THE SHORT OXFORD HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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CLARENDON PRESS • OXFORD
1994

Oxford University Press, Walton Sheet, Oxford OX2 6DP

Modernism and its Alternatives: Literature 1920-1945

When the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens visited the battlefield of north-eastern France in July in order to investigate the need for permanent memorials to the vast number of British and Empire dead, he described in a tone of horrified amazement the s trange interaction of men and nature he had witnessed. "What humanity can endure and suffer is beyond belief", he told his wife[. ...] For the moment, the only monument he could envisage as appropriate was 'a solid ball of bronz3' Lutyen's ambigu ity concerning what he had seen as a non-combatant on the Western Front proved typical of the future reactions of those re membering or contemplating

wasteful devastation of the war. The post-war period was haunted by long memories, some tender, some angry, most sickening. According to the critic and poet Herbert Read, writing in *The Criterion* in 1930, it had taken more than a decade for ex-combatants to come to terms with what the war had meant to them and with 'the debris of its emotional conflicts' before they could begin to transform their experience into literature. Nevertheless, it was the incongruity implicit in the idea of the 'friendliness' of the unfeeling wild flowers noted by Lutyens, as much as that of the equally indifferent poppies, cornflowers, skylarks and rats of the poetry that had emerged from the war, that effectively marked the end of an art which had once reached for comforting or sympathetic images from nature. Stark and solid balls of bronze seemed a more appropriate tribute to those sacrificed to the unfeeling might of the machines devised and exploited by human ingenuity.

The feeling that a new start ought to be made, in politics and society as much as in art, was accentuated rather than initiated by the war and its immediate aftermath. When Virginia Woolf announced with a devastating flippancy that 'in or about December, 1910, human character changed', she was expressing what seemed by 1924 to be an accumulated sense of exhilaration at a variety of

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new beginnings and rejections of the past. Although she was referring back specifically to Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* as an early symptom of cultural questioning and to the plays of Shaw as a record of a continuing shift in attitudes, the intellectual elite who formed the first audience for Woolf's paper 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' would probably have acknowledged the potent influence of other and wider European innovations. In November 1910 the eyes of London gallery-goers had been opened wide to the blazing colours and visual fragmentations of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin at the exhibition organized by Roger Fry of 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists'. Although the Press had been vituperative and mocking in its criticism, and some visitors had laughed convulsively and shaken their umbrellas at the canvasses they found offensive, the exhibition's *succès de scandale* was to change the course of British painting in the twentieth century. In 1912 a second Post-Impressionist exhibition introduced the visual economies, the rethinkings of form, and the abstractions of Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and Derain to a London public. This second exhibition also included somewhat tamer pictures by English imitators, notably Duncan Grant and Virginia Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell, and a sprinkling of work by Russian artists.

A Russian contributor to the 1912 catalogue noted the significance of a new generation of national painters who had assimilated themselves 'to the popular art', rejoicing in its 'sincere directness' as a counterweight to what he saw as 'the over-refined and effeminate tastes' of the 'aesthetical gourmands' of St Petersburg. This comment related new Russian painting to the most familiar Western realization of the Slavic Renaissance, the seasons of ballet and opera organized in Paris and London by Diaghilev's company. Diaghilev's sensational contribution to the Coronation Gala programme at Covent Garden in 1911 had served to revolutionize English conceptions of dance and set design. On seeing Diaghilev's company in London, a gushingly enthusiastic Rupert Brooke wrote: 'They, if anything can, redeem our civilization. I'd give anything to be a ballet-designer.' It was not an ambition that Brooke was to realize, but the influence of the painters, designers, composers, and choreographers associated with Diaghilev's company remained remarkable. Besides ballets by Debussy, the second season of 1912 included the London première of Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird*. It was followed in June 1913 by four performances of *The Rite of Spring*, a ballet which had been greeted with an orchestrated furore in Paris the month before. To ears unattuned to Orthodox liturgical chant and to Russian popular music, Stravinsky's aggressively repeated phrases and emphatic rhythms seemed like an excoriating exposure to something savagely primitive. To eyes accustomed to gently receding sylvan vistas as a frame for smooth and balanced balletic movement on the stage, the startling backdrops and the angularly athletic choreography jolted audiences into a new perception of theatrical kinetics. The very subjects of the new ballets commissioned by Diaghilev were seen as direct challenges to the vaunted 'refinement' and urbanity of inherited, aristocratic Western culture and to the emasculated

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nature of much of its own folk-tradition. Despite its reputation for being straitlaced and insular, pre-war London had cautiously emerged both as responsive to aesthetic novelty and as a focal point in the international dissemination of an art which seemed as distinctively 'modern' as it was innovative.

The outbreak of hostilities in August 1914 brought an abrupt if temporary end to easy international exchange and to expensive and overtly Germanic public displays in opera-houses. Even to non-combatants, to women, to middle-aged or unfit men, to exiled Americans, or to Irishmen unaffected by enforced conscription, the fabric of London intellectual life appeared to have deteriorated. To D. H. Lawrence, writing in 1923, the spirit of the old London collapsed in the winter of 1915-16: 'the city, in some way, perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears and horrors.' Political dissent and debate too were suspended

or at worst suppressed. The international General Strike, once seen as socialism's trump card to be played against a warmongering ruling class, failed to materialize in 1914 and Labour MPs were chosen to serve both in Lloyd George's War Cabinet and in minor governmental posts. The cause of women's suffrage, so actively pursued in the years up to 1914, was effectively silenced by the promise of future electoral reform (a promise partly redeemed in 1919). Even the subject of Irish Home Rule, the chief entanglement of domestic policy since the 1880s, was put on ice after the third reading of the Home Rule Bill in May 1914. It was violently kicked into life again by the six-day Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916. The 'Irish question', as with so many other suspended questions, was finally attended to in the context of a Europe which like Ireland had 'changed utterly' by the early 1920s. An Irish Free State, bereft of the six predominantly Protestant counties of Ulster, came into fudged being in 1921 and found itself immediately plunged into a brief but painful civil war.

By merit of its being deemed a 'domestic' concern of the victorious UnitedKingdom the problem of Ireland scarcely vexed the concentrated minds of the rulers of post-war Europe and America who met at Versailles in order to unravel the outstanding historical, geographical, religious, and racial knots in Central and Eastern Europe. In most cases severance proved quicker and more efficient than unravelling. Although there was no real hope of a return to the status quo ante, the treaties of Versailles and the Trianon proved only temporary compromises in the face of political circumstances moulded not simply by the disasters of war but also by the presumptions of the social and national revolutions the war had provoked. These new circumstances rarely left the politics, and by extension the literature, of the United Kingdom untouched. A sense of fragmentation, which was as much geographical and historical as it was cultural and psychological, haunted the experimental texts of the 1920s. The old continental empires had been convulsed and, in the case of Austria-Hungary and Turkey, posthumously dismembered. Humiliated Germany staggered from its attempts to establish a Marxist republic, to an unstable and impoverished 'bourgeois' democracy, and finally to a National Socialism intent

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on fulfilling what it claimed was the nation's unrealized European destiny. Above all, the October Revolution of 1917 had changed once arch-conservative Russia to a bright shade of red. It had also shifted the ground and the rules of all post-war political discussion.

The beleaguered Bolshevik state, first assaulted by armed Western intervention, then wracked by civil war and the destructive manoeuvres of international capital, emerged for many post-war intellectuals as the model progressive society. In 1935 the veteran English collectivists and socialists, Sidney (1859-1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), subtitled their flattering study of Soviet Communism with the question 'A New Civilisation?'. In later editions the question mark was dropped. Respected British socialists such as H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw returned from fact-finding missions to Soviet Russia in the 1930s and airily assented to the idea that they had seen the working future of humankind. Most conveniently avoided contemplating the fate of the Russian intelligentsia and the manifest suffering of uprooted, regimented, and forcibly collectivized peasants. To many British writers of the younger generation, the failure of the Western 'bourgeois democracies' to address the problems of poverty at home, and the problems of the explosive antidemocratic energies of Italian, German, and Spanish Fascism abroad, seemed further to expose Communist Russia as the only antidote to political despair. Fellow-travelling became the order of the day. It generally entailed keeping one bright eye on the goals at the end of the broad highway and a blind one on the deeds of one's travelling companions.

The optimism of 'progressive' British intellectuals about the vaunted achievements of the first 'Workers' State' was formed not simply by Soviet propaganda but by a pained awareness of the manifestly poor working and living conditions of a large percentage of their fellow-countrymen and women. The Britain to which demobbed troops returned in 1918 and 1919 proved not to be the 'Land fit for Heroes' promised by the wartime Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. Despite the social reforms initiated by pre-war Liberal governments, the condition of the industrial and agricultural poor, and of the unemployed, often contrasted as starkly with that of the rich as it had in mid-Victorian Britain. The peculiarly British brand of socialist thought and experiment, which had so marked the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, also served to determine the policies and electoral success of the Labour Party in the 1920s. That the party so stoutly resisted Marxist and Communist influence, and thereby alienated many young and more headstrong radicals, was an immediate result of its origins in quirky native ideologies and untheoretical traditions. A minority Labour Government was formed after the General Election of 1923 but fell only ten months later. Its impact on both the old order and the new was more symbolic than effective. In October 1924 the Government was profoundly shaken by the publication of a letter, supposedly from the Bolshevik Zinoviev, exhorting 'the masses of the British proletariat' to bestir themselves against the very sort of compromise the Labour Party itself

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represented. A month later Labour defeat in a General Election brought the Conservatives back to power.

The General Strike of May 1926, which collapsed after nine days, demonstrated the failure of organized labour to topple, or even shake, a resolute and unsympathetic Government. The Government's propaganda victory was partly due to its successful control of the media, including, for the first time radio broadcasting. Continuing economic depression and rising unemployment nevertheless helped to ensure both that Labour was able to form a second Government between 1929 and 1931, and that Labour's reforming zeal floundered. There was relatively little any democratic government seemed to be able to do to reverse the devastating effects of the economic depression on heavy industry. Waste Lands seared themselves into more than simply the literary imagination. 'When the industry of a town has been killed', the trade unionist and politician Ellen Wilkinson wrote in her propagandist study of Jarrow, *The Town that was Murdered* (1939), 'it seems as difficult to apply artificial respiration as on a human corpse'.

Although the fate of Jarrow seemed to socialists like Wilkinson (1891-1947) to exemplify the inhuman shortcomings of the inherited capitalist order, it should not be assumed that British literature of the 1920s and 1930s was exclusively dominated by images of decay and instability or by a language of fragmentation and reformulation. The sometimes bright, sometimes troubled, new horizons opened by international cultural innovation were, however, rarely concordant with the working lives and domestic diversions of the vast mass of the British population. In his pithy essay 'Art and Life' (1917), republished as the first paper in his influential *Vision and Design* in 1920, Roger Fry (1866-1934) had argued that 'the correspondence between art and life which we so habitually assume is not at all constant and requires much correction before it can be trusted'. If Fry's argument sets out initially to counter the idea of art as photographic representation, it ends by announcing that 'the artist of the new movement is moving into a sphere more and more remote from that of the ordinary man' and that 'in proportion as art becomes purer the number of people to whom it appeals gets less'. Much of Fry's artistic mission consisted of attacks on the narrow perceptions of the now socially and intellectually emancipated lower-middle class. It was a class now served by new middlebrow newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* (founded 1896), *Daily Mirror* (the first newspaper devoted exclusively to women's interests, founded 1903), and the *Daily Express* (founded 1900 and developed into a journal of substantial influence and circulation under the proprietorship of Lord Beaverbrook in the 1920s). In the opinion of such newspapers and their readers, a broad national 'culture' and a sense of participation in all elements of national life were no longer the exclusive preserve of an educated or privileged elite. Popular newspapers helped secure their position as moulders of social opinion by sponsoring easily assimilated history books, illustrated commemorative volumes, reissued classic novels, dictionaries and, above all, moderately priced

encyclopaedias. 'I know what I like' and 'I know how to see through what I have been told to like' became interchangeable and variable propositions according to class, education, and purchasing power. It was an aspect of freedom and cultural multiplicity which was rarely acceptable to an aesthetic and political avant-garde.

However disconcerting it may have seemed to highbrow opinion, the triumph of the middlebrow was successfully fostered by technological innovation. In many ways the British middle classes, and those who aspired to modest middle-class status and respectability, did well out of the inter-war period. The evolution of the detached and semi-detached villa by countless speculative builders seemed to offer the promise of a better and cleaner life in the expanding outer suburbs of those British cities which remained unaffected by the Depression. Lines of fussy, historically referential but unpretentious 'semis' spread out along arterial roads and sprawled over former farmland and the abandoned gardens of the demolished mansions of earlier and richer suburbanites. The construction of these suburbs was an enterprise as socially significant in its way as the building of the medieval cathedrals or the country houses of the Georgian aristocracy (if one rarely as aesthetically satisfying). They also gave, and still give, ordinary people a much-desired quality of life: a garden back and front, conveniently sized rooms, and a suburban ambience detached from the supposed annoyances of the town. With the advent of the wireless in the 1920s (the British Broadcasting Company merged into the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1926) a vital aspect of popular entertainment shifted classlessly away from the public domain and into the domestic, from the theatre and the ballroom to the parlour and the kitchen. The first music broadcast by the new Corporation on New Year's Day 1926 was the insistently democratic song 'The more we are together the merrier we'll be'. Programming decisions determined that dance music vied with the classical and the big band with the orchestra. Actors, music-hall artistes, novelists, journalists, and poets cemented their reputations by directly addressing audiences unimagined by their predecessors. Even the reserved King George V cultivated a newly intimate relationship with his people through the medium of cheery Christmas messages broadcast to the Empire (his wayward successor, Edward VIII, however, used the radio in December 1936 to announce his abdication from the throne).

With the brief advent of television in the late 1930s (an experiment terminated by the Second World War) a further dimension was added to home entertainment for those who could afford it. Television eventually diminished both the glory and the audiences of by far the most popular form of diversion in the 1930s, the cinema. The

construction throughout Britain of the great ‘picture-palaces’ set the seal on the success of a form of entertainment that appealed equally to the middle and working classes. The achievement of the art of the cinema, and particularly the American cinema, had no real precedent. Its subjects, and the often fantastic buildings in which films were shown, looked

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both backwards and forwards. Audiences were imaginatively projected back to Imperial Rome and to Medieval Europe; they escaped into dreams of grand hotels and streamlined art deco apartments and, in the case of films like the admirable British film-version of H. G. Wells’s *Things to Come* (1936), they glimpsed a disturbing but ultimately happy future. The efforts of both the Hollywood studios and, later, of their less well-endowed British shadows, also conditioned the popular perception of certain literary ‘classics’ for both good and ill. *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* of 1934, for example, wove fictional strands around the story of the elopement of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. The 1931 version of *Frankenstein* distorted Mary Shelley’s plot and her central characters out of recognizable shape, while William Wyler’s *Wuthering Heights* of 1939 rendered Emily Brontë’s novel little more than a vehicle for the high-flown talents of Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier. Olivier also starred in the 1940 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (for which Aldous Huxley helped provide a screenplay). Both Shakespeare and Dickens were, however, better served by still celebrated versions by Max Reinhardt of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1935), by Olivier of *Henry V* (1945) and *Hamlet* (1948) (both with the director in the title-role), by George Cukor of *David Copperfield* (1935, with W. C. Fields as Micawber), and by David Lean of *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948). In a separate category stands the cinematic involvement of living British writers, notably the collaboration of Noël Coward with David Lean in the ever-so-British wartime heroics of *In Which We Serve* (1942), Coward’s script for the delicate tear-jerker *Brief Encounter* (1945), and Terence Rattigan and Graham Greene’s screenplay for John Boulting’s film of Greene’s novel *Brighton Rock* (1947).

The cultural perspective offered by the cinema, and by a director’s freedom to depart from the limitations of a given text, serves as a reminder of the twentieth century’s growing awareness of the instability of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed object, the reader and the text, the past and the present. Questionings of received ideas of form haunt the critical writings of the early Modernists. Debates about tradition and the rejection of tradition, about the use and interpretation of history, and about the very survival and value of the written word have taken on a renewed urgency as Modernism evolved into a variety of post-Modernisms. Any overview of the literature of a given historical period is, however, further conditioned by the awareness of often radically different perspectives between then and now. As with the years 1780-1830, to see one single mood, genre, style, or ideology as dominant in the Britain of the inter-war period serves to distort its real multiplicity. It is equally confusing to trust the opinions of contemporaries, from whatever side they come, without questioning them. When, for example, the middlebrow *Illustrated London News* published a ‘Silver Jubilee Record Number’ in 1935 to celebrate twenty-five years of the reign of George V, its retrospect on ‘Writers of the Present Reign’ diverged radically from the prospects for a new ‘Georgian’ literature earlier set out in Virginia Woolf’s two essays ‘Modern

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Fiction’ (1919) and ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ (1924). Where Woolf had divided her ‘Edwardians’ (Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy) from her ‘Georgians’ (Eliot, Forster, Lawrence, and, somewhat reluctantly, Joyce), *Illustrated London News* commissioned a brief survey of modern letters from G. K. Chesterton and illustrated it with photographs of writers selected, one presumes, by the issue’s editor. Chesterton skirted as carefully as he could around the evident disjunctures within his subject. He was evidently happier with the work of an older generation (Hardy, Shaw, Yeats) and even with the ‘high note in normal English versification’ of younger conservative poets (Alfred Noyes, John Drinkwater, Lascelles Abercrombie, and Humbert Wolfe) than he was with the fictional ‘mud-slinging’ of Aldous Huxley and with the poetry of Pound and Eliot (whom he sees as representing an unwelcome American innovation). Chesterton managed, with some reserve, to admire the novels of Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, and he found himself able to draw an over-neat contrast between Lawrence and Huxley (‘Lawrence tried to escape through the body, and Huxley through the brain; but it is doubtful if either of them did escape’). More starkly out of step with what has become the received opinion of later generations are the twenty-two vignette-photographs of writers which illustrate the essay. Lytton Strachey appears as ‘biographer and historian’, but his name is somewhat incongruously linked to those of Hilaire Belloc and the now forgotten historians Sir Julian Corbett and Viscount Morley. Mrs Humphry Ward (d. 1920) rubs shoulders with Katherine Mansfield (d. 1923) but they are joined by a decidedly rum ‘representative’ selection of once popular novelists and essayists: Israel Zangwill, Mary Webb, Robert Hichens, W. J. Locke, ‘F. Anstey’, A. E. W. Mason, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, and E. F. Benson. Apart from W. B. Yeats the reputations of the four other selected poets (Alice Meynell, Robert Bridges, Stephen Phillips, and Sir William

Watson) have slumped disastrously. To readers with sensibilities moulded by books which have since been deemed to be characteristic of the early 1930s — Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Burnt Norton* (1935), Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Auden's *Poems* (1930) and *The Orators* (1932) — the *Illustrated London News*'s canon looks stillborn. It may still be possible that posterity will find Ezra Pound's insistence on new beginnings and a new kind of post-war writing misguided, but it seems unlikely. What the age 'demanded' when the guns fell silent in November 1918 still seems to us to have called forth a particularly influential form of rearticulation.

'Bloomsbury' and beyond: Strachey, Woolf, and Mansfield

When the narrator of Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* goes up to Oxford as an undergraduate in 1922 he decorates his college rooms with objects indicative of his 'advanced' but essentially derivative taste. Charles Ryder hangs up a reproduction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, a painting which had been

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shown at the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, and he displays a screen painted by Roger Fry that he has acquired at the closing sale at Fry's pioneering Omega Workshops (a byword for the clumsily experimental interior design of the period). He also shows off a collection of books which he later embarrassedly describes as 'meagre and commonplace'. These books include volumes of Georgian Poetry (the last in the series of which had just appeared), once popular and mildly sensational novels by Compton Mackenzie (1883-1972) and Norman Douglas (1868-1952), Roger Fry's *Vision and Design* of 1920 and Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* of 1918. These last two volumes, issued in a similar popular format in the early 1920s, are the clearest signals of the extent to which the young Ryder has been influenced by the canons of taste enunciated by the group of writers and artists who have come to be known as the 'Bloomsbury Group'.

'Bloomsbury' was never a formal grouping. Its origins lay in male friendships in late nineteenth-century Cambridge; in the early 1900s it found a focus in the Gordon Square house of the children of Leslie Stephen in unfashionable Bloomsbury; it was only with the formation of the 'Memoir Club' in 1920 that it loosely defined the limits of its friendships, relationships, and sympathies. The 'Memoir Club' originally centred on Leslie Stephen's two daughters Virginia and Vanessa, their husbands Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell, and their friends and neighbours Desmond and Molly MacCarthy, Duncan Grant, E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, and John Maynard Keynes. The group was linked by what Clive Bell later called 'a taste for discussion in pursuit of truth and a contempt for conventional ways of thinking and feeling, contempt for conventional morals if you will'. Their discussions combined tolerant agnosticism with cultural dogmatism, progressive rationality with social snobbery, practical jokes with refined self advertisement. When in 1928 Bell (1881-1964) attempted to define 'Civilization' (in a book of that name) he identified an aggrandized Bloomsbury ideal in the *douceur de vivre* and witty iconoclasm of the France of the Enlightenment (though, as Virginia Woolf commented, 'in the end it turns out that civilization is a lunch party at No 50 Gordon Square'). To its friends 'Bloomsbury' offered a prevision of a relaxed, permissive, and elitist future; to its enemies, like the once patronized and later estranged D. H. Lawrence, it was a tight little world peopled by upper-middle-class 'black beetles'.

The prime 'Bloomsbury' text, Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, suggests that it is easier to see what the group did not represent than what it did. Strachey's book struck a sympathetic chord with both his friends and the public at large. *Eminent Victorians* (1918), a collection of four succinct biographies of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon, seemed to many readers to deliver the necessary *coup de grâce* to the false ideals and empty heroism of the nineteenth century. These were principles which seemed to have been tried on the Western Front and found disastrously wanting. Strachey (1880-1932) does not so much mock his subjects as let them damn themselves in the eyes of their more enlightened successors.

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He works not by frontal assault but by means of the sapping innuendo and the carefully placed, explosive epigram. His models, like Bell's, are the Voltairean conversationalists of the Paris salons of the eighteenth century, not the earnest Carlylean lecturers of Victorian London. When, for example, he speculates about Florence Nightingale's conception of God he jests that 'she felt towards Him as she might have felt towards a glorified sanitary engineer'. In a review written in 1909 Strachey had endorsed the idea that 'the first duty of a great historian is to be an artist'. As his later studies of *Queen Victoria* (1921) and of *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928) suggest, Strachey was neither a great historian nor, ultimately, a great biographer, but he was undoubtedly an innovative craftsman. The 'art' of biography has never

been quite the same since. It is not simply that he was an iconoclast; he was the master of a prose of elegant disenchantment. His age, if it did not always cultivate elegance, readily understood disenchantment.

Strachey's biographies challenged the conventional wisdom of interpretation. They sprang, like the disparate essays assembled in Roger Fry's *Vision and Design*, from an urge to establish a new way of seeing and observing which was distinct from the stuffy pieties of the Victorians. Fry's title carefully avoids the word 'form', but it is that word, linked to the crucially qualifying adjective 'significant', which weaves, by direct reference and by implication, in and out of the twenty-five short essays. Although *Vision and Design* is primarily dedicated to reconsiderations of painting and sculpture, the implications of its theoretical formulations for the experimental fiction of Virginia Woolf are considerable. In his 'Essay in Aesthetics' Fry distinguishes between 'instinctive reactions to sensible objects' and the peculiarly human faculty of 'calling up again ... the echo of past experiences' in the imagination. The 'whole consciousness', he argues, 'may be focussed upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience' and thus produced in the imaginative life 'a different set of values, and a different kind of perception'. As the 'chief organ of the imaginative life' Art works by a set of values distinct from those of pure representation. When he specifically returns to his argument in the book's final 'Retrospect' Fry offers a further definition of the term 'significant form' as 'something other than agreeable arrangements of form, harmonious patterns, and the like'. A work of art possessing this elusive, and seemingly indefinable quality implies, he asserts, 'the effort on the part of the artist to bend to our emotional understanding by means of his passionate conviction some intractable material which is alien to our spirit'.

Virginia Woolf's criticism distils and reapplies Bell's and Fry's aesthetic ideas as a means of arguing for the potential freedom of the novel from commonly received understandings of plot, time, and identity. In discussing the revision of traditional modes of representation in her essay 'Modern Fiction', Woolf (1882-1941) insists that each day 'the mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel'. The novelist, attempting to work with this 'incessant shower of innumer-

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able atoms', is forced to recognize that 'if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention', there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe 'in the accepted style'. The task of the future novelist, Woolf therefore suggests, is to convey an impression of the 'luminous halo' of life — 'this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit' — with as little mixture of the 'alien and external' as possible. What Woolf seeks to defend in her essays is not necessarily a new range of subjects for the novel, but new ways of rendering and designing the novel. She does more than present a challenge to the received idea of realism; she reaches out to a new aesthetic of realism. Essentially, she defines her own work, and that of contemporaries, such as Lawrence and Joyce, against the example of the Edwardian 'materialists' (and Arnold Bennett in particular) who, to her mind, laid too great a stress on 'the fabric of things'. Not only did they weigh their fiction down with a plethora of external detail, they too readily accepted the constraints of conventional obedience to 'plot' and sequential development. Much as Roger Fry had seen the liberated artist 'bending' intractable material into significance, Woolf insists that the twentieth-century novelist could evolve a new fictional form out of a representation of the 'myriad impressions' which daily impose themselves on the human consciousness.

As Virginia Woolf's fictional style developed beyond the relatively conventional parameters of *The Voyage Out* (1915) to the experimental representations of consciousness in *Mrs Dallomay* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931), specific characterization recedes and the detailed exploration of the individual identity tends to melt into a larger and freer expression. The discontinuities, fragmentations, and disintegrations which her avant-garde artistic contemporaries observed in both the external and the spiritual world become focused for Woolf in the idea, noted in her diary in 1924, of character 'dissipated into shreds'. Her novels attempt both to 'dissipate' character and to reintegrate human experience within an aesthetic shape or 'form'. She seeks to represent the nature of transient sensation, or of conscious and unconscious mental activity, and then to relate it outwards to a more universal awareness of pattern and rhythm. The momentary reaction, the impermanent emotion, the ephemeral stimulus, the random suggestion, and the dissociated thought are effectively 'bent' into a stylistic relationship to something coherent and structured. A 'coherence in things' is what Mrs Ramsay recognizes in a visionary, and quasi-religious, moment of peace in *To the Lighthouse* as 'a stability ... something ... immune from change'. The supposedly random picture of the temporal in Woolf's later fiction is also informed and 'interpreted' by the invocation of the permanent and the universal, much as the 'arbitrary' in nature was 'interpreted' with reference to post-Darwinian science, or the complexities of the human psyche unravelled by the application of newly fashionable Freudian theory. Although her characters may often seem to be dissolved into little more than ciphers, what they come to signify is part of a complex iconographic discourse. In the instances of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* the

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glancing insights into the identities of characters are complemented by larger symbols (a flickering lighthouse or moving water) which are allowed to be both temporary and permanent, both 'real' and resonant, both constant and fluctuating. The fictional whole thus becomes a normative expression of certain Modernist themes and modes. Woolf's particular preoccupation with time is closely related to her manifest interest in flux, a dissolution or dissipation of distinctions within a fluid pattern of change and decay, which she recognizes in nature and science as much as in the human psyche. Her universe, though effectively Godless, is not one deprived of imposed meaning and patterning. Her narratives are variously punctuated by clock-readings and clock-soundings, by the measurement of tides and the altitude of the sun, by history and archaeology, by ageing and dying. Whereas in her longest novel, *The Years* (1937), she stresses the nature of a local awareness of the sequential passage of time from the 1880s to the 1930s, and explores the consequences and processes of waiting, learning, and ageing, she elsewhere shapes her fiction by means of the larger consciousness of a narrator alert both to historical callibration of time and, more significantly, to an imaginative freedom from time.

The informing presence of women characters with an aesthetic propensity, or of particular women artists, serves to moderate and condition the larger ambitions of the narratives in which they appear. Although Virginia Woolf rarely directly echoes the insistent narrative voice of a George Eliot, her own work does reflect what she recognized in her pioneer essay on Eliot (1925) as a tendency to introduce characters who stand for 'that troubled spirit, that exacting and questioning and baffled presence' of the novelist herself. If neither Lily Briscoe nor Miss La Trobe possesses the cultural significance of a Romola or a Dorothea, both are allowed, as amateur artists, to act out the ordering dilemma of the professional. In the final part of *To the Lighthouse* the 'weight' of Lily Briscoe's painting seems to be poised as she explores the elusive nature of mass and form: 'Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron.' A similar 'visionary' insight temporarily enlightens the amateur author of the historical pageant around which *Between the Acts* (1941) is shaped. Miss La Trobe watches entranced as butterflies (traditional images of the human soul) 'gluttonously absorb' the rich colours of the fancy dress strewn on the grass; the possibility of a completer art briefly dawns on her, only to fall apart again. In both novels women's sensibility (and sensitivity) contrasts with the factual 'materialism' of a world dominated by the kind of men who 'negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance' or who insist, as Colonel Mayhew does in *Between the Acts*, that no picture of history is complete without reference to the British Army. The Mrs Ramsays, the Lily Briscoes, and the Miss La Trobes dream their brief dreams or are vouchsafed momentary 'epiphanies'; the men are often left content with a limited grasp, and presumed control, of the physical world.

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Virginia Woolf's most complete, but ambiguous, representation of the life of a woman character's mind in *Mrs Dalloway* is also her most thorough experiment with the new technique of interior monologue. The novel plays subtly with the problem of an identity which is both multiple and singular, both public and private, and it gradually insists on the mutual dependence and opposition of the perceptions of Clarissa Dalloway and the shell-shocked ramblings of a victim of the war, Septimus Warren Smith. *Mrs Dalloway* reveals both the particular originality of Woolf's fictional mode and the more general limitations of her social vision. When she returns to the problem of a dissipated identity in her extraordinary tribute to the English aristocracy, *Orlando* (1928), she seems to seek both to dissolve and define character in a fanciful concoction of English history and shifting gender. The book is in part a sentimental tribute to the personal flair and ancestral fixation of her aristocratic friend and fellow-writer, Victoria ('Vita') Sackville-West (1892-1962), in part an exploration of a 'masculine' freedom traditionally denied to women. If Woolf's depiction of the society of her time is as blinkered as that of E. M. Forster by upper-middle-class snobberies and would-be liberalisms, the historical perspective which determined her feminism made for a far more distinctive clarity of argument. In the essay 'Street Haunting' (published in 1942) she writes of the pleasures of a London *flâneuse* who discovers as the front door shuts that the shell-like nature of domestic withdrawal is broken open 'and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye'. Almost the opposite process is delineated in the study *A Room of One's Own* (1929), where the existence of a private space, and of a private income, is seen as a prerequisite for the development of a woman writer's creativity. *A Room of One's Own* is, however, far more than an insistent plea for privacy, leisure, and education; it is a proclamation that women's writing has nearly come of age. It meditates on the pervasiveness of women as the subjects of poetry and on their absence from history; it plays as fancifully as the narrator of *Orlando* might with the domestic fate of a woman Shakespeare, but above all it pays tribute to those English novelists, from Aphra Behn to George Eliot, who established a tradition of women's writing. 'Masterpieces are not single and solitary births', she insisted, 'they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.' It is in this tradition that Virginia Woolf most earnestly sought to see herself, a tradition which to her would eventually force open a way for the woman writer to see human beings 'not always in relation to each other but

in relation to reality; and to the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves'.

Woolf's 'significant forms', shaped from glancing insights and carefully placed and iterated details, are to some degree echoed in the work of her New Zealand-born contemporary, Katherine Mansfield (the pseudonym of Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, 1888-1923). If Mansfield's success with reviewers and readers seems to have stimulated Woolf's jealousy rather than critical

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generosity (Woolf generally found Mansfield 'inscrutable'), both writers can be seen as developing the post-impressionist principle of suggestiveness and rhythm from a distinctively feminine point of view. Mansfield worked determinedly on a small scale, concentrating on carefully pointed, delicately elusive short stories. Her succinct narratives, collected as *In a German Pension* (1911), *Bliss, and other Stories* (1920), and *The Garden Party, and other Stories* (1922), are brief triumphs of style, a style which serves both to suggest a pervasive atmosphere and to establish a series of evanescent sensations (creaks, yawns, draughts, cries, footfalls, bird-calls, and cats' miaows). Where *In a German Pension* conveys a fastidious dislike of Teutonic manners and mannerisms (though Mansfield declined to have the volume reprinted during the Great War), her later stories move towards a greater technical mastery and to a larger world-view. She draws significantly on the landscapes and flora of her native New Zealand (in, for example, 'The Aloe'), she attempts to explore the responses of a wide spectrum of social types, and, by means of a style which takes on a yet more shimmering elusiveness, she endeavours to describe the mysterious 'diversity of life ... Death included'. Her own untimely death from tuberculosis cut short a remarkably innovative career.

Richardson and Lawrence

The phrase 'stream of consciousness' was coined in 1890 by the American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) as a description of the flow of thought within the waking human mind. It was a phrase much used and abused in the criticism of the new fiction of the 1920s and 1930s, and particularly with reference to the work of Virginia Woolf, in an effort to come to terms with a literature which boldly attempted to replicate or represent the flux of thought and feeling within a character without resorting to objective description or to conventional dialogue. The technique had been first pioneered in France, notably by Édouard Dujardin in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* of 1888 and later by Marcel Proust whose vast serial novel, collectively known as *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27), had a vast impact on Britain both in its original French and in the fine translation of 1922-31, retitled (with an intrusively nodding reference to Shakespeare) *Remembrance of Things Past*. The phrase 'stream of consciousness' had, however, first been adapted to literary-critical usage in 1918 by May Sinclair in an essay on Dorothy Richardson's attempt to eliminate 'the wise all-knowing author' from her novel sequence *Pilgrimage*. To Richardson herself, 'stream of consciousness' seemed a narrowly clumsy misnomer. 'In deploring the comparison of consciousness with a stream', she later wrote, 'and suggesting that fountain would be a more appropriate metaphor, I do not recognise the latter as a suitable label for the work appearing early in the century'. For Richardson (1873-1957) the novel of the period merely reflected a move away from 'Romance' to what she saw as a

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distinctive kind of 'Realism' which had dispensed with the old constrictions of 'plot', 'climax', and 'conclusion'.

Richardson's *Pilgrimage* is a sequence of twelve novels published between 1915 and 1938, with the posthumous addition of a thirteenth volume in 1967. The novelist latterly insisted that each volume was effectively only a chapter of the whole and that *Pilgrimage* should be read as a single sequence. Her originality lay not merely in the shape and scope of her huge undertaking but in her determination to forge a technique expressive of an explicitly female consciousness, a style which stood in antithesis both to a received 'masculine' tradition and to new male-dominated experiments in literature. Since most realist novelists happened to be men, Richardson wrote in the Preface to the 1938 Collected Edition, she found herself faced with the choice 'between following one of her regiments and attempting to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism'. 'Feminine prose', she further insisted, 'should properly be unpunctuated, moving from point to point without formal obstructions'. Her sentences are unanchored either by strict syntax or by formal reference to an exterior world; they fragment, drift, dissolve, and form themselves into new, ambiguous, and suggestive shapes. They allow for a representation of free association, for open-endedness, and for a perpetually varied interaction of the liberating inner consciousness (which Richardson particularly associated with the female) with an external world (whose control she saw as traditionally male). The eschewal of 'formal obstructions' in both her style and her overall structures has, however, often rendered her an

unapproachable, demanding, and 'difficult' writer. When Virginia Woolf argued in 1923 that Richardson had invented a sentence 'of a more elastic fibre than the old' she perforce added, in a disdainful put-down, that it was a woman's sentence 'only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything she may discover in the psychology of her sex'. Unlike Woolf, Richardson does not offer a fiction of fortuitous shapes, of patterns, of images, or of manipulated events. Not only is her chronology fluid, her narrative seems to repudiate linear development in order to allow for a reader's freedom of engagement with her implied thematic structures. It is not a freedom that all readers have relished.

The self proclaimed apostle of new literary and moral freedoms, D(avid) H(erbert) Lawrence (1885-1930), had little time for Richardson's, Joyce's, and Proust's narrative experiments. They were, he facetiously observed in his essay 'Surgery for the Novel — or a Bomb?' in 1923, 'death-rattles' to which the novelists themselves were listening 'trying to discover whether the intervals are minor thirds or major fourths'. Some convulsion or cataclysm, he insisted, was still needed to get the 'serious' novel out of its self consciousness and to force it 'to tackle new propositions without using abstractions'. The purged novel form had to present readers with 'new, really new feelings, a whole new line of new emotion, which will get us out of the emotional rut'. Lawrence's apostolic mission, loudly announced in a series of essays in the 1920s, was both to break

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open fictional doors and to nag readers and writers into passing through them. He was utterly persuaded that his mission as a novelist and as a critic of the novel was of the most elevated, most radical, and most urgent order. In the essay 'Morality and the Novel' (1925), he saw the twentieth-century novel as 'the highest example of subtle interrelatedness that man has discovered' and he confidently declared that if a novel revealed 'true and vivid relationships' it was a moral work; if the novelist honoured the relationship in itself, his work automatically took on greatness. In 'Why the Novel Matters' (also of 1925) Lawrence proclaimed the novelist to be superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet. Other artists and thinkers had merely analysed parts of experience; the novelist, by contrast, dealt with life as a whole. 'Life with a capital L', the fully vibrant human organism, formed the peak of an energetic hierarchy: 'All things that are alive are amazing. All things that are dead are subsidiary to the living. Better a live dog than a dead lion. But better a live lion than a live dog. *C'est la vie*.' 'Man alive', feeling, experiencing, learning, and integrating, was the central concern of the supreme human achievement — the novel.

D. H. Lawrence's utter confidence in his art is rooted, like his language, in the evangelical earnestness of the biblical prophets and visionaries and in that of their English Nonconformist successors. If Lawrence rejected the outward forms and the intellectual formularies of Christianity, he retained a vivid interest in its underlying mysteries, tropes, and patterns. He secularizes both the idea of a brooding Holy Spirit and the interrelationships of life and death, death and resurrection; he sexualizes the biblical language of possession and enthusiasm and he forges Christian images and metaphors into new and often shockingly gaudy shapes (a factor which particularly determines the nature of Lawrence's erotic fantasy about the resurrected Christ, *The Man mho Died* (1927-8)). Above all, he seeks to propound a Modernist theology of the fulfilled and fully integrated personality. It is a theology which relies less on the death of God than on the advent of a Godless prophet, Freud. Lawrence's new philosophy, like Freudian psychology, is centred on the concept of a welling, subterranean male consciousness and on the liberation of sexuality from inherited social repression. In his two most Freud-inspired tracts, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) he also attempts to reach out to new definitions (though, admittedly, often rhetorical ones) of the essential dynamism of the personality. These essays extend the ideological and critical base for his own later fiction which had been set out in the 'Study of Thomas Hardy' (written in 1914). This essay is only marginally an appreciation of Hardy. It is often astute about Hardy's aesthetic predilections and reiterations, but it is more of an allusive exploration of the quirks and twists of Lawrence's mind (and particularly his view of women) than an exposition of Hardy's art. At its core lies an attempt to distinguish between notions of essential maleness and essential femaleness. The unsteady argument is developed by means of an interfusion of theological, mystical, pseudo-scien-

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tific, literary, and art-historical reference. It concludes with a contemplation of what Lawrence sees, as an 'antinomy' between the principles of 'Law and Love', or, put more crudely, between female 'inertia' and male 'movement'. This 'antinomy', he proposes, will progressively give way to a kind of fusion of wills and personalities in which Man, as the embodiment of Love, and Woman, as the embodiment of Law, will form the two complementary parts of a living human whole. It is in the exploration of erotic complementariness, in a sexual and spiritual coming together and in a vital expansion of shared consciousness, that Lawrence seeks to bed his nascent future for the human race. His post-war novels formed the Sibylline books from which he trusted the moral direction of the future might be spelled.

Lawrence's first fictions are less oracular. They are rooted both in what he later saw as the provisionality of his own early sexual experience and in his East Midlands working-class background. He was amongst the first English novelists to have profited from the effects of the late-Victorian Education Acts which enforced the provision of free elementary education for the poor; he was amongst the last to have benefited from a provincial self helping, hymn-singing, richly Bible-centred Chapel-culture. Throughout his work, too, the mechanical rhythms, the monotonies, and the deprivations (both economic and spiritual) of industrial England are contrasted with vivid evocations of a working countryside that survives, if scarcely competes, with its machine-scarred urban counterpart. For Lawrence, the direct inheritor of Romantic prejudices against machines, the rural admonishes the industrial much as the instinctual takes precedence over the intellectual. In the semi-autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* (1913) the contrasts around which the novel is built are not simply those of ill-matched parents, of clinging mothers and releasing lovers, but also those of town and country, mining and farming, working and walking. At the opening of *The Rainbow* (1915) the Brangwen family farm, divided from the sprawling mining village by a canal, seems to be on 'the safe side of civilization' and the male members of the family are mystically linked by a 'blood-intimacy' to the fertility of the soil they till and to that of the animals they tend. The controlling images and the reiterated metaphors of both *The Rainbow* and of its successor, *Women in Love* (1920), stress a distinction between nature and anti-nature, between freedom and control, between instinct and will. In *Women in Love* Gerald Crich, the son of a colliery owner and the efficient masterer both of his men and of animal resistance, conceives of a world in which 'the will of man was the determining factor', where 'Man was the arch-god of earth' with a will that was 'the absolute, the only absolute'. As his fiction develops Lawrence increasingly associates true human freedom with the untamed and often unacknowledged might of nature rather than with a repressive will. Those who are seen to 'do the dirty on life' by denying their unconscious, natural or sexual energies bring about personal or symbolic disasters. Ursula Brangwen confronting apocalyptic horses at the end of *The Rainbow* or Rupert Birkin walking naked through the long grass at Breadalby in *Women in Love* are

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enriched, intense, ecstatic, and resurrected. By contrast, Gerald Crich wills his unbending life to an end in an Alpine snowdrift and a flood fortuitously purges the bitter and stuffy hypocrisies of the world of *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1926).

The central achievements of Lawrence's career as a novelist, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, reflect and echo what are assumed to be natural or psychical rhythms and currents. Certain passages in both novels (such as in the pressurized description of Lincoln Cathedral in the former or the car journey in the chapter called 'Excurse' in the latter) may burst unwelcomely into adjectival over-ripeness or may simply provoke derision, but the overall effect of the two novels is richly episodic, carefully wrought, and cumulative. *The Rainbow* deals with the evolving perceptions of three generations of a single family. Its 'sequel' *Women in Love*, which first outgrew then grew out of the originally arched scheme for a single novel, spans a far more contained period of time. In it Lawrence abandoned regular narrative linearity and shaped his fiction instead around certain charged, symbolic, even epiphanic incidents. The novel's central characters move easily through the stratified English society of the early years of the twentieth century, encountering industrial workers and industrial magnates, the inhabitants of arty-crafty cottages and cultured country mansions, the clienteles of effete London cafes, Southwell tea-shops, and Swiss skiing hostels. *Women in Love* opens with an unanswered question about marriage and ends with an unanswerable speculation about relationships beyond both the marital and the narrowly heterosexual. It explores a world which is fragmenting from a lack of coherence, but it neither looks nostalgically back to a lost pre-industrial 'blood-intimacy' nor confidently forward to a new social order. In chapter 26 ('A Chair') Birkin and Ursula briefly contemplate the prospect of an earth made safe for popular democracy and inherited by 'the meek' but they also recognize that it will not be their place. 'Then what are we going to do?' Ursula asks, 'We're not like them — are we? We're not the meek?' 'We've got to live in the chinks they leave us', Birkin replies.

When, in his novels of the later 1920s, Lawrence begins to ground his often ill-defined ideas of human liberation in a discourse which is both political and psycho-sexual, his writing is both more awkward and more problematical. Birkin's 'chinks' are prised open to provide an adequate *Lebensraum* for a newly enlightened and emboldened elite. Both *Kangaroo* (1923) and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) explore a revitalized social ethic beyond the kind of socialism which Lawrence sees as offering a materialistic and flabby democracy to the 'meek'. Neither book has an English setting and neither has much time for defunct English niceties or socialistic panaceas. *Kangaroo* flirtatiously contemplates the rise and the failure of an Australian proto-fascism based on male-bonding; *The Plumed Serpent*, set amidst the revolutionary fluidity of Mexico, dwells on the regenerative and redemptive potentiality of an Aztec blood-cult of dark gods and phallic power. Both novels are symptomatic of Lawrence's rejection of his roots and of his restless search for new landscapes and new

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bases for social relationships. This restlessness is more adventurously, more personally, and somewhat less dangerously explored in the series of travel-books written in his post-war *Wanderjahre*: *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), *Mornings in Mexico* (1927), and *Etruscan Places* (1932). Each traces a different affinity and a distinct fascination. His final large-scale fictional experiment, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, emphatically returned to an England crushed and emasculated by the war. It is an ambitious work which inveighs against materialism, intellectualism, and priggism while lovingly delineating the worship of Priapus and composing poetic liturgies to accompany copulation. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was not published in an unexpurgated form until 1960 and only then after a failed prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. In a sense the book's uncensored reappearance belatedly ushered in a new literary decade, one in which Lawrence's literary reputation and his moral influence reached their zenith.

Old and New Writing: Practitioners, Promoters, and the 'Little Magazines'

'The essence of poetry with us in this age of stark and unlovely actualities', D. H. Lawrence wrote in 1916, 'is a stark directness without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow of deflection anywhere.' Such 'stark, bare, rocky directness of statement', Lawrence believed, constituted the only true poetic expression in an age marked by a disillusion with outmoded forms and by the cultural fragmentation imposed by the war. Lawrence was the only English-born poet of Modernist leanings who had published verse before 1914 to survive that war. His verse has always been difficult to classify. His poetry appeared both in the influential, but essentially conservative, volumes, of *Georgian Poetry* and in far more radical company in two of the anthologies entitled *Some Imagist Poets* (1915, 1916). His distinctively 'direct' and intense poetry sits somewhat uneasily beside the shapely, rhymed realism of the Georgians but, given that its subjects are most frequently derived from an observation of nature, it is not really out of place. Writing to Edward Marsh (1872-1953), the editor of *Georgian Poetry*, in 1913 Lawrence insisted that it was not the 'obvious form' or the subject that made poetry but the 'hidden emotional pattern'. His patterning, he explained, was not likely to appeal immediately to ears conditioned by the smooth traditions of late-Romanticism against which he had declared war. Later, in the Foreword to his volume *Pansies* (1929) he argues for a form that conveyed the tightness of thought; 'a real thought', he suggests, 'a single thought, not an argument, can only exist easily in verse', and, in what reads almost like perverse admission of personal culpability, he confesses that 'there is a didactic element about prose thoughts which makes them repellent, slightly bullying'.

Much of Lawrence's best poetry, concentrated, stark and unrhymed, appeared in the volume *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* in 1923. In the poem 'Figs', for

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example, he offers an analysis of a fruit which veers suggestively between the culinary, the botanical, the symbolical, and the sexual ('Fig, fruit of the female mystery, covert and inward'). Elsewhere in the volume, analysis is subsumed in an attempt on the poet's part to feel himself into the life of an animal or to identify with the intensity of life he observes in growing and moving things. Each poem represents an attempt to become familiar with, but never to domesticate, the exotic. He associates himself with the cypresses of Tuscany which seem to hold the dark secret of the dead Etruscans ('Dusky, slim marrow-thought of slender, flickering men of Etruria, | Whom Rome called vicious') ('Cypresses'), while wild cyclamens observed in a Sicilian dawn have a vivid particularity of their own, appearing 'like delicate very-young greyhound bitches | Half yawning at the open, inexperienced | Vista of day, | Folding back their soundless petalled ears' ('Sicilian Cyclamens'). A male tortoise screaming as it mounts a female ('Tortoise Shout') seems to stand for all life that cries out either in pain or in ecstasy while a Sydney kangaroo, watching with 'eternal, cocked wistfulness', is taken as representative of the distinctive quality of Australian nature, both human and animal. In 'Snake', the transfixed poet watches, with an emotion that confuses honour, fear, gratitude, and mystery, as a snake drinks at his water-trough. When he frightens away the snake by throwing a log at it, the thrill is superseded by a new sense of guilt which is at once 'literary' and primitive and profound:

> And I thought of the albatross,
> And I wished he would come back, my snake.
> For he seemed to me again like a king,
> Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
> Now due to be crowned again.
>
> And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
> Of life.

And I have something to expiate;
A pettiness.

It would be wrong to confuse a cultivated simplicity with the merely petty in the work of two of Lawrence's most enduringly popular 'Georgian' contemporaries. Nevertheless, by comparison with the challenge of Lawrence's exhilarating energy much of even the best verse of John Masefield (1878-1967) and Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) seems merely unaffectedly dextrous. Despite the prominence of his work in the volumes of *Georgian Poetry*, a good deal of de la Mare's poetry, notably the volumes entitled *Peacock Pie* (1913), *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (1932), and *This Year: Next Year* (1937), was written specifically for children. His appealingly direct and fluent songlike manner still provides young readers with an ideally unpretentious introduction to the virtues of rhyme and rhythm. The best of Masefield's verse is haunted by the variety, wildness, and desolation of the sea; it is also occasionally marked by the inflections and peculiarities of sea-language. Two lyrics which first appeared

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in his volumes of 1902 and 1910, 'Sea Fever' ('I must go down to the sea again ...') and 'Cargoes' ('Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir ...'), remain amongst the most commonly cited and anthologized poems of the century. Neither Masefield's longer narrative poems, such as *The Everlasting Mercy* (1910) and the anti-blood sport *Reynard the Fox* (1919), nor the many bland lyrics which proclaim the virtues of the open road have the easy swing and the elegance of the early work. Masefield's *Collected Poems* of 1923, however, proved hugely popular with readers. It reached its twelfth edition in 1930, the year in which he was appointed Poet Laureate in succession to the equally unadventurous Robert Bridges (1844-1930).

It was largely through what have since become known as the 'little magazines' that the Modernist revolution in poetry was announced, carried forward, and propagated. It is by the very success of that revolution that we now inevitably judge the poetic achievement of the 1920s and 1930s. An educated audience, impatient with inherited conventions, was ready for change. If the audience was relatively small, 'advanced' in its opinions and predominantly young, its enthusiasms and perceptions steadily established new critical norms which came to be applied far beyond the predilections of a coterie. The appearance of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in the first issue of the quarterly magazine *The Criterion* (circulation 600) in October 1922 struck many as forcefully expressing the disordered and irregular nature of the modern condition in a language that was indisputably 'modern'. When the poem was published separately, initially in issues of one thousand, it gained in esteem and notoriety. In their Preface to the undergraduate volume of *Oxford Poetry 1926*, for example, Charles Plumb and W. H. Auden boldly pronounced that 'if it is a natural preference to inhabit a room with casements opening upon Fairyland, one at least of them should open upon the Waste Land'. In the same year Evelyn Waugh purchased Eliot's *Poems, 1909-1925* in Oxford and found them 'marvellously good but very hard to understand', adding that there was 'a most impressive flavour of the major prophets about them'. This was not an opinion shared by Waugh's father, the critic and publisher Arthur Waugh. Eliot's poetry, he held, offered a salutary example which reflected that of the ancients: 'It was a classic custom in the family hall, when a feast was at its height, to display a drunken slave amongst the sons of the household, to the end that they, being ashamed at the ignominious folly of his gesticulations, might determine never to be tempted into such a pitiable condition themselves.'

Arthur Waugh's outrage was not confined to Eliot. According to his son he had earlier been equally shocked by the 1916 anthology of *Some Imagist Poets*. The existence of the Imagists (or, as he first put it, the 'Imagistes') had been announced in a London tea-shop in 1912 to two startled fellow-poets by Ezra Pound. Pound (1885-1972) had arrived in London from the United States in April 1909 and he made the metropolis the centre of his energizing activities for the following eleven years. They were years of crucial importance to the future of English, and to some extent American, poetry. Pound was as discerning as

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he was arrogant, as stimulating to fellow-writers as he was discriminating about their work, though he later seemed to the equally restless radical Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) merely a 'fire-eating propagandist' whose utterances 'were not accompanied by any very experimental efforts in his particular medium'. Lewis, the co-editor of *Blast, the Review of the Great English Vortex* (1914-15), scarcely rendered Pound proper justice after the collapse of their co-operative relationship. Their concerns had also veered apart, those of Lewis towards painting and prose, those of Pound towards a highly complex referential poetry (a poetry that Lewis improperly saw as looking backwards rather than forwards to 'the new burst of art in progress'). The two numbers of *Blast* had ambitiously attempted to forge together the interests and advances of writers, theorizers, and artists but its ultimate achievement is more strictly visual and typographical than 'literary'. It made loud but often empty revolutionary noises about there being no

‘Verbotens’ and about despising and ignoring ‘this impure Present’ but it grated nerves more than it shook foundations. Lewis’s career beyond *Blast* is marked by some startlingly dynamic paintings and by a series of angry, edgy texts. His most innovative novel, *Tarr* (1918), is set in an artist-dominated Paris in which a frantic bohemianism has assumed a political and sexual arrogance in the face of bourgeois ‘sentimentalism’. It is written in what Lewis described as a ‘jagged prose’, one in which he had attempted to eliminate ‘anything less essential than a noun or a verb’. Ezra Pound remarked in 1920 that *Tarr* was ‘the most vigorous and volcanic English novel of our time’ and its author ‘the rarest of phenomena, an Englishman who has achieved the triumph of being also a European’. Despite the sustained wit of Lewis’s staccato sentences his later, far more parochially ‘English’ novel, *The Apes of God* (1930) reads like a satirical guide to the negatives and shortcomings of artistic London in the 1920s (it is particularly acerbic about Bloomsbury). *The Revenge for Love* (1937), which begins in Civil War Spain, is by contrast an unsteady but scathing attack on the political (and particularly Marxist) deceptions of the 1930s. The three completed novels of a planned four-part sequence, *The Human Age*, began in 1928 with *The Childermass* but was resumed again only in 1955 with the publication of the grandly conceived sub-religious discourses, *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*. Lewis’s most considered, if jumpy, political and artistic manifesto *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) argues that society had been inevitably revolutionized by mechanical change and that both change and revolution ought to be embraced by the artist. When he moves on to address the problem of a distinction between an artistic or intellectual elite and an indifferent mass he writes with considerable panache though, as ever, he tends to knock down Aunt Sallies with as much verve as he quixotically assaults windmills. He also determinedly abandons the use of certain capital letters as a gesture against the inherited privileging of certain words and titles. *The Art of Being Ruled* glances forward to a time when ‘Everyman’ will be loosed from the chains of poverty by a new absolutist state, a state which would do away with old niceties, economic injustices and inefficiencies. ‘Can this poor man be the loser’, he asks, ‘has he

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anything to lose? — by his rulers shedding the pickwickian masks, the socialist noses, the kindly liberal twinkles of the european egalitarian masquerade?’ In many ways Lewis’s slide towards a lonely kind of Fascism in the late 1930s was inevitable.

Lewis’s tendency to refer to whimsical ideas as ‘pickwickian’ was picked up by Richard Aldington (1892-1962) when he looked back in his autobiography of 1941 to Pound’s confident announcement of the existence of ‘Imagism’. Poems by Aldington and his American wife Hilda Doolittle (‘H.D.’) were published with brief notes ambiguously explaining that the Imagists were ‘a group of ardent Hellenists who are pursuing interesting experiments in *vers libre*’. Precise definitions of the new poetry remained as vague, though an insistence on the ‘principle of liberty’ implicit in the irregular rhythms of *vers libre* remained constant. The Imagists were not Symbolists, Pound later insisted; where the Symbolists had dealt in ‘association’ — ‘in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory’ — the images of the Imagists had ‘a variable significance like the signs a, b, and x in algebra’. Pound was also emphatic that ‘the author must use his image because he sees it or feels, not because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics’. This loose emphasis opened the way to the inclusion of a considerable variety of poets and poetic techniques in the Imagist anthologies. *Des Imagistes* of 1914 printed poems by Aldington, H. D., Pound, and James Joyce; the three later volumes entitled *Some Imagist Poets* (1915, 1916, 1917) introduced work by Ford Madox Ford and D. H. Lawrence. All these anthologies, which ultimately determined the future of American literature more than they did English, also contained seminal poems by the American poets Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams.

Since the 1920s, Aldington has been remembered more as a remarkably perceptive assistant editor of the periodical *The Egoist* (1914-17), as the controversial biographer of his sometime friend, D. H. Lawrence (1950), and as a sharply observant novelist than as a poet. In 1916 he had enlisted in the Infantry and his profound unsettlement as a result of the war is reflected in the often brilliant cynicism of his first novel *Death of a Hero* (1929), which deals with both the frustrations of pre-war English society and ‘the false ideals, the unintelligent ideas ... the humbug, the hypocrisy, the stupidity’ of those who waged the war. Its ‘hero’, George Winterbourne, resists the dullness of convention with a kind of angry paganism, but as its poetic ‘Epilogue’ implies, the final mood of the novel is shaped by ‘an agony of helpless grief and pity’. The disillusion which continues to condition his two later novels, *The Colonel’s Daughter* (1931) and *All Men are Enemies* (1933), is somewhat dissipated in comparison.

For a short period in the 1920s Aldington worked as an assistant to a fellow ex-combatant, and already experienced novelist, Ford Madox Ford. Ford (born Ford Hermann Hueffer) (1873-1939), the grandson of the painter Ford Madox Brown, began his literary career in 1896 with a biography of his grandfather and developed his fictional style through a close association with Joseph

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Conrad (including collaboration on the novels *The Inheritors* of 1901 and *Romance* of 1903). *The Fifth Queen*, his decoratively ornate trilogy of historical novels about Catherine Howard, the unhappy wife of Henry VIII, appeared between 1907 and 1908. In the latter year he founded the *English Review*, a pioneer journal which published new work by established writers such as Hardy, James, Bennett, and Wells, and which also boldly printed poems by Lawrence for the first time. Ford's own series of polemical essays on the state of the novel (later republished as *The Critical Attitude* in 1911) also appeared in its pages. These essays contrast what Ford sees as the 'temperamentally British novel', a 'loose, amorphous, genial and easy-going thing' which had been almost casually evolved by Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope, with the tighter, more self consciously artful form developed in France. Ford praises both James and Conrad for their 'great attention to their Art' and it is as a development of their techniques that his own fictional masterpiece, *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion* of 1915, can best be appreciated. Although the first part of the story (provisionally entitled 'The Saddest Story' appeared in *Blast* in June 1914, its fascination with Conradian shifts in time and perceptions of betrayal and its Jamesian concern with the subtleties of overlapping relationships and emotions mark it as essentially pre-Modernist in technique. At times, however, its ambiguous American relater, John Dowell, reveals a knowing awareness of the arbitrary nature of his narration before attempting to console himself 'with thinking that this is a real story and that, after all, real stories are probably told best in the way a person telling a story would tell them'. *The Good Soldier* doubtless seemed an appropriate title for a novel which finally appeared in wartime. Ford's exploration behind the disciplined and gentlemanly façade of his title character was to a limited extent continued in his post-war tetralogy *Parade's End*. The four novels, *Some Do Not ...* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926), and *Last Post* (1928), are concerned with the gradual break-up of the traditional squirearchical values of Christopher Tietjens, an unhappy lover, a largely unsuccessful soldier, and a rootless, passive, and neurotic survivor after 1918. The very fact of Tietjens's post-war career as a restorer of antiques suggests the extent to which he is still trying to make sense of a battered old world which is now essentially fragmented.

Eliot, Firbank, and the Sitwells

'When I wrote a poem called *The Waste Land*', T. S. Eliot noted in 1931, 'some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the „disillusionment of a generation", which is nonsense.' 'I may', he continued, 'have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.' T(homas) S(tearns) Eliot (1888-1965) the most important and influential English poet of his own and of the two subsequent generations, did not write *The Waste Land* (1922) as an Englishman. He was, like his friend and

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early mentor Ezra Pound ('*il miglior fabbro*', 'the better craftsman', of the dedication to *The Waste Land*), an American resident in London. Unlike Pound, he had studied and found employment in England and in 1927 he took out British citizenship and was received into the Church of England. It was as the devout Anglo-Catholic author of the essay *Thoughts After Lambeth* (a reflection on the resolutions of the 1930 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops) that Eliot proclaimed the 'nonsense' of the belief that his major poem had expressed the disillusionment of a generation.

If the body of Eliot's work can be claimed as much for 'English' as for 'American' literature it is because of the distinctively cisatlantic pointing that marks it (in his essay on William Blake, for example, he addresses his 'fellow' English readers). Although much of his topography, vocabulary, and awareness of public history and culture are self consciously British, Eliot's literary roots were cosmopolitan. As a student at Harvard between 1906 and 1914 he had become acquainted with an eclectic range of philosophical, historical, and literary scholarship. In Paris in 1911 he attended lectures by Henri Bergson, practised French conversation with Henri Alain-Fournier, and encountered the monarchist Catholic journalism of Charles Maurras. At Harvard in 1908 he had been sufficiently fired by Arthur Symons's account of recent French poetry in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) to send off to Paris for the poems of Jules Laforgue (1860-87). Through Laforgue he had discovered the attractions of a reticent, ironic, clever, and referential poetry, a poetry often cast in the form of free-verse dramatic monologues in which a wry persona expresses himself rather than acts out the private emotions of his creator. The influence of the brittle Laforgue, though crucial in moulding Eliot's early style, was transient; that of Baudelaire and Dante proved more lasting and more haunting. In Baudelaire's poetry he recognized what he described in 1930 as an elevation of 'imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis ... to the first intensity', an elevation which 'created a mode of release and expression for other men'. Baudelaire remained for him the great inventor of a modern poetry because his verse and language seemed 'the nearest thing to a complete renovation that we have experienced'. In Dante, by contrast, he found a

medieval spiritual and a poetic authority which seemed to him to address the modern condition directly. Dante's verse, he reiterated throughout his career, was both scrupulously disciplined and easily intelligible. 'The thought may be obscure', he proclaimed in an essay of 1929, 'but the word is lucid, or rather translucent'. Speaking in 1950 he insisted that Dante's 'universality' provided any later poet with a constant reminder 'of the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them'. When in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1935-42) Eliot attempted to explore 'beyond the frontiers of ordinary consciousness', his immediate prompting and much of his reference was Dantean.

Eliot's Harvard doctoral thesis, left unexamined due to his prolonged

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absence in wartime England, was concerned with experience and the objects of knowledge in the work of the Oxford philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) (he published the manuscript in 1964 as *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*). Eliot later affirmed that his own prose style was closely formed on that of the subject of his dissertation, but something of Bradley's intellectual influence can also be indirectly felt in the concerns of the broad range of his writing. Although he disarmingly claimed in 1964 to be no longer able to understand much of his own argument, his emphasis on Bradley's interest in the relationship of the subjective consciousness with the objective world, and particularly on Bradley's notion of the correlation of the individual mind with a larger, single comprehensive consciousness, can be linked to Eliot's persistent interest in individual and external patterns of order. If in one sense he reinterpreted Bradley's idea of a comprehensive consciousness as a responsive God, in another he consistently sought to relate individual perception to a larger human tradition. Eliot's critical essays attempt to define and prescribe traditions which are historical, religious, moral and, above all, literary. In one of his earliest and most celebrated, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1917), he argues that 'no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone'. He is equally insistent that personal emotions, provoked by particular events in a poet's life, do not make for 'remarkable or interesting' poetry. In its relation to a larger tradition, poetry is not 'a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality'. In the series of lectures given at Harvard in 1932 and 1933 entitled *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* he defined the 'auditory imagination' of a poet as 'the feeling for syllable and rhythm' which penetrated 'far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling ... sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning in the end'. Earlier in his influential study of 'The Metaphysical Poets' of 1921 he justified the contortions of John Donne's poetic thought by insisting that when a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work 'it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience'. The ordinary man's experience, Eliot argued, is 'chaotic, irregular, fragmentary'; the 'ordinary man' falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking, but for the poet like Donne 'these experiences are always forming new wholes'. Eliot's attraction to the intellectual and lexical dexterity of 'Metaphysical' poetry would seem to have derived from a temperamental sympathy with a world-view which rejoiced in complex patterning and which perceived a divine order beyond the physical evidence of disorder. Throughout, Eliot shapes his literary tradition around those writers whom he sees as feeding his particular concept of 'Modernism'. Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, Webster, Andrewes, Marvell, Dryden (just) and Dickens (glancingly) pass muster to join the company of Virgil, Dante, and Baudelaire; Milton fails the test aesthetically, Blake intellectually, Swinburne morally. In his discussion of two earlier critics whose

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stature he grudgingly acknowledges, Eliot sees the Coleridge of *Biographia Literaria* merely as a writer who had found a vocation as 'a ruined man' and Matthew Arnold as little more than an 'undergraduate' in philosophy and theology and a 'Philistine' in religion. When he treats his older contemporaries he finds much to admire in the mystical Yeats but dismisses the agnostic Hardy as 'an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs'.

Eliot's juvenilia, belatedly collected under the title *Poems Written in Early Youth* in 1950 (reissued posthumously in 1967), contains examples of hearty student graduation songs as much as quizzical tributes to Laforgue. Two poems in particular, 'Nocturne' of 1909 (a wry undoing of Romeo's *grand serieux* wooing of Juliet) and the unpublished and experimental 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' of *c*. 1911 (whose opening lines were incorporated into *The Waste Land*), look directly forward to the work which first brought Eliot to wider public notice. His 'apprenticeship' proved to be remarkably fertile. When he showed 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (also of *c*. 1911) to Ezra Pound in 1914, Pound announced he had found an American poet who had 'actually trained himself and modernized himself on his own' (that is, without Pound's generally benign interference). The poem was published in the Chicago magazine *Poetry* in 1915 and appeared again, due to Pound's shaping influence, in Eliot's first important collection

Prufrock and Other Observations in 1917. The twelve poems in the collection include ‘Portrait of a Lady’, like ‘Prufrock’ an exquisitely poised account of uneasy social intercourse, bleakly restless evocations of urban landscape (such as the musically entitled ‘Preludes’ and ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’), and the character sketches ‘Aunt Helen’, ‘Cousin Nancy’, and ‘Mr Apollinax’ (this last a sharply imaginative remaking of an encounter with Bertrand Russell at an academic tea-party at Harvard). The poems are specifically American and often precisely Bostonian (including the nods to the example and the titles of Henry James). ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ sets the tone of the whole volume with its play with politeness and failures of comprehension, with surfaces and hints of subcutaneous despair. Prufrock carefully presents himself as modestly fashionable and sociable but he also reveals an acute self consciousness about the opinions of others (‘They will say: „How his hair is growing”’ ‘They will say: „But how his arms and legs are thin!”’). He indulges in the social niceties represented by ‘the cups, the marmalade, the tea’ but is aware of the impossibility of saying what he means while being ‘formulated’ like a butterfly ‘sprawling on a pin’. It was in many ways fitting that this disconcerting and subtly evasive monologue should be placed first in all the collections of his verse published in Eliot’s life-time.

The nuances of a broader tradition which help shape the tone of ‘Prufrock’ (Dante, Michaelangelo, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, the Bible) became more emphatic in Eliot’s *Poems* printed in London in 1919 by Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press. The volume contained ‘Gerontion’ (an old man’s

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monologue burdened with an ominous perception of divinity) and four poems in French (one of which, ‘Dans le Restaurant’, was also later fed into *The Waste Land*), but its overall character was most determined by the seven short quatrain poems. The temporary shift away from *vers libre* allowed both for a new sharpness, even slickness, and for a new variety of tone. In ‘The Hippopotamus’ Eliot comments satirically on the claims and pretensions of ‘the True Church’; in ‘Whispers of Immortality’ he edgily contrasts the ‘anguish of the marrow | The ague of the skeleton’ in the work of Webster and Donne with the ‘promise of pneumatic bliss’ offered by an uncorseted Russian girl; in ‘Burbank with a Baedaeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’ he unflatteringly, even prudishly, observes the sexual adventures of American tourists against a backdrop of a decaying Venice derived variously from Canaletto, Shakespeare, and Jonson. The effects of incongruity, historical anomaly, and densely amalgamated reference are perhaps most successfully exploited in ‘Sweeney Among the Nightingales’. The ‘Nightingales’ of the title are at once the prostitutes amongst whom the unlovely Sweeney amuses himself and the song-birds which ‘sang within the bloody wood’ | When Agamemnon cried aloud | And let their liquid siftings fall | To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud’. It is not only the murdered Agamemnon who is dishonoured; the whole inheritance of history, tradition, and historical literature seems soiled by the shabby commonplaces and compromises of the modern world.

The epigraphs to the *Poems*, derived from Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Villon, St Paul, Marlowe, and Aeschylus, serve to alert readers to Eliot’s fascination with order and fragmentation, with the survival of tradition and the collapse of tradition. The last section of *The Waste Land* ends with a series of quotations which are, if anything, yet more abstruse. In the midst of these echoes Eliot places his own line: ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’. Is his poem therefore to be seen retrospectively as a series of fragments? Or does he intend that these jerky half quotations from Dante, the *Pervigilium Veneris*, Tennyson, Nerval, Kyd, and the Upanishads somehow shore up a tottering ruin that was Western civilization? Or is he suggesting that a poet needs the shield of tradition as a defence against a hostile and encroaching world? The poem remains fragmentary and ambiguous to many of its readers. The original draft (published in 1971) was severely edited by Ezra Pound, and we are left with five interrelated sections, each with a separate title. This final shape, with a long introductory section, a terse fourth one, and a long meditative conclusion, was one that Eliot repeated in each of his *Four Quartets*. What unity the poem has is based on the reiterated idea of the exploration of a desert which is both physical (‘where the sun beats, | And the dead tree gives no shelter’) and figuratively urban (as in its references to the ‘falling towers’ of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna and, above all, London). Baudelaire’s `fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves’ is here a specific but ‘unreal’ London where bemused crowds flow over London Bridge, where there are recognizable streets, churches and hotels and suburbs called Greenwich, Richmond,

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and Kew. London accrues the cultural resonance not simply of its own Elizabethan and Dickensian pasts, of Baudelaire’s Paris and Saint Augustine’s Carthage, but also of the decayed metropolises of the Jewish and Greek Empires; like them all, it shares in corruption. Eliot delves into this corruption like an archaeologist exploring the layered detritus of broken civilizations. The urban wasteland also assumes a mythical identity as a landscape in which a quest for healing, fertility, power, and meaning is pursued. This ‘quest’ is both Arthurian (with occasional Wagnerian emphases) and anthropological (in its glances at the theories of Jessie L. Weston and Sir James Frazer).

The most striking effects in *The Waste Land* are achieved through the play of jarring juxtaposition, inconsistency of perception, multiplicity of narration, and fluidity of time and place. These juxtapositions, inconsistencies, multiplicities, and fluxes are as much visual as lexical. The extended image of a woman drawing out her hair in the final section of the poem is, for example, disconcertingly surreal:

> A woman drew her long black hair out tight
> And fiddled whisper music on those strings
> And bats with baby faces in the violet light
> Whistled, and beat their wings
> And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
> And upside down in air were towers
> Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
> And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In passages like this *The Waste Land* challenges preconceptions as to the nature and effect of poetry by demanding redefinitions.

Eliot created a series of similarly surreal pictures in *Ash-Wednesday*. The six sections of this poem are, however, given an almost liturgical character by the reiterated echoes of the prayers and metaphors of Anglo-Catholicism (or, more precisely, of Catholic spirituality with a distinct English accent). The ambiguity of *Ash-Wednesday* is related less to the question of whether or not some kind of God might actually respond than to an open wonder at the epiphanies of a Christian God. It is a poem centred on the idea of ‘quickening’, of a painful awakening of the spirit in the midst of a mysterious landscape haunted by female figures (all of them types of the Virgin Mary). A parallel concern with the quality and pain of revelation runs through the three most successful of the ‘Ariel Poems’, poems published, as Eliot later explained, ‘as a kind of Christmas card’. ‘Journey of the Magi’ (1927) and ‘A Song for Simeon’ (1928) are both concerned with literal epiphanies, experiences of the infant Christ which disturb or disorient aged eyewitnesses. ‘Marina’ (1930), which explores the awed rediscovery of his lost daughter by Shakespeare’s Pericles, though more obviously secular in its subject, reaches out to the half grasped mystery of ‘grace dissolved in place’.

The intermixture of the secular, the topographical, and the mystical also

determined the themes of Eliot’s last major poems, ‘Burnt Norton’ (1935) and its related successors, ‘East Coker’ (1940), ‘The Dry Salvages’ (1941), and ‘Little Gidding’ (1942) — published together as *Four Quartets* in 1943. As their joint title implies, their form, their lyricism, and their relative intimacy of communication, are akin to the effect of chamber music. Although the five sections of each of the poems look back to the form of *The Waste Land*, they also suggest a move away from the jars and abrupt shifts of tone of the earlier poem towards a more consistent classicality (albeit the vaulting classicality of Beethoven’s late string quartets). Gone are the clashing multiple speakers, the juxtaposed scenes, and the disparate or outlandish quotations; in their stead is a smoother narrative surface inlaid polyphonically with hints of other voices. Each poem in the opening of its fifth section ponders the signification of words, and the difficulty of building words into poetry. In ‘Burnt Norton’, for example,

> words strain
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.

In ‘East Coker’ military metaphors, appropriate to 1940, are employed to describe a poet’s lexical battle against the yet unformulated:

> And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion.

Although each of the poems is related to a specific place, the ancestral significance of the village of East Coker and

the religious-historical associations of the chapel at Little Gidding were given a particular urgency by the threat of wartime dissolution and destruction. The houses in East Coker, 'rise and fall, crumble, are extended, | Are removed, destroyed, restored'. In 'Little Gidding', where in an epiphanic moment history seems to be 'now and England', the idea of change and decay is reinforced by veiled references to the *Blitzkrieg*. From the uneasy, smoky silence after a London air raid, 'after the dark dove with the flickering tongue | Had passed below the horizon of his homing' there emerges the 'familiar compound ghost' of a poet. The ghost is both Dantean and Yeatsian, historical and ahistorical, an individual voice and the compounding of many voices. His voice speaks of 'the rending pain of re-enactment', a pain which also informs the references to the divisions of seventeenth-century politics, religion, and literature which Eliot associates with the disruption of Nicholas Ferrar's community at Little Gidding. This inherited pain of human sinfulness, the poem proclaims, is assuaged only by a redemption from time and by a renewal and transfiguration of history 'in another pattern'.

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The mystical longing to be free from time and the perception of eternity in moments of vision which run thematically through *Four Quartets* also characterizes the experience of Archbishop Becket in the hieratic drama, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). It is the most successful, if the least experimental, of Eliot's six verse-dramas largely because of the ritual formality of its structure and the set-piece neo-classical confrontations between Becket, his tempters, and his murderers. Its forerunner, the church pageant *The Rock* (1934), is, by comparison, arch in its verse, lifeless in its dialogue, and embarrassingly clumsy in its presentation of society. Both plays stemmed from Eliot's long-held ambition to renew poetic drama by exploring what he recognized as 'a kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once'. When in *The Family Reunion* (1939) he attempted to inject the modern middle-class, 'well-made' West End play with a portentous dose of Aeschylean doom, the effect was verbally dense rather than theatrically exhilarating. The verse 'comedies', *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959), were politely received in their time but, largely due to their somewhat laboured attempts to interfuse Greek myths with modern types and conditions, have met with only limited success on the stage since. All of them lack the jerky energy and effervescence which gives the unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes* its individuality. This fragment of 'an Aristophanic Melodrama', toyed with from the mid-1920s and published unperformed in 1932, to some extent parallels Yeats's contemporary experiments with ritual, masks, dance, and music (though Eliot consulted Arnold Bennett with reference to its potential dramatic impact). It is shot through with the syncopated rhythms of jazz and the bravura skittishness of the English music-hall (which Eliot so admired), and combines incantatory choruses with witty but nervous dialogue. It is an ambiguous, restless, death-haunted attempt to create a new drama appropriate to a broken and essentially iconoclastic age. Its inventiveness was not fully appreciated until a new age of theatrical experiment began in the late 1950s.

The dissonant clash of avant-garde applause and conservative disapproval which greeted the work of T. S. Eliot and James Joyce in the 1920s was to some degree symptomatic of an age that was acutely uncertain of its cultural bearings. Although their writings are essentially more frivolous in style and intent, the novels of Ronald Firbank (1886-1926) and the early poetry of Edith Sitwell (1887-1964) also typify the often simply naughty 'Modernist' interplay of tradition and individual talent. Both writers set out to provoke tight bourgeois literary conventions and to explore the creative potential of the impressionistic verbal mosaic. Firbank's last five completed novels — *Valmouth* (1919), *Santal* (1921), *The Flower beneath the Foot* (1923), *Sorrow in Sunlight* (known as *Prancing Nigger* in America) (1924), and *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926) — share a cosmopolitan brevity, a poised wit, and a camply decorative prose style. Each has a contrived surface which serves both to conceal and to reveal perfumed waves of eroticism. In *Valmouth* the residents of an ostensibly prim English watering-place are manipulated, both physically and

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mentally, by a black masseuse, Mrs Yajnavalkya (who first appears 'wreathed in smiles ... a sheeny handkerchief rolled round and round her head, a loud-dyed petticoat and a tartan shawl'). In *Cardinal Pirelli* a Spanish prelate, accused of unmentionable vices and unbecoming peccadilloes (including making the sign of the cross with his left foot at meals) is forced by official disapproval into a far from chaste exile from his diocese. Firbank's effects depend upon an almost baroque play with lush adjectives, metaphors, and a provocative incongruity.

Edith Sitwell's poems for the musical entertainment *Façade* (1922) struck the audiences at its first public performances in 1923 as equally provocative and inordinately flippant. Her enterprise in planning *Façade* with the composer William Walton was actively abetted by her younger brothers Osbert (1892-1969) and Sacheverell (b. 1897), the former a future poet, librettist, and novelist of some flair, the latter an innovative art-historian, essayist, and travel-writer. Osbert Sitwell records in *Laughter in the Next Room* (1949), the fourth volume of his

autobiography, that the *Façade* poems were written as exact complements to Walton's settings: 'neither music nor words were to be treated or taken as a separate entity — and thus ... able to reach for once that unattainable land ... full of meaning and of nuances, analogies and images'. The eighteen lyrics were exercises in rhythm, rhyme, assonance, and dissonance, skittishly varied in style and mood, and replete with arcane reference. They were recited by the poet herself through a Sengerphone (an advanced kind of megaphone) placed against a hole in a painted canvas curtain, a device which, in an exaggeratedly Eliotic manner, eliminated the personality of the reciter. Edith Sitwell's ultimate achievement as a writer and propagandist extended far beyond the early notoriety of *Façade*. As a determined opponent of the romantic ruralism of the volumes of *Georgian Poetry* she had earlier published her own anthology, *Wheels* (1916-21), the 1919 edition of which published six of Wilfred Owen's war poems for the first time. Her own autumnal outpouring of verse, notably that collected in the volumes *Street Songs* (1942), *Green Song* (1944), and *The Song of the Cold* (1945), reflects not simply her interest in history and her religious devotion but also the uncertainties of the period of the Second World War. In 'Still Falls the Rain', subtitled 'The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn', she sees Christ recrucified 'each day, each night'; in 'Anne Boleyn's Song' she gives the condemned queen a vision of the embraces of a new king, 'Old amorous Death ... acclimatised to my coldness'; in 'Harvest' her narrator proclaims herself 'an old woman whose heart is like the Sun', a theme taken up again in the poem simply called 'An Old Woman' ('I, an old woman in the light of the sun, | Wait for my Wanderer'). Although there is a clear debt to Eliot's later verse, Sitwell's poems with their reiterated images of juvenescence and senescence, of dark and light, and of the passion of Christ, are quite distinctly the product of an explorative feminine sensibility. Towards the end of her life she continued to act out the role of the eccentric artist, flamboyant in her dress and manner, much courted by painters, photographers, and interviewers, and always prepared to be oracular. Taken as a whole, the three Sitwells' contribution to

twentieth-century British literature is far more than a history of patronage or elitist self publicity but it is perhaps only in Edith's verse that a distinct and continually challenging note emerges.

Joyce

If T. S. Eliot recognized any true literary kinship amongst his contemporaries it was not with the likes of the Sitwells but with the Irish novelist James Joyce (1882-1941). In 1918 he proclaimed Joyce 'the best living prose writer' and a year later he described the 'Scylla and Charybdis' section of *Ulysses* as 'almost the finest I have read: I have lived on it ever since I read it', though he felt obliged to add that he had found it 'uphill and exasperating work trying to impose Joyce on such "intellectual" people, or people whose opinion carries weight as I know, in London'. Joyce too had found the struggle to get his works accepted by publishers and public alike an uphill one. His confrontations with official and unofficial censors were especially frustrating. The manuscript of his collection of twelve stories, *Dubliners*, finished in 1905, was rejected by its prospective London publishers after a period of protracted uncertainty. In 1909 it was submitted to a Dublin firm; publication was postponed in 1910 and in 1912 the type was broken up by the printers due to a fear of libel action from local tradesmen mentioned in the text (Joyce got his own back in the rumbustious broadside 'Gas from a Burner'). With the addition of three further stories the volume finally appeared in 1914. *Ulysses*, composed in three different cities, was published in Paris in 1922 in a limited edition; after the confiscation of subsequent editions, on pornographic grounds, by customs officers in Britain and America it was not made legally available in the United States until 1933 and was printed in an unlimited edition in London only in 1937. Joyce's relationship with Eliot as his publisher proved infinitely easier. In 1931 Eliot contracted to publish *Finnegans Wake* through the firm of Faber and Faber of which he was a director (he had already issued a section of the 'work in progress'). In order to introduce Joyce's work to the elusive 'general' reader, rather than simply to an intellectual coterie, Faber produced a short selection of his prose, edited by Eliot, in 1942.

The title of Joyce's somewhat mechanical and Ibsenesque play *Exiles* (written in 1914, but published and performed in 1918) is a key word in the writer's own career. His play is set in Dublin and is concerned in part with the conflicting emotions of his central character about his homeland. Should he remain loyal to Ireland and attempt to open up its culture to a broader Europeanism? Or would Ireland ultimately enforce upon him a Swiftian estrangement? For Joyce himself, and for his chief mouthpiece in fiction, Stephen Dedalus, a European exile was the only solution, an exile from 'home and friends' which could provide the right circumstances in which, as Stephen extravagantly puts it, to 'forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race'. Joyce did

not, significantly enough, choose London or New York over Dublin; instead, he moved away from an English-speaking environment to a succession of notably cosmopolitan and polyglot European cities. *Dubliners* was written in Trieste, Italian in population but still the main port of Austria-Hungary. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is signed at the end 'Dublin, 1904. Trieste, 1914', *Ulysses* 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris 1914-1921', and *Finnegans Wake* 'Paris 1922-1939'. Despite the frustrations and limitations of the Ireland he happily left behind him, Joyce's loyalty to his native city was expressed, and steadily more complexly explored, in each of his prose works.

In September 1905 Joyce sent his brother Stanislas a list of questions from Trieste concerning details of Dublin life and customs which he needed for the stories on which he was working. In the same letter he explained that his collection would be based on a particular sequence. Three of the *Dubliners* stories would deal with childhood, three with adolescence, three with mature life, and three with public life. When he wrote in October to his prospective London publisher, he repeated the justification for his volume which he had previously articulated to Stanislas. No writer, he argued, had yet presented Dublin to the world; it had been a European capital for 'thousands of years'; it was supposed to be the second city of the British Empire and was nearly three times as big as Venice (so often the focus of classic English texts). In a further letter of May 1906 he insisted that he was writing 'a chapter of the moral history' of his country and that he had chosen Dublin not for its animation but because it seemed to him 'the centre of paralysis'. This idea of cultural 'paralysis' is stressed in the opening of the first story, 'The Sisters'. There is a reference in the first line to the priest's fatal stroke and later in the first paragraph the narrator repeats the word as he gazes up nightly at a window in the priest's house. Throughout the collection Dublin seems trapped by the mundane, the quotidian, and the historic. Its citizens are observed as bound up in private concerns and incapable of properly judging or quantifying their experience. Some are disillusioned, others lose vocations and illusions, others are graceless (both figuratively and spiritually). Any perspective is provided by the detached artist-narrator, observing, shaping his narratives but not offering judgement. In the haunting tenth story, 'Clay', the ungainly, ageing Maria loses a slice of plum cake on a tram. It is only through the shape of the complete narrative that the seemingly inconsequential loss is given a contextual perspective. At the close of the story, Maria's vulnerability is further exposed by her unconscious 'mistake' of singing 'in a tiny quavering voice' the Balfe song superstitiously held to foretell mortality, 'I Dreamt that I Dwelt in Marble Halls'. The various flat and conspicuously 'ordinary' details of the story are forged into a new whole, the nuances shaped into initially unperceived meanings, and the neutral tones assume hues as readers deduce significances. Only in the long last story, 'The Dead', does Joyce's baldly undemonstrative prose style, one he described as possessing the quality of 'scrupulous meanness', assume a greater luxury. The dominant figure of the literate and articulate Gabriel Conroy in this the

last of the stories to be added to the collection shifts their general concern away from the uneducated and the narrow-minded. The quality of the family party he attends is established by snatches of conversation, exchanged politenesses, familiar memories, popular quotations and songs. By means of these fragments Joyce deftly draws together and re-echoes themes from earlier stories. He particularly allows for a sharp exchange between Gabriel and the insular Miss Ivors concerning the nationalist tensions of contemporary Ireland. Gabriel — who reviews English books and takes holidays in France and Belgium in preference to learning the Irish language in the western reaches of his own country — is accused of being a 'West Briton' (an Irishman content not to undo the Union with Great Britain). 'Irish', Gabriel insists, in a significant pre-echo of Stephen Dedalus, 'is not my language'. The issue, though seemingly forgotten amid the enforced accord of the party, re-emerges in its final paragraphs. Gabriel, temporarily alienated from his wife by her recall of memories of the song of a dead suitor from the Celtic West of Ireland, muses in his hotel room as snow falls in the city and unites it to the whole white island stretching westwards beyond it. The snow seems to join the living and the dead, the romantically lost and the practical present, but it does more than stir memory and desire; it offers a momentary vision of a release from time and from purely temporal and mundane preoccupations.

Before he had begun work on *Dubliners* Joyce had set down a series of what he styled 'Epiphanies' in his notebooks for 1903 and 1904. These short prose sketches vary from the drab and domestic to the dreamlike, but each is shaped around a moment of revelation related to, but rarely as emphatic as Gabriel's. In *Stephen Hero* (the discursive preliminary version of *A Portrait of the Artist* which was published from his fragmentary manuscript in 1944) Joyce gives his hero a definition of an epiphany as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or a memorable phase of the mind itself'. These 'most delicate and evanescent of moments' seem to transform the commonplace into the special as tiny transfigurations worked without the operation of the divine. Joyce's use of theological terminology here and elsewhere in his definitions of his working methods is typical of the product of an exacting Jesuit education at school and university (he later compared the writing of *Ulysses* to the mystery of the Mass). With the exception of the converts Newman and Hopkins, Joyce is the first major writer in English since the Reformation to have been 'supersaturated' in specifically Roman Catholic teaching. Although

Stephen Dedalus's admiration for Newman's prose style becomes a contentious issue in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) it is the eucharistic theology of Thomas Aquinas that most determines the complex aesthetics that Stephen expounds. Although his faith is replaced by scrupulous doubt, Stephen retains an insistent Jesuit authoritarianism in his arguments about definitions of beauty. As the latter stages of the story affirm, Stephen assumes a new priesthood, that of the artist. In a crucial sense, he also fulfils the implications of his pointedly un-Irish name. He is Daedalus, the builder of Cretan

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mazes and the ingenious feathered escaper from islands. It is to this symbolic artist, the 'old father, old artificer', that Stephen finally dedicates himself. But if the second half of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is taken up with debate and definition, its opening sections attempt to describe, in an extraordinarily original manner, the growth of an artist's mind. There was obviously nothing new about the fictional autobiography, especially the kind that dealt with the emotional and intellectual development of a prospective writer. Its last conventional fling came in 1915 with W(illiam) Somerset Maugham's hugely popular account of a lonely boy's metamorphosis into responsive adulthood in *Of Human Bondage*. Where Maugham (1874-1965) ploddingly adapts formulas which would have been familiar enough to readers of *David Copperfeld*, Joyce challenges received ideas of literary decorum. He plays even in his opening sentences with fairy-tale phraseology, nursery-rhyme rhythms and baby-talk and he deftly suggests how an infant's experience is shaped by sensual stimuli (Stephen hears a story; he smells his mother and the oil-sheet on his bed; he tastes lemon platt (a kind of children's sweet); he feels warm and wet). The narrative moves him forward from being the passive feeler, hearer, and observer to being the doer, reader, writer, and maker. It later seeks to express the process of Stephen's adolescent exploration of his personality and the flexibility of his mind. Above all, it describes him trying out the poses of the would-be priest, the lover, and the intellectual before finally breaking the narrative into a series of diary entries as the potential artist prepares himself for flight.

In *Ulysses*, once conceived of as a story for *Dubliners*, a troubled Stephen Dedalus has returned to his birthplace, to his circle of intellectual friends, and to the dangerously outstretched tentacles of his family. *Portrait* was focused on a single personality; *Ulysses*, by contrast, has a multiple focus. Stephen's refined perceptions are played against the earthier preoccupations of an *homme moyen sensuel* — the Dublin Jew, Leopold Bloom — and the consciousness of both is finally contrasted with that of Bloom's wife, Molly. The thought and actions of all three are interwoven with the diverse life of Dublin on a single day, 16 June 1904. Characters cross and recross the city (though Molly remains seemingly marginalized in her bed; she sleeps, entertains a lover, and ultimately moves centre-stage as she muses on her life and loves in an extraordinarily unpunctuated monologue). When Stephen and Bloom finally encounter one another, and drunkenly discover a brief intimacy, they have taken separate voyages of exploration through the city. Underneath each of the eighteen extended episodes around which the novel is built lies a Homeric precedent. Bloom is a latter-day Odysseus/Ulysses; Stephen his lost son Telemachus; Molly his Penelope. Mr Deasy, the opinionated Protestant schoolmaster with whom Stephen has an uneasy morning interview, corresponds to Nestor; Bloom's attendance at Paddy Dignam's funeral has overtones of the Homeric descent to Hades; the fantasizing Gerty MacDowell, whose sighting on the beach sexually stimulates Bloom, is a Nausicaa; and the xenophobic 'Citizen' in Barney

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Kiernan's is a type of the blinded giant, Cyclops. Beyond the explorations of the fluid consciousnesses of his major characters, and beyond the Homeric underpinning, Joyce ingeniously attempts to expand certain of the later episodes into experiments with form. In the 'Wandering Rocks' sequence, for example, the peregrinatory Father Conmee links together a series of brief scenes by crossing Dublin by a route meticulously plotted and timed by Joyce (with the aid of maps and of his Dublin-based brother) and by finally coinciding with a vice-regal cavalcade (representing a meeting of the Roman and the British domination of Ireland). In the 'Sirens' episode an attempt is made to reflect the musical form of a fugue and in the 'Oxen of the Sun' (set in the Holles Street maternity hospital) an extended pastiche of English prose style, from its beginnings to the present, parallels the embryonic development of a child in the womb. *Ulysses* is, however, far more than the self referential series of echoes or the cryptogrammatic integration of puns, acrostics, and dense literary and historical allusion which its successor, *Finnegans Wake*, threatens to become. It rarely needs to be exactly untangled before it communicates. It is eminently *readable* rather than narrowly *studiable*. Reading *Ulysses* is a process of refamiliarization with a variety of adapted styles, modes, and techniques. In one sense, it stretches fictional realism almost to a point of absurdity, for example, in the 'Ithaca' section by subjecting Bloom, Stephen, and the objects in their immediate ambience to a process of forensic listing (Joyce himself called it a 'mathematical catechism'). In another, it consistently attempts to observe more intimately and precisely than any earlier novel. It follows the extraordinary vagaries of Bloom's mind as he shops, lusts, cooks, eats, relieves himself in

the privy, and goes about his business. Whereas Stephen is preoccupied both with guilt over his failure to pray at his mother's death-bed and with intellectual speculation, Bloom's far less organized mind regularly throws up snippets of phrases and memories from a private past and from an observed world. His mind unsystematically returns to half understood Hebrew and English words, to the smell of soap, to memories of his dead son, to an advertisement for Plumtree's Potted Meat, and to the jingling brass bed quoits which signal his wife's adultery. From these reiterations, repetitions, and variations Joyce gradually weaves a fabric which is at once startling and familiar, superbly comic and cerebral, rumbustious and refined. It mixes the music-hall with the opera house, the cliché with a disquisition on *Hamlet*, the 'fine tang of faintly scented urine' from mutton kidneys with the progress of European civilization. If the contortedly encyclopaedic vision of *Finnegans Wake* determinedly shunts the modern literary experiment into a siding, *Ulysses* continues to realise narrative vitality as exuberant as the God-like 'Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee' in Mr Deasy's school playground and as confident as Molly Bloom's concluding 'Yes'.

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Inter-War Drama: O'Casey, Coward, Priestley, and Sherriff

The innovations of 'Modernism' or, more precisely, the dramatic experiments of the leading 'Modernists', touched the English theatrical mainstream in the twenty years between the two world wars only indirectly. Joyce's *Exiles* was rejected by the normally progressive Stage Society in London and had to await a first performance, in a German translation, at Munich in 1919. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*, published in 1932, was, somewhat bizarrely, given its first performance a year later by the women students of Vassar College in the United States. His *Murder in the Cathedral* was first acted in 1935 not in a London theatre but in the chapter house of Canterbury Cathedral. Of D. H. Lawrence's three remarkable, if somewhat static, explorations of working-class life — *A Collier's Friday Night* (written *c*. 1909 and published 1934), *The Daughter-in-Law* (1912), and *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* (1914) — only the last received a London performance, under the auspices of the Stage Society in 1926. This performance belatedly provoked George Bernard Shaw to write that its 'torrent of profuse yet vivid dialogue' made his own seem 'archaic in comparison'. Even the redoubtable Shaw's most challenging late plays, *Heartbreak House* (1919) and *Saint Joan* (1924), received their premières in New York (though highly successful London productions of both followed within months).

The three best-known plays of Shaw's younger compatriot, Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), were shaped by the new Irish theatrical environment rather than by the demands of the more conventional London Establishment. O'Casey (born 'John Casey', and, at the peak of his association with the nationalist Gaelic League, known as 'Sean O Cathasaigh') was the last of the major early twentieth-century Irish playwrights to be associated with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. A poor Protestant Dubliner by birth, he wrote about what he knew best —the sounds, the rhetoric, the prejudices, the frustrations, and the manners of tenement dwellers of the slums of the Irish capital. Unlike his Abbey predecessors he was not prepared to romanticize Ireland or to fantasize about either its past or its bloody present. Nor was he inclined to 'poeticize' the vigorously rhythmical language of the Dublin poor. *The Shadow of a Gunman* (performed in Dublin in 1923 and in London in 1925) is set in a back room in 'Hilljoy' Square at the time of the 'Black and Tan' repression in 1920. The action of *Juno and the Paycock* (Dublin, 1924; London 1925) also takes place in a single room in a two-room tenancy, though the period has moved forward to the time of the Irish Civil War in 1922. *The Plough and the Stars*, which provoked nationalist riots at the Abbey in 1926 but was more placidly received at the Fortune Theatre in London in the same year, describes the prelude to the eruption of the Easter Rising and the disjunctions of the Rising itself in 1916. Its action takes place in and around the Clitheroes' rooms 'in a fine old Georgian house struggling for its life against the assaults of time, and the more

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savage assaults of its tenants'. Despite the exemplary nature of O'Casey's nationalist credentials, in none of these three plays does he offer apologies for the troubles of Ireland, or take sides with its oppressors or its supposed liberators. The poor are seen as caught up in a struggle which disrupts their lives rather than enhances or transfigures them. They are never dumb victims, but their very garrulousness reveals them as incomprehending and unwilling sufferers for someone else's cause. All three plays are characterized by their author as tragedies, but in all three the shadow and the reality of death is relieved by a wit which is as instinctive as it is irreverent. This ambiguity is to some degree exemplified in *Juno and the Paycock* in Jack Boyle's blusteringly reiterated reflection that 'the whole worl's in a state o'chassis'. In *The Shadow of a Gunman* the theme of deception and self deception, taken up from Synge's rural *Playboy of the Western World* (1907), is played ironically back in a revolutionary, urban setting. The play's title is

itself ambiguous. Gunmen on both sides overshadow the characters, but the gunman of the play is a sham. It is not this supposed warrior, the 'poet and poltroon' Donal Davoren, who dies violently but the girl who looks upon him as a hero, the 'Helen of Troy come to live in a tenement', Minnie Powell. The conflict between bravado and bravery and between swaggering and fighting also determines the complex interactions of *The Plough and the Stars*. The assaulted tenement is both partially detached from the political struggle taking place beyond its walls and inextricably bound up in its confusions, injustices, and bloody accidents (again it is a woman, the otherwise impressively resilient Bessie Burgess, who is the victim). When O'Casey's experimental comment on the First World War, the 'Tragi-Comedy' *The Silver Tassie*, was rejected by the Abbey Theatre, O'Casey found a London theatre for its première in 1928 (he himself had already moved to England two years earlier). With Charles Laughton in the lead role and with scenery for the stylized expressionism of Act II designed by the painter Augustus John, *The Silver Tassie* seemed set to launch the dramatist on a new phase in his career. Its accentuated paradoxes, and the jerky contrast between the naturalism of its first and fourth acts and the exposed alienation of its middle two, in reality merely formed a prelude to the uncertainty, the awkwardness, and the socialist rhetoric of his later work. Neither *Red Roses for Me* (1943) nor the gesturing anti-clerical, anti-capitalist analyses of modern Ireland, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949) and *The Bishop's Bonfire* (1955), managed to recall the tense, unsentimental energy of his Abbey plays.

The work of the most representative English dramatist of the period, Noël Coward (1899-1973), contrasts vividly with that of O'Casey. Coward combined the talents of actor, composer, librettist, playwright, and poseur and his long career allowed each aspect a more than ample expression. After uncertain theatrical beginnings in the immediately post-war years he achieved a double *succès de scandale* in 1924 with *The Vortex*, a high-flown exploration of the condition of a drug-addict tormented by his slovenly mother's adulteries, and the equally melodramatic *The Rat Trap*, a study of the miserable marriage of a

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playwright and his novelist-wife. In what must have seemed to audiences an abrupt change of style, in 1925 Coward produced *Hay Fever*. This elegantly malicious comedy, in which absurdity meets incomprehension, exposes both the eccentric, self centred rudeness of the Bliss family and the bafflement of their conservative guests. His subsequent smartly packaged excursions into Ruritania — *The Queen was in the Parlour* (1926), *The Marquise* (1927), and the musical comedy *Bitter Sweet* (1929) — though vastly well-received in their time, effectively looked back nostalgically to the lost enchantments of the Edwardian theatre. In his three major plays of the early 1930s, however, Coward glanced freshly at the problems of the immediate past and the increasingly uneasy present. The elaborately staged *Cavalcade* (1931) traces the fortunes and opinions of the Marryot family in twenty-one short scenes covering the years 1899-1930, and includes episodes set variously in drawing-rooms, theatres, bar parlours, railway stations, and even on board the *Titanic*. It concludes with two contrasting scenes, the first of which shows its now aged central characters toasting the future in the hope that 'this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and greatness and peace again'. The second, called 'Twentieth Century Blues', takes place in a nightclub and intermixes a song about 'chaos and confusion', popular dance, wounded war-veterans making baskets, and the cacophonous sounds of loudspeakers, jazz-bands, and aeroplane propellers. The 'angular and strange' effect that Coward sought at the end of *Cavalcade* is minimally reflected in the dialogue of his two comic studies of fraught marital relationships, *Private Lives* (1930) and *Design for Living* (1933), though, alas, neither play ultimately fulfils the psychological promise of the situations Coward wittily establishes. The limited ambitions of both were summed up in 1931 in their author's insistence that 'the primary and dominant object of the theatre is to amuse people, not to reform or edify them'. His last great success, *Blithe Spirit*, written in five days in 1941, ran for 1,997 performances in the West End of London (a record for a non-musical play in its time) as well as touring the provinces. It offered an essential escape from the preoccupations of the 'Home Front' in the Second World War, though it included, through the ethereal presence of Elvira and the spiritual interference of Madame Arcati, the reassurance to families parted by the war that death did not necessarily mark the end of a relationship.

J(ohn) B(oynton) Priestley (1894-1984), like Coward one of the most familiar and popular figures in the realm of propagandist entertainment during the Second World War, established his reputation as a novelist with *The Good Companions* (1929) and *Angel Pavement* (1930). The first, an account of the vagaries of the life of a travelling theatrical troupe, was successfully dramatized (with the aid of Edward Knoblock) in 1931. It opened the floodgates to Priestley's career as a dramatist in his own right, a career which ultimately included more than forty plays. His stance as a no-nonsense populist and professional Yorkshireman, so self consciously cultivated in his wartime radio broadcasts (published

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under the confident titles *Britain Speaks* (1940) and *All England Listened* (1968), belied his genuine sophistication

and dedication as an artist and critic. His best-remembered and most commonly revived plays, *Time and the Conways* (1937), *When We Are Married* (1938), and the mystery *An Inspector Calls* (1947), show a mastery of the conventional 'well-made' form and a tolerant sporting with human folly. The two comedies in particular tend to reinforce the virtues of common sense and stolidity rather than to challenge preconceptions as to the nature of society or the role of the theatre.

R(obert) C(edric) Sherrifl's distinctly unreassuring dramatic account of life in the trenches of the First World War in *Journey's End* was translated from the Apollo Theatre (where it had been produced in December 1928 by the Stage Society) to the Savoy in January 1929. It ran for 594 performances before transferring to yet another West End theatre. Sherriff (1896-1975) never wrote anything more striking (though he had some later success in the theatre and with screenplays for the film-director Alexander Korda). *Journey's End* combines realism with the kind of restraint which is expressive of far more than the stiff upper-lip heroics of idealized British officers. Its novelty lay in its stark portrayal of male relationships strained by an uncomfortable intimacy with discomfort, psychological dissolution, and death. It brought a frank representation of wastage and violence to the London theatre which served as effectively as Wilfred Owen's posthumously published poetry to stir unreconciled and unhappy emotions in ex-soldiers and to exemplify the pity of war to those who had not been required to fight.

Retrospect and Historical Memory: Graves and Jones

The success of *Jurney's End* on the London stage in 1929 coincided with the publication of the English translation of Erich Maria Remarque's powerful and phenomenally popular anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen nichts neues*). Writing in *The Criterion* in 1930 the poet, critic, and ex-combatant Herbert Read (1893-1968) argued that the human mind had 'a faculty for dismissing the debris of its emotional conflicts' and that only now, after a significant hiatus, did veterans feel ready yfor the spiritual awakening and *All Quiet* was the touch that released this particular mental spring'. As Read's three poems (published together in 1933 as *The End of a War*) themselves suggest, the 1930s were remarkable for a variety of delayed retrospects on the 'Great' War. These retrospects were shaped as memoirs, as novels, as collections of verse, and as experimental interfusions of verse and prose. As with the novels of Aldington and Ford and Siegfried Sassoon's fictionalized autobiography, completed in 1936, Robert Graves (1895-1985) felt prompted to public confession and evaluation. In his highly coloured autobiography, *Goodbye to All That* (1929, partly revised 1957), Graves describes a sense of alienation from post-war

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student life in Oxford which he shared with his friend and former fellow officer, the poet Edmund Blunden (1896-1974). Everything in their delayed studies was 'translated into trench-warfare terms' and Graves was apt to find the lectures he attended interrupted by 'a sudden very clear experience of men on the march up the Bethune-La Bassee road'. It was, however, through his Oxford acquaintance with one of the rare 'heroic' figures to emerge from the war, T(homas) E(dward) Lawrence (1888-1935), that Graves may have begun to recognize the fictional potential of feeling along an extended chain of connection between the present and the experience of the remoter past. The already 'legendary' Lawrence, deeply drawn to the continuities and raw grandeurs of Arab culture, was at work on his romantic account of his desert campaigns which he published, for private circulation, as *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in 1926, and which was posthumously released to a highly receptive wider public in 1935.

By his own account, Graves had begun to write his own autobiography in 1916 in the form of a novel, though he was obliged to 're-translate it into history' for *Goodbye to All That*. The processes of translating and intermixing also determined the nature of his string of popular first-person historical novels which began in 1934 with *I, Claudius*. His choice of narrator was striking. Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus, the future Emperor of the Romans and the successful colonizer of Britain, may be cast as an idiosyncratic and decidedly unheroic autobiographer, but he remains the central actor in the evolution of a large historical drama. Most historical fiction, from the time of Scott onwards, had employed observant, passive, fictional protagonists who stood on the sidelines of history. Although his attempts at valour are chiefly notable for their extreme discretion, birth and accident determine that the historical Claudius must fulfil his recorded destiny as Emperor. His is essentially a sordid, upper-class family history rather than an analysis of the growing pains of post-Republican Roman society, but it is animated with philosophical reflection and with a series of highly entertaining grotesqueries (notably the portraits of the Empress Livia and of her protégé Caligula). *I, Claudius* and its successor, *Claudius the God, and his wife Messalina* (also 1934), repackaged Roman history for an age which had begun to witness the decline of classical studies but which, conversely, had seen the rise of a new, imperially ambitious Italian autocrat, Benito Mussolini. None of Graves's subsequent historical fictions had quite the flair and modern relevance of his first.

The military career of David Jones (1895-1974), and the consequent Roman bias of the literature that eventually emerged from it, were quite distinct from Graves's. Jones, born in London of a Welsh father and an English mother, remained fascinated by his divided British inheritance. He was a cockney Welshman who, despite his love of its sounds and its literature, never fully mastered the Welsh language. After studying at the Camberwell School of Art, Jones joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers and served as a private soldier in the trenches on the Western Front. It was this view from the ranks, partly

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refocused after his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1921, which determined the intimacy, the nervous intensity and peculiarly Latinate reference of his subsequent poetry (he remained an equally intense and experimental painter). Jones began work on his epic of suffering and comradeship, *In Parenthesis*, in 1927. It was not published until 1937 and was latterly reprinted with an appreciative 'Note of Introduction' by T. S. Eliot. Its title refers both to a private history which had become, as Jones saw it, 'a kind of space between' and to an escape from the 'brackets' of the 1914-18 war. *In Parenthesis* is divided into seven parts, each of which intermixes and combines the various registers of terse military commands, profane army slang, Welsh tags, cockney phrasing, reportage, description, extended prose meditation, and the striking fragmentation of prose into a dense and allusive poetry. Throughout, Jones sees his patient modern soldiers, Private John Ball and Private Watkin, the one the Saxon Londoner and the other the Celtic Briton, as bearing in their bodies 'the genuine tradition of the Island of Britain'. It was a tradition which he saw as moulded in turn by the popular vigour of Welsh and English comic literature, and the modern music-hall. But his soldiers have also unconsciously inherited a line of recorded history stretching back to the ancient meeting of Roman and Celt, a meeting finally cemented in the Latin Christianization of the colony of Britain. They move through a confused khaki world of reveilles, mud, mustard-gas, barbed wire, and bomb-craters, but it is also a world haunted by the ghosts of Welsh heroes and Roman legionaries. Out of the twisted debris of all battles, ancient and modern, Jones painstakingly assembled a diverse and often dazzling work of art, part *objet trouvé*, part collage, part expressionist construction.

The fragmentary archaeological poetry perfected by Eliot in the 1920s clearly left its imprint on Jones's slowly produced work. His longest poem, *Anathemata* (1952), in part a tribute to his native London, interweaves the legendary history of Britain with the complexly layered history and prehistory of Europe, tying the island to the Continent by threads that are both Celtic and Teutonic, both Imperial Roman and Roman Catholic. Celtic, Latin, and Germanic concepts jostle each other when, for example, he considers the anonymous prehistoric sculptor of the so-called Willendorf Venus (a buxom Celtic figure found near the Danube):

> Who were his *gens*-men or had he no *Hausname* yet
> no *nomen* for his *fecit*-mark
> the Master of the Venus?
> whose man-hands god-handled the Willendorf stone
> before they unbound the last glaciation
> for the Uhland Father to be-ribbon *die blaue Donau*
> with his Vanabride blue.
> O long before they lateen'd her Ister
> or Romanitas manned her gender'd stream.
>
> O Europa!

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Anathemata is shot through with modernist effect, Modernist fragmentation, and modernist difficulty, but, as with Joyce's later work, it is ordered by an artistic sensibility which is essentially theological. When in a late poem, *The Tribune's Visitation* (1958, 1969), he returned to the idea of a Welsh soldier, he described not a muddy private on the Western Front, but a conscripted Celt in the Roman army witnessing the passion of Christ. For Jones, history was a process of conflations and synchronies out of which poetry was painfully squeezed.

'Society' and Society: The New Novelists of the 1920s and 1930s

To the upper- and middle-class generations that either avoided or missed combat in the First World War, the often flippant 1920s and the far gloomier 1930s were less a time for retrospects than an age that seemed like a springboard

to an uncertain future. The uncertainties were built into an often sardonic, questioning, terse, and jerky new fiction. The poet Stephen Spender (b. 1909) describes his boyhood and adolescence in his autobiography *World Within World* (1951) as a period of growing up 'in an atmosphere of belief in progress curiously mingled with apprehension'. His senior, William Gerhardie (originally Gerhardi) (1895-1977), who spent much of the war as a junior attaché in the British Embassy in Petrograd, viewed the 1920s as a decade in which inhibitions were broken down. 'Young people', he wrote in his comically subversive history of the first half of the twentieth century *God's Fifth Column* (1981), 'disillusioned by inconsistencies of avowed ideals with palpable results, as exemplified by the behaviour of their parents, discovered a style of life for themselves which allied mature superciliousness about their elders with an insistence on the advantages of young years and limbs'. A sense of disillusion and an amused superciliousness runs through Gerhardie's two first, and best, novels, *Futility: A Novel on Russian Themes* (1922) and *The Polyglots* (1925). Gerhardie, who had been born of British parents in Imperial St Petersburg, was well attuned to things Russian (he published a pioneer study of Chekhov in 1923 and a sharply observant history of the Romanov tsars in 1940). *Futility* is a sub-Chekhovian essay in absurdity, aimlessness, and non-communication set against the background of the Russian revolutions of 1917. There is a parallel series of diverse fictional manoeuvres between comedy and tragedy in *The Polyglots*, whose setting moves panoramically from Japan, to Harbin in Manchuria, to Shanghai before ending up in the drizzling rain of England. The novel's narrator, the capriciously named Georges Hamlet Alexander Diabologh, is a polyglot English outsider, detached both from the displaced and disparate collection of refugees from Russia he encounters in the East and from the English with whom he is never properly at home. Despite the confusion of tongues and manners that the novel implies, Diabologh accepts the English language as his medium and uses it to create what he sees as an Anglo-

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Saxon 'world of assumed restraint' as opposed to a 'Maupassantian ... candour'. 'The novel', he also remarks, 'is a cumbersome medium for depicting real people.' Diabologh's narrative is frequently threatened with dissolution by confusions of identity, trivialities, seeming inconsequences, and soliloquies (his middle name is not 'Hamlet' by accident). In a sense it enacts the disintegration which is its subject.

Henry Green (1905-73), the pseudonym of Henry Vincent Yorke, was the son of a wealthy Birmingham industrialist. For Green, writing in his 'self portrait' *Pack my Bag* in the midst of another war in 1940, the domestic circumstances in which he found himself during the war of 1914-18 had opened up disorienting vistas. The family house at Tewkesbury had become a convalescent home for wounded officers, one of whom attempted to commit suicide. The event, coupled with the death of an elder brother at school and 'the lists of the dead each day in every paper', reinforced an acute awareness of mortality. Perhaps as significant was the opportunity provided to learn what he called 'the half tones of class' and to experience 'those narrow, deep and echoing gulfs which must be bridged'. In *Party Going* (1939) Green's seemingly unpromising subject is the four-hour delay experienced by a young and smart set of party-goers. Little enough actually happens. Fog forbids departure by train and the group resort to the station hotel from whence they can look down on the masses of less privileged travellers below them, the 'thousands of Smiths, thousands of Alberts, hundreds of Marys, woven tight as any office carpet'. 'What targets', someone later remarks, 'what targets for a bomb'. In *Party Going* the few are divided from the thousands, but they are also glimpsed as incomprehendingly surrounded by the evidence of death and decay. Not only does the order of society seem fragile when the topic of an air raid is raised (a very present threat in 1939), but the external gloom of the fog and the sudden illness of Miss Fellowes (who has inexplicably picked up a dead pigeon as the novel opens) serve to cast glancing shadows over the generally trivial gossip of the young travellers. Social class, and the problems attendant on class divisions, figure too in Green's below-stairs vista on country-house life in neutral Ireland, *Loving* (1945), but his most impressive achievement remains the neutral study of the commonplaces of Birmingham factory life, *Living* (1929). For this, his second novel, he evolved a startlingly abbreviated narrative style, a style which eliminates definite articles and adjectives, which experiments with verbless sentences, and which allows for the flatness of much colloquial discourse. It was a style modelled, by his own account, on the reflection of Arabic in the prose of the Victorian traveller C. M. Doughty (1843-1926) (Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* had been republished in 1921 with an introduction by T. E. Lawrence). There is nothing exotic about *Living*. As Dupret, the son of the factory-owner, walks through the artisan streets he remarks on their air of 'terrible respectability on too little money' and on a way of life that consists for all classes of the monotonies of being born, of going to school, of working, of being married, of bearing children, and of dying. 'What had you before you

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died?', he ponders, 'Grandchildren? The satisfaction of breeding the glorious Anglo Saxon breed?' This monotony is briefly relieved by the exploited Lily Gates's attempted escape to Canada with Bert Jones. The couple's elopement

only takes them as far as Liverpool and their journey is marked by Lily's dim awareness that 'while she expected to be happy she was not and Mr Jones could only think of what they would do in Liverpool'. Lily returns, almost as arbitrarily as she left, to the routines of her life in Birmingham.

Living was praised in its time for its evocation of the rhythms, repetitions, and deprivations of industrial life. An equally original, but far wider ranging, representation of working-class life and working-class perception appears in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's remarkable trilogy, *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933), and *Grey Granite* (1934), known collectively as *A Scots Quair* (its title is a proletarian echo of King James I of Scotland's *The Kingis Quair* of *c*. 1423). Gibbon, the pen-name of James Leslie Mitchell (1901-35), uses the thread of the life of Chris Guthrie and her three marriages to draw his three independently shaped novels together. Chris's marriages and widowhoods occasion her movement from a farm in the north-east Lowlands first to a small-town manse and then to a boarding-house in a city. She endures the death of her farmer husband in the First World War and watches as the iron enters the soul of the Scottish working classes during the period of the General Strike, the Depression, and the Hunger Marches of the 1930s. The novels are distinctive not so much for their attempt to root private and public history in a Marxist understanding of class struggle as for their return to the matter and the speech of Scotland. For Gibbon, the assertively Scottish novel of the twentieth century should be expressed in a tempered version of the Scots vernacular that his characters speak, a language which for them is embedded in 'the smell of the earth ... and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies'. The predominantly rural *Sunset Song* opens with an evocation of place which is at once mythical and sub-medieval, legendary and historical: 'Kinraddie lands had been won by a Norman childe ... in the days of William the Lyon, when gryphons and such-like beasts still roamed the Scots countryside and folk would waken in their beds to hear the children screaming, with a great wolf beast, come through the hide window, tearing at their throats.' The violence implicit in this opening is reflected not only in the sharp divisions between the possessors and the dispossessed examined in the subsequent narratives, but also in the death in battle of Chris's husband Ewan with which the first volume concludes. The widow at first refuses to recognize that her husband could have been sacrificed for anything so irrelevant to him as somebody else's war: 'He wasn't dead, he could never have died or been killed for nothing at all, far away from her over the sea, what matter to him their War and their fighting, their King and their country? Kinraddie was his land, Blawearie his, he was never dead for those things of no concern, he'd the crops to put in and the loch to drain and her to come back to.' Chris's awareness of her particular place and of her local identity is reinforced in the 'Epilude' to *Sunset Song* by the inclusion of the music to 'The Flowers of

the Forest' (originally a lament for the fallen Scots in the disastrous battle of Flodden fought against the English in 1513). The melody, played on the pipes as the village's War Memorial stone is unveiled, had earlier seemed to Chris to hold in it not simply sadness of mourning but the accumulated history of her nation.

In the latter stages of *Grey Granite* Chris's Communist son Ewan is fired by the idea that he is himself History: 'A Hell of a thing to be History! — not a student, a historian, a tinkling reformer, but LIVING HISTORY ONESELF …'. In the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett (1884-1969) the pervasive detachment from public events might be said to render such an idea marginal, illusory, even irrelevant. Nevertheless the eighteen novels she wrote after disowning her first published work, *Dolores* (1911), describe an enclosed, circumscribed, and dying historical world, drab in its consistency. The variations between the novels are relatively small, though none precisely mirrors its predecessors. Each is concerned with a small upper-middle-class group of characters in the period antecedent to the First World War. The most common setting is a large if shabby country house, the most common grouping is the late Victorian extended family. The small society Compton-Burnett observes does not consider itself oppressive or exploited, but in each novel a complex series of oppressions and exploitations emerge. As a selection of her titles suggest (*Pastors and Masters* (1925), *Brothers and Sisters* (1929), *Men and Wives* (1931), *A House and its Head* (1935), *Parents and Children* (1941), *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947), and *A Father and his Fate* (1957) she concentrates on relationships which imply power on the one side and submission and humiliation on the other. Power is exercised by genteel bullies largely for reasons of personal vanity; it is these respectable oppressors who inflict an exquisite and protracted mental suffering on their equally genteel victims. Men readily take on dictatorial roles while women and, above all, children, represent an exploited class (though the positions and oppressions are reversible). There is little room for kindness, warmth, and affection. 'Dear, dear, the miniature world of the family!', the eldest daughter in *Parents and Children* remarks, 'All the emotions of mankind seem to find a place in it.' At the beginning of *A Father and his Fate* the father, Miles Mowbray, serenely expounds the principle that his three unmarried daughters have the life they ought to have: 'A life in the family home, with the protection and provision that is fit for them. What more could they want?' When his nephew questions his judgement, the offended Mowbray insists that he is not a tyrant and that his house is not a torture chamber. 'Then it is different from many houses', his nephew retorts. Compton-Burnett's style is as austere as her subjects are, though it often suggests a brittle sense of humour generally denied to her characters. Her effects are achieved through conversation which is simple, undramatic, and determined by the flat

good manners of a polite and often repressed society. It is, however, through these flat, claustrophobic dialogues that there emerge the deceptions, frauds, and the often melodramatic surprises on which the novels turn. Crimes, imagined and realized,

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await exposure, and murders, committed or contrived, serve to satisfy the demands either of vengeance or of selfishness. Compton-Burnett's fictional style can be an acquired taste, requiring as it does a susceptibility educated to respond to her distinctive but subdued acidity.

Bright Young Things and Brave New Worlds: Wodehouse, Waugh, and Huxley

The eccentricities, oddities, fogyisms, fads, and fashions of inter-war upper-class England are nowhere better charted than in P. G. Wodehouse's mockery of them. Between 1902 and the end of his life P(elham) G(renville) Wodehouse (1881-1975) published over 120 volumes of novels and short stories. He first introduced his most famous characters, Bertie Wooster and his man Jeeves, in an unremarkable story in the collection *The Man with Two Left Feet and Other Stories* in 1917. The modest collection itself is notable for its variety of narrators, which range from a dog to a London waiter, and amongst them the Wooster narrative sits snugly and companionably. When, however, in 1919 Wodehouse began to explore further the potential of the disarmingly dim Bertie as a narrator and his relationship to the resourceful Jeeves in *My Man Jeeves*, he took the classic master-servant partnerships of literature into a new era. Here was a Samuel Pickwick and a Sam Weller advanced both in fortune and in class into the Jazz Age. Wodehouse's art lay in telling a simple and amusing story simply and amusingly. He once described his method of writing as 'making a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether'. Although Wodehouse's is a genuinely escapist fiction, it neither truly ignores 'real' life nor suggests an ignorance of the political and social currents of its time. It identifies likely disturbers of the public peace in the guise of aunts and flapper feminists, gangsters and *arrivistes*, cranks and enthusiasts, mindless bachelor members of the Drones Club and thuggish followers of the Fascist Black Shorts movement, and it systematically deflates them all.

Despite the fun, there is far less geniality in the early fiction of Evelyn Waugh (1903-66). There is a menace even in the titles of his first four novels, *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Vile Bodies* (1930), *Black Mischief* (1932), and *A Handful of Dust* (1934). *Decline and Fall*, with its Gibbonian suggestions of a society in decay, traces the disastrous career of the innocent Paul Pennyfeather, a failed undergraduate, a failing schoolmaster, and the exploited lover of the highly corrupt Margot Beste-Chetwynde (the future Margot Metroland). Sentenced to a term at the Egdon Heath Penal Settlement (a Dartmoor in the midst of Hardy country) thanks to Margot's white-slaving activities, Paul endures his fate patiently. 'Anyone who has been to an English public school', the narrator wryly remarks, 'will always feel comparatively at home in prison.' Throughout both *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, the accumulated evidence of depravity is

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balanced by a comedy that sports not simply with human folly but with crime, injustice, and even potential horror. As with Ben Jonson's equally savage comedies or with Dickens's comic inflations, venality embraces vulgarity and the ridiculous frolics with the rapacious. In *Vile Bodies* the devaluation of received standards is typified by the filming of a preposterous life of John Wesley in which Wesley and Whitefield fight a duel for the love of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. 'This is going to make film history', the director announces, 'We're recording extracts from Wesley's sermons and we're singing all his own hymns.' *Black Mischief*, set in the tottering African kingdom of Azania, intermixes farcical representations of the Emperor's birth-control campaign ('Through Sterility to Culture') with rum accounts of civil war corruption, and mayhem which were imaginative expansions on the circumstances Waugh himself had witnessed in Ethiopia. He had initially described his African journey in the travel-book *Remote People* in 1931; he returned to Ethiopia during the Italian invasion, publishing an account of his experiences as a journalist in *Waugh in Abyssinia* in 1936 and a fictional enlargement on them in *Scoop* in 1938 (the novel is also a pointed satire on a popular newspaper industry dominated by the opinionated Lord Copper). By far the finest, and the most refinedly cruel, of the early novels is *A Handful of Dust*. The novel's title amplified in its epigraph, reveals Waugh's debt to the bleakness of *The Waste Land*. Although it is quintessentially a commentary on 'the way we live now', it also glances back, both in terms of form and in reference, to the moral strictures on the decay of social responsibility in the works of Dickens and Trollope. *A Handful of Dust* explores the painful collapse of the illusions and complacencies of a rural feudalism, represented by Tony Last (whose name may reflect the passing orders of Bulwer-Lytton's titles), and it

exposes the surface values and the cynicism of the thoroughly modern and essentially metropolitan 'bright young things'. It moves between a seedy Arthurian-Victorian country house, to glib London clubs and smart apartments, to a Brighton hotel, and to the uncharted equatorial forests of South America, each of them significant re-presentations of aspects of Eliot's poem. Literally and figuratively it centres on the idea of divorce, a divorce between old and new values and divorce as the legal end to marriage which was very much an aspect of upper-class social relationships at the time of its publication. The novel ends with the rootless and defeated Tony Last trapped in the jungle by the calculating, half crazed Mr Todd who forces him to read and reread Dickens's novels aloud to him: 'Your head aches does it not ... We will not have any Dickens today ... but tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. Let us read *Little Dorrit* again. There are passages in that book I can never hear without the temptation to weep.' Without itself being insistently 'Modernist', *A Handful of Dust* is shaped around some of the most troubling juxtapositions, fragmentations, and allusions in English literature.

Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder (1945) reworks and reconsiders the thematic tensions of *A Handful of Dust* in the

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context of Britain in the Second World War. Here again was the romantic country house (though now baroque rather than Gothic) and here again was the clash of tradition with the modern fragmentations of the family and of society. What has shifted is Waugh's narrative perspective. Where the earlier novel was referential, *Brideshead* is essentially reverential. Waugh's narrator, Charles Ryder, is both the central actor in the plot and the far from detached observer and recorder of its action. It is Ryder who is required both to observe and to translate his experience from an agnostic negativity into a series of barely grasped Catholic positives. The harsh outlines of the ironies and unresolved oppositions of Waugh's earlier fiction now seem blurred by a dim religious light. Although Ryder's retrospect traces the effective decline of an aristocratic family, the final extension of his memories into the present allows for the momentary triumph of the ancient and the continuous over the modern and the ephemeral, of the flickering of a sanctuary lamp over the middle-brow popularism that Ryder identifies as 'Hooperism'. Despite its overall mood of nostalgia, *Brideshead* remains a more open and subtle novel than its critics often allow. When in the latter part of his career the convert Waugh adopted the role of amateur apologist for Roman Catholic teaching, as he did in his historical novel *Helena* (1950) and in his biographies of Edmund Campion (1935) and Ronald Knox (1959), his universal sense of the ridiculous tended to desert him and to be superseded by a pompous and exclusive piety. The old detached and dust-haunted Waugh blazed into satiric life one more time, however, in the short fantasia on the eccentricities of Californian funerary practices, *The Loved One* (1948). Otherwise the tone of his late fiction seems to have been determined by an often agonized Augustinian awareness of sin and human failure. The ambitious *Sword of Honour* trilogy (*Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961)) traces the disappointments of another Catholic patrician, Guy Crouchback, as an army officer muddling through a decidedly un-heroic and often pathetic series of experiences during the Second World War. Though it is a far cry from the ideals of chivalric patriotism that he initially seeks to embody, Crouchback's basic decency emerges as a spot of civilized brightness in what Waugh portrays as an increasingly dismal world.

In a review of Waugh's *Vile Bodies* in the *Daily Sketch* in January 1930 Rebecca West recognized that the novel had 'a very considerable value as a further stage in the contemporary literature of disillusionment' and that it followed in a new tradition, first established by *The Waste Land* and continued by Aldous Huxley's novels *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925). Waugh rarely appreciated comparisons between his work and that of Huxley (1894-1963). He found *Point Counter Point* (1928) a rehash of *Antic Hay* with 'all the same social uncertainties, bored lovemaking ... [and] odd pages of conversation and biology'. There are, however, certain obvious parallels between the satirical pictures of the self conscious pursuit of modernity by a young, smart set in the work of both novelists in the 1920s. Thereafter, their

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styles and subjects diverge radically. As the derivations of Huxley's titles from phrases of Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, and Marvell imply, he was, like Waugh, self consciously 'literary'. Unlike Waugh, he initially shaped his novels on the model of the densely conversational, country-house symposia of Thomas Love Peacock; as his experiments with form became more elaborate, so did his tendency to explore ideas at the expense of action. *Point Counter Point* is particularly intricately constructed. As suggested by its title, it attempts to investigate an analogy with musical counterpoint by offering glimpses of diverse experience which seem to be observed simultaneously. Huxley's 'musicalization of fiction ... on a large scale, in the construction' is explained by one of his characters, Philip Quarles, a novelist-within-the-novel: 'A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become different ... All you need is a sufficiency of

characters and parallel, contrapuntal plots.' The ingenuity of the constructive concept is generally more impressive than the final achievement. The novel is notable for its sympathetic portrait of D. H. Lawrence as Mark Rampion, but it was Lawrence himself who remarked on its theme of the 'slow suicide of inertia'. Despite the sensationalism of the famous scene in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) in which a dead dog drops from an aeroplane and bloodily explodes on a flat roof where the hero is making love, the unchronological shifts in time and perspective around which the novel is built tend to fascinate rather than engage by their immediacy.

Huxley's most celebrated book, the Utopian, or rather Dystopian, fantasy *Brave New World* (1932), is essentially the projection of an idea that might have been debated at a Peacockian house-party to which a latter-day Mary Shelley had been bidden. The novel's germ can be precisely located within Huxley's own work in Mr Scogan's evocation of a scientific future in *Crome Yellow*, a future in which 'impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system'. 'In vast state incubators', Scogan continues, 'rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower'. Huxley, as a grandson of Darwin's defender, Thomas Henry Huxley, and a descendant of the Arnolds, might have been expected to have inherited a distinct family bias towards the idea of progress. Where, however, T. H. Huxley had sought to sap the biblical foundations of Victorian religious faith by arguing for rationalism and modern science, his grandson offered a challenge to scientific optimism about the future by presenting a case for individual freedom rooted in literature and religion (the monitory Savage of his tale moulds his opposition to Utopia on ideas derived from Shakespeare). When Huxley earlier described his experiences of India in the travel-book *Jesting Pilate* (1926), he had recognized the advantages that the example of Henry Ford offered over that of the Buddha: 'One is all for religion', he wrote, 'until one visits a really religious country. Then one is all for drains, machinery

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and the minimum wage.' In *Brave New World*, where the calendar is dated AF (after Ford), and the revolutionary thinkers of the modern age (Darwin, Marx, Helmholtz, Freud, Lenin, and even Mussolini) have left their mark on the names of the newly hatched élite of Alphas, the advantage begins to swing back to a religion which attempts to embrace and explore the problem of pain. The Savage seeks the admittedly narrow freedom to be unhappy rather than to escape into an induced, tidy and controlled *soma* dream. Huxley was intellectually projecting himself beyond the political and social preoccupations of the 1930s towards a technologically engineered future. When he reconsidered the book for a new Foreword in 1946 he acknowledged that an immediate 'failure of foresight' had meant that he had omitted all reference to nuclear fission; more vitally, he saw that the European world that had emerged from the Second World War was already conditioned by science and the State to accept a 'horror' that could be upon us within a single century, 'that is, if we refrain from blowing ourselves to smithereens in the interval'. Although the brave world of the Seventh Century AF was to have rid itself of a sense of guilt, it was precisely to the 'savage', uneasy and unliberated consciences of the twentieth century that Huxley was addressing his book.

The Auden Circle

'We young writers of the middle 'twenties', Christopher Isherwood wrote in his partly fictionalized autobiography *Lions and Shadows* (1938), 'were all suffering, more or less subconsciously, from a feeling of shame that we hadn't been old enough to take part in the European war.' For Isherwood (1904-86), and for the group of writers and artists who shared his political ideology (and often his sexual inclinations too), this subconscious 'shame' determined the degree of relish with which they embraced the crusading militancy and socialism in the 1930s. Socialism, generally with a strongly Marxist hue, appeared to be the leading vehicle for social, sexual, and literary emancipation. Although they had missed a European war, they were of a generation that recognized that siding with the Left in a class-war might bring about a purging of the inherited guilt of the upper and middle classes. As faith declined in the 'God of Battles', who had been so over-invoked during the Great War, the vacuum was filled by an evangelizing mission to change society and to foster the democratic millennium. The much vaunted successes of Soviet Communism, which offered so blatant a contrast to the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini and their connivance in destabilizing the reformist Republican Government of Spain, seemed to be the paradigm of a future society. When in 1936 General Franco's Nationalist army invaded the Spanish mainland, the battle lines effectively stretched far beyond the Iberian peninsula.

A year after war broke out in Spain the *Left Review* (founded 1934) published its pamphlet, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War*, the result of a survey of

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149 writers out of which 127 proclaimed themselves 'FOR' the Spanish Republic. Taking sides, or rather forming ranks with the Left, seemed to many young English writers to be the order of the day. 'It became possible to see the Fascist-anti-Fascist struggle as a real conflict of ideas ... To write about Fascism was ... to write about the experience which had usurped the place of more personal ones', Stephen Spender (b. 1909) reflected in *World Within World* in 1951. To confirm his notion of the conjunction of ideas and externalized experience he quoted twenty-nine lines of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. The young writers of 1937, he claimed, had found themselves in a 'parallel situation' to that of Wordsworth in 1791; they felt that 'their duty was to survive and bear witness'. 'The strongest appeal of the Communist Party', Louis MacNeice reflected in 1941, 'was that it demanded sacrifice; you had to sink your ego.' Younger poets such as Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-72) and their less talented fellows, Randall Swingler (b. 1909), John Cornford (1915-36), 'Christopher Caudwell' (Christopher St John Sprigg) (1907-37), and Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978), joined the Communist Party after reading the signs of the times in a Marxist light. A further degree of solidarity was expressed by those who went out to beleaguered Republican Spain. Cornford and Caudwell fought with the International Brigade and were killed in action; Spender and MacNeice (1907-63) made investigative visits to Barcelona, Madrid, and the front line; even W. H. Auden, whose flirtation with Marxism was beginning to diminish, left for Barcelona in January 1937. Having had his services as an ambulance driver refused and having instead made token propaganda broadcasts (in English) for the Republican cause, he returned to England in early March.

When W(ystan) H(ugh) Auden (1907-73) left for Spain he had been hailed by the Communist Daily Worker as 'the most famous of the younger English poets ... and a leading figure in the anti-Fascist movement'. Auden's rise to fame had been rapid. His distinctive qualities had forcibly struck fellow undergraduate poets at Oxford, but his wider reputation had to wait on T. S. Eliot's publication of his 'charade' 'Paid on Both Sides' in the January 1930 issue of *The Criterion* and of his *Poems* in the September of the same year. His reputation was cemented by the appearance of *The Orators: An English Study* in 1932 and by the collection *Look Stranger!* in 1936. The *Daily Worker* had also reminded its readers of the critical success of the play *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, produced by the Group Theatre in London in 1935. *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, written with Christopher Isherwood, was but one of a series of significant collaborations between Auden and his friends, collaborations which suggest his prominence in experimental artistic life in Britain in the 1930s. He worked again with Isherwood on the dramatic parable of power and will, *The Ascent of F6* (1936, performed 1937 with incidental music by Benjamin Britten) and on the less well-received *On the Frontier* (performed in Cambridge in 1938 with incidental music by Britten, and transferred to London in 1939). Auden had already established a working relationship with Britten at the GPO film unit

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(which produced the famous *Night Mail* in 1935); he selected texts for Britten's song cycle *Our Hunting Fathers* in 1936; his poems, together with those of Randall Swingler, were quarried for the *Ballad of Heroes* in 1939 (written in honour of those who had been killed in Spain); and he provided the composer with a libretto for the improbable opera of American lumberjack life, *Paul Bunyan*, in 1941. A trek across Iceland with Louis MacNeice in 1936 led to the 'travel-book' *Letters from Iceland* (1937), a volume remarkable more for its poetry than for its photographic illustrations (which have the amateur air of holiday snaps).

His collaborative experiments with drama apart, Isherwood is likely to be remembered for his two most individual works of fiction, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye To Berlin* (1939). Both draw on his experiences of living and teaching in the uncorseted, anything-goes Berlin of the years 1929-33. At the end of *Lions and Shadows* ('An Education in the Twenties') the narrator's decision to go to Germany seems almost arbitrary. He had been urged, he says, to see Berlin by 'Hugh Weston' (Wystan Auden), but as Isherwood later revealed in his third-person study of himself, *Christopher and His Kind* (1977), the real motive for the visit was the perception that 'Berlin meant boys'. Neither of the Berlin books is explicitly homosexual, though in both a whole variety of sexual tastes, whims, and deviations are touched upon, all of them openly catered for at the clubs, bars, and nude beaches of Weimar Germany. Isherwood's Berlin is decadent, economically depressed, politically volatile, but for his narrator, artistically exhilarating. In *Mr Norris* the explosive mood of the city is suggested by its discourse, a language which is as 'inflated ... beyond recall' as the Deutschmark: 'The vocabulary of newspaper invective (traitor, Versailles-lackey, murder-swine, Marx-crook, Hitler-swamp, Red-pest) had come to resemble, through excessive use, the formal phraseology of politeness employed by the Chinese. The word *Liebe*, soaring from the Goethe standard, was no longer worth a whore's kiss.' Against a shifting, and often shifty background, Isherwood's narrator in the sex sections of *Goodbye To Berlin* himself shifts between identities. He is variously addressed as 'Herr Issyvoo', 'Christoph', and 'Herr Christoph'. As the 'Herr Issyvoo' of the first section claims: 'I am a camera with its shutter open ... Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed and fixed.' The camera metaphor applies both to still photography and to the newer techniques of the documentary cinema (Isherwood probably knew Walter Ruttmann's inventive

celebration of urban life in *Berlin: Die Symphonie der Grossstadt* of 1927). Isherwood sought to write a plain and objective prose which would fix an image of observed reality. In line with the picturesquely phrased condemnation of the 'bourgeois' elitism of Joyce and Proust at the Soviet Writers' Congress in Moscow in 1934 (the proceedings of which were published in English as *Problems in Soviet Literature* in 1935), Isherwood eschews an elaborate prosody in favour of an easily assimilated lucidity. As one alert to the techniques of Freudian therapy, he also conveys the impression of tolerance and sympathetic understanding (though

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tolerance and sympathy rapidly evaporate when he describes encounters with the Nazi party). In January 1939 Isherwood left Europe with Auden for the United States. While Auden settled on the East Coast, Isherwood (who became an American citizen in 1946) gravitated naturally towards the West. His fictionalized account of working with an exiled Austrian film-director, *Prater Violet* (1946), suggests that he had already imaginatively served an apprenticeship for his sporadic future employment as a Hollywood screenwriter.

Stephen Spender shrewdly remarked of Isherwood, with reference to the period they spent together in Berlin, that 'Christopher, so far from being the self effacing spectator he depicts in his novels, was really the centre of his characters, and neither could they exist without him or he without them'. Spender's own art never makes a pretence of detachment. His early volumes, *Twenty Poems* (1930), *Poems* (1933), and *The Still Centre* (1939), intermix public, political, and private verse. He adulates the Romantic hero in 'Beethoven's Death Mask' and he un-Romantically analyses himself in 'What I Expected'; he attempts to empathize with van der Lubbe, the Dutchman accused by the Nazis of setting fire to the Reichstag, and rejoices in 'the black statement of pistons' and 'the luminous self possession' of a steam train in 'The Express'. His awareness of the cultural anomalies and conflicts of class interest in inter-war Britain shine through his 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum', and his sense of historical injustice determines the evocation of the voices of Victorian slum-children in 'A Footnote (from Marx's Chapter, The Working Day)'. It is, however, in the poems that rose out of his experience of the Spanish Civil War that Spender achieves his most effective balance of personal response and public engagement. In 'Two Armies' and 'Ultima Ratio Regum' he recognizes the erotic implications of the intimacy of huddled, sleeping soldiers ('a common suffering | Whitens the air with breath and makes both one | As though these enemies slept in each other's arms') and of a boy's corpse ('He was a better target for a kiss'). He assembles a mosaic of impressions of defeat in 'Fall of a City' and plays, both informally and earnestly, with the sense of an already fragmentary 'I' threatened with physical dissolution in 'Thoughts During an Air Raid' ('Of course, the entire effort is to put myself | Outside the ordinary range | Of what are called statistics'). In attempting to explain why, despite his support for the Spanish Republican cause, the poems in *The Still Centre* had not struck a more heroic note, Spender asserts in his Foreword 'that a poet can only write about what is true to his own experience, not about what he would like to be true to his experience'. The poem that most accurately captures his failure to convey a sense of the heroic at the 'still centre' both of the war and of the poet's consciousness is 'Port Bou'. The narrator sits 'at the exact centre' of the town, 'solitary as a target, | Where nothing moves against a background of cardboard houses | Except the disgraceful skirring dogs'. He feels himself to be neither at one with the embattled townspeople nor identified with the dogs, neither disillusioned nor capable of maintaining the illusion of

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courage. This ruminative inconclusiveness, coupled with a new evocation of the destructive energy of battle, also determines the mood of Spender's poems of the Second World War, notably 'Air Raid across the bay at Plymouth' and the fine picture of blitzed London in 'Epilogue to a Human Drama'. His later work, with its increasing stress on private emotions and relationships, suggests the degree to which he had retreated from his short-lived attempt to marry Liberalism and Marxism.

A sonnet published by Cecil Day-Lewis in *Left Review* in 1934 begins clumsily with the lines 'Yes, why do we all, seeing a communist, feel small?' Its clumsiness derives from both its deliberate echo of Hopkins's 'Yes, why do we all seeing of a soldier, bless him?' and from the nature of its subject. It was not a poem that Day-Lewis chose to include in his *Collected Poems* of 1954 nor was it the kind of public verse that he would have seen as enhancing his official reputation as Poet Laureate (to which post he was appointed in 1968). Much of Day-Lewis's most distinctive early verse is, however, inescapably enthusiastic about the prospect of a Marxist transformation of society. In section 32 of *The Magnetic Mountain* of 1933, for example, he announces to those 'that love England' that they 'need fight in the dark no more' for they 'shall be leaders when zero hour is signalled ... and welders of a new world'. In its original form, the volume *A Time to Dance* (1935) moved from the heroic celebration in its title poem of the pioneer airmen, Parer and M'Intosh (those 'haughty champions'), to a series of poems describing a seething and depressed England (including the sardonic poem later named 'A Carol', a lullaby which ends with the words 'Thy mother is crying, | Thy

dad's on the dole: | Two shillings a week is | The price of a soul'). The time to dance, 'An Address to Death' asserts, is now and 'in the rhythm of comrades'. The same volume also contained two somewhat more ambiguous poems, 'The Conflict' and 'In Me Two Worlds'. The first pictures a poet singing 'on a tilting deck' in a sea-storm in order to 'keep men's courage up'. Is this the floundering ship of capitalism? Or is the Party itself losing impetus with one comrade worrying about who is steering? The poet sees himself as one 'between two massing powers ... whom neutrality cannot save', but when he encouragingly speaks of the rallying force of 'the red advance of life', the surge of blood might as well be a blush as a declaration of solidarity with socialist progress. In 'In Me Two Worlds' he sees his body as a 'moving point of dust | Where past and future meet' and as a battlefield where 'the armies of the dead' meet their antagonists, 'the men to come', in an 'inveterate feud'. This feud is to be fought out not in clear daylight of dialectical materialism but in 'my senses' darkened fields'. In some ways we are back with Matthew Arnold's ignorant armies clashing by night. Day-Lewis's volumes *Overtures to Death* (1938) and *Poems in Wartime* (1940) signalled that he, like Spender, had begun to retreat from confident Marxist analyses as the Second World War approached. The faded elegance of a nineteenth-century terrace in 'Regency Houses' may be a metaphor for condemned bourgeois society, but the poem goes on to evoke a different melancholy, the disillusion of those who

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'in younger days, | Hoping too much, tried on | The habit of perfection' and who have now 'learnt how it betrays | Our shrinking flesh'.

Much of Day-Lewis's later career was taken up with translations of Virgil, a poet who had oscillated between public celebrations of a national mission and a delight in bucolic retreat. A version of *The Georgics* appeared in 1940 and was followed in 1952 by *The Aeneid* and in 1963 by *The Eclogues*. Louis MacNeice, a poet of a very different disposition, was as a student and teacher of Greek and Roman literature equally attentive to the classical tradition which fed his own poetic preoccupations. At the beginning of his career he published a series of verse dialogues with the title 'eclogue' ('Eclogue for Christmas', 'Eclogue by a Five-barred Gate', 'Eclogue from Iceland', and 'Eclogue between the Motherless'). In 1936 he produced an often colloquial and distinctly unheroic verse translation of Aeschylus's the *Agamemnon*. Unlike Day-Lewis, MacNeice seems never to have fallen for the idea of feeling small when faced with a working-class Communist or to have embraced simple solutions to what he saw as complex historical, social, and political problems. 'My sympathies are Left. On paper and in my soul', he wrote, 'But not in my heart or my guts.' In the poem 'Snow', published in the *Poems* of 1935, he describes the world as 'crazier and more of it than we think, | Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion | A tangerine and spit the pips and feel | The drunkenness of things being various'. 'Your thoughts make shape like snow', he tells a Communist in a short lyric from the same collection, 'Consult the barometer — | The poise is perfect but maintained | For one day only.' He concludes the poem 'Entirely', published in the collection *Plant and Phantom* in 1941, with the unblinkered assumption that 'In brute reality there is no | Road that is right entirely'.

MacNeice was an Ulsterman by birth and tradition, the son of a vicar of the fortress town of Carrickfergus who rose to the episcopate of the Church of Ireland. The geography and the folklore of Ireland haunt his verse, but there is a firm lack of commitment to any political or religious Establishment, whether Protestant or Catholic, whether Unionist or Nationalist. When he writes affectionately of Carrickfergus in the poem of that name, he describes his sense of exclusion from 'the candles of the Irish poor' yet he also implies a clear detachment from Protestant Ulster's involvement in the First World War. The quality of MacNeice's scepticism, and of his refusal to accept the 'jejune dichotomies' that he mentions in 'The Cromlech', was determined by an intellectual exploration which looked beyond Irish confines. He fluctuates between a God of discipline and a God of liberty, between divided vocations to the ascetic and the sensual in 'Stylite' and in 'London Rain', the latter evoking a wet London which is a place where 'God and No-God' | Play at pitch and toss'. In the charmlike 'Prayer Before Birth' (published in *Springboard* in 1944) he asks for the spirit of delight and for freedom from those 'who would freeze my | humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton | would make me a cog in a machine'. When he returns to an Ireland in wartime in the poem 'Neutrality' (published in the same collection), he recognizes a parallel

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between the geographical entity and 'the neutral island in the heart of man', both ostensibly non-committed, but both internally vexed by 'fermenting rivers' and 'intricacies of gloom and glint'.

MacNeice's landscape and townscape poems provide a focus for his preoccupation with ambiguity and for his divided literary loyalty between Ireland and England. In his unfinished autobiography, *The Strings are False* (1965), he describes his enthusiasm as a schoolboy in Wiltshire for *The Waste Land*, an enthusiasm which expressed itself in paddling a hired canoe 'beneath the gas works, a fine place ... for reading Webster'. This feeling for incongruity and for urban unloveliness emerges in the poem 'Birmingham' of 1934, a tribute to the city in which MacNeice taught

after his graduation from Oxford. ‘Birmingham’ is made up of a series of fragmentary impressions of railway cuttings, of cars, of factories, and of half timbered suburban houses with ‘lips pressed | So tightly and eyes staring at the traffic through bleary haws | And only a six-inch grip of the racing earth in their concrete claws’. In ’Woods’, published in *Holes in the Sky* in 1948, he acknowledges a distinction between his father’s relish for empty Irish moorland and his own for the woodlands of the ‘tame’ English landscape. The woods are romantically ‘packed with birds and ghosts’ but they are not like the wilds of Mayo, ‘they are assured | Of their place by men; reprieved from the neolithic night | By gamekeepers or by Herrick’s girls at play’. A similar feel for a lush and varied English West Country, an archaeological landscape haunted by historical and literary associations, shapes *Wessex Guidebook*, published in MacNeice’s last volume *The Burning Perch* (1963). The land is historically endowed with memories of Roman emperors and English kings, but it is also a place where the local measurement of time is erased by villagers who forget the church clock ‘in deference to Big Ben’. The indifference of Time to men, and of men to history in the last stanza takes on a deliberate and appropriately Hardyan tone:

> But hindmost, topmost, those illiterate seasons
> Still smoke their pipes in swallow-hole and hide-out
> As scornful of the tractor and the jet
> As of the Roman road, or axe of flint,
> Forgotten by the mass of human beings
> Whom they, the Seasons, need not even forget
> Since, though they fostered man, they never loved him.

MacNeice recognized his own contradictions as an artist in the external manifestations of human history, in smokestacks as much as in ploughmarks. The remarkable thematic consistency of his poetry emerges from a process of questioning and balancing those contradictions.

When W. H. Auden paid posthumous tribute to MacNeice he remarked on his friend’s pleasure in ‘language, in country landscapes, in city streets and parks, in birds beasts and flowers, in nice clothes, good conversation, good food, good drink, and in what he called “the tangles”’. These transient,

temporal pleasures, tangles and all, are reflected in Auden’s own verse. Auden, whose precocity of talent was evident in his first volume of 1930, is, however, a far more affirmative poet. The nature of his affirmation shifted as he gradually moved, in charted stages, from a Marxist alignment to a Christian one. When he removed himself to the United States in 1939 and took out US citizenship in 1946 he regarded both as decisive breaks with his personal, political, and literary pasts (though he returned to Britain at the end of his life). In his middle age he became a determined pruner and reviser of what he had come to regard as the excesses and infelicities of his poetic youth, first tampering with, then declining to reprint certain published poems. The most notable of these revisions and suppressions concern the poem ‘September 1, 1939’, a work which he later disdained as ‘a hangover from the U.K.’ and one ‘infected with an incurable dishonesty’. ‘September 1, 1939’ was specifically transatlantic both in its setting (‘I sit in one of the dives | On Fifty-Second Street’) and in its first appearance in the American journal *New Republic*, but it strains to undo a tangle which is essentially European. The date of its title is that of Hitler’s invasion of Poland, two days before the consequent precipitation of Britain into the Second World War; the focus of its argument lies, however, in a declaration of independence from the ‘State’ and of an alternate dependence on human relationships (‘We must love one another or die ... May I, composed like them | Of Eros and of dust ... Show an affirming flame’). Having left his native island, Auden, the inveterate commender of islands, was now attempting to proclaim himself part of a continent.

It is possible that what Auden later recognized as the ‘incurable dishonesty’ of the poem lay in its very attempt to deny the significance of the insular. ‘The whole talent, the whole genius of Auden’, Stephen Spender remarked in 1970, ‘has been never to be a central figure. He’s a central figure on the margin.’ That ‘margin’ is perhaps best typified by Auden’s fondness for the role of an observer of islands. In this role he explores geographical and spiritual detachment from the mainland or the mass and, as his later interest in the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard also suggests, he allows individual freedoms to take precedence over the demands of the community. The *Poems* of 1930 (which were revised, expanded, and excised in 1933) reflect, if not on islands, at least on a landscape of alienation peopled by strangers. This alienation is derived from a Marxist perception of the decay of late capitalist society, from a Freudian approach to psychic disorder, and from a relation of both to the imagined landscapes of *The Waste Land*. All human relationships evoked in the poems are conditioned by the reiterated imagery of invasions, conquests, sentries, spies, and frontiers. As Auden’s verse developed in the later 1930s, however, geography took on a fresh significance. The title of the 1936 volume, *Look, Stranger!*, derived by its publishers from the opening line of

one of the most sharply focused poems in the collection, was rejected by Auden who insisted that *On this Island* be substituted for the American edition. The poem (later renamed 'Seascape') from which both titles derive is concerned with

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perspectives; it distinguishes the 'far off' from a 'stable here', but it also leaves a reader of the poems that surround it free to interpret how its insistent direction, 'Look', be applied. Auden may cast himself as a 'lover of islands' in his maritime address to Isherwood, 'Journey to Iceland' of 1937, but his view of Iceland is tentative, escapist, and half idealized. Following the evaporation of Auden's Marxist enthusiasm for communal action in the 1940s, a continental pull slackens, insular responses predominate, and 'unreality' becomes an emphatically acceptable norm in the sequence of meditations on Shakespeare's *The Tempest — The Sea and the Mirror* (1945). On Prospero's island, in contrast to all its earlier foreshadowings in Auden's verse, 'flesh and mind | Are delivered from mistrust' and Ariel, the 'unanxious one', is bidden to entrance and rebuke 'the raging heart | With a smoother song | Than this rough world'. In an even later celebration of islands in the fifth of the 'Bucolics' (published in *The Shield of Achilles* in 1955) the shore of a 'lake turned inside out' seems 'cosy' to the individual who fascinatedly rejoices in 'that class | Whose only member is Me'.

Auden's gradual eschewal of a narrowly political sympathy with the demands of a present community are countered by new, creative, though sometimes quirky responses to the 'old masters' (poets, painters, thinkers, and composers). In the various critical essays later collected as *The Dyer's Hand* (1962) and *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973) he can be both infuriating and incisive. The inherited literary tradition equally marks his poetry. The 'Letter to Lord Byron', published in *Letters from Iceland* in 1937, suggests a real relish for the 'something light and easy' (and the ultimate seriousness) of *Don Juan* (a text which Auden had taken with him to 'humourless' Iceland). Reworkings and rethinkings of an inherited tradition were especially evident in the verse that emerged in his first American years. In 'Musée des Beaux Arts', for example, Auden identifies suffering and 'its human position' as a key concern of art (though in the Brueghel painting of the fall of Icarus to which the poem refers 'everything turns away | Quite leisurely from the disaster'). The two elegies to W. B. Yeats and Sigmund Freud (both of 1939 and both written in the tradition of Milton's *Lycidas*) celebrate continuity as much as they mourn the departed and the condition of the age. Yeats's words 'are modified in the guts of the living' and 'persuade us to rejoice' even in 'a rapture of distress', while Freud, the 'rational voice' and the demystifier of the human condition, provides the wisdom that 'to be free | Is often to be lonely'. Much of Auden's later work continues the process of bouncing tangentially and experimentally from works of art. His responses to Shakespeare in *The Sea and the Mirror*, to Hogarth in the libretto for *The Rake's Progress*, which he and Chester Kallman provided for Stravinsky in 1951, and to Mozart in his free translation (also with Kallman) of Schickaneder's libretto to *The Magic Flute* (1957), all reveal an interfusion of the bawdy, the commonplace, the unexpected, the evanescent, the magical, and the philosophical.

In spite of his withdrawal from the politics of community into the philosophy (and theology) of individualism, Auden spoke with a public, if reticent, voice. A

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good deal of his most assured verse emerges from his discovering for himself what Eliot had called an 'objective correlative', that is 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events' which become the formula for '*particular*' emotion. For Auden the imagining or contriving of a landscape serves as a reification of a psychological state or premiss. When in 'In Praise of Limestone' he reflected on *karst* contours, he sought to typify his own unpredictability, his elusiveness, even his fondness for change and changing things. Here is a limestone landscape which draws 'we the inconstant ones', one shaped by a rock which dissolves in water and which produces 'a secret system of caves and conduits'. The argument of the poem is made up of trickles of thought which seem to appear and disappear as a speaking voice rises and falls. The worried, heterogeneous, and contrived scenery of the *Poems* of 1930 is abandoned for a landscape which is now literally subverted, subverting, and unpredictable. It is a place where joy surprises and where Eros and Agape, human and divine Love, achieve a conditional but ultimate victory in the imagination:

> In so far as we have to look forward
> To death as a fact, no doubt we are right: but if
> Sins can be forgiven, if bodies rise from the dead
> These modifications of matter into
> Innocent athletes and gesticulating fountains,
> Made solely for pleasure, make a further point:
> The blessed will not care what angle they are regarded from,

Having nothing to hide. Dear, I know nothing of
Either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love
Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape.

Subversion and unpredictability, which had once so troubled Auden's fellow-poets of the 1930s, are now taken as evidence of the divine; the temporal seems to be dissolvable in the eternal, thisness in otherness, the material in the mystical.

'Rotten Elements': MacDiarmid, Upward, Koestler, and Orwell

It was not surprising that the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid (the pseudonym of Christopher Murray Grieve, 1892-1978) should have so admired the national emblem of Scotland. His life, work, and opinions were consistently as prickly as a thistle. MacDiarmid is the finest and most original of the writers who revived and invigorated an explicitly Scottish poetry in the mid-twentieth century. Having spent his early years as an active supporter of the Labour Party, in 1928 he became a founder member of the Scottish National Party and in 1934 a member of the Communist Party (he was expelled four years later, but perversely rejoined it, when so many others had left after the suppression of the

Hungarian Revolution, in 1957). Despite, or perhaps because of, the internationalism of his Marxist vision, MacDiarmid was both passionately attached to Scotland and equally passionately disparaging of England and all it stood for (in his latter years he dreamed of a future Celtic Workers Republic embracing Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland). He saw his own identity as a socialist and a poet as defined by a Scottish culture purged of its bourgeois anglicization. His most vigorous verse is written in a synthetic vocabulary forged from the vernacular of south-west Scotland and the distinctive archaisms he found in a dictionary of the Middle Scots Tongue. Collections and selections of his poetry have generally, and of necessity, been supplemented with glossaries. In his most celebrated poem, *A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle* (1926), MacDiarmid speaks in an authorial note of a logic of drunkenness, a logic which seems to allow for the poem's variety, sporadic inconsistency, and phantasmagoria within the framework of an extended dramatic monologue. It is on the acerbic and lyrical Scots poems contained in the volumes published in the 1930s (*First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* of 1931, *Scots Unbound and Other Poems* of 1932, *Stony Limits and Other Poems* of 1934, and *Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* of 1935) that MacDiarmid's reputation will ultimately rest (his longer, later poems in English are singularly drab by comparison). The argumentative 'First Hymn to Lenin' challenges with its immediacy and with its uncompromising Marxist-Leninist evangelism:

Christ said: 'Save ye become bairns again.'
Bairnly eneuch [childish enough) the feck [most] o' us ha' been!
Your work needs men and its worst foes are juist
The traitors wha through a' history ha' gi'en
The dope that's gar'd the mass o' folk pay heed
And bide [stay) bairns indeed.

As necessary, and insignificant, as death
Wi' a' its agonies in the cosmos still
The Cheka's horrors are in their degree;
And'll end suner! What maitters 't wha we kill
To lessen that foulest murder that deprives
Maist men o' real lives?

This justification of Lenin's terror and his secret police also has a logic, the horrid logic of a man temporarily drunk on revolutionary politics. MacDiarmid may have been repelled by the poverty and deprivation of industrial Scotland during the Depression, but his ideological enthusiasms, like Dunbar's four hundred years earlier, may strike latter-day readers as deliberately provocative rather than considered and refined. A very different mood haunts the lyric 'Lourd in my Hert' of 1934 as a heavy-hearted poet contemplates 'the state of Scotland' in the midst of a 'dour winter' when it is 'scarce grey licht at noon'. As a light breaks in the East (the capital letter suggests that this 'east' is centred in Moscow) there is an urge to cry 'the dawn, the dawn', but the poem ends with the disillusioned: 'But ah | — It's just

mair snaw!'

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The English Marxist, Edward Upward (b. 1903), had little of MacDiarmid's prickly Scots obstreperousness and little of his provocative, imaginative energy. 'A modern fantasy cannot tell the truth', Upward proclaims in his 'Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature' published in C. Day-Lewis's collection of essays entitled *The Mind in Chains* (1937). Fantasy, Upward explains, implies 'a retreat from the real world into the world of imagination, and though such a retreat may have been practicable and desirable in a more leisured and less profoundly disturbed age than our own it is becoming increasingly impracticable today'. Upward, the dedicatee of Isherwood's first novel, and the addressee of Ode III of Auden's *The Orators*, shared with his middle-class English friends a sure and certain hope in the prospect of a socialist new order of things. 'A writer today who wishes to produce the best work he is capable of producing', he insisted in 1937, 'must first of all become a socialist in his practical life, must go over to the progressive side of the class conflict.' Despite these doctrinaire 'musts', and despite his once ardent espousal of the orthodoxies of the Communist Party, Upward too had his doubts about the exclusive validity of the party-lines on life and literature. His short novel *Journey to the Border* (1938) traces the growing determination of a singularly guilt-ridden and neurotic private tutor to 'get in touch with the workers' movement', a gesture which is seen as marking a break with his earlier allegiances, thoughts, and feelings. The long-term error of judgement that the hero makes becomes the theme of Upward's `thesis' trilogy collectively known as *The Spiral Ascent*. The three novels, *In the Thirties* (1962), *The Rotten Elements* (1969) and *No Home but the Struggle* (1977), drably recount a series of ideological dilemmas, tergiversations, and intellectual shufflings on the part of the socialist poet, Alan Sebrill. As the second and third volumes explore, Sebrill finds it increasingly hard to reconcile an 'opportunist' party line with what he sees as his personal and artistic integrity. He becomes what his erstwhile comrades dismiss as a 'rotten element'. The corrosive force of this 'rot' also fascinated two less stilted, and far more 'deviationist' novelists of the 1940s, Arthur Koestler (1905-83) and George Orwell, the pen-name of Eric Arthur Blair (1903-50).

Koestler's contribution to R. H. Crossman's symposium, *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* (1950) was entitled 'Confessions of a Tightrope Walker'. A year after the publication of his wittily detached and self critical essay Koestler returned to the subject of his journey into Communism and his exit from it in the first volume of his autobiography, *Arrow in the Blue*. 'In 1931', he claimed, 'we lived under the fascist threat, but we saw an inspiring alternative in Russia. In 1951 we live under the Russian threat, but there is no inspiring alternative in sight; we are forced to fall back on the threadbare values of the past.' Throughout his career as writer Koestler walked intellectual tightropes, nimbly balancing himself while recognizing the dangers of the abysses which opened up beneath him. An essential part of his daring lay in the fact that the English in which he wrote most of his books was not his native tongue

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(he was born into a polyglot Jewish family in Budapest, educated in Vienna, and produced his masterpiece, *Darkness at Noon*, in German). A Communist journalist and observer of the Spanish Civil War, he was arrested as a spy when Republican Malaga fell into the hands of General Franco, condemned to death, and ultimately released in exchange for a Nationalist prisoner. These experiences are recounted in his *Spanish Testament* (published by the Left Book Club in 1937), whose last section, 'Dialogue With Death', nurtured the account of the arrest, examination, and self questioning of the veteran Revolutionary, Nicholas Salmanovitch Rubashov, in *Darkness at Noon* (1940). Although set in an unspecified European dictatorship and originally written in German, Koestler's novel in fact offers the most subtle, economical, and intelligent analysis of the contortions of Stalinist thought composed in England. It is a novel concerned with the structures, uses, and corruptions of power. When it considers the exercise of control, it seeks to liberate the 'I' from the 'We' and the 'They' and to free the individual from enforced fraternalism with the 'masses'. As Rubashov awaits execution, he defines for himself 'the grammatical fiction' by which the Party has disposed of the 'I': 'The infinite was a politically suspect quantity, the 'I' a suspect quality. The Party did not recognise its existence. The definition of the individual was: a multitude of one million divided by one million.' But Rubashov, as the now isolated, traduced, publicly vilified, and disillusioned individual, attempts to work out the personal and social consequences of this 'grammatical fiction'. Premisses of 'unimpeachable truth' have led to a result which appears to him completely absurd. It dawns on him that for forty years the masses have been driven through the desert 'with threats and promises, with imaginary terrors and imaginary rewards. But where was the Promised Land?'

The idea of a Promised Land, the Mosaic vision of which was denied to Rubashov, occurs again in Koestler's two interesting, if less satisfying, novels of the 1940s, *Arrival and Departure* (1943) and *Thieves in the Night* (1946). The former returns to a grim European dictatorship (now again a Fascist one) and to the slow disillusion of a middle-class revolutionary, but it finally offers a patriotic glimmer of hope in that its hero determines to continue his resistance to

Fascism by travelling to embattled Britain rather than withdrawing as a refugee to neutral America. *Thieves in the Night* is set in Palestine as the British mandate draws to an end and as the battle lines between Jew and Arab are established. It lets a plague fall on both houses while offering a carefully observed picture of the tensions within a secular, but essentially alien and intrusive kibbutz. Koestler returned to the problem of what he saw as the inherent contradictions within Soviet Communism in the volume of essays *The Yogi and the Commissar* of 1945 but the concerns of much of his later prose owe more to the mysticism of the Yogi than to the over-defined ideology of Marxism-Leninism. His *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe* (1959) ambitiously and provocatively attempts to draw together scientific and philosophical theories and to insist that 'our hypnotic enslave-

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ment to the numerical aspects of reality has dulled our perception of non-quantitative moral values'. Koestler's latter-day speculations about parapsychology and the paranormal, outlined in *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967) and *The Roots of Consciousness* (1972), suggest that even as an old man he still rejoiced in the precarious role of an intellectual tightrope walker.

George Orwell shared with Koestler a profound disillusion with Soviet Communism. Both recognized, as many of their blinkered liberal colleagues refused to do, that Stalin had betrayed a human ideal and had in the process of his betrayal exposed a fallacy at the heart of that ideal. In an essay of 1947 entitled 'Why I Write' Orwell insisted that every line he had written since 1936 had been written 'directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism' and that where he lacked '*political* purpose' he wrote lifeless books and 'humbug generally'. His early novels, *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), offer little more than fictional analyses of the narrownesses and idiocies of the British at home and abroad, as smug imperialists and even smugger domestic tyrants. It was as an investigative social journalist that Orwell's true distinctiveness as a writer emerged. He is an acute observer and a generalizer, an open-eyed crosser of class boundaries and a delineator of essentially English fudges and compromises (compromises which sometimes infuriate him, sometimes amuse him, sometimes rejoice his heart). Even in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), his account of eking out a dire life in ill-paid jobs and common lodging-houses, he manages to delight in an England of 'bathrooms, armchairs, mint sauce, new potatoes properly cooked, brown bread, marmalade, [and] beer made with hops'. The main subject of both *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) is not, however, a comfortable and familiar England but a singularly uncomfortable and unfamiliar one. Orwell does more than puncture assumptions by exploiting easy contrasts between the rich and the poor; he attempts to describe the slums by slumming it and to write about the disinherited by disinheriting himself. The clothes he dons in order to learn about London tramps have 'a gracelessness, a patina of antique filth, quite different from mere shabbiness', and after an excruciating night in a lodging-house in the Waterloo Road he ruefully, but somewhat unscientifically, notes that 'bugs are much commoner in south than north London'. When he goes north in search of details of an urban life scarred by unemployment and poverty, he is repelled by the untidy ugliness of industrialism 'so frightful and so arresting that you are obliged, as it were, to come to terms with it', and yet he adulates the 'easy completeness, the perfect symmetry ... of a working-class interior' with mother and father on each side of the fire and the children and the dog in the middle. It is, he adds tellingly, 'a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently *of* it to be taken for granted'.

At the close of 1936 Orwell left for Spain to fight for the Republican cause. His account of his experiences in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) and the essay 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' (1943) reveal that what he chiefly discovered in Spain

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was personal discomfort and political disillusionment. *Homage to Catalonia* ends with his escape not from victorious Fascists but from persecution at the hands of one of the warring factions into which the Spanish Left had split. Orwell's book has always provoked those who insist on a rigid division of history into right causes defended by heroes and wrong causes supported by villains. 'I have the most evil memories of Spain', he wrote in 1938, 'but I have very few bad memories of Spaniards.' Looking back in 1943, he criticizes both those intellectual pacifists who hold to a theory that 'war is all corpses and latrines and never leads to any good result' and those who would dismiss as sentimental his contention that 'a man holding up his trousers isn't a „Fascist", he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him'. *Animal Farm* (1945), Orwell's satire on the manifest failure of Communist ideals in Russia, vexed its targets sufficiently to bring about a ban on its publication in the Soviet Union and its satellites until after the revolutions of the late 1980s. The fable may sentimentalize working-class strength and good nature (as characterized by the carthorse, Boxer) but there was a fine appositeness in Orwell's choice of pigs as

the vanguard and the undoing of the animals' revolution. Pigs may at times look suspiciously human (despite their four legs), they may traditionally be associated with greed and laziness, but they are also proverbially supposed to be incapable of flight. Their revolution remains earthbound, their aspirations all too like those of their enemies. The corruptions and distortions of language which serve Napoleon's dictatorial ends in *Animal Farm* became a particular concern of Orwell's last years. In the essay Ppolitics and the English Language' of 1946 he recognized that 'if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought' and argued for a plain English 'as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought'. The idea that political language 'is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable' is substantiated in the Party slogans picked out on the façade of the Ministry of Truth in *Nineteen Eighty four* (1949): 'WAR IS PEACE'; 'FREEDOM IS SLAVERY'; 'IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH'. In *Nineteen Eighty-four* Stalin's Russia blends with bomb-scarred post-war Britain, Kafka's dark fantasies of incomprehension and impersonal oppression with Koestler's nightmares of totalitarian logic and Huxley's dystopian vision of an ordered scientific future. Purges and vaporizations have become 'a necessary part of the mechanics of government' and the Party's prospective Newspeak dictionary will not simply cut the official language 'down to the bone', but also serve to 'narrow the range of thought'. The Party's aim, O'Brien explains to Winston Smith, is to create a world where there are no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self abasement; the 'intoxication of power' will remain, a 'thrill of victory' which is expressed in an excited mental picture of 'a boot stamping on a human face-for ever'. In Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* the nature of a self seeking, individualist society obsessed by the power of money is typified by the phrase 'scrunch or be scrunched'. For Orwell, who was amongst the first modern critics to take Dickens's fiction seriously, the scrunching has become

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the prerogative of a Party which has relieved the individual of responsibility and which enforces acquiescence. His 'modern fantasy' does not suggest a retreat from the real world but a monitory response to what he readily recognized was a 'profoundly disturbed age'.

Looking at Britain at War

One of the most striking and popular visual images to emerge from wartime Britain was John Armstrong's modestly surreal painting *Can Spring be far Behind?* of 1940. Armstrong, who was employed with Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, and John Piper as an Official War Artist, drew an outsize tulip sprouting from the bombed ruins of houses and factories set against a purplish early morning sky. His poetic title, derived from Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', enforces the idea of a spring of hope succeeding a winter of destruction. Unlike the battles of the First World War, the bombing raids of the Second World War brought death and dissolution to what was known as 'the Home Front'. The *Luftwaffe* campaigns of 1940 and 1941 left a good deal of Britain's industrial and cultural heritage in ruins, but the shells of buildings and the piles of rubble, which by 1945 had spread over the whole of Europe, took on a certain suggestive power. Domestic interiors exposed as façades collapsed, camouflaged factories, doors distended by sandbags, bodies huddled in bomb-shelters, corpses distorted by hunger or pain, and human faces preposterously hidden by gas masks had confounded life and art, vision and reality. If the churned moonscapes and the twisted metal of the Western Front had seemed to insist on a new kind of responsive art, the artists who confronted the violent fragmentations, waste lands, and unforeseen juxtapositions of the Second World War were to some degree already equipped with a post-impressionist and post-Eliotic vocabulary with which to articulate their reactions.

The impression of a shifting relationship between objects and concepts, and a Freudian stress on the significance of the unconscious, had become particular features of the publicity generated by the rise of the Surrealist movement. The international exhibition of the work of the Surrealists held in London in June 1936 had included the work of some sixty-eight artists, fourteen of them British. The near suffocation of Salvador Dali as, kitted out in a diving suit, he inaudibly addressed an audience, may have pointed to the extravagantly absurdist side of the movement, but the stress certain critics laid on native prefigurings of Surrealism partly explains why British opinion appears to have been far less provoked by the novelty of the new forms than it had been by Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910. As Herbert Read pointed out in drawing a distinction between a 'classical art' which appealed to the intellect and a 'romantic art' which drew on 'irrational revelations' and 'surprising incoherencies', Surrealism could effectively look back to the work of Blake and

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Lewis Carroll, to Fuseli and Gillray, and find a reflection of itself. Nightmares and daydreams, distortions and distensions, snarks and mock-turtles, shoes and ships and sealing-wax were already part of an established verbal and pictorial tradition. Amongst the most determined of the British apologists for the brief blaze of surreal experiment in the late 1930s was the poet David Gascoyne (b. 1916). Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* appeared in 1935; his often obsessively odd collections of poems, *Man's Life is His Meat* in 1936 and *Hölderlin's Madness* in 1938. 'The Very Image' (addressed to the Belgian painter René Magritte) opens with a verbal evocation of 'An image of my grandmother | her head appearing upside-down upon a cloud | the cloud transfixed on the steeple | of a deserted railway-station | far away'; 'Figure in a Landscape', with its nods to the iterations of Eliot, enacts a kind of ritual awakening; 'The Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis' (which dispenses with capital letters and, apart from two almost arbitrary full stops, with punctuation) restlessly intermixes the extraordinary, the challenging, and the unapologetically silly ('and the wings of private airplanes look like shoeleather | shoeleather on which pentagrams have been drawn | shoeleather covered with vomitings of hedgehogs | shoeleather used for decorating wedding-cakes'). Perhaps in response to genuinely urgent times, Gascoyne's wartime poems deviate into a certain kind of logical sense. His 'Farewell Chorus' (signed 'New Year 1940') greets the sphinx of 'the Forties' with the assertion that 'we see certain truths now' when 'each lonely consciousness' mirrors 'War's world ... without end'. 'Walking at Whitsun', written at the time of the invasions of Belgium, the Netherlands, and France in May 1940, wonders at the 'anguish' which makes the English landscape seem 'Inhuman as the jungle, and unreal | Its peace' and it veers finally towards uneasy thoughts of helmets, ruins and 'invading steel'.

The association of the work of the Anglo-Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, with a lush kind of Surrealism has more often been assumed than proved. As his ambitious and uneven first volume, *18 Poems* (1934), suggests, Thomas (1914- 53) had begun to mould an extravagant and pulsatingly rhetorical style before he became aware of the imported innovations of international Surrealist writing. He was, however, decidedly a poet who thought in images. If there is a kinship evident in Thomas's verse it is with the 'difficulty', the emotionalism, the lyric intensity, and the metaphysical speculation (though not the intellectual rigour) of the school of Donne. It is Donne's 'Death's Duell' which is cited in the title of Thomas's volume *Deaths and Entrances* of 1946 ('our very birth and entrance into this life, is *exitus a morte*, an *issue from death*') and it is Donne's ghost that broods over the poem written in memory of Thomas's aunt, Ann Jones. 'In Memory of Ann Jones', published in *The Map of Love* in 1939, is, however, specifically Welsh in terms of its local reference and in the claims that Thomas makes for himself as 'Ann's bard on a raised hearth'. In considering the coffined corpse laid out in the farmhouse parlour it evokes a memory of a gush of love in the past (Ann's 'fountain heart once fell in puddles | Round the parched worlds of Wales and drowned each sun') and it yearns for a future,

universal release from death as the 'stuffed fox' which decorates the room miraculously cries 'Love', and the once 'stale', and now 'strutting', fern lays 'seeds on the back sill'. The 'sensual strut', to which Thomas refers in the poem 'Twenty-four Years Remind the Tears of My Eyes', somehow typifies the confident, loose-limbed swing of much of his verse, and it is to the thematic interweaving of the turbulent pulses of nature and the stillness of death that his poetry steadily returns. In the Vaughan-like 'Fern Hill', the celebration of his youth 'easy under the apple boughs', he repeats the words 'green' and 'golden' as part of an incantatory recall of a golden age of innocence where the knowledge of death is kept at a distance. 'Poem in October', written in his 'thirtieth year to heaven', also re-enacts the scenes and freedoms of childhood before summer turns to autumn, the sun to showers. It is, however, in the sequence of wartime poems published in *Deaths and Entrances* that Thomas most impressively detaches himself from the flood of private reminiscence and addresses the idea of Death touching the Resurrection. The poems are explicitly, even noisily, Christian. The three stanzas of the volume's title poem each begin with the line 'On almost the incendiary eve', an apocalyptic linking of incendiary bombs and fire-storms with an impending Armageddon. 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid' and 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London' grieve and refuse to grieve. The first sees destruction enthusiastically translated into reconstitution ('And the dust shall sing like a bird | As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart'). The second, with its cold title which seems to demand explanation, is an ecstatic reflection on the promised Resurrection, if one in which the poet seems almost to be carried away by the unstoppably hypnotic music of his own voice:

> Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
> Robed in the long friends,
> The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
> Secret by the unmourning water
> Of the rising Thames.
> After the first death, there is no other.

Although in the intriguingly entitled sonnet, ‘Among those Killed in the Dawn Raid was a Man aged a Hundred’, Thomas again rejoices in images of a surreal rebirth (‘The morning is flying on the wings of his age | And a hundred storks perch on the sun’s right hand’), his most celebrated late poem, ‘Do not go gentle’, withdraws into a more personal and protesting anxiety in which ‘rage, against the dying of the light’ intrudes itself between death and ecstasy.

The work of two soldier poets, Sidney Keyes (1922-43) and Keith Douglas (1920-44), both of whom died in the war, is far less pictorially apocalyptic than Thomas’s. Both were the sons of army officers and both discovered that a new kind of war poetry, quite distinct from that of the First World War, was wrenched out of them by the distinct nature of the new conflict. Douglas, in particular, felt that the weight of an earlier tradition had initially tended to

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dumbfound a new generation. ‘The hardships, pain and boredom; the behaviour of the living and the appearance of the dead’, he wrote from Tunisia in May 1943, ‘were so accurately described by the poets of the Great War that every day on the battlefields of the western desert ... their poems are illustrated.’ A new imagery, related to a new landscape of war and to a far less dissenting ideology of battle, seemed gradually to impose itself. The poems that Keyes wrote during the early stages of the war look back to ancestral forms for refreshment. The ideas of a chain of experience interlinking writer and writer, and of humanity swept up in great creating nature, seem to have held a particular attraction for him in a time of unnatural change. His ‘Cervières’ of September 1940 addresses the French owners of a cherry orchard ravaged by birds and threatened by an invader who will take more than cherries. The poem’s didactic expression of hope lies in its insistence on a natural sequence: the birds may drop the cherry stones and create new trees elsewhere; so, by analogy, the temporary defeat of human dreams may bear an incalculable future fruit. Keyes’s meditation on ‘Europe’s Prisoners’ of May 1941, somewhat airily trusts, as Wordsworth’s sonnet to Toussaint L’Ouverture does, in the ultimate triumph of freedom and justice (‘at last the courage they have learned | Shall burst the walls and overturn the world’). Wordsworth, in the sonnet that Keyes addressed to him in 1941, lives on ‘a boy again’ in a ‘noisy glen’, and the dead novelist in the ‘Elegy for Mrs Virginia Woolf’ becomes a single stream of consciousness with the watery element that drowned her (‘Colours and currents tend her; no more vex | Her river-mind our towns and broken skies’). When, however, Keyes faced what by 1942 was the inevitability of his calling in the poem ‘War Poet’, he recognized himself as ‘the man who groped for words and found | An arrow in my hand’. Although he hankers for the support of ‘the immortals’ in the poem ‘Advice for a Journey’, he acknowledges that those who remain ‘too young | For explorers’ are obliged to explore war without any hope of finding ‘Canaan, or any golden mountain’. A similar bleakness shapes his Eliotic response to the desert in ‘The Wilderness’. Here is a land without the civilized comforts of cultivation, water, and the dream of love, but here he purports to accept the knowledge that ‘I am no lover, but destroyer ... content to face the destroying sun.’

The lonely landscapes of Keith Douglas’s desert poems are equally indebted to the examples of Eliot, Auden, and the Surrealists (he was himself a vivid pen-sketcher of the peculiar contortions and dislocations of wrecked bodies and machines). *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), Douglas’s posthumously published diary account of his service in the desert campaign, remains one of the most vivid, lucid, and clear-headed prose documents of the war. His desert is a place of ‘indeterminate landscapes of moods and smells’ against which dance ‘black and bright incidents’, yet, he declares, his war offers ‘things to excite financiers and parliamentarians — but not to excite a poet or a painter or a doctor’. In the poem ‘Desert Flowers’, in part a tribute to the painter-poet Isaac Rosenberg, he looks down from the angle of a pilot or an angel ‘on some eccentric chart’, a

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plain dotted with ‘useless furniture ... squashed dead or still entire, stunned | Like beetles’. In ‘Cairo Jag’ he returns from leave to a world where ‘the vegetation is of iron | dead tanks, gun barrels split like celery | the metal brambles have no flowers or berries | and there are all sorts of manure’. When he attempts to describe a dead German soldier in the poem ‘Vergissmeinnicht’ he sees ‘the dust upon the paper eye | and the burst stomach like a cave’. If he lacks the bitterness and disillusion of the First World War poets, he shares their sense of futility and their interrogation of the concept of heroism. The colonel who jokes with troops in ‘Gallantry’ may fail to see that the real jokers are the bullets and the shell splinters that kill his men; the bugle sounding reveille in ‘The Trumpet’ may seem to lie when it hints that ‘war is sweet’, but in the carefully ambiguous poem ‘Aristocrats’ of 1943 Douglas allows for the congruent jostling of noble carelessness and plain stupidity. ‘How can I live among this gentle | obsolescent breed of heroes and not weep?’ the poet asks when faced, as a note on his manuscript explains, with the death of an officer who had left money in his will to the Beaufort Hunt and who instructed that the incumbent of a Church living in his gift should be a man ‘who approves of hunting, shooting, and all manly sports, which are the backbone of the nation’. The final

stanza ambivalently struggles to suggest an answer:

> The plains were their cricket pitch
> and in the mountains the tremendous drop fences
> brought down some of the runners. Here then
> under the stones and earth they dispose themselves,
> I think with their famous unconcern.
> It is not gunfire I hear but a hunting horn.

The aristocratic dead 'dispose themselves' as elegantly as the heroes of romance, seeming to die according to the dictates of form and good manners. Yet the horn that finally drowns the guns might be as much Roland's Olivant as it is that of a hunting squire.

Alun Lewis (1915-44), born and educated in Wales, rarely poses in his poetry as a specifically Welsh poet-at-war (the peacetime lyrics 'The Mountain over Aberdare' and 'The Rhondda', and the wartime 'Destruction' and 'A Welsh Night' are exceptional). Of all the distinctive soldier writers of the Second World War, Lewis is the most assertively civilian. Despite its military title, his often reprinted first volume, *Raiders' Dawn* (1942), pays tribute to another unwilling soldier, Edward Thomas, and to the English landscapes most associated with him. The much anthologized 'All Day It Has Rained ...' evokes the tedium of life in an encampment in 'the skirmishing fine rain | And the wind that made the canvas heave and flap'. It ends with a sweet-sour inconsequent-consequential recall:

> And I can remember nothing dearer or more to my heart
> Than the children I watched in the woods on Saturday
> Shaking down burning chestnuts for the schoolyard's merry play,

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> Or the shaggy patient dog who followed me
> By Sheet and Steep and up the wooded scree
> To Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded long
> On death and beauty — till a bullet stopped his song.

Lewis's own brooding was prophetic. His second volume of poems, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, was published posthumously in 1945 (he was killed accidentally in Burma 'by a pistol shot'). Although the volume's striking title derives from the description of a war-horse in the thirty-ninth chapter of the Book of Job, there is little of the war-horse's exhilaration ('he paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men') in the poems themselves. Lewis arranged his volume (subtitled 'poems in transit') in three parts: the first variously describing a tense, waiting England, the second the voyage to the East, the third India. It is in the third section that his particular interest in landscape is revealed as he uncomfortably comes to terms with the alien contours, the harsh light, and the dry wastes of India (in, for example, 'The Mahratta Ghats', 'Indian Day', and 'Observation Post: Forward Area'). 'I'm as restless and fidgety as a man on a deserted platform ... India! What a test of a man', he wrote in one of his last letters home. His best poems marvellously suggest this reluctant, deracinated, restlessness.

Faced with the demand that writers 'speak up in freedom's cause', C. Day-Lewis asked himself 'Where are the War Poets?' In a resultant poem he arrived at the compromised conclusion that the best that an artist could do in the Second World War was to 'defend the bad against the worst'. Day-Lewis, like many others, may have been troubled by the uneasy compromises of those German artists who had accepted, but not necessarily endorsed, the National Socialist regime. The question of a British artist's response to the Second World War, and to the concomitant threat of a dissolution of inherited cultural values, was frequently raised in the years 1939-45 and the idea of a co-operative struggle which united all classes against an external enemy was actively exploited by Government propaganda. Few established artists, even the famously 'detached' ones, remained untouched by the mood of embattled Britain. 'Now and in England' seemed like a historical imperative. Creativity both embraced and countered the evidence of destruction.

In one of the most strikingly aflirmative and original novels of the war-years, Joyce Carey's *The Horse's Mouth* (1944), an artist-hero paints a mural of the Creation on a threatened wall. Carey (1888-1957) allows the last word to his ageing, unconventional, unsentimental, Blake-obsessed painter-narrator, Gulley Jimson. Jimson has painted the wall in a state of indifference to its prospective demolition, to rumours of war, and to the approach of his own death. On his death-bed he both thanks God for 'that indefinable something' which is, for him, 'the final beauty of a wall', and he equates prayer with a full and lusty enjoyment of life. His picture, a wry footnote to the novel explains, proved to be as impermanent as his wall. For Carey and his hero, however, the very act of making was in itself a gesture

against the abomination of desolation.

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[Andrew SANDERS: *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994]

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10
Post- War and Post-Modern Literature

WHEN the Second World War ended in Europe in the summer of 1945, much of Britain was in ruins. Quite literally in ruins. Its devastated industrial cities were not exactly the heaps of rubble that appalled post-war visitors to Germany (Stephen Spender, for one, spoke of the 'astonishing and total change, that incalculable shift from a soaring to a sinking motion which distinguishes a dead body' that disturbed him when revisiting Hamburg), but British cities as diverse in character as Glasgow, Coventry, Canterbury, Bristol, Exeter, and Portsmouth had been torn apart by bombs. London, in particular, had been universally pitted and scarred and was now marked by absences where familiar landmarks had once stood. Whole districts were in ruins and most streets somehow bore the signs of blast, shrapnel, fire-bombs, or high explosives. Although its greater monuments, such as St Paul's, had survived largely intact, the cathedral itself now rose hauntingly and, to some imaginative observers, resolutely above the shells of churches and blasted office buildings. This broken London of bricks, façades, and dangerously exposed basements can now be only recognized from paintings and photographs and from the cinematic exploitation of bomb-sites in films such as the two early comedies made at the famous Ealing Studios, Charles Crichton's rowdy *Hue and Cry* (1947) and Harry Cornelius's farce *Passport to Pimlico* (1949).

This landscape of ruins must also be recognized as forming an integral part of much of the literature of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. It was a landscape which provided a metaphor for broken lives and spirits, and, in some remoter and less-defined sense, for the ruin of Great Britain itself. It was also a ruin-scape that could sometimes surprise its observers with joy. In 1953 Rose Macaulay (1881-1958) ended her highly romantic and impressively wide-ranging survey, *Pleasure of Ruins* with 'A Note on New Ruins', a note which briefly balanced a fascination with the 'catastrophic tipsy chaos' of a British bomb-site against her earlier explorations of the historic wrecks of Greek and Roman cities, of jungle-swamped Inca and Buddhist temples, and of ivy-mantled Gothic abbeys. Three years before the appearance of *Pleasure of Ruins*,

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Macaulay's novel *The World my Wilderness* had focused on outsiders and exiles, all of them 'displaced' persons, finding the ruins of London a solace and a refuge. Her London, as her choice of words indicates, is both distinctly post-War and post-Eliotic: 'Here you belong; you cannot get away, you do not wish to get away, for this is the maquis that lies about the margins of the wrecked world, and here your feet are set . . . „Where are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, you cannot say, or guess ...'' But you can say, you can guess, that it is you yourself, your own roots, that clutch the stony rubbish, the branches of your own being that grow from it and nowhere else.' Macaulay's quotation from *The Waste Land* serves to reinforce the view commonly held by artists and writers of the period that the strange juxtapositions of flowers and dust, of unexpected, wild gardens and shattered, empty houses, and of the familiar seen in an unfamiliarly surreal way through a broken wall had somehow been prepared for by Modernist experiments with fragmentation.

Amongst writers whose reputation had been established well before 1945, Macaulay was far from alone in seeing the immediately post-war period as one which required the reassembling of fragments of meaning (she was herself to return to a landscape of classical ruins and to jarring private experience in her novel *The Towers of Trebizond* in 1956). The Second World War had provided an additional means of focus for the fiction of Anglo-Irish novelist, Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973). Throughout her earlier work, most notably in her novel *The Last September* (1929) and her memoir *Bowen's Court* (1942), she had explored the tensions implicit in the history of her landed family and the divided loyalties of the increasingly dispossessed Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. When she wrote of England in the 1930s, as she did with supreme assurance in her most Jamesian novel, *The Death of the Heart* (1938), she took as her theme the loss of innocence in the face of shallow sophistication and the flashy glamour of metropolitan values. The sometimes painful rift between the perceptions of children and those of adults was re-examined very differently in her penultimate novel, *The Little Girls* (1964). It was, however, in the wartime collections of short stories, *Look at all those Roses* (1941) and *The Demon Lover* (1945), and, above all, in her novel *The Heat of the Day* (1949) that Bowen exploited the fictional potential of an upper-class Irish woman's perception of

the British ‘Home Front’. In all her fiction Bowen displays a finely tuned stylistic tact in deploying and using detail, a tact evident in her evocations of London and Londoners changing, adjusting, and adapting under the impact of the Blitz. In *The Heat of the Day*, for example, she establishes that the lovers, Stella Rodney and the invalided Robert Kelway, have met in the ‘heady autumn of the first London air raids’ and that Stella puts down her failure to notice Robert’s limp ‘to the general rocking of London and one's own mind’. It is a period of morning mists ‘charred by the smoke from ruins’, of evenings marked by a ‘darkening glassy tenseness’ while waiting for the air raid sirens, and of ‘an acridity on the tongue and the nostrils ... as the singed dust settled’.

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Robert’s disability, the urban unease, the strangeness, and the headiness all have their place in a narrative from which it gradually emerges that Robert is an enemy spy, a betrayer both of an allegiance to Britain (which the Anglo-Irish Stella and her soldier son Roderick maintain) and of the partly bemused, partly detached Stella herself.

Betrayal, the unwinding and rewinding of the skeins of history, and an insistently feminine viewpoint also mark the wartime and post-war books of Rebecca West (the pen-name of Cecily Isabel Fairfield, 1892-1983). West, whose Anglo-Irish father had settled first in London and later in Edinburgh, meticulously reassembled and fictionalized certain aspects of her cultured, eccentric, and unsettled childhood in *The Fountain Overflows* (1956), a novel whose first-person narrator tells the story with a subtle combination of adult knowingness and a sense of lost, or never-achieved, content. Rebecca West adopted her pen-name at the age of 19, at the time of her espousal of the campaign for women’s suffrage, from the strong-willed character in Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*. As she announced in 1941, however, her excitement with Ibsen’s frankness and intellectual enterprise was temporary (‘As I grew older I began to realize that Ibsen cried out for ideas for the same reason that men call out for water, because he had not got any’). Nevertheless, she neither lost the belief that ‘it is ideas that make the world go round’ nor abandoned her determined outspoken, practical, and thoughtful feminism. Her remarkable first novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), looks at the problem of the human ruins left by the First World War from the point of view of the women who are obliged to pick up, and come to terms with, the pieces. Thereafter, most challengingly in *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (1929), she experimented with a form that can best be described as mannered whimsy (she later modestly claimed that she had written the novel in order to find out why she loved London).

It is, however, through the non-fiction and the journalism of the 1930s and 1940s that West’s intelligence shines most radiantly. In 1933 she wrote a short biography of St Augustine which intermixes an antipathy to Augustine’s introspective, life-denying, masculine, doctrinal narrowness with a real appreciation of the taut, and equally masculine, ‘modernity’ of the author of the *Confessions* (‘One perceives the barbaric vitality which needed to be disciplined and acquainted with mildness, but which itself framed the discipline, so that in the end, though violence bent its neck to mildness, the proceedings were violent’). Her most searching work of non-fiction also emerges from a keen sense of the complex interrelationships of human beings with their historical environments. The two-volume study *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: The Record of a Journey through Yugoslavia* (1941) is far more than a pre-war travel book; it is a vehicle for a dense and digressive discourse on European history which grows into an elegy for the Yugoslav national experiment then floundering under the impact of military occupation and a redrawing of its internal borders by the German Reich (the book reads yet more poignantly following Yugoslavia’s slide into bloody dissolution in the 1990s). West can write both provocatively

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(‘It is sometimes very hard to tell the difference between history and the smell of a skunk’) and capriciously (she describes a baroque church in Dubrovnik as ‘a captive balloon filled with infinity’), but she always returns to what history and historical artefacts imply for those who have to make sense of them amid the painful, destabilizing realities of the twentieth century. The intense ideological and political distortions of the Second World War were imaginatively explored in a series of articles on the Nuremberg trials of 1946 (republished in 1955 as *A Train of Powder*) and in her broad political analysis of the implications of the trial of the British traitor, William Joyce, in *The Meaning of Treason* (1949) (reworked, with additional material referring to the British spy-scandals of the 1960s, in 1965). This non-fictional enterprise shaped the argument of West’s searching historical novel about the ideological divisions of pre-revolutionary Russia, *The Birds Fall Down* (1966). It is a book which seeks to respond to the political issues raised variously by Dostoevsky, Conrad, Kropotkin, and Lenin as they impinge upon the consciousness of an Anglo-Russian girl of the 1910s and as they are filtered through the intelligence of a woman writer of the 1960s. *The Birds Fall Down* remains one of the most stimulating novels of the latter half of the century.

Neither Bowen nor West responded in any profound way to the experiments with form and technique pioneered by the Modernist writers who were very nearly their contemporaries. Both appear to have accepted that their art was rooted in an older tradition and that, by means of a steady adaptation of this tradition, they could address a wide audience. Neither of them, however, ever rivalled the popular acclaim accorded to the work of Graham Greene (1904-91). ‘For a writer, success is always temporary’, Greene wrote in his autobiographical memoir *A Sort of Life* (1977).

‘Success’, he added with a characteristic note of pessimism, ‘is only a delayed failure’. By the mid-1960s, when his novel *The Comedians* was published, he was able to command sales of some 60,000 copies in hardback alone (this was at a time when more ‘experimental’ work by less established contemporaries would probably have had a print-run of only 1,600 copies). Even though something of the commercial success of *The Comedians* can be put down to the international scandal it provoked (the Haitian Government brought a case against it in France, claiming that it had damaged the Republic’s tourist trade), Greene was already by far the best known and most respected British novelist of his generation. Something of his international esteem can be put down to what at the time might have seemed the ‘un-English’ prejudices which were patently evident in his work. He was a devout anti-imperialist (resenting the new American imperialism as much as he despised the crumbling edifice of the British Empire). He was also a semi-devout, but believing, Roman Catholic. Greene, who later claimed to have been powerfully drawn to Africa by reading Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* as a boy, had, after a singularly unhappy and suicidal adolescence, been received into the Roman Church in 1926. The themes of a colonially wounded world beyond Europe, a gloomy sense of sin

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and moral unworthiness, and a commitment to outsiders and rebels, haunt his subsequent work.

Greene had published his first work of fiction, a short story, at the age of 16. In all, he wrote twenty-six novels and nine volumes of short stories. His first novel, *The Man Within* (1929), bore as its epigraph a quotation from Sir Thomas Browne: ‘There is another man within me that is angry with me.’ Many of his later protagonists reflected this two-sidedness, complicated by a seedy and dangerous self destructiveness. The Catholic boy-gangster, Pinkie, in Greene’s eighth novel *Brighton Rock* (1938) is not only fascinated by the concept of ‘Hell, Flames and damnation’ but seemingly intent on courting his own eternal destruction in the face of ‘the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God’. Taken with his painful account of the career of a whisky-priest in anti-clerical Mexico in *The Power and the Glory* (1940), Greene seemed to many observers to have emerged as Britain’s answer to the ambiguous, knotted, but affirmatively Catholic fiction of his French contemporaries, Mauriac and Bernanos. The angry, self destructive, ‘other man’ was, however, to oblige Greene’s fiction to move in a more distinctively agnostic direction. It may be significant that the phrase ‘whisky-priest’ is Greene’s most obvious gift to the English language. *The Power and the Glory* was as much about doubt and failure as it was about faith (the novel was condemned as ‘paradoxical’ by the Holy Office which ought, given the nature of Christian doctrine, to have known better). The Catholic Christianity of Greene’s novels, if that is what it can properly be called, seems most often to resemble a single ray of heavenly hope which glances over dark abysses of human depravity, despair, decay, and pain. To Greene’s characters, God and his Church seem to be as distant as they are evidently ‘appallingly strange’.

As with Bowen’s novels, the Second World War sharpened certain of Greene’s fictional perspectives and preoccupations. Certainly, what is generally agreed to be his finest work appeared between 1940 and 1951. The novels of this period modulate between troubled and disorienting topographies, each one of which seems to reflect the untidy frustration of another. The twilit, blitzed London of *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) and *The End of the Affair* (1951) opens up into the violently restless Mexico of *The Power and the Glory*; the precarious, ‘smashed, dreary’ and partly subterranean Vienna of *The Third Man* (1950) parallels the flyblown, rat-infested, war-blighted West African colony of *The Heart of the Matter* (1948). Most of the key characters in these stories are Catholics; all of them are ruins, or at best ruinous. Scobie, the suicidal protagonist of *The Heart of the Matter*, accuses God of ‘forcing decisions on people’ and blames the Church for having all the answers (‘we Catholics are damned by our knowledge’). In *The Third Man*, a short novel which coexists with its more brilliant variant, the film-script that Greene wrote for the director Carol Reed in 1949, Catholic Vienna is wrecked, divided, and guilt-ridden, but then so are its citizens, its displaced refugees, and its military occupiers. It is scarcely surprising that its sewers, rather than its palaces, figure so prominently

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in the story. None of Greene’s sleazier and more ostensibly political later novels (*The Quiet American* of 1955 is set in Vietnam, its successor, *Our Man in Havana*, in Cuba) has quite the same edgy power or quite the same success in matching compromised and seedy people to compromising and mouldy places.

In the phantasmagoric world of *The Ministry of Fear*, the tormented Arthur Rowe recognizes the extent to which the man and the hour have coincided (‘I’m hiding underground, and up above the Germans are methodically smashing London to bits all around me ... It sounds like a thriller’). Rowe’s frenetic hallucination contrasts markedly with the far more subdued and matter-of fact references to wartime Britain in Anthony Powell’s sequence of twelve novels known collectively as *A Dance to the Music of Time*. At the opening of the eighth volume, *The Soldier’s Art* (1966), Powell’s wryly observant but adaptable narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, buys an army officer’s greatcoat in a London outfitters. It is a shop which also supplies theatrical costumes and there are two headless tailor’s dummies in the fitting-room, one costumed as Harlequin, the other dressed in the scarlet uniform of an infantry regiment:

‘allegorical figures, so it seemed, symbolising dualisms ... Civil and Military ... Work and Play ... Detachment and Involvement ... Tragedy and Comedy ... War and Peace ... Life and Death ...’. Jenkins, the officer-narrator, sets the amused and dualistic tone for his war. He is a keen, detached observer of surfaces, but he is also alert to the fact that they only partly conceal the murkier, and even tragic, undercurrents in private and public histories. Jenkins’s blitzed London is as memorable for its continuities as it is for its absences, for its specific locations as much as for its occasional dislocations.

Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time* is neither a fictionalized war memoir, nor a prose elegy for the decline and fall of a ruling class. However, as a chronicle of British upper-middle-class life, set between the 1920s and the 1950s, it necessarily takes the disasters, disillusions, inconveniences, and changes of a society and its war in its leisurely and measured stride. Powell (b. 1905) had opened his first volume, *A Question of Upbringing* (1951), with the image of workmen warming themselves in the street amid flurries of snow. The image is in no sense ‘timeless’, but it is somehow allowed to float as if obedient to a broader concept of time than that measured by clocks and calendars. Powell’s narrator makes this clear when he refers to the Poussin painting (in the Wallace Collection) from which the sequence takes its title: ‘classical projections, and something in the physical attitudes of the men themselves as they turned from the fire, suddenly suggested Poussin’s scene in which the Seasons, hand in hand and facing outward, tread in rhythm to the notes of the lyre that the winged and naked greybeard plays. The image of Time brought thoughts of mortality ...’. As he closes the last novel in the sequence (*Hearing Secret Harmonies*, 1975), Jenkins quotes a meditation on human mutability from Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* before returning glancingly to the classical rhythms of the Poussin painting (‘even the formal measure of the Seasons seemed suspended in the wintry silence’). Time may suddenly seem to be

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suspended by eternity, but it is art, Jenkins’s melancholy, oblique art, which seems to have imposed its own order on a series of fragments. *A Dance to the Music of Time* has sometimes been compared to Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*. It could, with rather more justice, be seen as rooted in the tidy, intricate English ironies of Jane Austen’s fiction and in the seemingly more leisured and spacious tensions of Anthony Trollope’s chronicles. Above all, and perhaps most unexpectedly, it expansively reflects Powell’s professed delight in the gossip, the rumour, and the randomness of John Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*.

Dividing and Ruling: Britain in the 1950s

One sometimes gets the impression that the Second World War was Britain’s last great communal experience. Certainly, neither the readjustments demanded by the steady loss of an overseas Empire nor the equally radical challenges presented by a belated entry into the European Community seem to have rivalled the prominence in the popular imagination of Britain at war. Having been instructed by one of Winston Churchill’s most memorable rhetorical flourishes that the Battle of Britain in 1940 marked ‘their finest hour’, many Britons seem to have since forgotten that Churchill was referring not simply to the embattled United Kingdom but to ‘the British Empire and its Commonwealth’. In the immediately post-war years, the Empire melted into the larger concept of the ‘Commonwealth’, a loosely associated fellowship of independent former colonies dominated by Britain’s closest wartime allies, the old, white Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The acceptance by the post-war Labour Government that India should be granted its independence and that the sub-continent should be divided into two separate self governing countries inevitably brought about the broadening of this concept of a ‘Commonwealth of Nations’. In June 1947 King George VI formally abandoned his inherited title of ‘Emperor of India’ as a necessary prelude to India’s assumption of self-determination in August. In May 1953 his daughter, Elizabeth II, formally expressed herself content with the compensatory royal title of ‘Head of the Commonwealth’.

Official propaganda greeted the subsequent granting of independence to former colonies in Africa, Asia, the West Indies, and the Pacific as successful examples of Britain’s enlightened policy towards those it had once sought to educate in the principles of good government and fair play. Rather than leaving Britain without a role (as it was glibly supposed to have done), the loss of the Empire was probably deeply resented only by those members of the upper and middle classes who had once felt called to serve it as colonial governors, civil servants, district administrators, and law officers. Its gradual disappearance, together with that of its somewhat exclusive employment opportunities, was steadily compensated for by Britain’s gain of a new cultural diversity following the immigration of a large body of workers, both professional and unskilled,

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from the Indian sub-continent and the West Indies. The British psyche had been wounded only when the last twilit

days of the imperial dream became nightmarish (as in the bloody communal violence which attended the division of India in 1947 and the expiry of the British mandate in Palestine in May 1948). The 1950s were marked not solely by immigration but also by the deaths of conscripted British soldiers fighting against Communist insurgents in Malaya, the Mau Mau in Kenya, and EOKA guerrillas in Cyprus. Perhaps the most notable example of the failure of the imperial muscle and of the imperial will was the Anglo-French military débâcle at Suez in November 1956 following the nationalization of the Canal by the Egyptian Government. The Conservative Government's inept intervention, in the face of a radically changing pattern of international relations, was readily interpreted by many jaded observers at home as looking more like carelessness than misfortune.

It was a post-war Labour Government which, in the face of Winston Churchill's impotent dismay, had brought in the legislation which gave India its independence. This same government, led by Clement Attlee, had been elected with a clear majority in 1945 (Labour had received some 47 per cent of the vote, though some 20 per cent of the nation had declined to involve itself in the democratic process). Labour's mandate for the domestic reforms it attempted to introduce was based on a widespread popular acceptance that the war, the war economy, and wartime propaganda had prepared the way for social change. An Act passed in 1944 had already radically reorganized state-aided education by raising the school-leaving age and subdividing the system into primary, secondary, and further educational stages. It also, for the first time, provided the opportunity of a free, if selective, academic education at grammar schools irrespective of a pupil's social background. The incoming government was pledged to nationalize the railways and the coal and steel industries. It was also pledged to speed the advent of what had been hailed during the war as the 'Welfare State' (as opposed to Hitler's 'warfare state'). The 1948 National Assistance Act formally abolished the old, despised Poor Law, but the Welfare State's cornerstone was the new National Health Service Act of 1946 which required that by 5 July 1948 free medical treatment should be available to all citizens.

An air of optimism, which was not generally shared by the Conservative Opposition, fostered the idea that Britain was rebuilding itself in a new, socially responsive economic dawn. The mood had earlier been summed up in a stylishly illustrated pamphlet issued in the election year of 1945 and ambitiously entitled *Design for Britain*. 'The Aeroplane has not only given us a new vision', it blandly announced, 'but a new chance by blasting away centres of cities so that we can rebuild them with a new plan designed for the swift flow of modern traffic, for the play of light and air, inspiring to look at and live in.' This hopeful mood was also exemplified in the decision made by the Labour government in 1947 to commemorate the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 by celebrating 'the British contributions to world civilisation in the arts of

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peace'. This scheme, brought to its final realization by the Conservative Government elected in 1951, was the Festival of Britain. The main Festival site was an area of bombed land on the south bank of the river Thames in London. Out of the dereliction rose an architect-designed simulacrum of the brave new world. London got a new concert-hall as a permanent memorial to the Festival's somewhat lofty view of the nation's culture, though airy, temporary pavilions on the south bank had proudly shown off examples of new school equipment and domestic furniture and illustrated modern advances in public health, industrial production, invention, and exploration. A pavilion called 'The Lion and the Unicorn' had also attempted to define the 'British character' by endeavouring to represent 'two of the main qualities of the national character: on the one hand, realism and strength, on the other fantasy, independence and imagination'. 'If on leaving this Pavilion', the official guide-book whimsically announced, 'the visitor from overseas concludes that he is still not much the wiser about the British national character, it might console him to know that the British people are themselves very much in the dark about it.'

The optimism implicit in the Festival of Britain was not exactly forced, but it was clearly designed to cheer up a dreary and deprived nation, one drained by the sacrifices which had been required of it by the effort of fighting the war. It had, however, been a 'People's War', one which had forcibly suppressed distinctions between classes, genders, and races through military conscription, a planned economy, the recruitment of women's labour, and the rationing of food and luxury goods. The victory, as much as the misery, had been shared by everyone. This was the loathsome future Britain, with its earth inherited by Hoopers, that Evelyn Waugh saw coming into being in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). This was the drab, egalitarian Britain which found an exaggerated echo in the world of Oceania in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949). This was the Welfare Britain, with its citizens cared for from the cradle to the grave, that the post-war Labour government nobly attempted to forge into a united nation by the exercise of benign state planning. This too was the innocent world of the exemplary and improbable film comedy *Holiday Camp* (1948), a delightfully naïve film in which the diverse social classes of Mr Attlee's Britain are seen mixing easily amid the obligatory but frugal cheer of a seaside holiday camp. It was an orderly and conformist Britain that was also ripe for further change, not all of it disciplined or planned.

The New Theatre

It was assumed at the time, and it continues to be assumed, that John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*, which opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London on 8 May 1956, marked either a 'revolution' or a 'watershed' in the history of the modern British theatre. The play certainly shocked its first audiences, as

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well as some of its more perceptive critics, into responsive attention. It is also sometimes claimed that the play single-handedly provoked theatre managers and theatre companies out of their complacent faith in the middle-class virtues of 'the well-made play' and into a response to a new kind of drama which grappled with 'the issues of the day'. Osborne's play was revolutionary neither in its form nor in its politics; it was, however, by the standards of its time, alarming in its rancour, its language, and its setting. After *Look Back in Anger*, out went the country drawing-room with its platitudes and its sherry; in came the provincial bed-sitter with its noisy abuse and its ironing-board. The accepted theatrical illusion of a neat, stratified, and deferential society was superseded by dramatic representations of untidy, antagonistic, and disenchanted groups of characters grating on one another's, and society's, nerves. The social class of these characters may not have changed, but their social assumptions and their conversation had.

The transformation of the English theatre in the late 1950s and early 1960s was both more gradual and more truly radical than can be explained by focusing on a single production or on the work of a single playwright. Before 1956 British drama, and the London stage in particular, had been far more open to new influences, both from home and abroad, than is often supposed. The theatre could, and did, fall back on its inherited tradition of plays and acting styles, notably in its rethinkings of Shakespeare and in its revivals of more recent English, Irish, and European dramas. Although the record-breaking run of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* at the Ambassadors Theatre may tell us something about the resilience of certain theatrical conventions and styles (the play opened in November 1952 and is still going strong in the 1990s), it does little to illustrate the real challenges that a discriminating theatre-goer might have discovered in the London theatres of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The repertoires of West End theatres and their provincial counterparts may, for the most part, have been selected so as not to offend the sensibilities of audiences happy with a pattern of light-hearted banter divided into three acts by two generous bar-intervals, but that does not tell the whole story. The work of two native playwrights, Christopher Fry (b. 1907) and Terence Rattigan (1911-77), belies the accusation of theatrical blandness with which some literary historians have damned the immediate post-war period. Since the 1960s, however, the dramatic achievement of both writers has been commonly belittled as irredeemably genteel. Fry's attempt to revive the fortunes of poetic drama both derived from, and was contemporary with, T. S. Eliot's later experiments in the same genre. Like Eliot, Fry saw poetry as the vehicle for a re-exploration of religious mystery in the theatre; unlike him, he never quite found a voice or a subject which satisfactorily echoed the essentially agnostic prosiness of modern life and thought. He put his considerable international critical success in the early 1950s down to what he saw as a reaction against 'surface realism' in the theatre, with its 'sparse, spare, cut-and-dried language', and to a post-war world which longed again for a poetry of 'richness and

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reaffirmation'. With hindsight, it now seems that his hopes of re-creating an Elizabethan ambience, in which 'the accent of living' was placed firmly on 'the adventuring soul', proved as ephemeral as his once inflated reputation. Nevertheless, the original commercial success of the comedies *A Phoenix too Frequent* (1946), *The Lady's Not For Burning* (1948), and *Venus Observed* (1950) and of the church pageant *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951) (performed throughout England as part of the Festival of Britain), cannot be put down solely to the excellence of their original casts. At its worst, Fry's verse can seem mannered, arch, and effete; at its best, it enables him to distance his dramatic discourse from 'surface realism' in order to play with the effects of alienation, of the unexpected, and of metaphysical oddity.

Rattigan is a far more impressive dramatist. He was neither an innovator nor a particularly cerebral writer, but he was a profound sympathizer with the cause of the victims of what he saw as the tyrannous hypocrisies, the double standards, and the emotional coldness of 'respectable' British society. Although his first theatrical success, *French Without Tears* (which ran for 1,039 performances in 1936), made few real demands on either the emotions or the intellect, his equally 'well-made' post-war plays took up the themes of vulnerability and victimization. The upper-class Rattigan's sympathy with the wounded outsider, and with the insider compromised by his or her emotional choices, can certainly be related to his own discreet homosexuality (discreet in the sense that he made no parade of it, though he later acted as an appreciative and generous champion of Joe Orton). In *The Winslow Boy* (1946), a middle-class father determines to play by constitutional rules in battling against the oppressive weight of the British Establishment. In *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), however, an equally middle-class character, the wife of a judge,

determinedly breaks social rules by having a passionate affair with a bluff, down-at-heel RAF officer and by desperately attempting suicide. If this is not quite the world of *Look Back in Anger*, the play is set in a furnished flat which has 'an air of dinginess, even of squalor, heightened by the fact that it has, like its immediately blitzed neighbourhood, so obviously „come down in the world"'. People and places which have come down in the world also figure in the pair of one-act plays, *Separate Tables* (1954), set in the ironically named Beauregard Private Hotel near Bournemouth. The second play of the two, 'Table Number Seven', highlights the complementary emotions of two of the Beauregard's 'guests', a repressed girl and a bogus major who has been found guilty of molesting women in a local cinema. It exposes a communal pretence to 'virtue' which is far more damaging to society than the major's assumption of respectability, but it also affirms the possibility of a new strength emerging from the dismantling of protective illusions.

In the early 1950s Christopher Fry enhanced his already considerable reputation by translating into English two plays by Jean Anouilh (*Invitation au château* in 1950 and *L'Alouette* in 1955) and one by Jean Giraudoux (*La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* also in 1955). The London staging of all three translations

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bears witness to the fact that the British theatre was not as insular as it is sometimes made out to be. The new French drama, which so impressed post-war visitors to Paris by its energy, sophistication, and political directness, had a sustained impact on supposedly unreconstructed British audiences (Anouilh's *Antigone* and Sartre's *Huis Clos* had been performed in 1946 and Camus's *Caligula* in 1948). Even though the influential critic, John Lehmann (1907-87), had wondered in 1946 whether or not 'a vigorous theatre can exist on the cerebral subtleties of *Huis Clos* and *Caligula* alone', the much vaunted intellectuality of Paris did not prove completely alien to London. Nor did the sometimes shocking vitality of the new American drama. Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) was produced in 1948 and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) in 1949 (with Vivien Leigh as Blanche du Bois). *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), having been refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain in 1958, had, however, to be privately performed under the auspices of a 'theatre club'. Less controversially, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) appeared at the Phoenix Theatre in 1949, his *The Crucible* (1952) at the Bristol Old Vic in 1954, and his *A View from the Bridge* (1955) at the Comedy Theatre in London in October 1956. Perhaps the most striking theatrical event of all was the visit to London of the Berliner Ensemble in August 1956, some two weeks after the death of its founder, Bertolt Brecht. The company brought with them their celebrated productions (in German) of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and his lesser-known adaptation of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Offcer-Pauken und Trompeten*. Brecht's work, which proved so influential over a new generation of British playwrights, was, up to that time, little known to British theatre audiences (though there had been an amateur production of *Galileo* in Birmingham in 1947 and a professional staging of *Mother Courage* in Barnstaple in 1955).

With benefit of hindsight, it is arguable that by far the most significant 'foreign' novelty to be performed in London in the years immediately preceding the appearance of *Look Back in Anger* was Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The play opened to largely dismayed reviews at the small Arts Theatre in August 1955, but reports of the sensation it had caused in Paris two years earlier, coupled with a real enough and discriminating curiosity, allowed it to transfer for a longer run at the Criterion Theatre a month later. The success of *Waiting for Godot* in London cannot simply be put down to a yearning for innovation on the part of a theatre-going intelligentsia; the play also contained distinct echoes of a truly 'alternative', but often despised, British theatrical tradition, that of music-hall comedy. In Beckett's hands, however, that tradition had been transformed by a sparse, but none the less definite, musicality and by a dialogue rich in literary resonance. Beckett (1906-89), born near Dublin, educated (like Wilde before him) at Portora Royal School and at Trinity College, and since 1937 permanently resident in Paris, cannot be slickly or imperially fitted into a narrowly 'English' tradition of English writing and English theatre. He was an English-speaking, Protestant Irishman, and, as the

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full range of his work demonstrates, his highly literate, cricket-playing, Bible-reading, Irish background had a profound bearing on what and how he wrote. Having worked closely with James Joyce and his international circle in Paris in the late 1920s, Beckett also remained part of a polyglot and polyphonic world of literary innovation. His earliest publications (which, apart from his work as a translator and a novelist, include an essay on Joyce and a study of Proust) also testify to his espousal of a Modernism which transcended frontiers and what were often presumed to be the impassible barriers between languages. Beckett continued to work in both English and French, with French often taking precedence over his native tongue. His work, however, ceased to be tied to a monoglot environment once it had undergone the scrupulous linguistic metamorphosis which mark his own acts of translation (his puns, for example, are often exclusively and inspiredly English).

Although his trilogy of novels, *Molloy* and *Malone Meurt* (1951) and *L'Innommable* (1953), had established Beckett as amongst the most discussed and respected of the avant-garde Parisian writers of the early 1950s, it was

Godot (also originally written in French) that gave him a wide international reputation. That reputation was cemented by his later work for the theatre, notably the plays known by their English titles as *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1960), and *Happy Days* (1962). He also wrote innovatively for the radio (*All that Fall* of 1957, *Embers* of 1959, *Words and Music* of 1962, and *Cascando* of 1963) and for BBC television (*Eh, Joe* of 1965 and *Ghost Trio* of 1977). His one foray into the cinema, *Film* (a complex 'script' designed as a tribute to Buster Keaton in 1964), was remarkable not simply for its nods to a cinematic comedy rooted in music-hall and for its visual puns on the philosophical ideas of being and seeing but also for its silence broken only by the sound of a voice saying 'sssh'.

Beckett was consistent in his use of drama as an extension of his wider interest in the gaps, the jumps, and the lurches which characterize the functioning and the malfunctioning of the human mind. In his plays — as much as in his novels — ideas, phrases, images, and minds overlap; voices both interrupt and inherit trains of thought begun elsewhere or nowhere and separate consciousnesses both impede and impress themselves on one another. Beckett's dialogue, for which *Waiting for Godot* is particularly remarkable, is the most energetic, densely layered, and supple written by any twentieth-century playwright; his comedy, whether visual, verbal, ritual, or even, at times, slapstick is amongst the most subtle and surprising. The set of *Waiting for Godot* may, for example, require simply the suggestion of 'a country road' and 'a tree'; *Endgame* may take place in a 'bare interior'; and the designer of *Happy Days* may be instructed to aim for a 'maximum of simplicity and symmetry' in the representation of an 'expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound', but the static baldness of Beckett's visual statements serves both to counterpoise and complement the animation of his verbal ones. When Beckett uses blindness, as he does with Hamm in *Endgame*, he suggests that one kind of deprivation may alert audiences to the force of alternative ways of perceiving.

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When, by contrast, he uses silence, as in *Film* and the mime play *Act without Words II* (1967), he seems to be directing his audiences to explore the value of new sensory and physical formulations. Beckett never plays with minimalism and reductionism simply for the sake of the aesthetic effects he could achieve. In parallel to the work of certain Modernist architects and composers, if without their puritan frugality, he was exploring the radical potential of the idea that 'less is more'.

Time-present, as Beckett represents it in his plays, is broken, inconsistent, and inconsequential. Nevertheless, in each play he allows for the intrusion of a past which is oppressively rich in the larger inconsistencies of private and public history. *Krapp's Last Tape* and the two far sparser late plays, *Footfalls* and *That Time* (both 1976), make much out of the involuntary, untidy, quirky, and even ghost-haunted memories of the old. These memories negate linear concepts of time and of ageing as much as they disturb old assumptions about 'plot'. The structural principles on which he built both his plays and his novels can be related back to the pattern of ideas explored in 1931 in the dense critical essay on Proust. When, for example, he insists on Proust's 'contempt for a literature that „describes"', or when he affirms that 'there is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us', or when he describes 'the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible' as 'merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic', it is possible to recognize the extent to which his theatrical innovation was rooted both in a literary precedent and in a coherent Modernist philosophical statement. Beckett continued to be fascinated by what he saw as Proust's concern with the protective significance of habit: 'Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence.' His own dramatic repetitions and iterations, his persistent echoes and footfalls, emerge not from a negative view of human existence, but from an acceptance of 'dull inviolability' as a positive, if minimally progressive, force. As his inviolable and unsentimental Krapp also seems to have discovered, a path forward lay in exploring the resonances of the circum-ambient darkness.

Although Beckett gradually came to be recognized as the most important dramatist writing in English in the latter half of the twentieth century, his work initially struck many early critics as emerging from a largely foreign tradition of symbolic and philosophically based drama. If the purely British shock waves radiating from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 need to be accounted for, it was because Osborne's work was more obviously a response to, as much as a reaction against, an established native theatrical tradition. His was the rebellion of an insider. Osborne (b. 1929) had served his apprenticeship as an actor in provincial touring companies and his plays show an appreciation both of the craftsmanship that went into the making of the respectable 'well-made play' and of the art that allowed a Wilde, a Shaw, a Coward, and a Rattigan to

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transcend conventions while exploiting them. Osborne's sometimes painful witticisms can be as carefully and devastatingly placed as are those of Wilde and Coward, his confrontations and surprises can be as telling as those of Rattigan, his invectives and monologues can be as provocative as Shaw's. However, the origins of Osborne's style do not lie exclusively in what was once known as 'the legitimate theatre' but are also found in the noisier, often impromptu and far more various world of vaudeville. Where Beckett's debts to an inherited tradition of music-hall lie

in his appreciation of dead-pan humour and careful timing, Osborne's are revealed in his love of the outrageous, of the suggestive and, above all, of loud-mouthed repartee. It was a debt acknowledged in his forceful juxtaposition of a shabby and increasingly outdated type of theatre with a faded and redundant British imperialism in *The Entertainer* (1957).

Look Back in Anger introduced the noisiest of what contemporary journalists dubbed the 'angry young men' to theatre audiences. Osborne's hero, Jimmy Porter, is 25 and 'a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike'. He was for the 1950s what the restless, idealistic, public-school misfits had been to the 1930s (Porter's father, we learn, had fought in Spain, but Porter himself is neither an idealist nor an ex-public schoolboy). He is, as his wife's friend Alison recognizes, 'born out of his time'. He is a revolutionary without a revolution, or, to put it in terms readily grasped in the 1950s, he is a rebel without a cause. He fulminates against the crumbling authority of what he identifies as Establishment values; his wife's middle-class and ex-Indian army parents; his Sandhurst-educated, Member of Parliament brother-in-law (characterized as 'the platitude from outer space'); bishops and church bells; the intellectually pretentious Sunday newspapers; English music (Vaughan Williams) and English literature (Shakespeare, Eliot, and 'Auntie Wordsworth'). Nevertheless, Jimmy Porter is the protagonist in an otherwise affirmative play, one in which love and loyalty are tested and are found, despite the strains, not to be wanting. He may be a new type of character, classless, restless, and aimless, but his dramatic context was largely conventional. When a middle-aged Jimmy Porter returned to the stage in Osborne's play *Déjà Vu* in 1992, the force of those dramatic and philosophical conventions became self evident.

In many ways Osborne's most impressive 'angry young man' is the title character in his historical play *Luther* (1961). When Martin utters his classic avowal of personal integrity — 'Here I stand; God help me; I can do no more. Amen' — we sense that it has been refined by his latent anger: anger with his parents, his Church, and even with the demands of his God. Osborne's Martin may periodically clutch his bowels in agonies of constipation, and he may have flashes of theological insight in the latrine, but he is the quintessential spiritual Protestant, the lonely rebel whom God has graced with a cause. In *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964) Osborne asked for a location 'where a dream takes place ... a

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site of helplessness, of oppression and polemic', in essence an office-cum-courtroom in which an angry, sex-obsessed, middle-aged solicitor lurches rhetorically towards a private and professional breakdown. In the first volume of his pungently observant, and equally pungently spiteful, autobiography, *A Better Class of Person* (1981), Osborne observed of himself as a schoolboy that he already had a gift for smoking out 'the prigs, hedgers and dissemblers' and that he had a complementary talent to vex rather than to entertain, a talent 'not to amuse but to dissent, although I possibly thought I could do both'. The anger, the dissent, the vexatiousness, the protest, and the theatricality of Osborne's characters has always been an extension of his perception of himself.

The New Novelists of the 1950s

Samuel Beckett's trilogy, published together in London in 1959 under the English titles *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*, was in every sense the most radically innovative fictional statement of the 1950s. The edition bore the announcement that the three novels had been 'translated from the original French by the author'. Beckett's pre-war fiction in English — the episodic novel *A Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written in 1932, but published posthumously in 1992), the ten interconnected stories derived from it and given the title *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), and the novel *Murphy* (1938) — had responded with a gauche confidence to the challenge of Joyce's experimental 'work in progress', *Finnegans Wake*. The titles of the first two of his pre-war works (one being loosely adapted from Chaucer, the other bawdily punning on a phrase of St Paul's) also suggest the degree to which Beckett was self consciously attempting to regenerate and re-energize the literary traditions of his native language. *Murphy* is the most substantial of the three. Its solitary title character, who 'sat it out, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton', is an Irishman in London, precisely placed in time and space (it is Thursday, 12 September 1935 and he has an unbroken view from his window to the north-west). His 'mew' (a bird-coop, originally one designed for moulting falcons) is condemned (we presume as unfit for human habitation) and Murphy must contemplate the upheaval of removal ('Soon he would have to buckle to and start eating, drinking, sleeping and putting his clothes on and off, in quite alien surroundings'). Ostensibly, *Murphy* is constructed around the drab rituals and the vacuous repetitions of a largely inert life passed in a confined urban space. More profoundly, it seeks to represent a man's energetic inner life which finds its own repetitive rhythms and patterns and its own time-scheme distinct from those of the outside world.

When Beckett returned to fiction after the Second World War, he opted for the discipline of writing in French rather than in English. He also chose the form of a fluid monologue, a positively gushing 'stream of consciousness', rather than that of a third-person narrative. *Molloy* (written in 1947, published in Paris

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in 1951, and subsequently translated into English in 1955) shares a deliberate ambiguity of telling with its two successors. Each of the ageing narrators in the trilogy habitually contradicts himself, stumbles over the contortions of his syntax, and is obliged to pause in order to reflect on precisely how he has to express himself or on what he feels pressed to say. Both the flow of narrative and the language employed threaten to break under the strain. Beginnings are vexed or subverted, tenses shift between past and present, and what seem to be digressions or interpolations assume a vital momentum. *Molloy* (the very title of which may possibly, with the addition of one simple vowel, glance back to Joyce's superlatively fluid consciousness, Molly) is built around two self explorative consciousnesses, the one seeking the other. Much as the disabled Molloy melts disconcertingly into his complementary other half, the self abused, decayed Moran, in the first novel, so both Molloy and Moran are subsumed in the other compulsive story-tellers of the trilogy, Malone and the isolated, unnamed narrator of *The Unnameable*. The last anguished and lachrymose teller recognizes the extent to which he has assimilated and now disowns the experiences of his narrative forebears: 'All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing ... I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers in my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it ... these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been.' Whereas Murphy sits it out 'as though he were free', this man of sorrows, the Unnamable, wrenches phrases from himself in his isolation and probes the implications of the perception that he is neither truly alone nor free of a larger humanity ('the little murmur of unconsenting man, to murmur what it is their humanity stifles'). The trilogy ends with an ultimate contradiction in terms: 'in silence you don't know, you must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.'

Beckett's experiments with narrative form and with the disintegration of narrative form had few immediate echoes in the more popular fiction of the 1950s. The one British writer of the period who keenly responded to the idea of creating an avowedly 'Modernist' fiction, and whose experiments were enthusiastically received by a wide public, was Lawrence Durrell (1912-90). Durrell was born in India of parents whose families had made the sub-continent their home for several generations. Although he became briefly acclimatized to bohemian (as opposed to 'respectable') England in the early 1930s, Durrell found what he regarded as his spiritual home in the Mediterranean, moving first to Corfu and then, after the German invasion of Greece, to Egypt. As a young man he also responded to the liberating influence of two modern writers in particular, D. H. Lawrence (with whom he shared an antipathy to British reserve as much as to British rain) and the Paris-based American novelist Henry Miller (with whom he embarked on a long correspondence). Miller's influence can be felt on Durrell's *The Black Book: an*

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Agon, 'a savage charcoal sketch of spiritual and sexual etiolation', which was privately printed in Paris in 1938 (its overt eroticism precluded its publication in Britain until 1973). In 1944, as Press Officer of the British Information Office in Egypt, Durrell was posted to Alexandria, the city of 'five races, five languages, a dozen creeds' which inspired the four novels of his 'Alexandria Quartet' — *Justine* (1957), *Balthazar*, *Mountolive* (both 1958),and *Clea* (1960). Durrell's dusty, sweaty, multi-layered Alexandria, a city he described in *Balthazar* as 'half imagined (yet wholly real), [which] begins and ends in us', is a phantasmagoric, Eliotic place in which men and women dissolve into one another and ancient splendours melt into modern inconveniences. The city's real and imagined disconnections provide the setting for a series of interlocked fictions describing interconnected, unfulfilling love-affairs. The narrator, Darley, is both a self conscious, self referential teller and an incorporator of the narrative voices of other tellers, notably that of a fellow-writer, Pursewarden. In one of the 'workpoints' — sentences, ideas, and occasionally poems or translations seemingly discarded from the main narrative of *Justine* and then appended to it as a kind of afterthought — Pursewarden's 'n-dimensional novel' is described by its author as having a forward narrative momentum which is 'counter-sprung by references backwards in time, giving the impression of a book which is not travelling from a to b but standing above time and turning slowly on its own axis to comprehend the whole pattern'. Readers are doubtless meant to read Darley's actual narrative as somehow shadowing Pursewarden's speculative one. The Alexandria Quartet, in common with Durrell's yet more ambitious 'Avignon Quintet' — *Monsieur* (1974), *Livia* (1978), *Constance* (1982), *Sebastian* (1983), and *Quincx* (1985) — attempts to break down preconceptions of time as much as it assaults inherited prejudices in favour of fictional realism. Durrell's literary reputation, so buoyant in the breezy, liberal climate of the early 1960s, tended to sag thereafter. Where his contemporary, Beckett, was economical, he was prodigal; where Beckett saw the force of scrupulous compression, he indulged in a passion for words which is more often libertine than it is liberating.

William Golding's first and most enduringly popular novel, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), gives a surer indication of

his continuing concern with moral allegory than it does of his subsequent experiments with fictional form. Golding (1911-93) set the novel on a desert island on which a marooned party of boys from an English cathedral choir-school gradually falls away from the genteel civilization that has so far shaped it and regresses into dirt, barbarism, and murder. The island is cut off both from the disciplined harmony of the boys' musical background and from a disharmonious world of grown-ups at war. The novel is shaped intellectually by an intermixture of the Christian concept of original sin, a post-Darwinist and post-Wellsian pessimism, and a systematic undoing of R. M. Ballantyne's adventure story of plucky and resourceful boys, *The Coral Island* (1857). At the end of the story an officer from the warship that rescues the boys dejectedly remarks, 'I should have thought that a pack of British boys ...

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would have been able to put up a better show than that'. The sudden shift of viewpoint and the dejection were re-explored, with subtle variations and darker ramifications, in each of Golding's subsequent novels. As the range of his fiction shows, Golding emerged as a major successor to an established line of Modernist mythopoeists. Unlike Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, or Jones, however, he was not content with a reanimation of ancient myth; he was intent on overturning and superseding a variety of modern rationalist formulations and on replacing them with charged, unorthodox moral shapes. It is not just British boys who reveal their innate depravity, but the whole human race. *The Inheritors* (1955) moves back into an anthropological, rather than an Adamic, prehistory in which the talented, if thoroughly nasty and brutish, progenitors of *Homo sapiens* exterminate their gentler, simpler-minded Neanderthal precursors. The dense, difficult *Pincher Martin* (1956) has as its greedy egotistical 'hero' a drowned sailor, lost from a torpedoed destroyer, whose body is rolled by the Atlantic. But the 'Pincher' is also a survivor, one whose consciousness tries desperately to hold on to its fragmented identity in a watery purgatory. This identity attaches itself to an imagined rock, one that Martin names 'Rockall', and one which he also recognizes in its rhymed naval transmogrification as 'Buggerall' (a hellish nothing). Golding experimented with a similar metaphorical structure in *Free Fall* (1959), a tortuous exploration of free will and fallen humanity in relation to the scientific idea of the unrestrained movement of a body under the force of gravity. The subject of *The Spire* of 1964 was both more concrete and more elusive. Jocelin, the ambitious Dean of an unnamed English cathedral at an unspecified point in the Middle Ages, is a fallen man obsessed with raising a tall stone spire above his cathedral. His obsession is determined by a serpentine knot of motives — architectural, theological, visionary, psychological, sexual, self deprecating, and self aggrandizing. Jocelin both achieves his desire and fails in it; he builds an awe-inspiring structure on shaky foundations, but he is also forced to experience its maiming; he erects an airy reflection of heavenly glory, but he is also obliged to recognize the hot, distracting force of the phallus; he periodically escapes upwards, with a vertiginous thrill, into a Gothic fretwork, but he is held earthbound by the overloaded, creaking pillars that have to support his aspiration. Finally struck down by a mortal paralysis, and attended by a priest known as Father Adam, the dying Jocelin struggles to find the meaning of his life's work, a meaning which gradually forms itself around the metaphoric core of the lost earthly paradise: 'In the tide, flying like a bluebird, struggling, shouting, screaming to leave behind the words of magic and incomprehension — *It's like the appletree!*'

Golding's *The Pyramid* (1967) was followed by what appeared to be an abstention from fiction, an abstention broken in 1979 by *Darkness Visible*. All Golding's opening scenes, suggestions, and sentences are disconcertingly striking. None is more so than that of *Darkness Visible*, a compelling evocation of an intense fire-storm in the London Blitz out of which walks a fearfully burned child: 'He was naked and the miles of light lit him variously ... The

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brightness of his left side was not an effect of light. The burn was even more visible on the left side of his head.' From the terrible beauty of this beginning there develops an intense and sometimes confusing exploration of the polarities of redemptive saintliness and destructive malignity, of disinterested love and calculated terrorism. The four novels published since *Darkness Visible* — *Rites of Passage* (1980), its sequels *Close Quarters* (1987) and *Fire Down Below* (1989), and *The Paper Men* (1984) — have extended what can be seen as an established rhythm of contrasted sea-stories and land-stories all of which are concerned with extremity and isolation. The most successful is *Rites of Passage*, the first volume of a sea-trilogy set on a decayed man-of war bound for Australia in the opening years of the nineteenth century. Its cocky, journal-writing narrator, Edmund Talbot, is alerted to the problems of 'too much understanding' but can himself comprehend little of 'all that is monstrous under the sun'. Talbot, like all Golding's central characters, is rawly exposed both to his darker self and to the grinding despair of one of his fellow-passengers. Although Golding's work has sometimes been compared to that of Conrad, it is often closer in spirit, and in its aspirations to the condition of poetry, to that of Eliot. Each of Golding's male protagonists seems obliged to re-articulate the agonized, incomprehending, unspecific question of *Gerontion*: 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?'

As his novels of the 1950s suggest, Angus Wilson (1913-91) seems to have been intent on restoring Victorian narrative styles to English fiction in opposition to what he saw as the errant experimentalism of the Modernists. In contrast to the slim, even anorexic, shapes accepted by his contemporaries, he steadily swelled the physical shape of the novel back to something approaching its nineteenth-century proportions. As a means of emphasizing where his artistic loyalties lay, he published a fine, but decidedly untheoretical, study of Émile Zola in 1952 (thoroughly revised in 1965); in 1970 he added an observant, semi-biographical, critical introduction to Dickens and in 1977 an essay on Kipling. Wilson recognized in Dickens a writer who combined 'art and entertainment' and whose works made up a 'complete whole — the World of Charles Dickens'. In 1961 he also proclaimed his continuing confidence in the 'God's eye view', the omniscient narrative stance of many of the Victorian novelists that he admired. Although some critics have attempted to draw parallels between Wilson's own work and that of Zola, Dickens, and even George Eliot, the parallels cannot really be sustained. He was, it is true, a convinced realist who occasionally indulged in grotesquerie and fantasy and a finely tuned comic writer who habitually allowed for the intrusions of tragedy and cruelty, but the world of his own novels is idiosyncratic and decidedly that of the mid-twentieth century. Wilson, who began his literary career with two volumes of short stories, *The Wrong Set* (1949) and *Such Darling Dodos* (1950), had a talent more developed for creating scenes, set pieces, and characters than for the spruce and ordered fictional shapes that defined themselves against what Henry James had dismissed as 'loose baggy monsters'. Wilson's novels, from

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his first, *Hemlock and After* (1952) to his last, *Setting the World on Fire* (1980), are essentially comedies of manners in which the comedy winces, sometimes gratuitously, with pain. As an observer and mimic, Wilson also had an exceptionally sharp ear and eye for the whims, voices, vogues, pretensions, and pomposities of his time. He had a particularly fastidious distaste for the kind of social gatherings which represent what he called in his essay *The Wild Garden, or Speaking of Writing* (1963) 'the hell of the human failure to communicate', where the damned are 'the social climbers, those wanting to be loved, the unloved women who push people around, the organization men who fall to pieces when they are alone'. His two most 'traditional' novels, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956) and *The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot* (1958), are also probably his surest comments on the cultural, social, and sexual tensions of a period struggling to come to terms with the conflicting claims of tradition and novelty. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* is especially adept in its panoramic movement from scene to scene and in its gradual establishment of connections between a disparate number of characters. Wilson beds his novel in an archaeological fraud (perpetrated in 1912 before the narrative begins) whose ramifications return to darken the present of Gerald Middleton, an ageing historian. *Late Call* (1964) also introduces the idea of historical determination (its opening 'Prologue' is set in 1911) but it narrows the scope of its plot to an account of the alienation of the retired Sylvia Calvert amid the affected liberalism and the engineered environment of one of the 'New Towns' (social experiments much promoted by government planners in the late 1950s). The latter part of Wilson's career was marked by an increasing experimentalism, not all of it successful. *Late Call* is notable for its deliberate use of pastiche and its undercutting of cliché; *Old Men at the Zoo* (1961, but set in an 'utterly improbable' 1970-3) for its juxtapositions of men and beasts against a background of 'wars, domestic and foreign'; *No Laughing Matter* (1967) for its long time-span (1912-67), for its parodies, and for its introduction of scenes presented as if they were written for the stage. Neither the capricious *As If By Magic* (1973) nor the yet wilder *Setting the World on Fire* (1980), however, exhibit quite the vivacious panache of Wilson's earlier work.

Irish Murdoch (born in Dublin in 1919) was, in the early part of her career, to remain equally faithful to traditional fictional shapes. Unlike Wilson, however, she underpinned her novels with arguments derived from a scrupulous investigation of the problems posed by moral philosophy. This underpinning has been consistently enhanced by a series of independent philosophical studies, notably *Sartre, Romantic Rationalist* (1953), *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992). If Murdoch was amongst the earliest readers to respond positively to Beckett's fiction (she read *Murphy* as an undergraduate at Oxford and paid homage to it in her own first published novel, *Under the Net*, in 1954), her only work of fiction which can be said to draw directly from Beckett's example is *Bruno's Dream* (1969), a study of the atrophying consciousness of an old man. Murdoch sketched the nature of her own

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philosophical and literary standpoint in an article entitled 'Against Dryness' in 1961. 'We live in a scientific and anti-metaphysical age', she argued, an age in which 'we have been left with far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality' and in which the connection between art and the moral life had languished 'because we are losing our sense of form and structure in the moral world itself'. The problem with much modern writing, as she saw it, lay in

‘our tendency to produce works which are either crystalline or journalistic’; writers needed to turn away from ‘the dry symbol, the bogus individual, the false whole, towards the real impenetrable human person’. Against the ‘consolations of form, the clean crystalline work, the simplified fantasy-myth’, writers should pit ‘the destructive power of the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character’.

None of Murdoch’s own novels could remotely be called ‘dry’, despite the determining concern with ethical dilemmas that each betrays. All of them are carefully patterned, though the rules of the obscure game which decide these patterns often seem to be broken, reformed, and realigned by the very nature of the freedom which she allows her characters. Jake Donaghue, the male narrator of *Under the Net*, both resists and creates theoretical patterns with words which, like nets, entrap and constrain perceptions of a larger and expanding reality. As a range of novels from *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1955) to *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) and *The Philosopher’s Pupil* (1983) suggest, those characters who attempt to impose nets, theories, mystical enchantments, ‘artistic’ arrangements, or restrictive myths upon reality must themselves adapt to a world which of necessity eludes predetermined human systems of control. In *The Bell* (1958) and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) the loss or fragmentation of objects also seems to suggest why established patterns of relationships between characters must themselves be removed and reordered. As Rupert warns in the latter novel, ‘some general view ... makes you blind to obvious immediate things in human life’. In some senses, Murdoch’s fascination with spiritually gifted outsiders, androgynes, and foreigners (particularly East Europeans) further emphasizes the fictional significance she places on indeterminacy, difference, and strangeness. *The Bell*, set in a lay religious community established in a country mansion near to a convent of enclosed nuns, begins with a fragmenting marriage and gradually explores the emotional, sexual, and moral tensions which force the community itself to break up and re-form. The convent bell, from which the novel takes its title, bears the inscription ‘*Vox ego sum Amoris*’ (‘I am the voice of Love’); it is at once an aesthetic focus and a disturbing catalyst, an ideal and a breaker of ideals. It proves to be less of a link back to a restrictive and legendary past, than an announcer of new freedoms and the rightness of new contingencies. As the Abbess, one of Murdoch’s first spiritually gifted outsiders, has announced, ‘all our failures are failures in love’. New contingencies also determine the nature and the structure of what remains Murdoch’s most experimental novel, *The Black Prince* (1973). Its narrator, Bradley Pearson, a novelist, both tells the story

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and, in a sense, is the story. ‘Art’, he remarks, ‘is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for telling certain truths. Yet how almost impossibly difficult it is not to let the marvels of the instrument itself interfere with the task to which it is dedicated.’ *The Black Prince* is, on one level, a contrived intellectual thriller; on another it is an equally contrived multiple and untrustworthy narrative. It opens with two Forewords, the first by a supposed editor, Loxias (whose name is derived from the Greek word for ‘oblique’); the second by Pearson himself. As the narrative line develops, so do different ways of approaching and understanding ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. It ends with six separate, disparate and, to some degree, conflicting Postscripts, four of them written by different members of what Murdoch describes as her ‘dramatis personae’. The use of this theatrical term serves as a deliberate reminder of the Shakespearian echoes and connections with which the narrative has played and with which it finally fragments (‘Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. It is the light by which human things can be mended. And after art there is, let me assure you, nothing’). If Loxias, the supposed editor of the manuscript, is here echoing Pearson’s own sentiments, he is also playing a Horatio to a dead Hamlet, an uncloaked Prospero, deprived of his charms, asking for the indulgence of an audience.

Muriel Spark (b. 1928), a Catholic convert of Jewish descent and Scottish birth, shares with Murdoch and Golding a pressing commitment to moral issues and to their relation to fictional form. Her first novel, *The Comforters* (1957), is concerned with a neurotic woman writer, Caroline Rose, having to come to terms with her new-found Catholicism, with her hallucinations, and with her God-like status as a creator. Rose, is not merely working on a study of contemporary fiction entitled *Form in the Modern Novel* (and having particular difficulty with the chapter on realism), she has also resolved to write a novel about writing a novel. Spark has been as consistently fascinated by the narrative problems posed by self consciously literary texts as she has been preoccupied with the theological problem of evil. As the opening paragraph of her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae* (1992), serves to suggest, she has been equally determined to explore the potential of light to dispel darkness and to illuminate the creatures, the thoughts, the motives, and the sins that dwell in darkness.

It is not insignificant that in 1951, before she had embarked on her own career as a novelist, Spark published a critical reassessment of the work of Mary Shelley under the title *Child of Light*. Her own early novels marked new advances in the often distinctively British exploration of the Gothic. If, on one level, she revealed herself as the Scots heir to the tradition of Burns, Hogg, and Stevenson, on another, hers is a Gothic enlivened by a decidedly post-Calvinist glee. *Memento Mori* (1959), which was recommended to readers as a ‘brilliant and singularly gruesome achievement’ by Evelyn Waugh, is concerned with a diverse group of London geriatrics who receive anonymous

telephone calls telling them to remember the inevitable fact of their impending deaths. Spark's

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title recalls the skulls and funerary desk ornaments favoured by baroque meditators on mortality, but her own narrative is wry, blunt, and provocatively funny. She ends the novel with dry medical case histories as one of her characters, paralysed by a stroke, searches through his mind, 'as through a card-index', for the causes of his friends' mortal sicknesses: 'Lettie Colston, he recited to himself, comminuted fractures of the skull; Godfrey Colston, hypostatic pneumonia; Charmian Colston, uraemia; Jean Taylor, myocardial degeneration; Tempest Sidebottome, carcinoma of the bronchus; Guy Leet, arteriosclerosis; Henry Mortimer, coronary thrombosis ...'. His litany is broken by the third-person narrator turning to a separate meditation, one that finally turns on the reader with the words of a children's catechism: 'Jean Taylor lingered for a time, employing her pain to magnify the Lord, and meditating sometimes confidently upon Death, the first of the four last things to be ever remembered.' The Gothic of *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) is quite distinct in its comic chill. Both novels are, in their different ways, concerned with possession: the first with necromancy in a south London suburb in the 1950s, the second with the peculiar exercise of psychological power in an Edinburgh girls' school in the 1930s. Miss Brodie's superbly poised and precisely defined moral sway over her favourite pupils is compared by one of her protégées to that of 'the God of Calvin'; the narrator, however, suggests a more deflationary contemporary parallel, based on Miss Brodie's fondness for pointing out the common Latin root of the words 'educate' and 'Duce': 'Mussolini stood on a platform like a gym teacher or a Guides mistress ... the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti.'

The dispassionate, sometimes ironic, sometimes disingenuous tone of Spark's narrators helps her to create a sense of discordance between the aberrance of what happens and its cool, precise delineation. This is particularly true of her 'metaphysical shocker', *The Driver's Seat* (1970), a carefully ordered, even meticulous, present-tense account of a woman with a death-wish who plots the circumstances of her own violent murder. The novel undermines easy assumptions about cause and effect as much as it challenges ideas of authorial authority and control. If *Not to Disturb* (1971) — -with its opening quotation from *The Duchess of Malfi*, its foul weather, and its 'zestful' aristocratic cretin imprisoned in a wing of a Swiss château — is Gothic in the traditional sense of the term, Spark's *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), a brusque investigation of an upper-crust English convent, completely avoids the prurience traditionally inspirational to earlier Gothic novelists. The convent is ruled by an Abbess adept in exploiting all the technological and propagandist skills of the twentieth century in order to manipulate her sisters into compliance with her will. She not only appreciates the state of the art, she is also, like so many of Spark's protagonists, something of an artist herself. 'Scenarios', the Abbess tells the nuns, 'are an art-form ... based on facts. A good scenario is a garble. A bad one is a bungle. They need not be plausible, only hypnotic, like all good art.' Throughout the narrative, she has revealed a

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remarkable taste for secular literature (Machiavelli jostles with a wide range of poetry). At the end, when she meets her Watergate, she gives orders 'for the selection and orchestration of the transcripts of her tape-recordings'. At certain points in the transcripts she includes the explanatory instruction 'Poetry deleted'. It is distinctly more elegant, but no less politic, than the phrase it echoes, Richard Nixon's 'Expletive deleted'.

Poetry since 1950

Philip Larkin's novel *Jill* (1946) is set in an Oxford from which Arnold's 'last enchantments of the Middle Age' and Waugh's *douceur de la vie* have been banished by the make-do-and-mend mentality of the Second World War. 'Life in college was austere', Larkin wrote in the introduction he added to the novel in 1963, 'Its pre-war pattern had been dispersed, in some instances permanently. Everyone paid the same fees ... and ate the same meals ... At an age when self importance would have been normal, events cuts us ruthlessly down to size.' *Jill* is remarkable not simply for its picture of an Oxford forced into a dispirited egalitarianism by the war, but also for its introduction of what became a common theme in the literature of the 1950s and 1960s, the awkward self consciousness of provincial, lower-middle-class England and the upward mobility of a grammar-school educated intelligentsia. Although Larkin (1922-85) was not of the generation which benefited most from the provisions of the 1944 Education Act, he was typical of a new breed of articulate university graduate. As the key poet of the post-war decades he was also to chart other social and cultural changes with a sardonic percipience. Larkin was the most significant of a loose group of writers known in the early 1950s as 'the Movement', a group assumed by those who disliked what it stood for to be the typical product of

wartime planning and the Welfare State. Evelyn Waugh, not unexpectedly, complained in 1955 of a `new wave of philistinism with which we are threatened by these grim young people coming off the assembly lines in their hundreds every year and finding employment as critics, even as poets and novelists'. 'The Movement', which also included the novelist Kingsley Amis (b. 1922), the poet and critic Donald Davie (b. 1922), and the poet and novelist John Wain (b. 1925), was united not so much by its class origins or by its beer-drinking, pipe-smoking, and jazz-appreciating friendships, but by a sensibility shaped by a shared antipathy to the cultural pretensions of Bohemia and Bloomsbury and to what it saw as the elitism of much Modernist writing. It would be preposterous to cast the self effacing Larkin as a prototype of the 'angry young man' of the late 1950s, but his was a distinctive and to some degree representative new voice.

The six volumes of verse that Larkin published in his lifetime were all modest in size. His first, *The North Ship*, appeared in 1945; it was succeeded by *XX Poems* (published in a tiny edition in 1951), by a slim pamphlet containing

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five further poems in 1954, and in 1955 by the volume that first made his name as a poet, *The Less Deceived*. His earliest published poem, 'Winter Nocturne' (printed in his school magazine in 1938), clearly shows the influence of Yeats, an influence, 'as pervasive as garlic', which Larkin claimed could also be felt in the poems in *The North Ship*. From the mid 1940s, however, he discovered a new model of poetic restraint in Hardy. It is Hardy's example which seems to inform even the title of *The Less Deceived*. Much of Larkin's subsequent poetry was to bypass Modernist experiment and high-flown language in favour of traditional metrical forms and a precise and plain diction. The two later collections, *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974), point not simply to the sharpness of Larkin's ear for the inflexions of his own age, but also to a new and, at the time, deliberately provocative frankness. As the selection of his *Letters* published in 1992 reveals, Larkin had a private penchant for what was once coyly described as 'four-letter words'. If this vocabulary had only minimally entered the 'polite' literary mainstream before, Larkin's long-established admiration for Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* may partly explain the plain speaking of certain of the poems published in *High Windows*. The language of the title poem stresses its contemporaneity: 'When I see a couple of kids | And guess he's fucking her and she's | Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm, | I know this is paradise | Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives'. 'Annus Mirabilis', an old man's sing-song ballad, sees the paperback publication of Lawrence's book as part of a wider shift in popular culture and manners: 'Sexual intercourse began | In nineteen sixty-three | (Which was rather late for me) — | Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban | And the Beatles' first LP.' What has since become Larkin's most quoted line ('They fuck you up, your mum and dad') opens 'This Be The Verse', a poem which at first sight appears to be a neat summary of Freudian theory and Hardyan pessimism, but one which moves into an intensely private disillusion: 'Man hands on misery to man. | It deepens like a coastal shelf. | Get out as early as you can, | And don't have any kids yourself.'

When he was asked by an interviewer in 1979 if he had felt like an outsider as a child, Larkin stressed that he had been fond enough of his parents even though 'they were rather awkward people and not very good at being happy'. 'These things rub off', he added ruefully. There is little exhilaration in Larkin's verse. Human history and human experience, as he observes them, provide few occasions for rejoicing. If he recognizes that certain inherited characteristics do indeed 'rub off', he nevertheless sees himself as alienated from both an uncomfortable past and a cheerless, Godless present. In 'I remember, I remember' a series of negatives undoes the fond sentimentality of Thomas Hood's poem of the same name. In a later poem, 'To the Sea', Larkin looks back far more gaily to the seasides of his parents' courtship and of his own boyhood, but the line expressive of the continuities that the poem recalls ('Still going on, all of it, still going on') scarcely suggests a sense of liberation in or from time. The snapshots in 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album'

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record 'dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds' and stir a sense of alienation from 'a past that no one now can share'. Larkin's present, a late 1950s present in the poems 'The Whitsun Weddings' and 'Afternoons', is that of an England of false cheer, cheap fashions, joyless wedding parties, drab recreation grounds, and 'estatefuls' of washing. His accounts of the past are marked by an awareness of a gulf fixed between then and now by death and ageing. In 'MCMXIV', a joint tribute to the art of Wilfred Owen and to the deceptions of photography, he describes an 'innocent' group of young recruits, 'grinning as if it were all | An August Bank Holiday lark', about to be bloodied by the Great War. The country church in 'Church Going' is inspected with an 'awkward reverence' by a 'bored, uninformed' post-Christian narrator who frets at the prospect of a future in which religion will have shrunk to a prevalent fear of death. In what is perhaps his most delicate and lyrical poem, however, history and time, an unease at the prospect of death and an uncertain glimmer of human hope are fused together into a new whole. 'An Arundel Tomb' describes a medieval funerary monument to a husband and wife who are shown lying side by side and hand in

hand. The ‘lengths and breadths of time’ have not only marred the sculptural image, but have also served to alter the way in which all images are read and interpreted:

Snow fell, undated. Light
Each summer thronged the glass. A bright
Litter of birdcalls strewed the same
Bone-riddled ground. And up the paths
The endless altered people came,

Washing at their identity.
Now, helpless in the hollow of
An unarmorial age, a trough
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins
Above their scrap of history,
Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

The Audenesque confidence of the last line is deliberately qualified by the two preceding ‘almosts’. The provisionality is essentially Larkin’s own.

John Betjeman (1906-84), whose poetry, almost uniquely amongst his contemporaries, Larkin professed to admire heartily, dealt with English tradition, English religion, and English melancholy in a very different way. By the 1960s Betjeman’s work was selling phenomenally well (his *CollectedPoems*, first published in 1958, sold 90,000 copies within two years). His was a popular

success based not simply on easily comprehensible, generously rhymed, and meticulously scanned verse, but also on a calculated projection of himself as a celebrity. He adopted an enthusiastic, if somewhat bumbling, persona for himself on television (though he consistently proved to be an intelligent and inventive performer, an adept critic of architecture and a sensitive apologist for poetry). Middle-brow readers also welcomed his somewhat unproductive tenure as Poet Laureate from 1972. Although Betjeman claimed in his gushy, blank-verse autobiography, *Summoned by Bells* (1960), to have presented a volume of his schoolboy poems to ‘the American master, Mr Eliot’, he never later revealed much of a response to Eliot’s metrical, intellectual, and lexical novelty. He did, however, share Eliot’s Anglo-Catholicism and something of his feeling for national history and it was a fusion of religious and historical sentiment with the associations of certain buildings and places which made for Betjeman’s most effective verse. His collection *Old Lights for New Chancels* (1940) opens with eighteen specifically topographical poems and ends with a ‘Miscellaneous’ section which includes his wry study of an upper-class woman at prayer in wartime, ‘In Westminster Abbey’. His later volumes, *A Few Late Chrysanthemums* (1954), *High and Low* (1966), and *A Nip in the Air* (1972), suggest a poet further refining the techniques and forms he had evolved in the 1940s rather than one capable of surprising his readers. But then, most of Betjeman’s readers, Larkin included, did not read him for surprises.

Stevie (Florence Margaret) Smith (1902-71) also won herself a wide, young, and sometimes unexpected, audience in the 1960s. Smith, whose *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936, reissued 1969) and two volumes of verse — *A Good Time was Had By All* (1937) and *Tender Only to One* (1938) (both illustrated by her own straggly, naïve drawings) — had received relatively little attention in their time, achieved a belated celebrity in 1957 with her new collection *Not Waving But Drowning* (whose title poem proved her most popular). She cemented her reputation with a series of distinctive, incantatory public readings, with her *Selected Poems* (1962), and with a new volume, *The Frog Prince*, in 1966. A *Collected Poems* appeared posthumously in 1975. She made a barbed, ostensibly simple poetry out of the kind of subjects and expressions which other poets might have rejected as unconsidered trifles. She remained sentimentally attached to the Church of England while denouncing its doctrines and its priests; she immersed herself in mortality while whimsically greeting Death as a ‘gentle friend’ and dwelling, almost gaily, on the effects of physical and mental decay. The drowning man, whose gesturing is misunderstood in ‘Not Waving but Drowning’, moans that he was ‘much too far out all my life’ and Death in ‘Do Take Muriel Out’ is pressed to take the lonely Muriel on a last outing (‘She will not complain | When you dance her over the blasted heath’). Smith wrote two

poems with the Elizabethan title ‘Come Death’. Both avoid echoes of Elizabethan melancholy and of the fraught mortal ambiguities of John Donne. The first, published in 1938, expresses a longing for extinction with an admixture of archaism and easy modern frankness (‘Who would not rather

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die | And quiet lie | Beneath the sod | With or without a god?’). The second, written in the poet’s final illness, has a far more lyrical form and a far more punchy simplicity:

> I feel ill. What can the matter be?
> I’d ask God to have pity on me,
> But I turn to the one I know and say:
> Come, Death, and carry me away.
>
> Ah me, sweet Death, you are the only god
> Who comes as a servant when he is called, you know,
> Listen then to this sound I make, it is sharp,
> Come Death. Do not be slow.

The poetry of Ted (Edward James) Hughes (b. 1930) plays a much more wolfish and unfriendly game with mortality. Hughes’s first two volumes, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960), express a rapt fascination with animal energy and independence and an awareness of the affinities between animal and human life, between human aspirations to freedom and power and the instinctive animal achievement of both. A caged jaguar in a zoo, ‘on a short fierce fuse’, is compared to a solitary visionary pacing his cell. A macaw in ‘a cage of wire ribs | The size of a man’s head’ is provoked into ‘conflagration and frenzy’ by a little girl’s caresses and tantrums. The intense physicality of ‘The Bull Moses’ is recalled in ‘the warm weight of his breathing, | The ammoniac reek of his litter, the hotly-tongued | Mash of his cud’, but the bull’s gait as he is returned to his stall suggests that he was not named ‘Moses’ idly: ‘something deliberate in his leisure, some beheld future | Founding in his quiet.’ Hughes’s otter ‘brings the legend of himself’, his pikes swim in a pond ‘as deep as England’, and his ‘terrifying’ thrushes, with their ‘single-mind-sized skulls’, possess an ‘automatic purpose’ parallel to that of a Mozart or to ‘the shark’s mouth | That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own | Side and devouring of itself’. Strikingly, Hughes compares his own creative purpose to a vulpine visitation in ‘The Thought-Fox’. The poem opens with an insistent act of imagination and with a ‘blank page’. The fox approaches with stealth:

> Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
> A fox’s nose touches twig, leaf;
> Two eyes serve a movement, that now
> And again now, and now, and now
>
> Sets neat prints in the snow,
> Between trees ...
>
> Across clearings, an eye,
> A widening deepening greenness,
> Brilliantly concentratedly,
> Coming about its own business
>
> Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
> It enters the dark hole of the head.

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> The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
> The page is printed.

When, in his most anthologized poem, ‘Hawk Roosting’, Hughes represents the consciousness of an animal, the hawk expresses its animal single-mindedness with an unmistakably human arrogance (‘There is no sophistry in my body: | My manners are tearing off heads’). Hughes’s language seems more taut in the interspersed prose and verse of *Wodwo* (1967) (a volume named from the wild men of the woods of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), but his earlier experiments with the violent meshes of animal and human sense culminate in the gnomic sequence of poems *Crow:*

From the Life and Songs of the Crow (1970, amplified 1972). Crow is a survivor, a blackly comic speculator about the inadequacy of the old definitions of the relationship of the Creator to his Creation, and a weaver of new myths about a God who sometimes sleeps and who occasionally perversely co-operates in the negatives of his adversaries. Crow himself plays pranks, refuses to learn the word 'love', and re-enacts aspects of the stories of Adam, Oedipus, Ulysses, and Hamlet. The poems intertwine and redefine established ideas by means of brash assertions and intense, even brutal stabs at meaning. None of Hughes's subsequent volumes has had quite the same abrupt intensity.

Hughes's verse grew out of the distinctive dialect of his native West Yorkshire, a dialect which the poet himself saw as connecting him 'directly and in my most intimate self to Middle English poetry'. A quite distinct alertness to place and to the ramifications of local and historical speech is evident in the work of Geoffrey Hill (born in Bromsgrove in the West Midlands in 1932). Although it can be equally bloody, Hill's England is far less demonic, lonely, and wild than Hughes's. Where Hughes uses instinct and myth to feel himself into a poetic space beyond recorded history, Hill has consistently sifted through archaeological strata and explored human landmarks and human residues. His particular fascination with English medieval history was evident in his first volume *For the Unfallen* (1959), though the sonnet 'Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings', with its overarching concept of 'caved chantries, set in trust | With well-dressed alabaster and proved spurs', is juxtaposed with two 'Formal Elegies' (again sonnets) for the Jews of Europe slaughtered in the 1940s by those who believed that they had superseded dynasties and elegies alike. All three poems are about the propriety of requiems and elegies and about how human memories are formed and conditioned. *King Log* (1968), which opens with a poem about poetic choices and evasions ('Ovid in the Third Reich'), also contains 'Funeral Music', a sequence of eight unrhymed, fourteen-line poems written in commemoration of three noblemen beheaded during the Wars of the Roses. Hill's 'essay' on the sequence, published as an appendix to the volume, describes it as an attempt to suggest 'a florid grim music broken by grunts and shrieks'. The first poem, which recalls the command of John Tiptoft that he should be decapitated in three strokes 'in honour of the Trinity', plays

decorative vanity against ritual decorum, judicial murder against echoes of heavenly order:

> Processionals in the exemplary cave,
> Benediction of shadows. Pomfret. London.
> The voice fragrant with mannered humility,
> With an equable contempt for this world,
> 'In honorem Trinitatis'. Crash. The head
> Struck down into a meaty conduit of blood.
> So these dispose themselves to receive each
> Pentecostal blow from axe or seraph,
> Spattering block-straw with mortal residue.
> Psalteries whine through the empyrean ...

This is the violent, sticky, unstable political world of Shakespeare's histories, but the fierce polyphony that Hill evolves from the 'grunts and shrieks' of the fifteenth century is decidedly his own. The thirty *Mercian Hymns* (1971) eschew the tortured lyricism of 'Funeral Music' in favour of a prosy, Modernist play with anachronism and incongruity. The hymns are a tribute to the great Anglo-Saxon king, Offa, who ruled over the Midlands Kingdom of Mercia in the late eighth century, and a celebration of Hill's own history. His Offa is a king of then and now, at once the 'King of the perennial holly-groves' and the 'overlord of the M5'; a man who is proud to be the friend of Charlemagne and one who rules a land of gasholders, car parks, and charabancs. Past and present co-exist and fluidly inform one another, easily so in the ninth poem (the account of a family funeral) and somewhat more restlessly in the twenty-fifth (which interlocks John Ruskin's complaints about the miserable conditions in which women nail-makers worked in the nineteenth century with the experience of his own grandmother 'whose childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the nailer's darg'). In the twentieth hymn the fanciful names of modern suburban villas are also, far less innocently, the names of the battles which determined the destinies of early England. Clashes of colour replace clashes of culture:

> Primeval heathland spattered with the bones of mice
> and birds; where adders basked and bees made
> provision, mantling the inner walls of their burh:
>
> Coiled entrenched England: brickwork and paintwork

stalwart above hacked marl. The clashing primary
colours — ‘Ethandune’, ‘Catraeth’, ‘Maldon’,
‘Pengwern’. Steel against yew and privet. Fresh
dynasties of smiths.

The smiths are both Offa’s craftsmen and the modern inheritors of the commonest of British surnames. In his later volumes, *Tenebrae* (1978) and *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (1983), Hill moves beyond the matter of Britain towards a wider exploration of the problems of pain and death. In the

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‘Lachrimae’ poems included in *Tenebrae* he returns to the densely worked sonnet forms of his earlier work (though with reference to Renaissance spirituality and music), but in his extended tribute to the nationalist-Catholicism of Péguy, Hill investigates a new landscape, that of the war-torn fields of an uneasy France.

In a lecture given in 1976, and reprinted in his collection of essays *Preoccupations* (1980), the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (b. 1939) traced a ‘defensive love of their territory’ through the work of Larkin, Hughes, and Hill, a love ‘which was once shared only by those poets whom we might call colonial’. Heaney counts himself amongst the colonials, but, as other essays in the volume suggest, he is fully aware of the doubleness and division of his inheritance. ‘I speak and write in English’, he noted in an article written in 1972, ‘but do not altogether share the preoccupations and perspectives of an Englishman ... the English tradition is not ultimately home. I live off another hump as well.’ That other ‘hump’ is the Ireland, or more particularly the rural Ulster, which figures so delicately, richly, and painfully in his verse. His Irish inheritance is multiple. Heaney’s *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969) wonderingly recall and reconstruct a familiar childhood landscape peopled by farmers, labourers, and fishermen. In *Wintering Out* (1972) and its two successors, *North* (1975) and *Field Work* (1979), Heaney broods less on a private landscape and more on an island full of ‘comfortless noises’. His ‘hump’ is a place in which successive strata of history continue to determine the perceptions of the present. In ‘Tinder’, flints, ‘cold beads of history and home’, serve to spark a recall of a prehistoric past. In ‘Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication’ — the memorial lyrics which preface Heaney’s most obviously ‘political’ volume, *North* — he extends his perspective from his father’s farm to include the ‘troubles’ of Ulster and their relationship to the long and contentious history of Ireland. Part I of the volume opens with ‘Antaeus’ (a reference to the giant whose strength came from touching his mother, the earth). It is followed by ‘Belderg’, a poem in which history emerges from the soil as ‘quernstones out of a bog’ and is implicit in the very name of the Heaney farm, ‘Mossbawn’ (‘He crossed my old home’s music | With older strains of Norse ... I could derive | A forked root from that ground | And make *bawn* an English fort, | A planter’s walled-in mound | Or else find sanctuary | And think of it as Irish’). These four strains, the prehistoric, the Gaelic, the Norse, and the English, continue to haunt the volume. Although many of the poems deal directly with the present, with ‘neighbourly murder’, with Orange drums ‘like giant tumours’, and with blasted streets where ‘the gelignite’s a common sound efiect’, Heaney also sees the rifts in Irish life as rooted in a long history of occupation and imperial influence. ‘Freedman’ acknowledges parallels to ancient Roman slavery in subjugation to the culture of the Roman Church (‘I was under that thumb too like all my caste’), but ‘Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces’, ‘Bone Dreams’, and ‘Punishment’ variously recognize the prefigurations of modern anxieties which are contained in Ireland’s archaeological and

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linguistic subsoil. ‘Bone Dreams’ and the volume’s title poem see ‘dictions’ and ‘past philology and kennings’ as an inheritance which obliges an Irish poet to come to terms with the Teutonic roots of the imperial language, English. In ‘North’, a glance back to Viking Ireland, and to Norse enterprise and Norse ruthlessness, leads into a reflection on how a poet can use a language buried, like an alien treasure, in his native soil. A voice, associated with ‘violence and epiphany’, but, like some Viking longship, ‘buoyant with hindsight’, offers the advice:

‘Lie down
in the word-hoard, burrow
in the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain.

Compose in darkness.
Expect aurora borealis
in the long foray

but no cascade of light.

Keep your eye clear
as the bleb of the icicle,
trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
your hands have known.'

This is no retreat into the historical memory but a discovery of a poetic potential as liberating as Yeats's 'terrible beauty'. The Scandinavian burial mound, with its recalls of *Beowulf* and Sutton Hoo, offers an epiphanic transcendence of history. Heaney's verse published since *Field Work* —*Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), and *Seeing Things* (1991) — suggests a further extension of the exploration of language, place, and memory begun in the sensuous early poetry and so sharply crystallized in *North*.

The verse of an equally prolific English poet, Tony Harrison (b. 1937), has also consistently investigated the significance of native sounds and native roots. Harrison, born and educated in Leeds, and resident in Newcastle, has, despite his frequent reference to a wider world beyond Britain, emerged as an emphatically urban poet. More particularly, he is a poet of the industrial North of England who has explored the cultural rift that divides his educated adult eloquence and 'sophistication' from the abrupt reticence of his working-class boyhood. He introduces *The School of Eloquence* (1978) with two quotations, the first (from which his own title derives) from E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), the other from Milton's Latin poem *ad Patrem* ('To his Father'). To these quotations he adds 'Heredity', a short prefatory lyric of his own:

How you became a poet's a mystery!
Wherever did you get your talent from?
I say: I had two uncles, Joe and Harry —
one was a stammerer, the other dumb.

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Harrison's poetry gushes with the joy of release from impediments to speech. At times, his adjectives, his metaphors, and his classical references seem to tumble over each other as prodigally as do Keats's. At others, and notably in his striking translations of the *Oresteia* and of plays by Molière and Racine, he writes with an expressive immediacy. This is particularly true of his versions of the medieval religious plays published in 1985 as *The Mysteries*, versions which are firmly rerooted in Harrison's own gritty Yorkshire English and in the continuing culture of the North. His urban poems, however, tend to look at cities from oblique angles. His Durham is culturally trisected as 'University, Cathedral, Gaol'; his York is contracted to a malodorous telephone kiosk; his Leeds is untidy, sooty, and war-scarred; his Newcastle, so exotically celebrated in his 'Newcastle is Peru' (1970), is the city of the 'sluggish Tyne meandering through | the staithes and shipyards of Peru' where 'commerce and contraceptives glide | and circle on the turning tide'. Harrison's long quatrain poem *v* (1985) draws together many of the recurrent themes of his verse. As its abbreviated title (*v* for *versus*) suggests, it is a poem of contentions. It moves from the Leeds graveyard where his parents are buried, through an imagined dialogue with the inarticulate skinheads who have defaced the headstones with obscene graffiti, to a brief pondering of local demographic changes, and, finally, to 'Home, home to my woman, where the fire's lit'. As so often in his work, coal, coal dust, and coal fires represent the tangible fibres of working-class England, its pressed seams of meaning, its securities and its distinctive values.

The 'New Morality': The 1960s and 1970s

When Philip Larkin located the stirrings of a sexual revolution in the 'annus mirabilis' of 1963, he was not simply hitting on a convenient rhyme for that other newish phenomenon, the 'LP'. Larkin had long admired what was probably the most influential novel of the British 1960s, the belatedly published *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and he later expressed an appreciation of what he recognized as 'the first advance in popular music since the War', the songs of the Beatles. The unequivocal 'Not Guilty' verdict at the conclusion of the trial of Penguin Books in 1960 — after their publication of a paperback version of Lawrence's banned novel — seemed to Larkin, and to other contemporary observers, to be a liberating sign of the times. So, in a different sense, was the release of the Beatles' first album three years later. The *Lady Chatterley* verdict represented a breaking of the shackles of official censorship and public prudery; the Beatles' record expressed the energy of a new popular music, one that had appropriated the vitality of American styles and added a new lyricism and a home-grown romanticism. At the trial, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had been defended against charges of obscenity by a succession of witnesses drawn from the literary, critical, and clerical

establishment, but, despite the fact that it sold

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over two million copies in the year following its publication, the novel struck many of its readers as representative of an essentially high-brow, 'literary' tradition. The Beatles' music was, by contrast, patently not high-brow. It erupted from below, both socially and harmonically, and it offended against canons approved by right- and left-wing arbiters of taste alike. Not only Beethoven had to roll over: so did Bartok and Britten, Modern and Traditional Jazz, and the kind of folk-music regarded by its earnest *aficionados* as the authentic voice of the downtrodden. The music of the Beatles and other groups of the time was not simply an added stimulus to some amorphous 'cult of youth', but was itself a part of the vanguard of a new youth culture. This dissenting, anarchic, constantly shifting youth culture, which had been preliminarily delineated by Colin MacInnes (1914-76) in his novels *City of Spades* (1957) and *Absolute Beginners* (1959), was galvanically energized in the 1960s.

The decade was often hailed, though not universally welcomed, as the era of the 'New Morality'. It was certainly the era of the female contraceptive known popularly since 1960 simply as 'the pill'. In 1956 the influential theatre critic and baiter of Mrs Grundy, Kenneth Tynan (1927-80), had described Jimmy Porter's 'casual promiscuity' as typical enough of the sexual behaviour of post-war youth. A somewhat more flamboyant, rather than simply 'casual', promiscuity had been cultivated by the hero of Ian Fleming's popular James Bond novels, published between 1953 and 1964 and translated to the screen from 1962. But the 'New Morality', as it came to be defined, was not simply to do with promiscuity, the pill, and 'macho' male values. It was in part a reflection of a post-Freudian openness about sexual relationships and in part a post-Lawrentian attempt to sanctify sexuality. At the *Lady Chatterley* trial, John Robinson, the suffragan Bishop of Woolwich, had declared that Lawrence had portrayed 'the sex relation' as 'in a real sense an act of holy communion' and had exhibited a 'quite astonishing sensitivity to the beauty and value of all organic relationships'. Three years later, this same bishop announced in his contentious little book, *Honest to God*, that the doctrine that marriages were made in heaven was little more than 'the metaphysic of a pre-scientific age'. For Robinson, all of the Church's traditional moral teachings had to be scrutinized in accordance with the fashionable intellectual 'isms' of the age, and those that failed the test had to be jettisoned as so much redundant mumbo-jumbo. In the same year, the BBC's Reith Lecturer, Professor George Carstairs, announced that popular morality was a wasteland 'littered with the debris of broken convictions' because of the emergent concept of sexual relationships 'as a source of pleasure'. If the 1960s did not exactly mark the discovery of the pleasures of sexual intercourse, the decade proved memorable not simply for its legislative liberalization (birth-control and divorce were facilitated; abortion and adult male homosexual acts were legalized) but also for the gradual establishment of new moral, political, and cultural discourses.

The debates of the 1960s were, to a considerable degree, refocused by the

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consequent theoretical formulations of the 1970s and 1890s. They were also conditioned by the national and international political issues of the decade itself. In 1962 the temperature of the 'Cold War' was dangerously raised as a result of the crisis over the siting of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Britain, insistent both on the significance of its 'independent' nuclear deterrent and on the wider security offered by NATO, was obliged to stand by and watch as the United States and the Soviet Union uneasily defused the crisis before lumbering into others. Britain proved to be impotent also in the face of the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and attempted to avoid all direct involvement in the escalating American campaign in Vietnam. Although successive British governments remained firmly committed both to the use of nuclear weapons and to the NATO alliance, the appeal of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (founded in 1957) pointed to a popular revulsion at the prospect of a nuclear war and a resurgence of idealist pacifism amongst the young. In 1959 some 50,000 people, including the aristocratic dissident, Bertrand Russell, and the theatrical one, John Osborne, attended the culminating protest rally in London after a march from Aldermaston in Berkshire. These Easter marches became something of a national institution in the early 1960s. In 1962 the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square in London was the focus of a 'Hands Off Cuba' rally organized by the anti-nuclear 'Committee of 100'. In 1966 and, yet more spectacularly, in the spring and summer of 1968 the Embassy drew far larger numbers of protestors against the war in Vietnam. To those who matured in, or who were matured by, 1968, the evidence of world-wide disaffection seemed to suggest that radical political change might not just be possible but imminent. A new generation, impatient with the fudges, compromises, and sins of their elders, felt they might be as much the forgers of a new social order as they were already the beneficiaries of a new moral one. For the 'New Left' authors of the 1968 *May Day Manifesto*, distributed by Penguin Books and edited by the socialist literary critic and novelist Raymond Williams (1921-88), 'the years immediately ahead' seemed likely to be 'confusing and testing', but there remained the real hope that what they defined as the

‘active socialism of the immediately coming generation’ would help shape ‘the political structure of the rest of the century’ rather than merely revise ‘the forms which now embody the past and confuse recognition of the present’. Even to those to whom, through age, temperament, or lack of opportunity, the events of 1968 signified little, it was none the less a year which served to focus minds. When Lindsay Anderson’s surreal cinematic study of a machine-gun-toting public-schoolboy revolution, *if . . .*, was released in the following year, it struck many sympathetic chords.

In terms of other international commitments and the long-term political destinies, the 1960s were notable for the attempts of British governments to negotiate a belated entry into the European Economic Community. Although the first two attempts were rebuffed by General de Gaulle and a French veto, the prospect of closer European involvement was not necessarily greeted with

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unadulterated enthusiasm on the part of the British electorate. In a symposium organized by the magazine *Encounter* in December 1962 some hundred ‘writers scholars and intellectuals’ were asked to express an opinion about what was styled the ‘Britain and Europe debate’. The replies received revealed deep divisions and often irrational prejudices parallel to those evident in the nation at large. T. S. Eliot declared that he was ‘strongly in favour of close cultural relations with the countries of Western Europe’, but E. M. Forster remained equivocal; W. H. Auden hoped that Britain would join the Community, but opined that that would not make her part of Europe, ‘because Europe no longer exists’; Graham Greene, writing, he announced, ‘as a materialist’, was merely ‘inclined’ in Europe's favour; Arthur Koestler, referring back to an article he had written in 1950, pressed for the idea of a supranational federation, while Kingsley Amis claimed to be very disturbed by any future surrender of sovereignty; Iris Murdoch urged longer reflection because ‘joining Europe’ had such a dangerously romantic appeal to ‘many naive hearts’; Angus Wilson admitted to being ‘filled with suspicion’ and John Osborne proclaimed a faith in Britain’s going it alone and making ‘a small start on the socialist revolution by slinging away our defence expenditure’. Harold Pinter bluntly announced: ‘I have no interest in the matter and do not care what happens.’ Little enough did happen for some nine years. Together with the Republic of Ireland and Denmark, Britain became a full member of the European Community on 1 January 1973, a decision later confirmed by a referendum. Debates about the ramifications of these decisions for national sovereignty have continued just as divisively into the 1990s.

In 1957 the Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had blandly declared that Britain had ‘never had it so good’. The relative prosperity of Britain in the late 1950s and 1960s may have been insecurely based on illusions of an economic renewal and a more equable distribution of wealth, but such economic optimism both propped up successive Conservative administrations and helped support the dream of a technological revolution sponsored by the Labour Government that supplanted them in 1966. Although the emphatically working-class fiction of Alan Sillitoe (b. 1928) offers little comfort to any Conservative, his first novel, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), confirmed that the living and working conditions of many working people had improved beyond measure (even though their real freedom of action had not). Although Sillitoe’s promiscuous protagonist, a Nottingham factory worker, may angrily recognize that his social and economic horizons remain severely restricted, his father believes that a decent wage, a holiday, and a television set have transformed his life. The 1960s and 1970s did not merely see wide-scale slum clearance and the reconstruction of swathes of industrial Britain in accordance with the high-rise architectural principles of the Modern Movement, they also offered new opportunities for travel and home entertainment. What had once seemed unaffordable luxuries, such as continental holidays and televisions and stereos, were gradually transformed into virtual necessities.

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Social deprivation and homelessness may not have been abolished, but they seemed less noticeable and were consequently less addressed as pressing problems. The material prosperity and consumerism of the 1960s and 1970s led directly to the relative complacency of the Thatcherite 1980s. The ‘New Morality’ and ‘You’ve never had it so good’ did not begin to sound really hollow until the frugal, AIDS-haunted 1990s.

Female and Male Reformulations: Fiction in the 1960s and 1970s

The broadening of women’s perspectives and women’s opportunities proved the most radical and substantial of the social changes of the 1960s. Not only had the ‘New Morality’ begun to challenge received perceptions of gender, sexuality, and marriage, but new patterns in women’s employment, and particularly professional employment, had steadily emerged since the end of the Second World War. Germaine Greer’s lively and largely untheoretical book, *The*

Female Eunuch (1970, reissued in paperback in 1971 and later translated into twelve languages), provided a stimulus to the development of a newly outspoken and often provocative feminism in the period. For Greer (b. 1939), the campaigns of genteel suffragettes had represented the 'first feminist wave'; her own book, she claimed, formed part of a second wave which was already evident in the fact that 'ungenteel middle-class women are calling for revolution'. Greer's phrase may possibly echo the perception of one of the male characters in Doris Lessing's novel, *The Golden Notebook* (1962): 'The Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution-they're nothing at all. The real revolution is, women against men.' For both Greer and Lessing (b. 1919) that revolution began with a heightened alertness to the narrow representations of women's roles, and women's consciousness, in society and its literature.

Lessing had begun her career as a writer with novels concerned with the growth of political awareness amongst native blacks and white settlers in colonial East Africa. Her five-volume sequence *Children of Violence* (1952-69) deals with the developing political commitment, and the later political disillusion, of Martha Quest. Martha is carefully 'placed' at the beginning of the first novel as 'adolescent, and therefore bound to be unhappy; British, and therefore uneasy and defensive; in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, and therefore inescapably beset with problems of race and class; female, and obliged to repudiate the shackled women of the past'. Martha learns her radicalism in colonial Africa, but she is also forced by circumstances to unlearn the Stalinist assumptions she makes about world revolution. In the last, and most experimental, volume in the sequence, *The Four-Gated City* (1969), set initially amid the fragmented political aspirations of British anti-nuclear campaigners, Martha recognizes that there are few protesters 'whose lives did not have a great gulf in them into which all civilization had vanished,

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temporarily at least'. The novel ends with a projection forward to the years 1995 and 2000 after a devastating atomic war. Martha discovers a hope for the future on a remote Scottish island where a group of mutant children has had its mental powers enhanced, and its social vision reintegrated, by the effects of radiation. In many ways, *The Four-Gated City* marks the beginning of Lessing's exploration of what she has called 'inner space fiction', a fiction that has systematically moved away from conventional realism. It was, however, with her central work of fiction, *The Golden Notebook*, that she first began to relate the concept of mental fragmentation to the disintegration of fictional form. The novel is shaped around the series of notebooks, Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue, kept by a woman writer, Anna Wulf, as a means of separating and analysing different aspects of her life. The notebooks seem to present her with a means of ordering her life according to neat categories, both private and public, but Anna's evolving perceptions of herself finally dictate that her attempts at categorization break down, not into new patterns but into an inevitable and welcome formlessness. *The Golden Notebook* is in many ways a traditional narrative subjected to a process of disordering. It can be seen both as a wayward development of the kind of nineteenth-century realist fiction admired by Marxist critics (including Lessing herself) and as an attempt to come to terms with an intelligent woman's sense of private and public diffusion. Anna herself realizes that she is incapable of writing the only kind of novel which interests her, 'a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life'. Her awareness is accompanied by the conviction that this diffusion is a symptom not of social, mental, or ideological disease, but of personal liberation. Anna had once struggled with the 'banal commonplace' that 'women's emotions are all still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists'; the narrative shaped around her bid for freedom gradually allows her the perception of the new, if still insecure, value that is to be found in the fact of a woman's creativity.

Insecurities also haunt Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), in part a rethinking of Mr Rochester's account of his courtship and marriage as given in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys (1894-1979) transfers the scene of her novel away from Charlotte Brontë's damp England to the lusher, more tempestuous West Indies of her own childhood (she was born in Dominica). She also radically alters perspectives. Her four earlier novels, published between 1928 and 1939 and set in the lax, anything-goes world of European bohemians, had dealt with women determined to explore the implications of their sexuality and, ultimately, with women adrift and women exploited. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, these themes were replayed with a new intensity and savagery. In a narrative divided between Rochester and his Creole wife-to-be, Antoinette Bertha Cosway, Rhys explores the nature of loneliness, exploitation, and victimization. The novel interlocks the corrupt and uneasy society of the post-emancipation Caribbean, its decaying plantations, its exotic, untrimmed gardens, its ghosts, and its tropical storms, with the onset of Bertha's mental

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turbulence. 'I think of my revenge and hurricanes', she writes, 'Words rush through my head (deeds too). Words. Pity is one of them. It gives me no rest.' The last section, set in the draughty attics of Thornfield Hall, ends with Bertha's unsteady awareness of what she has to do with the flickering candle that she has stolen.

Rhys's career contrasts vividly with that of the outwardly far more conventional Barbara Pym (1913-80). Like

Rhys, Pym had to wait until the end of her life for real literary success. Her first novels, *Some Tame Gazelle* (1950), *Excellent Women* (1952), *Jane and Prudence* (1953), and *Less than Angels* (1955), culminated with *A Glass of Blessings* (1958). All proclaim the virtues of restraint, good behaviour, and feminine resilience, but *A Glass of Blessings* is particularly effective in its representation of the shortcomings of disingenuousness and of the lack of scope of women of a certain generation. The novel's comedy depends upon the misapprehensions and the conventional pieties of its slightly bored, fondly imaginative, dully married narrator. Pym's fiction is generally set in a small world of middle-class families and middle-aged spinsters, a world shaped by its topography of shops, tea-rooms, and Anglo-Catholic churches and ordered by rituals of sherry and gossip. Publishers of the 1960s, working under the assumption that readers would prefer accounts of up-market philandering in Hampstead, down-market adultery in Huddersfield, and downright fornication in Cumbria to Pym's sharp delineations of suburban gentility, rejected her subsequent submissions. The situation changed in 1977, largely thanks to Larkin's determined advocacy. The revival of her fortunes as a writer was marked by the appearance of two new novels, by the reprinting of her work of the 1950s, and, posthumously, by the publication of fiction she herself had set aside or abandoned. The finest of her later novels, *Quartet in Autumn* (1978), departs slightly from her established social patterns but not from the delicate representation of obscure lives in which she excelled. The 'quartet' of the title, two men and two women who work together in a London office, is observed as it divides, briefly celebrates, and privately decays. The novel's last sentence, with its reference to a life that 'still held infinite possibilities for change', has an irony which does not smother its pathos.

Angela Carter's fiction presents its readers with a world of magic and theatre in which there is an infinite possibility for change. Her's is an extravagance just held in check by the splendid artifice of her prose. Carter (1940-92) reinvented the fairy-tale for a knowing adult public, infusing her narratives with macabre fantasy and erotic comedy. Although she could scarcely be described as a pornographer herself, she recognized in her deft and suggestive essay, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979), that pornographic fantasy too would have its legitimate place in literature once it could be moulded to the service of women and once women had ceased to be considered as mere commodities. Carter is rarely a polemical writer, but as her novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and her two volumes of Gothic stories, *Fireworks* (1974) and *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), suggest, she can startle by the very vividness of her

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renegotiations of the elements that have shaped traditional accounts of male-female relationships. When she describes the central (male) character in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* as being divided between 'a barren yet harmonious calm and a fertile yet cacophonous tempest' and between 'the drab colourless world' and 'the fragile marginalia of our dreams', she suggests something of her own narrative attraction to the sonorities and colours of the margins of the imagination. This is particularly evident in her two major theatrical novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), both of them set in the golden age of escapist entertainment, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fevvers, the cockney bird-woman of *Nights at the Circus*, has been hatched, like the offspring of Leda and Jove, from an egg; at the age of puberty she has also, miraculously, sprouted wings ('as my titties swelled before, so these feathered appendages of mine swelled behind'). After a foster-childhood spent in a Whitechapel brothel, Fevvers becomes a star of the London music-hall and the imperial circus in St Petersburg; she survives an attempt at seduction by a Russian Grand Duke ('his voice glutinous with tumescence'), and she ends married to an American journalist in the wastes of Siberia where she, literally, has the last laugh when her new husband discovers that she is not 'the only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world'. Carter's last novel, *Wise Children*, dwells on the glossy careers of theatrical twins, both dancers, and the illegitimate offspring of an eminent Shakespearian actor, a pillar of the 'legitimate' theatre. The narrative is in part an autobiographical quest to justify this Shakespearian descent, in part an exploration of sisterhood and interchangeable identity. It is also a tour de force of ventriloquism. Carter's narrating twin is chatty, digressive, and theatrically camp, but her voice also creates and subverts. She forges links between 'theatre' and 'literature' and she threatens to undermine neat gender definitions. 'It's every woman's tragedy', says one middle-aged twin to the other as they make up for a party, 'that after a certain age, she looks like a female impersonator'. 'What's every man's tragedy then?' asks the other. 'That he doesn't, Oscar', comes the pat post-Wildean reply. Carter was no man's fool. Nor was she any woman's.

In comparison to the work of their women contemporaries, the novels of John Fowles (b. 1926) and Anthony Burgess (b. 1917) can seem strained, contrived, and forced. Fowles's *The Collector* (1963) is a post-Freudian fantasy, a first-person narrative supposedly written by a repressed, butterfly-collecting clerk who, having won the football pools, kidnaps (or collects) the sophisticated art-student whom he has admired from a distance. Fowles has continued to be fascinated by repression and by what he tends to see as its happy antithesis, the release of sexual energy which can be equated with personal liberation. In *Mantissa* (1982), this espousal of the cause of psychic and sexual liberation wastes itself in an explosive, self indulgent erotic fantasy; in *The Magus* (1966, revised 1977), it is

intricately translated into an omnifarious masque and a proliferating orgy of mythology and literature. In Fowles's most

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popular and admired novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), the juxtapositions of repression and release serve to dictate not just the novel's argument, but its narrative shape as well. The novel's narrator looks back, somewhat smugly, from the moral and narrative redefinitions of the 1960s, 'the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes', to the narrower determinants of doing and telling in the 1860s. He both appreciates the art of the Victorian novel and feels infinitely superior to it. His central characters, a Darwinian palaeontologist, Charles Smithson, and the supposedly abandoned mistress of the French lieutenant, Sarah Woodruff, play out his theme for him. Both seek to break 'iron certainties', the social, moral, and religious conventions of their day, much as the narrator consistently endeavours to remind us of his presence and of his very present power. Sarah tricks and eludes Charles, just as the narrator rejoices in his own tricksy elusiveness. He admits in his thirteenth chapter (typically choosing what has always been regarded as a dangerous number) that he 'stands next to God', but insists that liberal modern novelists 'are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority'. God-like to the end, he offers his readers a trinity of possible conclusions to the narrative; one conventionally happy; one unconventionally happy; the last uncertain and open. In the final chapter a 'rather foppish and Frenchified' figure, with 'more than a touch of the successful impresario about him', adjusts his watch and seems to obliterate the second possible ending. This impresario drives 'briskly' away, supposedly leaving Charles to his freedom and his doubts, but he remains a god who has declined to stop interfering.

Anthony Burgess's narrators tend to be just as knowing as Fowles's, but they are far less tricksy, cocky, and manipulative. Kenneth Toomey, the autobiographical narrator of *Earthly Powers* (1980), loves effects. His 'It was the afternoon of my eighty-first birthday, and I was in bed with my catamite when Ali announced that the archbishop had come to see me' is perhaps the most striking opening sentence in modern English literature. But he also loves 'cunning' and 'contrivance' and he knows the power of popular story-telling. Toomey, a Catholic, a homosexual, and a successful writer, bestrides the twentieth century without seeking the status of a colossus. He travels across the five continents; he finds himself close to 'Hitler . . . Mussolini and the rest of the terrible people this terrible century's thrown up'; he strikes up acquaintances with Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford, and Kipling; and he finds himself the brother-in-law of a saintly, sybaritic (and fictional) Pope. As so often in Burgess's earlier work, *Earthly Powers* is an entertaining exploration of moral antinomy. In his futuristic fantasy, *The Wanting Seed* (1962), he had somewhat slickly proposed that human moral history could be seen as evolving cyclically, swinging between Augustinian ages ('Gusphases', in which the concept of original sin is paramount), 'Interphases', and Pelagian ages ('Pelaphases', in which liberal humanism triumphs). Burgess's preoccupation with the theology and sociology of sin also determines the argument of his most

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brilliant and experimental novel, *A Clockwork Orange* (also of 1962). It is a sharply anti-utopian vision of the technological future, told from the point of view of Alex, a 15-year-old delinquent who fantasizes about rape, assault, and murder while listening to Mozart. It also throws down two distinct challenges to its readers. When, in Part 2 of the novel, Alex is brain-washed into conformity ('committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable only of good') it questions the sentimentally framed ideals of freedom and social responsibility which were dear to the liberal 1960s. Secondly, and perhaps more disconcertingly, Burgess renders his narrator sympathetic by contrasting his geniality and vitality with the numb, soullessness of the society which has produced his reaction. Moreover, Burgess seems to make his readers complicit in what Alex thinks and does by obliging them to share in his lexical rebellion and his lexical excitement. Alex expresses himself in 'nadsat', a Russian-rooted argot, which is abbreviated, aggressive, rich, and strange ('Then we slooshied the sirens and knew the millicents were coming with pooshkas ... That weepy little devotchka had told them, no doubt, there being a box for calling rozzes not too far behind the Muni Power Plant'). If Burgess's work as a whole does not manage to rival the epic vitality of Joyce's, *A Clockwork Orange* does at least shift something of Joyce's linguistic ingenuity into the age of subcultures.

In some ways the most 'typical' (at least in the sociological sense) of the English novelists of the 1960s and 1970s is Margaret Drabble (b. 1939). Her first novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), is a first-person narrative describing the gossipy, sexually liberated, party-going worlds of a university-educated woman and her married sister. *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967) is a far more assured, and far less jerky, account of another woman-graduate, this time a girl growing out of the cultural and moral narrowness of her northern background and opening up to what we are led to believe are the sophistications of high-brow London (including its bohemian male adulterers). Of her novels of the 1970s, perhaps the most artful and suggestive is *The Ice Age* (1977), a novel centred not on a woman exploring the process

of her social liberation, but on a series of interlinked relationships all of which humourlessly suggest something of the shabby and disappointed state of contemporary England. Drabble touches on corrupt property-developers and IRA bombs, on broken marriages and the alienations of upward social mobility, on rural withdrawal and on what was then the 'other world' of Eastern Europe (if awkwardly glimpsed as Walachia, 'the most obscure and mysterious of the Communist states', a benighted country where one of the characters cannot buy sanitary towels). Each novel's setting seems to imprison its, sometimes willing, occupants. The process of negotiating a release is, as so often in Drabble's work, a precarious and unsatisfying one. Her England is not so much a promised land as a focus of redundant promises.

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Drama since the 1950s

After more than sixty years of proposals, high hopes, and false starts, Britain finally got its National Theatre in July 1962. More precisely, it got an official announcement that a National Theatre was to come into being. A Board was established and in October 1963 a National Theatre Company presented its inaugural production of *Hamlet* in the cramped, but venerable, surroundings of the Old Vic (the Company was not able to move the relatively short distance to its partially completed new building on the south bank of the Thames until March 1976). Since its inception, the National Theatre (from 1988, the Royal National Theatre) has always had serious rivals, in terms of both prestige and innovation. In the 1960s and 1970s Britain's other subsidized 'national' theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, established an enviable record of experiment (though it has since largely concentrated on the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries). For a remarkable, if relatively brief, period, which began with the formation of the English Stage Company in 1956, one commercial theatre, the Royal Court, also seemed to lead the way in encouraging, commissioning, and presenting the work of new dramatists, both native and foreign. In their different ways, all three companies engineered a London-based theatrical revolution.

Although the National Theatre had called on the services of the unconventional Kenneth Tynan as its literary adviser, its choice of plays and directors was initially somewhat cautious. The Royal Shakespeare Company, by contrast, startled audiences out of any sense of stability and complacency with four particularly celebrated productions by the director, Peter Brook (b. 1925): a much admired and starkly Beckettian *King Lear* in 1962; a version of the German dramatist, Peter Weiss's, play known colloquially as the *Marat/Sade* in 1964; and, following Brook's exploratory 'Theatre of Cruelty Season', the experimental Artaudian commentary on the Vietnam war, *US*, in 1966. Perhaps most stunning and provocative of all was his complete rethinking of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1970, a rethinking which swept away fairyland glades and gauzes and boldly substituted dazzling light, erotic gestures, and perilous acrobatics. When Brook declared that his production of the *Marat/Sade* had been designed to 'crack the spectator on the jaw, then douse him with ice-cold water, then force him to assess intelligently what has happened to him, then give him a kick in the balls, then bring him back to his senses again', he was stating an extremist principle of what has come to be known as 'director's theatre' (though it was a principle which could be said to have determined many of the effects of the 'political' theatre of the 1970s). It was not a principle on which the Royal Court generally worked. Its intellectual assaults were of a different, though not necessarily more subtle, order.

John Arden (b. 1930) was in many ways typical of a new generation of playwrights launched at the Royal Court: provocative, argumentative, brusque, and

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Anglo-Brechtian. Arden's *LiveLike Pigs* (1958), a play about the resettlement of gypsies in a housing-estate, explores anti-social behaviour. It leaves the firm impression that 'respectability' and its official guardians, the police, were ultimately far more damaging to society than the unconventional mores of the play's gypsies. Arden's most celebrated and punchy play, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), addresses its anti-militaristic theme with a combination of Brechtian exposition and music-hall routines (dance, song, and monologue). Although the play grew out of contemporary circumstances (army conscripts, recruited under the system known euphemistically as 'National Service', had recently suffered casualties in the campaign in Cyprus), its setting is loosely Victorian. Its red military tunics, its black bibles, its narrow logic, and its unresolved social tensions are all designed to disconcert audiences and to raise questions about the principles of duty, rigidity, and order. When Arden reworked his play in 1972 as *Serjeant Musgrave Dances On* he gave it a far more overt and direct political message, one focused on the engagement of British troops in Ulster. *Serjeant Musgrave Dances On* may have grown out of Arden's steady questioning of British political, legal, military, and imperial traditions in plays such as *Left-Handed Liberty* (1965), *The Hero Rises Up*

(1968), and *The Island of the Mighty* (1972), but it seems like a crude piece of *agitprop* in comparison to the rigorous scepticism of his earlier work.

Arnold Wesker's *Chips with Everything*, performed at the Royal Court in 1962, is also concerned with National Service, though in this instance with a fictional expansion on Wesker's own experience in the RAF. The play contains remarkable moments of concerted physical action by the group of recruits (notably a raid on a coke store), but it ultimately suggests that, despite official pretensions to the contrary, conscription was no leveller and no social panacea. Wesker (b. 1932) had earlier shown himself capable of creating a virtuoso visual theatre in his representation of alternating periods of action and inaction in a restaurant in *The Kitchen* (1959). Both kitchen and camp serve as metaphors for an unfair and hierarchical society in which the disadvantaged are forced to fall back on their chief resource, their proletarian vitality and their innate capacity for feeling. In his most substantial work, the so-called 'Trilogy' (*Chicken Soup with Barley* of 1958, *Roots* of 1959, and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* of 1960), Wesker manages to relate his intense respect for working-class community to a social, historical, and political perspective stretching from the anti-Fascist protests of the Jewish East End in 1936 to the failure of a project to establish a new Jerusalem and a new idealist-socialist lifestyle in the Norfolk of the late 1950s. In all three plays, Wesker conveys an acute sense of place by capturing distinctive ways of speaking (both London Jewish and rural East Anglian) and representing the distinctive rhythms of urban and rural domesticity. In 1958 he announced that he would like to write plays not simply 'for the class of people who acknowledge plays to be a legitimate form of expression', but also for 'the bus driver, the housewife, the miner and the Teddy Boy [the type of adolescent who in the 1950s affected a fashion for vaguely Edwardian clothes]'. With this

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aim in mind, and with the high-minded hope of forging links between the arts, socialist action, and society at large, Wesker founded Centre 42 in 1960-1. The substantial Trade Union involvement that Wesker required was not forthcoming, but the project failed largely because popular taste proved to be more resistant to his ideals than he had expected. Centre 42 aimed at creating the conditions in which old-fashioned sweetness and light could filter down. It was checked by an upsurge of a new 'alternative' and genuinely popular culture and it foundered. With it, sank the urgency of Wesker's dramatic enterprise.

By far the most original, flexible, and challenging of the new dramatists of the late 1950s, Harold Pinter (b. 1930), was, like Wesker, the son of an East End Jewish tailor. Unlike him, however, he was an actor by training and profession. All Pinter's plays suggest a sure sense of the dramatic effect of pacing, pausing, and timing. Despite his determined protest against National Service as an 18-year-old, and despite his two brushes with the law as a conscientious objector, his early plays generally eschew direct political engagement and comment. They open up instead a world of seeming inconsequentiality, tangential communication, dislocated relationships, and undefined threats. Many of the dramatic *non sequiturs* of Pinter's first four plays — *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* (all written in 1957), and *The Caretaker* (written in 1959 and performed in the following year) — indicate how positive was his response to the impact of *Waiting for Godot*; their distinctive air of menace, however, suggests the influence of Kafka and the patterning of their dialogue a debt to the poetry and early drama of Eliot. In all four plays Pinter also reveals himself to be a master of a colloquial, vapidly repetitive, London English, one adept at varying the idioms of his characters' speech to striking and sometimes disturbing effect. In the most polyphonic of the early plays, *The Birthday Party*, he intrudes seemingly incongruous clichés about cricket and Sunday School teachers into Goldberg's volubly Jewish dialogue and he softens McCann's edgy bitterness with Irish sentimentality. Both characters threaten, and finally break, the inarticulate Stanley with a monstrous, staccato barrage of unanswerable questions and half associated ideas: 'You need a long convalescence.' | 'A change of air.' | 'Somewhere over the rainbow.' | 'Where angels fear to tread.' | 'Exactly.' | 'You're in a rut.' | 'You look anaemic.' | 'Rheumatic.' | 'Myopic.' | 'Epileptic.' | 'You're on the verge.' | 'You're a dead duck.' | 'But we can save you.' | 'From a worse state.'

The Homecoming, first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964, marks something of a turning-point in his career. Though the play opens familiarly enough in an undistinguished room in a north London house and with a one-sided conversation, an indifferent exchange of insults, and an ostensibly comic reference to an advertisement for flannel vests, it steadily veers away from comedy. Everything in the play is unspecific. The rhythms of Max's speech ('One of the loves of my life, Epsom?') suggest that the family may be Jewish, but nothing definite is made of the fact. More significantly, there appears to be a family tradition of unfaithful women, for parallels are

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loosely established between the dead but adulterous mother and her living daughter-in-law, Ruth, whom the male members of the family treat as if she were a whore. There are also often inexplicit frictions between generations and between the uneducated stop-at-homes and the homecoming son, Teddy, a professor at an American university. *The*

Homecoming leaves a residual sense of sourness and negativity. Its most notable successors, *Old Times* (1971), *No Man's Land* (1975), and *Betrayal* (1978), all extend its calculated uncertainty and its (now gentrified) hints of menace and ominousness. All of them are distinguished by their teasing play with the disjunctions of memory and with unstable human relationships. *Old Times* presents its audience with an open triangle, defined not only by its characters, two women and a man, but also by silences, indeterminacies, and receding planes of telling and listening. In *No Man's Land*, two elderly men, and two younger ones, seem to shift in relationship to one another; they know and do not know; they remember and obliterate memory. *Betrayal*, cleverly based on a series of retrogressions, deals, ostensibly realistically, with middle-class adultery in literary London (though its reiterated ideas, words, and phrases reveal how artificially it is patterned). Since *One for the Road* (1984), Pinter's plays have shifted away from developed representations of uncertainty towards a far more terse and more overtly political drama. Both *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* (1988) are insistently concerned with language and with acts of interrogation. As in *The Birthday Party*, language is seen as the means by which power can be exercised and as something that can be defined and manipulated to suit the ends of those who actually hold power. Nevertheless, the two plays focus on individuals threatened no longer by an unspecified menace, as Stanley was, but by the palpable oppression of (unnamed) modern states. Where Pinter's earlier work had allowed for indeterminacy, his latest work seems to have surrendered to an insistent demand for moral definition. The ideas of 'them' and 'us', which were once open, subtle, fluid categories, have been replaced by a rigid partisanship.

'If I ever hear you accuse the police of using violence on a prisoner in custody again', Inspector Truscott announces in Joe Orton's *Loot* (1966), 'I'll take you down to the station and beat the eyes out of your head.' As all his plays suggest, Orton (1933-67) has quite as refined a sense of the potential of the state, its institutions, and its human instruments to oppress the citizen as has Pinter. He had good reason to distrust the political system under which he lived, and, by extension, all systems of authority and control. He was an active, not to say promiscuous, homosexual in a period when homosexual acts between consenting males were still regarded as a criminal offence. He was himself brutally murdered by his long-term companion, and erstwhile collaborator, Kenneth Halliwell. In 1962 Orton and Halliwell had been prosecuted on the relatively trivial charge of stealing and defacing library books and sent to prison by a particularly authoritarian magistrate. Orton the artist fought back against authority with the two weapons he wielded most efficiently: anarchic comedy and priapic energy.

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The five major comedies that Orton completed before his untimely death — *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (19g64), *Loot* (1966, published 1967), *The Ruffian on the Stair, The Erpingham Camp* (both 1967), and *What the Butler Saw* (1969) — were calculated to outrage. When, in whimsical mood, he took to writing to the press and to theatre managers under the nom de plume of Edna Welthorpe (Mrs), he was parodying the kind of bourgeois respectability against which he had long defined himself. But what Edna described as his 'nauseating work' and his 'endless parade of mental and physical perversion' were not just symptomatic expressions of the liberal 1960s, but gestures of protest extrapolated from a long and perfectly respectable comic tradition. Orton never simply hid behind jokes. His comedy served not simply to expose the folly of the fool, the double standards of the hypocrite, or the unbalanced humours of everyman, but to disrupt the very status quo. Pompous asses though they may be, Orton's villains, such as Erpingham, are no fools. Caught out though they may be, Orton's fools, such as Drs Rance and Prentice, are no innocents. Exploited, abused, and tormented though they may be, Orton's innocents, such as McLeavy, are no wronged paragons. In *The Erpingham Camp*, the camp's owner may dream a vulgarian's dream of a future England sprouting 'Entertainment Centres' from coast to coast, but, as the play makes clear, Erpingham is as much in the business of social control as are the posturing psychiatrists, Rance and Prentice, and his sordid camp is as much a metaphor for an over-organized and explosively revolutionary state as is the private clinic of *What the Butler Saw*. Revolutions may be waylaid by guile and incompetence, but in no sense can the meek inherit Orton's earth. As McLeavy is dragged away by the police in *Loot*, he first protests his innocence and then wildly exclaims: 'Oh, what a terrible thing to happen to a man who's been kissed by the Pope.' In none of Orton's plays can innocence ever be a defence. For a man to be obliged to exit in the arms of police officers while recalling another man's kiss sounds more like carelessness than pathos.

Orton does not simply exploit the traditional forms of comedy and farce, but also dangerously transforms them. He takes an anarchist's delight in fostering disorder, but none at all in seeing why order can or ought to reassert itself. When he gestures to a Pinterian inconsequentiality at the opening of *The Ruffian on the Stair* he adds a *double entendre* of his own by giving Mike an appointment with a man in the toilet at King's Cross station. Even when he uses the conventional embarrassments of farce — its undressings, its incongruous dressings, and its cross-dressings — he manages to render them not merely suggestive but distinctly suspicious. Kath's removal of Sloane's trousers in *Entertaining Mr Sloane* is accompanied by the knowing declaration: 'I've been doing my washing today and I haven't a stitch on ... I'm in the rude under this dress. I tell you because you're bound to have noticed ...'. Alternatively, when

Mrs Prentice finds her husband holding a woman's dress in *What the Butler Saw*, she first asks whether he had taken up transvestism and then adds: 'I'd no idea our marriage teetered on the edge of fashion.' Orton is at his most

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consistently *risqué* in the topsy-turvey world of *Loot*, a play in which the Oedipal jostles with the necrophilic and in which the old buttresses of social order — love, medicine, religion, and law — are systematically sapped. Here, as in all Orton's work, moral floors dissolve leaving a space which is both amoral and, by extension, apolitical. If some of his critics po-facedly condemn him for never exploring the consequences of the social questions he raises, it should be allowed that the very velocity of his verbal comedy never really allows him to stay for answers.

Where Orton's comedy is explosive, untidy, and unresolved, that of Tom Stoppard (born in Czechoslovakia in 1937) is implosive, symmetrical, and logical. Where Orton disorders the traditional elements of farce, Stoppard takes a fresh delight in the kind of theatrical clockwork that was perfected by Feydeau. Unlike Orton or Feydeau, however, Stoppard seems to take a deep intellectual pleasure in parallels, coincidences, and convergences that extends beyond a purely theatrical relish. In an age which has exhibited a fascination with the often extraordinary patternings of mathematical and metaphysical theory, he has emerged as an almost exemplary artist, one with an appeal to the pragmatic and the speculative alike. At their most brilliant, his plays are carefully plotted, logical mystery tours which systematically find their ends in their beginnings. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which opened at the National Theatre in April 1967 (the year following its first, amateur, presentation at the Edinburgh Festival), begins, according to its stage direction, with 'two ELIZABETHANS passing the time in a place without any visible character'. This is *Hamlet* playfully reread according to Einsteinian laws, Eliotic negatives, and Beckettian principles. Everything is rendered relative. The perspective is changed, time is fragmented, the Prince is marginalized, and two coin-spinning attendant lords are obliged to take on the weight of a tragedy which they neither understand nor dignify. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* de-heroizes, but, despite its frantically comic surfaces, it never expels the impending sense of death implied in its title. Shakespeare's toadying gentlemen are transformed into two prosy commoners endowed with twentieth-century sensibilities, men trapped by their costumes, their language, and their characterless setting. Their tragedy, if tragedy it is, lies in their awareness of convergence, concurrence, and consequence: 'Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are ... condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one — that is the meaning of order. If we start being arbitrary it'll just be a shambles ...'. However arbitrary life might appear to be, logic is relentless and the pre-existent and inescapable pattern of *Hamlet* determines that Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's strutting and fretting must end, like real life, with death.

Much of Stoppard's subsequent drama introduces characters who are as much out of their intellectual and social depths as are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In the short radio play, *If You're Glad I'll be Frank* (1966), a bemused husband desperately tries to reclaim his wife who has become

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subsumed into a speaking clock. In *The Real lnspector Hound* (1968), a superbly poised parody of an English detective story, two theatre critics find themselves absorbed into a play and a murder which they assumed they had come to observe. In *Jumpers* (produced by the National Theatre in 1972) a moral philosopher preparing a lecture on the existence of God, and on the related problem of the objectivity of good and evil, is confronted by the murder of an acrobat at a party in his own home. As its title so succinctly and riddlingly suggests, *Jumpers* is about intellectual gymnastics, the making of mental and moral jumps and the construction of an unsteady philosophical architecture; it is also a *tour de force* of plotting. Henry Carr, the somewhat dim-witted central figure of what is perhaps Stoppard's most sustainedly witty and inventive play, *Travesties* (1974), is equally overwhelmed by the events in which he becomes involved. The play begins with a historical footnote (the real Carr, British Consul in Zurich, had taken James Joyce to court, claiming reimbursement for the cost of a pair of trousers worn in an amateur production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* performed in Zurich in March 1918), and a historical coincidence (Joyce, Lenin, and the Dadaist poet, Tristan Tzara, all used Zurich as a refuge from the First World War), but it develops into a complex, totally speculative, extrapolation of political and literary history. Stoppard shapes his own play around echoes, parodies, and inversions of Wilde's comedy and, to a lesser extent, of Joyce's *Ulysses*. None of his later plays has quite the same confident verve. His excursions into explicitly political drama — with the unwieldy script for actors and symphony orchestra, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977), and the clever television play, *Professional Foul* (1978) — demonstrate an (at the time) unfashionable concern with persecution of intellectuals by the thuggishly illiberal Communist regimes of Eastern Europe. *Hapgood* (1988), with its carefully deployed twins, its double-takes, and its spies who explain the particle theory of light, does, however, suggest something of a return to his old whimsy, albeit a singularly menacing whimsy.

Whimsy, intellectual gymnastics, and symmetry are not qualities that most audiences would readily associate with

the work of Edward Bond (b. 1934). Bond has always rigorously cultivated plainness in both expression and design. His career began at the Royal Court Theatre with versions of plays by, and exercises in the manner of Brecht, and it is to the radical, didactic German tradition that he has remained faithful. If he later proclaimed that, in contrast to Brecht, he considered it necessary ‘to disturb an audience emotionally’ by finding ways to make what he called the ‘aggro-effect’ more complete, it has generally been to the bald agonies of Büchner and to the psychological aggression of Wedekind that he has looked. *The Pope’s Wedding* (1962) and *Saved* (1965), the first of his own plays to be performed, both concentrate on a *Woyzeck*-like inarticulacy and on an inherited lexical and emotional poverty in English working-class life which finds a natural expression in violence. In *Saved* an unloved, unwanted baby is, almost gratuitously, stoned to death by a gang of grunting youths (‘Right in the lug’ole’, ‘Get its ’ooter’, ‘An its slasher’).

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Bond shows violence as the inescapable consequence of the brutalization of the working class in an uncaring, stratified, industrial society. In the authorial note prefaced to the play he nevertheless speaks of *Saved* as ‘irresponsibly optimistic’, as a work which suggests the survival of innate goodness despite ‘upbringing and environment’ and despite the ostensible failure of inherited patterns of religion and morality. The lapidation, he provocatively insists, was a ‘typical English understatement’ compared to the ‘strategic’ wartime bombing of German cities and to ‘the emotional deprivation of most of our children’. If, for writers such as Greene, Golding, Spark, and Burgess, the violence with which Bond habitually deals is rooted in the concept of original sin, for Bond himself that concept needed to be redefined as ‘a doctrine of natural aggression’, one determined by a manifestly unjust society. In *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1968), *Lear* (1971), *Bingo* (1974), and *The Fool* (1976) anger and violence are seen not merely as the only means of self expression open to the socially deprived but also as the engine of social change, both for good and for ill. These plays are concerned with power and the corruptions of power, and are all equally concerned with the stance of the artist who is faced with the evidence of such corruptions. In *Narrow Road*, the poet, Basho, a would-be detached idealist, is seen as indirectly responsible for the atrocities the play describes (his responsibility becomes far more direct in the 1978 revision of the play as *The Bundle*). In *Bingo*, Shakespeare, in his complacent bourgeois retirement, is complicit in the economic oppression of the poor, active in the emotional oppression of the women members of his family, but silent when it comes to effective social protest. In *The Fool: Scenes of Bread and Love*, John Clare, the working-class poet whose class anger is real enough, is forced into frustrated compromise and madness because he cannot find the ideological weapons with which to fight his oppressors. In the most emotionally challenging of Bond’s plays, *Lear*, he not only drastically revises the King Lear story but also re-engages with Shakespeare’s themes of blindness, madness, and the exercise of power. There is little room for what might conventionally or comfortingly be seen as ‘poetry’ or ‘tragedy’. Bond’s version is remarkable for its brutally stilted language, for its extravagant and unremitting representation of violence, and for its messy, clinical dissection of human nastiness. When Lear witnesses the autopsy performed on the body of one of his dead daughters, he declares that he has never seen anything so beautiful: ‘If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I would have loved her.’ In Bond’s *Lear*, love, like political and moral clear-sightedness, always remains a might-have-been.

‘May 1968 was crucial’, Howard Brenton wrote in an article published in 1975, ‘It was a great watershed and directly afiected me ... [it] disinherited my generation in two ways. First it destroyed any remaining affection for official culture ... it also destroyed the notions of personal freedom, anarchist political action.’ For Brenton (b. 1942) the generation which matured in 1968, a generation ‘dreaming of a beautiful utopia’ was kicked, ‘kicked awake and not

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dead'. The new, radical drama of the 1970s and 1980s, with which Brenton, Trevor Griffiths (b. 1935), David Hare (b. 1947), and David Edgar (b. 1948) were prominently associated, was essentially the product of the assimilated political and cultural lessons of the Parisian *événements* of May 1968. For Edgar, writing in 1979, the implications of what had happened in Paris were just as plain: ‘Revolutionary politics was seen as being much less about the organisation of the working class at the point of production, and much more about the disruption of bourgeois ideology at the point of consumption.’ Despite largely token attempts to take a new type of polemic drama to the factory floor, and despite the development of small, experimental theatre-groups and workshops, much of the new dramatic energy of the Left was specifically, but no less provocatively, addressed to a relatively élite, bourgeois audience and performed in relatively conventional theatre buildings. In 1976, when Brenton had begun to establish himself at the National Theatre, he proclaimed that he would rather have his plays presented to 900 people ‘who may hate what I’m saying than to fifty of the converted’. Bourgeois ideology was indeed being challenged at its ‘point of consumption’, but,

given the generally imperturbable quality of London audiences in the period, it was only minimally disrupted. Much of the political drama of the 1970s and 1980s was founded on the assumptions that rotten capitalist society was on the brink of collapse and that there was a widening division between 'them' (the surprisingly elastic ruling class which hung on to its inherited power with increasing cynicism) and 'us' (the ruled, for whom proper enlightenment preceded liberation). This perception of a deeply divided society was accentuated in the spring of 1979 by the Conservative victory in the General Election and by the twelve-year Prime Ministerial regime of Margaret Thatcher. The early Thatcher years were remarkable for the uniformity of theatrical protest against Government policies, philosophies, and philistinism (albeit a protest often voiced in state subsidised theatres). As Hare's *The Great Exhibition* (1972) and Griffiths's *The Party* (1973) had already suggested, resistance to 'Thatcherism' went hand in hand with a sense of disillusion with the earlier compromises of the Labour Party and with the tendency to bickering and in-fighting amongst the British political Left.

Generally, the political drama of the period worked from a basis of Marxist theory informed by the example of 1968, but it rarely addressed problems beyond those of the local difficulties which beset post-imperial little-England. Much of it now seems distinctly time-locked. References to Ireland and to the troubles of Ulster were legion, but neither subtle nor especially direct (Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* of 1980 is a case in point). The world at large, and Europe in particular, tended to be glimpsed through carefully angled binoculars (as the somewhat conventional assumptions about the nature of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe in plays such as Edgar's *Maydays* of 1983 suggest). The implicit parallel between the manipulation of information in the Soviet Union and the corrupt control of the British press by an ambitious and

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unscrupulous newspaper tycoon in Hare and Brenton's collaborative play *Pravda: A Fleet Street Comedy* (produced at the National Theatre in 1985) is ultimately as slick as its criticism of capitalism is melodramatic. Hare's subtlety as a dramatist and a political analyst is more evident in *Plenty* (also produced at the National Theatre in 1978). *Plenty* (which was filmed in 1985) is a study of an intelligent and corrupted woman, a former undercover agent in wartime France who has pursued a career in advertising in post-war Britain ('In France ... I told such glittering lies. But where's the fun in lying for a living? ... Sold out. Is that the phrase?'). His interest in character, and in how characters shape and are shaped by the institutions to which they give their loyalty, also determined the often elusive texture of *Racing Demon*, an amused, almost Trollopian, study of how power is manipulated by the smug hierarchy of the Church of England. Trevor Griffiths, always adept at articulating debate, if rarely given to comedy, made one supremely successful and ambitious stab at exploring the political nature of humour in the play *Comedians* (1975). Although the play ingeniously outlines a socio-political thesis, it also allows for a singular variety of demonstration and exemplification. The retired comic, who has taught a class of aspiring comedians at a Manchester night school, devoutly insists that a true joke 'has more to do than release tension, it has to liberate the will and the desire, it has to change the situation', but his tuition is effectively subverted by the theatrical agent who favours those who support the status quo by retaining old racial and sexual stereotypes. The strength of Griffiths's play lies in its creative tensions and in its representation of a battle of wits in which no holds are barred.

Caryl Churchill's work has been equally rooted in opposition to a social system based on exploitation. Unlike her male counterparts, however, Churchill (b. 1938) has recognized an equation between the traditional power exercised by capitalists and the universal subjection of women. Her woman characters emerge as the victims of a culture which has regarded them merely as commodities or which has conditioned them to submit to masculine social rules. Her plays have systematically thrown down challenges either by reversing conventional representations of male and female behaviour (as in the Ortonian *Owners* of 1972) or by drawing disconcerting parallels between colonial and sexual oppression (as in *Cloud Nine* of 1979, with its ostensibly farcical shifts of gender and racial roles). In the multilayered *Top Girls* (1982) Churchill explores the superficial 'liberation' of women in the Thatcherite 1980s by contrasting the lifestyle of Marlene, a pushy, urban, woman executive, with that of her articulate, rural, stay-at-home sister. More pointedly, the first act of the play puts Marlene's supposed success in the context of the careers of other 'top girls', historical women who either became famous by usurping male roles (Pope Joan, and the Victorian explorer, Isabella Bird) or remained obedient to male-imposed stereotypes (the Japanese courtesan, Lady Nijo, and Patient Griselda). All except Dull Gret, a figure taken from a painting by Brueghel whom Brecht had apotheosized as the representative of peasant

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rebellion, have ultimately submitted and been sacrificed. The women rarely seem to understand how much their circumstances and experience overlap, though Gret, the uneducated rebel who later reappears as Marlene's rejected daughter, seems to offer an angrier, vaguer, but more genuinely radical kind of liberation. Churchill's cultivated

talent for documentary *pièces d'occasion* achieved considerable commercial success with the apocalyptic and, at the time highly topical, study of the effects of stock market deregulation in the City of London, *Serious Money* (1987). More remarkable was *Mad Forest: A Play from Romania* (1990), the outcome of her work with a group of British drama students in Bucharest in the immediate aftermath of the Romanian revolution. It is a powerful and demanding study of competing truths and half truths, perspectives and distortions, aspirations and disillusionments.

Probably the most intelligent, challenging, and humane of the political playwrights who established a reputation in the 1970s and 1980s is the most senior, Brian Friel (b. 1929), an Irishman who has written almost exclusively about and for Ireland. *Philadelphia, Here I Come* (1964), written after he had abandoned his chosen career as a schoolmaster, deals with a young man's decision to escape from the frustrations of village life in County Donegal by emigrating to America, but it does so by presenting a would-be emigrant's dilemma through two actors who separately represent his public and private consciousnesses. *The Freedom of the City* (produced in 1973) is set in a dangerous Londonderry in 1970 as British troops attempt to disperse Catholic civil-rights marchers, three of whom take temporary refuge in the assertively Unionist mayor's parlour in the Guildhall. This same Guildhall has figured prominently in Friel's subsequent career as the prime venue for the productions of Field Day, a small touring theatre company which has had the distinction not only of transferring productions to London theatres but, far more importantly, of winning financial and popular support from both sides of the Irish border. The Field Day company has premiered two of Friel's most remarkably revisionist plays, *Translations* (its première production in 1980) and *Making History* in 1988. *Translations* opens in a hedge-school in an Irish-speaking community in the 1830s. Although the play's medium is English, it is built around an implied clash of languages (English, Irish, Latin, Greek), around attempts to find a common means of communication, and around juxtapositions of cultures. On one level, the British Army surveyors, working on the Ordnance Survey map of Ireland, are intruders who impose their fudged and alien nomenclature on pre-existent ways of seeing and naming; on another, they are the representatives of disinterested scientific advance, jumping the West of Ireland into European conformity. The play's ramifications are relevant to virtually every territory over which tribes, aspirant colonizers, and recalcitrant natives have disputed and claimed as their unique possession. *Making History*, by contrast, explores how the writing of history imposes ordered arguments, narrative patterns, and convenient interpretation on essentially disordered and inconclusive material. Friel's questioning of assumptions, manners, and inherited prejudices is also

evident in his subtlest and densest play, *Dancing at Lughnasa* (premièred at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1990, and presented at the National Theatre in London later in the same year). The play's narrator, an adult looking back on and re-enacting his boyhood in a Donegal cottage, is faced with a series of confusions and half truths, but *Dancing at Lughnasa* as a whole deals with far more than the altered perceptions of maturity. Its supposed date, 1936, removes it from simply nationalist preoccupations, but places it squarely on the margins of other conflicts: a Spanish civil war which causes Irish Catholics to lean instinctively towards Franco, and Irish involvement in Catholic missionary work in Africa. The play does not simply question the inward-looking, self protecting values of a tightly knit family, it also exposes the ostensibly Catholicized culture of rural Ireland to direct parallels with despised 'pagan' Africa. Its delicacy, sympathy, and lexical richness render it comparable to the plays of Synge. Its multiple layers of reference, its political tensions, and its open-endedness render recent English attempts to write either about Ireland or about the rural working class patronizingly crude by comparison.

Broad as has been the theatrical appeal of most of the dramatists discussed so far, none has been able to match the popular success and the prolific output of Alan Ayckbourn (b. 1939), who in 1976 managed to have five plays running simultaneously in London. Ayckbourn's success has been based not simply on his sure ear for ordinary conversation or on his sharp observation of the whims, vices, irrationalities, and snobberies of precisely the kind of people who come to see his plays, but on his ability to amuse and provoke without giving offence. He has few ideological axes to grind. Some of his rapport with the public at large can also be put down to the fact that his plays have become central to the repertoires of the numerous middle-brow, amateur theatrical companies which operate in a long and honourable (if generally non-innovative) English tradition.

Despite Ayckbourn's prominence on both professional and amateur stages, his work, like that of many other living and dead dramatists, has reached a mass audience only through the medium of television. Though it has often been despised as a vulgar and largely commonplace form of entertainment and though it has sometimes been disparaged as a mere popularizer, British television has consistently attracted creative talent. Whereas the London stage was remarkable in the 1980s for adaptations of classic novels-notably Edgar's dramatization of *Nicholas Nickleby*, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1980, and the extraordinarily effective version of Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, adapted for the same company by Christopher Hampton (b. 1946) in 1987 — the tradition of high quality adaptation had been kept vigorously alive in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s both by the BBC and by commercial television companies. Though some critics have always deplored the idea of translating prose fiction into

drama, it ought to be conceded that modern television companies were only continuing practices actively espoused by the theatrical contemporaries of Scott and Dickens. New serialized versions

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of novels by Dickens (originally a serial novelist, of course) and Jane Austen were the classic staples of early television, their evident appeal to viewers encouraging now celebrated, sometimes lushly visualized, adaptations of works by Galsworthy (*The Forsyte Saga*, BBC 1969), Trollope, Graves, and Waugh. These versions have had an extraordinary success outside Britain, notably so in America and when they were shown on Soviet and Eastern European state television. Both the BBC and Independent television have proved enterprising patrons of more run-of the-mill, but none the less thoughtful and socially responsive, serials in the form of vastly popular, long-running soap-operas, the most established of which is Granada Television's *Coronation Street* (which began in December 1960).

It is, however, as a patron of new drama that British television has performed an invaluable service to working writers and to their prospective audiences. Although at one stage the BBC prudishly decided that Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was 'not suitable for a television audience' (the play was, however, transmitted by Granada), it later made honourable amends by commissioning new work by Beckett, Pinter, and Stoppard. Nevertheless, television's most solid contribution to artistic innovation has been through the evolution of a specific kind of drama shaped by the special resources of the medium. This innovation has been especially associated with Alan Bennett (b. 1934) and Dennis Potter (b. 1935). Bennett, who has also maintained an active involvement with the theatre (his play *The Madness of George III* was produced by the National Theatre in 1991), has been adept at working with particular actors and particular themes. His *An Englishman Abroad* (BBC 1983), a piquant re-creation of the brief encounter in Moscow of the British spy, Guy Burgess, with the actress Coral Browne (who appeared in the production), uses both small and large spaces, cramped rooms and suggestions of Moscow theatres, streets, and churches. His series of monologues, *Talking Heads* (BBC 1990), however, concentrated on intimacy, on suggestive camera angles, and, above all, on physiognomies, glances, and revelatory turns of phrase. Potter is far more exclusively associated with television. His *Alice*, a version of Lewis Carroll's stories, was the first of a series of relatively shocking 'Wednesday Plays' broadcast by the BBC from December 1962, and his paired dramas about the career of an upwardly mobile Member of Parliament (*Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton* and *Stand Up for Nigel Barton*, both 1965) suggested a quite new, far from deferential response to Establishment politics. Potter's later works — notably the six-part drama *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), the intense evocation of childhood disaster (in which the children's parts were played by ungainly adults), *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979), and the supremely ingenious intermixture of music, fantasy, sex, crime, and physical disease, *The Singing Detective* (1989) — suggest how profoundly television has been able to contribute to a still developing dramatic literature.

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Fin de siècle: Some Notes of Late-Century Fiction

'Each moment seems more urgent than all preceding ones', the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge wrote in his study *The Thirties* (1940), 'each generation of men are convinced that their difficulties and achievements are unparalleled'. It would be presumptuous to attempt to draw any firm or precise conclusions about the state of literature in the last decade of the twentieth century. Assuming the privilege of a historian, it is possible to draw loose parallels, not necessarily with the 1930s, but with two other decades, the closing years of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and thereby to observe that it would probably be foolish to attempt to be either categorical or prophetic. Our present, as Muggeridge observed, makes us myopic. How literature might have developed twenty years hence is the business of the writers who will make it develop, not of prescriptive critics. In common with the 1790s and the 1890s, the 1990s looks set to be a decade of uncertainties and redefinitions, of false starts, blind alleys, reiterations, and tired reaffirmations. There are certain periods (the 1930s was one) when the *Zeitgeist* declares itself; there are many others when contemporaries signally miss the point about what really matters to later generations in how they thought, acted, and wrote. If it was clear enough to the men and women of the 1790s that the period would have to come to terms with the political implications of the French Revolution, relatively few contemporary British critics and readers clearly identified what seem to us to be the leading literary spirits of the time. The British 1890s were dominated by already established writers, but, with the exception of W. B. Yeats, very few of the new and supposedly avant garde younger writers of the decade did in fact determine how the Modernist revolution of the early twentieth century would be realized or even influenced the development of the non-Modernist Edwardian novel. What seem to be leading cultural lines lead nowhere. What strikes some observers as conservative may in fact be radical. What looks like a

byway may be a high road. What high-minded critics insist is a contemporary canon of excellence, formed by particular perceptions of unparalleled 'difficulties and achievements', is nearly always wrong.

What is certain is that the literature of the 1990s lacks the tutelary presence of a major writer or major writers. British writing now seems to be still living off the accrued fat of the twentieth-century past. It has little of the originality and intellectual bite of the recent work that has emerged, often belatedly, from South America and the former Communist states of Eastern Europe. It also seems to be taking its time in assimilating the import of the substantial changes that have taken place in the world since the end of the Cold War, since the fragmentation of the Soviet Empire and its former satellites, and since the resurgence of Islam and the redefinitions of Orthodox and Catholic Europe. It may have taken post-colonialism in its politically correct stride and it may have awkwardly flirted with the notion of 'multiculturalism', but it will have to learn

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the true significance of other histories and other ways of telling stories. Despite the United Kingdom's prominent place in the European Community and despite the significance of the English language both to Europe and to the world as a whole, English literature still shows a marked tendency to be insular and to dwell on a narrow view of the past. Although it likes playing games with narrative, and with the idea of narrative, it has relatively few grand ideas and rather fewer epic pretensions. As old assumptions go, as old ideologies turn rancid, as old borders are superseded, as some nations tear themselves apart or as others attempt to live in unprecedented intimacy with one another, so a future English literature might respond with new forms, sounds, subjects, and preoccupations. But then it might not. Stuffy, smug little-Englandism would, however, seem unlikely to be capable of nourishing the embryonic writing of the twenty-first century.

In the early 1990s the novel remains the most accessible, the most discussed, and the most sponsored literary form. Literary prizes, such as the annual Booker prize, founded in 1969 on the model of the French Prix Goncourt, have helped to stimulate an interest in new fiction which cannot be anything but healthy (even though a number of the prize novels have not fully justified the temporary prestige they acquired). Judging from the work of new, or newish, novelists over the past fifteen years, the forms and subjects of the late twentieth-century novel remain plural but conservative despite, or perhaps because of, the plethora of contemporary narrative theory. What some critics see as 'post-Modernism' has entailed both a return to the basic challenges posed by the pioneer experimentalists of the early century, and, by extension, a degree of subversion of the very assumptions upon which both traditional and early-Modernist fictional forms were based. The novel has properly reflected 'modernity', the changes in how we think, move, and have our modern being, and the fragmentation and chaos of contemporary life. It has also had to readapt the Modernist insistence on new kinds of meaning.

The 'campus fiction' of the 1970s and 1980s may still prove to have life in it. These novels, set in universities and colleges or dealing with wayward academics let loose on the wider world, both reflected American models and developed the line established in British fiction by Larkin's *Jill* (1946). Larkin was the dedicatee of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), a comic account of a would-be radical lecturer's floundering attempts at resistance to the culture of a provincial university, a culture which proves itself to be both earnestly pretentious and complacent. In *One Fat Englishman* (1963) Amis turned to a British visitor's experiences in an American college. While 'lucky' Jim Dixon had been a typical enough 'angry young man' and the portly Roger Micheldene the model of the kind of Englishman who grimly kicks against the pricks of the American way of life, in the hands of three slightly less manic writers the 'campus novel' of the 1970s served to reflect the academic ambitions and the academic tensions of the rapidly expanding world of higher education in the period. Tom Sharpe (b. 1928) proved to be the most vivacious *farceur* amongst

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them, extravagantly tripping up the good intentions of a technical college lecturer in *Wilt* (1976) and its sequels *The Wilt Alternative* (1979) and *Wilton High* (1985) and literally exploding the unresolved frictions within a corrupt Cambridge college and its members in *Porterhouse Blue* (1974). Malcolm Bradbury (b. 1932) has shown himself to be a writer who is less concerned with fads and diversions than with façades and distortions. Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975) is a study of a smugly radical sociologist at a new university, one who has published books which are 'in consort with the times' and whose slickly packaged analyses are seen as symptomatic of what often passed for social criticism in the years following 1968 (što understand [his radical transformation], Howard, always a keen explainer, always explains, you need to know a little Marx, a little Freud, and a little social history'). The texture of Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange* (1983) is less abrasive. The book, together with its witty fellow-traveller, the spoof guide book *Why Come to Slaka* (1986), offers a telling account of the profound ambiguities, inconveniences and mendacities of travelling in the unreconstructed Communist east of Europe before the fall of the Berlin wall. Bradbury's novel makes

extensive and clever play with ideas of disparity and exchange (his central character, Petworth, on a British Council lecture tour in 'Slaka', is 'an expert on real, imaginary and symbolic exchanges among skin-bound organisms working on the linguistic interface, which is what linguists call you and me'). When one persistent Slakan asks Petworth if he knows a 'campus-writer Brodge' most of Bradbury's readers would have recognized the distortion as a yoking together of his own name with that of a fellow professor of literature, David Lodge (b. 1935). Lodge's novels *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (1975), *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984), and *Nice Work* (1988) are all loosely centred on the University of Rummidge. Where the first two novels deal with academic misunderstanding and intellectual crossed wires, the third explores the non-communication between representatives of Rummidge's university Arts faculty and its city's industry. Nevertheless, all three novels are self consciously literary in the sense that they seek both to explore the implications of literary theory and to prod inherited narrative shapes into new life. Where *Small World* reinvigorates mediaeval concepts of pilgrimage and quest (shooting them through with a final Wildean contrivance), *Nice Work* takes up the themes and compromises of Gaskell's *North and South* and genially allows characters alienated by circumstances and prejudices to formulate a new basis for understanding. *Nice Work* deals with a British university suffering from cuts in its resources and staggering under the burden of the Benthamite ethics and calibrations imposed on it by central government. It is just possible that those same insistent economic, pedagogic, and structural reforms, which continued into the late 1980s and 1990s, have served irrevocably to change the once relatively leisurely and benign (though not always tolerant) culture of academe. As with the very phenomenon of academics who find sufficient time to write fiction, so the 'campus novel' may strike future readers as a quaintly telling period piece.

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Broadly speaking, other recent British fiction can be seen as having explored four particular areas of interest: it has, sometimes outrageously, continued the development of the well-established Gothic tradition; it has sought a newly distinct feminist expression; it has tried out new varieties of historical writing; and it has begun to widen its horizons to include writers and subjects stemming from the old colonial Empire and from a wider world. All four areas overlap, interweave, and inform one another. The new Gothic, so brilliantly engineered to suit her feminist ends by Angela Carter, has, in their very individual ways, also been taken up by two distinctly urban, but distinctly dissimilar, writers-Ian McEwan (b. 1948) and Alasdair Gray (b. 1934). McEwan's cultivatedly precise narrative, *The Cement Garden* (1978), is the account of the private disposal of a corpse under domestic cement, a cement which reflects the drab uniformity of a London of concrete tower blocks standing 'on wide aprons of cracked asphalt where weeds were pushing through'. It established a disconcerting but chaste narrative manner on which McEwan has subsequently built in his *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) and *Black Dogs* (1992). Gray's two most ambitious novels, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) and *Poor Things* (1992), fantastically re-imagine Glasgow. Both novels draw from the English and Scots Gothic traditions, the former acknowledging its multiple debts to the Modernists, the latter elaborately replaying themes from Mary Shelley and James Hogg against a backdrop of Scottish medicine and art. The flair of both writers is occasionally reflected in the overstated, frenetic, cosmopolitan urban world of Martin Amis (b. 1949), the author of the ambitious *Money: A Suicide Note* (1986) and *London Fields* (1989).

Jeanette Winterson (b. 1959) began her career in 1985 with *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, a witty, bitingly perceptive study of a provincial childhood passed within the narrow, women-dominated confines of an evangelical Christian sect. It was also an avowedly lesbian novel of escape into a more open kind of gynocentrism. She has since experimented with two fantastic, quasi-historical novels, *The Passion* (1987) and *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), both of which fuse elements of the male and the female, the past and the present, and with a non-gender-specific love-story *Written on the Body* (1992), an exploration of a loved woman's body which combines an intense, would-be poetic passion with clinical exactitude. *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) and *Possession* (1990), the two most substantial and demanding novels of A(ntonia) S(usan) Byatt (b. 1936) also play with shifting perceptions of the past and the present and with the interrelationship of verse and prose. *The Virgin in the Garden* is set in 1953, the year of the coronation of Elizabeth II, and around the performance of a celebratory verse-drama concerned with the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. *Possession* alternates accounts of the modern researches of two young academics with a vivid, gently assembled, reconstruction of the once secret love-affair of the objects of their academic research, two Victorian poets. Byatt's imitations of the work of these imagined poets (loosely based, we suppose, on Robert Browning and Christina Rossetti) constitute one of the most sophisticated achievements of recent fiction.

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A similar meticulous ingenuity is evident in Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* (1989). Palliser (b. 1945) has scrupulously re-created a Victorian narrative, shaping it according to a precise fivefold pattern. In some senses it is a connoisseur's book, but like Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (which it resembles to some degree) it has also

appealed broadly to *aficionados* of the mystery story and to unreconstructed admirers of tidy and resolved plots. The new historical novel, of which *The Quincunx* is a relatively conservative example, has also flourished in the hands of Peter Ackroyd (b. 1949), the author of, amongst other novels, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983), *Hawksmoor* (1985), and *Chatterton* (1987), and of biographies of T. S. Eliot (1984) and Dickens (1990). Ackroyd has proved a particularly impressive ventriloquist, echoing the inflexions of the dying Wilde in the earlier novel and imagining confessional voices of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the two later ones. The finest of the three, *Hawksmoor*, juxtaposes then and now, exploring the career of a murderously necromantic church architect of the 1690s (who is *not* called Hawksmoor, despite his passing resemblance to the real, and innocent, architect of that name) and the latter-day detective work of a policeman (who *is* called Hawksmoor). A quite different blend of ingenuity, literary detective work, and biographical reconstruction is evident in Julian Barnes's wry search for an elusive fellow-novelist in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984). Barnes (b. 1946) plays with his careful, but somewhat bemused, narrator's obsession with fact as much as he delightfully toys with the fictional form that evolves under Flaubert's indirect tutelage ('I thought of writing books myself once. I had the ideas; I even made notes. But I was a doctor, married with children. You can only do one thing well: Flaubert knew that ... The unwritten books? They aren't a cause for resentment. There are too many books already. Besides, I remember the end of *L'Education sentimentale* ...'). Graham Swift's perspective in his subtle, thoughtful novel, *Waterland* (1983), is less drawn out but quite as decidedly historical. Swift's learnedly digressive narrator is a history teacher in a London school threatened with the extinction of his subject by a 'progressive' headmaster. He is also the reassembler of an agonized private and familial past, a past rooted in the East Anglian fens. There is no escaping existence, he writes, 'even if we miss the grand repertoire of history, we yet imitate it in miniature and endorse, in miniature, its longing for presence, for feature, for purpose, for content'. For Swift (b. 1949) historic occasions conspire and combine just as surely as his ubiquitous watercourses feed into one another and carry the flotsam of evidence down towards the sea.

The history of the fragmented, and still fragmenting, former British Empire has held a notable fascination for other recent novelists. Victorian India has in particular attracted the restorer of the boys' adventure story for adult readers, George Macdonald Fraser (b. 1925). Three of the nine raffish volumes of the so-called 'Flashman Papers', dealing with the supposed career of the ex-villain of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (the first of which appeared in 1969; the latest in 1990), have dealt variously with the Afghan War of 1842, with the British

acquisition of the Punjab, and with the Mutiny of 1857. Far less provocatively schoolboyish is J(ames) G(ordan) Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), an account of British common sense, British eccentricity, and British arrogance in a besieged and crumbling Residency during the Mutiny. Farrell (1935-79) offers a chronicle of events as seen from the perspective of the rulers and not the rebels, but it allows the flickering debates of its characters to illuminate the 'perplexing' question of the imperial mission and of British pretensions to cultural superiority. 'Things are not yet perfect, of course', Farrell's Collector sighs. 'All the same, I should go so far as to say that in the long run a superior civilization such as ours is irresistable. By combining our advances in science and in morality we have so obviously found the best way of doing things. Truth cannot be resisted!' But, as a round shot hits the roof, he is obliged to add: 'Er, that's to say, not successfully.' Farrell's flailing description of a peculiarly Anglican religious controversy in Victorian Simla in his unfinished *The Hill Station* (1981) has little of the verve of his earlier novel. The ultimate failures of British rule in and, more significantly, of British attitudes to, India had earlier been yet more impressively explored in Paul Scott's four novels known collectively as the 'Raj Quartet' (*The Jewel in the Crown* of 1966, *The Day of the Scorpion* of 1968, *The Towers of Silence* of 1971, and *A Division of the Spoils* of 1975). Scott (1920-78) deals broadly with India during the Second World War and with its uneasy progress towards independence and partition, but his concentration on the complex, interconnecting careers of certain key characters also allows him gradually to establish an elaborate jigsaw, whose logic is only fully revealed once the picture is completed in the concluding volume. Scott's last novel, *Staying On* (1977), deals with two ageing minor characters from the earlier sequence, both of them social misfits, who have decided to eke out a living on an army pension and who are obliged to adjust to the circumstances of the (to them) disconcertingly new, independent India.

Quite the most striking and inventive single novel to discuss India's transition from Raj to Republic is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Rushdie, born of a Muslim family in Bombay in 1947 and educated in England, deals phantasmagorically with a rising generation of Indians, born as midnight on 15 August 1947 ushers in independence and with it a new era of communal tension. Rushdie's central character, Saleem Sinai, is 'handcuffed to history', peculiarly endowed with a series of accentuated perceptions which allow him to explore his family's and his nation's twentieth-century destiny. 'Reality is a question of perspective', he writes, 'the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems-but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible.' Rushdie's own 'handcuffing' to history rendered him an especially effective, sensitive, and observant commentator on India for non-Indian readers. As his subsequent fiction has shown, however, he has found himself

handcuffed in a very different way. Rushdie is, however, far from alone in his awareness of how a non-European cultural awareness can shift the sometimes narrow temporal and intellectual perspectives of

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European, and specifically British, literature. Timothy Mo, born in Hong Kong in 1950 of an English mother and a Cantonese father, has deftly described the closed, protective, alienated, and opportunistic society of the London Chinese in *Sour Sweet* (1983). More ambitiously, in the panoramic *An Insular Possession* (1986), he has attempted to explore the beginnings of Hong Kong as a British trading colony following the so-called 'Opium War' of 1839-42. Quite distinct, and far less easily characterized as 'post-colonial', is the work of the Japanese-born Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954) whose novel *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) is a delicate fictional study of an ageing painter's awareness of, and detachment from, the political and cultural development of twentieth-century Japan. When Ishiguro writes directly about Britain, as he does in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), he manages to ask equally delicate, carefully framed, but none the less demanding cultural questions.

In speaking of the British and Irish literature of the past forty-five years it is clear that it remains dominated by the historical and social changes wrought by the Second World War and by the period of external decolonization and internal reconsideration that followed. If one single decade seemed at the time to matter more than any other, it was, of course, the 1960s. Whether or not that decade will in future seem remarkable for the literature it produced, rather than simply for the changes in popular culture and popular awareness that it witnessed, will be for the future to judge. Its political events and non-events are already part of history. It is, however, with one quintessentially 1960s voice that it seems appropriate to end. It also seems proper to let one unequivocally American voice comment on a period in which an English-speaking American culture has seemed to be more dominant than that emanating from the English-speaking off shore islands of Europe. But, as Bob Dylan insists in his lyric 'The Times They Are A-Changin'', all judgements on who and what we are at present must remain relative:

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'.
For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'.

[end of Chapter 10]

[Andrew SANDERS: *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994]

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CHRONOLOGY

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
450	Traditional date of the coming of the 'Saxons' to England		
597	St Augustine's mission arrives in Kent		
		c. 720	Lindisfarne Gsopels
		731	Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*
735	Death of Bede		

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
793	First Viking raid; Sacking of Lindisfarne		
796	Death of Offa of Mercia		
871	Alfred becomes King of Wessex		
899	Death of Alfred		
960	Dunstan appointed Archbishop of Canterbury		
991	The Battle of Maldon		
		992	Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies*
		c. 1000	The four major surviving manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon poetry: Vercelli, Exeter, Cædmon, and *Beowulf* MSS
1042	Accession of Edward the Confessor		
1066	Death of Edward the Confessor; Harold succeeds to the throne; defeat of Harold Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge; Battle of Hastings; William of Normandy becomes King of England		
1070	Lanfranc appointed Archbishop of Canterbury		
1086	Domesday Book		
		c. 1138	Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*
1152	Marriage of future Henry II to Eleanor of Aquitaine		
1154	Accession of Henry II		
1169	Norman Barons invade Ireland		
1170	Murder of Becket		
		1184-6	Andreas Capellanus, *De amore*
		c. 1188	Gervase, *History of Canterbury*
1189	Death of Henry II		
		c. 1200	*The Owl and the Nightingale*; LaZamon, *Brut*; Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle*
1204	Loss of Normandy		
1215	Magna Carta		
		c. 1220	*Ancrene Riwle*
1221-4	Arrival of Dominican and Franciscan friars in England		
		c. 1225	*King Horn*
		c. 1275	Guillaume de Lorris, *Roman de la rose*
1314	Battle of Bannockburn		
1327	Accession of Edward III		
1337	Beginning of Hundred Years War		
c. 1344	Birth of Chaucer		
1346	Battle of Crécy		
1348	First occurrence of the Black Death in England		
		c. 1370	Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*
1377	Death of Edward III; accession of Richard II	*c*. 1377	Langland, *Piers Plowman* (B Text)
1381	The Peasants' Revolt		
1384	Death of Wyclif		
		c. 1385	Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*
		c. 1387	Chaucer begins *The Canterbury Tales*
		1390	Gower, *Confessio Amantis*
1394	Birth of Charles d'Orléans and James I of Scotland		

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
1399	Deposition of Richard II; accession of Henry IV		
1400	Death of Chaucer; murder of Richard II	*c*. 1400	Sole surviving MS of *Sir Gawain*, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*
1408	Death of Gower		
		1411-12	Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*
1413	Death of Henry IV; accession of Henry V		
1415	Battle of Agincourt		
1422	Death of Henry V; accession of the infant Henry VI		
1426	Death of Hoccleve		
		1431-8	Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*
		c. 1435	James Stewart, *The Kingis Quair*
1449	Death of Lydgate		
1453	Battle of Castillon; loss of last English possessions in France		
1455	First battle in the Wars of the Roses		
1461	Deposition of Henry VI; Edward IV proclaimed king		
1470-1	Restoration of Henry VI		
1471	Murder of Henry VI; Edward IV regains throne		
		1473-4	Caxton, *History of Troy*, the first book printed in English
1483	Death of Edward IV; accession of presumed murder of Edward V; accession of Richard III		
1485	Richard III killed at Battle of Bosworth; accession of Henry VII	1485	Malory, *Morte Darthur*
1492-1504	Voyages of Columbus		
		c. 1500	Skelton, *Bouge of Court*
		c. 1504	Skelton, *Philip Sparrow*
1504	Colet made Dean of St Paul's		
1509	Death of Henry VII; accession of Henry VIII		
1513	Battle of Flodden	1513	Douglas, translation of *Aeneid*
		1516	More, *Utopia*; Skelton, *Magnificence*
1517	Luther publishes 95 theses at Wittenberg		
1520	Field of Cloth of Gold		
1521	Henry VIII given the title 'Defender of the Faith' by the Pope		
		1523	Skelton, *Garlande of Laurell*
1529	Fall of Wolsey; rise of Thomas Cromwell; More becomes Lord Chancellor		
		1531	Elyot, *Boke named the Governour*
1533	Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury; Henry VIII divorces Catherine of Aragon and marries Anne Boleyn		
1534	Abolition of Pope's authority in England; Henry, 'Head' of Church of England		
1535	Thomas More executed		
1536	Anne Boleyn executed; William Tyndale burned in the Netherlands; union of England and Wales		
1536-9	Dissolution of the Monasteries		
1540	Institution of the Society of Jesus; fall and		

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
	execution of Thomas Cromwell		
1545	Council of Trent opens		
1547	Death of Henry VIII; accession of Edward VI		
1549	Act of Uniformity	1549	Book of Common Prayer
1553	Death of Edward VI; accession of Mary		
1555-6	Execution of Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer		
		1557	Tottel's edition of *Songes and Sonettes* ('Tottel's Miscellany'); Surrey's translation of *Aeneid*, II and IV
1558	Loss of Calais; death of Mary; accession of Elizabeth I		
		1560	'Geneva' Bible
		1561	Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *The Courtyer*
		1563	Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*
		1568	Bishops' Bible
1570	Excommunication of Elizabeth	1570	Ascham, *The Scholemaster*
1571	Battle of Lepanto		
1577	Drake begins his circumnavigation	1577	Sidney, 'Old' *Arcadia*; Holinshed, *Chronicles*
		1578	Lyly, *Euphues*
		1579	Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender*
		1581-6	Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (1581-3); *Defence of Poesie* (*c*. 1582); 'New' *Arcadia*
1586	Death of Sidney at Zutphen		
1587	Execution of Mary Queen of Scots; opening of Rose Theatre	1587	Camden, *Britannia*
1588	Defeat of Spanish Armada	1588-92	Shakespeare's early plays including *1, 2, 3 Henry VI, Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labour's Lost, Richard III*
		1589	Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*
		1590	Spenser, *Faerie Queene* (I-III); Lodge, *Rosalynde*
		1592	Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*; Daniel, *Delia*
		1593	Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*; Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*; Drayton, *Idea*; Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (I-IV)
		1594	Shakespeare, *Sonnets*
		1594-1600	Shakespeare, plays including *Midsummer Night's Dream; 1, 2 Henry IV; As You Like It; Merry Wives of Windsor; Julius Caesar*
		1595	Daniel, *Civil Wars* (I-IV); Spenser, *Amoretti; Epithalamion*
		1596	Spenser, *Faerie Queene* (I-IV); Davies, *Orchestra*
		1597	Bacon, *Essays*
		1598	Chapman-Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*; Stow, *Survey of London*; Jonson, first version of *Everyman in His Humour*
1599	Globe Theatre opened	1599	Daniel, *Poetical Essays*; Nashe, *Lenten Stuffe*
1601	Essex rebellion	1601-4	Shakespeare plays including *Hamlet*,

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
			Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure
1603	Death of Elizabeth; acceession of James VI as James I; union of the crowns of England and Scotland	1603	Jonson, *Sejanus*
		1604-8	Shakespeare plays including *Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus*
1605	Gunpowder plot; Jonson's first court masque with Inigo Jones	1605	Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*
		1608-13	Shakespeare's last plays including *Tempest, Winter's Tale, Henry VIII*
		1611	'Authorized' version of Bible
1613	Globe Theatre burned	*c*. 1613	Webster, *The White Devil*
1616	Death of Shakespeare	1616	Ben Jonson, *Works*
1618	Execution of Raleigh; beginning of Thirty Years War		
1620	Pilgrim Fathers sail for America		
1621	Donne appointed Dean of St Paul's	1621	Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*; Mary Wroth, *Urania*
		1622	Middleton, *The Changeling*
		1623	First Folio of Shakespeare
1625	Death of James I; accession of Charles I	1625	*Purchas his Pilgrimes*
1629	Charles I begins personal rule with dissolution of Parliament	1629	Andrewes, *XCVI Sermons*
1633	Laud appointed Archbishop of Canterbury	1633	Donne, *Poems*; Herbert, *The Temple*; Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*
		1634	Milton, *Comus* performed
		1635	Quarles, *Emblems*
		1637	Milton, *Lycidas*
1640	Long Parliament summoned		
1642	King attempts to arrest the five members; raises royal standard at Nottingham beginning Civil War; theatres closed by order of Parliament		
1644	Victory of Parliamentary Army at Marston Moor	1644	Milton, *Areopagitica*
1645	Execution of Laud; victory of Parliamentary Army at Naseby		
1646	Charles surrenders to Scots	1646	Crashoaw, *Steps to the Temple*
1647	Putney debates	1647	Cowley, *The Mistress*
		1648	Herrick, *Hesperides*
1649	Trial and execution of Charles I	1649	Lovelace, *Lucasta*
1649-52	Cromwell's campaigns in Ireland and Scotland		
		1650	Marvell, 'An Horation Ode'; Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans*
		1651	Hobbes, *Leviathan*
1653	Cromwell becomes Lord Protector		
		1656	Harrington, *Oceana*
1658	Death of Cromwell; Richard Cromwell succeeds his father		
1659	Richard Cromwell overthrown by army; recall of Rump Parliament		
1660	Restoration of Charles II; re-opening of theatres	1660	Dryden, *Astraea Redux*; Pepys begins his diary

EVENTS	LITERARY WORKS
1662 Restoration of Church of England and final revision of Book of Common Prayer; Royal Society receives its charter	
	1664 Katherine Philips, *Poems*
1665 Plague in London	
1666 City of London destroyed by the Great Fire	
	1667 Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis*; Milton, *Paradise Lost*
	1671 Milton, *Paradise Regain'd*
	1675 Rochester, 'A Satyre agqainst Mankind'; Wycherley, *The Country Wife*
	1677 Dryden, *All for Love*; Behn, *The Rover*
	1678 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Part I)
	1680 Rochester, *Poems*
1681 Lord Shaftesbury tried for High Treason: acquitted	1681 Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems* (posthumously published); Dryden, *Absalom & Achitophel*
1685 Death of Charles II; accession of James II; Duke of Monmouth's rebellion crushed at Sedgemoor	
	1687 Newton, *Principia*
1688 'Glorious Revolution'' James II flees; William III and Mary II succeed	
	1690 Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
1694 Death of Mary	
	1695 Congreve, *Love for Love*
	1700 Congreve, *The Way of the World*
1701 War of Spanish succession; Great Britain allied against France	
1702 Death of William III; accession of Anne	1702-3 Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*
1704 Marlborough's victory at Blenheim	1704 Swift, *The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub* Farquhar, *The Recruiting Officer*
1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland	1707 Farquhar, *The Beaux Stratagem*
	1709 Steele (and others), *The Tatler*
	1711 Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*
	1711-12 *The Spectator*
	1712 Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*
1713 Peace of Utrecht ends War of Spanish Succession	1713 Anne Finch, *Miscellany Poems*
1714 Death of Anne; George I, Elector of Hanover, succeeds	
1715 Jacobite Rebellion in favour of James Edward (the 'Old Pretender')	
	1717 Pope, *Works*
	1719 Defoe, *Robison Crusoe*
1721 Walpole forms ministry	
	1722 Defoe, *Moll Flanders* and *Journal of the Plague Year*
	1726 Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*; Thomson, *Winter*
1727 Death of George I; accession of George II; Walpole retains power; death of Newton	
	1728 Gay, *Beggars Opera*; Pope, *Dunciad* (1st

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
			version)
		1733	Pope, *Essay on Man*
		1738	Johnson, *London*
		1739	Charles Wesley, first collection of hymns
1740	War of Austrian Succession begins	1740	Richardson, *Pamela*
1742	Fall of Walpole	1742	Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*
		1743	Pope, *The Dunciad* (final version)
		1744	Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*
1745	Second Jacobite Rebellion led by Charles Edward (the 'Young Pretender')		
		1747-9	Richardson, *Clarissa*
1748	Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle ends War of Austrian Succession	1748	Smollett, *Roderick Random*
		1749	Fielding, *Tom Jones*
		1750-2	Johson, *The Rambler*
		1751	Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle*
		1752	Lennox, *The Female Quixote*
		1754	Richardson, *Grandison*
		1755	Johnson, *Dictionary*
1756	Beginning of Seven Years War		
1757	Conquest of India begins under General Clive	1757	Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*
1759	Wolfe takes Quebec	1759	Johson, *Rasselas*
		1759-67	Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*
1760	Death of George II; accession of George III		
1763	Peace of Paris ends Seven Years War; British gains in India and North America		
		1764	Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*
		1765	Percy, *Reliques*
		1766	Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*
		1768	Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*
1770	Lord North, Prime Minister; suicide of Chatterton	1776-88	Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
		1777	Sheridan, *School for Scandal*; Reeve, *The Old English Baron*
		1778	Burney, *Evelina*
		1779-81	Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*
1780	Gordon Riots		
1781	Breitish forces defeated by Americans at Yorktown	1781	Sheridan, *The Critic*
1783	Independence of American Colonies recognized by Peace of Paris		
1784	James Watt invents the steam engine		
1785	Edmund Cartwright invents the power loom	1785	Cowper, *The Task*
		1786	Beckford, *Vathek*; Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*
1787	Association for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded		
		1788	Wollstonecraft, *Mary*
1789	French Revolution; Fall of Bastille; Declaration of the Rights of Man	1789	Blake, *Songs of Innocence*
		1790	Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
1791	Flight of Louis XVI	1791	Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*; Paine, *The Rights of Man* (Part I)
1792	Siege of Tuileries; September Massacres	1792	Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; Holcroft, *Anna St Ives*
1793	Execution of Louis XVI; Reign of Terror; Britain and France at war	1793	Blake, *America*; Godwin, *Political Justice*; Smith, *The Old Manor House*
1794	Executions of Danton and Robespierre; Habeas Corpus Act suspended in Britain; Holcroft acquitted of treason charge	1794	Blake, *Songs of Experience*; Godwin, *Caleb Williams*; Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*; Holcroft, *Hugh Trevor*
1795	Directory established in France; Speenhamland system of poor relief		
1796	Bonaparte's Italian campaign	1796	Burney, *Camilla*; Bage, *Hermsprong*; Lewis, *The Monk*
1798	Nelson's victory at Battle of the Nile; rebellion in Ireland	1798	Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*; Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*
1799	Napoleon, First Consul		
1800	Act of Union with Ireland	1800	Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*
1801	Union of British and Irish Parliaments; Habeas Corpus Act again suspended		
1802	Peace of Amiens	1802	Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*; foundation of the *Edinburgh Review*; Cobbett begins his *Political Register*
1803	Renewal of war against France		
1804	Napoleon, Emperor of France	1804	Blake, *Milton*
1805	Nelson's victory at Trafalgar	1805	Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*; Wordsworth at work on a version of *The Prelude*
1807	Abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire	1807	Wordsworth, *Poems*
1808	Peninsular War begins	1808	Scott, Marmion; Hunt, The Examiner
		1809	Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*; foundation of the Quarterly Review
		1810	Crabbe, *The Borough*; Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*
1811	Prince of Wales becomes Regent; Luddite riots	1811	Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*
1812	French retreat from Moscow	1812	Crabbe, *Tales*; Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; Edgeworth, *The Absentee*
		1813	Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*; Shelley, *Queen Mab*
1814	Abdication of Napoleon; restoration of Louis XVIII; Stephenson's steam locomotive	1814	Wordsworth, *The Excursion*; Byron, *The Corsair*; Austen, *Mansfield Park*; Scott, *Waverley*; Burney, *The Wanderer*
1815	Battle of Waterloo	1815	Wordsworth, *Poems*; Scott, *Guy Mannering*
		1816	Coleridge, *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*; Shelley, *Alastor*; Austen, *Emma*; Scott, *The Antiquary* and *Old Mortality*; Peacock, *Headlong Hall*
1817	Habeas Corpus Act suspended	1817	Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*; Byron, *Manfred*; Keats, *Poems*; Hazlitt, *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*; foundation of *Blackwood's Edinburgh*

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
			Magazine
1818	Habeas Corpus restored	1818	Austen, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*; Keats, *Endymion*; Scott, *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of Midlothian*; Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*; Ferrier, *Marriage*
1819	Peterloo massacre	1819	Crabbe, *Tales of the Hall*; Byron, *Don Juan*; Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*
1820	Death of George III; accession of George IV	1820	Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*; Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*; Clare, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life*; Scott, *Ivanhoe*; Lamb, *Essays of Elia* begun; Cobbett, *Rural Rides* begun; Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*
1821	Greek War of Independence	1821	Byron, *Cain*; Shelley, *Adonais*; Clare, *The Village Minstrel*; De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; Galt, *Annals of the Parish*
		1822	Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sketches*; Byron, *The Vision of Judgement*; Galt, *The Entail*
1824	National Gallery opened; death of Byron in Greece	1824	Scott, *Redgauntlet*; Hogg, *Private Confessions of a Justified Sinner*; foundation of the *Westminster Review*
1825	Financial crisis; opening of Stockton and Darlington Railway	1825	Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*; publication of Pepys's diary
		1827	Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*; Keble, *The Christian Year*
1828	Repeal of Test and Corporation Acts		
1829	Catholic Emancipation Act		
1830	Death of George IV; accession of William IV; opening of Manchester and Liverpool railway	1830	Tennyson, Poems, *Chiefly Lyrical*
1831	Unsuccessful introduction of Reform Bills; riots in Bristol and elsewhere		
1832	Reform Act; Death of Scott	1832	Tennyson, *Poems* (dated 1833)
1833	Abolition of Slavery; Keble's Assize sermon	1833	Carlyle, Sartor Resartus
1834	New Poor Law; burning of Houses of Parliament; Fox Talbot's first photograph		
1835	Municipal Reform Act	1835	Browning, *Paraclesus*
		1836	Dickens, *Sketches by 'Boz'* and the first number of *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7)
1837	Death of William IV; accession of Victoria	1837	Carlyle, *The French Revolution*; Dickens, *Oliver Twist*
1838	'People's Charter' published; London-Birmingham Railway opened	1838	Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*
1839	Penny Postage Act	1839	Carlyle, *Chartism*
1840	Opium War; new Houses of Parliament begun; first presentation of People's Charter to Parliament	1840	Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* (1840-1); Browning, *Sordello*
		1841	Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*; Newman, *Tract XC*; foundation of *Punch*
1842	Chartist riots; second presentation of Charter to Parliament; Copyright Act	1842	Tennyson, *Poems*; Browning, *Dramatic Lyrics*
1843	Theatre Regulation Bill (monopoly removed	1843	Macaulay, *Essays*; Carlyle, *Past and*

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
	from Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres)		*Present*; Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (vol. I); Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*
1844	Royal Commission on Health in Towns	1844	Disraeli, *Coningsby*; Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*
1845	Failure of Irish potato crop	1845	Disraeli, *Sybil*; Browning, *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*
1846	Famine in Ireland; repeal of Corn Laws	1846-8	Dickens, *Dombey and Son*
1847	Ten Hours Act	1847	Tennyson, *The Princess*; Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*; Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*; Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*; Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847-8)
1848	Chartist demonstration in London (third presentation of Charter); Public Health Act; foundation of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; revolutions in France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Italy; Second Republic proclaimed in France; Roman Republic	1848	Gaskell, *Mary Barton*; Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Thackeray, *Pendennis* (1848-9)
		1849	Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*; Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*; Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1849-50); Macaulay, *History of England*
1850	'Papal Aggression' (following re-establishment of Roman Catholic hierarchy in England)	1850	Tennyson, *In Memoriam AHH*; Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*; E. B. Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*; Kingsley, *Alton Locke*
1851	Great Exhibition; Louis Napoleon's coup d'état	1851	Gaskell, *Cranford*; Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3)
1852	Death of the Duke of Wellington	1852	Thackeray, *Henry Esmond*; Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna*; Dickens, *Bleak House* (1852-3)
		1853	Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*; Gaskell, *Ruth*; Arnold, *Poems*
1854	Crimean War breaks out; Battles of Alma, Inkerman, and Balaclava (with the Charge of the Light Brigade); Preston cotton spinners strike; Working Man's College opened	1854	Dickens, *Hard Times*; Thackeray, *The Newcomes* (1854-5)
1855	Fall of Sebastopol; Metropolitan Board of Works established; repeal of Stamp Duty on newspapers	1855	Tennyson, *Maud*; Kingsley, *Westward Ho!*; Browning, *Men and Women*; Gaskell, *North and South*; Trollope, *The Warden*; Dickens, *Little Dorritt* (1855-7)
1856	Peace of Paris (ending Crimean War)		
1857	Indian Mutiny	1857	E. B. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*; Trollope, *Barchester Towers*; Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*; Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*; Thackeray, *The Virginians*
1858	Peace in India; India transferred to British Crown	1858	Clough, *Amours de Voyage*; Carlyle, *Frederick the Great*
		1859	Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Eliot, *Adam Bede*; Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feveral*; Mill, *On Liberty*; Darwin, *The Origin of Species*; Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King* (1859-72)
1860	Garibaldi's campaign in Siciliy and Naples	1860	Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*; Collins, *The Woman in White*; Ruskin, *Unto This Last*; Dickens, *Great Expectations*

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
1861	Victor Emanuel, King of United Italy; outbreak of American Civil War; death of Prince Consort	1861	Eliot, *Silas Marner*; Trollope, *Framley Parsonage*
		1862	C. Rossetti, *Goblin Market*; Meredith, *Modern Love*; Eliot, *Romola* (1862-3); Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*
1863	'Cotton Famine' in Lancashire	1863	Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers*
1864	Geneva Convention	1864	Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*; Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*; Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5)
1865	Suppression of Jamaican rebellion by Governor Eyre; assassination of Lincoln	1865	Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*; Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon*; Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*
1866	Austro-Prussian War	1866	Eliot, *Felix Holt*; Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads*
1867	Representation of the People Act (second Reform Bill)	1867	Arnold, *New Poems*; Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*
		1868	Collins, *The Moonstone*; Browning, *The Ring and the Book* (1868-9); Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70)
1869	First Vatican Council	1869	Trollope, *Phineas Finn*; Mill, *The Subjection of Women*
1870	Married Woman's Property Act; Franco-Prussian War; Forster's Education Act; Papal States incorporated into Kingdom of Italy; death of Dickens	1870	Dickens, *Edwin Drood*; D. G. Rossetti, *Poems*
1871	Paris Commune	1871	Lear, *The Owl and the Pussy Cat*
		1871-2	Eliot, *Middlemarch*
		1872	Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*; Butler, *Erewhon*; Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree*
		1873	Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*; Mill, *Autobiography*; Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*; Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (1873-4)
		1874	Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd*
1875	Agricultural Depression		
		1976	Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*
1877	Victoria proclaimed Empress of India		
1878	Congress of Berlin	1878	Hardy, *The Return of the Native*
		1879	Meredith, *The Egoist*
1880	Gladstone, Prime Minister	1880	Hardy, *The Trumpet Major*
1881	Death of Disraeli	1881	White, *Mark Rutherford's Autobiography*
		1882	Hardy, *Two on a Tower*
1885	Radio waves discovered; internal combustion engine invented	1885	Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*; Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways*
1886	Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill for Ireland defeated	1886	Moore, *A Drama in Muslin*; Stevenson, *Kidnapped* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; Gissing, *Demos*
1887	Victoria's Golden Jubilee	1887	White, *Revolution in Tanner's Lane*; Doyle, first Holmes story published in the *Strand Magazine*
		1888	Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*; Ward, *Robert Elsmere*
		1889	Yeats, *The Wanderings of Oisin*;

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
			Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*
1890	Parnell falls as leader of Irish Home Rule Party after being citewd in the O'Shea divorce case	1890	Kipling, *Barrack Room Ballads*
		1891	Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; Gissing, *New Grub Street*
		1892	Shaw, *Widowers' Houses*; Yeats, *The Countess Cathleen*
1893	Second Home Rule Bill rejected by the House of Lords	1893	Pinero, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*; Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession*
		1894	Ward, *Marcella*; Moore, *Esther Waters*
1895	X-rays discovered	1895	Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*; Wells, *The Time Machine*
1896	Wireless telegraphy invented	1896	Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*; Houseman, *A Shropshire Lad*; Shaw, *You Never Can Tell*
1897	Victoria's Diamond Jubilee	1897	Stoker, *Dracula*
		1898	Hardy, *Wessex Poems*
1899-1902	Boer War		
1900	Relief of Mafeking	1900	Conrad, *Lord Jim*
1901	Death of Victoria; accession of Edward VII	1901	Kipling, *Kim*
		1902	Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns*
1903	First aeroplane flight; foundation of Women's Social and Political Union	1903	Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*; Gissing, *Henry Ryecroft*
1904	Franco-British Entente	1904	Conrad, *Nostromo*; Hardy, *The Dynasts* (1904-8)
		1905	Shaw, *Major Barbara* and *Man and Superman*; Wells, *Kipps*
1906	Liberal government elected; launch of HMS *Dreadnought*		
1907	Anglo-Russian Entente	1907	Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*; Conrad, *The Secret Agent*
1908	Old Age Pensions Act; Elgar's first symphony	1908	Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*; Forster, *A Room with a View*; Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*
1909	'People's Budget'; English channel flown	1909	Wells, *Tono Bungay*
1910	Death of Edward VII; accession of George V; first Post-Impressionist Exhibition	1910	Bennett, *Clayhanger*; Forster, *Howards End*
1911	National Insurance Act	1911	Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*; Wells, *The New Machiavelli*
1912	Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition; Home Rule Bill rejected by Lords; sinking of SS *Titanic*; death of Scott in the Antarctic		
1913	Second rejection of Home Rule Bill by Lords	1913	Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*
1914	Home Rule Bill passed by Parliament; Britain declares was on Central Powers (4 Aug.)	1914	Lewis, *Blast*; Joyce, *Dubliners*; Yeats, *Responsibilities*; Hardy, *Satires of Circumstances*
1915	Second battle of Ypres; sinking of SS *Lusitania*	1915	Ford, *The Good Soldier*; Woolf, *The Voyage Out*; Lawrence, *The Rainbow*; Brooke, *1914 and Other Poems*; Richardson, *Pointed Roofs*
1916	First Battle of the Somme; Gallipoli Campaign; Easter Rising in Dublin	1916	Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
1917	Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele); T. E. Lawrence's campaigns in Arabia; Revolution in Russia (Feb., Oct.)	1917	Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations*
1918	Second battle of the Somme; final German offensive collapses; Armistice with Germany (11 Nov.); Franchise Act granting the vote to women over 30	1918	Lewis, *Tarr*; Hopkins, *Poems*; Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*
1919	Treaty of Versailles; Atlantic flown	1919	Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*
		1920	Owen, *Poems*; Lawrence, *Women in Love*; Shaw, *Heartbreak House*; Fry, *Vision and Design*
1921	Establishment of Irish Free State	1921	Huxley, *Crome Yellow*
1922	Fascist government in Italy	1922	Eliot, *The Waste Land*; Joyce, *Ulysses*; Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*
		1923	Huxley, *Antic Hay*; Shaw, *Saint Joan*; Bennett, *Riceyman Steps*
1924	First Labour Government	1924	Forster, *A Passage to India*; O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*; Coward, *The Vortex*
		1925	Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*; Gerhardie, *The Polyglots*
1926	General Strike	1926	MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle*
		1927	Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
1928	Death of Hardy	1928	Yeats, *The Tower*; Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; Waugh, *Decline and Fall*; Sherriff, *Journey's End*
		1929	Aldington, *Death of a Hero*; Green, *Living*
1930	World economic depression	1930	Auden, *Poems*; Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*; Waugh, *Vile Bodies*; Coward, *Private Lives*
1931	National Government formed	1931	Woolf, *The Waves*
		1932	Huxley, *Brave New World*; Gibbon, *Sunset Song* (first part of *A Scots Quair*)
1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany	1933	Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London
		1934	Eliot, 'Burnt Norton'; Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*; Graves, *I, Claudius*; Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks*
1935	George V's Silver Jubilee	1935	Isherwood, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Lions and Shadows*; Auden and Isherwood, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*; Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*
1936	Death of George V; accession of Edward VIII; abdication crisis; accession of George VI; Civil War breaks out in Spain; first of the Moscow show trials	1936	Auden, *Look Stranger!*
		1937	Auden and MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*; Jones, *In Parenthesis*; Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*
1938	German Anschluss with Austria; Munich agreement; dismemberment of Czechoslovakia	1938	Beckett, *Murphy*; Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*; Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*; Greene, *Brighton Rock*
1939	End of Civil War in Spain; Russo-German	1939	MacNeice, *Autumn Journal*; Green, *Party*

EVENTS		LITERARY WORKS	
	pact; Germany invades Poland (Sept.); Britain and France declare war on Germany		*Going*; Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*; Eliot, *The Family Reunion*
1940	Germany invades north-west Europe; fall of France; evacuation of British troops at Dunkirk; beginning of the 'blitz'	1940	Auden, *New Year Letter*; Eliot, 'East Coker'; Greene, *The Power and the Glory*; Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*
1941	Germany invades Russia; Japanese destroy US Fleet at Pearl Harbor	1941	Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages'; Woolf, *Between the Acts*; Coward, *Blithe Spirit*
1942	Fall of Singapore; British victory in North Africa at El Alamein	1942	Eliot, 'Little Gidding'
1943	Allied invasion of Italy	1943	Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*
1944	Allied landing in Normandy ('D Day'); liberation of Paris	1944	Cary, *The Horse's Mouth*
1945	Surrender of Germany; atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Labour Government elected	1945	Green, *Loving*; Orwell, *Animal Farm*; Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*; Larkin, *The North Ship*
1946	Nuremberg Trials end; nationalization of coal industry; foundation of National Health Service	1946	Larkin, *Jill*; Rattigan, *The Winslow Boy*; Thomas, *Deaths and Entrances*
1947	Independence of India and Pakistan	1947	Compton-Burnett, *Manservant and Maidservant*
1948	Berlin Air Lift; 'cold war' at its height	1948	Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*; Fry, *The Lady's Not For Burning*
		1949	Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-four*; Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*
1950	Labour returned at election with reduced majority	1950	Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems*; Beckett, *Molloy* (first volume of trilogy)
1951	Conservative victory at General Election; Festival of Britain	1951	Douglas, *Collected Poems*; Powell, *A Question of Upbringing* (first volume of *A Dance to the Music of Time*)
1952	Death of George VI; accession of Elizabeth II	1952	Jones, *Anathemata*; Rattigan, *The Deep Blue Sea*; Wilson, *Hemlock and After*
		1954	Rattigan, *Separate Tables*; Golding, *Lord of the Flies*; Amis, *Lucky Jim*
		1955	Larkin, *The Less Deceived*; Golding, *The Inheritors*; Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (first British performance)
1956	Egypt nationalizes Suez Canal; Britain and France intervene and are obliged to withdraw; Soviet invasion of Hungary	1956	Golding, *Pincher Martin*; Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*; Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*
1957	CND formed	1957	Hughes, *The Hawk in the Rain*; Spark, *The Comforters*; Durrell, *Justine*; Osborne, *The Entertainer*
		1958	Pym, *A Glass of Blessings*; Betjeman, *Collected Poems*; Pinter, *The Birthday Party*; Murdoch, *The Bell*
		1959	Spark, *Memento Mori*; Wesker, *Roots*; Golding, *Free Fall*; Arden, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*
1960	Unexpurgated text of Lady Chatterley's Lover published after obscenity trial	1960	Hughes, *Lupercal*; Pinter, *The Caretaker*; Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*; Spark, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*
		1961	Osborne, *Luther*; Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
1962	Establishment of the National Theatre	1962	Beckett, *Happy Days*; Wilson, *Late Call*;

EVENTS		LITERARY	WORKS
			Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*; Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
		1963	Amis, *One Fat Englishman*; Fowles, *The CollectorA*
		1964	Orton, *Entertaining Mr Sloane*; Larkin, *The Whitsun Weddings*; Golding, *The Spire*; Osborne, *Inadmissible Evidence*; Pinter, *The Homecoming*
		1965	Bond, *Saved*
		1966	Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist*; Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*; West, *The Birds Fall Down*; Scott, *The Jewel in the Crown*; Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*
1967	Legalization, within limits, of homosexuality and abortion	1967	Orton, *Loot* and *The Erpingham Camp*; Hughes, *Wodwo*
1968	Evénèments in Paris; Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; 'Troubles' begin in Northern Ireland	1968	Stoppard, *The Real Inspect Hound*; Hill, *King Log*
1969	Abolition of capital punishment	1969	Heaney, *Door in the Dark*; Orton, *What the Butler Saw*; Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*
1970	Age of majority reduced from 21 to 18	1970	Hughes, *Crow*
		1971	Hill, *Mercian Hymns*; Bond, *Lear*; Pinter, *Old Times*; Spark, *Not to Disturb*
		1972	Stoppard, Jumpers
1973	United Kingdom enters European Economic Community	1973	Beckett, *Not I*; Murdoch, *The Black Prince*
		1974	Spark, *The Abbess of Crewe*; Beckett, *That Time*; Larkin, *High Windows*; Stoppard, *Travesties*
		1975	Heaney, *North*; Pinter, *No Man's Land*; Griffiths, *Comedians*; Bradbury, *The History Man*
		1977	Stoppard, *Professional Foul*; Drabble, *The Ice Age*; Pym, *Quartet in Autumn*
		1978	Pinter, *Betrayal*; Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*; Byatt, *The Virgin in the Garden*; Hill, *Tenebrae*
1979	Election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government	1979	Golding, *Darkness Visible*; Heaney, *Field Work*
		1980	Golding, *Rites of Passage*; Burgess, *Earthly Powers*; Friel, *Translations*
		1981	Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*
		1982	Churchill, *Top Girls*
		1983	Swift, *Waterland*
		1984	Heaney, *Station Island*; Carter, *Nights at the Circus*
		1985	Hare and Brenton, *Pravda*; Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor*
		1988	Pinter, *Mountain Language*; Stoppard, *Hapgood*
1989	Revolutions in Eastern Europe topple Communist regimes		
1990	Fall of Margaret Thatcher	1990	Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa*; Byatt, *Possession*

EVENTS	LITERARY WORKS
	1991 Carter, *Wise Children*