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🎞 **فيديو للمشاهدة.**

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🔗 **رابط خارجي.**

❓ **أسئلة للتفكير والتقييم الذاتي.**

📋 **أنشطة ومهام.**

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The Romantic period

1789–1832

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> *Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive*
> (William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*)

CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS

The dates of the Romantic period of literature are not precise and the term 'romantic' was itself not widely used until after the period in question. Conventionally, the period begins in 1798, which saw the publication by Wordsworth and Coleridge of their *Lyrical Ballads*, and ends in 1832, a year which saw the death of Sir Walter Scott and the enactment by Parliament of the First Reform Bill. These years link literary and political events. The Romantic period was an era in which a literary revolution took place alongside social and economic revolutions. In some histories of literature the Romantic period is called the 'Age of Revolutions'.

The period was one of rapid change as the nation was transformed from an agricultural country to an industrial one. The laws of a free market, developed by the economist Adam Smith in his book *Wealth of Nations* (1776), dominated people's lives. At the same time a shift in the balance of power took place. Power and wealth were gradually transferred from the landholding aristocracy to the large-scale employers of modern industrial communities. An old population of rural farm labourers became a new class of urban industrial labourers. This new class came to be called the working class. These workers were concentrated in cities and the new power of an increasingly large and restive mass began to make itself felt.

The Industrial Revolution created social change, unrest, and eventually turbulence. Deep-rooted traditions were rapidly overturned. Within a short period of time the whole landscape of the country changed. In the countryside, the open fields and communally worked farms were 'enclosed'. The enclosure movement improved efficiency and enabled the increased animal farming necessary to feed a rapidly expanding population; but fewer labourers were required to work the land, and that led to an exodus to the cities of large numbers of people seeking employment. Increasing mechanisation both on the land and in the industrial factories meant continuing high levels of unemployment. Workers in the rural areas could no longer graze the animals on which they partly depended for food and income. Acute poverty followed.

These developments literally altered the landscape of the country. Open fields were enclosed by hedges and walls; in the cities, smoking factory chimneys polluted the atmosphere; poor-quality houses were built in large numbers and quickly became slums. The mental landscape also changed. The country was divided into those who owned property or land – who were rich – and those who did not – who were poor. A new world was born, which Benjamin Disraeli, who was both a novelist and Prime Minister of Britain under Queen Victoria, was later to identify as 'Two Nations'.

The Industrial Revolution paralleled revolutions in the political order. In fact, Britain was at war during most of the Romantic period, with a resultant political instability. Political movements in Britain were gradual, but in countries such as France and the United States political change was both more rapid and more radical. The American Declaration of Independence (from Britain) in 1776 struck an early blow for the principle of democratic freedom and self-government, but it was the early years of the French Revolution, with its slogan of 'Equality, liberty and fraternity', which most influenced the intellectual climate in Britain. In this respect the storming of the Bastille in 1789, to release political prisoners, acted as a symbol which attracted the strong support of liberal opinion.

Debate in Britain was, however, polarised between support for radical documents such as Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), in which he called for greater democracy in Britain, and Edmund Burke's more conservative *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Later in the 1790s, more measured ideas are contained in the writings of William Godwin, an important influence on the poets Wordsworth and Shelley, who advocated a gradual evolution towards the removal of poverty and the equal distribution of all wealth. Such a social philosophy caused much enthusiasm and intellectual excitement among many radical writers and more liberal politicians; but these ideas also represented a threat to the existing order. Positive use of the words 'Jacobin' or 'radical' was dangerous in the 1790s. 'Jacobin', in particular, which derived from French, implied strong sympathy with ideals of absolute social equality.

However, as the French Revolution developed, support for it in Britain declined. There was violence, extremism and much bloodshed as sections of the old aristocracy were massacred, as the members of the new French Republic fought among themselves and with other countries, and as Napoleon Bonaparte became emperor and then dictator of France. In

Britain these events were witnessed with some dismay. In *The Prelude*, a long autobiographical poem, Wordsworth wrote that in the early years of the French Revolution 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive'. But he later recorded his feeling that the leaders of the French Republic had:

> become Oppressors in their turn.
> Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence
> For one of Conquest, losing sight of all
> Which they had struggled for.

Support for the spirit of the early years of the French Revolution remained. Among more liberal and radical thinkers there was a feeling of ambivalence when England went to war against France and, after many years, finally defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The victory was followed by years of social unrest at home. The end of the war led to a decline in manufacturing output and to unemployment, as soldiers returned from war to a world in which the divisions between the 'two nations' were becoming sharper. In the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic wars the government and ruling classes adopted especially repressive measures. These culminated in the 'Peterloo Massacre' of 1819, in which government troops charged a large group of workers who were meeting in Manchester to demand social and political reforms. Nine were killed and thousands more injured. The word 'Peterloo' ironically recalls the Battle of Waterloo. Samuel Bamford's account of the social and political unrest in the Manchester area between 1816 and 1821, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, first published in 1884, although written more than twenty years after the events described, is a valuable and vivid account of the Peterloo Massacre, full of descriptions, characters and eye-witness accounts.

The period from 1820 to 1832 was a time of continuing unrest. The unrest took place against a background of the cycles of economic depression which so characterise the modern world. The prevailing economic philosophy was that of *laissez-faire*, meaning 'leave alone'. The consequences were that the government did not intervene directly in economic affairs. It let the free market and private individual decisions control the course of events. During this time, the wealth of the country grew, although it had become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the new manufacturing and merchant classes.

This new middle class wanted to see its increased economic power reflected in greater political power. A general alliance arose between working-class reformers, liberal (called Whig) politicians and this new middle class, resulting in pressure on the Tory government for political reform. After many struggles, and with the threat of national disorder not far away, the first Reform Act was passed by Parliament in 1832. The bill extended voting rights to include a more representative proportion of the country. The immediate benefits were limited, but the bill was of great symbolic importance and a movement was started which would lead, decades later, to universal suffrage and greater democracy in the country.

In terms of literary history, the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 is seen as a landmark. The volume contains many of the best-known Romantic poems. The second edition in 1800 contained a Preface in which Wordsworth discusses the theories of poetry which were to be so influential on many of his and Coleridge's contemporaries. The Preface represents a poetic manifesto which is very much in the spirit of the age. The movement towards greater freedom and democracy in political and social affairs is paralleled by poetry which sought to overturn the existing regime and establish a new, more 'democratic' poetic order. To do this, the writers used 'the real language of men' (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*) and even, in the case of Byron and Shelley, got directly involved in political activities themselves.

The Romantic age in literature is often contrasted with the Classical or Augustan age which preceded it. The comparison is valuable, for it is not simply two different attitudes to literature which are being compared but two different ways of seeing and experiencing life.

The Classical or Augustan age of the early and mid-eighteenth century stressed the importance of reason and order. Strong feelings and flights of the imagination had to be controlled (although they were obviously found widely, especially in poetry). The swift improvements in medicine, economics, science and engineering, together with rapid developments in both agricultural and industrial technology, suggested human progress on a grand scale. At the centre of these advances towards a perfect society was mankind, and it must have seemed that everything was within man's grasp if his baser, bestial instincts could be controlled. The Classical temperament trusts reason, intellect, and the head. The Romantic temperament prefers feelings, intuition, and the heart.

There are further contrasts in the ways in which children are regarded and represented in Classical and Romantic literature. For the Augustan writer the child is only important because he or she will develop into an adult. The child's savage instincts must be trained, making it civilised and sophisticated. For the Romantic writer the child is holy and pure and its proximity to God will only be corrupted by civilisation. The child then is a source of natural and spontaneous feeling. When Wordsworth wrote that 'the Child is father of the Man' (in *My Heart Leaps Up*) he stressed that the adult learns from the experience of childhood.

The two ages may be contrasted in other ways: the Classical writer looks outward to society, Romantic writers look inward to their own soul and to the life of the imagination; the Classical writer concentrates on what can be logically measured and rationally understood, Romantic writers are attracted to the irrational, mystical and supernatural world; the Classical writer is attracted to a social order in which everyone knows his place, Romantic writers celebrate the freedom of nature and of individual human experience. In fact, the writings of the Augustan age stress the way societies improve under careful regulation; Romantic literature is generally more critical of society and its injustices, questioning rather than affirming, exploring rather than defining.

The language and form of the literature of the two ages also shows these two different ways of seeing. The Augustans developed a formal and ordered way of writing characterised by the balance and symmetry of the heroic couplet in poetry and by an adherence to the conventions of a special poetic diction. The Romantics developed ways of writing which tried to capture the ebb and flow of individual experience in forms and language which were intended to be closer to everyday speech and more accessible to the general reader. Here is an extract from the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (in the revised version of 1802):

> The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way.

Contrasts between the Augustan and Romantic ages are helpful but there are always exceptions to such general contrasts. For example, eighteenth-century writers such as Gray, Collins and Cowper show a developing Romantic sensibility, and Romantic poets such as Byron were inspired by Augustan poetic models. Romanticism was not a sudden, radical transformation, but grew out of Augustanism. Furthermore, English Romanticism contrasts with mainland European Romanticism which, for example, tends to be more politically motivated and philosophically radical. It is therefore unwise to make too many unqualified generalisations about Romanticism.

One final introductory point can be made about the Romantic period. The English Romantic literature discussed in the following sections grew out of specific historical contexts. The Industrial Revolution led to an increasing regimentation of the individual. Small towns and villages, where everyone knew their neighbours, began to disappear. They were replaced by a more impersonal, mechanised society, fed and clothed by mass production. In this new world individuals lost their identity. The writers of this time wanted to correct this imbalance by giving greater value to the individual sensibility and to the individual consciousness. Their poetic revolution aimed at greater individual freedoms.

'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive' are words written by Wordsworth (in *The Prelude*) at what he felt to be the dawn of a new age. It was an age in which the uniqueness of the individual would be celebrated. It was a time of war, a time of ideals, a time of freedom, and of oppression. Its conflicts and contradictions breathed new life into literature and, in particular, into poetry.

The Romantic period is seen today as a crucial time in history. It embodies many of the conflicts and ideological debates which are still at the heart of the modern world; political freedom/repression, individual and collective responsibility, masculine and feminine roles (until recently the traditional canon of Romanticism was almost exclusively male), past, present, and future. These issues recur time and again in Romantic writing. It was a time when ideologies were in the melting-pot, when radicalism and tradition, change and stability, the old and the new, were just as vital as the more traditionally literary themes of innocence/experience, youth/age, country/city, man/nature, language/expression. Many of these issues are as alive today as they were two hundred years ago. The recovery of many female writers' works in recent years is one significant sign that our relationship to the Romantic period is an ongoing and ever-changing one. In many ways, we are all post-Romantics.

BLAKE, WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

> *The Child is father of the Man*
> (William Wordsworth, *My Heart Leaps Up*)

William Blake achieved little fame in his own lifetime but in the twentieth century he came to be recognised as a poetic genius. Blake was also an engraver, and illustrated many of his poems so that they could be read visually as well as verbally. His life was spent in rebellion against the rationalism of the eighteenth century and he rejected, in particular, the formal restrictions of Augustan poetry, writing in a lyrical visionary style and developing, in the process, an individual view of the world. A characteristic feature was a tendency to see the world in terms of opposites. Blake wrote that 'Without Contraries is no Progression' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) and much of his poetry illustrates this. The major opposition reflected in his poetry is between the order of the eighteenth century and the sense of liberation felt in the 1790s as a new century approached.

Blake makes extensive use of symbolism in his poetry. Some of the symbols are straightforward: innocence is symbolised by children, flowers, lambs, or particular seasons. Oppression and rationalism are symbolised by urban, industrial landscapes, by machines, by those in authority (including priests), and by social institutions. The symbolism in some of his later poems, such as the epic *Milton*, is less easy to interpret. Blake sometimes creates a mythological world of his own. For example, the giant Los, who represents the human imagination, is set against his opposite Urizen, who represents the restrictions of law and order. Blake's best-known symbol is that of the tiger in his poem *The Tyger*. The tiger has been interpreted differently by successive generations but its basic meaning is the natural and creative energy of human life, an inspiring shape ('symmetry') which no one should try to control:

> Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
> In the forests of the night,
> What immortal hand or eye
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Images of childhood have a central place in Blake's poetry, as they do in the work of many Romantic poets. Blake's most famous collection of poetry, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, published separately in 1789 (*Songs of Innocence*) and 1793 (*Songs of Experience*), and together in 1794, abounds in images of children in a world in which people are exploited. (A good example is Blake's poem *The Chimney Sweeper*.) The child in Blake's poetry stands for the poet's dissatisfaction with society and for his belief in the power of uncorrupted feeling and imagination. Through the images of childhood, Blake dramatises the conflict between nature and social order, between natural innocence and the pressures of social experience.

In the volume *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, several poems are written in pairs, contrasting states of human innocence and experience. In them, Blake reveals a profound understanding of psychology and an ability to explore the spiritual side of human existence, both of which are remarkably modern.

Blake was also conscious of the effects on the individual of a rapidly developing industrial and commercial world. He saw the potential dangers of a mass society in which individuals were increasingly controlled by systems of organisation. In his poem *London* he refers to these systems as the result of 'mind-forg'd manacles'. In *London* even the River Thames has been 'charter'd' (given a royal charter to be used for commercial purposes). The repetition of words and structures seems to underline a monotonous regimentation:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
> And mark in every face I meet
> Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
>
> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice, in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

This political view of London contrasts with Wordsworth's *Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* (1802) in which the poet's personal elation at the 'majesty' of London is recorded: Blake's vision is social where Wordsworth's is personal.

There are some similarities between Blake's poetry and the poetry of William Wordsworth, particularly his emphasis on the value of childhood experience and its celebration of nature. Central to Wordsworth's vision of nature is the importance of the impact and influence of nature on the human mind. Wordsworth's poetry is essentially empirical: that is, he records the evidence of his senses, looking inward rather than outward. Nevertheless, he does describe the world of nature and of the characters who inhabit the natural landscape. In fact, Wordsworth gives detailed accounts of the lives of ordinary people in poems such as *The Old Cumberland Beggar* and *The Leech Gatherer* – characters of a low social position not normally represented in Augustan poetry. Wordsworth celebrates the spirit of man, living in harmony with his natural environment and away from the corrupt city. However, the essence of his poetry lies not in the description of this world of nature but rather in the development of the inner mind which records it.

In Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1805; final version 1850) the main concern is the psychology of the individual. Such an emphasis on the formation of the individual sensibility has since become a major characteristic of Western literature. One of its original titles was *A Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind.* It is characteristic of the Romantic period that its major epic poem should be about this subject. In many parts of *The Prelude*, and in poems such as *Tintern Abbey* and *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, Wordsworth records a personal search for the moments of insight and understanding which, he believed, only nature could give. Time, and the passing of time, become recurring themes, as in

'Five years have passed' in *Tintern Abbey*, where memory of the past, together with the effects of nature, allow the poetic 'I' 'to see into the heart of things' in the present. He believed in the truth of his own senses and imagination and he sometimes describes moments in which he perceives mystical and transcendental truths:

> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; 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.
> (*Tintern Abbey*)

Throughout his poetic career, however, Wordsworth continued to regard the child as the single most important source of wisdom and truth. In his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* the child, as a symbol of all that is holy and good, is directly addressed:

> Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
> Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,
> That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
> Haunted forever by the eternal mind.

The child is seen here as father of the man. Although lines such as these do not strictly adhere to Wordsworth's poetic principles of simple and unadorned language, many of his poems do create a new poetic language. Wordsworth's language frequently moves towards the language of everyday speech and the lives of ordinary people. It breaks with the artificial diction of the previous century, creating a more open and democratic world of poetry. Wordsworth stated later in his life that he had aimed to show that men and women 'who do not wear fine clothes can feel deeply'.

Wordsworth did not always achieve his aim of writing poetry according to the manifesto in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Sometimes it is direct, simple and close to ordinary spoken language. For example:

> A slumber did my spirit seal;
> I had no human fears:
> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.

Sometimes he uses more complex grammar and vocabulary, as we can see from the above examples. Words like 'heritage' and 'deeply interfused' and the long sentences with several clauses in them seem a long way from his poetic ideals. (See Language note, page 206.)

Wordsworth's search to record the insights of the imagination and the power of human memory could not always be sustained. Imagination fails. Memories fade, shine brightly and then fade again. Wordsworth revised *The Prelude* throughout his life; in each version he tries to capture more accurately the lasting insights of his past. But later drafts lack the excitement of earlier versions of the poem. It is also possible that the failure of the French Revolution affected the course of Wordsworth's own poetry and life.

LANGUAGE NOTE

Reading Wordsworth

One of the best known texts of the Romantic period, this poem was written in 1804, and first published without the current second stanza in 1807. The complete text, as we now know it, was published in 1815. The poet's sister Dorothy famously documented the same experience of seeing the daffodils in her diary: 'We saw a few daffodils close to the water-side'. The poem is often known as *Daffodils* but in fact its only title is its first line.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed — and gazed — but little thought
What wealth to me the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

The movement of the text is vital to our understanding of it: compare the first line and the last line and we see a range of movement from 'I' as subject to a non-personal subject ('my heart') which is not even in the same line; there is also a movement, therefore, from outside/external in line 1 to inside/internal in the last line; movement from past ('wandered') to present ('dances') and with different kinds of motion, from vague and aimless to ordered and harmonic; movement from 'lonely' to 'dances with' unaccompanied to shared presence; from similarity ('as') to actuality, and from high in the air ('a cloud') to ground-level viewpoint.

In the course of the poem the narratorial pronoun 'I' loses its dominant subject-place to the daffodils: 'Ten thousand saw I' reversing the normal subject-verb-object order. 'I' by line 15 loses his personal pronominal identity and becomes the more impersonal 'a poet' in a line which uses a negative form to express positive emotion: 'could not but be gay'. There is marked difference between perception and rational thought. In fact, line 17 tells us that thinking is precisely what 'I' did not do.

The shift to the present is carried by the little link word 'For' – the 'I' is now horizontal rather than vertical ('I lie' as opposed to the earlier 'I wandered') and the subject-position has been entirely taken over by the objects perceived: 'They flash'. It is significant to note what is not said: there is no mention of memory or recall, which would be active processes initiated by 'I'. Instead, the process is initiated by the daffodils, no matter whether 'I' is mentally occupied or not ('in vacant or in pensive mood'). The time marker 'then' links back to 'oft' in line 19 and indicates the final movement to the culminating action, as 'I' allows his heart to respond.

It is worth reflecting, if we did not know what daffodils are, whether they could equally represent something other than flowers? Birds, for instance? At this point, the text becomes more than a poem about flowers. It contains before and after, innocence and experience, perception and reflection, external and internal, past and present, openness and receptivity – many of the key binary concepts of much of English Romanticism.

In the formative stages of his poetic career Wordsworth collaborated with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Both contributed to *Lyrical Ballads*, but Wordsworth alone was responsible for the important Preface, which was to influence the whole of the Romantic movement and much subsequent poetry in English. Wordsworth's poetry is concerned with the ordinary, everyday world and with the impact of memory on the present; Coleridge's poetry frequently communicates a sense of the mysterious, supernatural and extraordinary world. Wordsworth stated that he wanted to explore everyday subjects and give them a Romantic or supernatural colouring; by contrast, Coleridge wanted to give the supernatural a feeling of everyday reality.

One of Coleridge's best-known poems is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In the poem an old sailor or mariner narrates the terrible sequence of events which followed when he shot an albatross and was cursed. His ship is becalmed, he is subjected to nightmare visions and to a long period of suffering and his water supply runs out in punishment for his deed. When the mariner blesses some sea-creatures, his offence against the power of nature is forgiven and he is able to return home, revitalised through his shared suffering. The whole poem is written in a form recalling that of a mediaeval ballad.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

Even from these few lines it is possible to see something of the allegorical and symbolic power of the poem. The lack of water represents the dryness of spirit, the becalmed ship symbolises the aimless soul of a man who has sinned and who awaits eventual redemption. The explicit moral is essentially Christian:

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small.
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The conclusion, ‘A sadder and a wiser man/He rose the morrow morn’, underscores the passage from innocence to experience, from past to present, which is central to a great deal of Romantic writing. (The sadder, wiser man is the wedding guest to whom the mariner’s story has been recounted.)

Other poems by Coleridge explore a mystical and supernatural world. Unlike Wordsworth, who concentrates on the everyday world of the present, Coleridge turns to the romance and mystery of the past. *Christabel*, also written in a mediaeval ballad form, is another allegory in which sinister and grotesque images from a distant past have an everyday reality. In *Kubla Khan*, Coleridge presents an exotic landscape which has often been interpreted as symbolising the movement of the creative imagination. The poem opens with a basic contrast between the River Alph, a potentially destructive force, and the pleasure-dome, a source of deep perception and understanding:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

In *Kubla Khan*, Coleridge embodies the essence of the poetic imagination, the most powerful of the human senses which is alone capable of perceiving the underlying harmony of all things and of understanding the truth about the world. The subtitle to the poem is *A Fragment*. It was reported that Coleridge did not complete the poem because he was interrupted by a visitor during its composition. The poem is indeed a fragment of a powerful vision, but it is a complete statement of a vision which can only be communicated in parts and fragments.

Coleridge's *Christabel* is also an 'unfinished' poem. Several Romantic poems are fragments, almost as if they represent the impossible nature of the Romantic quest for complete meaning and fulfilment. Yet such is the power of the poet's imagination that an unfinished journey can still reveal insights of lasting significance. Even Coleridge's poem *Dejection: An Ode*, which explores an occasion on which the poetic imagination fails, captures a permanent truth. Coleridge's determination to continue his search for transcendental understanding led him to take drugs such as opium. Like a number of Romantic writers, he wished to extend the power of his senses and intuitions as far as possible, even if that were to risk serious damage to his health.

> My genial spirits fail;
> And what can these avail
> To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
> If it were a vain endeavour,
> Though I should gaze for ever
> On that green light that lingers in the west:
> I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.
> (*Dejection: An Ode*)

It is important to compare and contrast the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. They created a new kind of poetry, innovating in form, language and subject matter and creating a lasting influence on English poetry. Although their particular styles and methods were generally in contrast, it is necessary to stress that they shared important goals, particularly the goal of making poetry closer to the rhythms and diction of everyday language.

Coleridge's 'conversation poems' are in this respect very close to many of Wordsworth's poems. Poems such as *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* do indeed represent exotic and intensely mystical flights of the imagination. Yet poems such as *Dejection*, *Frost at Midnight* and *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* are based on everyday observation. They reflect on universal issues such as the relationship between parents and children and are intimate and conversational in tone. A good example of Coleridge's dialogic, conversational style is found in *Frost at Midnight* in which the poet addresses his son Hartley:

> My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
> With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
> And think that 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 . . .

We note here a contrast between the natural world and the world of the city, but the choices of language capture the movement of a speaking voice in conversation. The exclamation marks, the use of italics for emphasis, the steady pace of the rhythm, all serve to express a quiet speaking voice revealing intimate thoughts.

While some critics have judged that Wordsworth's later poetry (for example, long poems such as *The Excursion*) lacked the vitality of his earlier work, Coleridge complained that poetic inspiration had deserted him and he wrote no poetry during the last thirty years of his life. Instead he dedicated himself to philosophy and to literary criticism. In 1817 he published *Biographia Literaria*, which contains important discussion of the workings of the poetic imagination and reveals the extent of his thinking about the nature of literature. It has become one of the most influential works of criticism. Together with Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, it also reveals another aspect of the modern writer: almost simultaneously the writer produces both literary work and self-conscious critical reflections on that work and on literature in general. In more ways than one, the Romantics are genuine forerunners of the Modern movement in literature and the arts.

LANGUAGE NOTE

The 'real' language of men

> Remuneration! O that's the Latin word for three farthings.
> (William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*)

> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion, steps
> Almost as silent as the turf they trod.
> (William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*)

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800; revised 1802) Wordsworth makes the first theoretical argument in the history of English poetry for a radical review of the language of poetry. His argument is that conventional poetic diction should be replaced by a language closer to the everyday speech of ordinary people. It is an essentially democratic statement, arguing that ordinary words should be admitted into the society of the poem. Wordsworth and Coleridge wanted to purify and renew the language of poetry. From a different starting point Dryden and Pope in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and T.S. Eliot in the twentieth century attempted similar processes of renewal.

At the time of writing, the classical, Latinate style of Milton and his poetic descendants tended to be regarded as the norm. It was an appropriately elevated 'diction' which conferred dignity on lofty thoughts and feelings. Such diction was rejected in the Preface as being too elitist and too remote from the language of 'a man speaking to men'. Here are two examples which illustrate the argument. One is taken from mid-eighteenth-century poetry; the other is taken from a poem by Wordsworth.

Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen
Full many a sprightly race
Disporting on thy margent green
The paths of pleasure trace,
Who foremost now delight to cleave
With pliant arm thy glassy wave?
(Thomas Gray, *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*)

In the sweet shire of Cardigan,
Not far from pleasant Ivor-hall,
An old man dwells, a little man,
I've heard he once was tall. . . .

Full five and twenty years he lived
A running huntsman merry;
And, though he has but one eye left,
His cheek is like a cherry.
(William Wordsworth, *Simon Lee*)

Although they are less than fifty years apart, the poems show marked contrasts in language. Wordsworth believed that the kind of poetry written by Gray was too affected and ornate with its mainly Latin vocabulary and its deliberate choices of words and phrases which are far removed from everyday language use (for example, 'disporting': playing; 'margent green': river bank; 'cleave with pliant arm': swim) and which conform to Gray's own theory that the language of poetry should have an elevated diction of its own. In *Simon Lee*, Wordsworth writes in unaffectedly simple language, although the demands of such poetic conventions as rhythm and metrics mean that the language can never be entirely similar to ordinary language.

In poetic practice, however, there are limitations to Wordsworth's theory of poetic language. Some would say, for example, that poems like *Simon Lee* are too banal, and that in trying to explore the ordinary feelings of ordinary people in ordinary settings Wordsworth runs the risk that he will fail to find the style which can elevate the poem into a memorable and durable artefact. Indeed, when Wordsworth does achieve poetic heights he does so by using language which is so elevated and Latinate that it falsifies his theory. An example would be the lines cited at the beginning of this language note, which in fact mix 'low' and 'high' styles and in the process chart the ebb and flow of perception and understanding. The lines also, however, illustrate another basic paradox of much Romantic poetry: that the poet is forced to use language to describe experiences which are outside or beyond language.

On the other hand, some critics feel that in groups of poems, such as the 'Lucy' poems published in *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth comes very close to achieving his poetic ideals. A frequently cited example is the poem *She Dwelt Among th' Untrodden Ways*, which combines complexity of insight with simplicity of expression.

KEATS

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know
(John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*)

John Keats is likewise a poet who reflected on the nature of poetry. Keats's letters are important documents and offer many revealing insights into the nature of poetry and many critical precepts which are still cited today as a basis for the evaluation of poetry. Keats wrote that 'we hate poetry that has too palpable a design upon us'. By this he means that we distrust poetry which tries overtly to persuade or convert us to the poet's point of view. According to this statement, poetry should be more indirect, communicating through the power of its images without the poet making his own presence too obvious.

Like other Romantic poets, Keats wrote poems which were incomplete; unfinished fragments of a larger vision. He also, like several other Romantic artists, died at a very young age before fulfilling his potential and completing the poetic journey he had begun. However, by the age of 25, he had written a major body of work containing some of the most memorable poems in the English language. Keats's best-known poetry was composed twenty years after the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* and, although his poetry contrasts with that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, they remained an important influence on his work and his theories of poetry.

A main theme of Keats's poetry is the conflict between the everyday world and eternity: the everyday world of suffering, death and decay, and the timeless beauty and lasting truth of poetry and the human imagination. His earliest poetry consists mainly of long poems, some of them epic in style and concept. *Endymion* (1818) is written in four books and is derived in style and structure from Greek legends and myths, the main theme being the search for an ideal love and a happiness beyond earthly possibility. A more ambitious long poem is *The Fall of Hyperion* (1819) which is heavily influenced by John Milton and was not finished by Keats, in part because he wished to develop his own style and identity as a poet. It tells of the downfall of the old gods and the rise of the new gods who are marked by their strength and beauty. Although the poem has been criticised for a lack of control in the writing, there are several places where sensuousness and precision of rhythm and image are combined:

> No stir of air was there,
> Not so much life as on a summer's day
> Robs not one light seed from the feathered grass,
> But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.
> (*Hyperion*)

Keats continued to write long narrative poems which allowed him to develop a characteristic feature of the style of all his poems: lush, sensuous imagery which supports precise descriptive detail. Keats, like Coleridge, was also attracted to exotic settings for his narratives. These include mythic classical backgrounds and mediaeval contexts of high Romance. The poems *Isabella*, *Lamia*, *The Eve of Saint Agnes* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* explore familiar Romantic themes: the relationship between emotion and reality; the impermanence of human love; the search for an elusive beauty. Unlike poets and philosophers of the classical, eighteenth-century period, who saw the mediaeval era as one of darkness and superstition, Keats, along with other Romantic poets, was attracted by those times.

> Oh, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
> Alone and palely loitering;
> The sedge is withered from the lake,
> And no birds sing.
> (*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*)

Keats was particularly fascinated by Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and by the 'pre-Romantic' figure of the poet Thomas Chatterton, who forged copies of mediaeval ballads and who committed suicide in 1770 at the age of eighteen.

> Mie love ys dedde,
> Gon to hys death-bedde,
> Al under the wyllowe tree.
>
> Waterre witches, crownede wythe reytes,
> Bere me to yer leathalle tyde.

I die; I comme; mie true love waytes.
Thos the damselle spake, and dyed.
(Thomas Chatterton, *Song to Aella*, 1769–70)

The ballads written by Chatterton were attributed to the fictional Thomas Rowley but they are 'pre-Romantic' because they point the way, in the late 1760s, to a poetry of direct utterance which escaped the ornamentation of much of the verse of the time. Keats's admiration for the Middle Ages allows him to make particular use of the ballad form to explore aspects of the irrational, unconscious and supernatural world.

Keats's ballads were written within a two-year period (1818–20); in fact, the years saw an intensely creative period of Keats's life and during the same period he wrote the odes in which the rich and sensuous variety of human experience is set against the transience of human life. The odes explore fundamental tensions and contradictions. Keats finds melancholy in delight, pleasure in pain, and excitement in both emotional sensations and intellectual thoughts. He contrasts dreams and reality, the imagination and the actual, the tangible and the intangible. He celebrates beauty but at the same time he knows that all things of beauty must fade and die. He experiences love and death with equal intensity, knowing that they are closely connected. He shared with both Wordsworth and Coleridge the view that suffering is necessary for an understanding of the world and that great poetry grows from deep suffering and tragedy. In one of his letters Keats wrote: 'Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?'

The ode is a complex poetic form, and Keats is generally regarded as one of the masters of the form. At the same time he develops a poetic language appropriate both to the form of the ode and the nature of his themes. Keats's language renders experience precisely; it captures the rhythm and movement of thoughts and feelings; it registers a full range of sense impressions. For example, in the following lines from *Ode to a Nightingale* the poet asks for a drink of cool wine:

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!

The description is an example of synaesthesia – a feature which recurs frequently in Keats's poetry and in the poetry of others, such as the twentieth-century poets Wilfred Owen and Dylan Thomas, who were much influenced by Keats. Synaesthesia is a use of imagery and language choices which describe sensory impressions in terms of other senses. In the lines above, Keats manages to appeal to sight, colour, movement, sound, and heat almost simultaneously. For example, the movement of dancing and the sound of song is described as a taste. 'Sunburnt mirth' describes the sight of sunburnt faces at the same time as we hear the same people laughing. Keats also created a rich poetic music. An example of his control of the rhythmic movement and syntax is the following lines from the *Ode to Autumn*:

> Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
> Among the river sallows, borne aloft
> Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies.

Here the rise and fall in the rhythm of the lines matches the flight of the gnats. Keats's characteristic representation of the physical world, his total immersion in an experience of things outside himself, his delight in sensuous but precise words can be further exemplified from the same poem, where autumn is seen as:

> Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
> Conspiring with him how to load and bless
> With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
> To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
> And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.

Instead of the expected picture of falling leaves and decay here, the view of autumn is positive and life-affirming (as in James Thomson's *The Seasons*; see page 174). The final lines take the reader through winter, symbolised by the robin redbreast, and on to the future sounds of spring; moving, in effect, through almost the whole calendar in its appreciation of the riches of autumn.

> Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
> Among the river sallows, borne aloft
> Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
> And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
> Hedge-crickets sing; and now with a treble soft
> The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;
> And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Keats's pursuit of the eternal truths of poetic art and the imagination are powerfully expressed in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. In the poem the urn itself suggests that:

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Grecian urn and the artistic carvings on it represent the permanence of art and celebrate the power of the artist to immortalise human activity, to make it permanent, preserving it against mortality and the passing of time. The beauty of art is seeing the real truth of existence.

Keats also gives us occasional glimpses of solitude and desolation. In his famous letters, he calls the world 'The Vale of Soul-Making'; in his sonnet beginning 'When I have fears that I may cease to be', he depicts a desolate shore which anticipates John Clare and Matthew Arnold in its emptiness. The sonnet is all the more poignant when we know that Keats died at the age of 25, a tragically young age, with a poetic career of even greater fulfilment in front of him. He was the Romantic poet *par excellence*: his continuing dedication to poetry in the knowledge that he was dying (from tuberculosis) made him a symbol for the Romantic movement. At the time of his death, the first generation of Romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge, could no longer write the intense poetry of their early years. He became an emblem of transience, and Shelley's visionary essay *Adonais* on Keats's death depicts the exquisite early flowering and then sudden death of Keats, the man and poet. SEE ALSO KEY TEXTS P.580.

SHELLEY

The lone and level sands stretch far away
(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Ozymandias*)

The poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley is similar to that of Keats in a number of respects, but, unlike Keats, Shelley explores political and social questions more explicitly. Shelley represents the more revolutionary and non-conformist element in English Romanticism and was constantly critical of conventional authority. He was the individualist and idealist who rebelled against the institutions of family, church, marriage and the Christian faith and against all forms of tyranny. He started writing and publishing poetry while at Oxford University, some three years before Keats's first publication.

One of Shelley's first major poems, published in 1813, was *Queen Mab*. In the poem he attacks institutional religion and codified morality, portraying a utopian vision of man's need for simple virtue and straightforward happiness. Shelley's ideas were anarchic and dangerous in the eyes of the conservative society of his time. He believed that original sin did not exist and that it was possible to attain human perfection on earth if humans could only free themselves from the chains of a repressive society. A year before *Queen Mab*, Shelley had gone to Dublin to distribute a pamphlet – *Address to the Irish People* – and to take part in campaigns for Catholic emancipation and for social justice for oppressed and poverty-stricken people. In a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*, Shelley argued that the existence of God could not be proved. His refusal to withdraw the pamphlet led to his being expelled from Oxford by the university authorities. At the time of writing *Queen Mab*, Shelley was under the influence of the social philosopher William Godwin who was also influential on the thinking of Wordsworth and other Romantic poets.

Other major poems by Shelley also addressed social and political issues. *The Mask of Anarchy* was a direct response to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. Like the sonnet *England in 1819*, it closes with a vision of the future revolution of the working classes: 'a glorious phantom may/Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day'.

In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), generally regarded as one of Shelley's most successful long poems, he employs the Greek myth of Prometheus, who was punished for stealing the gift of fire from the gods and giving it to mankind; but in Shelley's poem he is redeemed by the power of love and acts as a symbol of human fulfilment resulting from a change in his imaginative vision. Prometheus represents archetypal humanity and, as in *The Ancient Mariner*, an apocalyptic change in his life reveals limitless possibilities; above all, a new way of seeing the world.

> To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
> To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
> To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
> This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
> Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
> This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.
> (*Prometheus Unbound*)

Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo* (1824) can in many ways be taken as a central text of English Romanticism. It is described as 'a conversation', and its couplets reflect a chatty and intimate tone. The two characters, Julian and the Count Maddalo, clearly represent Shelley himself and Byron. Their conversation is naturalistic, rather than idealistic, and takes in the life and atmosphere the two characters observe as they ride on the sands, or sail around Venice. The city, and in particular its lunatic asylum ('the madhouse and its belfry tower'), take on a universal significance as the discussion ranges around free will, religion, progress, frustration, and love: like the sonnet *Ozymandias*, it is an evocation of a wasteland, both literally and metaphorically. The lido inspires the phrase 'I love all waste/And solitary places', aspiring to the boundless possibilities of the human soul; but the city and the asylum return the characters to real life, and the prisons of the soul, ending the 'conversation' in a silence which is astonishingly modern in its resonances, uncertainty and religious doubt.

> 'And such,' – he cried, 'is our mortality,
> And this must be the emblem and the sign
> Of what should be eternal and divine! –
> And like that black and dreary bell, the soul,
> Hung in a heaven-illumined tower, must toll
> Our thoughts and our desires to meet below
> Round the rent heart and pray – as madmen do
> For what? they know not . . .'
>
> (*Julian and Maddalo*)

Like so many works of Romantic literature, from the novels of Scott to Shelley's own *The Triumph of Anarchy*, this clash between the ideal and the real, between the general and the particular and between past, present and future reflects the principal anxiety of the time: that the necessity of revolutionary change causes individual anguish in the process. This foreshadows a major concern with the suffering of victims at all levels of society, but particularly the lower classes, throughout Victorian literature.

The poem was profoundly influential, especially on the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning later in the century – his *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, published in 1855 (see page 291), in many ways carries forward the disturbing preoccupations found in *Julian and Maddalo*.

Shelley also wrote many intense short lyrics which draw direct inspiration from nature and are written in controlled, sparse language:

> A widow bird sat mourning for her love
> Upon a wintry bough;
> The frozen wind crept on above,
> The freezing stream below.
>
> There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
> No flower upon the ground,
> And little motion in the air
> Except the mill wheel's sound.
>
> (*A widow bird*)

Here the images from nature are employed to express inner feelings and states of mind. A sense of loss and emotional numbness is conveyed through the cold, the emptiness of the scene and the overall lack of movement. Shelley has often been criticised for putting his own feelings too directly at the centre of his poems and for being too self-indulgent and self-pitying. There are certainly lines in some poems where this is the case. For example:

> Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
> I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
> (*Ode to the West Wind*)

> I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care
> Which I have borne and yet must bear.
> (*Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples*)

A widow bird and numerous other lyrics (for example, *To a Skylark*, *The Cloud*, *With a Guitar to Jane*, *The Indian Serenade*) do not, however, fall into that category. In one of his best-known lyrics, *Ode to the West Wind*, Shelley makes the wildness of the wind a controlled symbol of his deepest personal aspirations for human freedom. The wind sweeps away the old life and spreads the seeds which will produce a new ideal life:

> O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
> Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
> Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
>
> Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
> Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
> Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
> The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
> Each like a corpse within its grave, until
> Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow . . .

Like several of his contemporaries, Shelley believed that poetry could reform the world. Central to this belief is that the creative power of the imagination and the poet's quest for beauty and the eternal truths of beauty will show the way to a better society. According to Shelley this makes poets 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. In his *A Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821 but not published until 1840), Shelley wrote a poetic manifesto for these beliefs, making the poet a missionary, a prophet, a potential leader for a new society. The following extract from *A Defence of Poetry* illustrates these main points:

> It exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world . . . if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place; if no monuments of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us; and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief. The human mind could never, except by the intervention of these excitements, have been awakened to the invention of the grosser sciences, and that application of analytical reasoning to the aberrations of society, which it is now attempted to exalt over the direct expression of the inventive and creative faculty itself.

The view of the creative artist as hero was later embraced by other writers in the Victorian and modern periods.

BYRON

I need a hero
(George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*)

It is appropriate that Byron should be the last major Romantic poet we examine, for many readers, especially in the nineteenth century, regarded Byron as the prototype of the Romantic poet, and many writers across the whole of Europe were influenced by his approach. Like Shelley, Byron was heavily involved with contemporary social issues and became particularly well known for his verse satires. The heroes of his long narrative poems were often imitated; in fact, the Byronic hero almost became a literary fashion. The hero is usually a melancholy and solitary figure who in his actions often defies social conventions; almost, indeed, the poet as reclusive pop star.

The long poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* – the term 'childe' is a mediaeval word for a young nobleman waiting to become a knight – was the work which made Byron's name. The hero, Childe Harold, is often identified with Byron himself. He is a restless wanderer, alternating between despair and great energy and commitment to new, usually forbidden experiences. The poem was published when Byron was only 24 years of age, in 1812. It made him famous overnight and his public career as a popular and scandalous figure was launched.

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see

Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

A more developed example of the Byronic hero comes in his dramatic poem *Manfred* (1817). Manfred is a particularly passionate outcast and rebel whose typically Romantic heroism contrasts with the restraint and humility of the typical Augustan, classical hero. Manfred's disdain for ordinary humanity, his unidentified guilt, his sense of gloom and doom, make him, paradoxically, a deeply attractive, even erotic figure. He seems to be beyond good and evil and to define his own moral codes. His unsatisfied quest makes him not so much a hero as an anti-hero, with literary descendants in characters such as Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Here Manfred rails against a spirit which wants to make him feel guilty:

Back to thy hell!
Thou hast no power upon me, *that* I feel;
Thou shalt never possess me, *that* I know:
What I have done is done; I bear within
A torture which could nothing gain from thine:
The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts,
Its own origin of ill and end,
And its own place and time.

(*Manfred*)

Byron's semi-autobiographical *Don Juan* is an example of the more satiric side to his poetry. The tone of the poem is light-hearted and comic throughout, even when the subject matter is at its most serious, moving easily through black comedy and the pathos of tragedy. This is in part due to the *ottava rima* rhyme scheme and partly due to the mixture of different styles, from the most formal poetic diction to the most informal colloquial and everyday English. In particular, the rhyme scheme, which demands regular full rhymes, is difficult to achieve in English without comic effects. The following lines describe Don Juan's first seduction:

And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,
Until too late for useful conversation;
The tears were gushing from her gentle eyes,

I wish, indeed, they had not had occasion,
But who, alas! can love, and then be wise?
Not that remorse did not oppose temptation;
A little still she strove, and much repented,
And whispering 'I will ne'er consent' – consented.

Don Juan is an adventure poem as well as an ongoing series of love stories. It begins with a shipwreck and continues by exploring the results that follow. Its essence is the restless, amorous adventures of a young Spaniard, but there are departures from the main plot line so that Byron, as narrator, can advance his own ideas on a range of subjects and can satirise many aspects of contemporary life and of his own contemporaries. Byron himself insisted that *Don Juan* is a satire on abuses of the present state of society but, in several places, judgement is passed upon many of the institutions and values of Western society. However, Byron's poetry cannot be properly compared with the Augustan satires of Dryden or Pope. He saw Pope as his main technical model, but his satires are not based on a vision of positive moral values. The character of Don Juan is a constant seeker of meaning rather than one who already knows the moral basis for his actions. He is not a complete anti-hero; but neither is his quest wholly heroic. Byron's own view of his hero is ironic in places, as in the following instance:

He pored upon the leaves, and on the flowers,
And heard a voice in all the winds; and then
He thought of wood-nymphs and immortal bowers,
And how the goddesses came down to men:
He missed the pathway, he forgot the hours,
And when he looked upon his watch again,
He found how much old Time had been a winner –
He also found that he had lost his dinner.

Here Juan is first described as a kind of mock Romantic poet (with perhaps a slight hint of Wordsworth and *Tintern Abbey*); the final two lines show his love of nature to be over-indulgent. He is brought comically down to earth in a sharp colloquial reminder which contrasts ironically with the more elevated language and topic at the beginning of the stanza.

Such sudden changes in style are common in Byron's poetry. Byron learned from the mock-heroic style of Pope and Dryden, and uses colloquial language widely (which the Augustans did not). In fact, although Wordsworth had advocated the use of the language of ordinary men, *Don*

Juan contains more everyday language than *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* put together. The famous short lyric *So we'll go no more a-roving* (1817) shows how simple and heartfelt Byron can be:

> So we'll go no more a-roving
> So late into the night,
> Though the heart be still as loving,
> And the moon be still as bright.
>
> For the sword outwears its sheath,
> And the soul wears out the breast,
> And the heart must pause to breathe,
> And love itself have rest.
>
> Though the night was made for loving,
> And the day returns too soon,
> Yet we'll go no more a-roving
> By the light of the moon.

Byron also likes to play with his readers by following amusing and sometimes trivial digressions. In this respect, he is similar to the eighteenth-century novelist, Laurence Sterne. He invites his readers to participate in his poetry, to laugh with him at his heroes and to question their own values. In these lines from *Don Juan*, he warns his readers that the love affair between Juan and Haidée is unlawful and dangerous because they are not married.

> Then if you'd have them wedded, please to shut
> The book which treats of this erroneous pair,
> Before the consequences grow too awful;
> 'Tis dangerous to read of loves unlawful.

Don Juan was judged an immoral poem by many of Byron's contemporaries but it is never clear how far this is a judgement on Byron himself, who scandalised society with a series of well-publicised affairs and who seemed compelled to try forbidden experiences: society's contempt for his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh led Byron to leave England forever in 1816. As a Lord, he held an unconventional liberal (Whig) view of society, supporting Catholic emancipation and the Nottingham weavers, who were made unemployed as a result of new technology in the industry.

Don Juan begins with the narrator saying 'I need a hero'. The need to identify with heroic struggle, to map out a heroic quest and to push one's self to the limits of heroism is an aspect of Romanticism which remained with Byron throughout his life. Byron died at the age of 36, fighting on the side of the Greeks in their war for independence from Turkey.

Robert Southey was one of the most prolific of all writers of the Romantic period. A great friend of Coleridge, they collaborated while at Oxford University, and shared many idealistic enthusiasms, which disappeared in Southey's later works. His poems from the late 1790s contain some famous ballads, such as *The Inchcape Rock*, and echo the aim of *Lyrical Ballads* to break away from eighteenth-century poetic constraints. Although he became Poet Laureate and remained one of the Lake Poets, living in the Lake District near Wordsworth, Southey devoted his later career more to history and biography than to poetry.

He attacked Byron in the Preface to *A Vision of Judgement*, and as a result Byron wrote a parody called *The Vision of Judgement* a year later, in 1822. It is ironically for this, and for the many mocking mentions of Southey in Byron's *Don Juan*, that the Poet Laureate of the Romantic period from 1813 is largely remembered rather than for the early poems which brought him fame.

RIGHTS AND VOICES AND POETRY

Woman! Too long degraded, scorned, oppressed
(Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The Rights of Woman*)

The Romantic period is traditionally seen as more or less an all-male preserve, with token mentions of Mary Wollstonecraft or Frances Burney or Mary Shelley and of course Jane Austen as the minority female presences (see pages 228–9 and 237ff). This is a considerable oversimplification. Just as there were many women writing prose and drama throughout the eighteenth century, there were many female voices before and during the Romantic period, among the most distinctive of the pre-Romantic writers being Charlotte Smith (see pages 184–5).

Mary Alcock, in *The Chimney Sweeper's Complaint* (1799) clearly echoes Blake in her depiction of the boy, although her tone is rather more pathetic than socially concerned:

A chimney-sweeper's boy am I;
  Pity my wretched fate!
Ah, turn your eyes; 'twould draw a tear,
  Knew you my helpless state.

Susanna Blamire was a poet of Cumberland, close to where the Lake Poets spent a lot of their time, but seems not to have been known to them. She is a great documenter of country life, and deserves to be considered with Burns and George Crabbe as a major realistic voice of rural life. She used dialect as well as standard English, and wrote in many poetic forms, songs, epistles, descriptive and narrative verse. Her poems were collected in 1842.

There's bonny Tibby o' the glen,
  And Anny o' the hill,
Their beauty crazèd baith their men
  And might delight them still;
But now they watch their lordies' frowns,
  Their sauls they daurna own;
'Tis tyranny that wedlock crowns,
  And women's joys are flown.
    (Susanna Blamire, *O Jenny Dear*, 1790s)

Clara Reeve, (see page 186), better known as a novelist, had written as early as 1756 *An Argument in Favour of the Natural Equality of Both the Sexes*, in which she showed how a talented woman might see her role:

Those talents, that were once my pride,
I find it requisite to hide;
For what in man is most respected,
In woman's form shall be rejected.

But after the cries for freedom of the American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution, there was a new air of assertiveness among radical intellectuals and Anna Laetitia Barbauld could write a poem echoing the title as Mary Wollstonecraft used for her polemic *The Rights of Woman*, in which she could say, 'Make treacherous Man, thy subject, not thy friend'; but she went on to conclude, 'That separate rights are lost in mutual love', which might be seen by some readers as a weakening of her position!

As with many writers of the time, Barbauld experienced long delays in getting some of her work published. This poem, although probably written about 1795 was not published until 1825. However, the industrious Mrs Barbauld edited fifty volumes of *The British Novelists* (1810). Her heroic couplets poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, published in 1812 is interesting in being one of the first texts to foresee the decline of Britain's wealth and power and the increasing prosperity of America.

Felicia Browne, who became Felicia Hemans, published her first volume of poems at the age of fifteen. She was immensely prolific and seems to have had no problems at all getting her work published from *Domestic Affections* (1812) to *The Forest Sanctuary* (1829) which contains her most famous, or indeed notorious line, in the poem *Casabianca*:

> The boy stood on the burning deck
> Whence all but he had fled.

It was also Mrs Hemans whose domestic affections gave us *The Homes of England*:

> The stately homes of England
> How beautiful they stand,

which proves, if proof were needed, that not all female poets of the time were as radical as Mrs Barbauld and her kind. Felicia Hemans was probably the biggest selling poet of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Mary Robinson, born Mary Darby, is a writer of many voices, – poet, novelist, philosopher, feminist, actress, celebrity. Her poem *The Haunted Beach*, from 1800, echoes Coleridge and anticipates Shelley in its picture of the solitude, guilt and desolation of a shipwrecked mariner,

> Doomed from his home to sever,
> Who swore to be through wind and sea
> Firm and undaunted ever!

Letitia Elizabeth Landon was one of the first women to earn her living entirely from her writing, and was one of those who used her initials, L.E.L., to sign her works. She wrote several volumes of poetry, and novels, including *Ethel Churchill* (1837). Her mysterious death, in West Africa, would make a fascinating subject for a biography.

CLARE

I am – yet what I am none cares or knows
(John Clare, *I Am*)

The poetry of John Clare is sometimes studied alongside the Romantic poets. It is also sometimes studied as Victorian poetry, since Clare wrote major poetry until his death in 1864. Clare's poetry is, however, difficult to categorise, in more ways than one. Like Blake, he was largely neglected during his lifetime. Like Burns, he is a genuine peasant poet in that he was inspired by the ballads and folk-songs of rural labourers. (His father was a thresher and ballad singer who knew over a hundred songs.) He is a nature poet but his poetry is different from other Romantic poets'. Clare knew the world of nature from direct experience; his observations are as much those of a naturalist as they are of a poet. He also witnessed at first hand the rapid break-up of the traditional agricultural world in the first decades of the nineteenth century, mainly as a result of the enclosure movement. John Clare could make a living neither as a farm worker nor as a poet.

Clare's poetry stresses the spoken voice, with intimate rhythms and, often, local dialect words. It registers unique feelings in distinctive tones. The feelings are usually of sadness, regret, and of love lost. Nature is accurately recorded but the poet is always self-conscious and aware of his own position:

Brown are the flags and fading sedge
And tanned the meadow plains
Bright yellow is the osier hedge
Beside the brimming drains
The crows sit on the willow tree
The lake is full below
But still the dullest thing I see
Is self that wanders slow
(*Child Harold*)

Clare's awareness of his self and identity, most apparent in poems such as *Remembrances* and *I Am*, was acute, but always conscious that the 'I' is fragile and easily broken. In this respect Clare's *I Am* compares well with Keats's poem *When I have fears that I may cease to be* in its emphasis on solitude and desolation (see page 212). It may have contributed to the madness of his later years, as he took longer and more detailed journeys between external nature and internal landscapes of the mind.

The metaphor of the journey or quest is central to Romantic poetry. Literally, the journey for some Romantic poets meant leaving England in search of new experiences and radical social or political causes. In their poetry, the journey is an interior one. Poems of epic length explore the growth and development of the self. Lyrics show a search for identity and a genuine spiritual home. There is a close relationship between the poem and the poet's own personal circumstances, but there is almost always something heroic about the journey, and in the longer poems the reader is invited to identify with the hero as he moves through various crises and stages of growth. The poem then becomes a form of spiritual autobiography.

ROMANTIC PROSE

In prose, too, these years saw parallel growth, particularly in the form of personal essays and autobiographies. Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt wrote a large number of letters and essays on a range of topics, literary and otherwise, and in the process established the importance of the literary form of critical essay which came to particular prominence in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. Some prose works were personal confessions, the most famous of which was Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. This is an autobiographical account of his opium addiction. In *Confessions* he penetrates the depths of his own subconscious world, describing the simultaneously nightmarish and ecstatic experience with great precision and lyrical intensity. Opium provided the Romantic writer with a starting point for a further journey of the imagination into extreme feelings and experiences.

> Oh! just, subtle, and mighty opium! that to the hearts of poor and rich alike, for the wounds that will never heal, and for 'the pangs that tempt the spirit to rebel,' bringest an assuaging balm; eloquent opium! that with thy potent rhetoric stealest away the purposes of wrath . . . and 'from the anarchy of dreaming sleep,' callest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties, and the blessed household countenances, cleansed from the 'dishonours of the grave.' Thou only givest these gifts to man; and thou hast the keys of Paradise, oh, just, subtle, and mighty opium!

De Quincey is a rare example of a journalist whose essays remain classics of the genre. They have been influential ever since they were written, and some of them have never been surpassed in their psychological and imaginative acuity. 'On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*' and 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' are among the most remarkable. He also wrote widely on the nature of dreams, and anticipates modern psychological studies in relation to childhood experience and imaginative creation. He is a very modern figure in many ways, not only in relation to the drug culture. He is a link between the Romantics, with his *Reflections of the Lake Poets*, dating from the mid-1830s, and the decadent modern sensibility of such figures as Baudelaire in France and Edgar Allan Poe in America. From 1853 until his death in 1859 he was occupied in collecting his works under the title *Selections Grave and Gay*.

De Quincey, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt and other writers revolutionised the form of the essay and gave it a new literary impetus. Like the Romantic poets, the essayists rebelled against eighteenth-century conventions. They developed new styles and wrote on a wider range of topics.

Instead of describing the leisure pursuits of the upper and middle classes, these essayists wrote about the lives of clerks, chimney-sweeps and prize-fighters. Instead of an elaborate formal style, they developed looser, more subjective and impressionistic uses of language, giving each essay their own personal stamp. Like the Romantic poets, the essayists of the Romantic period put their own responses to experience at the very centre of their work. Charles Lamb's two series of *Essays of Elia* (to sound like 'a liar'), first published in *The London Magazine* and collected in 1823 and 1833, covered a wide range of middle-brow topics including whist and roast pig. The ostensible narrator, in the tradition of Addison's Sir Roger de Coverley, is 'a bundle of prejudices', essentially a highly conservative Englishman, but the intention is ultimately innocuous, with no satirical bite or social criticism. As such, Lamb's essays retained their popularity long after many more contentious essayists had lost their appeal. For some, Lamb has been seen as a major critic, but recent tastes have affirmed the names of Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt as making a more significant contribution to Romantic criticism.

> The poet is far from dealing only with these subtle and analogical truths. Truth of every kind belongs to him, provided it can bud into any kind of beauty, or is capable of being illustrated and impressed by the poetic faculty. Nay, the simplest truth is often so beautiful and impressive of itself, that one of the greatest proofs of his genius consists in his leaving it to stand alone, illustrated by nothing but the light of its own tears or smiles, its own wonder, might, or playfulness.
>
> (Leigh Hunt, *What Is Poetry?*, 1844)

> No young man believes he shall ever die. It was a saying of my brother's, and a fine one. There is a feeling of Eternity in youth, which makes us amends for every thing. To be young is to be as one of the Immortal Gods. One half of time indeed is flown – the other half remains in store for us with all its countless treasures; for there is no line drawn, and we see no limit to our hopes and wishes. We make the coming age our own.
>
> (William Hazlitt, *On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth*, 1850)

Thomas Love Peacock was a friend of Shelley's as early as 1812, although his final work was published almost fifty years after that. He spans the Romantic and Victorian ages and was deeply involved in the issues of both periods. His poetry is now neglected, although *Rhododaphne* (1818) is one of the most significant longer poems of the lesser-known Romantic poets, and worthy of rediscovery. Peacock's reputation rests on his novels of ideas expressed in conversation – and he deserves recognition as an original contributor for the way he introduces the characters and issues of the time into his works: for example, in *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) Coleridge, Byron and Shelley are satirised, their works, attitudes and life-styles criticised, and the 'morbidities' of modern literature comically questioned. Perhaps surprisingly, Shelley was full of praise for the book.

Peacock worked for many years in the East India Company and at the end of his career returned to his preferred genre of the satirical novel of ideas and conversation – the novel as commentary on the times – in *Gryll Grange* (1860–61), where a collection of characters debate such themes as schools for all, the boring nature of lectures, and the faithfulness of wives.

> I'm afraid we live in a world of misnomers and of a worse kind than this. In my little experience I have found that a gang of swindling bankers is a respectable old firm; that men who sell their votes to the highest bidder, and want only 'the protection of the ballot' to see the promise of them to both parties, are a free and independent constituency; that a man who successfully betrays everybody that trusts him, and abandons every principle he ever professed, is a great statesman, and a Conservative, forsooth, a *nil conservando*; that schemes for breeding pestilence are sanitary improvements; that the test of intellectual capacity is in swallow, and not in digestion; that the art of teaching everything, except what will be of use to the recipient, is national education; and that a change for the worse is reform.

By this time, Peacock's thinking was almost self-consciously old-fashioned: he enjoyed being a Tory reactionary, and something of a parody of himself. But Peacock's questioning throughout his career touches on vital issues; his essay *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) can be seen in many ways to have been the spark which inspired Shelley to write his *A Defence of Poetry*.

Peacock's novels are unusual in making the form a mixture of genres, from sub-Gothic to semi-pastoral, with the essential element of conversation, which occasionally develops into an early kind of stream of consciousness. As such, they have an urbanity of ideas and stylish refinement of debate that remain almost unique in the English novel. Recent critical revaluation has given Peacock a major role as an influence on the ideas of the Romantic poets.

The Romantic journey was usually a solitary one. Although the Romantic poets were closely connected with one another, and some collaborated in their work, they each had a strong individual vision. Romantic poets could not continue their quests for long or sustain their vision into later life. The power of the imagination and of inspiration did not last. Whereas earlier poets had patrons who financed their writing, the tradition of patronage was not extensive in the Romantic period and poets often lacked financial and other support. Keats, Shelley and Byron all died in solitary exile from England at a young age, their work left incomplete, nonconformists to the end. This coincides with the characteristic Romantic images of the solitary heroic individual, the spiritual outcast 'alone, alone, all, all alone' like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner and John Clare's 'I'; like Shelley's Alastor, Keats's Endymion, or Byron's Manfred, who reached beyond the normal social codes and normal human limits so that 'his aspirations/Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth'. Wordsworth, who lived to be an old man, wrote poems throughout his life in which his poetic vision is stimulated by a single figure or object set against a natural background. Even his projected final masterpiece was entitled *The Recluse*. The solitary journey of the Romantic poet was taken up by many Victorian and twentieth-century poets, becoming almost an emblem of the individual's search for identity in an ever more confused and confusing world.

By the mid-1820s the high point of Romanticism in England had passed. The hopes and ideals expressed by Wordsworth in the first decade of the nineteenth century grew weaker. Wordsworth himself constantly revised his poems, in an effort to capture the poetic and idealistic intensity of his youth. He wrote more and more in regretful memory of lost opportunities.

The roots of European Romanticism lie much more in political and philosophical ideas and there the Romantic movement was influential in all spheres of society, not only in artistic circles. By contrast, the political involvements of Wordsworth and, more directly, Shelley and Byron, appear amateurish and more concerned with heroic gestures than with long-term political commitment. European Romanticism continued through the 1830s and 1840s, reaching into another age of revolutions which began in 1848. The political instabilities in Europe contrasted with the more stable climate in England where the movements for political reform were much more gradual.

THE NOVEL IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Oh! it is only a novel!
(Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*)

Romantic poetry can be easily labelled, while it could be argued that there is no such thing as 'the Romantic novel'. During the eighteenth century, the novel had evolved into a wide-ranging genre. In the forty or so years after the French Revolution in 1789, novelists brought new themes, new approaches to the novel; and, in doing so, they raised it from the inferior level of critical esteem – 'only a novel', as one of Jane Austen's characters puts it – to the most significant, most popular, and most highly regarded genre of literary expression.

The intellectual climate of the time is reflected in the wide range of issues, themes, and settings which the novel was now beginning to encompass: high-class society contrasts with the primitive; national concerns with regional; male points of view with female; present with past, as more and more new subjects become the raw material for fiction.

William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), subtitled *Things As They Are*, is a novel of propaganda, but it contains elements of crime, detection, pursuit, and punishment which are remarkably innovative. It is one of the first novels to give a psychological portrait of character at the same time as illustrating conflicts of political ideals and beliefs.

The subtitle of *Hermsprong* (1796) by Robert Bage, *Man As He Is Not*, and the title of his *Man As He Is* (1792), echo Godwin's subtitle and show a similar concern to examine views and values in what can be seen as a more 'truthful', realistic way. The 'truth' in this case is found, as with much of Romantic poetry, in a return to nature. *Hermsprong* is the novel which, more than any other, makes its hero a 'natural' man – a primitive, brought up by American Indians without the constrictions of civilised religion, morality, and ethics. It thus becomes a satire on the values which Hermsprong finds in the civilised society to which he returns. Many views – for example on social class and privilege, and on equality for women – are aired in ways which are critical of conventional English society.

Equality, and rights for women, had been the subject of discussion among educated women for several decades. In 1792, these views reached their most noted expression in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a work which was to have a lasting impact on future women thinkers and writers.

> Probably the prevailing opinion that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses' poetical story; yet as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground, or only to be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to show that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure.

The novels read by most women of the 1790s were more likely to be by Frances (Fanny) Burney or Clara Reeve than to be Mary Wollstonecraft's

Mary (1788), or *St Leon* (1799) by her husband William Godwin, in which she was portrayed after her death in childbirth. The daughter, also called Mary, was to become a novelist herself, and the wife of another Radical figure and Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Frances Burney's novels, from *Evelina* (1778) through *Cecilia* (1782) to *Camilla* (1796), are novels of how a young woman grows up and develops as she enters and experiences the society of her day. The tone is gently satirical, with vivid observation, continuing in the vein which Eliza Haywood had exemplified in the mid-eighteenth century. Society, and aspirations to be part of it, are the main concerns in Burney's novels. Her novels were best-sellers, brought her considerable fame and expanded her range of social contacts. Fanny Burney's diaries chronicle her times vividly, and feature such characters as Samuel Johnson and the mad King George III. Today they are seen as a good focus for many of our present-day concerns in their earliest manifestation: gender roles, women's influence in social history, and the growth of autobiographical writing. She helped to make novel-writing 'respectable' – Virginia Woolf called Burney 'the mother of English fiction' – and with the ongoing publication of her voluminous correspondence, interest in her is burgeoning.

The only female novelist who shared Robert Bage's concern with 'primitive' values was, not surprisingly, a friend of William Godwin's, Elizabeth Inchbald. Her *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796) stress 'a proper education', and the bad effects of civilisation, but in a tone that is more romantic than polemical. Elizabeth Inchbald was also one of the most successful playwrights of her time. *I'll Tell You What* (1795) was one of her best-known plays; she also edited an important collection of older and new plays in *The British Theatre* (1806–9).

Mary Robinson was also involved in theatre, as an actress. Her writings again clearly reflect the tone of the times. Among them are *The Widow* (1794), which is sub-titled 'A Picture of Modern Times', and *Walsingham: the Pupil of Nature* (1797).

Jane Austen

> *Three or four families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on*
>
> (Jane Austen, Letters)

Jane Austen is quite different from any novelist before her, and an important part of the difference is that for many years she was not consciously writing for publication. Female writers were not unusual: indeed, many of the most notable writers of the thirty or so years before Austen were women – Clara Reeve, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Frances Burney in particular.

In Austen's own time, Maria Edgeworth established herself very significantly as a writer of small-scale, so-called 'provincial' novels, set in Ireland, at the time when the Act of Union (1801) brought Ireland fully into the United Kingdom, in both a political and legal sense. Her *Castle Rackrent* (1800) is particularly significant, both as a regional novel and as an evocation of history, being set 'before the year 1782'.

> Then we were all bustle in the house, which made me keep out of the way, for I walk slow and hate a bustle, but the house was all hurry-skurry, preparing for my new master. – Sir Murtagh, I forgot to notice, had no childer, so the Rackrent estate went to his younger brother – a young dashing officer – who came amongst us before I knew for the life of me whereabouts I was, in a gig or some of them things, with another spark along with him, and led horses, and servants, and dogs, and scarce a place to put any Christian of them into; for my late lady had sent all the feather-beds off before her, and blankets, and household linen, down to the very knife cloths, on the cars to Dublin, which were all her own, lawfully paid for out of her own money. – So the house was quite bare, and my young master, the moment ever he set foot in it out of his gig, thought all those things must come of themselves, I believe, for he never looked after any thing at all, but harum-scarum called for every thing as if we were conjurers, or he in a public-house. For my part, I could not bestir myself any how; I had been so used to my late master and mistress, all was upside down with me, and the new servants in the servants' hall were quite out of my way; I had nobody to talk to, and if it had not been for my pipe and tobacco should, I verily believe, have broke my heart for poor Sir Murtagh.

'The great Maria', as she came to be called, was one of the best-known literary figures of her time, writing several more novels about Irish society, such as *The Absentee* (1812), and many books for children. But her reputation did not last long; and Jane Austen soon came to be regarded as the greatest woman writer of her time.

What Jane Austen did – and no author before her had attempted it so successfully – was to apply the techniques of the novel to the acute observation of society in microcosm: 'three or four families in a Country Village' was 'the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work', she wrote in her letters. That her intentions were not small-scale, however, is clear from her next words – 'so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labour'.

Jane Austen deliberately avoids effect, exaggeration and excess. Going against the trend of the novels of her time, she applies the microscope to human character and motivation, with no great didactic, moral, or satiric purpose, but with a gentle irony and perspicacity which make her novels unique, as representations of universal patterns of behaviour, and as documentation of an aspect of the provincial society of her time.

It was a time of war: and, in the history of the novel, it was the time when the Gothic novel was at its most popular. War is only touched upon slightly (for instance, the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 is mentioned in *Persuasion*) but novels and reading are quite significant in Austen's writing, especially *Northanger Abbey*.

Jane Austen was already writing in the early 1790s, as the debates raged on Radicalism, women's rights, and primitivism. The first versions of the novels now known as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* probably date from 1795–97; after several failed attempts, it was *Sense and Sensibility* which was her first novel to be published, in 1811, and this gave her the impetus, in the last few years of her life, to revise her earlier work and start writing again after a gap of some three or four years.

Northanger Abbey was probably the first of Jane Austen's novels to be completed, around 1798. It was actually sold to a publisher in 1803, but was only published, with the late novel *Persuasion*, in 1818, the year after the writer's death. *Northanger Abbey* gently satirises the 1790s enthusiasm for the Gothic novel, by contrasting day-to-day life with the imagined horrors of Ann Radcliffe's work, which have had a considerable effect on the impressionable heroine, Catherine Morland. The author's distanced, slightly ironic observation of the heroine, and of the love intrigues in fashionable Bath, already displays the tone and the point of view which Austen was to refine in her later works, which are less obviously intended to ridicule and more concerned with acute depiction of character and interaction.

She continues to focus on young heroines: the contrasting Elinor (sense and self-control) and Marianne (sensibility and impulsiveness) in *Sense and Sensibility*; Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*; Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*; Emma in the novel that bears her name; and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. Sisters are often contrasted, and the closely worked out plots usually involve the twists and turns of emotion in the search for love, marriage, happiness and social status.

Where other writers had used the novel to create fictional models, to give moral examples, to ridicule manners and morals, to describe real or imagined worlds and ways of life, Jane Austen's achievement was to create in each novel a fully realised and populated world, strictly limited in scope, such that the reader can observe – without being made to judge – a group of characters whose emotions are recognisable, whose faults are human, whose traits are familiar. The 'issues' may seem small-scale, when compared to the wars being waged outside the limits of the village; but it is precisely the universality of the characters' preoccupations that makes these issues, and their expression, attractive in a lasting way to a great many readers.

When discussing Jane Austen's work, critics tend to speak of her delicacy and irony, her femininity and her lack of ambition and scope. This is to undervalue her and to prettify a group of novels which are considerably more than 'novels . . . about the gentry and addressed to the gentry'. Neither should she be seen as 'typical' of her age: the major artist is probably the least typical representative of any age. But Austen shows 'the form and pressure of the time' on a society which was undergoing many radical changes; the questions her characters face, 'anti-Jacobin' though their conclusions may be, are just as significant as the questions of social class and Irish identity examined by Maria Edgeworth, the pursuit of truth in Godwin, and the anti-aristocratic satire of Bage. Jane Austen too criticises the 'gentry': her characters stage an 'anarchic' play in *Mansfield Park* (a play, incidentally, by Elizabeth Inchbald); she portrays an older order of values that is changing, at a time when the gap between the gentry and the poor is widening. Her young female characters, in search of the best prospect for marriage, end up marrying a country clergyman or a landed gentleman. Only Anne Elliot breaks with this 'Cinderella' tradition (which, for example, is the mainstay of Frances Burney's novels) by marrying a sailor. But the choices, the options, are indicative: what Jane Austen emphasises is community in microcosm, the search for order in a world beset by chaos, threatened on all sides, not only by war, or class division, but by such human fears as loneliness, uncertainty and failure.

Most writers of the Romantic period engage deeply in an ideological conflict between the past and the future. In many cases, the past wins – in Wordsworth and Scott, most notably. In her settling of plot in the future of marriage, Jane Austen is not succumbing to an ethos of the past, but is endeavouring to confront the realities of a difficult future, without taking recourse to the falsity of a comfortable happy ending.

LANGUAGE NOTE

Jane Austen's English

Jane Austen and the Romantic writers of the early nineteenth century write in an English which is recognisably a modern variety. Shakespeare and Chaucer can be read but most will need to have recourse to an etymological dictionary or to an editor's footnotes to help in understanding the words and idioms which are no longer part of the contemporary language or which have meanings which are far removed from those established for the words today. The novels of Jane Austen, the writings of Peacock or Hazlitt, or the poetry of Wordsworth can normally be read without any such reference to dictionaries or special editions.

Such a position is broadly true, but it should not deceive us into thinking that the language has not changed at all during the course of the past two hundred years. There are some subtle differences in the English used by Jane Austen when it is compared, for example, with the present-day language. When, on the second page of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, we read the following sentence, we might note that 'injury' (upset/hurt), 'comprehended' (included) and 'intercourse' (communication) are words with changed meanings in contemporary English:

> Mrs Price in her turn was injured and angry; and an answer which comprehended each sister in its bitterness, and bestowed such very disrespectful reflections on the pride of Sir Thomas, as Mrs Norris could not possibly keep to herself, put an end to all intercourse between them for a considerable period.

As further illustration, the following words, phrases and structures are all extracted from Jane Austen's novels with 'translations' provided in brackets.

> Three or four officers were **lounging** together. [walking/strolling]
> She made her first **essay**. [attempt]
> Suppose you **speak for** tea. [order]
> She must know herself too secure of the **regard** of all the rest of you. [affection]
> For a day or two after the affront was given, Henry Crawford has endeavoured to **do it away** by the usual attack of gallantry and **compliment**. [remove/pass it off] [flattery]
> So you **are come** at last. [have come]

Scott

Where Jane Austen deliberately limited her area of concern, Walter Scott opened up the novel to the full panorama of revolution, dissent, rebellion and social change. Having written verse romances with great success for several years, he published his first novel only in 1814, at the very end of the Napoleonic wars when Britain was triumphant. And, equally significantly, the settings of his novels are in the past, rather than the immediate and highly troubled present.

After the Napoleonic wars, Britain entered a time of severe social unrest, of high unemployment, of widening gaps between rich and poor, employers and workers, upper, middle and lower classes. These contemporary concerns, vividly espoused by writers from the poet Shelley to the social campaigner William Cobbett, are absent from Scott's work.

Scott does, however, use the historical framework of his novels to give a detailed portrait of turmoil. Most of the early Waverley novels, from *Waverley* (1814) to *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), are set in times of revolution and rebellion. There is an old-fashioned code of chivalry, which is fundamentally undermined, as the individual comes to terms with the changes in his world. By the end, most of Scott's heroes or heroines have lived through traumatic times, close to what Britain had recently emerged from; and they have resolved *not* to be heroes. The system, the whole mechanism of society, the forces of history, are all greater than any individual, no matter how idealistic or heroic his aspirations. This leads to a kind of accommodation with history, which has given rise to the definition of the historical novel as 'the epic of a world forsaken by God'. Scott alludes to Byron's 'sublime and beautiful' in his description of landscape in *The Monastery* (1820):

> The scene could neither be strictly termed sublime nor beautiful and scarcely even picturesque or striking. But its extreme solitude pressed on the heart; the traveller felt that uncertainty whither he was going, or in what so wild a path he was to terminate which, at times, strikes more on the imagination than the grand features of a show scene, when you know the exact distance of the inn where your dinner is bespoke and at the moment preparing. These are ideas, however, of a far later age, for at the time we treat of, the picturesque, the beautiful, the sublime, and all their intermediate shades, were ideas absolutely unknown to the inhabitants and occasional visitors to Glendearg.

Scott's return to history takes in many periods, from the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 in *Waverley* (1814) to the twelfth-century Crusades in *The Talisman* (1825), from the clash between Saxon and Norman in *Ivanhoe* (1819) to the time of Mary, Queen of Scots in *The Abbott* (1820), and on to the Porteous riots in Edinburgh in 1736 in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), which has been seen as the most successful of the novels. *Ivanhoe* is, with *Rob Roy* (1817), probably the best known of Scott's novels, with Robin Hood and King Richard the Lionheart among its characters.

In *The Heart of Midlothian*, the heroine Jeanie Deans has gone to London to ask for mercy for her sister Effie who has been condemned to death. Here she talks to the Queen, in the presence of the Duke of Argyle:

> The Duke made a signal for Jeanie to advance from the spot where she had hitherto remained watching countenances, which were too long accustomed to suppress all apparent signs of emotion, to convey to her any interesting intelligence. Her Majesty could not help smiling at the awe-struck manner in which the quiet demure figure of the little Scotchwoman advanced towards her, and yet more at the first sound of her broad northern accent. But Jeanie had a voice low and sweetly toned,

> an admirable thing in woman, and eke besought 'her Leddyship to have pity on a poor misguided young creature,' in tones so affecting, that, like the notes of some of her native songs, provincial vulgarity was lost in pathos.
>
> 'Stand up, young woman,' said the Queen, but in a kind tone, 'and tell me what sort of a barbarous people your countryfolk are, where child-murder is become so commonplace as to require the restraint of laws like yours?'
>
> 'If your Leddyship pleases,' answered Jeanie, 'there are mony places beside Scotland where mothers are unkind to their ain flesh and blood.'
>
> It must be observed, that the disputes between George the Second, and Frederick, Prince of Wales, were then at the highest, and that the good-natured part of the public laid the blame on the Queen. She coloured highly, and darted a glance of a most penetrating character first at Jeanie, and then at the Duke. Both sustained it unmoved; Jeanie from total unconsciousness of the offence she had given, and the Duke from his habitual composure. But in his heart he thought, My unlucky protegee has, with this luckless answer, shot dead, by a kind of chance-medley, her only hope of success.

Scott acknowledged his debt to Maria Edgeworth, but what he himself did with the historical novel as a form was to have an influence on European and world literature which went far beyond the use of regional setting and historical reconstruction. In effect, Scott rewrote history, re-creating for the nineteenth century the real historical figures and bringing them to life in the turmoil of their times, fictionalising history and historicising fiction until the two became almost inextricably linked in the minds of his readers. He moves from the mediaeval ethos of chivalry into an accommodation with the historically determined mercantile ethos of modern times. In an *Essay on Chivalry* (1818), he writes:

> As the progress of knowledge advanced, men learned to despise its fantastic refinements; the really enlightened undervaluing them, as belonging to a system inapplicable to the modern state of the world. . . . The system of chivalry, as we have seen, had its peculiar advantages during the Middle Ages. . . . We can now only look back on it as a beautiful and fantastic piece of frostwork, which has dissolved in the beams of the sun!

Before he turned to the novel, Walter Scott was a hugely successful poet, writing highly original narrative poems such as *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and *Marmion* (1808). There is something of the sense of loss and desolation of *Deor's Lament* (see page 8) in the minstrel's (Harper's) plight:

Old times were changed, old manners gone;
A stranger fill'd the Stuarts' throne;
The bigots of the iron time
Had call'd his harmless art a crime.
A wandering Harper, scorn'd and poor,
He begg'd his bread from door to door,
And tuned, to please a peasant's ear,
The harp a king had loved to hear.
(Introduction to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*)

Scott was also important as a collector of songs and ballads of the Borders, notably in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, published in three volumes in 1802–3. He had translated Goethe, and was instrumental in setting up the *Quarterly Review*, the Tory response to the *Edinburgh Review*. Scott was therefore a major figure in the literary establishment when Byron began to attack his poetry – and then Byron began to be more popular than Scott in the genre of narrative poetry. After *Waverley*, Scott only wrote two more long poems, abandoning that form for the novel, which he brought to great popularity and to new levels of achievement.

Sir Walter Scott (he was knighted in 1820) published all his novels anonymously until 1827 – perhaps an indication of the low consideration the novel still had until his own worldwide success. He was the first hugely popular, international bestselling author, reaching vast numbers of readers in many languages, paying off huge debts in his final years through the success of his writing.

As a novelist, Scott's influence was immense: his creation of a wide range of characters from all levels of society was immediately likened to Shakespeare's; the use of historical settings became a mainstay of Victorian and later fiction; his short stories helped initiate that form; his antiquarian researches and collections were a major contribution to the culture of Scotland.

Yet in the twentieth century Scott's reputation drastically declined. This was perhaps due to the fact that the late Victorian writers who used his works as a model and inspiration frequently surpassed his achievement. But he can now be seen to be a great original, almost inventing Scotland as a fictional setting, and illustrating, as only Shakespeare's history plays had before him, the place of the individual in the context of historic events. Historical necessity, the complex interaction of circumstance, character, and change in creating history, is made tangible in his writings. The novels of Scott gave the nineteenth-century world, and especially nineteenth-century Britain, its sense of historical identity. The novels seemed to affirm a chivalric ethos, the constant value of humanity, despite the turmoil of the world. Yet Scott did not affirm static values: his novels are all about movement, the fluctuations of fortune, the rise and fall of families and nations, the ambivalence of good and evil.

The Victorian age perhaps read into Scott an affirmation of the clear-cut values they wanted to affirm in their own society. In many ways the Victorians wished to put times of crisis and upheaval behind them; but almost all Scott's novels are set in times of crisis, and his characters inevitably have to take sides, and make moral decisions. The French novelist George Sand described Scott as 'the poet of the peasant, soldier, outlaw, and artisan'. In introducing the transforming power of history, and its effects on every character's life, Scott transformed the very nature, the scope, and the future of the novel.

From Gothic to *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley, wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, is best known as the author of *Frankenstein* (1818). Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, was a radical political philosopher and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was also a radical writer, responsible for the famous work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792. *Frankenstein* is a Gothic horror story in the tradition established in the late eighteenth century by Ann Radcliffe, William Beckford and Horace Walpole (see page 186). The story concerns the creation by Frankenstein, an idealistic scientist, of a living creature from the bones of the dead. Frankenstein believes he has found the secret of creating life, but his creation turns out to be a destructive monster which no one, not even Frankenstein, can control. *Frankenstein*, together with other novels by Mary Shelley such as the futuristic *The Last Man* (1826), *Caleb Williams* by her father William Godwin (1794), C.R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), continued the Gothic traditions established at the end of the eighteenth century. The importance of this tradition is underscored by the way in which it is satirised in novels in the Romantic period, such as Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* and later *Gryll Grange.*

In the context of the Romantic period of literature, 'Gothic' writers are central insofar as they continue a tradition which challenges the emphasis on reason, control and order which characterises early eighteenth-century literature. Gothic novels such as *Frankenstein* explore the deepest recesses of human psychology, always stressing the macabre, the unusual and the fantastic and preferring the realities of the subjective imagination. *Frankenstein* underlines a shift in sensibility and a movement towards the uncanny, the marvellous, the rationally uncontrollable and the psychologically disjunctive. Such a shift also has political repercussions in that the worlds depicted represent a clear challenge to the existing order and to rational modes of thought and of social organisation. The Gothic novels of the Romantic period were to exert a considerable influence on the novels of the nineteenth century. Novels by Dickens and the Brontës, the romances of R.L. Stevenson, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the 'fantastic' science fiction of H.G. Wells, the melodramas of Victorian fiction and drama were all to be a part of a continuing exploration of increasingly mainstream 'Gothic' themes and preoccupations.

The Gothic is a subversive tradition in writing (as well as in modern film), though it should never be forgotten that it attracts and continues to attract a wide and popular audience. In the Victorian period, Sheridan Le Fanu and Wilkie Collins, in particular, emerged as bestselling novelists of the sinister and supernatural. In America in the nineteenth century the works of Edgar Allan Poe derive substantially from these roots. In the Modern period this tradition of the Romantic Gothic novel has continued with writers such as Ruth Rendell and Angela Carter.

The Scottish regional novel

After the Scottish Enlightenment of the early to mid-eighteenth century, Edinburgh became a major publishing centre, and several of the most influential magazines of the nineteenth century were based there. Byron's famous attack on Walter Scott, *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers* (1809), is in part a satire on the *Edinburgh Review*, which was founded in 1802 (an earlier review with the same name had lasted two years in the mid-1750s) and became one of the most significant magazines of the century. Like its main rival *Blackwood's Magazine* (known as 'the Maga'), it published essays, articles, stories, and fiction by a great many of the leading figures of English literature of the time. *Blackwood's* was founded in 1817 as another Tory rival to the *Review*, which was Whig-oriented. The *Review* lasted until 1929, 'the Maga' until 1980.

After Maria Edgeworth, the regional novel began to flourish. Susan Ferrier's three novels of Scottish life – *Marriage* (1818), *The Inheritance* (1824) and *Destiny* (1831) – contain the acute social observation of Austen, but with rather more didactic intent.

John Galt's *The Ayrshire Legatees* and *Annals of the Parish* (both 1821) use the small-town setting to underscore the humour of social pretensions. *The Provost* and *The Entail* (both 1822) expand Galt's range, bringing themes of power, the abuse of power, and greed to significantly new expression. *The Provost* uses a self-revealing first-person narration to create a complete picture of the manipulations of Mr Pawkie, the small-town politician.

> I have had occasion to observe in the course of my experience, that there is not a greater mollifier of the temper and nature of man than a constant flowing in of success and prosperity. From the time that I had been Dean of Guild, I was sensible of a considerable increase of my worldly means and substance; and although Bailie M'Lucre played me a soople trick at the election, by the inordinate sale and roup of his potatoe-rig, the which tried me, as I do confess, and nettled me with disappointment; yet things, in other respects, went so well with me, that about the eighty-eight, I began to put forth my hand again into public affairs, endowed both with more vigour and activity than it was in the period of my magisterial functions.

The Entail is a portrait of a selfish obsession with inheritance and property, and the tragic consequences for an entire family. These two novels are forerunners of many works on similar themes in later English and European literature: Galt's influence is less obvious than Scott's, but it can be seen in the themes of many French and Russian novelists later in the century.

Galt's parochial, small-town novels show a quite different Scotland from that of the Edinburgh of the eighteenth century. That was the time of the Scottish Enlightenment, when Edinburgh was one of the intellectual capitals of Europe, with the philosopher David Hume as one of its leading lights. The economic theorist Adam Smith, a close friend of Hume, was professor of logic and moral philosophy in Glasgow, the country's trade and business capital.

After Scott, in particular, and after the Romantic writings of Ossian and the homely tones of Galt, the image of Scotland changed profoundly and, out of considerable diversity, a kind of national cultural identity was created. Perhaps the most significant single Scottish novel of the time was James Hogg's psychological study of what is now called a 'split personality' – *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, published in 1824. The fanatical narrator sees it as his mission to commit a series of murders, 'justified' because of his own faith and religious superiority. It is one of the earliest novels of 'a second self', anticipating Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* by some sixty years, and is one of the strangest and most disturbing novels of the entire nineteenth century. Here, Hogg's narrator uses a kind of *alter ego* to kill his own brother:

> There was scarcely an hour in the day on which my resolves were not animated by my great friend, till at length I began to have a longing desire

to kill my brother, in particular. Should any man ever read this scroll, he will wonder at this confession, and deem it savage and unnatural. So it appeared to me at first, but a constant thinking of an event changes every one of its features. I have done all for the best, and as I was prompted, by one who knew right and wrong much better than I did.

The nineteenth century

1832–1900

God's in his heaven –
All's right with the world!
(Robert Browning, *Pippa Passes*)

CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS

The term 'Victorian age' is often used to cover the whole of the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, at a time when the monarchy as an institution was not particularly popular. But as the success of the nation reached its peak and then began to decline, the monarch assumed a greater and greater symbolic importance. Victoria, widowed in 1861, became Empress of India, and by her death in 1901 had come to represent the nation in a way which only Queen Elizabeth I had done in the past.

A history of the Victorian age records a period of economic expansion and rapid change. If change can be measured by change to the capital city of a country, then the history of the growth of London during this century is revealing. When Queen Victoria came to the throne, the population of London was about two million inhabitants; at her death in 1901, the population had increased to 6.5 million. The growth of London and of other major cities in Great Britain marked a final stage in the change from a way of life based on the land to a modern urban economy based on manufacturing, international trade and financial institutions.

Great Britain was one of the first countries of the world to industrialise, to establish markets and to reinvest the profits in further manufacturing developments. Britain became the centre of the new philosophy of Free Trade, of new technology and of continuing industrial inventions. The country became the workshop of the world, and from the 1870s onwards had become the world's banker. In a period of little more than sixty years of Queen Victoria's reign, the major invention of steam power was exploited for fast railways and ships, for printing presses, for industrial looms and for agricultural machinery. An efficient postal service was developed, the telephone invented and communications improved. The country of the United Kingdom, indeed the world as a whole, became a smaller place.

One commentator remarked that 'we have been living, as it were, the life of three hundred years in thirty'. The age was characterised by optimism and a sense that everything would continue to expand and improve. Beneath the public optimism and positivism, however, the nineteenth century was also a century of paradoxes and uncertainties.

After the Battle of Waterloo, Britain saw itself as the mightiest power in the world, but the first Anglo-Afghan war, which began in 1839 and ended in 1842, was Britain's greatest military humiliation of the 19th century. It was followed by the almost equally disastrous Crimean War from 1854 to 1856, the first war to be documented in the daily newspapers as it happened, by the *Times* journalist William Russell. Modern parallels abound.

The contrast between social unrest, with related moves towards change, and the affirmation of values and standards which are still referred to as 'Victorian values', is an essential part of the paradox of the age. 'The Victorian compromise' is one way of seeing this dilemma. It implies a kind of double standard between national success and the exploitation of lower-class workers at home and of colonies overseas; a compromise between philanthropy and tolerance (the abolition of slavery, 1833; tolerance for Catholics, 1829) and repression (the punishment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, 1834; the conditions of the poor).

The literature of the time reflects these concerns from the very beginning. The Jacobin novels of the 1790s had already outlined some areas of discontent. These novels had been suppressed, as also were the Romantic poets' political statements – such as Shelley's pamphlets on the Irish problem and the necessity of atheism. With the younger Romantic poets in exile after 1815, the government was still severely criticised: when riots by unemployed ex-soldiers and others were violently suppressed in 1819, the so-called 'Peterloo Massacre' became the subject of one of Shelley's most virulent satires.

The 1820s saw the deaths of Byron, Keats and Shelley, but they also saw the greatest success of Sir Walter Scott, whose influence on nineteenth-century literature worldwide was immense. Indeed, the 1820s and 1830s can be described as the era of the historical novel, with such followers of Scott as Edward Bulwer Lytton (who wrote *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1834) and Harrison Ainsworth commencing their careers at the same time as Benjamin Disraeli, who was later to become prime minister of Great Britain. The novel as a form became hugely popular and it was the novelists rather than the poets who became the literary representatives of the age.

It was Disraeli whose political novels give us one of the main 'labels' of the Victorian age. *The Two Nations* – i.e. the Rich and the Poor – was the subtitle of his novel *Sybil*, published in 1845. It underlines the fact that social concern and reform were sympathetic subjects for a novel many years before Disraeli himself actually implemented some of the reforms described. Thirty years after the Battle of Waterloo, the working-class Chartist movement was still considered too radical and dangerous to be tolerated. This movement arose directly as a result of the First Reform Bill of 1832, which, although it extended the franchise and gave more people the right to vote, excluded the working classes by its insistence on property ownership. It was not until 1918 that universal suffrage, the first claim of the Chartists, was reached in Britain. Even then, it was not until 1928 that the vote was given to all adult women.

There is thus a movement throughout the Victorian period towards democracy, as there was in the rest of Europe. But where mainland Europe suffered revolutions and political upheavals (1848 came to be called The Year of Revolutions), the British government kept a strong hold on power. Working-class movements, republican groups, trade unions and similar dissident expressions were contained as far as possible. In literature, however, such expression flourished.

DICKENS

The History of England is emphatically the history of progress

(Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Historical Essays*)

The life of Charles Dickens can be seen to mirror the intellectual patterns of the Victorian age, in which he became the dominant literary figure. He started his career as a journalist, and his first success came with *Sketches by Boz* (1836), the kind of light humorous writing which had been popular for more than a century. The extension of this form into the novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–37) established Dickens as a comic novelist in the eighteenth-century tradition represented by Smollett, whom he acknowledged as one of his masters. The vein of good-natured comedy, well-observed character, humorous use of class and dialect difference, and 'traditional' values will be found repeatedly in Dickens's work after *The Pickwick Papers*. *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is the high point of one of these trends, bringing together a touch of the Gothic, the clash between wealth and poverty, and the sentimental assertion of fireside and family values. This is the happy ending:

> 'God bless us every one!' said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

However, a more serious tone soon enters Dickens's works, as he begins to play on his readers' awareness of social problems and the growing conscience of the age. *Oliver Twist* (1837–38) highlighted the problems of poor city children who after the Poor Law Act of 1833 ended up in the workhouse, or at the mercy of crooks like Fagin and Bill Sykes. One of the most memorable images in the novel is when Oliver asks the workhouse master for more to eat:

> He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: 'Please, Sir, I want some more.'

This is the city as portrayed in Blake's *London*, rather than Wordsworth's *Sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*. In many of Dickens's novels he portrays the diversity and disorder of the rapidly growing capital. The suffering of children continues in the Yorkshire schools described in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39); money emerges as the main influence behind the action here, a role it continues to play in late novels of the century. Sentiment takes over in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41) with its heroine, Little Nell, the epitome of the helpless Victorian female victim. The death of Little Nell is the climax of the sentimental trend started by Henry Mackenzie in his novel *The Man of Feeling*. However, the change in taste between 1841 and the end of the century is wittily underlined in Oscar Wilde's comment on the lachrymose death scene: 'One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.'

In the 1840s, Dickens described increasingly realistically the society of his time, but with a faith and optimism which reaches a climax in the semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield* (1849–50). Like all his works, it was published in serial form, building up a huge worldwide readership for each monthly issue. 'I like this the best,' said Dickens later of this novel, and indeed it marks the high point of the first phase of his writing – where the hero could achieve success, marry his (rather vapid) sweetheart Dora, and, after her death, the faithful Agnes, and where even the debt-ridden Mr Micawber achieves respectability. Dickens's plots and portrayals of character are regarded by some critics as melodramatic and sentimental, but his insights into human situations are frequently profound and always accessible. He remained a bestseller all his life, giving numerous public readings of his work, travelling widely, but at the same time putting great strain on his health.

Dickens's next novel (1852–53) begins to mark a change in sensibility and attitude. Even the title *Bleak House* reveals a negative feeling. Rain and fog come to represent the gloom that has settled over the characters. 'Lady Dedlock sat again looking at the rain': it is always raining in the heart of Lady Dedlock. The city of London, which had given hope and a future to Dickens's heroes Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, Paul Dombey (*Dombey and Son*, 1846–47), and David Copperfield, is shrouded in fog in the opening chapter of *Bleak House*. This might be read as a symbol of what was happening to Victorian optimism and self-confidence:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city.

Dickens's scope expands greatly during the 1850s, from the concentration on the individual hero to examinations of society, the law, industrialism, trade unions, historical ideals (*A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859), and on to the re-examination of the semi-autobiographical concerns of *David Copperfield* in the ironically titled *Great Expectations* (1860–61).

Hard Times (1854), subtitled *For These Times*, is the most familiar of Dickens's 'state of the nation' novels, perhaps because it is one of his shortest. It contains a picture of the industrialised English Midlands which emphasises the dehumanising aspects of the Industrial Revolution: Jeremy Bentham's philosophy of utilitarianism – 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' – is called into question. And education, one of Dickens's concerns throughout his life, finds a memorable embodiment in Mr Gradgrind, the educator who insists on 'Facts' at the expense of imagination:

> 'Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!'

Hard Times is actually one of the less rich and rewarding of Dickens's novels, but is in many ways his most accessible critique of the society he lived in.

Great Expectations marks a change from *David Copperfield*. Here the hero – bearing a close resemblance to Dickens himself – does not achieve the success and happiness which crowned the earlier novel. Disappointment and disillusionment dominate, with such memorable images as Miss Havisham, eternally ready for the marriage which will never happen:

> I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone.

Philip Pirrip is one of the first modern anti-heroes, a character whom life treats in a way readers would recognise as 'real', rather than romanticised. This echoes the American writer H.D. Thoreau's statement (in *Walden*, 1854) that 'the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation'. This despairing tone becomes the keynote of much literature in the later decades of the century.

The last nine years of Dickens's own life produced only *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65) and the unfinished Gothic novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). In the earlier *Little Dorrit* (1855–57) and in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's disgust with the hypocrisies of Victorian society reached new heights of savage comic expression. Characters have comic names, but the evil characters of the early novels (Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop)* have become more realistic, credible characters. Mr and Mrs Merdle, in *Little Dorrit*, anticipate a fixation with the worst elements of society:

> For by that time it was known that the late Mr Merdle's complaint had been simply Forgery and Robbery. He, the uncouth object of such widespread adulation, the sitter at great men's feasts, the roc's egg of great ladies' assemblies, the subduer of exclusiveness, the leveller of pride, the patron of patrons . . . he, the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over a certain carrion at the bottom of a bath and disappeared – was simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows.

The fixation with filth and corruption fills the time of Mr Boffin, the Golden Dustman in *Our Mutual Friend*. In *Little Dorrit*, the Circumlocution Office satirises bureaucracy mercilessly; Mr and Mrs Veneering (in *Our Mutual Friend*) are the epitome of social falsity, and Mr Podsnap could represent all the worst of Victorian mentality and attitudes:

> Mr Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied,

> and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself. Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness – not to add a great convenience – in this way of getting rid of disagreeables, which had done much towards establishing Mr Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!'

The high point of Victorian success and self-esteem was probably the Great Exhibition of 1851. The exhibition was held in the Crystal Palace in London which was specially built to display Britain's achievements at home and abroad, and to show Britain at the height of its wealth, power and influence. The guiding spirit behind this display of industrial and commercial domination was the Queen's husband, Prince Albert. He insisted that 'it should not merely be useful and ornamental; it should preach a high moral lesson'. This didacticism underlines the feeling of superiority in mid-century, the role the Victorians gave themselves as moral leaders and exemplars – though it was soon to be undermined. Albert's death, ten years later, left Victoria a widow, and this gives us the image of her as she is generally remembered. It also marks the beginnings of a growth in public sympathy for the Queen as a symbol of the nation. This was to be brilliantly manipulated by the prime minister, Disraeli, in his imperialist policies of the 1870s, reinforcing the image of the monarch by her nomination as Empress of India.

However, public faith had been shaken in the 1850s by two unrelated events. The Crimean War (1853–56) was the first war Britain had been involved in (from 1854) since the victory at Waterloo in 1815; it was a war in a distant place, and for no clear purposes – as Vietnam was for America in the 1960s and 1970s. Like that war, it was covered by the 'mass media': William Russell of *The Times*, the first war reporter, kept his readers informed of what was happening. The lack of a clear-cut victory, the losses recalled in Alfred Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1854), and the sheer waste of the war brought a whole new sense of doubt to the nation's recent high self-esteem.

The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 was another severe blow to mid-Victorian self-esteem. Indeed, Darwin, foreseeing the kind of effect his doctrine of 'natural selection' would have on the religious beliefs and moral attitudes of Victorians, postponed publication of his scientific work for almost thirty years. Its effect was profound, greater perhaps than any other single publication of the nineteenth century. Darwin showed the determining factors of chance and necessity in the 'survival of the fittest', and totally undermined the higher values of religion and morality which, for centuries, society had done so much to create and affirm.

> Man . . . still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.

Statements of this kind from Darwin were the source of continuing moral and existential uncertainties. The period was a time of intellectual and moral ferment. In a volume entitled *Essays and Reviews*, published in 1860, many of the religious thinkers of the established church caused profound shock in their attempts to come to terms with scientific theories and discoveries.

The influence of Darwin was immediate, partly because his ideas had been circulating for so many years. Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1867) and *Physics and Politics* (1872) are determinedly post-Darwinian in their thinking: the latter volume was described as 'an attempt to apply the principles of natural selection and inheritance to political society'. Bagehot's works have remained the classics in their field.

The disillusion and doubt which exist in the later novels of Dickens became ever more dominant in late Victorian and early twentieth-century literature, especially in the novel. The novel, published in weekly or monthly parts, became both increasingly popular and the forum for the expression, discussion and shaping of ideals and ideas. The history of the period, then, was *not* always as 'emphatically the history of progress' as Macaulay asserted.

LANGUAGE NOTE

Reading Dickens

The opening of Charles Dickens's novel *Bleak House* consists of four paragraphs of which three do not contain a single main verb.

> LONDON. Michaelmas Terms lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in the mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very

> blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.
>
> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollution of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance of people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.
>
> Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the street, much as the sun may, from the spongey fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time – as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.
>
> The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

There are, of course, verbs in this opening to the novel. In the opening paragraph alone there are verbs such as: 'retired', 'waddling', 'splashed', 'jostling', 'slipping', 'sliding', and so on. The verbs all serve to create an atmosphere of constant action and movement in the big city. Yet there are no *main finite* verbs in the text until the fourth paragraph.

Main finite verbs provide an anchor for the action. It is clear when something took place and that the action was completed. In the second sentence the reader is left suspended, knowing that the action is ongoing, but awaiting a main verb to complete the meaning. A sentence such as the following provides that kind of 'anchor' for the action in the verb 'arrived', which is the finite verb in the sentence: 'Foot passengers jostling one another's umbrellas and losing their foothold at street corners arrived at the bank.'

The following phrases therefore serve to create a sense both of disorientation and dislocation. The activity of London is made to appear confused and directionless. The present participles ('jostling', 'wheezing', 'looming') in particular convey a feeling of continuous action which could almost be timeless.

> London.
> Implacable November weather.
> Smoke lowering down from chimney pots . . .
> Dogs, undistinguishable in the mire.

> Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas . . .
> Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners,
> wheezing by the firesides . . .
> Gas looming through the fog in divers places . . .

Given the timeless character which is imparted to these descriptions it is perhaps not surprising that Dickens can suggest that London has an almost prehistoric feel to it – 'and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill'.

In the final paragraph of this opening to *Bleak House* main finite verbs are restored. The main verb 'to be' is repeated: 'The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest . . .'. The presence of a main verb is particularly noticeable in the final sentence: 'And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.' This structure would be more normal and would follow the conventional word order for sentences in English if the subject ('The Lord High Chancellor') occurred first and was then followed by a main finite verb ('sits'). However, one of Dickens's purposes may be to delay the subject so that it has more impact. It also has a very particular impact as a result of being in the simple present tense ('sits') rather than the more usual simple past tense ('sat').

'Sits' suggests that the Lord High Chancellor always sits there and is a permanent landmark in this landscape. The simple present tense in English carries this sense of a permanent, general, unchanging truth.

In this final paragraph it is suggested that the legal system of the country is in a state of permanent confusion or creates states of confusion which cannot be changed. And both in these opening paragraphs and in the novel as a whole *fog* assumes symbolic importance, reinforcing a sense both of general confusion and of not being able to see clearly. The Lord High Chancellor is always 'at the very heart of the fog' and nothing will alter this position. For this reason perhaps choices of language and of the structure of the sentence position 'the Lord High Chancellor' and 'the heart of the fog' together.

VICTORIAN THOUGHT AND VICTORIAN NOVELS

Harrison Ainsworth was the biggest-selling historical novelist after Sir Walter Scott. By 1841, he was second only to Dickens in fame and income as a writer; and Dickens could not quite match him in producing novels for the market. Ainsworth's history brought together elements of the Gothic, the adventure story, and the detailed 'archaeological' sense which the mid-nineteenth century took as authenticity. In fact, his history is fanciful rather than factual; early pulp-fiction rather than well-researched history, transformed into fiction. His subjects are often figures who are partly historical and partly mythical: Dick Turpin (in *Rookwood*, 1834), Guy Fawkes (1841) and Jack Sheppard (1839) in the novels which bear their names are good examples. Later, Ainsworth used places with historical associations as his background: the Tower of London, Old St Paul's and Windsor Castle give their names to three of Ainsworth's novels of the 1840s. Later still, *The Lancashire Witches* (1848) took a well-known and much mythologised series of events as the basis for a popular novel, which led to many more with similar settings.

Harrison Ainsworth was an entertainer first, a historian much later. He cashes in on the early/mid-Victorian taste for historical fantasy, making little use of the kind of serious social observation of the past, in relation to the present, which characterises the best of Scott's works. The nearest twentieth-century equivalent is the Hollywood historical epic: research is taken over by the glamour of the hero and the pace of the action. This can be seen as escapist use of history, rather than well-researched authenticity. Ainsworth writes swashbuckling page-turners with few pretensions to offering more than that. For today's readers there is the added attraction of the 'Victorian hero' bestseller ethos, anticipating H. Rider Haggard and Anthony Hope (see page 285). Instead of far-off colonies, or Ruritania, Ainsworth's romanticisation of history is always set solidly in English history and myth, and with a lovable rogue at its heart rather than a stiff-upper-lipped gentleman hero.

Ainsworth and Edward Bulwer Lytton tapped into the Victorian interest in crime, and criminal fictional subjects, which was also to be a major part of Dickens's writing, and would later develop into a distinct genre. Lytton's *Eugene Aram* (1832) uses the name of a real criminal to give us one of the earliest of the century's 'Newgate' novels, carrying on the tradition of such novels as *Moll Flanders* more than one hundred years before. Lytton's *Lucretia* (1846) used the real-life case of the murderer Thomas Wainewright, a well-known artist and associate of literary figures, in one of the first novels which tries to examine the psychology of the criminal mind.

Charles Reade became known as a 'reforming' novelist for his novels about prison life and the treatment of criminals. By the mid-1850s he and Bulwer Lytton were as popular as Dickens, and were considered among the major writers of the age. Reade's successful novels included *Christie Johnson* (1853) and *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* (1856). Reade was also one of the most successful theatre managers and playwrights of his time, and many of his works appeared as plays as well as novels. His best-known novel was *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861). In 1866 *Griffith Gaunt* caused considerable controversy for its outspoken treatment of sexual themes. In this, Reade was one of the forerunners of the gradually more and more explicit handling of taboo subjects through the rest of the century. Reade was an innovator, one of the first 'realists' in Victorian fiction, and many saw him as the natural successor of Dickens, but today he is rather unjustly neglected.

The crusading fervour of many novelists of the nineteenth century reflects the changing role of the writer in society. As in the eighteenth century, creative writers came under the influence of philosophers of a wide spectrum of different opinions. Dickens, for example, was greatly affected by the writings of Thomas Carlyle. Translator of the German national poet Goethe, and historian of the French Revolution, in the 1840s Carlyle became occupied with 'the Condition-of-England question', anticipating in many of his ideas the social novels of Gaskell, Dickens, and others. His views on strong leadership (in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 1841) have been criticised for their apparent support of dictatorship, but they are more relevant to the coming manifestation of the anti-hero in late Victorian and more modern writing. The concept of the hero, the great man as model of behaviour, was beginning to lose its appeal; Carlyle, in affirming the importance of 'Great Men' at a moment of historical and ideological crisis, highlights a crucial shift in awareness. He stressed the need for heroic behaviour in an increasingly unheroic age. *Past and Present*, written in two months in 1843, expresses Carlyle's anger (and compassion) at the statistics which announced that there were 1,429,089 'paupers' in England and Wales. Carlyle's essay praises work, and berates the system which deprives so many of work. He questions liberty, and gives us a continuing sense of the social anger found in Shelley:

> The liberty especially which has to purchase itself by social isolation, and each man standing separate from the other, having 'no business with him' but a cash-account: this is such a liberty as the Earth seldom saw; – as the Earth will not long put up with, recommend it how you may. This liberty turns out, before it have long continued in action, with all to die by want of food; for the Idle Thousands and Units, alas, a still more fatal liberty to live in want of work; to have no earnest duty to do in this God's-World any more. What becomes of a man in such predicament?

The novelist George Eliot described Carlyle's influence in glowing terms: 'there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings'. Hers was one of the most 'superior or active' minds of the age and, like Carlyle, was considerably influenced by German thought – especially by David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, which she translated in 1846, and Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, which she translated in 1854. These works fuelled George Eliot's conviction that religious belief is an imaginative necessity and a projection of concern for mankind; this is a humanist tendency which goes beyond any single doctrine, and allows Eliot to welcome Darwin's scientific theses without the great crisis of belief which affected many of her contemporaries. Apart from Carlyle, John Stuart Mill was probably the most influential of Victorian philosophers; his writings cover such topics as utilitarianism, liberty, logic, and political economy. They reflect the intellectual concerns of the day, rather than make a wholly original contribution to the history of thought.

In the nineteenth century, the novels of Sir Walter Scott gave a totally fresh view of the mixed history which united the once-divided Scotland, and later the once-divided United Kingdom. The leading non-fictional historian of the age was Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose *Essays Critical and Historical* (1834) reached a wide audience. Compared to Edward Gibbon (see pages 146–7), however, Macaulay is less balanced, more prejudiced and dogmatic. His *History of England*, published in four volumes between 1849 and 1855, can now be seen to reflect Victorian attitudes and complacency, although his reconstructions of historical events, under Scott's influence, are still effective.

Probably the most famous and influential work of its kind, written in England, was *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx, published in 1867. *Das Kapital*, in effect a theory of political economy, is a negative critique of the capitalist system which concentrates wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer people, at the expense of the labouring class. Marx, with Friedrich Engels, had made a close study of Britain's industrial system and its effects. Engels's study *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), which was researched in Manchester, praises Carlyle's awareness of workers' conditions, and anticipates the kind of situation which Elizabeth Gaskell was to describe, three years later, in *Mary Barton*.

Marx has been blamed for many things which *Das Kapital* does not suggest. But the abolition of private property, the advocacy of class war, and the slogan 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' are vital to his doctrines, and brought to the age a new awareness of social class, means of production, and working-class exploitation. His ideas were to become more important as the century progressed.

Marxism is a social and materialist philosophy contrasting with more religious and spiritual views of the world. After the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, there was a movement towards the Catholic church on the part of some members of the Anglican faith. The Oxford Movement, as it was known, was a small but significant eddy in the tide of Victorian faith. The theme, however, remains of interest in the novels of Barbara Pym (see page 460); but now the subject is treated as delicate social comedy, rather than as the serious issue it was in the 1840s. John Henry Newman – Cardinal Newman, as he became in 1879 – was the leading figure of the Oxford Movement, the author of an important autobiography, *Apologia* *pro Vita Sua* (1864), of novels including *Loss and Gain* (1848) which portray the intellectual and religious life of Oxford at the time, and of the visionary poem *The Dream of Gerontius* (1865). The fact of religious debate is significant, echoing some of the controversies of the Elizabethan age, between high church and low church. In the nineteenth century, the move towards faith, especially towards the Catholic church, is a vital contrast with the move away from faith of many of the writers and thinkers of the time.

In the mid-nineteenth century there was a vogue for handbooks on self-improvement, and these became among the bestselling books of their time. They were the first 'how to' books. The best known of these was *Self-Help* by the Scotsman Samuel Smiles, first published in 1859, and translated into many languages. For many, this book and other Smiles' titles such as *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), and *Duty* (1880) represent the negative aspects of the Victorian bourgeois ethos. Smiles was also the biographer of such nineteenth-century worthies as railway pioneer George Stephenson and pottery owner Josiah Wedgwood.

Charles Kingsley was highly regarded as a novelist and critic in his own day, but is now remembered more for his controversial attacks on Newman and some interesting reforming novels of social concern such as *Alton Locke* (1850). His *Westward Ho!* (1855) is memorable as a patriotic statement re-evoking the Elizabethan age, just at the time when the Crimean War was denting national pride.

The novels of Benjamin Disraeli tend to be overshadowed by his political career: he became Tory prime minister for a few months in 1868, and then held the office from 1874 to 1880. But, he declared, 'my works are my life', and his many portrayals of high society and politicians are ironic and well-observed, if often rather rhetorical in manner. Disraeli is best known for the trilogy *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847). These are perhaps the first truly political novels in English; Disraeli wanted to influence public opinion through them. *Sybil* echoes Carlyle's *Past and Present* in its concern with the plight of the poor, one of the two nations which Disraeli's novel identified. His later novel *Lothair* (1870) is quite different. A huge success when first published, it in some ways foreshadows Wilde for its irony and wit. Lothair searches for Christian truth, while all sorts of struggling patriots (mainly Italian) try to control and influence him, in order to have access to his wealth. In its treatment of such themes as money, religion, aristocracy, and patriotism, *Lothair* brings together the verve and wit of Byron and the end-of-the-century cynical realism of Oscar Wilde.

William Makepeace Thackeray can be seen to follow Dickens's example in beginning his career in light, sketch-type journalism, and, like Dickens's pen-name Boz, Thackeray's 'Michael Angelo Titmarsh' became a well-known voice. But the lightness of the humour of his early works begins to darken in the late 1840s and early 1850s. *Vanity Fair* (1847–48) gives an unusual perspective on the Napoleonic wars, focusing a satirical eye on high society. The heroine, Becky Sharp, is a penniless orphan, and is contrasted throughout the novel with rich, spoiled Amelia Sedley. The background of the war, with Waterloo a climax of death in the private world of the heroines at the moment of greatest national triumph, underscores the hollowness behind the achievement. Thackeray anticipates Dickens's later concern with money and society: Becky can impress society on 'nothing a year' with the facade of respectability which is soon revealed to have no substance.

Pendennis (1848–50) and *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852) – the first, like *David Copperfield*, a story of the growth of the hero from childhood to adulthood, the second a historical novel – confirm the darker side of Thackeray's outlook in the creation of characters whose lives are 'a series of defeats' to be overcome rather than a simple progress to prosperity. Thackeray, who was born in Calcutta (the first major novelist to be born in the colonies), continued the Henry Esmond story in *The Virginians* (1857–59), one of many English novels of the age to be set in America, which is viewed with a critical eye. Dickens's own reactions to America in *American Notes* (1842), and then in the novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–44), had offended his American readership considerably. Thackeray's melancholy tone, and the characters' fixations with money, inheritance and social status, confirm that, since Scott, the historical novel had made considerable progress as a vehicle for social observation and comment. Dickens's portraits of Victorian society are broader than Thackeray's, and George Eliot explores psychological and moral issues in greater depth; but Thackeray contributed substantially to the growth of the nineteenth-century novel.

The Newcomes (1853–55) even experiments with a kind of 'alternative ending', anticipating John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) by over a century. Thackeray is the omniscient author *par excellence*: He sees himself as a kind of puppet master, in control of his characters and their destinies, as we see at the end of *Vanity Fair*:

> Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied? – Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.

This self-conscious authorial role recalls Henry Fielding, but later Victorian novelists tend to point their moral in a more compassionate rather than manipulative way; the author's point of view becomes more sympathetic, often almost participatory.

The growth of the provincial novel in both Ireland and Scotland is an important development in the early nineteenth century. Two novels by Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys* (1827), are significant 'national tales' which brought their author such renown that she was the first woman to be granted an annual pension for her services to the world of letters. The works of Maria Edgeworth (see pages 230ff) and Lady Morgan open up areas of non-cosmopolitan experience, but, equally significantly, begin to give a clear identity to the province of Ireland. This would grow and develop throughout the century, eventually leading to political separation in the twentieth century. Many writers are now described as Anglo-Irish, and the distinction between Irish and Anglo-Irish will assume greater importance in all later discussions of writing in and about Ireland.

The English novelist Anthony Trollope, for example, set his first two novels in Ireland: *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847) and *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (1848) remain important portrayals of Ireland, published at a time when it was much talked about because of the Great Famine. Trollope was to return twice more to the subject of Ireland, in *Castle Richmond* (1860) and the unfinished *The Landleaguers* (1882). Two out of four of his titles echo Edgeworth and Morgan's earlier Irish novels. Trollope knew their work well, and was also considerably indebted to the Irish writer William Carleton's novel of the Famine, *The Black Prophet* (1846–47). Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830–35) and *Tales of Ireland* (1834) are seminal in their impact on all subsequent writing about the province, initiating both a concern with local character and life, as well as effectively establishing the new tradition of tales and short stories, which were to become a major feature of Irish writing.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the novels of Charles Lever enjoyed great popularity for their racy, anecdotal style. *The Martins of Cro'Martin* (1847) was published in the same year as Trollope's first novel, also set in Ireland, and was a considerably more successful portrayal of family life in the West of Ireland. *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872) is Lever's most significant novel, one of the major contributions to Irish literature between Edgeworth and Joyce. It handles the theme of the misrule of Ireland by the English, and instead of the rollicking homely warmth of much Irish writing, including much of Lever's own, it presents a wide-ranging canvas illustrating chaos and despair, decay and discontent. It is close to late Dickens or George Eliot in its serious analysis of the Irish problems of the period.

The novels of Anthony Trollope offer considerable insight into the 'progress' of society in Victorian England. He was the most industrious of writers, the most prolific since Scott, writing every day while at the same time maintaining a career and travelling all over the country and abroad as a Post Office civil servant. His *Autobiography* (1875–76, published posthumously in 1883) shows a man of immense self-discipline and energy; he is even credited with the invention of the pillar-box. His novels have been seen as the epitome of conservatism, but the undercurrents flowing through them reflect the changing times in which he lived. His insistence that 'on the last day of each month recorded, every person in [the] novel should be a month older than on the first' shows a concern with time and its effects that is vital in the development of the novel.

Trollope wrote two great series of interconnected novels: the Barsetshire novels (1855–67), set in a fully realised West Country area, and the Palliser novels (1864–80), which are the most politically contextualised novels of the nineteenth century.

The fictional county of Barsetshire gives Trollope the opportunity to expand upon Jane Austen's desire for the novel to explore 'three or four families in a Country Village'. The series examines the religious tendencies of the time in a local situation, and the social behaviour of a wide cast of characters is observed: ambition, career, belief and personality are portrayed through the clashes and conflicts that occupy them.

The Palliser novels move on to the national political stage, with a similarly careful observation of social influences on public life. Women's roles are particularly important in this series – 'love and intrigue' being a main feature of the plots. Trollope's novels trace the rise and fall of Victorian characters, shading in their ideals and aspirations with a gentle irony, rather than with the social concern of Dickens or Gaskell, the moral weight of George Eliot, or the sharpness and later melancholy of Thackeray.

Trollope's plots contain all the manifold contrivances and complications which have come to be seen as typical of the Victorian novel: inheritances, intrigues, scheming and cheating, property and propriety. They are novels of behaviour rather than of manners; novels which, quietly and undramatically, reveal as much about the second half of the nineteenth century as any of the more acclaimed works of 'greater' writers. By the time of *Orley Farm* (1862) – his most complex inheritance plot – Trollope was already a master of how situations evolve and develop, and the processes behind action. It is this which gives him his status as a major writer. *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870) anticipates some of the themes of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* some twenty years later in its story of Carry Brattle, a 'fallen woman'; it also has a murder mystery, with Carry's brother Sam falsely accused, and an inheritance sub-plot. By the time of *The Way We Live Now* (1875), his writing could be seen not just as a highly readable social observation of character and intrigue, but also as a fully worked out criticism of capitalist ethics and 'the commercial profligacy of the age'. The financier Augustus Melmotte, the leading character in this novel, is one of the best examples of Victorian hypocrisy; behind the hugely wealthy facade is a sordid and corrupt reality that recalls Mr Merdle in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and Bulstrode in Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

> He had not far to go, round through Berkeley Square into Bruton Street, but he stood for a few moments looking up at the bright stars. If he could be there, in one of those unknown distant worlds, with all his present intellect and none of his present burdens, he would, he thought, do better than he had done here on earth. If he could even now put himself down nameless, fameless, and without possessions in some distant corner of the world, he could, he thought, do better. But he was Augustus Melmotte, and he must bear his burdens, whatever they were, to the end. He could reach no place so distant but that he would be known and traced.

Trollope is in a long line of Victorian writers who continually explore and question what is meant by historical 'progress' in the context of the nineteenth century.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, George Meredith was considered the 'grand old man' of English literature. He was the model, early in his career, for the famous painting of the death of the young poet Chatterton, by Henry Wallis, in 1851. From poor beginnings, he gradually established an immense reputation, although few of his novels enjoyed great popularity in his lifetime. Only *Diana of the Crossways* was a considerable bestseller when it was published in 1885. This novel shows many of Meredith's qualities – an unusual capacity for portraying female characters and a good ear for the presentation of dialogue. His major novels, from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), which caused a scandal when first published, to *The Egoist*, twenty years later, and the political novel *Beauchamp's Career* (1876), are all concerned with the psychology of misunderstanding. Characters in Meredith's novels are not understood, or do not understand themselves, with personal, social, and even political consequences. They are therefore novels of discovery and self-discovery, and as such are often considered to be very Modern in outlook, especially as regards the role of women. But Meredith's style tended to become precious and overwritten in his later works, and his high reputation declined after his death.

Meredith's *Modern Love*, published in 1862, is a remarkable series of fifty sixteen-line 'sonnets' about the decline of a marriage, reflecting his own disillusionment after his wife, the daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, left him for the painter Wallis. Often considered to be one of the first psychological love poems, *Modern Love* has kept Meredith's fame as a poet alive: like his younger contemporary, Thomas Hardy, Meredith always considered himself a poet rather than a novelist. But it is his novels, his influential essay *The Idea of Comedy* (1897; originally a lecture in 1877), and his role as a 'grand old man' of letters which give him his place in literary history.

The Brontës and Eliot

A Woman is a foreign land
(Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*)

Women writers and female characters had been part of novel-writing since the time of Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley, and it is a commonplace that women were the main readers of the genre in the eighteenth century. After Sir Walter Scott made the novel popular worldwide, it was, for two decades, seen largely as a man's genre. Women writers were expected to write the kinds of novel which George Eliot was to condemn in an essay as *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists* – the sub-genres of romance, fantasy and sensation. But several of the major figures of the Victorian novel are women; and the heroines they created began to throw off the victim's role that male authors had created, from Moll Flanders, Pamela, and Clarissa onwards. Jane Eyre's 'Reader, I married him' close to the end of Charlotte Brontë's novel (1847) that bears the character's name, shows the reversal of roles and the decision-making capacities that the new generation of socially aware women could demonstrate.

On the whole, Dickens's women are not well portrayed; but from Trollope to Thomas Hardy and Henry James, a desire to present fully rounded and complex female characters can be traced. George Eliot (née Mary Ann Evans) took a male name partly in order to rise above the 'silly novels' syndrome, but such writers as Elizabeth Gaskell and the Brontë sisters had already made a notable contribution to the flourishing of female writing in mid-century.

The Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, not only contributed much to the growth of the novel, but also to the position of women at this time. They did much to alter the way in which women were viewed, demonstrating new social, psychological and emotional possibilities for women. Like George Eliot, however, they adopted pseudonyms (Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell) in order not to draw attention to the fact that they were women. Charlotte and Emily Brontë are in many ways both opposites to Jane Austen. They are distinctly romantic in temperament, exploring in their novels extremes of passion and violence. Although there are some features of Romanticism in Jane Austen's novels, her work is essentially Augustan in spirit. She prefers exploration of the individual within clear boundaries of decorum and restraint.

Charlotte Brontë's first novel *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 to considerable critical acclaim. Like Dickens's *David Copperfield* it is a *Bildungsroman* (a novel of growing up). Jane Eyre, the character whose name forms the title of the novel, begins life as an orphan, undergoes many difficulties working as a governess, and finally marries the man she loves, Rochester, who is her social superior and a man of wealth. On one level, the novel is a rags-to-riches story. On another level, it is a novel of love, mystery and passion which poses profound moral and social questions. The good characters win, but only after they have suffered and been forced to examine their own conscience and to explore their moral selves. The plot is characterised by melodramatic incidents, but in each phase Jane grows in maturity and understanding. She becomes increasingly independent and self-reliant in her judgements. Like the heroine in *Villette* (1853), she is not strikingly beautiful but plain, and, on the surface at least, reticent. However, she is passionate and unafraid of her strong feelings. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë sends out a signal that ordinary women can experience deep love and begin to take responsibility for their own lives.

Emily Brontë's only novel *Wuthering Heights* was also published in 1847. It is a novel which contains a degree of emotional force and sophisticated narrative structure not seen previously in the history of the English novel. Many of the early reviewers of the novel thought that it must have been written by a man of a particularly uncontrolled temper. *Wuthering Heights* is a cyclical novel in structure. It moves in a tragic circle from relative peace and harmony to violence, destruction and intense suffering, and finally back into peace and harmony again. It is a work of extreme contrasts set in the wild moorland of Yorkshire, which is appropriate to the wild passions it describes between the two main characters, Cathy and Heathcliff. Here is an episode from the novel in which one of the narrators, Lockwood, 'dreams' of Cathy. She is beating at his window in Wuthering Heights, a house situated at the top of a desolate and isolated hill, literally at the edge of the normal world:

> Terror made me cruel, and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed clothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear.

In the novel the incident is described as if it were a dream, but there is a strong emotional and psychological reality to it. It is poised between dream and reality, lucidly capturing the extreme feelings of Cathy. Another incident, narrated in a matter-of-fact way by a boy who was himself only told about it by someone else, describes how the ghosts of Heathcliff and Cathy walk across the moors after their deaths. Heathcliff himself is a man of dark and brooding passions, whose love for Cathy has no boundaries. At times, their love for each other is violent and destructive; at others, it appears to be a completely natural phenomenon. Cathy says: 'My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary.' The tragic outcome to the novel is inevitable, but the depths of their mutual feeling endure. *Wuthering Heights*, a novel of unique imaginative power, was Emily Brontë's only novel, for she died the year after it was published at the age of 30.

The third sister, Anne, wrote *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), which has been overshadowed by Charlotte and Emily's more spectacular successes. It is, however, an important novel in its own right. In the novel Anne Brontë depicts a bitterly unhappy marriage followed by the departure of the wife, Helen Huntingdon, and her search for new freedom. One critic wrote that the 'slamming of Helen's bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England'.

The Brontë sisters opened up new possibilities for the form of the English novel; at the same time they provided a basis for which psychological exploration became a key component in the development of the genre of the novel. They also offered new possibilities for the portrayal of women in fiction. Women became even more of a 'foreign land', but increasingly familiar and central as subjects for fiction.

In the works of George Eliot, the English novel reached new depths of social and philosophical concern, and moral commitment. For some twentieth-century critics, Virginia Woolf and F.R. Leavis among them, her writings are seen to have brought the novel to new heights of maturity. She shares with the greatest European writers of her century – Balzac, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy – a concern for her characters' vulnerability and weakness in the face of 'progress' and the moral imperatives of duty and humanity.

The scope of Eliot's writing is considerable. From the early stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857–58), published anonymously but recognised by Dickens as certainly by a female hand, to the massive *Middlemarch* (1871–72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), she touches on many of the major issues of her day. Such issues have not lost their pertinence over a century later: how a wife copes with a drunken husband (*Janet's Repentance* in

Scenes of Clerical Life); what happens when an unmarried girl is accused of murdering her infant child (*Adam Bede*, 1859); how an orphan child brings humanity to a miserly social outcast (*Silas Marner*, 1861); and how a sister and brother achieve reconciliation in the moment of tragedy after bankruptcy, moral compromise, and ostracism have separated them (*The Mill on the Floss*, 1860). *Janet's Repentance* is particularly vivid in its evocation of the woman's plight:

> Poor Janet! how heavily the months rolled on for her, laden with fresh sorrows as the summer passed into autumn, the autumn into winter, and the winter into spring again. Every feverish morning, with its blank listlessness and despair, seemed more hateful than the last; every coming night more impossible to brave without arming herself in leaden stupor. The morning light brought no gladness to her: it seemed only to throw its glare on what had happened in the dim candle-light – on the cruel man seated immovable in drunken obstinacy by the dead fire and dying lights in the dining-room, rating her in harsh tones, reiterating old reproaches – or on a hideous blank of something unremembered, something that must have made that dark bruise on her shoulder, which ached as she dressed herself. Do you wonder how it was that things had come to this pass – what offence Janet had committed in the early years of marriage to rouse the brutal hatred of this man?

These are the themes of Eliot's early novels, and show her concern for the outsider in society. Her search for illustration illuminated the moral areas of experience which more traditional Victorian thought would have tried to handle in absolute terms – black and white, wrong and right. The moral simplicity of early Victorian thinking and writing, influenced (as indeed Eliot was) by Scott's return to a mediaeval ethos, had to change with the times, and encompass a much wider range of problems and experience.

George Eliot's novels are largely set in the realistically presented location of the Midlands area of her childhood – Warwickshire – and her characters tend to be ordinary, unheroic people caught up in circumstances which are greater than any individual. The necessity of heroic behaviour in an unheroic age (advocated by Carlyle) reaches its highest expression in *Middlemarch*, which Virginia Woolf described as 'one of the few English novels written for adult people'. Here the 'heroine', Dorothea Brooke, is seen very much not to be a heroine.

> She was open, ardent and not in the least self-admiring: indeed it was pretty to see how her imagination adorned her sister Celia with attractions

> altogether superior to her own. . . . Dorothea, with all the eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas about marriage. . . . The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could even teach you Hebrew, if you wished it.

In the final sentence, Dorothea's own voice emerges through the standard third-person narrative perspective. It enables Dorothea's own thoughts and feelings to be heard more clearly, but it also allows George Eliot to distance herself from them. Dorothea appears in the light of her own point of view. George Eliot can present her ironically and critically. It is an approach which many novelists were subsequently to adopt. SEE ALSO KEY TEXTS P.582.

Dorothea Brooke is both complementary to and a contrast with Romola in the novel of the same name (1863), set in the 1490s in Florence, at the peak of the Renaissance; *Romola* is George Eliot's most historically researched novel. Both Dorothea and Romola have to seek and find their calling by experiencing and rejecting various ways of life: religion, good works, love and marriage, betrayal and disappointment. As always, Eliot makes use of the standard Victorian plot devices – inheritances, secrets hidden and revealed, and natural disasters. But it is in *Middlemarch* that she finds the imagery perfectly to match her theme: the 'Dead Hand' of the past on the living pulse of the city. Middlemarch is a town in the Midlands in 1832, at the time of the First Reform Act. Readers in the 1870s could see how much or how little progress had been made since then: in politics, in medicine, in transport (the clash between horse-drawn transport and the railways is particularly remarkable), in social concern for the poor, in dedication to humanity. Corruption and stasis are tempered by duty and hope. The downfall of the 'villain' of the piece, the banker Mr Bulstrode, is a vividly dramatic moment of public denunciation and personal self-recognition.

George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, moves on to grander themes of dedication in the professional, artistic and nationalistic senses, following Gwendolen Harleth's career through disillusionment to self-sacrifice. The fight for a Jewish nation, and a wider worldview than English provincial life, are keynotes of this work; a novel which, like much of George Eliot's work, was to have a considerable influence on future generations of writers, most notable among them Henry James.

'Lady' novelists

After the flourishing of women's writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century brought great popularity to many female authors. Equality was still some way off, as is shown by Mary Ann Evans's choice of pen-name, George Eliot, when she began to write fiction. As already mentioned, it was George Eliot, in an essay called *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists*, who attacked the lightweight nature of the writing by many of her contemporaries.

However, there were many whose work was very distinguished. F. (Frances) Trollope is remembered as the mother of Anthony Trollope, but in her own day she was the author of one of the first 'visit America' books, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). She followed this with books on Austria and Italy and a long series of 'silver fork' novels of high society, which became enormously popular in the 1840s.

Mrs Craik (Dinah Maria Mulock) is remembered best for *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856). Set near Tewkesbury, in the west of England, it is the classic tale of the poor orphan boy who reaches the level of 'gentleman' by his own efforts, and marries the heroine, Ursula March, for love. It is the last flush of mid-Victorian realism, exactly between Dickens's *David Copperfield* and the more disillusioned *Great Expectations*. Mrs Craik's huge output was frequently in the area of children's literature.

Many of the women writers of the Victorian age were enormously prolific. Mrs Margaret Oliphant, for example, wrote too many novels for her reputation's good: over one hundred. Her series *Chronicles of Carlingford* (1863–76) is witty and observant, similar in some ways to Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire novels. Carlingford is a small town near London, and Mrs Oliphant handles many of the topical themes of class, religion, and progress with immense verve. If the series were to be dramatised on television, as many Victorian novels have been, Mrs Oliphant might reach an enormous new audience. Her series *Stories of the Seen and Unseen* (from 1880) exploits the late Victorian fascination with death and the soul.

Mrs Oliphant proclaimed that she was shocked by the works of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, whose sensational *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) was one of the lasting successes of the time. It introduced 'the fair-haired demon of modern fiction', the scandalous woman, whose role would become more and more serious and socially significant towards the end of the century – in works by Thomas Hardy, George Moore, and Oscar Wilde. *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* (1863) are the two best-known novels of over seventy works by Miss Braddon.

East Lynne (1861), the first novel by Mrs Henry Wood (born Ellen Price), was similarly sensational and similarly successful. It was the first of her many mysteries in middle-class settings, which are forerunners of the crime genre which became so successful in the twentieth century. Mrs Henry Wood's novels are distinguished not only for their careful plotting and detailed settings, but there is usually also a degree of social awareness:

strikes and unemployment feature often. This is not escapist fiction, but entertainment with something of a conscience.

Mrs Eliza Lynn Linton was something of a reactionary, attacking feminism and concepts of 'the New Woman'. Her collected journalism, *The Girl of the Period* (1883), gives a memorable counterblast to the burgeoning ideas of female liberation. Of her many novels, historical and contemporary, *Rebel of the Family* (1880) is probably the best remembered, although the earlier *Joshua Davidson* (1872) is a remarkably socialist novel in its sympathies.

Mrs Humphry (Mary Augusta) Ward was from the same family as Matthew Arnold, and her novels reflect the intellectual and religious ambience of Oxford and the Oxford Movement (see page 255). *Robert Elsmere* (1888) was her most famous work; *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898) one of the most distinctive. Her works are quite different from those of Mrs Oliphant and Miss Braddon: they are full of high moral purpose, an earnestness which has gone out of fashion more rapidly than wit and sensation. Mrs Humphry Ward was an early feminist, and follows George Eliot as one of the most distinguished of serious women writers of the late Victorian period.

Late Victorian novels

> *The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass*
>
> (Oscar Wilde, Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

As the novel expanded in range and scope in the nineteenth century, so the range of characters and localities grew. Novelists in the eighteenth century like Smollett and Sterne had brought in a wide range of dialects and discourses; for example, naval language in Smollett. With Maria Edgeworth and Scott, Irish and Scottish voices began to be heard. In poetry, Burns and Fergusson had revitalised Scots, and in the nineteenth century the Dorsetshire dialect writings of William Barnes were to be a considerable inspiration to Thomas Hardy in the characterisation and settings of his Wessex novels.

Dickens's cockney characters, such as Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers* and Sarah Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, are classics of their kind, but Dickens's choice of dialect is more normally used for comic effect than for social criticism. In the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, as later with Hardy, dialect often reflects conflicts between social classes; linguistic collisions come to symbolise social issues. George Eliot tries to bring different speech communities into greater social harmony in her works, making linguistic integration an emblem of a new social order.

Dialects have always been part of English literature. They are a central feature of English as a polyglot language. In literature, they have also been used to underline the values of community and of individual identity, especially as set against the standardising centrist tendencies of London and the South East. From Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* through Henryson's fifteenth-century Scottish fables, of which *The Town Mouse and the Uplandis Mouse* is a good example, through Shakespeare to the Victorians and beyond, dialect shows the difference between the city and the country, between aristocrat and peasant, and often between rich and poor. The Victorian novel is rich in linguistic variation as the genre explores differences in social class and expands the boundaries of nationhood and social identity. Colonial expansion will bring a very much wider range of voices, dialects, and Englishes into modern writing.

The industrial novel, of which Dickens's *Hard Times* is the best-known example, originated as early as 1832 with *A Manchester Strike* by Harriet Martineau – one of the most successful female polemicists of all time, a fiercely independent reformer and social observer. She wrote few novels, of which her own favourite was *Deerbrook* (1839), but maintained an output of fiery and significant journalism for another forty years. Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby* (1844) and *Sybil* (1845) also explore industrial worlds and contexts.

The sub-genre can be seen to acquire force and commitment in the works of (Mrs) Elizabeth Gaskell. Mrs Gaskell took inspiration from Carlyle and Engels and their observations on working-class life for *Mary Barton* (1848). It is based in Manchester and guides largely ignorant readers into a world of conflict between factory owners and workers at a time when the Chartist movement was reaching its climax. Dickens recognised her worth, and published much of her writing in his magazines *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. It is significant, however, that Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853), a village story not far removed from Jane Austen, was for many years her best-remembered work. But her social concern, her realistic use of character, setting, and speech, and her pleas for humanity and reconciliation have been restored in recent years to a prominent place. Her contribution to the Victorian novel is now recognised as one of considerable social commitment and artistic achievement.

North and South (1855), with its contrast between the rural South and the industrial North, is a valuable companion piece to the bleaker *Hard Times*, published in the previous year. George Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) is perhaps the most complex of all the 'industrial' novels, bringing together the inheritance plot, social change, and political ideals in an optimistic but deeply serious tragicomic creation. The heroine of *North and South*, Margaret Hale, acts as a sensitive and intelligent counterpoint to both the snobbery and lack of direction of the southern gentry and the energy and lack of gentility of the manufacturing North. Margaret is shocked by a world in which it seems 'as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing' but she comes better to understand the world of the north by appreciating the commitment of the new manufacturing classes and by learning not to sentimentalise the working classes, learning instead to respect their independence and self-pride, maintained amid unspeakable conditions of living and working. As a second piece of industrial fiction *North and South* explores the possibilities for compromise between opposing worlds and world views, urban and rural as well as northern and southern, but, though highlighting social problems, does not directly suggest solutions.

Later in the century, social awareness and realism in the novel go hand in hand. As Oscar Wilde was to put it in his Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), 'The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.' Like Shakespeare's half-man half-beast Caliban in *The Tempest*, the Victorians did not necessarily want to see reality in the novels they read. Like Dickens's character, Mr Podsnap, they wanted to put it behind them, for it offended them.

The ever-stronger insistence on the more distasteful side of society in the later novels of Dickens was, in part, an attempt to bring his readers to a recognition that unpleasantness cannot be avoided. Moral questions – such as illegitimacy and cohabitation – are clearly raised in both the life and works of George Eliot. But the wider public was still easily shocked, and the realistic novels of the 1880s and 1890s aroused storms of protest and reaction.

Another novelist critical of the basis of Victorian society was Samuel Butler. His *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) marks a shift in attitude. Butler openly satirises major Victorian idols such as family life and Victorian fathers as the moral centre of society. His novel *Erewhon* (1872) (erewhon is almost 'nowhere' backwards) presents a utopian society which is used to satirise Victorian concepts of duty and religion. Like William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890–91) and later Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), the form of a utopian novel, dating back to Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), is used with a satirical aim.

George Gissing's novels, from *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *The Unclassed* (1884) to *The Nether World* (1889) and *New Grub Street* (1891), show a concern and sympathy for the deprived which is not far removed from Dickens. Gissing was a 'naturalist' writer in that he described everyday life in great detail.

> With the first breath of winter there passes a voice half-menacing, through all the barren ways and phantom-haunted refuges of the nether world. Too quickly has vanished the brief season when the sky is clement, when a little food suffices, and the chances of earning that little are more numerous than at other times; this wind that gives utterance to its familiar warning is the vaunt-courier of cold and hunger and solicitude that knows not sleep. Will the winter be a hard one? It is the question that concerns the world before all others, that occupies alike the patient workfolk who have yet their home unbroken, the strugglers foredoomed to loss of such scant needments as the summer gifted them withal, the hopeless and the self-abandoned and the lurking creatures of prey. To all of them the first chill breath from a lowering sky has its voice of admonition; they set their faces; they sigh, or whisper a prayer, or fling out a curse, each according to his nature.
>
> (*The Nether World*)

Gissing's naturalism was partly based on the writings of the French novelist Emile Zola (1840–1902). In places, however, he shows a greater degree of sentiment and social concern.

George Moore was associated with various kinds of writing during his long career. After a period as an art student in Paris in the 1870s and early 1880s, he wrote *A Modern Love* (1883), a novel set in Bohemian artistic society. This was banned by the circulating libraries, and inspired Moore to fight censorship for the rest of his career. He wrote several plays, including *Martin Luther* (1879), one of the few literary works in English to feature Luther as a tragic hero. The realistic novel *Esther Waters* made his name in 1894 as a scandalous novelist in the new realistic mode of Gissing and the French novelist Emile Zola. It is similar in some ways to Thomas Hardy's treatment of the woman as victim in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, published three years earlier. Esther is a servant girl from a religious background, who is seduced and deserted by another servant. (In the three other major novels on this theme, the seducer is of a higher class than the girl: Arthur Donnithorne is the squire who seduces Hetty Sorrel in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), and Alec D'Urberville is Tess's social superior in Hardy's novel of 1891. Ruth Hilton, in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), is seduced and abandoned by Henry Bellingham, who is a wealthy young man of a higher class.) The realism of *Esther Waters* lies in its depiction of poverty, and in its settings, which include the world of the racing establishment, a lying-in hospital and the workhouse. It takes the line of 'seduction novels' on to a new level of social realism, and although its ending is less tragic than some, it caused considerable scandal at a time when many novels were banned if they offended the tastes of the great circulating libraries, from which a large number of readers borrowed novels.

Moore's earlier novel *Mike Fletcher* (1889) is of particular interest as the only real decadent novel of the time, featuring a sensitive artistic hero whose sufferings and sensibility dominate the whole tale: the modern novel as a chronicle of artistic sensibility is importantly anticipated in this neglected work, which can find a comparison only in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–91) as a novel of an aesthetic life lived for its own sake. The discussion here anticipates Wilde's novel quite strikingly.

> 'You must consider the influence of impure literature upon young people,' said John.
>
> 'No, no; the influence of a book is nothing; it is life that influences and corrupts. I sent my story of a drunken woman to Randall, and the next time I heard from him he wrote to say he had married his mistress, and he knew she was a drunkard.'
>
> 'It is easy to prove that bad books don't do any harm; if they did, by the same rule good books would do good, and the world would have been converted long ago,' said Frank.

In his later work, Moore's Irish background comes more to the fore, and he is a major figure in the development of the short story in Ireland – *The Untilled Field* (1903) being a significant collection. His later novels, such as *The Brook Kerith* (1916), explore religious themes. Moore lived to become one of the grand old men of English letters, and at the same time worked with Yeats on plans for the Irish National Theatre. His reputation has declined since his death, but several of his works are being rediscovered and re-evaluated.

The 'proletarian' novel, describing, in realistic detail, working lives and conditions, had, in fact, been in existence since the 1830s and 1840s, in the form of broadsheets and cheap (penny) periodicals which carried all kinds of fiction, and began to include somewhat melodramatic tales in recognisably working-class settings. These works are more a sign that there was a commercial market for fiction among the poorly educated, rather than showing any upsurge of popular discontent in the novel. That discontent could be found in the ballads of Ebenezer Elliott (for example, *Corn Law Rhymes*, 1830), but not yet in an authentic 'working-class art', which would come many years later.

The works of Arthur Morrison – *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and *A Child of the Jago* (1896) – are perhaps the most successful fictionalised accounts of working-class life. But no novels compare with the documentary work of Henry Mayhew, whose *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) and *London Children* (1874) gave detailed records of real suffering, and had a considerable effect on the public awareness of the need for reform.

Taken with the writings of Friedrich Engels, these documents give the clearest insight into the harsh reality behind the Victorian facade, and perhaps confirm that the aims of novelists will always go beyond mere documentary realism towards some wider purpose. Victorian novelists do not express direct anger, perhaps because the victims of society were not educated to read and write until after the Education Act of 1870 (incidentally, the year of Charles Dickens's death). The generations which benefited from the Act would largely make their voices heard in the twentieth century, in the works of writers such as Robert Tressell and Walter Greenwood (see pages 370 and 393).

Thomas Wright, who, as the 'Journeyman Engineer', left us a fascinating series of documentary writings, turned to the novel with *The Bane of a Life* (1870); but, despite its first-hand account of working-class life, the polemical issues are toned down for a middle-class readership. John W. Overton, in *Harry Hartley* (1859) and *Saul of Mitre Court* (1879), makes his working-class concerns the basis of a philosophical approach to a new society along positivist lines. Overton was one of the earliest self-educated working-class intellectuals, and his contribution to the growth of socialist thinking was considerable.

W.E. Tirebuck's *Miss Grace of All Souls* (1895) has been described as 'the most important industrial novel' to be published in England since *Hard Times* forty years earlier, and it was the most successful portrayal of independent working-class life since *Mary Barton*. This 'industrial' trend in the novel made the 'two nations' theme especially vivid, with the workers' cause strongly maintained, with no possibility of compromise. *Miss Grace* is the continuation of a line in fiction which Disraeli began in *Sybil*, and of which *Mary Barton* and Kingsley's *Alton Locke* are perhaps the most significant examples.

Two women writers of the end of the century attempted to bring this industrial or working-class novel to a new readership, but their work is now little read. Constance Howell shows the conversion of an upper-class woman to socialism, in a novel of 'class repentance' called *The Excellent Way* (1888). Margaret Harkness (using a male pen-name, John Law) took realism to new levels of directness with *A City Girl* (1887) and her major novel *Out of Work* (1888).

> Competition has had its day; it *must* give place to co-operation, because co-operation is the next step in the evolution of society; it has a scientific

> basis. Individualists may try to stop it, but it cannot be stopped. The organisation of labour and the brotherhood of men are scientific truths which *must* be demonstrated. Join them in the struggle. Be Socialists.
>
> (*Out of Work*)

In 1890, John Law published both *In Darkest London* and *A Manchester Shirtmaker*. The brutality of her descriptions comes across with immense force:

> An old woman came to us last night and asked if we would take her to the doctor. Her little grandchild led her in. Her husband had knocked her eye out. She is stone blind now; for he knocked out her right eye when she was fifty, and last night he knocked her left eye out of its socket. I know six women close by this house whose husbands have knocked their eyes out.
>
> (*In Darkest London*)

A revolutionary tone pervades the work of all these 'socialist' writers, and, perhaps because the English establishment has always kept down revolutionary elements, these writers' works have remained obscure. But today's readers would still find them striking and vivid, a useful further viewpoint on the social conditions described by better-known writers. George Eliot had handled similar themes in *Janet's Repentance* (in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 1857–58), but with fictional intent balancing the anger which Harkness's writing reveals. Like so much of Victorian writing, these later flourishings of working-class concern lead directly to the writings of Oscar Wilde: in this case, to his essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891).

Victorian fantasy

The development of fantasy writing, set in other worlds or expressing other realities, became a popular phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century. Of course, the exotic had been a theme in literature from Mandeville to Beckford, and the Romantics had brought many oriental themes into their writings. The bestselling book of its day, *Lalla Rookh* (1817) by Thomas Moore (1779–1852), was a series of Oriental tales in verse, anticipating Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859) in its appeal.

Such fantasy expanded its range as the real Victorian world became less and less positive and acceptable. The new genre of science fiction was one result; the detective story, ghost stories (extending the Gothic novel's range), utopian writing, and fantasy writing for children, all represent the escapist search for other worlds in ways which were to become increasingly popular in the twentieth century.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872) are the most lasting mid-Victorian fantasies, requiring modern adjectives like 'surreal' and 'absurd' to describe their dream-like transformations and humour. Unlike a great deal of writing for children at the time, there is no overt moral or didactic intent, but the play of an absurd logic, perhaps influenced by the author's career as a mathematics lecturer. Both the linguistic experiments and the dream-type fluidity of character and plot anticipate trends in the innovative writing of the twentieth century. Much of Carroll's writing depends on ambiguities, such as the following extract from *Through the Looking Glass*:

> Here the Red Queen began again.
> 'Can you answer useful questions?' she said. 'How is bread made?'
> 'I know that!' Alice cried eagerly. 'You take some flour—'
> 'Where do you pick the flower?' the White Queen asked: 'In a garden or in the hedges?'

The detective story, originating in America with Edgar Allan Poe in the 1840s, finds its first full expression in novels such as *The Moonstone* (1868) by Wilkie Collins. The genre is a variant on the theme of the 'hidden secret' or the 'dead hand', which was a common theme in Victorian fiction – reaching great heights of complexity in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Wilkie Collins's other highly successful novel, *The Woman in White* (1860). What the detective novel offers is a solution to the mystery, rather than the resolution of a tangled past in the present, as in the 'dead hand' stories. The detective, starting with Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*, becomes with Sergeant Cuff (in *The Moonstone*) a fully fledged character who solves the mystery. From this official level, he moves on, in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (published from 1887 to 1927), to the omniscient amateur who stuns the world with brilliant solutions to impenetrable mysteries.

Sheridan Le Fanu was Irish, and a dominant figure in Dublin's literary life from the 1840s to the 1860s. His political interests are reflected in some patriotic popular ballads, but he is remembered for his continuation of the later Gothic strain found in C.R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Le Fanu's murder story *The House by the Churchyard* (1863) is one of the earliest novels of its kind, written at exactly the same time as Wilkie Collins was producing his novels of sensation. *Uncle Silas* (1864) is a classic of grotesque mystery and complicated plotting, a direct link between the fantasy of *Frankenstein* earlier in the century and *Dracula*, by another Irishman, Bram Stoker, published in 1897.

It is tempting to see the popularity of detective and mystery stories since the mid-nineteenth century as reflecting both the reader's interest in deviant psychology, and the satisfaction of a solution actually being offered – something which, in real life and in more 'serious' fiction, is less and less possible.

Science fiction, in the sense of time travel and space fantasy, became popular in the works of the French writer Jules Verne (1828–1905), although Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) contains elements of fantasy, travel, and social observation used by most modern writers in the genre.

William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890–91) is a socialist utopian fantasy set far in the future, when all the contemporary ills of society (industrialism, government, squalor, even money) have been superseded after a bloody revolution which takes place in 1952. Morris is, in effect, proposing an alternative society whose values (the beauty of handicrafts, the practical application of the Pre-Raphaelite ideals which Morris had shared early in his career) are clearly the opposite of the actual values of the age. His earlier *A Dream of John Ball* (1888) takes the genre back to 1381 – John Ball being one of the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt – and the historical fantasy is a clear protest against exploitation. The book wants to encourage a modern workers' revolt against the society and values of the 1880s.

With the growth of middle-class literacy in the nineteenth century, there was a corresponding growth in writing for children. This was usually heavily moral, full of 'good' children and didacticism. Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1865), for example, with characters such as Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid, recounts the transformation of a dirty chimney-sweep, Tom, into a clean little boy, worthy of middle-class Ellie. School stories, such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes (1822–96), family sagas like *The Daisy Chain* (1858) by Charlotte M. Yonge (1823–1901), and animal stories – for example, *Black Beauty* (1877) by Anna Sewell (1820–78) – set a trend which has continued to the present day.

Tom Brown's Schooldays portrays Rugby School and its headmaster Dr Thomas Arnold, father of the poet and critic Matthew Arnold. The character of Flashman is the archetypal bully, and the mid-century ethos which the novel affirms is very much the 'muscular Christianity', stiff-upper-lip way: strength of character and physical strength being seen as on a par; emotions and sensitivity being signs of weakness. For many readers this was the best of the British Empire; for others it was the worst!

Some so-called 'children's' writing, like Carroll's *Alice* books, or the adventure stories of Ballantyne and Stevenson, achieved success with adult readers too. Conversely, such adult novels as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Gulliver's Travels* were widely read as suitable for children. Books written specially for children are one result of the Romantic age's view of childhood. Meeting the needs of children, who are a special group of people with unique perceptions, was thought to be vital, though several Victorian books for children were, as we have seen, didactic and heavily moralistic.

Robert Louis Stevenson rises above any attribution of his work to the field of 'children's literature', although *Treasure Island* (1883), with its infamous pirate Long John Silver, has been consistently popular with young readers. Stevenson, like Wilde, was a writer in many genres, from drama to travel writing, from fiction to verse. He was one of the first writers to become a world traveller; writing anywhere, but referring constantly to his Calvinist background and upbringing in Scotland. Most of his best novels have a Scottish setting, but Stevenson's Scotland is markedly different from the historical romanticism of Walter Scott.

Stevenson probes the identity of his characters, finding constant contrasts: between the violent, unscrupulous devil-figure of the Master of Ballantrae (in the novel of the same name, 1889), and his more decorous, righteous younger brother; between the tyrannical 'hanging judge', Lord Hermiston, and his son Archie in the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston* (published posthumously in 1896). This is one of the few unfinished novels in English literature which is generally considered to be a masterpiece, taking Robert Louis Stevenson's reputation on from his most famous tale, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

> He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp. A cry followed; he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth; and as I looked there came, I thought, a change – he seemed to swell – his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter – and the next moment, I had sprung to my feet and leaped back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror.
>
> 'O God!' I screamed, and 'O God!' again and again; for there before my eyes – pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death – there stood Henry Jekyll!

This is the classic story of the *alter ego*, personifying good and evil in one character. This dichotomy, essential to Calvinist thinking, runs through all Stevenson's works, and can be seen to embody a part of the general Victorian crisis of identity – where good and bad cannot be easily delineated, where moral ambiguity, masks of social behaviour covering up shocking secrets, and the disturbing psychological depths of the human character are revealed. Stevenson is a writer who reveals realism behind the social mirror. Such writing caused even further discomfort for Victorian readers.

The 'double' in Scottish fiction can be traced back to James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). This was one of the first novels which could be called 'psychological' in its examination of an evil *alter ego* – the devil in the seemingly normal person. Hogg plays with point of view and psychology in a surprisingly modern way. He anticipates the concern with masks and faces which was to be exploited so successfully by Stevenson and Oscar Wilde more than sixty years later.

In *The Amateur Emigrant* (1892–95), a travel book which examines the phenomenon of emigration to and across the United States – at a time when people were flooding into that land of freedom and hope – Stevenson summed up in one simple phrase much of the philosophising of the age: 'We all live by selling something.' He thus undercuts with directness and simplicity the moral and philosophical ideas of mid-Victorian society. The end-of-the-century capacity for such brevity, without moralising, reaches its highest point in the epigrammatic and paradoxical witticisms of Oscar Wilde.

Wilde and Aestheticism

> *All art is quite useless*
> (Oscar Wilde, Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

The Aesthetic movement's insistence on 'Art for Art's sake' was just as much a search for new values as any philosophical or political movement, but its values and motivations have been called into question through the fate of Oscar Wilde (the movement's most prominent figure from about 1878) and the lack of other writers of stature to affirm the doctrine of aesthetic beauty.

Aestheticism may be traced back to Keats's affirmation, 'Beauty is truth, truth Beauty' (in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, 1819). The giving of absolute values to such abstracts as art, beauty, and culture, is part of the late Victorian search for constants in a fast-changing universe. Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) is an important book in this context (see pages 295–6), with its concept of philistinism. The re-evaluation of art, and the philosophical consequences of this, are found more significantly in the works of two of the most influential critics of the age – John Ruskin and Walter Pater.

Ruskin has been described as the first real art critic. His early concerns were to recognise and preserve architecture in the face of industrialism, and to attack the 'pseudo-science' of John Stuart Mill and the economist David Ricardo (1773–1823). Later he founded the Guild of St George, a utopian society which anticipates much of William Morris's utopian writing. Ruskin's importance lies in his considerable influence on late Victorian ways of thinking about art, architecture and the reclaiming of earlier ideals. His criticism ranged from genuine re-evaluations of painters such as Giotto to all-encompassing critiques of social concerns, which became angrier and more political as he grew older – as, for instance, in *Fors Clavigera* (1871–78).

Walter Pater was less of a polemicist than Ruskin. He was an academic, and much of his writing is in the form of lectures; it was at Oxford University that he began to influence the generation which included Oscar Wilde. In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Pater continued Ruskin's work in the re-evaluation of Italian Renaissance painting (notably Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci); *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) used the form of fictional biography to explore his concerns with Christianity, paganism and the classical world; *Appreciations: with an Essay on Style* (1889) confirmed his status both as a writer and an 'aesthete'. It was Pater who introduced the phrase 'the desire for beauty, the love of art for art's sake' into English, deriving it from Théophile Gautier (1811–72) who had used the phrase *l'art pour l'art* as early as 1835.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Aesthetic movement became associated with the kind of pale young man parodied in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience* (1881) as:

> A pallid and thin young man
> A haggard and lank young man

who would

> walk down Piccadilly
> With a poppy or a lily
> In his mediaeval hand.

The image of Pre-Raphaelite mediaevalism and delicate sensibility, combined with affectation and sentimentalism, did little to attract public sympathy.

Many tendencies in late Victorian writing come together in the works of Oscar Wilde. His image as a dandy made his name known long before his professional career as a journalist did, and the contrast between image and reality can be seen to run through all his later creative writing.

Wilde is remembered best as the author of theatrical comedies, and for the humiliating end to his career when he was sentenced to two years' hard labour for homosexual offences (made illegal in 1885). The dichotomy between the elegant social witticisms and the seeming frivolity of the comic plots, and the shame and scandal of Wilde's private life, are almost emblematic of the whole crisis of Victorian morals. Wilde's 'transgressive ethic' was a fully conscious playing with Victorian assumptions: 'How I used to toy with that Tiger, Life', as he expressed it after his release from prison. One of Oscar Wilde's stories, which effectively explores Victorian assumptions and values about a variety of issues including art, is *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is the story of a beautiful young man and his portrait. As he ages, he keeps his good looks and indulges himself in all kinds of sensual pleasure (the details of which are carefully left to the reader's own imagination) without regard to moral consequences. But, as the action proceeds, his portrait changes, reflecting the corruption of his soul. Wilde, the author, remains detached and refuses to pass judgement. Wilde's view of art is that the artist can have no ethical sympathies. It was, and continues to be, a controversial story, and has been read as a criticism of the 'art for art's sake' movement, as a criticism of superficial self-love, and as a criticism of a society, Victorian society, which does not recognise its moral responsibilities.

> All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.
>
> (Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

Wilde's essays reveal a serious, concerned thinker behind the aesthetic masks. *The Truth of Masks* (1885) and *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) probe behind the Victorian facade into the details and implications of some of the standard hypocrisies of the age. He continues a realism of portrayal which the nineteenth century did not want to applaud or even acknowledge.

> A man is called selfish if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality. . . . It is not selfish to think for oneself. A man who does not think for himself does not think at all.
>
> (*The Soul of Man Under Socialism*)

Wilde's name and reputation have also been associated with *Teleny*, a homosexual novel, explicitly the 'reverse of the medal' of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This was published, with no author's name, in 1893 by Leonard Smithers, who was to publish most of Wilde's later writing, after his conviction in 1895. Always limited in its circulation because of its highly explicit sexual content, *Teleny* was only made available to a wide readership in its original form in 1986. Many of Wilde's biographers ignore it completely: others suggest that he may only have been marginally involved in the book's writing. Nothing can be proved, as no original manuscript exists, but *Teleny* remains highly significant as a gay text, and as the expression of a minority voice, which would only be properly heard a century later.

Hardy and James

In more far-reaching ways, the novel form also documented the social changes of the time. The move from the high moral didacticism of mid-century to the exploration of moral issues and responsibilities can be seen particularly clearly in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Like so many of the major writers of the time, Hardy was something of an outsider. He came from the rural county of Dorset, which in his novels becomes Wessex, the fictional countryside with a long historical past which is markedly distant from the capital city, London, or the industrial North. In this scene from Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), Tess delivers milk on a cart to the local station as the milk train arrives:

> Then there was the hissing of a train, which drew up almost silently on the wet rails, and the milk was rapidly swung can by can into the truck. The light of the engine flashed for a second on Tess Durbeyfield's figure, motionless under the great holly tree. No object could have looked more foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels than this unsophisticated girl, with round bare arms, the rainy hair and face, the suspended attitude of a friendly leopard at pause, the print gown of no date or fashion, the cotton bonnet drooping on her brow.

Tess is presented here as 'foreign', as an outsider in a rural world which has seen rapid change, including the mechanisation of transport. But Hardy presents this new world largely through the eyes and inner thoughts of Tess. She is an uneducated farm labourer who speaks in the local dialect of her region and who possesses sharp insight, natural intelligence and deep feelings. Tess is one in a line of such heroines in Hardy's novels, including Bathsheba Everdene in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) and Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* (1887), whose natures make them outsiders in their own society as they fall victim to forces and changes, economic, social and sexual, which are outside their control.

Most of Hardy's novels are tragedies, or they reveal the cosmic indifference or malevolent ironies which life has in store for everyone, particularly for those unable to curb the demands of their own natures.

His last two major novels were *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). *Tess* is a deeply pessimistic novel, revealing how an intelligent and sensitive girl can be driven to her death by a society which is narrow in morality and in spirit. *Jude the Obscure* has another central character, Jude Fawley, whose sensual nature cannot be accommodated by a rigid and inflexible social system. The novel has been seen by many as Hardy's most direct attack on Victorian chains of class-consciousness and social convention. Both Tess and Jude are ambitious and articulate working-class people whose lives cannot be properly fulfilled. Tess is a modern version of 'the ruined maid' (a ballad of the same title is used in the novel). Hardy brings together such traditional forms and concepts, sets them in a literary context which goes back to Greek tragedy, and brings out issues which are highly relevant to his own day.

Hardy's vision has been called tragic, and the fate of many of his characters is indeed bleak. Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) rises to power, then brings about his own fall in a manner that recalls the classical forms of tragic drama. But his intention is also social. Tess, 'a pure woman', as the subtitle of the novel calls her, is the victim of a hypocritical sexual morality. She finally kills Alec, the man who caused her disgrace. But then society punishes her for that crime too.

Jude Fawley's 'crime' is to want an education. The university town of Christminster is always just beyond his reach. Poverty, marriage and family combine to keep him from his ambition. In one of the most tragic scenes, his children are all found dead one morning, with a note left by his son: 'Done because we are too menny.' Jude tries to comfort their mother Sue, saying:

> It was in his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us – boys of a sort unknown in the last generation – the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live.

This is a savage attack on the restrictions of late Victorian society. The book caused a terrible scandal, as had *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* four years earlier. It was burned, banned and denounced. Hardy became so discouraged by this reaction that he stopped writing novels, publishing only a novel on the theme of time, *The Well-Beloved* (1897; it had been serialised in 1892) before dedicating himself entirely to poetry. (See page 317.)

The 1890s, and the end of Hardy's career as a novelist, also mark the end of the dominance of the 'triple-decker' long Victorian novel, usually published in instalments. From this time, novels in general become shorter, and are usually published in volume form. The power of circulating libraries began to decline too. They were the places where people paid to borrow books, and the libraries could damage a book's success by refusing to have it. Some of Hardy's novels suffered in this way. But shorter novels were also cheaper, and a new era of book-buying was about to begin.

Hardy's Wessex is not a romanticised landscape; contrary to the view taken by some of his critics, Hardy's world is one of considerable social upheaval as settled communities face the disruption caused by the mechanisation of agriculture in the late nineteenth century. His last novels embody these changes technically. Hardy focuses less on plot, more on the lyrical revelation of character, using techniques of episodic structure; in this respect, though written at the end of the nineteenth century, his novels are frequently regarded as 'Modern' texts. He is one of the writers who best represent the transition from nineteenth to twentieth century.

Many of the novelists of the end of the Victorian age can be considered outsiders for one reason or another. Hardy was from the West Country, Gissing from the industrial North. Wilde was an outsider twice over, as an Irishman and a homosexual. This preponderance of outsiders becomes even more noticeable between the 1890s and 1914: Henry James was born in America, Joseph Conrad in the Ukraine (to a Polish family), Rudyard Kipling in India where much of his work is set, and George Bernard Shaw was another Irishman. As we move into the twentieth century, literature's horizons and influences expand in a broader vision. E.M. Forster, although of the southern English middle class, was homosexual, and his work reflects an outsider's concern with Englishness. D.H. Lawrence was from the working class, and spent much of his life in exile from England. T.S. Eliot was born in America; James Joyce was Irish; Ford Madox Ford was of German extraction, changing his original surname, Hueffer, to the more English-sounding Ford in 1919.

An American by birth, Henry James also stands 'outside' Britain, although his education was divided between America and Europe. He was deeply attracted to European culture but explored it from the perspective of a sophisticated New York background. When the First World War broke out in 1914, James became a British citizen.

His early novels, such as *The Americans* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), explore differences between European and American high society. The main point of view is that of an 'innocent' character who undergoes conflicts between innocence and experience. The novels are written in the manner of a *Bildungsroman* (a growing-up novel) and in them he reveals considerable depths in understanding female psychology. In *What Maisie Knew* (1897), the narrative is recounted almost completely from the point of view of a child's consciousness and understanding. Maisie is 6 years old when her parents divorce and she is forced to live alternately with both of them. The novel is a considerable technical and formal achievement, as James manages to re-create a child's world and to use language to represent her thought-processes and perceptions. In later novels such as *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Ambassadors* (1903), James's style is even more subtle, in order to render complexities of thought and feeling in the 'stream of consciousness' of the main characters who are each in different ways 'outsiders' in their society.

James was always deeply concerned with art, and how art both shapes and reflects life. From the short story *The Figure in the Carpet* (1895), which shows a concern with the mysteries and intricacies of a design, to his fine novel *The Golden Bowl* (1904), art, artifice and their role in human life are probed and evaluated.

> The Prince continued very nobly to bethink himself. 'Didn't we get you anything?'
>
> Maggie waited a little; she had for some time, now, kept her eyes on him steadily; but they wandered, at this, to the fragments on her chimney. 'Yes; it comes round, after all, to your having got me the bowl. I myself was to come upon it, the other day, by so wonderful a chance; was to find it in the same place and to have it pressed upon me by the same little man, who does, as you say, understand Italian. I did "believe in it", you see – must have believed in it somehow instinctively; for I took it as soon as I saw it. Though I didn't know at all then,' she added, 'what I was taking *with* it.'
>
> The Prince paid her for an instant, visibly, the deference of trying to imagine what this might have been. 'I agree with you that the coincidence is extraordinary – the sort of thing that happens mainly in novels and plays. But I don't see, you must let me say, the importance or the connexion—'
>
> 'Of my having made the purchase where you failed of it?' She had quickly taken him up; but she had, with her eyes on him once more, another drop into the order of her thoughts, to which, through whatever he might say, she was still adhering. 'It's not my having gone into the place, at the end of four years, that makes the strangeness of the coincidence; for don't such chances as that, in London, easily occur? The strangeness,' she lucidly said, 'is in what my purchase was to represent to me after I had got it home; which value came,' she explained, 'from the wonder of my having found such a friend.'
>
> (*The Golden Bowl*)

James's language and syntax are carefully modulated – at the same time delicate and convoluted. His sentences and paragraphs can reach considerable length and complexity, but, in so doing, his admirers affirm that they reflect the deep care and precision with which he worked to achieve the full expression of a highly refined consciousness. The opening sentence of *The Wings of the Dove* is a good example:

> She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in, but he kept her unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale with the irritation that had brought her to the point of going away without sight of him.

Here the constant increase in the clauses, the additional interrupting phrases ('in the glass over the mantel'), even the slight delay in the mention of Kate Croy's name, are characteristic. They show a concern to make language fit the delicate feelings of Kate as she hesitates, reflects, justifies and pauses in her actions and her thoughts about the relationship with her father. The 'outsider's' sense is vital to the ability of James and other writers to look at society objectively, to criticise it from a secure viewpoint and to create a fully realised world in their works.

These writers could bring a multiplicity of viewpoints and subject areas into the novel, which contrast with the London-centred viewpoints of many Victorian writers. The novel begins to represent a worldview rather than a national or regional concern, and its horizons begin to expand outwards geographically at the same time as the earliest studies in psychology begin to expand characters' inner horizons as well. It is perhaps no accident that the term 'stream of consciousness' was a concept first described in 1890 by the American psychologist William James, who was brother of the novelist Henry James. In the twentieth century, as concepts of society changed and things (as the poet W.B. Yeats said) began to 'fall apart', the fragmentation of all that held society together was expressed in the novel partly by the use of 'stream of consciousness', allowing the psychological revelation of what a character feels deep inside through constantly fluctuating points of view and by a fluid expansion and contraction of time. Although these emphases were new, and do depart from conventional representation in the nineteenth-century novel, the seeds of such developments lie in the techniques used in the eighteenth century by Laurence Sterne, especially in *Tristram Shandy*, in the 'monologues' of some of Charles Dickens's characters, such as Mrs Lirriper in the Christmas story *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* (1863), and in the experiments with viewpoint in Jane Austen and George Eliot's depiction of characters.

Something of an outsider in literary life, John Meade Falkner was an industrialist; but he wrote three remarkable novels, each of which is unique in its way. *Moonfleet* (1898) is a classic adventure yarn of smugglers, set on the south coast of England. *The Nebuly Coat* (1903) has echoes of Hardy in its setting and its vivid picture of the ending of a society. *The Lost Stradivarius* (1895) is a mysterious tale of drugs and decadence, set in Naples. Falkner has a fascination with word games, heraldry, and tradition, which lends his stories a mixture of puzzle, history and the unusual.

Adventure novels came to enjoy enormous popularity. They reached a high point towards the end of the nineteenth century in the jingoistic colonial tales of H. Rider Haggard (such as *King Solomon's Mines*, 1886, and *She*, 1887) and the Ruritanian fantasies of Anthony Hope (*The Prisoner of Zenda*, 1894). In their works, the stiff-upper-lip ethic triumphs over all sorts of devilish plots in the exotic locales of another 'outside'.

Rudyard Kipling, although awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907, is seen more as a Victorian figure than a modern writer. His novels, such as *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) and *Kim* (1901), are usually read as children's stories. They reflect a significant understanding of the culture of the Indian subcontinent, but are often seen as representing the colonial sentimentality alone. Kipling's short stories often rise above this rather negative judgement. *The Jungle Book* (1894) is a vital text in establishing a colonial ethos. This relates to the efforts of General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, a British hero of the Boer War (1899–1902), who founded the Boy Scout movement and used Kipling's text to establish a basis of discipline for the Wolf-Cubs, an organisation which brought together boys between the ages of 7 and 11, now known as Cub-Scouts. Akela, leader of the pack of wolves in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, became a well-known name for many young boys in England, as leader of their quasi-military group of young associates. More recently, *The Jungle Book* has become well known as an animated feature film (1967) from Disney Studios.

VICTORIAN POETRY

> *Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar*
> (Matthew Arnold, *Dover Beach*)

Victorian poetry is generally considered to be in the shadow of the popular genre of the novel: a reversal of the situation in the Romantic age, and largely due to the success of the novels of Walter Scott, who transferred his energies from poetry to the novel in 1814. Victorian poetry is, however, of major importance, and the most popular poet of the age, Alfred (later Lord) Tennyson, is as much a representative figure as Dickens.

In Memoriam A.H.H. is the key work of Tennyson; a series of closely linked but separate poems, it is, in effect, an elegy on the death of a close friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, who died in 1833 at the age of 22. Tennyson worked on the poem between 1833 and 1850, and it was published anonymously in 1850. Its publication appropriately marks a central point in nineteenth-century sensibilities, and the note of doubt and despair of *In Memoriam* matched the tone of the times perfectly, in the very year in which the first of the great Romantics, William Wordsworth, died.

In Memoriam became hugely popular, especially with Queen Victoria after the death of her husband, Prince Albert, in 1861. Its melancholy tone, not without a degree of self-pity, became a keynote of late Victorian taste and sentiment:

> I hold it true, whate'er befall;
> I feel it when I sorrow most
> 'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.

Such melancholy is sometimes reinforced in poems such as *The Lady of Shallot* by a background of mediaeval legend, in which a dream-like atmosphere of brooding tragedy is created.

However, there is more than emotion and simple feelings in Tennyson's work. *The Brook* gives a first-person voice to a stream, in a vision of eternity:

> For men may come and men may go,
> But I go on for ever.

Tennyson's observation is personal, deeply felt, and in many ways simplifies the worldview of the Romantic poets. But his view of nature could hardly be more different from the Romantics:

> Nature red in tooth and claw
> (*In Memoriam*)

is nature at its most violent, dangerous, threatening, rather than being the solace and inspiration it was to Wordsworth. Although Tennyson is not normally regarded as an observer of social realities, in *Locksley Hall* he presents a vision of social unrest and disturbance which was later to influence W.H. Auden in the 1930s:

> Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion, creeping nigher,
> Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying fire.

In such poems he continues a Romantic tradition of social prophecy.

Tennyson's emotion is recollected in regret, rather than in Wordsworth's 'tranquillity'. His sense of loss, doubt and anxiety gives his work a tone of melancholy which contrasts with much Romantic optimism, commitment and wit. Before the publication of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson had published a wide range of poems, of which *Poems*, published late in 1832, is taken as the starting point of his career. *(Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* – published in 1830 – does, however, contain some significant work.)

The best of Tennyson's early poems are dramatic monologues, a form which became highly developed in the hands of his contemporary, Robert Browning. *Mariana*, published by Tennyson in 1830, already contains a note of despair, as the abandoned heroine (inspired by Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*) waits for her lost lover. Other dramatic monologues, such as *Ulysses* and *Tithonus*, also convey a characteristic melancholy, with a foretaste of Arnold's 'long, withdrawing roar':

> The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
> The vapours weep their burden to the ground,
> Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
> And after many a summer dies the swan.
> (*Tithonus*, 1833; published 1860)

These lines also illustrate Tennyson's musicality, his belief that language should recreate the sights, sounds, and rhythms of a vision of life, as witnessed here by the falling movement of each melancholic line. However, such poems also show a stronger, fighting spirit, in the face of challenges:

> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
> (*Ulysses*, 1833; published 1842)

After the death of the nation's hero, the Duke of Wellington (commemorated by Tennyson as 'the last great Englishman' in an *Ode*, 1852), the Crimean War introduced a note of futility, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* commemorates one of the most futile moments of heroism in that war:

> All in the valley of Death
> Rode the six hundred . . .
> Someone had blundered:
> Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die . . .

This note of courage against all odds is the beginning of the characteristic 'stiff-upper-lip' behaviour which came to be seen as typifying British emotions. The contrast between early Victorian sentiment and this control of emotion is remarkable. On the one hand, it can be seen as a denial of human feelings, of a blindness to reality; on the other hand, of courage in difficult situations, even of heroism. Commentators have frequently accused Tennyson of sentimentality and self-pity. He has also been criticised for being more concerned with sensations than with ideas, and with simply conveying experience, rather than reflecting on it. But such accusations may be overstated. The sentimentality of, for example, Little Nell's death in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, represents the final scene in a tearful mode of writing initiated in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* in 1771. Tennyson's emotion is contained, although strongly felt. More than any other writer, he embodies – especially in his more heroic verse – a certain nobility, the peculiarly British colonial unemotional stiffness found in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and throughout Kipling's more patriotic pieces. It reaches its height in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859–91), with its note of nostalgic heroism, and in *If* (1892) by Rudyard Kipling:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you . . .

Recently, Kipling's *If* was voted the most popular and best-loved poem by general readers in Britain. The poem very much reflects a stiff-upper-lip late Victorian ethos, and in fact does not give any idea of the range of Kipling's verse, which uses dialect to express the feelings of the ordinary soldier in India with unusual sympathy and innovative rhythms: this example comes from *Gunga Din* in *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892):

The uniform 'e wore
Was nothin' much before . . .
You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

Vitae Lampada by Sir Henry Newbolt (1862–1938) – 'Play up! play up! and play the game!' – has been severely mocked for the 'public-school' ethos it embodies, but this way of thinking is central to the concepts of duty and conduct of the Victorian empire-builders. No less a figure than the Duke of Wellington is credited with the affirmation that 'the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton'. This shows how central the public-school ethos was to the whole age.

It is remarkable that Tennyson turned, both at the beginning and at the height of his career, to the myth of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table as a source of inspiration. Malory had used the myth in *Le Morte D'Arthur* as England endured the Wars of the Roses, and Milton had thought of writing an English epic after the Civil War and the Commonwealth, before turning to the more universal myth of the Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost.*

This recourse to the most potent English national myth at times of crisis is interesting in its wish to affirm English nationalism, history, and a sense of national identity. *Idylls of the King* incorporates Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur* from 1833 in a series of poems covering the whole tale of Arthur and Guinevere, through romance and chivalry, to adultery, denunciation, and the end of the kingdom, with the great sword Excalibur cast into the lake. The 'moral' is one of change; not just change and decay, however:

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new.
> (*Idylls of the King*)

What sets Tennyson apart as a major poet is his capacity to bring together sound and sense, mood and atmosphere, to make an appeal to the emotions of the reader.

> Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
> Tears from the depths of some divine despair.
> (*Tears, idle tears*)

His is emotive rather than intellectual poetry, only *naming* the 'divine despair' rather than investigating or challenging it, as Gerard Manley Hopkins was to do. It was perhaps inevitable that his poetry should fall from its high regard in the general reaction against Victorianism during the first half of the twentieth century. His reputation has recovered, however, and Tennyson now stands high among the lyrical poets.

Tennyson's melancholy is the first sign of a darkening vision in poetry after the Romantics. Victorian poetry moves progressively closer to despair during the century, coming, by the time of Hopkins and Hardy, to a sense of gloom which anticipates much of the desperation of the early twentieth century.

Tennyson's career, and the parable of the *Idylls*, mirror the mood of late Victorianism, without the early optimism found in the novel form. The poetry of Robert Browning – who was seen as Tennyson's rival throughout their careers, but generally considered superior since – develops the dramatic monologue to its greatest heights. In the early

Porphyria's Lover (1836), he already shows how the first-person speaker can tell a surprisingly vivid story of love and violence:

> That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
> Perfectly pure and good: I found
> A thing to do, and all her hair
> In one long yellow string I wound
> Three times her little throat around,
> And strangled her. . . .
> And thus we sit together now,
> And all night long we have not stirred,
> And yet God has not said a word!

My Last Duchess (1842), probably the most widely known of Browning's poems, is also a tale of love and violence, as the speaker reveals to a diplomatic emissary the true situation behind the facade of polite words: he had his previous wife murdered:

> I gave commands;
> Then all smiles stopped altogether.

These two poems were contained in *Dramatic Lyrics*, published in 1842. His later volumes often have similar titles: from *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845) to *Dramatis Personae* (1864), and two series of *Dramatic Idylls* (1879 and 1880). Some of Browning's best characters are contained in *Men and Women* (1855), where the monologues are spoken by such characters as the painters Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto:

> Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for?
>
> (*Andrea del Sarto*)

and by Bishop Blougram, who 'apologises' for his life.

Browning's dramatic monologues enable him to explore extreme and usually extremely morbid states of mind. But his use of different characters and a range of different voices does not allow the reader to identify the speaker with Browning the author. The dramatic monologues, which Browning developed after his experience of writing for the London theatre, act as a kind of mask. They anticipate the monologues of Modernist poets such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot (for example, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*). The 'mask' allows the writer to explore the human soul without the soul-searching being too directly personal. It distances Browning from the more subjective style of a poet such as Shelley, who was a considerable formative influence on his writing.

(Edinburgh) have reached a wide readership. The spread of Irish dialect has been more rapid, especially since the writing of James Joyce. Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett, and generations of younger novelists and poets have made Irish a distinct voice – and they have not always agreed that it should be considered part of *English* literature. Although there are social and political messages conveyed by the uses of dialects, there is also a strong sense that dialects are natural expressions of individual identity.

Here is an illustration from a poem by Tennyson, *Northern Farmer, New Style* (1829), in which a farmer talks about his attachment to property and gives his son down-to-earth advice on love and marriage.

Thim's my noätions, Sammy, wheerby I means to stick;
But if thou marries a bad un, I'll leäve the land to Dick
Coom, oop, proputty, proputty – that's what I 'ears im saäy –
Proputty, proputty, proputty – canter an' canter awaäy.

Standard English version:

That's how I think, Sammy, and I'll stick to my views
But if you marry a bad one, I'll leave the land to Dick.
Come on, property, property – that's what I hear him say –
Property, property, property – canter and canter away.

One interesting question raised by the representation of non-standard English in pre-twentieth-century literature is that writers generally employ it to represent the lower classes, those on the fringes of mainstream society, the uneducated, or the simply idiosyncratic. Non-standard English parallels what are represented as being 'non-standard' or socially marginalised people.

VICTORIAN DRAMA

Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that
(Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*)

The censorship of plays by the Lord Chamberlain, between the Theatres Licensing Act of 1737 and its abolition in the Theatres Act of 1968, meant that for some 230 years a wide range of subjects could not be handled in dramatic form. Initially a political move, the censorship of plays expanded to cover religious and moral themes, 'bad' language and 'indecency', and anything which was 'likely to deprave and corrupt' the potential audience.

This became a central problem for dramatists in the second half of the nineteenth century, when, as with the novel, social and moral issues became the subject matter of plays. The trend towards a kind of realistic drama began in the 1860s, with the plays of Tom (T.W.) Robertson. Their titles give an indication of their themes – *Society* (1865), *Caste* (1867), *Play* (1868) and *School* (1869) – far removed from the usual theatrical fare of melodrama, farce and burlesque. Robertson was the first playwright to insist on the stage-setting of a room having a real ceiling, and on real properties; this gave rise to his plays being called 'cup and saucer' dramas, almost a hundred years before 'kitchen sink' plays brought such attention to realistic detail back to the stage.

The social issues, presented fairly uncontroversially by Robertson, became highly controversial in the 1880s and 1890s. This was the time when the realistic novels of the French writer Emile Zola and the major novels of Thomas Hardy were publicly burned because of the moral outrage they caused. In drama, equivalent outrage was caused by the English translations of the plays of the Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen's early plays were written in the late 1860s, but it was not until 1880 that *The Pillars of Society* was staged in England, and almost ten years later *A Doll's House* received a successful production. George Bernard Shaw's essay *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, published in 1891 (the same year as Oscar Wilde's important *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*), gave the first great impetus to Ibsen's work, and to the concept of the 'play of ideas'. The new flood of ideas – socialist, Fabian (Shaw's brand of socialism), and aesthetic – was leading to a re-evaluation of the role of artistic expression in helping to formulate public opinion.

> For in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true. And just as it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can apprehend the Platonic theory of ideas, so it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can realise Hegel's system of contraries. The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks.
>
> (Oscar Wilde, *The Truth of Masks*, 1885)

Wilde's successful plays were all written and performed in a period of three years, between 1892 and 1895. They are brilliantly witty and epigrammatic comedies, whose surface polish conceals considerable social concern: the title of Wilde's essay *The Truth of Masks* is the clue to his comedies, which always handle dangerous and compromising secrets. Illegitimate birth in *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), culpable indiscretions in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895), obscure social origins in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) – these are the dark background to the light comedy of Oscar Wilde. The revelation of a hypocritical society, behind 'the shallow mask of manners', gives a resonance to the plays which Wilde's own destiny was to underscore. (His biblical tragedy *Salome*, written in 1891–92, was another play to be banned by the censor, even though it was written in French!)

MRS ARBUTHNOT All love is terrible. All love is a tragedy. I loved you once, Lord Illingworth. Oh, what a tragedy for a woman to have loved you!

LORD ILLINGWORTH So you really refuse to marry me?

MRS ARBUTHNOT Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH Because you hate me?

MRS ARBUTHNOT Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH And does my son hate me as you do?

MRS ARBUTHNOT No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH I am glad of that, Rachel.

MRS ARBUTHNOT He merely despises you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH What a pity! What a pity for him, I mean.

MRS ARBUTHNOT Don't be deceived, George. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely if ever do they forgive them.

(*A Woman of No Importance*)

LADY BRACKNELL I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK [*after some hesitation*] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.

(*The Importance of Being Earnest*)

While Wilde's career flourished, the other main figure in the theatre was Arthur Wing Pinero. His comedies, such as *Dandy Dick* (1887) and *The Magistrate*, (1885) are well-made farces. With *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893) Pinero touched successfully on the theme of social scandal, also handled by Wilde the year before in *Lady Windermere's Fan.* But his comedy lacks the bite and wit of Wilde, or the forceful debating ideas of George Bernard Shaw, whose early plays were first produced in the 1890s. Pinero's contemporary, Henry Arthur Jones, was a more socially committed dramatist, his end-of-the-century plays handling fashionable themes such as the double standards of behaviour concerning men and women but without the controversy of Shaw. *The Liars* (1897) and *Mrs Dane's Defence* (1900) are among his more significant plays.

LANGUAGE NOTE

Reading the language of theatre and drama

In a drama script what we read is largely only dialogue: setting and movement, intonation and attitude are at best only given as brief stage directions. In the scene from Edward Bond's *Bingo* (pages 410–11), for example, we have to conjure up the setting, a pub in Stratford, the relationship between the two men, their respective moods (happy or sad? aggressive? jovial or critical? etc.), the timing (fast or slow?), to gain some idea of the impact of the scene in performance. In this case the characters do at least observe one of the main principles of conversational interaction, that of *relevance*. They do respond relevantly and collaboratively to each other.

The famous 'handbag' scene from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* shows how comic effect can be created by the characters' *not* behaving so collaboratively.

LADY BRACKNELL Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

JACK I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

JACK I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

LADY BRACKNELL Found!

JACK The late Mr Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

LADY BRACKNELL Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

JACK (*Gravely.*) In a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL A handbag?

JACK (*Very seriously.*) Yes, Lady Bracknell, I was in a handbag – a somewhat large, black leather handbag, with handles to it – an ordinary handbag, in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL In what locality did this Mr James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

JACK In the cloakroom at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL The cloakroom at Victoria Station?

JACK Yes. The Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL The line is immaterial.

From the outset Lady Bracknell deliberately misconstrues Jack's words, punning on the verb 'to lose'. Even her 'minor matters' is socially not how one would expect the subject of parents to be treated. She continues to pick up on and repeat unexpected parts of Jack's discourse – and her failure to respond or interact when Jack has given her the information he considers necessary forces him into embarrassing pauses and comically *irrelevant* details: 'Worthing is a place in Sussex', which still elicits no response from his interlocutor, and he is forced into the wondrously banal assertion, 'It is a seaside resort.' What she picks up on is again not the most obviously relevant information – 'charitable', 'first class ticket' and, noticeably '*this* seaside resort'. But she insists on rephrasing her earlier 'Where', which she feels Jack has not adequately answered. The climactic answers crown the series of seemingly absurd and irrelevant turns with disconcertingly *direct* answers to direct questions.

	England to establish new colonies in north-eastern America ('New England')
1625	Charles I became king on the death of his father, James I. The government, which Charles directly controlled, quickly came into conflict with the landowners' Parliament
1628	The Petition of Rights. Parliament demanded assurances from the government against excessive taxes and arbitrary arrest
1629	The Royalist government abolished Parliament
1638	'The War of the Bishops': Scotland resisted the northward spread of the Church of England
1640	Parliament recalled ('the short Parliament'). Most members of Parliament were Puritans, and strongly opposed the government's taxation policies. The popular name changed to 'the long Parliament', as the power of the king was resisted
1642	Parliament closed down all theatres
1642–48	English Civil War. Government forces ('Cavaliers' loyal to King Charles I) opposed parliamentary forces ('Roundheads') led by Oliver Cromwell. Scotland joined on the side of Parliament, and the king was finally arrested
1648	Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe
1649	King Charles I tried and executed. Cromwell became the leader of a republican Britain known as 'the Commonwealth'
1658	Death of Oliver Cromwell
1660	The Commonwealth collapsed because of weak leadership; the son of Charles I was recalled from France (the Restoration) and became King Charles II. The terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' were first applied to landowners who, respectively, welcomed the division of power between the monarchy and the landowners, and those who favoured the retention of all power with the landowners (while not opposing the Restoration)

RESTORATION TO ROMANTICISM

1665	The Great Plague: London's population decimated
1666	The Great Fire of London: Christopher Wren was appointed principal architect for the rebuilding of the city
1667	Britain's colonial expansion continued, with the exchange of Surinam (which became Dutch Guiana) for many states in north-eastern America (including New York, formerly New Amsterdam)
1672	Third Anglo-Dutch War, involving many European states. Dutch forces were led by the young Prince William of Orange, who was married to King Charles II's niece Mary
1685	Death of Charles II: succession of his brother James II, a devout Catholic. Protestant landowners were disturbed when James became king
1688	The birth of a male heir to King James II (already father to two

	much older daughters – Mary and Anne) provoked the 'Glorious' or 'Bloodless' Revolution. James was exiled, and his daughter Mary became Queen Mary II with her Protestant husband William of Orange (King William III)
1689	The Declaration of Rights. In the same year, the philosopher John Locke published his *Two Treatises*, justifying the division of government into legislative and executive branches; this is often seen as the birth of party politics
1701	England established the Grand Alliance with the German House of Hanover. William and Mary were childless; if Mary's sister, who became Queen Anne, also died without an heir, the Hanoverians would become constitutional monarchs of Britain (the Act of Settlement)
1707	Union of the Scottish and English Parliaments
1709	The first Copyright Act protects the earnings of professional writers
1713	End of the major European war (of Spanish Succession) with the Treaty of Utrecht
1714	The Elector of Hanover succeeded Queen Anne, as King George I (he was great-grandson of King James I, through two female lines. The Hanoverian dynasty continues to the present day)
1721	Robert Walpole (a Whig) became the first prime minister of Great Britain (to 1742). Britain expanded greatly in mercantile trade and colonial development, often coming into conflict with the parallel ambitions of France
1743	Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle: France (allied with Prussia) conceded its claims to territories in Europe to Austro-Hungary (allied with Britain) at the end of the War of Austrian Succession
1754–63	Britain fought with France over territorial claims in the American colonies and in India. Britain gained decisive victories at Plassey (India, 1757) and in eastern Canada (1759–60). The British prime minister at this time, William Pitt (the Elder), Earl of Chatham, is often considered to be a 'Father of the British Empire'. France conceded a vast amount of territory to Britain with the Peace of Paris (1763)
1768	Captain James Cook's first journey to the South Pacific, in the name of colonial expansion as well as scientific discovery (Cook was killed in Hawaii in 1779)
*c.*1770	The so-called 'Age of Reason' – a term often applied to the whole of the eighteenth century – reached its height. The German word *Aufklärung*, applied to the works of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, was translated into English as 'Enlightenment'. Optimism in Europe was high, as intellectual superiority seemed to be assured. One English off-shoot of the Enlightenment was the establishment, by John Wesley, of the Methodist church. This Protestant sect rejected any personal

	extravagance (like the Puritans) but, unlike its predecessor, was born in a spirit of tolerance towards other Protestant sects
1775	The invention of the steam-engine, by the Scotsman James Watt, led to a rapid rise in industralisation and urban growth (the Industrial Revolution)
1776	The American Declaration of Independence (4 July). Britain was at war with America from 1775 to 1783, when independence was recognised

THE ROMANTIC PERIOD: 1789–1832

1789	The French Revolution: the monarchy of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette was overthrown
1793–94	'The Reign of Terror' in France, led by left-wing radicals known as Jacobins (Robespierre, Danton, Marat) who ruthlessly suppressed their political opponents
1793	Britain joined the 'Wars of the Coalition' against France, which was aiming for supremacy throughout Europe. Major British victories were achieved at sea, at Trafalgar (under Lord Nelson, 1805), and on land, at Waterloo (under the Duke of Wellington, 1815)
1801	The Act of Union: Ireland was politically joined to Britain
1804	Napoleon Bonaparte, an army general, became Emperor of France
1811–12	The campaign of the Luddites, who broke factory machinery in a protest about workers' conditions
1812–14	Second War of American Independence: Britain was unable to regain this part of the former Empire
1814	Invention of the railway locomotive by George Stephenson
1815	Congress of Vienna, at the end of the wars against France (the Napoleonic wars). Britain emerged as the most powerful nation in Europe, and consolidated this position throughout the nineteenth century
1819	The Peterloo Massacre: a workers' uprising in Manchester was brutally suppressed, with many casualties
1824	Trades unions were recognised by the British government
1829	The Catholic Emancipation Act made discrimination against Catholics illegal in Britain
1830	A new liberal (Whig) government was elected in Britain – emulating the upheavals of the so-called 'July revolution' in France, which led to the abdication of King Charles X

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: 1832–1900

1832	The First Reform Bill: voting rights were extended for the first time to men who were not landowners, and most of the privileged seats in Parliament (the rotten boroughs) were abolished

1833	Slavery abolished in British colonies
1833	First Factory Act improved workers' conditions and made factory inspections compulsory
1833	Poor Laws provided accommodation in workhouses for the destitute, but with forced labour
1834	A group of labourers from Dorset (later called 'the Tolpuddle Martyrs') were sentenced to exile for protesting against worker exploitation (remission was granted in 1836)
1837	Victoria became queen
1839	Industrial uprising of the Chartists, who rebelled against Parliament's rejection of the popular People's Charter of 1836, calling for greater democracy. A general workers' strike was called in 1842, but failed
1845–47	Famine in Ireland, largely due to failure of the potato crop. Irish population declined from 8.5 million to 6.5 million, with one million deaths and one million emigrations, principally to the United States of America
1846	Life for British farmers eased, with the repeal of the Corn Laws
1847	Publication of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Both Christianity and the landowners' control of political power were questioned
1848	The Year of Revolution. Many new regimes were established on the continent of Europe, but Queen Victoria increased her popularity in Britain
1851	The First World Fair (the Great Exhibition) was held in the Crystal Palace, especially erected in Hyde Park, London. The Queen's husband, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, is largely credited with this demonstration of British supremacy in science and the arts. The Great Exhibition is widely regarded as the high point of British imperialism
1853–56	The Crimean War: Britain's first war for two hundred years. With other European nations, the Russian claims in the Ukraine were rejected
1857	The Indian Mutiny: Britain's colonial presence was challenged for the first time. In 1858, the East India Company was wound up, and the Indian company became a vice-royalty – politically, therefore, a public rather than a private concern
1859	Publication of *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. This scientific treatise, conducted in the 1830s, challenged orthodox religious beliefs. For the first time, agnosticism and atheism became widespread
1861	Death of Prince Albert. Queen Victoria remained a widow for forty years, until her death in 1901
1861–65	The American Civil War. 'Confederate' states in the south-east wanted to preserve slavery for black immigrants. President Abraham Lincoln supported integration. The southern 'Confederacy' was finally defeated. In 1865, the Confederacy was joined to the already 'United' states (in the north-east).

	After 1865, the USA expanded towards the Pacific Coast, with territorial concessions from Spain and France
1860s	'Modernism' was recognised as a force in English literature. George Meredith was an early practitioner of Modernism
1860s–1880s	The Conservative party leader Benjamin Disraeli and the Liberal leader William Gladstone alternated as prime minister
1867	Karl Marx published, in England, *Das Kapital*, which was a principal text of socialist ideology for over a century. (Matthew Arnold's epoch-breaking poem *Dover Beach* dates from the same year)
1867	The Second Reform Bill: the right to vote in parliamentary elections was gradually being expanded in Britain (a third bill was passed in 1884)
1868	Foundation of the British Trades Union Congress, to politicise workers' rights
1870	Education Act makes schooling compulsory for children aged 5 to 13
1870	Political union in Italy
1871	Political union in Germany
1870s	Britain leads international communications with the development of postal services and pioneering work in telecommunications (the Italian inventor of the telephone, Giuseppe Marconi, worked in England)
1877	In order to boost the flagging popularity of the monarchy, Queen Victoria is declared Empress of India by Conservative Prime Minister Disraeli, reinforcing Britain's colonial ambitions
1879	John Henry Newman, a convert to Catholicism, is created Cardinal of England by the Pope
1880s	Radical Liberalism began to give way to Marxist-influenced Socialism: 1881, the Socialist Democratic Federation; 1884, the Fabian Society, which politicised Marxist ideas in parliamentary terms; 1893, the Independent Labour Party (founded by Keir Hardie) which first contested and won seats in Parliament. The Labour Party (1906) grew decisively in the early 1900s as political Liberalism lost favour (especially after the First World War, 1914–18)
1886	The Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone introduced the first Irish Home Rule Bill. Many members of his own party opposed him
1887	Queen Victoria celebrated fifty years as monarch (the Golden Jubilee)
1893	Irish issues continued to dominate British politics. Gladstone's revised Home Rule Bill introduced. Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party, originally supporters of Gladstone in the divided Liberal Party, became a full parliamentary force in 1906 (the Labour Party, under Ramsay Macdonald)

1898	Marxist politics introduced in Russia, with the establishment by Lenin and others of the Russian Socialist Democratic Workers' Party
1899	Establishment in Dublin of the Irish National Theatre
1899–1902	The Boer War: the Boers, from The Netherlands, occupied Transvaal and the Orange Free State in South Africa, and had territorial ambitions in Natal and the Cape Province (British colonies). Britain won the war, and established the Union of South Africa (to 1970)

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: 1900–45

1901	Death of Queen Victoria, after sixty-four years as monarch
1904	France established many political alliances between states on the continent of Europe; this was called the 'Entente Cordiale'. But the agreements lasted for only ten years, breaking down in 1914
1911	Height of the campaign by suffragettes in Britain; they were women who had not achieved suffrage (the right to vote) in three reform bills. Many people trace the beginning of feminism to the suffragette campaign (women over the age of 30 received the vote in 1918; from 1928, all adult women – aged over 21 – were given the vote)
1912	Defeat of the ruling Liberal Party's Bill for Irish Home Rule. The Conservative opposition were often called Unionists, a name which still exists today (the Ulster vote was decisive)
1914	Opening of the Panama Canal, built by the United States of America. Originally a French project, then widely supported in Europe, the work was conceded to the USA, which demanded the creation of the country of Panama, out of former Colombian territory
1914	Beginning of the First World War in Europe. This was started by the assassination of the Bosnian king in Sarajevo, which led to the collapse of the Entente Cordiale. Britain opposed Germany's territorial ambitions. The bloodiest battles were in Northern France, after Germany's takeover of the Benelux countries (BElgium, NEtherlands, LUxembourg)
1916	US President Wilson sent American forces to Europe, to help British and French forces to fight German aggression. American intervention was vital to the eventual defeat of Germany. While war continued on the Western European continent, the political climate changed elsewhere in Europe
1916	Easter Rising in Ireland, in protest at continued British presence. Several Irish rebels were executed by the English
1917	The Russian Revolution, led by so-called 'Bolsheviks', the majority of Communist sympathisers, led by Lenin. Execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Lenin became head of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (to his death in 1924, when he was replaced by Stalin)

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