captivity and abuse in Gothic novels and melodrama. These theatrical fictions, however, had little effect in diminishing the incidents of violence, and incest remained a recurring literary topos.¹⁷¹ Madness, too, became an apt theme for the age. George III suffered his first attack of mental illness in 1788, not recovering until the following year. In the meantime, rebellious defiance of Louis XVI in France rose to such a pitch that crowds stormed the Bastille. This was also the year that Blake published his *Songs of Innocence* (1789), that Charles Burney published his *History of Music* (1789), and that Fletcher Christian, Wordsworth's schoolmate at Hawkshead, led his mutiny on the *Bounty* (28 April 1789).

Anna Laetitia Barbauld's inquiry into aesthetic causality commenced early, under her father's tutelage. The pleasure in terror and attraction to the repugnant were an aesthetic paradox that Barbauld addressed first in an essay, 'On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror', and returned to in a second essay, 'An Inquiry into those kinds of Distress which excite Agreeable Sensations'. She formulated the problem in the first of these essays:

the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror, where our moral feelings are not in the least concerned, and no passion seems to be excited but the depressing one of fear, is a paradox of the heart, much more difficult of solution. (p. 283)

The key to her resolution is a capacity to disengage all personal moral responsibility so that the reader is held only by an unrelenting curiosity about reprehensible deeds and actions which ‘makes us desirous of again being witnesses to such scenes, instead of flying from them with disgust and horror’. The pleasure is possible because the fancy is equally stimulated: ‘Passion and fancy cooperating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.’ If the fancy subsides, curiosity alone will not enable the reader to tolerate the ‘overbalance of pain’.¹⁷²

The transformations of taste, slowly developing throughout earlier decades of the eighteenth century, achieved dominance in the final decade. A muse of depravity and madness seduced the popular imagination. Mario Praz cited the Marquis de Sade as having introduced ‘in the form of a fantastic tale, the first systematized account of sexual perversions’.¹⁷³ Ann Radcliff, M. G. Lewis, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, and Percy Bysshe Shelley are among the British authors Praz considered to be most successful in simultaneously captivating and terrifying their readers, arousing perverse fascination even while eliciting the deepest psychological fears. The Marquis de Sade, who renounced his title and became a citizen of the new republic, rose to literary notoriety for depicting the cruelty and perversity of the aristocracy. Such was the reputation Sade achieved in *Count Oxtiern, or the Effects of Libertinism* (*Le Comte Oxtiern, ou les effets du libertinage*, Théâtre Molière, 22 October 1791). The audience of Sade’s next play, *The Suborner* (*Le Suborneur*, Théâtre Molière, 5 March 1792), recognized that the author still adhered to the decadent morality of the *ancien régime*. In *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), Sade insisted that his description of desire was based on empirical evidence. The guillotine made the rolling of heads and the flowing of blood a common sight.¹⁷⁴ Sade contrasted his empirical fidelity with the fantasies of Gothic fiction as a genre that relied heavily on superstition and illusion.

Sade sought to distance his fiction from the currently fashionable Gothic terror. The Gothic sought its supernatural effects by conjuring imaginary ghosts and demons, whereas Sade’s own fiction stimulated the sexual affinity of pain and desire, and the release of bottled up taboos. While he emphasized these distinguishing advantages in his own works, he nevertheless granted that the Gothic played a necessary role in society. Gothic tales were a natural consequence of the revolutionary turmoil. The long-oppressed populace, in spite of newly acquired rights, still had no access to unrestrained self-indulgence. The Gothic, with its phantoms of former times, enabled contemporary readers to redefine the origin and practice of evil. Gothic authors, instead of affirming their own needs and urges, could ‘look to hell for help in composing their alluring novels’. Sade praised the work of M. G. Lewis and Ann Radcliffe as the best of Gothic fiction. He nevertheless accused the Gothic as an impoverished ersatz religion. Instead of a Christian morality based on God, angels, the devil, and Holy Scripture, the Gothic religion offered only ghosts, demons, and a mysterious old manuscript.¹⁷⁵

In the 1780s, the Marquis de Sade was regularly sending his comedies and tragedies to the leading theatres of Paris. Among these, the comedy *L’Inconstant*

was completed in 1781, the comedy *Le prévaricateur* and the tragedy *Jeanne Laisné* in 1783. *Le Comte Oxtiern, ou Les Malheurs du Libertinage*, the play which opened at the Théâtre Molière on 22 October 1791, remained Sade's only success on the public stage in his own country. The year previously, his comedies *Le Boudoir ou le mari crédule* and *Le Misanthrope par amour* were both rejected at the Comédie Française. Among the plays that he submitted to the Parisian theatres in 1788 was *La tour enchantée, un opéra-comique*, described in his *Catalogue raisonné* (October 1, 1788) as the concluding episode to a sequence of six plays entitled *L'union des arts*. On 27 February 1791, Nicolas-Etienne Framery, agent for playwrights, informed Sade that several of the plays had been accepted for performance.¹⁷⁶ They remained unstaged, but *La tour enchantée, un opéra-comique* made its way from Paris to London. One year after it was submitted in Paris, Sade's play, *La tour enchantée* (1788), was adapted for the London stage as *The Haunted Tower* (1789).

On 24 November 1789, *The Haunted Tower, a Comic Opera*, with a musical score by Stephen Storace and libretto by James Cobb, opened at Drury Lane. It was a significant success, with 84 performances in its first two seasons,¹⁷⁷ many more throughout the 1790s, and frequent revivals for the next half century. Sade, imprisoned in the Bastille, wrote his version a year earlier. On 2 July 1789, Sade shouted from his cell window that the prisoners were being murdered; on 4 July, he was transferred from the Bastille to the lunatic asylum at Charenton; on 14 July, the citizens of Paris stormed the Bastille, beginning the French Revolution. The advent of the French Revolution contributed to Cobb's rewriting and to the English reception of the play. Because Sade frequently described revolution and the downfall of corrupt aristocracy, it may well be that the original version of *La tour enchantée* provided the politically charged context missing from the surviving version, a transcription made in 1810 during Sade's final years at the Charenton Hospital.¹⁷⁸ In Cobb's adaptation, the play depicts treacherous rivalry among the English Barons after the Norman Conquest under King William.

From 1783 to 1787, Michael Kelly and Anna and Stephen Storace were engaged at the Italian Theatre in Vienna, where they enjoyed the friendship of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In the premiere production of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1 May 1786), Kelly sang as Don Basilio and Don Curzio, and Anna as Susanna. At the end of February 1787, Kelly and the Storaces left Vienna, arriving in London on 18 March. Kelly was now 24, Stephen 23, and Anna 21. Even before their departure from Vienna, Kelly had been assured of an engagement at Drury Lane by Thomas Linley and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*Reminiscences*, 1:255–262). Anna opened in London as the black slave in Paisiello's *Gli schiavi per amore* (*The Slave of Love*) on 25 April 1787. Kelly's first performance in London, opening at Drury Lane on 20 April 1787, was as Lionel in *Lionel and Clarissa* (*School for Fathers*), the same role he had performed before his departure from Dublin eight years earlier.¹⁷⁹

Stephen Storace quickly launched the series of collaborations with James Cobb that made him the master of comic opera in London. Cobb and Storace produced *The Doctor and The Apothecary* (Drury Lane, 25 October 1788), *The Haunted Tower* (Drury Lane, 24 November 1789), *The Siege of Belgrade* (Drury Lane, 1 January 1791), *The Pirates* (Drury Lane, 21 November 1792), and *The Cherokee* (Drury Lane, 20 December 1794). In many of these, Kelly and Anna Storace played leading roles: as Lord William and Adela in *The Haunted Tower*, as Seraskier and Lilla in *The Siege of Belgrade*, as Don Altador and Fabulina in *The Pirates*, and as Colonel Blandford and Elinor in *The Cherokee*. Storace pieced together a score for *Lodoiska* (Drury Lane, 9 June 1794), for a libretto that John Philip Kemble pieced together from French and Italian sources.¹⁸⁰ It was performed by Kelly as Count Floreski and Anna Maria Crouch as his love, Lodoiska. Storace then provided the music to George Colman's play *The Iron Chest* (Drury Lane, 12 March 1796), based on William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. This production created an even greater sensation than *The Haunted Tower*, but it was to be the end of Storace's career. During the rehearsals he caught cold and died on 19 March 1796.

Set on the coast of Kent in the time of William the Conqueror, *The Haunted Tower* opens with the arrival, after a stormy crossing, of Lady Elinor de Courcey and her attendants. She has been sent by her father, Lord de Courcey of Normandy, who, at the behest of King William, has arranged this marriage to the son and heir of the Baron of Oakland. In a flashback provided by the cottager Maud, it is revealed that the present Baron is but 'plain Edmund, the ploughman', a local villager who happened to be remotely related to the true Baron:

about ten years ago, the old Baron, Lord William, was accused of being in a plot, and conspiring against the life of our good King William, the conqueror, and was banished. [...] He took with him his only son, a fine youth, about twelve years of age; but, alas! sir, he has not been heard of since. [...] about a year ago, Lord William's wicked accuser died, and declared the good baron innocent. [...] The king willing to make reparation for the wrongs he had done him, endeavoured to find him, but all in vain, therefore his lands and estates have been in possession of a distant relation of the family. (I.i)

Ten years have passed. The usurping Baron lives in fear of the ghost of the old Baron, who is said to haunt the tower awaiting the return of the true heir of Oakland. That heir had been sent to France, where now, as a young man he is known as Sir Palamede (Sir Lorville in Sade's version). He has found protection in the court of Lord de Courcey and has fallen in love with Lady Elinor, De Courcey's daughter, and she is in love with him. When Lady Elinor is sent to England by her father to be married to the heir of Oakland, she has no notion that Sir Palamede is the true heir. She thinks she is to be married to Edward, son

of the false Baron. Edward is in love with a village girl, Adela, and both would be much happier to continue life in the country rather than in court, a theme well suited to the times. In the hope of fulfilling his father's expectation, Edward persuades Adela to assume the character of Lady Elinor. With a similar motive to delay her impending marriage, Lady Elinor assumes the character of an attendant on Lady Elinor. Meeting with Hugo, a loyal servant of his father, Sir Palamede reveals himself as Lord William. He declares that he expects letters from the King, acknowledging him as Baron of Oakland. From Hugo he receives a key to the tower, supposed to be haunted by the old Baron's ghost. Lord Hubert, a neighbouring nobleman, sends his army to assist Lord William in reclaiming his estate. Restored to his title and lands, Lord William marries Lady Elinor, and Edward marries Adela. The double marriage plot may have been Cobb's addition, but both Sade and Cobb rely on a haunting to enable true love to succeed.¹⁸¹

In spite of discrepancies in the plotting, the English like the French version uses Gothic supernaturalism as a convenient ruse, psychologically effective because of the Baron's guilt. The version of *La tour enchantée* that survives in the transcription of 1810 has a much simpler plot. The old Baron, although he similarly fears an avenging ghost haunting his castle tower, has no son whom he is eager to see married into nobility. He has, instead, a daughter, whose hand in marriage he had promised to whomever succeeds in exorcising the ghost. Thirty have tried and failed. The daughter and her companion, Juliette and Louise, correspond to Lady Elinor and Cicely, and her young lover, Lorville, corresponds to Sir Palamede/Lord William in Cobb's version. Although Lorville is the son of an old friend, the Baron rejects him as a suitor and attempts to discredit him as profligate and unprincipled. Juliette, however, remains attracted to him. To her father's account of Lorville having abducted a burgermeister's daughter, Juliette responds: 'Ah! the monster! That's why he hasn't written to me' (sc. 3). The Baron wants to be rid of the ghost, but he also wants to marry his daughter profitably. Thus, he promotes as suitor the elderly Grouffignac, a tax collector. Juliette and Louise conspire to arouse Grouffignac's superstitious fears of the haunted tower and to assist Lorville in his successful 'exorcism'.

Whether or not the historical context of Cobb's libretto derived from Sade's original version, it was particularly apt for the period of its reception, when sympathy for, and opposition to, the French Revolution grew intense. Although set in the time of William the Conqueror, the play was first performed (24 November 1789) little more than four months after the storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789). References to current relationships with France were evident. In the public response to Sheridan's *Pizarro* (1799), British audiences could readily identify with the suffering Peruvians and perceive in Pizarro's campaign the threat of French invasion.¹⁸²

How different this version of 1810 might have been from Sade's missing version of 1788 is impossible to ascertain. The simplification of plot may have been prompted by Sade's effort to make the play suitable for the more limited

means of production at the Charenton Hospital, where patients performed the plays that Sade himself directed. Evidence that Cobb may have adhered fairly closely to the earlier manuscript may be derived from a comparison of another instance of early and late revisions. *Le prévaricateur*, originally written in 1783, was also among those transcribed at the Charenton Hospital by Monsieur Donge, head of the Lottery Office.¹⁸³ A copy of the early manuscript was recovered by Sade in May 1793, after his estate in La Coste had been pillaged by villagers.¹⁸⁴ The version of 1810 presents Charlotte Corday as the murderer. On 8 December 1793, Sade, who had been serving as a judge, is arrested as counter-revolutionary and imprisoned, first at the Madelonnettes Prison, then at the House of the Carmelites, and finally at the House of the Picpus Fathers, where Sade is indicted on 26 July 1794. His execution would have followed, but he was saved by the overthrow of Robespierre, 27 July 1794, and the end of the Reign of Terror. The next day, 28 July 1794, Robespierre was guillotined without trial in the Place de la Révolution.

The Irish Rebellion

Louis Lazare Hoche rose through the ranks to become general of the revolutionary army. His major victories were defeating the Royalist forces in Brittany and driving the Austro-Prussian armies from Alsace in 1793. In December 1796, shortly after Napoleon advanced his power with the defeat of the Austrians in Italy, Hoche suffered a reversal of fortune. Following reports that many Irish, discontent with British rule, would join the French, Hoche intended to land 15,000 French troops at Bantry Bay and join an Irish resistance. As a diversionary attack to draw away British reinforcements, two smaller forces attempted similar expeditions by rousing the working population near Newcastle and by appealing to local patriotism on the Welsh coast. Strengthened by local followers, Hoche and his officers would further increase their numbers in a massive march on London. All three expeditions failed. Hoche's ships were scattered by atrocious weather.

The hope for Irish support was not far-fetched, but even the subsequent attempts at forming a French-Irish army failed because the Irish were valiant but untrained. The Irish Rebellion of 1798, also known as the United Irishmen Rebellion, was an uprising against British rule in Ireland lasting from May to September 1798. Hints of the long-brewing Rebellion were already discernible in the Society of United Irishmen, established in Belfast in October 1791 and led by Theobald Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell, Henry Joy McCracken, and William Drennan. They sought a means of reforming Irish parliament by removing the political factions that accompanied the intolerance among Protestants, Catholics, and Dissenters in Ireland. Efforts at unification were stifled by venerable affiliations. When Britain declared war on revolutionary France in February 1793, the United Irishmen were regarded as traitors to their country, first for

their admiration of the French overthrow of monarchy, then for the revelation of their conspiracy with French military. Although the Society was outlawed in May 1794, the resistance, initiated by Theobald Wolfe Tone, was already underway. On 22 August 1794, 1,000 French soldiers arrived by ship in Kilcummin, County Mayo. The French were joined by 5,000 local rebels. Together they managed to defeat British troops at Castlebar, which was then declared the seat of a newly established Irish Republic. A succession of uprisings followed in Longford Westmeath and Ballinamuck.

On 8 September 1798, 12 days after issuing its declaration of independence, the Irish Republic was vanquished, and the captured Irish rebels were executed for high treason. On 12 October 1798, a larger French force consisting of 3,000 men, and including Wolfe Tone himself, were defeated by ships of the Royal Navy squadron. Awaiting execution, Tone committed suicide in his prison cell. The total death toll of Irish Rebellion has been estimated to be as high as 30,000. The defiant rage against the English for their slaughter of the Irish rebels is heard in the elegiac tones and the strident resistance voiced in the ballads and tales of Irish Romanticism.¹⁸⁵ Still sung are the many anonymous ballads on the Croppies, Father John Murphy and the Wexford Rising, and the Dunlavin Green executions.¹⁸⁶ Thomas Moore's 'The Minstrel Boy' remains a well-known lament of the Rebellion in his *Irish Melodies* (1815).

Back in France, power and control were assumed by Napoleon Bonaparte following his *coup d'état* of 9–10 November 1799. The Napoleonic era began in 1799, when Napoleon overthrew the Directory and established the French Consulate, and it continued until his defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Among the first celebrations of the new era was the revival of Sade's play *Oxtiern*, performed in a theatre at Versailles (13 December 1799). Countering the failed efforts of the United Irishmen and the conflicts between England and Ireland, Napoleon endeavoured to establish a code of toleration among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants.

Coleridge at Cambridge

The problems of religious toleration would have justified introducing Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) earlier in Part I in relation to the Dissenters, or even in the context of the earlier section on the Gothic, but I have reserved a place for him here as one who got caught up in the protest against the abiding intolerance of the Toleration Act as exercised in the universities. Following the years from 1779 to 1787 at Hawkshead Grammar School, Wordsworth began his studies at St John's College, Cambridge. Coleridge, upon the death of his father in 1781, was sent to Christ's Hospital, a London boarding school that offered free education to orphans. Ten years later, in 1791, Coleridge entered Jesus College, Cambridge, arriving just after Wordsworth graduated. Were it not for the inextricable entanglement of religion and politics during the 1790s,

Coleridge's studies at Cambridge might not have been disrupted. As the youngest of 13 children of an Anglican clergyman in Ottery St Mary, his family anticipated that he would enter the Anglican ministry. After his father's death when he was not yet nine years old, he was sent to Christ's Hospital.¹⁸⁷ Charles Lamb recounts those years, when Coleridge, 'the inspired charity-boy' awed both teachers and classmates.

Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the dayspring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee – the dark pillar not yet turned – Samuel Taylor Coleridge – Logician, Metaphysician, Bard – How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, intranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young *Mirandula*), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of *Jamblichus*, or *Plotinus* (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting *Homer* in his Greek, or *Pindar* – while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the inspired charity-boy!¹⁸⁸

After entering Jesus College, Coleridge found himself swept up in excited debates among the students over the French Revolution. Many of the students, Coleridge included, adopted the radical side of the debate, while senior members of the faculty tended to hold the conservative position. The students, of course, risked expulsion for voicing their discontent with religious as well as political leaders for failing to address causes and consequences of the revolution.¹⁸⁹

Coleridge joined in the protests over the dismissal of William Frend, tutor at Jesus College. After Frend was banished from the university, Coleridge remained in touch with him. Frend's influence combined with his own independent thinking in moving him towards Unitarianism. Falling into debt and drunkenness, he fled from the university in November 1793. After gambling his last money on a sweepstake ticket and losing, he succumbed to suicidal depression. On 2 December 1793, he enlisted in a cavalry regiment as Silas Thompson Cumberbach. Five months passed before his brothers became aware of his predicament and for 25 guineas purchased his discharge on grounds of insanity. His brothers also paid his debts (£136.6s. 2¼d.), enabling him to return to Cambridge.¹⁹⁰

William Frend

Although Frend had prepared for the ministry within the Church of England, and advanced to the priesthood in 1783, he opposed the disregard of social responsibility that was rendering the church ineffective. Renouncing his subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles of faith, he left the church in 1787 to become a Unitarian. Frend published his 'Address to the Inhabitants of Cambridge' proposing that the university senate acknowledge the Unitarian as

an alternative to the Trinitarian dogma.¹⁹¹ Frend lost his position as tutor on 27 September 1788, and his appeal was dismissed on 29 December 1788.¹⁹² If the authorities had enforced the Blasphemy Act of 1697, the consequences might have been more severe. The Toleration Act of 1689 granted toleration only to those Protestant dissenters who accepted the Trinity. Not until the Doctrine of the Trinity Act of 1813 (53 Geo. III, c. 160) was toleration granted as well for Unitarian worship, but even then, the universities still excluded dissenters.

Frend used his dismissal as an opportune occasion for a tour of the Continent. Upon his return he joined with Joseph Priestley in a plan for a new translation of the scriptures intended to serve the Unitarian concept of revealed religion. A major component of Priestley's theology was his approach to the study of scripture. Rather than ignoring the array of connotations and ambiguities of idiom, he proposed a Unitarian Bible that would invite readers to probe meanings and consider alternative interpretations. Much earlier in his career, Priestley had grounded a theory of language and rhetoric in the associationist structures of words and meanings.¹⁹³ The understanding of the Bible would entail continual re-reading. Priestley strongly believed in intellectual engagement in matters of faith and advocated toleration for religious dissent. Not just his religion but his politics, too, aroused public and governmental mistrust. His Unitarianism and his support of the French Revolution combined to arouse a mob riot in Birmingham. Provoked by Priestley's audacity in hosting a dinner in July 1791 to celebrate Bastille Day, the angry mob set fire to his home and his library. During the three-day riot, 26 additional Dissenters lost their homes in the incendiary attacks and five nonconformist churches were burnt to the ground. Priestley fled to the United States in 1793. On Priestley's departure, three of the Cambridge radicals – Frend, John Tweddell, and James Losh – presented him with an inkstand as a reminder of the aims of the Corresponding Society.¹⁹⁴

France declared war on England on 1 February 1793, and England promptly reciprocated with a declaration on 11 February. Frend denounced the aggressive opposition at a time when the republican effort required a peaceful nurturing. In his tract entitled *Peace and Union recommended to the Associated Bodies of Republicans and Anti-republicans*, he denounced intolerance and accused the Church of England of leading congregations into error.¹⁹⁵ Members of the faculty demanded that Frend be prosecuted in the Vice-Chancellor's Court for writing and publishing a pamphlet which trespassed 'against the *Laws* of the University'.¹⁹⁶ During the trial undergraduates rallied to support Frend, with Coleridge among the most vociferous.¹⁹⁷ Following Frend's refusal to recant on 30 May 1793, the trial concluded with the pronouncement by Isaac Milner, the Vice-Chancellor, that Frend was banished from the University.¹⁹⁸ In spite of the verdict against him, he continued to receive his stipend as fellow until the end of term.

Moving from Cambridge to London, Frend tutored in mathematics¹⁹⁹ and gained recognition for his appropriation of logic and geometric proofs and his

rejection of negative numbers. He continued to campaign for religious and political reform. The Treason Trial of the previous October and November were still very much in the minds of the company who gathered for tea at Frennd's home on the 27 February 1795. Most prominent among his guests was William Godwin, whose *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*²⁰⁰ introduced the concepts of necessity and perfectibility and argued change would come gradually and governments would ultimately atrophy with no need for violent revolution. Having already declared his enthusiasm for the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, William Wordsworth joined the company primarily to meet the author. Also present was Thomas Holcroft, playwright, critic, and novelist. Holcroft had assisted Thomas Paine in the publication of the first part of *Rights of Man* in 1791. He joined the Society for Constitutional Information in 1792 and the London Corresponding Society early in 1794. In October 1794, Holcroft was indicted for high treason along with Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall, and John Horne Tooke, but when those two were acquitted, Holcroft was discharged without trial.

The astonishing assembly at Frennd's home was by no means happenstance. Frennd had kept up his campaign against the university,²⁰¹ and found a circle of like-minded friends. These were the intellectuals and literati of London who were leaders in the radical movement. Another in their company was George Dyer, who like Lamb and Coleridge was educated at Christ's Hospital, and like Frennd, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, had attended Cambridge. More closely the contemporary of William Blake and William Godwin, Dyer had experienced the American Revolution in his twenties and was almost 40 at the time he met with Frennd's conclave of radicals. As Dyer demonstrated in *Complaints of the Poor People of England*,²⁰² he shared with Godwin a doctrine of benevolence and argued a moral obligation to the poor. His volume *Poems* (1792) exhibited an attention to the common man similar to that subsequently developed by Coleridge and Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

John Tweddell and James Losh

Two more of Frennd's former Cambridge colleagues attended this noteworthy gathering. Like Dyer, John Tweddell and James Losh had also distinguished themselves as classical scholars at Cambridge. Dyer edited the 143-volume set of Greek and Latin works published by Abraham John Valpy as the *Delphin Classics*. At Trinity College in 1788, Tweddell won all three of the Sir William Browne gold medals (best Greek ode, best Latin ode, and best Latin and Greek epigrams); in 1789 he won two of the three. In 1792, the year that Coleridge won a Browne medal, Tweddell was elected Fellow of Trinity. He read his Latin prize essay on equal rights: *Utrum magnum imperium cum aequa omnium libertate constare possit?* (Can a great empire exist with equal freedom for all?). Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) may have been banished, but its principles could still be

upheld in proper academic Latin. With the title, *Prolusiones Juveniles*, Twaddell published his prize compositions in Greek, Latin, and English, further revealing that in academic circles it was possible to express political views on freedom, the rights of man, and the need for reform. Religion, however, and university tradition still had to be respected.²⁰³

Upon entering the Middle Temple in 1792, Tweddell became more bold in his radical partisanship, especially in the formation of the Society of the Friends of the People.²⁰⁴ At the tea party given by Friend on 27 February 1795, Tweddell maintained that the execution of Robespierre (28 July 1794) was proof that the French Revolution was again steering towards the principles of liberty. By 1798, however, Tweddell had become the most disillusioned of the entire company. His deep disappointment, it has been argued, prompted William Wordsworth's depiction of the character in *Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree*.²⁰⁵

Carlisle Losh and his brother were among those arrested in 1792 for 'disturbing the peace' as members of a group who shared republican views. Later that year, he visited Paris, attended the National Convention, and returned to England after the September Massacres.²⁰⁶ In March 1793, Losh established the Friends to the Liberty of the Press, and as member of the Society of the Friends of the People, he assisted in drafting a reform petition submitted to Parliament. He participated in the effort to secure funding for the defence of Hardy, Thelwall, and Horne Tooke at the Treason Trials of 1794. At this period, Losh also involved himself with the investigations of Edward Christian into the circumstances of his brother's role in the mutiny on the *Bounty*. Losh assisted with interviews of mutineers who had been brought back to England.²⁰⁷ As a boy, Fletcher Christian attended school in Cokermonth, as did the six year younger William Wordsworth, who was subsequently taught at Hawkshead, while Losh was schooled in nearby Penrith. In 1796, Wordsworth represented Rivers as the instigator of the rebellion in *The Borderers*, partly reflecting events in the French Revolution,²⁰⁸ but also alluding to the mutiny on the *Bounty*.²⁰⁹ In 1795, Losh left London for Bristol. There he encountered Wordsworth, whom he already knew; and through Wordsworth he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge; and at a breakfast, hosted by Coleridge in November 1796, Losh met Robert Southey, Thomas Beddoes, and Charles Lloyd.²¹⁰

In London, Losh joined the radical circle of William Godwin, whom he may have met at a dinner given by James Mackintosh (3 February 1794). Mackintosh had attracted considerable attention with his *Vindiciae Gallicae: A Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers* (April 1791), an intellectual liberal's reply to Burke. By the time Losh met him, however, the Reign of Terror had persuaded Mackintosh that Burke may have been right. Losh also attended a noted tea party held by Friend (27 February 1795), at which Godwin was a guest. Friend's gathering served to introduce Wordsworth to the London group: Losh and Wordsworth were already connected (Losh was a school contemporary of Wordsworth) and shared the expatriate period in Paris. Losh has been suggested as the source of Wordsworth's introduction, but Stephen Gill writes

that more likely it was William Mathews, his closest college friend.²¹¹ It was later that Wordsworth and Losh became good friends. Friend, Tweddell, and Holcroft advocated for reform in their books, pamphlets, and tracts, but authorities were quick to confiscate publications deemed hostile to church or state. In order to distribute the new literature of freedom and reform, a more basic foundational freedom was required – a freedom of the press.

Freedom of the Press

Losh bolstered his endeavour with a new edition of *Areopagitica; A speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England* (1644). The work of the most venerated of English poets, *Areopagitica* was recognized as an authoritative defence of the right to freedom of speech and expression. In its own time, however, Milton's philosophical argument against banning or censoring failed to convince its immediate audience, the Calvinist Presbyterians in Parliament who exercised censorship under the *Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing* (14 June 1643). Milton's *Areopagitica* was banned in its own time, nor was it persuasive after the Restoration. The new Parliament passed a new Licensing Act in 1662 (14 Car. II, c. 33; An Act for preventing the frequent Abuses in printing seditious treasonable and unlicensed Books and Pamphlets and for regulating of Printing and Printing Presses). This Act prohibited the introduction and use of a printing press without prior permission from the Stationers' Company and further empowered by warrant a king's messenger to enter private premises to search for unlicensed presses and printing.²¹²

Losh was not mistaken in his hope that Milton's *Areopagitica* would alleviate the restriction on the press or the prosecution of fellow radicals for daring to publish their ideals for reform. If nothing else, it would revive the plea for freedom of the press by one of the most respected authors of English literature. It was a fervent appeal that would resound alongside of Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791). Paine's book was banned and its author charged with treason for supporting the French Revolution. Rather than their works being banned or censored, the authors of more inflammatory works could be charged with treason or sedition, and the pamphlets and tracts intended for circulation among factory workers, domestic servants, clerks, and shopkeepers could be rendered too expensive by requiring payment for circulation under the Stamp Act. Under the administration of William Pitt (the Younger) as Prime Minister, Parliament passed in 1795 the Treasonable Practices Act (36 Geo. III, c. 7) and the Seditious Meetings Act (36 Geo. III, c. 8). As described above, the purpose was to suppress the burgeoning radical movement. Sentences of imprisonment, transportation, or execution were far more effective than banning or censoring. The government was now empowered to arrest members of the London Corresponding Society and other reform groups even without evidence of any other illegal activities. As Coleridge was later to argue in his essay on

‘The Liberty of the Press’ (*The Friend*, 1:70–76), the principle ought to be guided by the same toleration as exercised in religion and politics. But in the frightened reaction to the French Revolution despotism prevailed in all three.

Sedition was defined as a disruption of industrial and agricultural production as well as a disruption of governmental processes. Any effort among the workers to organize against management was, therefore, the new arena of sedition. Those who dared to distribute pamphlets intended to rally workers to strike, or to instigate protesters to riot, were charged with violations of the Stamp Act, the fourth of the Six Acts (60 Geo. III & 1 Geo. IV, c. 9), which extended and increased taxes to cover those publications.²¹³ The Stamp Act resistance was a matter of labouring class solidarity. By the 1830s, the defiant distribution of unstamped papers and pamphlets of the radical press had evolved into a concerted campaign. To circumvent the stamp tax that increased the price beyond a worker’s means, news shops would pay the tax and make room for readers to visit. Because that tactic imposed a difficulty on many workers, news hawkers would risk arrest by selling the unstamped papers.²¹⁴ Women supported the radical press because the radical press had made wages, work hours, and education for women major components of the reform campaign.²¹⁵ Although subjected to control by the Stamp Act, pamphlets, newspapers, and journals often evaded the attempts to suppress the liberal call for reform. Few books were subjected to censorship.²¹⁶ A play, however, was subjected to more rigorous control. Even though a play script had been approved by the Examiner of Plays, radical or subversive content could be easily introduced into the performance. To prevent the propaganda of reform from infiltrating the theatres, local authorities employed spies and informers to report on activities presented under the guise of popular entertainment.²¹⁷

With the national attention to revolutionary ideals, the rights, liberty, and dignity of the individual were more vehemently asserted, yet all the more aggressively repressed. In addition to extreme charges of sedition or treason, another legal procedure was to accuse the author of defamation. In the common law of libel, the claimant need only prove that the statement was made by the defendant, and that it was defamatory. The claimant is not required to prove that the statement was false. The truth of the statement must be proven by the defendant, even though proving the truth or falsity of the statement is rendered difficult or impossible, since the defendant has no means of petitioning the claimant to reveal any implicating documents. Under then existing defamation law the ‘burden of proof’ falls upon the defendant.

Many cases of libel throughout the eighteenth century arose from disputes in Parliament. ‘The Society of the Bill of Rights’, led by John Horne Tooke and John Wilkes, successfully conspired to publish the parliamentary debates which had previously been shielded by law. On 21 February 1771, John Wheble, publisher and bookseller, was summoned to Parliament by the Speaker of the House of Commons to answer to the charge that he had printed a full record of House debates. In his office as Alderman of London, John Wilkes presided over the enquiry, and contended that Wheble had simply exercised the rights of

an Englishman and the chartered privileges of a Citizen of London. Rather than being sentenced for a violation of law, Wheble was commended for his public service by the Corporation of London and awarded 100 Guineas by the Constitutional Society. Wilkes had gained a significant victory for the freedom of the press. The right to print reports of parliamentary debates had larger ramifications in the gradual shift of political sovereignty from House of Commons Parliament to the electorate at large.²¹⁸

Letters of Junius

Once the debates were in print, the implicating documents were a matter of record. With the circulation of what was actually said, defendants acquired a crucial source for their ‘burden of proof’. The trials against the publication of the *Letters of Junius* provided a noteworthy test of the extent to which John Wheble’s publication of the parliamentary debates had advanced the freedom of the press. In suits raised by the Attorney-General, the authors, printers, publishers, and booksellers of the *Letters of Junius* were charged with ‘seditious libel’ against the Crown. Not accustomed to losing such cases, the Crown was disturbed by the defeat in all three trials. The most rigorous charges were levelled against Henry Sampson Woodfall, in whose newspaper, the *Public Advertiser*, the letters were first published (1769–1772), and who subsequently edited the two-volume collection (1772).²¹⁹ The jury found him guilty ‘of printing and publishing only’. The author, the mysterious Junius, may have been unknown, but much of the content of the presumed libel was known through the previously published debates. The content of the letters was deemed scurrilous rather than seditious. Woodfall was arrested for publishing the letters, John Almon for selling them, and John Miller for republishing them. In November 1770, William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield and Lord Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, declared the proceedings a mistrial: Woodfall and Miller went free, Almon was charged but not sentenced.²²⁰

The pseudonymous Junius was less than pleased with the outcome. By declaring a mistrial, Lord Mansfield had avoided confronting the extent to which the press might be allowed its liberty. Among the letters of Junius were those by Philo Junius, who was typically introduced to defend Junius. It was Philo Junius who repeated Lord Mansfield’s instructions to the jury that the sole verdict to be decided was the printing and publishing only, not whether the writings were truth or libel, nor whether the defendants were guilty or innocent. Philo Junius then elucidated ‘whether Lord Mansfield’s doctrine concerning libels be or be not an attack upon the liberty of the press’:

it seems *the liberty of the press may be abused and the abuse of a valuable privilege is the certain means to lose it*. The *first* I admit; but let the *abuse* be submitted to a jury, a sufficient and indeed only legal and constitutional check upon the licenses of the press. The *second* I flatly deny. In direct contradiction to Lord Mansfield,

I affirm, that ‘the abuse of a valuable privilege *is not* the *certain* means to lose it.’ If it were, the English nation would have few privileges left, for where is the privilege that has not, at one time or another, been abused by individuals? But it is false in reason and equity, that particular abuses should produce general forfeiture. ... The liberty of the press is, after all, a *valuable privilege*. I agree with him most heartily, and will defend it against him. (I:424–426)²²¹

The trial over the *Letters of Junius* intensified the speculation over the identity of the author who borrowed his pseudonym, from the Roman patriot Lucius Junius Brutus, in order to pen a series of 69 letters sharply critical of the government under King George III. Following Woodfall’s edition of 1772, other editions followed in quick succession. In 1801, Robert Heron prepared a thoroughly annotated edition. In 1806, John Almon edited a version which documented his experiences in the trial of 1770. In 1812, an extensive new edition was issued by the Woodfall family, which added to the previously published letters the correspondence of Junius with Henry Sampson Woodfall, together with a selection of the letters attributed to Junius, facsimiles of his handwriting, and thorough annotation of the references to classical Latin literature.²²² The annotations were provided by John Mason Good, best known for his translation of Lucretius, *The Nature of Things* (1805), a dual language edition with textual and explanatory notes, together with parallel passages and quotations from European, Persian, and Arabic authors.²²³

As the perpetrators of corruption and scandal retired from public view, interest in Junius’s revelations and accusations ceased to arouse public attention. His advocacy of freedom of the press continued to be upheld by a new generation of journalists in the 1790s. He continued to be appreciated for his high literary standard for popular journalism. William Hazlitt, writing in 1807, speculated that the author of the Junius letters might well have been William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, father of William Pitt the Younger, also subsequently a prime minister. Chatham was held in awe for the power of his brilliant oratory, and for his devastating attacks on corruption in the government. Hazlitt argued that Chatham was a more likely candidate than either Edmund Burke or John Dunning, 1st Baron Ashburton, both of whom had written anonymous letters of aggressive critique, and therefore had been suspected to have been the brazen but elegant masked Junius:

Though I do not, on the whole, think it probable that lord Chatham was the author of Junius, yet I think that he was by far the most likely person that has thus far been named. He was about equal to the task. He had the same pith and nerve, the same acuteness and vigour: he worked in the same metal as Junius, with little less sharpness and fineness of the execution, and more boldness in the design. Burke was above it, Dunning was below it. It was physically impossible that Burke should have been the author. He could no more have written Junius, from the exuberance and originality of his mind, than Dunning could have written it from the poverty of his. The speeches of the latter are ‘as dry as the remainder of a

biscuit after a voyage.’ No human art could have moulded his stiff set of meagre sentences, with all the technical formality and servile exactness of a legal document, into the harmonious combinations and graceful inflections of Junius’s style. It is likely that it will never be known who Junius really was, and I do not wish it ever should; it is a sort of singular phenomenon, and curious riddle in the history of literature. It is better that it should remain a secret, and be something to wonder at, than that by it’s being explained, every one should become perfectly satisfied and perfectly indifferent about it. (Hazlitt, 1:168)²²⁴

In his lecture ‘On Tooke’s *Diversions at Purley*’ (1812),²²⁵ Hazlitt gleefully quoted ‘Junius’s sarcasm’ from Letter LIV in dismissing Horne Tooke’s polemical prose as simply ‘the little sneering sophistries of a collegian.’²²⁶ In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), Hazlitt observes that Horne Tooke ‘no where makes so poor a figure as in his controversy with Junius’, which leads him to speculate that Horne Tooke ‘knew who Junius was, and was afraid of him’.²²⁷ In ‘My First Acquaintance with the Poets’ (1823), Hazlitt observed that Samuel Taylor Coleridge had little respect for Junius ‘as a writer’ and even less for Samuel Johnson. He much preferred the ‘richness of style and imagery’ of Jeremy Taylor and other seventeenth-century divines (17:121).²²⁸

Coleridge’s response to Junius was far more complex, and his respect far greater, than Hazlitt had realized. Were Junius not a sneaking spy, Coleridge objected, then one might celebrate him as the Robin Hood in the struggle for freedom of the press. ‘As he never dropt the Mask, so he too often used the poisoned Dagger, of an Assassin’ (*Marginalia*, 3:220).²²⁹ The constant reliance on balance and antithesis Coleridge found tedious, and the longer sentences have ‘all the ins & outs of a snappish Figure-dance’ (3:221). He was at his best in shorter sentences as a mastery of that brevity that suggests more than it states. ‘The great Art of Junius is never to say too much.’ That skill was effectively combined with a manner of forthright honesty rather than abstruse insight. ‘If ever he deviates into any originality of Thought, he takes care, that it shall be such as excites surprize for its acuteness, rather than admiration for its profundity.’ Coleridge also judged the prose style of the letters to be perfectly appropriate for the intended audience:

It is impossible to detract from the merit of these Letters: they are suited to their purpose, & perfect in their kind. (They impel to action, not thought.) Had they been profound or subtle in thought, or majestic & sweeping in composition, they would have been adapted for the closet of a Sidney, or for a House of Lords such as it was in the time of Lord Bacon; but they are plain & sensible, whenever the Author is in the right, & (whether right or wrong) always shrewd, & epigrammatic & fitted for the Coffee-house, the exchange, the Lobby at the House of Commons, & to be read aloud at a public Meeting. (When connected, dropping the forms of connection.) Desultory without abruptness or appearance of disconnection, epigrammatic, (antithetical to excess,) sententious & personal, regardless right or wrong, yet well-skilled to act the part of an honest warm-hearted man, & even

when he is in the right, *saying* the Truth, but never proving it, much less attempting to bottom it – this is the character of Junius (3:221–222)

Having thus described the character of Junius, Coleridge then adds his crucial point: the character of Junius is not simply a prominent figure in the literary history of the past generation, it is the model for all polemicists and political journalists who seek success ‘in factious times’:

– and on this character, and in the mould of these writings, must every man cast himself, who would wish in factious times to be the important & long remembered Agent of a Faction. (3:222)

Coleridge’s praise for the style and rhetorical strategy of the *Letters of Junius* leads him to acknowledge the similar skills of Thomas Paine and John Horne Tooke. As David Erdman observed, this is for Coleridge ‘a rare appreciation’ of the two most prominent radicals of the age.²³⁰ Coleridge goes even further: he reflects on his own capacity to compete as an advocate of political and social reform.

I believe, that I could do all that Junius has done, & surpass him by doing many things which he has not done: ex. gr. by an occasional induction of startling facts, in the manner of Tom Payne, & lively illustrations, & witty applications of good Stories, & appropriate anecdotes, in the best manner of Horn Took. I believe, I could do it if it were in my nature to aim at this sort of excellence, or to be enamoured of the Fame, and immediate Influence, which would be its consequence & reward. (3:222)

Augmenting the epigrammatic content and balanced syntax of Junius with the ‘startling facts’ of Paine and the ‘good Stories’ of Horne Tooke, Coleridge claims that he could excel as a political activist. He could, that is, if seeking fame and influence ‘were in my nature’.

But it is not in my nature. I not only love Truth, but I have a passion for the legitimate Investigation of Truth. The love of Truth conjoined with a keen delight in a strict, & skilful, yet impassioned Argumentation, is my Master Passion, and to it are subordinated even the Love of Liberty & all my public Feelings – & to it whatever I labour under of Vanity, ambition, & all my inward Impulses. (3:222)

Junius is adept at ‘*saying* the Truth, but never proving it’, and avoiding all recondite reasoning. Coleridge by contrast, has ‘a passion for the legitimate Investigation of Truth’. Rather than epigrammatic truths, Coleridge wants ‘impassioned Argumentation’. The love of liberty may be dominant for Junius, Paine, and Horne Tooke, but for Coleridge that love is subordinate to the love of truth.

The identity of Junius, a question with which other critics were obsessed, is virtually ignored by Coleridge, who is concerned almost exclusively with the characteristics of style that distinguish the literary accomplishment of the polemicist and satirist. As just noted, Coleridge considers Junius a model for the effective activist. He also praises his epistolary excellence, ‘a model for Letters that are truly Letters’ (3:224)

perhaps, the fair way of considering these Letters would be as a Kind of satirical Poems – the short, and for ever balanced sentences constitute a true metre; & the connection is that of satiric poetry, a witty logic, an association of ideas by amusing semblances of cause and effect – the sophistry of which the reader has an interest in not stopping to detect – for it flatters his love of mischief, & makes the sport – (3:225)

Conjuring an interlocutor, a generic characteristic of the epistle, was crucial to the most devastating of Junius’s satiric assaults. As Coleridge observes, Junius seldom indulged in realistic portraits. A caricaturist’s sketch provided an adequate target:

One of Junius’s arts – & which gives me a high idea of his Genius, considering him as a poet & a satirist, is this: he takes for granted the existence of a character that never did, & never can exist, & then employs his wit, & surprises & amuses his readers with analysing & setting forth its incompatibilities. – (3:225)

The weakness of the *Letters of Junius* Coleridge attributed to the excess of their most significant strength. Junius’s great weapon was his mastery of wit and irony and the aggressive rhetoric of scorn and taunt. The weakness lies in their relentless occurrence: ‘Continual Sneer – continual Irony – all excellent, if it were not for the ‘all’ – but a countenance with a malignant smile in stately fixture on It, becomes at length an object of aversion (3:225). Aligning Junius with Paine and Horne Tooke, Coleridge emphasized the political power of the prose and its potential for imitation in his own times.

Although Hazlitt appreciated the style and the political significance of the *Letters of Junius*, he was, like most of his contemporaries, preoccupied with the mystery of their authorship. Prompted by Woodfall’s edition of 1812, John Taylor commenced a close examination of all available evidence. The result of his research, *The Identity of Junius* (1816), was printed in the publishing house that he had founded in partnership with James Augustus Hessey. With his claim that the letters were authored by Sir Philip Francis,²³¹ Taylor approached Sir Philip for his belated acknowledgment of authorship. He received neither admission nor denial. The similarity of his handwriting to the disguised hand used by the writer of the letters is close. His family maintained that Sir Philip addressed a copy of verses to a Miss Giles in the handwriting of Junius. The similarity of Junius and Sir Philip in regard to their education, knowledge, and

opinions are close. During the decisive years of the composition, from 1769 to 1772, Sir Philip seemed to have been immediately at hand.

The reception was less than Taylor had hoped, but Taylor's proof found a strong advocate in Thomas De Quincey. After Taylor and Hessey purchased the *London Magazine* in 1821, Thomas De Quincey became a major contributor and brought attention to the journal with his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), which appeared in two instalments before being published in book form. In 1824 De Quincey returned to Edinburgh, writing mostly for *Blackwood's Magazine*. Summarizing Taylor's abundant evidence that Sir Philip Francis had created the character of Junius, De Quincey devoted three instalments of the *Edinburgh Saturday Post* (29 December 1827, 5 and 12 January 1828) to redefining the mysteries of the letters. In the first instalment, he presented Taylor's evidence in seven categories,²³² concluding with the evidence that had prompted Hazlitt to consider Junius to have been possibly the mask of William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham. Junius used in his letters unacknowledged passages from several of Lord Chatham's speeches in Parliament. As a clerk in the War Office, Sir Philip had access to papers not authorized for public release. The letters of Junius cease at the very time that Sir Philip no longer served in the War Office.²³³ In his third instalment De Quincey summarizes Taylor's comparison of political allegiances as well as peculiarities of phrase and punctuation. In all characteristics of the writings and sentiments, De Quincey declares that Sir Philip is the 'twin' or 'double' of Junius.²³⁴

At the trial of Thomas Paine for seditious libel (18 December 1792), Thomas Erskine opened with a defence of the freedom of lawyers to represent their clients followed by defence of the freedom of the press. Erskine was applauded, but Paine was found guilty. Just as De Quincey concurred with the King's Bench in pronouncing Paine a traitor rather than a patriot for his *Rights of Man*, he also denounced the author of the *Letters of Junius* for his treasonous assault on the 'care-laden Ministers of a great nation'.

Did *they* join the popular cry – 'Here is a great rhetorician'? Never believe it; but 'Here is a great thief.' Not the eloquence, but the larceny moved their anxieties. State secrets were betrayed. Francis was the spy. He picked Lord Barrington's locks; he practised daily as an eavesdropper upon Lord Barrington's private communications with Ministers; he abused, for his own purposes, the information, select and secret, which often came before him officially, in his character of clerk at the War-Office. In short, he was an unfaithful servant, who, first of all, built himself up into terror and power as Junius.²³⁵

De Quincey expressed an intense dislike for literary and political Whiggism, for the principles of reform, and for all those who championed rights and reform. In his essay on Samuel Parr, schoolmaster, clergyman, Doctor of Law, and political author, he observed how 'politics and literature so naturally blended' in Parr's writings that the radical subterfuge often went undetected.

The subtle proselytizing from pulpit and podium could not be conducted without consequences.

If Dr Parr's friends acted upon Mr Paine's principle, propagated Mr Paine's principles, and suffered in public estimation, even to the extent of martyrdom, as champions of those principles – nobody can suppose that in selecting and professing a faith so full of peril, they could be other than greatly influenced by the knowledge that a learned doctor in the Church of England, guide and tutor to themselves, had publicly spoken of that Mr Paine as an authority not altogether without his claims to consideration.²³⁶

As applied to the disputes concerning Parr's counsels, the word '*parresia*', De Quincey observed, was an apt 'Grecian pun'. In the Athenian sense, '*parresia*' referred to freedom of speech, but it also had a negative meaning as unbridled or unlicensed speech.²³⁷

That the 'great rhetorician' was in fact the 'great thief' is reiterated in De Quincey's account of Junius in his 'Elements of Rhetoric' (1828). The account appears between a discussion of Edmund Burke and George Canning. From the former De Quincey quotes the opening repudiation of 'the learned professors of the *Rights of Man*' in his letter to the Duke of Bedford.²³⁸ Canning is described as an author of prose 'as florid as the age could bear'. Between Burke and Canning, Junius is introduced 'not so much for any power that he actually had as a rhetorician, but because he is sometimes reputed such'. His reputation as a master of prose style, De Quincey contends, rested on 'a great delusion'. Denying that Junius was ever read for his 'elegance', he identifies two separate groups of readers: the immediate audience of cabinet ministers, who for three years were threatened by his invectives and scandalous revelations; and a middle- and lower-class audience, who for many years thought that the letters were written by a champion of free press working in disguise to expose government corruption. The audience of ministers and officials cared nothing for any possible glimmer of 'elegance'. They read 'simply because it was most evident that some traitor was amongst them; and that either directly by one of themselves, or through some abuse of his confidence by a servant, the secrets of office were betrayed.' In the popular press there were numerous 'newspaper patriots', and readers of Junius were duped by the limited repertory of Ciceronian balances and antitheses in clumsy mimicry of refined elocution. 'The interest in Junius travelled downwards; he was read in the lower ranks, because in London it speedily became known that he was read with peculiar interest in the highest.'

But here for the first time a pretended patriot, a Junius Brutus, was anticipated with anxiety, and read with agitation. Is any man simple enough to believe that such a contagion could extend to cabinet ministers, and official persons overlaid with public business, on so feeble an excitement as a little reputation in the art of

constructing sentences with elegance; an elegance which, after all, excluded eloquence and every other positive quality of excellence? That this can have been believed, shews the readiness with which men swallow marvels. (6:178–179)

The mystery of Junius's identity having been solved, another mystery remained: 'his establishment as a classical author is a standing enigma.' What attributes of style had been mistaken for rhetorical excellence? The range was limited, for his prose 'lingered for ever in the dust and rubbish of individuality, amongst the tangible realities of things and persons'.

One talent, undoubtedly, he had in a rare perfection – the talent of sarcasm. He stung like a scorpion. But, besides that such a talent has a narrow application, an interest of personality cannot be other than fugitive, take what direction it may: and malignity cannot embalm itself in materials that are themselves perishable. Such were the materials of Junius. His vaunted elegance was, in a great measure, the gift of his subject: general terseness, short sentences, and a careful avoiding of all awkwardness of construction – these were his advantages. (6:179–180)

Having defined Junius as a meddler and promulgator of scandal, De Quincey allowed him no credit for his use of disguise as means to circumvent censorship, or charges of libel, at a time when the country was struggling with the idea of freedom of speech. Of course, De Quincey viewed the fortunes of Junius and Thomas Paine with the disdain of a Tory. A more liberal evaluation persisted. Defined by the retrospect of 75 years, John Wade in his 1850 edition of the letters celebrated Junius as a man of genius. Wade appraised the letters in the immediate context of reaction to the American Revolution, but also their reception when the issues of freedom of the press were debated during the years of the French Revolution. Their relevance, Wade argued, was not in their particular content, but rather in the bold manner of exposing to the citizenry at large what had previously been concealed in closed quarters:

As there is little in the subject matter of these famous epistles that could confer upon them such enduring celebrity, they must be mainly indebted for it to the writer's extraordinary powers, the varied resources of which have enabled him, with the peculiar characteristic of genius, to dignify and immortalize that which in its own nature, is secondary and perishable. In this respect, Junius stands alone – he is the Napoleon of public writers; and, like the author of the first and noblest epic, though he has had a host of imitators, he is still without an equal.²³⁹

This discussion of the Junius *Letters* began with reference to existing libel laws that placed the burden of proof on the defendant. With the publication of scandalous revelations of parliamentary debate, Junius challenged the libel laws and expanded freedom of the press. Judges, not juries, had the power to decide whether a libel had occurred, and since judges were connected with government and the established Church, they generally considered attacks on members of those institutions to be libellous.

Charles James Fox deserves credit for introducing the legislation to support the achievement of Junius. Fox believed the burden of proof should be on government. In order to make it more difficult to win a conviction for libel, he introduced in May 1791 a bill which would give juries, rather than the judge, the power to decide whether a libel had occurred. Edmund Burke presented a similar bill, but it failed to counter Fox's libel bill, which was passed by parliament and signed by the King. The Libel Act of 1792 may deservedly be considered as the most crucial legislation of Fox's political career. The Libel Act restored to juries, rather than judge, the right to decide whether a statement were libellous and whether a defendant were guilty. In the years immediately following, Fox's Libel Act saved numerous lives. Persuaded by the reactionary Pitt ministry, George III issued on 21 May 1792 the Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings and Publications. This attempt to silence dissidents was vigorously enforced. The Proclamation enabled the filing of 'more libel cases in the two years following passage of Fox's libel bill than had been filed during the entire eighteenth century'.²⁴⁰ If cases had been decided by judges alone, many of the accused might have been sentenced to the gallows or deported.

George Dyer

Although a crucial member of Frennd's circle, George Dyer was by all accounts the most eccentric. Numerous comic anecdotes were related by Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt about Dyer's losing a shoe, walking into the river, and other incidents of myopia and absent-mindedness.²⁴¹ Dyer was a distinguished classical scholar, who later in his career spent well over 10 years editing and annotating Greek and Latin works for the 143-volume set.²⁴² The long labour left him with seriously impaired eyesight. Earlier in his career, he authored a number of tracts on the plight of England's poor and on the injustices of the political system. Together with the reformists in Frennd's Cambridge circle, Dyer was dedicated to defending the rights of the Dissenters and to correcting the conditions of the impoverished lower class. As originally enacted in the English Reformation to strengthen the opposition to Roman Catholicism, adherence to the Thirty-nine Articles was made a legal requirement by Parliament in 1571 (13 Eliz., c. 12). During the Restoration a century later, responding to fears of violent resistance from the dissenting sects and 'popish recusants', the Test Act of 1672 (25 Car. II., c. 2) made adherence to the Articles a requirement for holding civil office. In 1790, Joseph Priestley joined Charles James Fox in the effort to get the Test and Corporation Acts repealed. That effort was taken up by many reformers but repeatedly failed until its repeal in 1824. Cambridge may have been regarded as the liberal, Oxford as the conservative university,²⁴³ but the fate of Frennd remains as evidence that Cambridge upheld reactionary policies. It is true, however, that students at Oxford were still expected to declare adherence until the passing of the University Reform Act of 1854. Boldly opposing the Test Act, Dyer's *Inquiry into the Nature of Subscription* (1792) linked his

argument with the current controversy over Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), declaring that subscription transgressed upon 'natural rights' to seek one's own form of worship. He argued further that subscription stifled the free inquiry and development of 'the human mind'. In his final chapters Dyer cited points on which subscription was at odds with the British Constitution and with the precepts of Christianity.²⁴⁴

Although it was widely circulated, Dyer's *Complaints of the Poor People of England* (1793), failed to usher in the needed changes. Enclosures and loss of commons deprived country dwellers of fish and game as well as plots for planting or grazing. Dyer decried the injustices introduced by wealthy landowners.

The air and the water, and the creatures that live in them, are the common gifts of providence. And till a man has, by his own industry, acquired some right in what nature has left common, they are as much one man's as another's. How far society has a right to appropriate what nature has left common, I shall not stop to enquire. God has never said, the squire may shoot a partridge or a pheasant, but the labourer shall not. Or that Sir Robert may draw the fish out of the river, and that his poor tenant shall be imprisoned for the same action.

I do but just mention these among the many laws that oppress the poor, and not to insist that these are unjust – which, however, they certainly are. I affirm in general that the more injustice there is in the laws, the greater is the necessity for their being known that a poor man may not be caught in a trap by his ignorance.²⁴⁵

During the ensuing decades of war, little progress was made in bringing about reform. The Industrial Revolution altered the cities with smoke-belching factories. Vast segments of the population moved to the cities in search of employment. Spitalfields, once a model for housing workers in the textile industry, soon degenerated into a crowded enclave without an adequate sewage system.

At Cambridge, Coleridge found intellectual kinship with Friend, Tweddell, Losh, and Dyer. Among them it was Dyer whom he called a brother. Although the group remained active in London, Coleridge had moved to Bristol, where he commenced a series of lectures in January 1795. At this very time, Dyer produced *A Dissertation on the Theory and Practice of Benevolence* (1795),²⁴⁶ a work with ideas strikingly similar to those in Coleridge's lectures.²⁴⁷ Like Dyer, Coleridge was convinced that mending 'the outward state of the world' would require an inward conversion. He also recognized a necessary reciprocity: 'the great exemplum of benevolence was Nature.'²⁴⁸ Coleridge tells Dyer of the opposition to his lectures:

Since I have been in Bristol I have endeavored to disseminate Truth by three political Lectures²⁴⁹ – I believe, I shall give a fourth – / But the opposition of the Aristocrats is so furious and determined, that I begin to fear, that the Good I do is

not proportionate to the Evil I occasion – Mobs and Mayors, Blockheads and Brickbats, Placards and Press gangs have leagued in horrible Conspiracy against me – The Democrats are as sturdy in the support of me – but their number is comparatively small – / Two or three uncouth and unbrained Automata have threatened my Life.²⁵⁰

Coleridge acknowledges that from a conservative perspective he is just a ‘damn’d Jacobine ... jawing away’. The dangers of assault, however, are real, and he recognizes, as well, the dangers of imprisonment should the authorities accept the accusations of treason or sedition. Because it had been ‘confidently asserted that there was Treason in it’, Coleridge explains to Dyer, he had been compelled to publish *A Moral and Political Lecture* (1795)²⁵¹ just as it was delivered in order to dispel the charges. That circumstance enables Coleridge to order 10 copies of Dyer’s *A Dissertation on Benevolence* (1795) to be circulated in Bristol, and to send Dyer ‘as many Copies [of *A Moral and Political Lecture*] as you may choose to give away’.²⁵²

Responding to a letter from Dyer, Coleridge declares that one sentence in particular has ‘affected me greatly’. Dyer had written: ‘I feel a degree of languor &c &c and by seeing & frequently feeling much illiberality acquire something of misanthropy.’ Dyer here provokes a discussion of the moral implications of urban vs. rural life and the ‘return to nature’ that became a dominant theme in Romantic literature. Cities, Dyer affirms, engender a moral malaise and even a misanthropy. Coleridge recognizes the ‘melancholy’ consequence of witnessing too closely and too frequently the exploitation taking place in London’s noisome quarters: ‘the best of us are liable to be shaped & coloured by surrounding Objects’, he tells Dyer, an effect that provides ‘a demonstrative proof, that Man was not made to live in Great Cities’.

Almost all the physical Evil in the World depends on the existence of moral Evil – and the long-continued contemplation of the latter does not tend to meliorate the human heart. – The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures – beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible. In the country, all around us smile Good and Beauty – and the Images of this divine Kalokagathon [ideal physical and moral beauty] are miniaturized on the mind of the beholder, as a Landscape on a Convex Mirror.²⁵³

As Nicholas Roe has pointed out, this passage closely anticipates Dyer’s thesis of universal benevolence in his *Dissertation*. He would approve its thesis ‘Benevolence is universal in its influence’. Coleridge and Dyer both attended Christ’s Hospital and Cambridge University, both turned to Unitarianism, and shared political and literary interests.²⁵⁴ As evident in Coleridge’s letters to Dyer, both were thinking about how the natural world might influence thought and action.

The pleasures of nature encourage moral improvement.²⁵⁵ Dyer develops the same argument in his *Dissertation*:

There is no time in which we range with so much advantage to ourselves through the walks of creation, as that, in which we contemplate the character of Benevolence. In whatever point of the universe we take our stand, and to whatever spot we turn our eyes, how fertile and glowing the landscape! In a system so contrived, that one part sheds its influence on, and promotes the harmony of, the other, this cannot be otherwise: There is a kind of voice that speaks through the universe.²⁵⁶

In terms close to Coleridge's letter of 10 March 1795, Dyer argues that by perceiving and responding to the harmony of the natural world, our behaviour towards others becomes more benevolent:

The GOOD MAN from the appearances of nature derives tender affections, generous principles, and humane conduct. From the glowing and variegated scenes around him he derives something which warms his heart, and throws a smile over his countenance ... The good man thus acquires universal tenderness.²⁵⁷

Pantisocracy, the egalitarian society that Coleridge devised together with Robert Southey, was intended to escape the existing corruption of church, palace, and factory, and move to the banks of the Susquehanna in order to establish an unencumbered life in nature. 'I would that we could form a Pantisocracy in England,' Coleridge told Dyer, 'and that you could be one of us.' As one who was constitutionally receptive to the benefits of life in nature, Dyer was also most sensitive to the depravity he must witness in London, 'The finely-fibred Heart, that like the statue of Memnon, trembles into melody on the sun-beam touch of Benevolence, is most easily jarred into the dissonance of Misanthropy.'²⁵⁸

The 'Satanic Mills', as Blake called them, overwhelmed the industrial cities with coal-powered, steam-driven machines that cheapened the value of human labour. Those who secured factory employment were paid wages that scarcely sufficed for cramped, unsanitary tenement dwellings. The unemployed wandered the streets as prostitutes or pick-pockets.²⁵⁹ Just as the divine revelation in nature provides a 'humanizing power',²⁶⁰ so too the sordid conditions of the city might also cause, as Dyer feared, melancholy and misanthropy, or worse, might promote the dehumanizing moral degradation of large segments of the urban population.

The struggle of benign against malignant forces also provides a repeated theme in Dyer's poetry. 'On Liberty', in his *Poems* (1792), heralds the benevolent change that Dyer anticipates through the French Revolution. Composed of 12 irregular Spenserian stanzas, the ode celebrates female leadership. The males whom Dyer praises for having forwarded the republican principles include John Locke, Algernon Sidney, John Milton, William Mason, Joseph Priestley, and John Aikin. His daughter, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, has been equally engaged in calling for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (*An Address to the*

Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, 1790), and supporting William Wilberforce in the campaign to end the Slave Trade (*Epistle to William Wilberforce Esq. On the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade*, 1791). Dyer lauds Wollstonecraft for her *Vindication* (1792), Ann Jebb for her political essays of the 1780s, Helen Maria Williams for her *Letters from France*, and Charlotte Smith for her *Elegiac Sonnets*. Her *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) not yet written, Mary Hays is acknowledged as ‘an admirer and imitator of Mrs Charlotte Smith’.²⁶¹

Nicholas Roe argued further that Dyer was an important model for Wordsworth and Coleridge in the way he brought politics to bear on the poetry of nature and imagination.²⁶² For Wordsworth, malignancy festers in the city, whereas nature is a tutelary presence. The city becomes a ‘monstrous anthill’ in the lines added to the ‘Residence in London’ in *The Prelude* (1850, 7:150). In ‘Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey’, he declares himself ‘A lover of the meadows and the woods,/ And mountains; and of all that we behold/ From this green earth; of all the mighty world/ Of eye, and ear’ (lines 102–105). Nature offered openness and freedom. By contrast, urban space was expressed in metaphors of repression and confinement. ‘Pent’²⁶³ is the word that Coleridge used in ‘This Lime Tree Bower my Prison’ (1797) to describe the predicament of Charles Lamb in London: ‘thou hast pined/ And hunger’d after Nature, many a year,/ In the great City pent’ (lines 28–30). Recalling that he was himself as a schoolboy ‘pent’ in the city, Coleridge in ‘Frost at Midnight’ (1798) promises for his infant son a life among nature’s bounties.

thou shalt learn far other lore,
And in far other scenes! For I was reared
In the great city, pent ’mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds (lines 50–56)

In the sonnet ‘To one who has been long in city pent’ (1816), John Keats relied on the same word and the same contrast between country and city to celebrate his own escape from his studies at Guy’s Hospital.²⁶⁴

After meeting Coleridge in September 1794, Dyer wrote favourable reviews of Coleridge’s poetry *The Fall of Robespierre* (September 1794) and *Poems on Various Subjects* (April 1796)²⁶⁵ in the *Analytical Review* and the *Critical Review*.²⁶⁶ From March through May 1796, Coleridge struggled to make a success of *The Watchman*. Following its tenth issue (13 May 1796), with an accumulated debt of £80, he was forced to acknowledge to Thomas Poole that *The Watchman* had ‘watched in vain’. Poole pledged an honorarium of £40, and Dyer offered to pay all of the outstanding printer’s bills. According to Coleridge, the war with France had inspired a surge of anti-Jacobinical patriotism at odds with the liberal politics espoused in the periodical.²⁶⁷

Mary Hays

In his first letter to Mary Hays (16 April 1792), William Frend proposed that they meet personally on his ‘next journey to London’. He praised her ‘candour of sound reasoning’, declaring that ‘we seem to agree together nearly in our creed’; he also suggested that they might discuss the character and role of the priest among Catholics, Anglicans, and Dissenters. As planned, they met in May. One month later, in June 1792,²⁶⁸ Hays met with Mary Wollstonecraft, and through Wollstonecraft she became acquainted with Joseph Johnson, foremost publisher of the radical literature of reform and also a committed publisher of women writers. With Wollstonecraft’s support, and Johnson as her publisher, Hays acquired an important venue for her literary work.²⁶⁹ Johnson’s *Analytical Review* (1788–1798) provided a forum for radical political and religious ideas. Although many of its articles addressed philosophical and aesthetic issues, other contributions were critical of the British government and supportive of reform.²⁷⁰ In late 1797, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* established itself as the adversary of the *Analytical Review* and represented conservative and reactionary interests. After Johnson was convicted of seditious libel, the *Analytical Review* suspended publication in December 1798.

Hays also gained access to an important literary circle which met regularly at the house of Joseph Johnson in St Paul’s Churchyard. In spite of a considerable overlap with the group hosted by Frend, there were a few members that attended only one of the two groups. In 1794, Hays met Elizabeth Inchbald, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Mary ‘Perdita’ Robinson at Johnson’s house. New members were constantly being added: Joseph Priestley introduced John Newton, former captain of slave ships who became an Anglican cleric, author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, ardent abolitionist, and witness to the abolition of the slave trade before his death in 1807. Newton brought John Hewlett, whose controversial work upheld the authenticity of the Parian Chronicles as historic rather than mythic.²⁷¹ Hewlett invited Mary Wollstonecraft, who in turn attracted Mary Hays, who brought William Godwin. William Blake, though he was not frequenting the same Unitarian circles as Coleridge, was also in touch with the new ideas. From textual evidence in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *There is no Natural Religion*, and *All Religions are One*, Stephen Prickett has argued that Blake was familiar with the Higher Criticism and had begun to adapt its key tenets as early as 1788. Prickett suggests that the evening discussions at meetings of the Johnson circle served as Blake’s primary source. Here Blake may have absorbed ideas from those who were actively engaged with the controversial texts of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren and the premises of the Higher Criticism. One of these would have been William Frend.²⁷² Among the many who gathered exclusively with the Johnson circle were Tom Paine, Joseph Priestley, and Richard Price. There were others who attended Frend’s circle as well: among them Mary Hays, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Holcroft, and John Thelwall.

Having identified himself as a dissenter, Frend in the ensuing years became a formidable dissident. In *Peace and Union recommended* (1793),²⁷³ Frend described the evils of the existing parliamentary system and of the game and poor laws, and he explained the necessity for numerous reforms. Responding to demands that he retract his accusations, Frend in the second edition placed the offending passages in quotation marks. In *Scarcity of Bread: a plan for reducing its high price* (1795),²⁷⁴ which promptly went through two editions, Frend urged subscriptions by the rich for the relief of the poor. Although this plea was forwarded 20 years before the Corn Laws were instituted in 1815, imposed restrictions and tariffs on imported grain, so that domestic producers could keep grain prices artificially inflated, as was already widely practised. In late 1795, Frend and Thelwall were called as orators for the mass meetings of the London Corresponding Society.²⁷⁵ All of these endeavours were discussed in the informal gatherings hosted by Frend. Contributing to the discussions were George Dyer, Thomas Holcroft, James Losh, William Godwin, John Tweddell, and John Thelwall, who were joined in 1794 by Mary Hays.

Hays confessed an emotional attraction to Frend, which he turned aside with the claim that an attachment was impossible on financial grounds. She wrote autobiographically about the relationship in her first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). She was 33 years of age, Frend 35, when she joined their daringly Jacobinical circle. The semi-autobiographical tale of unrequited love is the structure in which Mary Hays relates an intriguing account, fictive though it may be, of her initiation into the radical circle of Frend and his acquaintances. Fairly obvious are the representations of Hays as Emma Courtney and Frend as Augustus Harley. Perhaps no novel of merit is ever well served by a plot summary. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* is poorly served. Although by no means a *roman à clef*, the dialogue with other characters in the novel is assembled with fidelity to real events, as is further sustained by Hays's inclusion of actual correspondence that she had exchanged with Godwin and Frend.

In the novel she presents Emma, her fictional counterpart, as youthful, naïve, religiously and politically conservative. Through her exposure to the radical thought at these meetings, she is gradually converted to liberal reform.

During three years, I continued my weekly visits to Berkley-square. I was not always allowed to join the parties who assembled there, neither indeed would it have been proper, for they were a motley groupe; when permitted so to do, I collected materials for reflection. I had been educated by my good aunt, in strict principles of religion; many of Mr. Courtney's friends were men of wit and talents, who, occasionally discussed important subjects with freedom and ability; I never ventured to mingle in the conversations, but I overcame my timidity sufficiently to behave with propriety and composure; I listened attentively, to all that was said, and my curiosity was awakened to philosophic enquiries.²⁷⁶

Not reared by an aunt, strict in religious principles, Mary Hays was the daughter of Dissenters who welcomed discussion and controversy. At age 17, she fell in

love with John Eccles, a young Dissenter without employment or prospects. The match was opposed by their parents, but they continued to meet and exchanged over 100 letters.²⁷⁷ Three years later, when Eccles had secured a position, they were engaged, but before a marriage could be planned Eccles died of a fever.²⁷⁸ Throughout the 1780s, she wrote tales, poems, and essays. Unlike Emma Courtney, who described herself as a modest auditor during the discussions at the home of Augustus Hanley, Mary Hays was already actively engaged in religious and political controversy before she attended meetings hosted by Frend.

In the late 1780s, Mary Hays joined the New College, an academy for Dissenters in Hackney. She exchanged letters with Robert Robinson, a Dissenting minister who campaigned against the slave trade. Through Robinson, she became aware of the activities of George Dyer and William Frend at Cambridge. Not a Unitarian, Robinson nevertheless determined late in life to meet Joseph Priestley. He journeyed to Birmingham, where Priestley invited him to preach two Charity Sermons on 6 June 1790, both in aid of the local Sunday Schools. Staying at the home of William Russell, Priestley's friend and benefactor, Robinson died in his sleep, in the early hours of 9 June 1790. With the funeral service performed by Priestley, Robinson was buried in the Dissenters' Burial Ground. With emphasis on Robinson's ministry dedicated to liberation of slaves and living wages for the lower classes, George Dyer wrote the impassioned *Memoirs* (1796).²⁷⁹

Another member of the controversial circle educated at Cambridge, Gilbert Wakefield left the Church of England to join the Unitarians. He earned his living as a classical tutor at the Dissenting academies at Hackney and Warrington. A supporter of the French Revolution, he joined Mary Wollstonecraft and others in the refutation of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In 1791, Gilbert Wakefield published a critique of communal worship.²⁸⁰ Mary Hays responded with a pamphlet entitled *Cursory Remarks on An Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1791).²⁸¹ Part of Wakefield's argument concerned whether the intimacy of prayer would be distracted by a crowd, or whether the very presence of a public would lead to the insincerity of making a show of worship. Also at stake, however, was finding a suitable place for worship for those who had left the Church of England, a kind of homelessness that was further exacerbated by strict laws against public assembly. Impressed by her extension of the argument, William Frend sent her a letter of praise that was followed by his invitation for her to join the group meeting at his house. Her circle of Jacobin friends continued to expand. When she received a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she promptly contacted Joseph Johnson, the publisher, which led in turn to her friendship with Wollstonecraft and further involvement with Godwin's intellectual circle. Wakefield attracted further attention with *An Examination of Paine's Age of Reason* (1794).

Hays next published *Letters and Essays* (1793) and invited Mary Wollstonecraft to comment on it.²⁸² Although she collaborated with her daughter on this volume, Elizabeth Hays disapproved of her daughter's keeping company with the radicals, and thoroughly opposed her decision to leave home. Wollstonecraft had recommended that women take charge of their lives, so Hays chose to live as an independent woman in London. This was for the time an impetuous act for a single woman. She took a room in Hatton Garden, the centre of the jewellery trade. Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) had just appeared. She knew that she must read it immediately, but she lacked the money to buy it. With typical boldness, she wrote to the author begging to borrow it. Flattered by her attention, Godwin offered his services as a mentor. Her attendance at the meetings hosted by Frennd continued during the ensuing years, bringing with them her reputed heartbreak over the failed relationship with Frennd. On 27 February 1795, William Wordsworth met Godwin in London, and joined that evening the company that included George Dyer, Thomas Holcroft, James Losh, John Tweddell, and John Thelwall. Also of this circle was Mary Hays.

Her next work, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), narrated a fictionalized version of her unrequited love for Frennd along with the intellectual adventure of the ideas promulgated by his circle. More than 130 years before Virginia Woolf delivered her lectures, 'A Room of One's Own' (October 1928), at Newnham and Girton, the women's colleges at Cambridge, Hays had scandalously already taken a room of her own in Hatton Garden in order to experiment with 'the idea of being free'.²⁸³ As Emma reaffirms even in her disappointment at the end of the novel, it was not a failed quest.

Moral martyrdom may possibly be the fate of those who press forward, yet, their generous efforts will not be lost. – Posterity will plant the olive and the laurel, and consecrate their mingled branches to the memory of such, who, daring to trace to their springs, errors the most hoary, and prejudices the most venerated, emancipate the human mind from the trammels of superstition, and teach it, that its true dignity and virtue consists in being free.²⁸⁴

Especially relevant to the task of retrieving the events that contributed to the fiction were the transcriptions from her correspondence with Frennd and Godwin. There are also recurrent allusions from the works of authors of Frennd's circle, including Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* and others. The heroine, Emma, falls in love with Augustus Harley. Recognizing that he cannot afford marriage, she offers to live with him as his wife without getting married.

My spirit is pervaded with these important ideas – my heart flutters – I breathe with difficulty – *My friend – I would give myself to you* – the gift is not worthless. Pause a moment, ere you rudely throw from you an affection so tried, so respectable, so worthy of you! The heart may be compelled – compelled by the touching sympathies which bind, with sacred, indissoluble ties mind to mind!²⁸⁵

Emma's discussion of marriage with Augustus follows Godwin's repudiation of marriage as a 'system of fraud':

marriage, as now understood, is a monopoly, and the worst of monopolies. So long as two human beings are forbidden, by positive institution, to follow the dictates of their own mind, prejudice will be alive and vigorous. So long as I seek, by despotic and artificial means, to maintain my possession of a woman, I am guilty of the most odious selfishness.²⁸⁶

While Godwin believed that everyone had a right to expect 'a certain sphere of discretion', he also defined it as a shield for indiscretion. Godwinian, too, is Emma's identification of reason and utility as a foundation of morality.²⁸⁷

Similarly, Mary Hays had Emma confirm the moral advantage of sincerity over discretion.

If to have been more guarded and reserved would have been more discreet, I have already forfeited all claim to this discretion – to affect it now, would be vain, and, by pursuing a middle course, I should resign the only advantage I may ever derive from my sincerity, the advantage of expressing my thoughts and feeling with freedom.²⁸⁸

In order to lend the appropriate tensions to the debate over slavery, Hays introduced into Augustus Harley's circle a few unlikely guests: Mr and Mrs Melmoth, a planter and his wife from the West Indies. She may have gleaned these arguments from a variety of sources, but Robert Robinson's anti-slavery campaign would have been foremost in her mind.²⁸⁹ As wealthy plantation owners and slave-holders, the Melmoths are also portrayed as arrogant buffoons. Also in the company is Mr Pemberton, who holds a commission in the militia and shares Mrs Melmoth's enthusiasm for the '*Pride, pomp, and circumstances of glorious war!*' (*Othello*, III.iii.364). Emma shocks these guests by declaring soldiers to be murderers. Informed that she has confounded 'the brave fellows, who fight to protect their king and country, and the ladies, with common ruffians and house-breakers', Emma replies that the latter, 'rendered desperate by passion, poverty, or injustice, endeavours by wrong means to do himself right, and through this terrible and pitiable mistake destroys the life or the property of a fellow being'. The military, however, is composed of murderers hired to protect or advance the possessions of the wealthy, and 'wantonly and in cold blood, cut down millions of their species, ravage whole towns and cities and carry devastation through a country'.²⁹⁰ If these opinions had been circulated as a pamphlet rather than uttered by a character in a novel, Mary Hays might well have been charged with sedition.

When Mrs Melmoth turns to Augustus Harley to repeat the question about soldiers and murderers, her husband intervenes with the declaration that he approves the use of soldiers as murderers to control the slave population in the West Indies.

Mr. Melmoth interposed, by wishing, ‘that they had some thousands more of these *murderers* in the West Indies, to keep the slaves in subordination, who, since absurd notions of liberty had been put into their heads, were grown very troublesome and refractory, and, in a short time, he supposed, would become as insolent as the English servants.’

‘Would you believe it, Mrs. Denbeigh, (said the Planter’s lady, addressing the sister of her husband), Mr. Melmoth and I have been in England but a month, and have been obliged three times to change our whole suit of servants?’

‘This is a land of freedom, my dear sister; – servants, here, will not submit to be treated like the slaves in Jamaica.’²⁹¹

Pertinent to the discussions of Frennd, Losh, Holcroft, Dryer, and other liberal-minded members of the circle, was the sympathy with the exploited workers in the factories, fields, and mines of Britain. That poorly paid domestic servants were kept in slave-like dependency prompted the ready comparison. The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (47 Geo. III, Sess. 1, c. 36) was introduced in Parliament by Charles James Fox in 1807. Another quarter of a century passed before the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 (3 & 4 Will. IV, c. 73), and even then, an exception was granted for another 10 years to the East India Company. Mary Hays was an active agitator during those long years in which planters, like Hay’s Pemberton, repeated the claims that Europeans were unsuited to the tropical labour and that sugar production would be bankrupt without the work of slaves. In Hays’s novel it is Augustus, her Frennd character, who carries the argument.

Mr. Melmoth again reverted to the subject of English servants, which gave rise to a discussion on the Slave Trade. Mr. Harley pleaded the cause of freedom and humanity with a bold and manly eloquence, expatiating warmly on the iniquity as well as impolicy of so accursed a traffic. Melmoth was awed into silence. Mr. Pemberton advanced some trite arguments in opposition, respecting the temporary mischief which might ensue, in case of an abolition, to the planters, landholders, traders, &c. Augustus explained, by contending only for the gradual emancipation, after their minds had been previously prepared, of the oppressed Africans. The conversation became interesting. Pemberton was not devoid of talents when he laid aside his affectation; the subject was examined both in a moral and political point of view. I listened with delight, while Augustus exposed and confuted the specious reasoning and sophistry of his antagonist; exulting in the triumph of truth and justice.²⁹²

At the close of the novel, Emma, who has assumed responsibility in rearing the son of Augustus Harley, confesses that she has come to an impasse. Because corruption is everywhere, she can recommend no career which transcends the ubiquitous perversion of society.

I wished to fit you for a commercial line of life, but the ardor you discovered for science and literature occasioned me some perplexity, as I feared it might unfit you for application to trade, in the pursuit of which so many talents are swallowed up,

and powers wasted. Yet, to the professions my objections were still more serious. – The study of law is the study of chicanery. – The church, the school of hypocrisy and usurpation! You could only enter the universities by a moral degradation, that must check the freedom, and contaminate the purity, of the mind, and, entangling it in an inexplicable maze of error and contradiction, poison virtue at its source, and lay the foundation for a duplicity of character and a perversion of reason, destructive of every manly principle of integrity.²⁹³

Hays echoes Holcroft's second novel, *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor* (1794–1797), in which young Trevor encounters corruption in every profession to which he is attracted, leading him to abandon hope for any sort of professional career. Fortunately for Trevor, a bequest from a dying relative enables him to retire to the countryside. The wealthy relative as *deus ex machina* pleased no one. The picaresque hero, denied all action, can take no ethical stand.²⁹⁴

Her next novel, *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), was published with Joseph Johnson.²⁹⁵ Hays addressed more rigorously the subordinate status of women, a subordination that she presented as inseparable from the firmly established class hierarchies, in each of which women were treated as inferior. Considered too radical, her book did not sell well. The main character, Mary, is brought up by her guardian Mr Raymond in a loving environment, apart from the prevailing prejudices of patriarchal society. Her childhood innocence is disrupted in her eleventh year, when Mr Raymond takes in two brothers, William and Edmund Pelham, as resident pupils. Mary develops a close friendship with William, and as they grow older, Mr Raymond realizes that he must move Mary out of the house, so that he does not risk violating his promise to the boys' father: that he would protect them from any relationships which might negatively affect their future. These conditions affirm that for men, their class status requires an arranged marriage to a woman of property and wealth. Removed from Mr Raymond's household, Mary is treated as a cast-off waif dependent on the charity of others, a condition that becomes worse with the death of her guardian.

Hays was influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (1792) and after writing admiringly to her, the two women became friends. The backlash following Wollstonecraft's death and posthumous publication of her *Memoirs* impacted Hays's later work. Among these later productions is the six-volume compendium *Female Biography: or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries* (1803).²⁹⁶ The income from *Female Biography* provided her with some independence, but her frank and forthright manner alienated a number of friends. After her falling out with Godwin, she established limited and short-lived contact with Robert Southey and the much-troubled Charles Lloyd. While Southey praised Mary Hays as 'a fine, lively, good natured girl, with a head brimful of brains',²⁹⁷ Coleridge referred to her as 'a thing ugly and petticoated'.²⁹⁸ Her ugliness derived in part from her presumption as a woman to argue theology with him. Although Coleridge was himself once under the intellectual sway of William Frend, he had put those days behind

him and had no patience with Hays reminding him of the arguments he had once shared with the members of the tea-time circle.

Elizabeth Hamilton

Too outspoken for many of her contemporaries, Hays was rejected by Coleridge as well as by Elizabeth Hamilton, who refused to acknowledge her as a proper member of her own sex. Following the research of her brother Charles, who died in 1792, Elizabeth Hamilton began to publish in the field of orientalist and linguistic studies. Her first fiction was a satire on contemporary society, *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796). She contributed as well to the gossip on Mary Hays's disgrace.²⁹⁹ In her second novel, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), Mary Hays is satirized as a sex-hungry man-chaser.³⁰⁰ Her *Letters on Education* (1801) were reform-minded and moderately radical in emphasizing the responsibility of employers to provide for the education of workers and their families. This work was republished several times and was followed by a number of other moral works.

Mary Robinson

Born in Bristol, Mary Darby was initially educated at the school run by Hannah More's sisters. At 16, she married Thomas Robinson. In 1775, her husband was imprisoned for debt, and she spent 10 months in prison with her infant daughter, during which she wrote and published *Poems* (1775). She became an actress at Drury Lane the following year. In 1780, her performance as Perdita attracted the attention of the Prince Wales (later George IV), who offered her £20,000 to become his mistress. He neglected to pay the bond after the relationship failed a year later, and the ensuing scandal ended her acting career. Her health was undermined following a miscarriage. In 1783, she contracted rheumatic fever, which left her an arthritic cripple throughout the remainder of her life. She turned to writing and quickly found success.³⁰¹

In earlier comments on the salon of Lady Anna Miller, I suggested that her coterie had promoted a flowery style not unlike the Della Cruscan verse that appeared in the *Arno Miscellany* (1784) and the *Florentine Miscellany* (1785). In 1788, Mary Robinson commenced a 'poetical correspondence'³⁰² with Robert Merry in the newspaper *The World*. Merry engaged in a similar poetic exchange with Hanna Cowley, also in the pages of *The World*. She was by far a better playwright than Merry, who stood foremost among the Della Cruscan poets – Hester Thrale, Bertie Greatheed, William Parsons – whom Merry joined in Florence. The Della Cruscan adopted a style of affectation, opulence, and over-ornamentation.

Mary Robinson found it easy enough to imitate the Della Cruscan style, and easy, too, to indulge the lavish praise on which the Della Crusicans thrived. She recognized that the Della Cruscan style was suited to sentimental effusion and an overflow of emotion, but lacked the vigour necessary to more serious poetry. Robinson wrote two volumes of poetry in 1775 and 1777, the latter under the patronage of the Duchess of Devonshire, and had success with her comic opera, *The Lucky Escape* (Drury Lane, 1778). A more important play, Robinson's *Nobody* (Drury Lane, 1794) stirred outrage among some viewers and critics who considered the stage exposition of a female gambling addiction as a crude insult to British women at large. Her *Sicilian Lover: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1796) was published but never performed. In 1791, the first volume of her newest verse collection, *Poems*, was published (the second volume would be released in 1793), and the following year saw the release of her first novel, *Vancenza, or, The Dangers of Credulity*. During her life, she published many additional volumes of poetry, including her important narrative sonnet sequence *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) and her *Lyrical Tales* (1800) written as a creative response to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Coleridge and Wordsworth. Her astonishing productivity also included *Modern Manners* (1793), and several novels: *Vancenza* (1792), *The Widow* (1794), *Hubert de Sevrac* (1796), *Walsingham* (1797), and *Natural Daughter* (1799). Like Mary Wollstonecraft, whose radical views she shared, she wrote boldly on social problems in her plays and novels. Recognizing that her subject would rile the very perpetrators of domestic abuse whom she chose to denounce, her *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799)³⁰³ was published under a fictitious name.

Coleridge and Wordsworth

Commencing his studies at Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1791, Coleridge maintained an academic discipline. At the end of it, he won the University's Browne Gold Medal for a Greek Sapphic Ode, an attack on the slave trade. In November 1792, at the beginning of his second year, he was one of four candidates for the Craven Scholarship in Classics, which he failed to win. With serious bouts of depression, he turned to opium, and by February 1793 the habit had become an addiction. At this time, too, he became an ardent advocate of Fren'd's challenge of the Toleration Act. Coleridge chose to leave before the end of the Michaelmas term of his third year. On 2 December 1793, under the name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbache, he enlisted as a private soldier in the 15th Light Dragoons. His brothers intervened to purchase his release.

In the meantime, he had, together with his new friend and fellow poet Robert Southey, evolved the idea of Pantisocracy, a Utopian model community to be established in America, close to where Joseph Priestley had taken up residence following his emigration. Despite much effort, there was little support and no

money to implement this idea, and it gradually faded. By the end of 1794, Coleridge was in London pondering his future; when Southey went in search of him, he finally discovered him together with his friend Charles Lamb in a Unitarian chapel, seeking divine guidance.

Coleridge's religious outlook at this point in his life was expressed in a long poem characteristically entitled *Religious Musings: a Desultory Poem written on the Christmas Eve of 1794*. Evident in these 'musings' is the influence of his Unitarian mentor Joseph Priestley, and in turn of David Hartley, from whom Priestley derived his associationist psychology. Hartley had promoted the view of God as 'All in all', but Coleridge was also indebted to the earlier Cambridge Platonists, in whose writings he had immersed himself.

There is one Mind, one omnipresent Mind,
Omnific. His most holy name is Love.
Truth of subliming import! with the which
Who feeds and saturates his constant soul,
He from his small particular orbit flies
With blest outstarting! From himself he flies,
Stands in the sun, and with no partial gaze
Views all creation; and he loves it all,
And blesses it, and calls it very good! (*Religious Musings*, lines 105–113)

The poem does not long remain at this level, but proceeds to dwell upon the horrors of war and social injustice, recollecting in particular the attack on Priestley's home midst the Birmingham riots of 1791:

Lo! Priestley there, patriot, and saint, and sage,
Him, full of years, from his loved native land
Statesmen blood-stained and priests idolatrous
By dark lies maddening the blind multitude
Drove with vain hate (*Religious Musings*, lines 371–375)

During his Unitarian period, which had now unmistakably begun, there were strong political themes woven through his religious thinking. As he began to preach for Unitarian congregations, he noted that 'my sermons spread a sort of sanctity over my sedition'. His support for the ideals of the French Revolution and opposition to the war with France resulted in his being suspected of sedition.

Coleridge visited Racedown to meet with William Wordsworth for the first time in September 1795. Thanks to the support from Thomas Poole, Coleridge was able to move into a cottage in Nether Stowey, Somerset, with his family in 1796. On 13 July 1797, William and Dorothy Wordsworth took residence in Alfoxden near Coleridge. John Thelwall, recently released from prison for rabble-rousing with his revolutionary rhetoric, arrived a few days later. Coleridge told the story that a government detective, sent to investigate their activities,

mistakenly understood their discussion of Spinoza as referring to ‘Spy Nosy’. Realizing that Thelwall’s reputation would bring further unwanted attention, Coleridge persuaded Thelwall not to seek a residence in Nether Stowey. Coleridge’s relationship with Thomas Poole deepened, and his friendship with Wordsworth developed into a creative collaboration at Alfoxden. Coleridge published a second edition of ‘*Poems*’ in 1797.

Both poets had been engaged in writing plays. In March 1797, Wordsworth had finished a draft of *The Borderers*, which he had begun the previous Autumn, and in March Coleridge had started composition of *Osorio*, the first half of which he read to William and Dorothy on 6 June. The poets submitted their plays to Richard Brinsley Sheridan at Covent Garden, and both plays were rejected. Not until 1842 did Wordsworth return to *The Borderers* and prepare it for publication.³⁰⁴ Coleridge did not wait quite as long. Revised and retitled, *Remorse* was successfully staged at Drury Lane (23 January 1813, and 14 April 1817). The initial run of 20 nights secured Coleridge ‘more in revenues than all his other literary productions combined’.³⁰⁵

In his poem ‘Fears in Solitude’ Coleridge described the condition of England in April 1798, when his fellow citizens feared that the country was about to be invaded by France.

Meanwhile, at home,
 All individual dignity and power
 Engulfed in Courts, Committees, Institutions,
 Associations and Societies,
 A vain, speech-mouthing, speech-reporting Guild,
 One Benefit-Club for mutual flattery,
 We have drunk up, demure as at a grace,
 Pollutions from the brimming cup of wealth;
 Contemptuous of all honourable rule,
 Yet bartering freedom and the poor man’s life
 For gold, as at a market! [...]
 [...] We have been too long
 Dupes of a deep delusion! Some, belike,
 Groaning with restless enmity, expect
 All change from change of constituted power;
 As if a Government had been a robe,
 On which our vice and wretchedness were tagged
 Like fancy-points and fringes, with the robe
 Pulled off at pleasure. (lines 53–63, 159–166)

Coleridge had originally thought of publishing *Osorio* together with Wordsworth’s *The Borderers*, but instead printed two extracts from *Osario*, ‘The Dungeon’ and ‘The Foster-Mother’s Tale’, in *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. It was this collection of poetry, and not the plays, that involved Wordsworth and Coleridge in their first collaborative endeavour. In the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge recollected how that collaboration was to be shared. His own

endeavours ‘should be directed to persons and characters supernatural’, and Wordsworth was ‘to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom’.³⁰⁶ The supernatural prevailed in Coleridge’s ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, and it was conjured by superstition in Wordsworth’s ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’ and ‘The Thorn’.

The flurry of activity during July and August registers the networking necessary to preparing the *Lyrical Ballads* for publication and reaffirming their social contacts before departing the country for an extended period: until 1 May 1799 for the Wordsworths, until 29 July 1799 for Coleridge. At the beginning of July, they visit with James Losh, John Wedgwood, and then Joseph Cottle, before setting off on a tour of the Wye Valley, visiting John Thelwall on their way. Between 10 and 13 July Wordsworth composes ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey’, which he then hands over to Cottle as the last poem to be included in *Lyrical Ballads*.

The final poem in the collection, ‘Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798’, revealed a new direction in Wordsworth’s poetry, a direction that he would further pursue during the ensuing months in Goslar, Germany. All the more remarkable, the newness emerged even while repeating many of the tropes used by several previous visitors to the ruined abbey of the Wye valley. As David Fairer has demonstrated, Wordsworth echoes lines from Thomas Warton and the tradition of ‘riverbank’ poetry, including Warton’s ‘River Loddon’ sonnet of 1777 and the poems of William Lisle Bowles. Wordsworth adopts the motif of revisiting a ‘native stream’, as well as the insertion of personal history into the poetic landscape.³⁰⁷ Among the books that lie in the background of Wordsworth’s poem was Richard Warner’s record of his fortnight’s ramble from Bath to Tintern. The prospect of the abbey was the goal of the journey:

we left a short time the banks of the river, and wound up the lane for another mile. We then attained the summit of a hill, and a prospect immediately burst upon us, scarcely to be equaled for richness or variety. Behind us lay the fairy region of Llandago, the busy village of Brookweir deeply embosomed in the wood. And the crystalline river, studded with vessels of different descriptions. Before us were spread the village of Tintern, with the diversified scenery of the dale in which it stands, its glittering stream and dark woods, and the lofty ruins of its abbey, a beautiful Gothic pile rising in solemn majesty, spotted with mosses, and crowned with ivy. The whole scene was gloriously tinted by the rich illumination of a setting sun.³⁰⁸

The principle difference is that Warner registered what he saw, whereas Wordsworth returns repeatedly to what he could no longer see. The ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling’, he affirmed and reaffirmed in his Preface (1802) to the *Lyrical Ballads*, is reanimated as ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’.

Juxtaposing the experiences of then and now, his 23-year-old self of 1793 and his 28-year-old self of 1798, Wordsworth describes his former self as ‘more like a man/ Flying from something that he dreads, than one/ Who sought the thing he loved’ (lines 70–72). If Wordsworth was intending a reunion with Annette Villon and his infant daughter Caroline, these lines expose a troubled mind. Thomas Carlyle declared that Wordsworth himself had told him the story of his return to France in 1793.³⁰⁹ Jonathan Wordsworth dismissed Carlyle’s account as ‘in the highest degree improbable’, declaring that the poet ‘was no Scarlet Pimpernel’.³¹⁰ Kenneth R. Johnston, on the other hand, presents corroborating evidence that Wordsworth had indeed made the dangerous trip.³¹¹

Whether or not he completed the crossing in 1793, Wordsworth’s poem on revisiting the Wye in 1798 relates complex workings of memory and the salutary effects of remembering. The opening lines emphasize not just the two visits, but also the passage of intervening time: ‘Five years have past; five summers, with the length/ Of five long winters!’ (lines 1–2). The poet then introduces the first in a series of open-ended comparisons that sustain the awareness of being situated on the brink:

Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion (lines 4–7)

Because his sight reveals only part of the secluded scene, he is prompted to think of a deeper seclusion beyond his sight. The details of the scene are absorbed into ‘one green hue’, evoking the ‘uncertain notice’ of what might be hidden, such as ‘vagrant dwellers’ or a hermit at his cave (lines 20–22).

The second verse paragraph recounts the efficacy of memory. Reviewing his experiences during the interim years, Wordsworth remembers remembering, even ‘in lonely rooms’ and ‘In hours of weariness’ (lines 25–27). The very act of remembering regenerates the physiological response by which sensations are stored in the mind. Just as the visible scene can prompt ‘Thoughts of more deep seclusion’, remembered sensations may elicit ‘feelings too/ Of unremembered pleasure’. And these lead to a further revelation, ‘Of aspect more sublime’. Wordsworth describes the power of remembered experiences to lighten ‘the weary weight/ Of all this unintelligible world,’ and to conjure a visionary state in which ‘We see into the life of things’ (37–40, 49).

Acknowledging that becoming ‘a living soul’ capable of mystical vision may seem ‘a vain belief’, Wordsworth is quite willing in his short third verse paragraph to abandon this speculation. But he nevertheless reaffirms the restorative power of his own recollections of the ‘sylvan Wye’ not as a static image but as an ever-moving ‘wanderer thro’ the woods’ (lines 50–57). In the fourth verse para-

graph ‘The picture of the mind revives again’, so vividly that past and present unite with the expectation that they will coexist in future acts of remembering. Memory provides a review of the stages of maturation: the ‘coarser pleasures’ and ‘glad animal movements’ of boyhood, and dawning manhood when objects of nature were ‘An appetite; a feeling and a love,/ That had no need of remoter charm’. Accepting that the former times, ‘And all its aching joys are now no more,’ the poet declares reconciliation with the present and the ‘Abundant recompense’ in an acquired depth of awareness (73–88). Resorting again to an open-ended comparison, he affirms

a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. (lines 95–102)

The comparisons to something ‘more’ grow larger and larger: ‘more deep seclusion’ and ‘aspect more sublime’ are expanded into ‘something far more deeply interfused’ in all of mind and nature. Having traced his way to that brink between ‘All thinking things’ and ‘all objects of all thought,’ Wordsworth can declare, as logical consequence,

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, – both what they half create,
And what perceive. (lines 102–107)

This conclusion reaffirms the juncture connecting the organs of sense with the external world, and leaves in irresolvable ambiguity which share was wrought by nature, which by the mind. More than reasoning applied only to personal circumstances, Wordsworth’s ‘Therefore’ is as universal as the *ergo* in Descartes’s famous formula, *cogito ergo sum*.

Not surprisingly then, he must apply a similar ‘Therefore’ again in his fifth and final verse paragraph which is addressed to his sister. She is less than two years his junior, but he sees in her a former self much like the one who visited the Wye five years earlier and whose passion is described in the previous verse paragraph. ‘Knowing that Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her’, the poet brings his Sister to the same brink, so that Nature might inform her

mind as it has his (lines 122–128). She too must become a lover of all that nature may reveal.

Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies. (lines 134–142)

From the very opening of the poem, memory has been a key to exploring the mind's capacities. So too at the conclusion, memory is invoked not simply as sustaining the bond between self and nature, but also between the poet and his sister. She will remember 'That on the banks of this delightful stream/ We stood together' (lines 150–151). Used strategically but sparingly in the previous sections of the poem, the comparisons are crowded one after another in these climactic lines, where they share their union 'With warmer love – oh! with far deeper zeal/ Of holier love', and the woods and cliffs surrounding them were made 'More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!' (154–159). Again and again he conjures with the open-ended comparison, as he does in *The Prelude*, Book Sixth, in explaining the 'hope that can never die' as 'Effort, and expectation, and desire,/ And something evermore about to be' (540–542). Or again in the last of the *River Duddon Sonnets*, in which he affirms that 'Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,/ We feel that we are greater than we know' (13–14).

At the beginning of September, Wordsworth and Coleridge visit Josiah Wedgwood. In London, mid-September, Coleridge dines with Anna Laetitia Barbauld and meets with Joseph Johnson. The first copies of *Lyrical Ballads*, the epoch-altering collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge, were printed by 5 September 1798. On 16 September, together with Dorothy Wordsworth and John Chester, they sailed aboard the ship that carried them from Yarmouth to Altona, then aboard a boat that brought them to the docks at Hamburg on 19 September. Soon after arrival in Germany, Coleridge took up residence in Ratzeburg, and the Wordsworths continued south to 'the romantic imperial town of Goslar', a walled town with impressive entries of towered gates, with the ruins (since restored) of what had been a palace (*Kaiserliche Pfalz*) of the Hohenstaufen, and with the Harz Mountains as a backdrop. They took rooms above a draper's shop in the Breite Straße, and their experience might have been as wonderful as the setting had they been able to establish relations with the townspeople, and had they not been confined by the intense cold. The positive consequence of the confinement was Wordsworth's decision to devote himself to writing.³¹²

The poems that Wordsworth wrote in Goslar during the ensuing five months reveal a new direction in his poetry. The new direction augmented rather than replaced the old. With Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*, he adapted the ballad from folk tradition to represent the common man in a natural rustic environment, speaking in a ‘language really used by men’. In Goslar, *The Prelude* had its beginning. In ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey’, he had already adopted the autobiographical and reflective manner which he was to continue to explore during the months in Goslar. Wordsworth completed, in addition to another 24 shorter poems, the ‘spots of time’ episodes of his formative years, the ‘fair seed-time’ of childhood. These were conceived as part of an extended autobiographical narrative, which began as ‘Was it for this’ (October 1798). The first part of the ‘Two-Part Prelude’ (1799), along with the ‘Lucy Poems’, the ‘Matthew Poems’, and a dozen more poems published in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), was written during the five months in Goslar.

The correspondence between Wordsworth in Goslar and Coleridge in Ratzeburg and then Göttingen was probably much like their conversation when together. It was about the poetry they are writing and hope to write. In December, Coleridge wrote to Wordsworth about his experimentation with German Hexameters. His sample in English imitates the manner of Johann Heinrich Voss’s *Luise*, Goethe’s model,³¹³ and is addressed to ‘William, my teacher, my friend! dear William and dear Dorothea!’ and again to ‘William, my head and my heart! dear Poet that feelest and thinkest! / Dorothy, eager of soul, my most affectionate sister!’ The sample includes school-boy instructions for counting out the metre and declares a mastery of hexametric galloping: ‘This is a galloping measure; a hop, and a trot, and a gallop.’ Coleridge may well have in mind Virgil’s onomatopoeic line describing the trampling steeds: ‘Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum’ (‘Then struck the hoofs of the steeds on the ground with a four-footed trampling.’ *Aeneid* VIII, 596); not a line that Wordsworth included in his 1823 translation. Coleridge concludes his hexameters with the line: ‘You have all in each other; but I am lonely, and want you!’³¹⁴

In his ‘want’ Coleridge confesses the extent of the symbiotic interdependency that had developed between them during the two preceding years. Beyond mere networking or exchanging ideas, Coleridge acknowledges the creative impulse each was capable of sparking in the other. ‘I need not say,’ Wordsworth responds, ‘how much the sentiment affected me.’³¹⁵ Dorothy copied several of the most recent poems, including ‘Nutting’ and passages on boat stealing and ice skating that would be included in *The Prelude* (1805, I:372–427, 452–489). Upon receiving a draft of ‘The Boy of Winander’ Coleridge replied, ‘I should have recognized them anywhere; had I met them running wild in the deserts of Arabia I should have instantly screamed out, “Wordsworth!”’³¹⁶ In spite of close collaboration and shared ideas, their poetry was very different. Coleridge’s ‘want’ was in part a want of motivation and stability. ‘I am sure I need not say how you are incorporated into the

better part of my being; how, whenever I spring forward into the future with noble affections, I always alight by your side.³¹⁷

A break in the cold made it possible, on 23 February 1799, for the Wordsworths to leave their rooms in Goslar and explore the Harz Forest. Eleven days earlier, Coleridge arrived in Göttingen in time to register for the summer semester. He took instruction in Germanic languages from Tychson, attended the lectures of Eichhorn in history, of Blumenbach in physiology, anatomy, and natural history. He also made extensive use of the library, where, in addition to gathering notes on Lessing and Schiller, he began to delve deeper into the metaphysics that influenced his subsequent critical thought.³¹⁸

After visiting Coleridge in Göttingen, William and Dorothy returned from Cuxhaven to Yarmouth, then headed directly to Sockburn-on-Tees, where they are welcomed as guests by the Hutchinsons. Coleridge finds a companion in Blumenbach's son, Friedrich, with whom he arranges an ascent of the Brocken, the highest peak in the Harz Mountains, hoping to sight the Brocken Spectre at daybreak. After his return to England on 29 July, Coleridge's first stop is to visit his benefactor Thomas Poole in Nether Stowey. In the company of Joseph Cottle the publisher, Coleridge rejoins the Wordsworths in Sockburn on 26 October. With instances of good fortune, Wordsworth finds his dwelling place in Grasmere in the vacant tavern, The Dove and Olive, promptly renamed Dove Cottage.

Joanna Baillie

Wordsworth was not adequately forthcoming about his sources in his Preface (1800) to the *Lyrical Ballads*. One influential work was Joanna Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' to her *Plays of the Passions* (1798).³¹⁹ Although he never acknowledged his debt, he acknowledged his admiration of her work. After the death in 1778 of her father, Rev. James Baillie, Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, she moved with her mother, Dorothea Joanna Baillie, and her sister, Agnes, into the family home at Long Calderwood. In the meantime, her brother, Matthew Baillie, was being trained in the medical profession. Matthew commenced his studies at Glasgow,³²⁰ then moved to Oxford, where his mother's brother, the celebrated anatomist Dr William Hunter, took charge of his medical studies.³²¹ Upon Dr Hunter's death in 1783, the Baillie family moved to Great Windmill Street, where Dr Hunter had his home and school. Matthew Baillie commenced teaching at the school, served as physician at St George's Hospital in 1787, completed his doctorate in medicine in 1789, became a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and was elected to the Royal Society in 1790. With his career now secured, Dr Matthew Baillie married Sophia, daughter of Dr Thomas Denman.³²²

Joanna Baillie began her literary career while living with her brother in Great Windmill Street. Here she wrote and published her *Poems of Nature and Rustic Manners* (1790). While Wordsworth is the poet most often credited for making

the rustic or common man the subject of his poetry, Crabbe in *The Village* (1783) preceded him by many years, and Robert Burns introduced rustic characters of ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’ in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish dialect* (1786). Burns’s *Tam O’Shanter* (1790), acclaimed as the best narrative poem of rustic life, anticipated a mode of storytelling that Wordsworth developed in *Peter Bell* (1798; published 1819) and *Benjamin the Waggoner* (1806; published 1819).

At Great Windmill Street, ‘whilst imprisoned by the heat of a summer afternoon and seated at her mother’s side engaged in needlework, ... the thought of essaying dramatic composition burst upon her.’³²³ She moved to London in her early twenties. Her first publication was *Poems* (1790), which received little notice. She was much more successful when she turned to drama, and the first volume of her *Series of Plays, in which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind* (3 vols., 1798–1812) brought her instant celebrity. Her successful tragedy *De Monfort* (1800) was produced at Drury Lane. In addition to *De Monfort* and *The Tryal*, the first volume of plays was accompanied by an ‘Introductory Discourse’ (1798) in which she set forth her theory of the drama, and from which Wordsworth borrowed ideas for his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

A dramatic theory founded on witnessing aberrational behaviour, as Baillie argued in her ‘Introductory Discourse’, provided a more refined mode of mimic and pantomimic action than currently practised on stage. Because the acting of the period relied heavily on body language, Baillie defined for her plays a counter-movement to the reductive stylization of dramatic gesture. Her intention was to reveal how a character succumbs to a compulsive emotion, which then wrecks its dramatic consequences. She also emphasized the sympathetic propensities that prompt a strong curiosity to observe the changing moods of others. In her plays, dramatic action involves not just the audience but the characters themselves in watching those changes unfold. She chose to represent dramatic character not in terms of traditional literary models, but rather in relation to the accounts of mental pathology in contemporary medical science, especially in the works of her brother.³²⁴ In the effort to comprehend its own nature, the human mind, even in its daily social occupations, seeks to trace the varieties of understanding and temper that constitute the characters of men. Amongst the common occurrences of life, evidence of vanity and weakness put themselves forward to view, more conspicuously than virtues, and behaviour that is marked with the whimsical and ludicrous will strike us most forcibly. Curiosity and sympathy are the driving impulses in Baillie’s theory of the drama, and her subject is the exposure of a person in the thrall of strong emotion. The theatre provides an acceptable arena for the voyeurism that can otherwise be satisfied only by chance and stealth. To witness a fellow being in the throes of extreme mental agitation and emotional turmoil holds a powerful attraction for our sympathetic curiosity. Whenever passions are displayed, the gaze must follow. Unlike the momentary sensations of joy or pain, the emotions of fear, despair, hatred, love, and jealousy embed themselves deeply into mind and character, influencing all one’s thoughts and actions. In our experience of watching the turbulent passions, we soon learn to detect the advanced signs of inner turmoil, the tell-tale facial expressions and

physical gestures that indicate the struggle to conceal anxieties or desires.³²⁵ With her insistence that drama should address the power of emotions to dictate behaviour and compel the overwrought individual to acts of irrational excess, Joanna Baillie engages aberrational psychology. She seeks to ground her analysis of behaviour on empirical observation, and to identify the looks and gestures that foreshadow an emotional crisis: the restless eye, the muttering lip, the half-checked exclamation, and the hasty start.

In *De Monfort* (Drury Lane, 29 April 1800), Baillie not only depicts the incremental sway of madness, she thematizes the act of watching. With Kemble as De Monfort, Sarah Siddons as Jane De Monfort, and Talbot as Rezenvelt, the play depicts De Monfort as he succumbs to an irrational and ungovernable hatred. From the very opening scene of the play, Baillie reveals that the mind of her central character is unsettled. He is not the man he was, his servant Manuel tells their landlord. He has become difficult, capricious, and distrustful. The audience need not strain to pick up the peculiarities of De Monfort's gestures. They are observed and commented on by the other characters. When Rezenvelt appears, his very presence drives De Monfort into frenzy. They duel, but Rezenvelt, the superior swordsman, easily disarms his opponent with a deft manoeuvre of his sword, then offers to return the weapon when his opponent is calmer (IV.ii). But no calm comes to De Monfort; rather, he continues to rave in mounting delirium. Rezenvelt is last seen wandering alone in the woods.

Baillie provides the final act with a Gothic setting: a convent in the woods, torches burning over a grave, lightning flashing at the windows, sounds of wind and thunder. A young pensioner, with a wild terrified look, her hair and dress all scattered, rushes in upon the assembled nuns to report hearing horrid cries of 'Murder!' echoing from the woods. Found and brought to the convent, De Monfort reacts with violent perturbation when the corpse of Rezenvelt is shown to him. Left alone with his murdered foe, De Monfort is overcome with wild anguish and attempts suicide. In his translation of J. J. Engel's work on gesture, it is Henry Siddons who comments on the detailed attention to the physical debility of De Monfort's madness: 'the man tormented by his own conscience is the object of self-violence; he is fearful and trembling; a leaf fall, a zephyr whispering fills him with terror, and inclines him to flight.'³²⁶

Baillie founded her theory of the drama on a 'sympathetick propensity' that compels individuals to watch fellow human beings, seeking to discern in their outward movements the secret springs of their internal feelings.³²⁷ This concern with the behavioural symptoms of extreme emotional duress is articulated more thoroughly by Joanna Baillie than by other playwrights of the period. An audience never loses their instinctive preference for what is native and natural. Baillie goes on to imply that this appeal is most strongly associated with the 'middling and lower classes of society', thus anticipating Wordsworth's theory. Even the inclusiveness of Baillie's language – 'men and women speaking' – suggests the wider possibilities of human discourse.

Maria Edgeworth

Eldest daughter of wealthy Anglo-Irish landowner Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who remarried twice after her mother's death and fathered 22 children, Maria Edgeworth was educated at school in England, but returned to Ireland at the age of 15 to help her father run his estate and remained there, unmarried, for the rest of her life. She published *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), and *The Parent's Assistant* in the same year. She collaborated with her father on *Practical Education* (1798). Her successful career as a novelist began with an Irish novel, *Castle Rackrent* (1800). She published further Irish novels, including *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817), and several contemporary English novels, among them *Belinda* (1801), *Patronage* (1814) and *Helen* (1834), as well as several collections of moral tales.

Charlotte Smith

Born in London, Charlotte Smith was married at 15 to Benjamin Smith, who proved to be a feckless and extravagant husband. She gave birth to 12 children, to whom her father-in-law left his estate on his death in 1776, but the complications of his will led to a lifetime of legal tussles in an attempt to gain access to the money. Her husband was imprisoned for debt in 1783 and, forced into the position of breadwinner for the family, Charlotte put to use an early talent for poetry. It was in *Desmond* (1792) that she articulated the necessity of her authorship:

Knowledge, which qualifies women to speak or to write on any other than the most common and trivial subjects, is supposed to be of so difficult attainment, that it cannot be acquired but by the sacrifice of domestic virtues, or the neglect of domestic duties. – I however may safely say, that it was in the observance, not in the breach of duty, I became an Author. (pp. 45–46)

The compelling duty was the need to support her large family. Her *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays* (1784) was an immediate success, going through eight editions by the end of the century, and Smith won an enduring reputation as sympathies shifted with the excesses of the French Revolution. She also published a number of successful novels, among them *Emmeline* (1788), *Ethelinde* (1789), *Celestina* (1791), *Desmond* (1792), and *The Old Manor House* (1793). Her collection of tales, *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, appeared in 1799, and she wrote several children's books. Her *Beachy Head*, to be discussed in Part II, was published posthumously in 1807.

In *The Old Manor House* (1793), Charlotte Smith combines elements of the romance, the Gothic, recent history, and culture to produce both a social document and a compelling novel. A 'property romance', the love story of Orlando

and Monimia revolves around the Manor House as inheritable property. In situating their romance as dependent on the whims of property owners, Smith critiques a society in love with money at the expense of its most vulnerable members, the dispossessed. Appendices in this edition include: contemporary responses; writings on the genre debate by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, John Moore, and Walter Scott; and historical documents focusing on property laws as well as the American and French revolutions. The novel, as a work of fiction, suffered fewer legal repercussions for daring to forward a radical critique of the conservative resistance to social and political change in the 1790s. Novels of this period, those by Charlotte Smith, as well as by Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald, Robert Bage, William Godwin, Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Maria Edgeworth, pushed against the *status quo* by exploring the intricate relationships between theories of rights, the responsibilities of proprietorship, and the resistance to conformity.³²⁸

Notes

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