

5

Town and Country

Yet the eventual structure of feeling is not based only on an idea of the happier past. It is based also on that other and associated idea of innocence: the rural innocence of the pastoral, neo-pastoral and reflective poems. The key to its analysis is the contrast of the country with the city and the court: here nature, there worldliness. This contrast depends, often, on just the suppression of work in the countryside, and of the property relations through which this work is organised, which we have already observed. But there are other elements in the contrast. The means of agricultural production—the fields, the woods, the growing crops, the animals—are attractive to the observer and, in many ways and in the good seasons, to the men working in and among them. They can then be effectively contrasted with the exchanges and counting-houses of mercantilism, or with the mines, quarries, mills and manufactories of industrial production. That contrast, in many ways, still holds in experience.

But there is also, throughout, an ideological separation between the processes of rural exploitation, which have been, in effect, dissolved into a landscape, and the register of that exploitation, in the law courts, the money markets, the political power and the conspicuous expenditure of the city.

The rhetorical contrast between town and country life is indeed traditional: Quintilian makes it his first example of a stock thesis, and conventional contrasts between greed and innocence, in these characteristic locations, are commonplace in later Greek and Latin literature. But it was especially in relation to Rome that the contrast crystallised, at the point where the city could be seen as an independent organism. In the savage satires of Juvenal we find the tone which is more than conventional: a sustained and explicit catalogue of corruption.

What can I do in Rome? I never learnt how
To lie.

This teeming life, of flattery and bribery, of organised seduction, of noise and traffic, with the streets unsafe because of robbers, with the crowded rickety houses and the constant dangers of fire, is the city as itself: going its own way. A retreat to country or coast, from this kind of hell, is then a different vision from the mere contrast of rural and urban ways of life. It is, of course, a rentier's vision: the cool

country that is sought is not that of the working farmer but of the fortunate resident. The rural virtues are there but as a memory, as in Satire XIV:

Old mountain peasants
Used to tell their sons . . .
Be content with a humble cottage . . .

In the city these virtues are often a lying nostalgia:

That clique in Rome who affect
Ancestral peasant virtues as a front for their lechery.

For the vision is specifically urban, even when it is negative.

In those days, when the world
Was young, and the sky bright-new still, men lived differently.

But this conventional reference back, in Satire VI, is to a time

When draughty
Caves were the only homes men had, hearthfire and household
Gods, family and cattle all shut in darkness together

and when the women were 'shaggier than their acorn-belching husbands'. What is idealised is not the rural economy, past or present, but a purchased freehold house in the country, or 'a charming coastal retreat', or even 'a barren offshore island'. This is then not a rural but a suburban or dormitory dream. And it is in direct reaction to the internal corruption of the city: the rise of lawyer, merchant, general, pimp and procurer; the stink of place and of profit; the noise and danger of being crowded together. Indeed in Satire XV it is the urban ideal that is celebrated:

Sovereign reason, the impulse to aid one another,
To gather our scattered groups into peoples, to abandon
The woods and forests where once our ancestors made their
homes;
To build houses in groups, to sleep sounder because of our
neighbours'
Presence around us, to learn collective security. . . .

And then the exact note is added:

But today even snakes agree better than men.

This powerful satire of a corrupt city life has had an extraordinary influence in subsequent literature; and it has been re-experienced, without influence, in many places and generations. But what matters is the way in which it was incorporated into the milder conventional contrast of town and country ways of life. Rome, after all, was a

special case: an imperial capital, a metropolis. It could have been traced to its sources, in the exploitation of a hundred peoples. But its particular and spectacular corruption becomes very different when it is incorporated into a version of relationships between any urban and any rural order, as a way of ratifying the latter. This, clearly, is the point of ideological transition.

The social and economic reasons for the growth of towns, the new urban movement of the late Middle Ages and the post-feudal settlement, are still highly controversial. There is a case for some independent growth, as in the extension of trade (Pirenne). There was growth in relation to religious houses and army barracks. There was a very important development of independent craft production, with its own tendencies to concentration and urban forms of control. But directly or indirectly most towns seem to have developed as an aspect of the agricultural order itself: at a simple level as markets; at a higher level, reflecting the true social order, as centres of finance, administration and secondary production. There was then every kind of interaction and tension, and some towns developed a certain autonomy. But in the period we are speaking of, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the ideological transition occurred, the effective bases of the society were still property in land and the consequent rural production, and the towns, even the capital, were functionally related to this dominant order. One of the new bases, in mercantile profit, was indeed disturbing to just this direct relation. Much of the conventional complaint is an articulation of this precise disturbance. But as we read the abstract comparisons of rural virtue and urban greed, we must not be tempted to forget the regular, necessary and functional links between the social and moral orders which were so easily and conventionally contrasted.

Thus in Jonson's poem to Wroth we can all feel the contrast between the country gentleman and the worldly men of the city. But what are the lawyers doing, much of the time, if not proving titles to land? A large part of what is being passed across the exchanges is the surplus value of the unregarded labourers at home and, as trade developed, abroad. And as the moneyed order of the city extends in importance, where does much of the new capital go, but back to the land, to intensify the exploiting process? The greed and calculation, so easily isolated and condemned in the city, run back, quite clearly, to the country houses, with the fields and their labourers around them. And this is a double process. The exploitation of man and of nature, which takes place in the country, is realised and concentrated in the city. But also, the profits of other kinds of exploitation—the accumulating wealth of the merchant, the lawyer, the court favourite—come to penetrate the country, as if, but only

as if, they were a new social phenomenon. As was said in 1577, about the merchants:

They often change estates with gentlemen as gentlemen do with them; by mutual conversion of one into the other.

That mutual conversion is the whole point. There is a common way of seeing the social process of this period as a kind of infection from the city:

from which (as if it were from a certain rich and wealthy seedplot) courtiers, lawyers and merchants be continuously transplanted.

Well, certainly; Penshurst is just such a case. But a real conflict of interest, between those settled on the land and those settled in the city, which continually defined itself in the shifting economy of the time, could be made the basis of an ideology, in which an innocent and traditional order was being invaded and destroyed by a new and more ruthless order.

The complicated shifts in ownership, in the whole period of the dissolution of feudalism, are certainly evident. Merchants and lawyers were the most identifiable and the most isolable kinds of new men. In the mid-sixteenth century Robert Crole criticised the process in an unusually precise reference to that feudal order in which each man was expected to stay in the vocation to which he was born:

If Merchants would meddle
With merchandise only,
And leave farms to such men
As must live thereby
Then they were most worthy.

Yet this rigidity of estate and vocation had been disappearing for at least two centuries, as much on the land as elsewhere. It is a pleasant fancy, but in the end an illusion, to suppose that it was only merchants who, as Crole continues,

take farms
To let them out again,
To such men as must have them,
Though it be to their pain:
And to levy great fines
Or to over the rent.

This was happening everywhere. It needed no merchant to teach it to landowners, as we have already seen from Thomas More. Or again, as one of Jonson's characters puts it, in *The Devil is An Ass*:

We see those changes daily: the fair lands
 That were the client's, are the lawyer's now;
 And those rich manors there of goodman Taylor's
 Had once more wood upon them, than the yard
 By which they were measured out for the last purchase.
 Nature hath these vicissitudes.

Estates were certainly lost by litigation, and lawyers were among those who profited. But it is a simple case of projection when the whole process of the transformation of ownership of the land is identified with the coming of this kind of 'outsider'. Such an identification depends, indeed, on a mystifying retrospect. 'Goodman Taylor' with his 'rich manors' is an attractive figure, but we need not suppose, any more than in the case of Penshurst, that his title began in Eden. This is where the idea of a 'traditional' order is most effectively misleading. For there is no innocence in the established proprietors, at any particular point in time, unless we ourselves choose to put it there. Very few titles to property could bear humane investigation, in the long process of conquest, theft, political intrigue, courtiership, extortion and the power of money. It is a deep and persistent illusion to suppose that time confers on these familiar processes of acquisition an innocence which can be contrasted with the ruthlessness of subsequent stages of the same essential drives. There is no need to deny the conflicts of interest between the settled owners and the newly ambitious, or between the holders of landed capital and new mercantile capital, and there was of course a political reflection of these conflicts in the formation of 'country', 'court' and 'city' parties. But it is hardly for the twentieth-century observer, or the ordinary humane man, to try to insert himself, as any kind of partisan, into the complicated jealousies and bitterness of that shifting and relative historical process. Whenever we encounter their proceedings in detail, the landowners, old and new, seem adequately described in the words of a modern agricultural historian: 'a pitiless crew'. The 'ancient stocks', to which we are sentimentally referred, are ordinarily only those families who had been pressing and exploiting their neighbours rather longer. And the 'intruders', the new men, were entering and intensifying a system which was already established and which, by its internal pressures, was developing new forms of predation. If we have humanity to spare, it is better directed to the unregarded men who were making and working the land, in any event, under the old owners and the new.

That temporary contrast, then, between country and city is only indirectly important. But there is another dimension in the whole contrast which requires emphasis. Of course a city eats what its country neighbours have grown. It is able to do so by the services it

provides, in political authority, law and trade, to those who are in charge of the rural exploitation, with whom, characteristically, it is organically linked in a mutual necessity of profit and power. But then, at marginal points, as the processes of the city become in some respects self-generating, and especially in the course of foreign conquest and trade, there is a new basis for the contrast between one 'order' and another. The agents of power and profit become, as it were, alienated, and in certain political situations can become dominant. Over and above the interlocking exploitation, there is what can be seen as a factual exploitation of the country as a whole by the city as a whole.

For just because the city ordinarily concentrates the real social and economic processes of the whole society, so a point can be reached where its order and magnificence but also its fraud and its luxury seem almost, as in Rome, to feed on themselves; to belong in the city, and to breed there, as if on their own. Thus parasites collect around the real services, as in the legal and social underworlds of seventeenth-century London. Around the engrossing lawyers collect the confidence-men and the professional sharpers. Around the profit-making merchants collect the hucksters, the puffers, the overtly fraudulent. Around the political authority collect the informers, the go-between men, the fixers and (in the court as often as anywhere) the prostitutes; some from, some on their way to, what was called an aristocracy.

There is another service which the city increasingly provided, as a result of changes in the laws of inheritance. It became a necessary marriage-market (what was later called 'the season') for the relatively scattered country landowners. Around this, again, collected the pimps and procurers as well as the professional escorts, the keepers of salons, the intermediary rakes and the whores. When these various underworlds were quite visibly established, it was easy to project an image of the simple man from the country, arriving with his rural innocence in such surprising company. There was, no doubt, even some reality in it. In Jacobean comedy—in Massinger's *New Way to Pay Old Debts* or Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*—the vitality of these underworlds is evident, and it is titles to property, mortgage papers, which are passed and schemed for. It is then easy to appreciate the grossness of an Overreach, a Lucre, a Hoard or a Witgood, and, picking up the action at a selected point, to identify with the 'rightful owners', the good and the innocent, who pick their way to their estates, their rural inheritance, through these corrupting alleys of city society. But this, at its ordinary level, is indeed an ideology, for what is never inquired into is the real past and present of that 'settled' and 'lawful' country order from which they come.

In Restoration comedy, the contrast between 'country' and 'town'

is commonly made, but with some evident ambiguity. Written by and for the fashionable society of the town, the plays draw on evidently anxious feelings of rejection, or a necessary appearance of rejection, of the coarseness and clumsiness, or simply the dullness, of country life. Certain rural stereotypes are established: a Blackacre or a Hoyden or a Tunbelly Clumsey; as later a Lumpkin and the whole lineage of Mummerset and the village clodhopper. Such types are easily laughed at, in the small talk of fashionable society. Separated from the country houses by which many of them were still maintained, the members of town society composed the sourest kind of counter-pastoral that anyone could have imagined. What was seen now, from this particular position, was

a great rambling lone house that looks as if it were not inhabited, the family's so small. There you'll find my mother, an old lame aunt, and myself, sir, perched up on chairs at a distance in a large parlor, sitting moping like three or four melancholy birds in a spacious volary.

That dull settled life was still associated, however, with settled relationships. A committed love was seen, in the same mode, as

more dismal than the country! Emilia, pity me, who am going to that sad place. Methinks I hear the hateful noise of rooks already—Kaw, Kaw, Kaw!

But what the birds cry is what the world cries in the end: that the settlement has to be made, into an estate and into a marriage. And this is the root of the ambiguity of feeling. What was going on, through the parades and visits and intrigues of London society, was just this making of marriages which were also necessary property transactions. It was impossible not to be cynical about it, while the game was being played, but equally this cynicism never reached the point of renouncing the advantages which were being played for; that is why it is cynicism, rather than real opposition.

Young Fashion: So, here's our inheritance, Lory, if we can but get into possession. But methinks the seat of our family looks like Noah's ark, as if the chief part on't were designed for the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field.

Lory: Pray, sir, don't let your head run upon the orders of building here; get but the heiress, let the devil take the house.

Young Fashion: Get but the house, let the devil take the heiress, I say.

And then, not surprisingly, the overt cynicism of this preliminary 'courting'—aptly so called—is prolonged into the marriage, which

when based on a property transaction is no more evidently moral than the advantageous sex of the town. For the point about the cynicism of these weary and greedy intrigues—the coarse having and getting which reduces its players to a mutuality of objects—is that it is only the scum on a deeper cynicism, which as a matter of settlement, of ordered society, has reduced men and women to physical, bargainable carriers of estates and incomes.

The wise will find a difference in our fate;
You wed a woman, I a good estate.

When marriage is like that, it is not properly available as a moral contrast to the intrigues of the whores and the fortune-hunters in residence. Any system which puts that kind of social advantage or convenience above any idea of personal love or fidelity must breed, in its visible centres, those habits and tones which are now, with facility, called the 'immorality' of Restoration drama. What this phrase directs us to, whether to be admired or despised, is only a petty and superficial immorality; an exhausted and brittle, a desperately fast and bright reaction to a sober realisation of the actual priorities of the system.

There is then no simple contrast between wicked town and innocent country, for what happens in the town is generated by the needs of the dominant rural class. The moral ratification of this drama is not marriage against an intrigue or an affair (again, aptly so-called), nor is it wit against folly, or virtue against vice. It is the steering of the estate into the right hands:

A deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella
Languish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell.

For indeed, if you stop to listen to it, the bright conversation of the town never really strays far from its quite inward concern with property and income. Even the apparent exceptions to the mode—the innocent, the unassuming, and the faithful—usually reveal themselves, in the end, as endowed. Fidelity, at the end of *The Plain Dealer*, when the greedy tricks of the town have been exposed and denounced, makes offer not only of her innocence but

such a present as this, which I got by the loss of my father, a gentleman of the north, of no mean extraction, whose only child I was; therefore left me in the present possession of two thousand pounds a year. . . .

This, in the most real sense, is the way of the world.

The transition in feeling from the Jacobean contrast—between a Wellborn and an Overreach—to the Restoration unity—a Tunbelly Clumsey and a Young Fashion—is then a gain in frankness as well

as a loss in both real and apparent standards. Certainly a coldness of attitude to the real processes by which land was secured has increased. An ideal is falling away, as well as a mystification. But we need not, at any stage, accept this town-and-country contrast at its face value. For in the transactions that mattered, who was it, after all, who came from the country? It was not the labourer or the cottager; the hunger of their families kept them in the fields. It was the landowner and his endowed son, the landowner's wife and her prospecting daughter, who came on their necessary business. When they were gulled or cheated, or mocked because they were behind the fashion, and then raised, in reply, their standards of a plain and simple honesty back home, we may see and feel with the persons behind the forms, but the forms we must see, now that the bones are dust. What they brought with them, and what they came to promote, rested on the brief and aching lives of the permanently cheated: the field labourers whom we never by any chance see; the dispossessed and the evicted; all the men and women whose land and work paid their fares and provided their spending money. It was no moral case of 'God made the country and man made the town'. The English country, year by year, had been made and remade by men, and the English town was at once its image and its agent (honest or dishonest, as advantage served). If what was seen in the town could not be approved, because it made evident and repellent the decisive relations in which men actually lived, the remedy was never a visitor's morality of plain living and high thinking, or a babble of green fields. It was a change of social relationships and of essential morality. And it was precisely at this point that the 'town and country' fiction served: to promote superficial comparisons and to prevent real ones.

6

Their Destiny their Choice

Yet the transition marked by the Civil War, the Commonwealth, the Restoration and the constitutional settlement of 1688 fundamentally altered the social character of England, and it is not surprising that in ideology, in mediation and in new creative work the literature of the country also changed. In the poems of rural retreat there is a marked transition from the ideal of contemplation to the ideal of simple productive virtue, and then to its complications, as we shall see in Thomson. But there is also an interesting transition in what must be seen as the most significant line: that of the country-house poems. If we look from Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* to Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* we can see this change clearly.

It is possible to assimilate *Upon Appleton House* to the world of *Penshurst* and *Saxham*, through certain obvious continuities. Here again is the exceptional house, as against the 'hollow Palaces', the 'unproportion'd dwellings' of other places and other men:

But all things are composed here
Like Nature, orderly and near.

And now the reference is historical and retrospective:

In which we the Dimensions find
Of that more sober Age and Mind
When larger sized Men did stoop
To enter at a narrow loop;
As practising, in doors so strait,
To strain themselves through *Heavens Gate*.

Here again there are the marks of a 'moral economy':

A stately *Frontispiece* of *Poor*
Adorns without the open Door:
Nor less the Rooms within commends
Daily new *Furniture* of *Friends*.

But then the changes become evident. The origin of the house is no longer mystified, but is openly and wittily stated and justified. This new house built by Fairfax, the Parliamentary General and founder of the New Model Army, had been completed only a year or two before the poem was written. It replaced an earlier house, in the same family, built on lands which passed to the Fairfaxes from the dissolution of the Cistercian priory of Appleton; the ruins of that priory were still visible in the grounds. Thus an explicit transition, in which so

much landed property had in fact been founded, is not only admitted but justified, in spite of the acknowledgement of an earlier 'more sober Age and Mind'. Like every expropriated religious house, this nunnery, it appears to its subsequent possessors, had been vicious. An incident in the Fairfax family at that time—'The *Nuns* smooth tongue has suckt her in'—is used to present a picture of a greedy, hypocritical and grasping order, and the consequent moral is drawn:

'But sure those Buildings last not long.
Founded by Folly, kept by Wrong'.

The dispossession and change can then be wholly ratified:

At the demolishing, this Seat
To Fairfax fell as by Escheat.
And what both *Nuns* and *Founders* will'd
'Tis likely better thus fulfill'd.
For if the Virgin prov'd not theirs,
The *Cloyster* yet remained hers.
Though many a *Nun* there made her Vow,
'Twas no *Religious House* till now.

This advance in candour is accompanied, significantly, by an increased willingness and ability to look at the immediate environment. The house is founded on a military fortune, and its garden, laid out 'in the just Figure of a Fort', is seen as a mutation into peace, in the form of a lost paradise:

When Gardens only had their Towers
And all the Garrisons were Flowers.

Yet the most remarkable and beautiful part of the poem (and that it is a composition of different ways of seeing, different essential directions and interests, is itself significant) is the look and walk into the fields and woods beyond. The magical country, yielding of itself, is now seen as a working landscape filled with figures: the mowers and haymakers, the 'Villagers in common' coming to graze their cattle on the mown meadows, the winter flooding of the river pastures. All these are seen, but in a figure: the conscious look at a passing scene: the explicit detached view of landscape:

They seem within the polisht Grass
A Landskip drawn in Looking-Glass.

Indeed the cleared meadows are seen as a canvas for a painter:

A levell'd space, as smooth and plain,
As Clothes for *Lilly* stretcht to stain.

But still the figures are *seen*, within this perspective: the 'wholesome heat' of the harvest, the mowing and the dance, the 'Villagers in

common'. And it is no less significant that the poet, having seen this populated landscape, goes beyond it into the wood, the true retreat into Nature as a way of escaping the world:

How safe, methinks, and strong, behind
These Trees have I incamp'd my Mind.

When he comes back the flood has receded and the fields are green again in the Spring.

The tension within this remarkable poem is then of a different order from anything that preceded it. The house and its basis in dispossession are justified, as a religious and natural order. But at the same time there is a movement beyond them, into a working landscape, and into the natural retreat of the untouched wood. The feeling moves this way and that, with only the voice of the poem as control. In the measured delight there is also a new sadness, an awareness of other experiences: the conventional celebration of the house as

Heaven's Centre, Nature's Lap.
And Paradise's only Map

occurs within a felt contrast with the precarious times:

'Tis not, which once it was, the World;
But a rude heap together hurl'd;
All negligently overthrowen,
Gulfes, Deserts, Precipices, Stone.

It was inevitable that this should be so, in the mind of a Marvell. But beyond even this, it is an unbearable irony to read the elaborate formal praise of the beauty and innocence of the daughter of the house, and to be directed forward to her marriage. She is the mistletoe on the Fairfax oak

Whence, for some universal good
The *Priest* shall cut the Sacred Bud;
While her glad Parents most rejoice
And make their *Destiny* their *Choice*.

The irony is not only the personal destiny that this marriage was to be to the appalling George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, within a few years of the idealisation in the poem. It is that the fruit of this new house was to be that kind of political deal in which property and title were reconstituted. It is a marriage between Villiers the Royalist and the daughter of the leading Parliamentary General. Some Villiers lands had passed to the Fairfaxes: the marriage was a settlement of a complicated political and propertied kind. The destiny of a once living virtue was indeed to be that exact kind of choice, and in land-holding as much as in political power we have to acknowledge the justice of Marvell's other observation, often applied to politics but

not also, as it should be, to this long process of family acquisition, the dispossessions and the deals, the founding of houses:

The same *Arts* that did *gain*
A Pow'r must it *maintain*.

What eventually emerged, from these complicated settlements, was a very different structure of feeling. Marvell's poem is truly transitional: a complication of feeling between an old order and a new. We can then see the critical folly of assimilating all country-house poems to a single tradition, as if their occupants were some kind of unbroken line. In its extreme forms this is a true reification of the houses themselves: the house, and then by derivation its occupants, being the evident sign of an order, even though this order was being continually reconstituted by the political and economic formation of a new aristocracy and then a new agrarian capitalism. By the time we get to Pope, not in the idealising pastorals but in the Epistles, we have the altered, the more explicit, feelings of just this class. The epistles to both Bathurst and Burlington are of 'the use of Riches', and what is recommended, between the extreme vices of miserliness and profligacy, is the prudent productive investment, tempered by reasonable charity:

The Sense to value Riches, with the Art
T' enjoy them, and the Virtue to impart,
Not meanly, nor ambitiously pursu'd,
Not sunk by sloth, nor rais'd by servitude;
To balance Fortune by a just expence,
Join with Oeconomy, Magnificence;
With splendour, charity; with plenty, health;
Oh teach us, BATHURST! yet unspoil'd by wealth!
(*Epistle to Bathurst*, 219-226)

Who then shall grace, or who improve the Soil?
Who plants like BATHURST, or who builds like BOYLE.
'Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expence,
And Splendor borrows all her rays from Sense.
His Father's Acres who enjoys in peace,
Or makes his neighbours glad, if he encrease;
Whose chearful Tenants bless their yearly toil,
Yet to their Lord owe more than to the soil;
Whose ample Lawns are not asham'd to feed
The milky heifer and deserving steed;
Whose rising Forests, not for pride or show,
But future Buildings, future Navies grow:
Let his plantations stretch from down to down,
First shade a Country, and then raise a Town.
(*Epistle to Burlington*, 177-190)

The order is no longer received and natural, as in Jonson and Carew, nor achieved and precarious, as in Marvell; it is a matter for conscious moral teaching. The house is properly subsidiary to the uses of money and productive investment, the creation rather than the celebration of Nature: nature in man's works rather than in a received or fortunate paradise. The poetry has altered in just these ways, from the ratifying traditional images, the conscious fusion of symbol and observation, to the direct moral argument in contemporary terms.

'Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expence.

But this conscious bourgeois ethic is qualified by two considerations. The idea of charity and benevolence is powerfully reasserted: derived from the ideal of a natural moral economy, and with some verbal continuity from it, but now argued as exemplary, as in the celebration of the Man of Ross, and explicitly contrasted with another product of the land-owning order: ironically (in the *Epistle to Bathurst*) that same Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, husband of the virgin of Appleton House:

Great Villiers lies—alas! how chang'd from him,
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!
. . . There, Victor of his health, of fortune, friends,
And fame; this lord of useless thousands ends.

The neglect of charity is now not only a moral and theological example, it is a default of use.

The second qualifying consideration is part of the isolation of the house as object: a completion and transformation of the process that began with the moral celebration of houses. Much of the *Epistle to Burlington* is near the head of that important eighteenth-century tradition of house-building and landscape-gardening, in which, as the outward sign of the new morality of improvement, the country was reshaped and redesigned. It is a condemnation of useless show and hollow palaces, as Jonson or Marvell might have expressed it, but it is also a conscious recommendation of how to build, how to lay out a park or a garden; the improvement of Nature:

In all, let Nature never be forgot.
But treat the Goddess like a modest fair,
Nor over-dress, nor leave her wholly bare.

In this persuasive recommendation a new structure of feeling has become explicit, as part of a new economy. And it is to the complications of this morality of improvement that we must now turn.

7

The Morality of Improvement

(i)

The true history of the English countryside has been centred throughout in the problems of property in land, and in the consequent social and working relationships. By the eighteenth century, nearly half of the cultivated land was owned by some five thousand families. As a central form of this predominance, four hundred families, in a population of some seven or eight million people, owned nearly a quarter of the cultivated land. Beneath this domination, there was no longer, in any classical sense, a peasantry, but an increasingly regular structure of tenant farmers and wage-labourers: the social relationships that we can properly call those of agrarian capitalism. The regulation of production was increasingly in terms of an organised market.

The transition from feudal and immediately post-feudal arrangements to this developing agrarian capitalism is of course immensely complicated. But its social implications are clear enough. It is true that the predominant landowning class was also, in political terms, an aristocracy, whose ancient or ancient-seeming titles and houses offered the illusion of a society determined by obligations and traditional relations between social orders. But the main activity of this class was of a radically different kind. They lived by a calculation of rents and returns on investments of capital, and it was the process of rack-renting, engrossing and enclosure which increased their hold on the land.

Yet there was never any simple confrontation between the four hundred families and a rural proletariat. On the contrary, between these poles of the economic process there was an increasingly stratified hierarchy of smaller landowners, large tenants, surviving small freeholders and copyholders, middle and small tenants, and cottagers and craftsmen with residual common rights. A process begun in the sixteenth century was still powerfully under way, with many of the smaller farms being suppressed, especially on improved arable land, while at the same time the area of cultivated land was itself steadily and at times dramatically increased. Even within the social relations of landowner, tenant, and labourer, there was a continual evolution of new attitudes. An estate passed from being regarded as an inheritance, carrying such and such income, to being calculated as an

opportunity for investment, carrying greatly increased returns. In this development, an ideology of improvement—of a transformed and regulated land—became significant and directive. Social relations which stood in the way of this kind of modernisation were then steadily and at times ruthlessly broken down.

The crisis of values which resulted from these changes is enacted in varying ways in eighteenth-century literature. In poetry, as we shall see, the idealisation of the happy tenant, and of the rural retreat, gave way to a deep and melancholy consciousness of change and loss, which eventually established, in a new way, a conventional structure of retrospect.

But before this development, there was a lively engagement with the human consequences of the new institutions and emphases. Indeed it was in just this interest that the novel emerged as the most creative form of the time. The problems of love and marriage, in a society dominated by issues of property in land, were extended from the later Jacobean comedy and the Restoration comedy of manners, and from the moral epistles of Pope, to the novels of Richardson and Fielding, and in the mode of their extension were transformed. Allworthy and Squire Western, the neighbouring landowners in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, or Lovelace in Richardson's *Clarissa*, are in some ways lineal descendants of the world of Wellborn and Overreach, and then of Tunbelly Clumsey and Young Fashion. The plot of *Tom Jones* is based on the desire to link by marriage the two largest estates in Somersetshire: the proposed marriage of Sophia Western to Blifil is conceived for this end; her marriage to Tom Jones, when he is eventually revealed as Allworthy's true heir, achieves what had formerly, for personal reasons, been rejected. Similarly, *Clarissa Harlowe's* proposed marriage to Solmes is part of her family's calculation in concentrating their estates and increasing their rank; it is from this that she recoils to the destructive and cynical world of the established landowning aristocrat, Lovelace.

What is dramatised, under increasing pressure, in the actions of these novels, is the long process of choice between economic advantage and other ideas of value. Yet whereas, in the plays, we saw this from one particular standpoint—the social world of London in which the contracts were made and in which, by isolation and concentration, the tone of the protesting and then the cynical observer could be established and maintained—in the novels we move out to the families themselves, and see the action in its homes and in its private character. For all the differences between Richardson and Fielding, this change is something they have in common. Instead of the formal confrontation between representatives of different groups—the wellborn and the overreachers—and the amused observation of a distanced way of the

world, the action becomes internal, and is experienced and dramatised as a problem of character.

The open ideology of improvement is in fact most apparent in Defoe, but in an abstraction which marks an essential difference from Richardson and Fielding. There is some irony in this fact, in that in his *Tour of England and Wales*, in the 1720s, Defoe was an incomparable observer of the detailed realities of country life, with his notes on methods of production, marketing and rents. It is from him that we learn the degree of specialisation and market-production in early eighteenth-century agriculture, and its intricate involvement with the cities, the ports, and the early coal, iron and cloth industrial areas. It is a frankly commercial world, with hardly any pastoral tinge, and Defoe's combination of intense interest and matter-of-fact reporting is the true predecessor of the major eighteenth-century tradition of rural inquiry, which runs on through William Marshall, the *County Reports*, Arthur Young and the *Annals of Agriculture*, to Cobbett and the nineteenth century. This emphasis is the real line of development of a working agriculture, and is in itself a major index of change. Yet, with rare exceptions, this emphasis was in its own way an abstraction from the social relationships and the human world through which the new methods of production worked. It is only at the end of this line, in the crisis at the turn of the century, that the social and economic inquiries are adequately brought together. It is then not surprising that Defoe, for all his close and specialised observation of what was happening in the fields and markets, did not, in his novels, consider their underlying social reality. Rather he projected, into other histories, the abstracted spirit of improvement and simple economic advantage—as most notably in *Robinson Crusoe*—and created a fictional world of isolated individuals to whom other people are basically transitory and functional—as again in *Crusoe* and in *Moll Flanders*. Consciously and unconsciously, this emphasis of a condition and of an ethic was prophetic and powerful; but it is an indication of its character that what *Crusoe* improves is a remote island, and that what *Moll Flanders* trades in is her own person. The important improvement and trading were at once nearer home and more general, but the simple practice and ethic of improvement could be more readily and more singlemindedly apprehended in deliberately isolated histories.

In the real life of the country, the commercial spirit had to interlock with, and be tested by, other institutions, considerations and modes. Neither Richardson nor Fielding knew as much as Defoe about what was happening in rural England, but their emphasis, in very different ways, was on human relationships in their more detailed course: not the spirit of the time, but its more immediate experience.

Yet we cannot, in turn, make an abstraction of these human relationships. When the marriage of Sophia and Blifil is proposed, as a way of uniting the neighbouring estates, the character of Blifil is shown in the true contemporary commercial spirit:

as to that entire and absolute possession of the heart of his mistress which romantic lovers require, the very idea of it never entered his head. Her fortune and her person were the sole objects of his wishes, of which he made no doubt soon to obtain the absolute property. . . .

Squire Western, of course, uses his daughter to unite the estates, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. And Allworthy—

not one of those men whose hearts flutter at any unexpected and sudden tidings of worldly profit

—is nevertheless recommended to us by his more sober and philosophical calculations:

Wisdom . . . only teaches us to extend a simple maxim universally known and followed even in the lowest life, a little farther than that life carries it. And this is, not to buy at too dear a price. Now, whoever takes this maxim abroad with him into the grand market of the world, and constantly applies it to honours, to riches, to pleasures, and to every other commodity which that market affords, is, I will venture to affirm, a wise man, and must be so acknowledged in the worldly sense of the word; for he makes the best of bargains, since in reality he purchases everything at the price only of a little trouble, and carries home all the good things I have mentioned, while he keeps his health, his innocence and his reputation, the common prices which are paid for them by others, entire and to himself.

This, indeed, is very much the position from which *Tom Jones* is written. It is the morality of a relatively consolidated, a more maturely calculating society. From such a position, the cold greed of a Blifil, the open coarseness of a Squire Western, can be noted and criticised; but calculation, and cost, are given a wider scheme of reference. Love, honour, physical pleasure, loyalty: these, too, have to be brought into the reckoning with incomes and acres. The humanity is of a resigned and settled kind: firm and open when faced by the meaner calculators, but still itself concerned to find the balance—the true market price—of happiness. Tom Jones learns from his apparent disregard of advantage, but it is not only that his more immediate satisfactions are tolerantly underwritten; it is also that Fielding's management of the action is directed towards restoring the balance in which personal satisfaction and material advantage are reconciled, compatible, and even identical. The novel continually

raises questions about the relations between material fortune and human need and impulse, but it resolves them by an adaptation in which, by an act of will, by a planned and fortunate disclosure, they come loosely and easily together. The famous irony is then the literary means by which this trick can be played, noticed, and still win. The tone of the settlement, when Jones is discovered as the rightful heir, and the estates can be united in what is also a love match, is of a deliberate—one might say a calculating—geniality—

in which, to our great pleasure, though contrary, perhaps, to thy expectation, Mr Jones appears to be the happiest of all humankind.

The settlements, the adjustments, the pensions are then neatly worked; and the 'condescension, indulgence and beneficence', of this finally happy pair is such as to make those below them, the tenants and servants, bless the marriage.

There was need, certainly, for this consolidated morality. The openly cynical scramble for land and for heiresses, which had been the predominant tone of an earlier period, was succeeded, in the more settled process of the first half of the eighteenth century, by just this wider, longer-sighted building of position. Humanity, family interest, personal need, must now, if at all possible, be included in any rational and improving settlement. If it was not possible, the main current of advantage took its way, leaving its human casualties.

It is significant that this darker view comes to us, in literature, through a particular fanaticism: the isolation, by Richardson, of virginity, as a single response to the whole struggle for human value. It is true that, in *Pamela*, virginity is treated as the term of a bargain: not a value in itself, but an asset which must not be surrendered without the necessary security of marriage. But in *Clarissa* the virginity is not negotiable, at any level or by any means; it is no longer simply a physical but a spiritual virginity: an integrity of the person and the soul. When the marriage to Solmes is proposed, as part of 'the darling view of *raising a family*' (that is, of consolidating and improving the family estates), *Clarissa's* answer—

'For the sake of this plan of my brother's, am I, Madam, to be given in marriage to a man I never can endure?'

—is, though quieter, in the same world as *Sophia's*, on the proposed marriage to Blifil—

'Oh! sir, such a marriage is worse than death. He is not even indifferent; I hate and detest him.'

But the emphasis, in *Clarissa*, is taken right through. The exposure to *Lovelace* has nothing to do with the lucky chances of the market,

or with raising the price of the human person. It is a total exposure, to a cynically calculating world—significantly that of an earlier kind of landowner, the unmediated because established cavalier, the 'wellborn'. No marriage contract can ratify that exposure; even rape cannot destroy *Clarissa's* virginity. This is the reverse of consolidation, of the necessary settlement, the striking of a bargain between advantage and value. The integrity of the human person is fanatically preserved, by its refusal to compromise and then its accepted destruction.

In his single emphasis, Richardson moved away from any negotiable world, and of course succeeded in specialising a general crisis to a personal and (in its context) fashionable issue. *Clarissa* is an important sign of that separation of virtue from any practically available world which is a feature of the later phases of Puritanism and still later of Romanticism. Though it engages with the current acquisitiveness and ambition of the landowning families, it is in the end not a criticism of a period or structure of society, but of what can be abstracted as 'the world'. This degree of retreat must be noted, but it is in its own way an answer to the problems being raised by an increasingly confident capitalist society. The specialisation of virginity, and the paradoxical isolation and even destruction of the individual as a means of survival, are connected with that specialisation of pity and charity, and the retreat from society into a nature which teaches humanity, which we shall later trace as responses to the continuing crises of a basically ruthless order, to which there was not, as yet, any available and adequate social response.

(ii)

It must then seem a world away, from the desperate and private emphases of *Clarissa*, to the calmly practical, the inquiring everyday tone of the actual agents of improvement. The social crisis can only be seen, in any connected way, when it is worked through in this everyday and general mode. As we read the agricultural writers, it is easy to accept their emphasis on a better use of the land, even when this is so often explicitly connected with the calculation of rents (*Lovelace*, interestingly, would never rack-rent old tenants; his income, like his sexual liberty, was inherited rather than speculative). We learn so much from these improving writers, and their achievement (together with that of the experimenting farmers and the better-known experimenting landowners), in providing more food is so impressive that it is easy for anybody who loves the land to place himself on their side. What is hardest to understand, for them as for us, is the ultimate consequence of just these improvements which in immediate terms were so readily justifiable.

To read the life of Arthur Young is to catch at once the spirit of improvement and its real complications. He grew up on an estate which had been in his father's family for generations, but which was set into order only by capital from his mother's side: a Jewish family which had come from Holland in the late seventeenth century. The old house was rebuilt into a mansion, as so often in this period. This social ambition overreached the family's income. Arthur Young was apprenticed as a merchant; he had wanted, like his father, to be a clergyman. When his father died, he had little money, and began to support himself by writing pamphlets. Then he returned to farm a copyhold of twenty acres, on his mother's small estate. Chronically short of capital, he never succeeded in becoming a successful farmer himself, but as an agricultural writer, collecting and publicising the techniques and spirit of improved production, he made a new kind of life. More than any other man, he made the case for the second great period of enclosures, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He travelled constantly, and in the forty-six volumes of his *Annals of Agriculture* provided the essential means of communication for the new experimental agriculture. The changes came from use of the land itself: in new crops (especially roots), in drainage and reclamation, in planned soil fertility, and in stock breeding. But Young emphasised the connections of the agricultural interest with the other new social forces of the time: with mercantile capital (as he had good reason, from his personal history, to know); with early industrial techniques (as in earth-moving, which was mechanised for harbour-building and quarrying before it was applied to farming-land); with the physical sciences (as in his collaboration with Priestley in soil-chemistry); and with political power and organisation (as in his propaganda to the King and Parliament, and in his eventual appointment as Secretary of the new Board of Agriculture).

Young touched, at every point, what we now see as the modernisation of the land in his century; but what he continually stressed was the backwardness of agriculture, its insufficient rate of progress, its neglect of great areas of waste land, its lack of investment by comparison with overseas trade. And increasingly, towards the end of his life, he admitted his own social experience and the result of his social observations. Thus improvement of land required considerable capital, and therefore the leadership of the landowners. But this not only increased the predominance of the landed interest; it created, by enclosure and engrossing to make large and profitable units, a greater number of the landless and the disinherited, who could not survive or compete in the new conditions. The slowness of many farmers to adopt the new methods was itself related to the land-holding system: since improvement often led to an increase of rent, there was a built-in

deterrent at the very point of production. It was only a rare landowner, like Coke, who kept a reasonable relation between the profits of the new production and the rents of his tenants. Thus the economic process, which could be so easily justified in its own limited terms, had social results which at times contradicted it, and at other times led to the disaster of families and communities. When Young saw the full social results of the changes he had fought for, he was not alone in second thoughts and in new kinds of questioning:

I had rather that all the commons of England were sunk in the sea, than that the poor should in future be treated on enclosing as they have been hitherto.

Enclosures, Commons and Communities

We have considered several instances of the melancholy of eighteenth-century poems of country life, and we have seen, in Crabbe, their culmination in distress. It is worth emphasising these predominant feelings of loss and pain as we move to that common outline of the history of rural England, in which the campaign of parliamentary enclosures is seen as the destroyer of a traditional and settled rural community.

We have already seen, in Arthur Young, a first estimate of what enclosure amounted to, in its contradictory social and economic consequences. Nobody who follows these through in detail would wish to underestimate them. Yet there is a sense in which the idea of the enclosures, localised to just that period in which the Industrial Revolution was beginning, can shift our attention from the real history and become an element of that very powerful myth of modern England in which the transition from a rural to an industrial society is seen as a kind of fall, the true cause and origin of our social suffering and disorder. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this myth, in modern social thought. It is a main source for the structure of feeling which we began by examining: the perpetual retrospect to an 'organic' or 'natural' society. But it is also a main source for that last protecting illusion in the crisis of our own time: that it is not capitalism which is injuring us, but the more isolable, more evident system of urban industrialism. The questions involved are indeed very difficult, but for just this reason they require analysis, at each point and in each period in which an element of this structure can be seen in formation.

There is no reason to deny the critical importance of the period of parliamentary enclosures, from the second quarter of the eighteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. By nearly four thousand Acts, more than six million acres of land were appropriated, mainly by the politically dominant landowners: about a quarter of all cultivated acreage. But it is then necessary to see the essential continuity of this appropriation, both with earlier and with later phases. It is necessary to stress, for example, how much of the country had already been enclosed, before this change of method in the mid-eighteenth century to a parliamentary act. The process had been going on since at least the thirteenth century, and had reached a first peak in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Indeed in history

it is continuous from the long process of conquest and seizure: the land gained by killing, by repression, by political bargains.

Again, as the economy develops, enclosure can never really be isolated from the mainstream of land improvements, of changes in methods of production, of price-movements, and of those more general changes in property relationships which were all flowing in the same direction: an extension of cultivated land but also a concentration of ownership into the hands of a minority.

The parliamentary procedure for enclosure made this process at once more public and more recorded. In this sense it was directly related to the quickening pace of agricultural improvement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this period the area mainly affected was a belt from Yorkshire to Dorset, across the mid-land counties, and extending eastwards to Norfolk. The same process occurred, a little later, in the Scottish Lowlands. But large tracts elsewhere were already effectively enclosed: Kent, parts of Surrey and Sussex, parts of Essex and Suffolk; Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and western Dorset; much of Wales and the border counties of Hereford, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire; the important cultivated areas of Lancashire, Cumberland, Westmorland, Northumberland and Durham. The social importance of enclosures is then not that they introduced a wholly new element in the social structure, but that in getting rid of the surviving open-field villages and common rights, they complemented and were indeed often caused by the general economic pressure on small owners and especially small tenants. No reliable figures are now available, but it can be reasonably argued that as many people were driven from the land, and from some independent status in relation to it, by the continuing processes of rack-renting and short-lease policies, and by the associated need for greater capital to survive in an increasingly competitive market, as by explicit enclosure.

The number of landless, before this period of enclosure, was in any event high: in 1690, five landless labourers to every three occupiers, as compared with a proportion of five to two in 1831. Most of the peasantry, in another sense—the classical sense of the small owner-occupiers under social and political obligations—had been bought and forced out in the period of the building of large estates in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. G. E. Mingay has concluded that those who survived this process hung on till the fall in product prices in the 1820s, and declined steadily through the nineteenth century, under general pressures:

on the whole it seems that the level of prices and the prosperity of farming had more impact on owner-occupiers than had enclosures.

The peasantry in yet another and very tenuous sense, the small tenant farmers, were of course already part of the system of agrarian capitalism. Their numbers were affected by the economics of scale, and by the aggregation of estates, but enclosure as such did not greatly affect them: in 1831 nearly half of all farms were small, by any ordinary standard. Thus there is no simple case, in the late eighteenth century, of the expropriation of a peasantry. What really happened was that in the economically dynamic areas a capitalist social system was pushed through to a position of dominance, by a form of legalised seizure enacted by representatives of the beneficiary class. This is crucially important, and in the acreage it affected—a quarter of all cultivated land—it can be said to be decisive. But it cannot be isolated from the long development of concentration of landholding, from the related stratification of owners and tenants, and from the increasing number of the landless, which were the general consequences of agrarian capitalism.

The links with the Industrial Revolution are again important, but not as the replacement of one 'order' by another. It is true that many of the landless became, often with little choice, the working class of the new industrial towns, thus continuing that movement of wage labourers to the towns which had long been evident. But the growth of the industrial working-class must be related also, and perhaps primarily, to the growth of population, itself spectacular, which though primarily related to changes in the birth and death rates in the general modernisation of the society, is related also to the increase in agricultural production which was so marked in the eighteenth century: especially in corn, but also in meat; changes themselves related to enclosure and more efficient production. The crisis of poverty, which was so marked in towns and villages alike in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was a result of this social and economic process as a whole, and cannot be explained as the fall of one order and the institution of another. The essential connections between town and country, which had been evident throughout, reached a new, more explicit and finally critical stage. It was characteristic of rural England, before and during the Industrial Revolution, that it was exposed to increasing penetration by capitalist social relations and the dominance of the market, just because these had been powerfully evolving within its own structures. By the late eighteenth century we can properly speak of an organised capitalist society, in which what happened to the market, anywhere, whether in industrial or agricultural production, worked its way through to town and country alike, as parts of a single crisis.

Within these developments, violent alterations of condition occurred, to many thousands of tenants and labourers, and to hundreds of

village communities. The new tone we have seen in eighteenth-century country writing is then related to these changes of condition, but also, as we have again seen, to ways of interpreting them. We can find the sense of collapse in Langhorne, from a part of the country where enclosure was not a main issue but where the whole economic and social process was exerting its pressures, as much as in Goldsmith, Crabbe, Cowper, and later Clare and Cobbett, from counties where enclosure was the most visible social fact.

At a certain stage, though, enclosure came to be isolated as a main cause. Young's change of mind, his recognition of social realities, came in the early years of the nineteenth century: by most acts of enclosure the poor had been injured, often grossly, and he imagined the poor man saying:

All I know is, I had a cow and Parliament took it from me.

Cobbett, by the 1820s, was speaking of the 'madness of enclosures' and even denying, with many argued instances, that they had increased production. He pointed out, what was undeniable, that the increased investment and concentration of money in the land had

worked detriment to the labourer. It was out of his bones that the means came. It was the *deduction made from him by the rise of prices* and by the *not-rise of his wages* (Cobbett's italics).

Cobbett argued in solid terms of the economics of farming, but inevitably from observation of single instances, as when he calculated that the value of bees on a particular Hampshire common was alone greater than the value of that same common enclosed, to say nothing of the cows, pigs and poultry, the apples and cherries, also raised there. But this is the familiar case of a local contrast between a mixed farming economy and the economics of specialisation and scale; in the long run, in trading terms, the latter of course prevailed.

An interesting element was then added to the argument by social observation of life on the old commons. For example Thomas Bewick the engraver, in his *Memoir* written in the 1820s, remembers a Northumberland common of the 1780s, and comments:

On this common—the poor man's heritage for ages past, where he kept a few sheep, or a Kyoew cow, perhaps a flock of geese, and mostly a stock of bee-hives—it was with infinite pleasure that I long beheld the beautiful wild scenery that was there exhibited, and it is with the opposite feeling that I now find all swept away. Here and there on this common were to be seen the cottage, or rather hovel, of some labouring man, built at his own expense, and mostly with his own hands; and to this he always added a garth and a garden, upon which great pains and labour were

bestowed to make productive. . . . These various concerns excited the attention and industry of the hardy occupants, which enabled them to prosper, and made them despise being ever numbered with the parish poor. These men . . . might truly be called—

'A bold peasantry, their country's pride'.

It is an attractive and wholly credible account, and we can learn from Bewick as he goes on to describe the independence and originality of mind of many of these men:

I think I see him yet, sitting on a mound, or seat, by the hedge of his garden, regardless of the cold, and intent upon viewing the heavenly bodies; pointing to them with his large hands, and eagerly imparting his knowledge;

or his description of Anthony Liddell—

The whole cast of his character was formed by the Bible, which he had read with attention, through and through. Acts of Parliament which appeared to him to clash with the laws laid down in it, as the Word of God, he treated with contempt. He maintained that the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea were free for all men; consequently, game-laws, or laws to protect the fisheries, had no weight with him;

or of Thomas Forster the beekeeper, who hid many of his hives in the whin, to keep away 'the over-inquisitive'.

From recollections like these, and from more conscious and extended accounts of pre-enclosure villages, a picture was built up which has still great emotional force: of independent and honourable men, living in a working rural democracy, who were coldly and 'legally' destroyed by the new enclosing order.

It is this picture as a whole that we have, even reluctantly, to question. The character given by independence needs little argument, though the character of Thomas Forster the beekeeper, who sold the honey of his home-hives to his neighbours and of his whin-hives at a distance, seems already well on the way to independence in another sense: that of the private entrepreneur who has at best an ambiguous relation to his community. The other kind of character, in which a man has time and spirit to observe, to think and to read, obviously flourished in the relative independence of the cottager, but is also part of the whole history—the glory and the tragedy—of working men everywhere. I do not know any social condition in which, against all the apparent odds, such characters have not emerged: whether it is that of Bewick's commoners, or of the field labourers like Stephen Duck, or of the Sussex shepherd-diarists, or of the amateur geologists and botanists of the Lancashire mill-towns, or of the working-

men scholars of our own century, the etymologists, the economists, the local historians. It is part of the insult offered to intelligence by a class-society that this history of ordinary thought is ever found surprising. There were, of course, in all these conditions, men of great capacity who gave a shape to their lives by long effort and wisdom. The values which these men lived and represented are opposed, always and everywhere, by the greed and pride of money, power and, too often, established learning. In that general sense, the growth of a system which rationalised greed and pride destroyed and has continued to destroy. But what we have also to notice is how much on the defensive, in how small a space of cleared life, the independence of the cottagers was maintained. The question we have to put to this version of social history is not whether some men emerged and survived—they will always do so, under any pressures—but whether, taken as a whole, the way of life could sustain a general independence. That, after all, is the test of community, as opposed to occasional private independence. And then at once we notice, even in Bewick, that the 'parish poor' are already there, as a distinguishable class. We have to notice, what Bewick also tells us, that the independent cottagers:

held the neighbouring gentry in the greatest estimation and respect; and these again, in return, did not overlook them, but were interested in knowing that they were happy and well.

What they have is then a relative and fortunate independence, in an interval of settlement which we can be glad lasted many men's lifetimes. But it is not necessarily an order that we can oppose to what succeeded it, when the same neighbouring gentry showed their interest in a different way and enclosed the commons. The rural class-system was already there, and men were living as they could, sometimes well, in its edges, its margins, its as yet ungrasped and undeveloped areas.

Most records of loss come from these marginal lands: the commons and heaths. But parliamentary enclosure did not only operate on them. Indeed we cannot understand the social consequences of enclosure unless we distinguish between two fundamentally different processes: the enclosure of 'wastes', which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accounted for some two million acres, and the enclosure of open arable fields, already under cultivation, which accounted for some four million acres. It is obvious that the social effects of these two processes must be radically different. What was being suppressed on the wastes was a marginal independence, of cottagers, squatters, isolated settlers in mainly uncultivated land. What was being suppressed in the open-field villages must have

been a very different kind of community: the close nucleated villages of an old arable economy. It is remarkable, as W. G. Hoskins has observed, that there is hardly anything in literature to record the passing of such villages, though the complaints of the loss of commons are very numerous. It is possible to read Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* as such a record, but characteristically it is indirect. Yet it is the alteration of the social and economic character of the open-field arable villages that ought most to engage us, if we are thinking of any pre-enclosure 'rural democracy'. Certainly it was the changes here which contributed most substantially to the newly prosperous and consolidated agrarian capitalism. But what kind of social order really existed, in the old open-field village? We must be careful not to confuse the techniques of production—the open-field strips—with what can easily be projected from it, an 'open' and relatively equal society. It is worth looking at the description by a modern rural historian, Fussell, of 'a typical open-field village' of the early eighteenth century. There are three hundred souls. Of these, nearly two hundred are cottagers and labourers and their families, indoor servants, and the unattached poor—widows, orphans, the aged. Some seventy are the copyhold tenant farmers and their families. Some twenty are the freehold farmers and their families. The ten or twelve others are the squire and his family and the parson and his family. It is an interesting distribution, but it is not, at first sight, so dissimilar from the ordinary social structure of mature rural capitalism as to suggest a radically different social order. There are, in effect, three classes: the gentry; the small entrepreneurs; the unpropertied poor. The inequalities of condition which the village contains and supports are profound, and nobody, by any exercise of sentiment, can convert it into a 'rural democracy' or, absurdly, a commune. The social structure that will be completed after enclosure is already basically outlined.

Yet there are qualifications, and it is these we must try to weigh. Among the cottagers and labourers, for example, some are craftsmen and tradesmen (blacksmith, carpenter, cobbler, carrier, publican), and these and others (though not all the others) have small rights of grazing and fuel on nearby common pastures and wastes. It is easy, in retrospect, for these rights to seem petty, but for at least some men they were an important protection against the exposure of total hire. Again and again, down to our own day, men living in villages have tried to create just this kind of margin: a rented patch or strip, an extended garden, a few hives or fruit trees. When I was a child my father had not only the garden that went with his cottage, but a strip for potatoes on a farm where he helped in the harvest, and two gardens which he rented from the railway company from which he drew his wages. Such marginal possibilities are important

not only for their produce, but for their direct and immediate satisfactions and for the felt reality of an area of control of one's own immediate labour. Under the long pressures of a dominating wage-economy, these exceptional areas have been critically important: they still occur, even in towns, in some subsidiary small trade or employment. And there can be little doubt that the pre-enclosure village made such opportunities available for more men than any immediately alternative community. In that sense, a degree of loss is real. But only a degree: for by these methods, while they remained marginal, no whole community could be economically sustained, and stratification within it was still inevitable.

To what extent, then, was there ever a genuine community, in such villages, in spite of the economic and social inequalities? It is very difficult to say, for there were major factual variations (we still need many more local studies and examples), and an estimate of 'community', at this distance in time, will be always to some extent subjective. We can of course look at institutions. The manorial courts, in which the business of the village was transacted according to customary rights, are often cited as 'communal'. These were, though, steadily decaying before enclosure, and retained only a declining importance until they were superseded by the completed system of propertied rule. The processes of local law and government show the same evolution: a steady concentration of power in the hands of the landowners, and a more evident (if not a more severe) arbitrariness as these came increasingly to represent a conscious national system and interest, in the constitution of the landowners as a political class. The reality of community must then have varied enormously. The detailed record of the Warwickshire village of Tysoe, which we can study in M. K. Ashby's remarkable biography of her father (*Joseph Ashby of Tysoe*, 1961), is a relevant example.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Tysoe, the registers showed, had been a village of yeomen, craftsmen, tradesmen and a few labourers—not separate classes, but intermarrying, interapprenticed sections of the community, unified by farming in cooperation and by as great mutual dependence in other ways. . . . In earlier years the division between classes in Tysoe had been no more than function or custom called for or worldly perspicacity earned. . . . After the years of wretchedness it was so deep a ditch that every foolish mind fell into it.

But what is then interesting is that this change, in 'the years of wretchedness', is not the result of enclosure, but had preceded it. The increasing poverty in the village became a system of pauperism, and for this

enclosure could not be blamed in Tysoe.

The scarlet letters for paupers were sewn in the 1740s. The entry of 'Pauper' in the burial register became more regular through the eighteenth century, and was eventually shortened to a crude 'P'. Unemployment was registered from the 1780s. The roundsman system was active from the 1760s. The smallpox came recurrently, and the consequences of its heavy toll of lives led to peaks of poor relief in the 1770s. This community, it is clear, was so involved in and exposed to the crises of a general system that its neighbourliness was, at best, relative. The friendly and comparatively informal relief of an earlier period gave way, under just this pressure, to the cold and harsh treatment of a separate class of 'the poor'. At the same time, again before enclosure though increasing after it, there was the more evident class-consciousness of the parsons, as in the new style of vicarage, hedged from 'their' parishioners, and of the more prosperous farmers, now called 'gentlemen-farmers'. Enclosure is then a factor within this complex of change, but not a single isolated cause.

Another thing we can learn is that community must not always be seen in retrospect. In Tysoe there was a revival of community, as the village came together in the nineteenth century, to fight for its rights of allotment in the Town Lands. In many parts of rural Britain, a new kind of community developed as an aspect of struggle, against the dominant landowners or, as in the labourers' revolts in the time of the Swing machine-smashing and rick-burning or in the labourers' unions from Tolpuddle to Joseph Arch, against the whole class-system of rural capitalism. In many villages, community only became a reality when economic and political rights were fought for and partially gained, in the recognition of unions, in the extension of the franchise, and in the possibility of entry into new representative and democratic institutions. In many thousands of cases, there is more community in the modern village, as a result of this process of new legal and democratic rights, than at any point in the recorded or imagined past.

That is active community, and it must be distinguished from another version, which is sometimes the mutuality of the oppressed, at other times the mutuality of people living at the edges or in the margins of a generally oppressive system. This comes out in many ways, overlapping with the community of struggle or persisting as local and traditional habit. One way of considering the survival of this traditional mutuality would be according to the distance of a village from its principal landowner. We have heard so much of the civilising effect of this landowning class, from its own mouth and from the mouths it has hired, that it is worth recording the coming of a more extreme class-consciousness—a systematic shaming of the labourers and the poor—from what were now so often the rebuilt country-houses, and often by way of their attendant and employed clergy.

The break of so many poor families from the Church of England into the nonconformist sects is directly related to this experience of landlord-and-parson religion. The barn-chapels of remote rural Britain are still moving witnesses of this radical community response. But the remoteness itself is very often a factor, whether regional or local. It has always seemed to me, from some relevant family experience, that the distance or absence of one of those 'great houses' of the landlords can be a critical factor in the survival of a traditional kind of community: that of tolerant neighbourliness. Matthew Arnold gave a clue to this when he wrote, in *Culture and Anarchy*:

When I go through the country, and see this and that beautiful
and imposing seat of theirs crowning the landscape, 'There',
I say to myself, 'is a great fortified post of the Barbarians'.

They had been there, indeed, from periods of direct military rule and occupation; but they had settled into a more social order. And it was in the eighteenth century, most visibly, that these strong points of a class spread in a close network over so much of Britain, with subsidiary effects, on attitudes to landscape and to nature, that we shall come to notice.

But consider, directly, their social effect. Some of them had been there for centuries, visible triumphs over the ruin and labour of others. But the extraordinary phase of extension, rebuilding and enlarging, which occurred in the eighteenth century, represents a spectacular increase in the rate of exploitation: a good deal of it, of course, the profit of trade and of colonial exploitation; much of it, however, the higher surplus value of a new and more efficient mode of production. It is fashionable to admire these extraordinarily numerous houses: the extended manors, the neo-classical mansions, that lie so close in rural Britain. People still pass from village to village, guidebook in hand, to see the next and yet the next example, to look at the stones and the furniture. But stand at any point and look at that land. Look at what those fields, those streams, those woods even today produce. Think it through as labour and see how long and systematic the exploitation and seizure must have been, to rear that many houses, on that scale. See by contrast what any ancient isolated farm, in uncounted generations of labour, has managed to become, by the efforts of any single real family, however prolonged. And then turn and look at what these other 'families', these systematic owners, have accumulated and arrogantly declared. It isn't only that you know, looking at the land and then at the house, how much robbery and fraud there must have been, for so long, to produce that degree of disparity, that barbarous disproportion of scale. The working farms and cottages are so small beside them: what men really raise, by their

own efforts or by such portion as is left to them, in the ordinary scale of human achievement. What these 'great' houses do is to break the scale, by an act of will corresponding to their real and systematic exploitation of others. For look at the sites, the façades, the defining avenues and walls, the great iron gates and the guardian lodges. These were chosen for more than the effect from the inside out; where so many admirers, too many of them writers, have stood and shared the view, finding its prospect delightful. They were chosen, also, you now see, for the other effect, from the outside looking in: a visible stamping of power, of displayed wealth and command: a social disproportion which was meant to impress and overawe. Much of the real profit of a more modern agriculture went not into productive investment but into that explicit social declaration: a mutually competitive but still uniform exposition, at every turn, of an established and commanding class power.

To stand in that shadow, even today, is to know what many generations of countrymen bitterly learned and were consciously taught: that these were the families, this the shape of the society. And will you then think of community? You will see modern community only in the welcome signs of some partial reclamation: the houses returned to some general use, as a hospital or agricultural college. But you are just as likely to see the old kinds of power still declared: in the surviving exploiters and in their modern relations—the corporation country-house, the industrial seat, the ruling-class school. Physically they are there: the explicit forms of the long class-society.

But turn for a moment elsewhere: to the villages that escaped their immediate presence; to the edges, the old commons still preserved in place-names; to the hamlets where control was remote. It can make some difference, as you go about every day, to be out of sight of that explicit command. And this is so, I do not doubt, in many surviving, precarious communities, the dispersed settlements of the west or some of the close villages of the east and midlands, where no immediate house has so outgrown its neighbours that it has visibly altered the scale. It makes a real difference that in day-to-day relations those other people and their commanding statements in stone are absent or at least some welcome distance away.

In some places still, an effective community, of a local kind, can survive in older terms, where small freeholders, tenants, craftsmen and labourers can succeed in being neighbours first and social classes only second. This must never be idealised, for at the points of decision, now as then, the class realities usually show through. But in many intervals, many periods of settlement, there is a kindness, a mutuality, that still manages to flow. It is a matter of degree, as it was in the

villages before and after enclosure. When the pressure of a system is great and is increasing, it matters to find a breathing-space, a fortunate distance, from the immediate and visible controls. What was drastically reduced, by enclosures, was just such a breathing-space, a marginal day-to-day independence, for many thousands of people. It is right to mourn that loss but we must also look at it plainly. What happened was not so much 'enclosure'—the method—but the more visible establishment of a long-developing system, which had taken, and was to take, several other forms. The many miles of new fences and walls, the new paper rights, were the formal declaration of where the power now lay. The economic system of landlord, tenant and labourer, which had been extending its hold since the sixteenth century, was now in explicit and assertive control. Community, to survive, had then to change its terms.

1

The Rise of English

In eighteenth-century England, the concept of literature was not confined as it sometimes is today to 'creative' or 'imaginative' writing. It meant the whole body of valued writing in society: philosophy, history, essays and letters as well as poems. What made a text 'literary' was not whether it was fictional – the eighteenth century was in grave doubt about whether the new upstart form of the novel was literature at all – but whether it conformed to certain standards of 'polite letters'. The criteria of what counted as literature, in other words, were frankly ideological: writing which embodied the values and 'tastes' of a particular social class qualified as literature, whereas a street ballad, a popular romance and perhaps even the drama did not. At this historical point, then, the 'value-ladenness' of the concept of literature was reasonably self-evident.

In the eighteenth century, however, literature did more than 'embody' certain social values: it was a vital instrument for their deeper entrenchment and wider dissemination. Eighteenth-century England had emerged, battered but intact, from a bloody civil war in the previous century which had set the social classes at each other's throats; and in the drive to reconsolidate a shaken social order, the neo-classical notions of Reason, Nature, order and propriety, epitomized in art, were key concepts. With the need to incorporate the increasingly powerful but spiritually rather raw middle classes into unity with the ruling aristocracy, to diffuse polite social manners, habits of 'correct' taste and common cultural standards, literature gained a new importance. It included a whole set of ideological institutions: periodicals, coffee houses, social and aesthetic treatises, sermons, classical translations, guidebooks to manners and morals. Literature was not a matter of 'felt

experience', 'personal response' or 'imaginative uniqueness': such terms, indissociable for us today from the whole idea of the 'literary', would not have counted for much with Henry Fielding.

It was, in fact, only with what we now call the 'Romantic period' that our own definitions of literature began to develop. The modern sense of the word 'literature' only really gets under way in the nineteenth century, Literature in this sense of the word is an historically recent phenomenon: it was invented sometime around the turn of the eighteenth century, and would have been thought extremely strange by Chaucer or even Pope. What happened first was a narrowing of the category of literature to so-called 'creative' or 'imaginative' work. The final decades of the eighteenth century witness a new division and demarcation of discourses, a radical reorganizing of what we might call the 'discursive formation' of English society. 'Poetry' comes to mean a good deal more than verse: by the time of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1821), it signifies a concept of human creativity which is radically at odds with the utilitarian ideology of early industrial capitalist England. Of course a distinction between 'factual' and 'imaginative' writing had long been recognized: the word 'poetry' or 'poesy' had traditionally singled out fiction, and Philip Sidney had entered an eloquent plea for it in his *Apology for Poetry*. But by the time of the Romantic period, literature was becoming virtually synonymous with the 'imaginative': to write about what did not exist was somehow more soul-stirring and valuable than to pen an account of Birmingham or the circulation of the blood. The word 'imaginative' contains an ambiguity suggestive of this attitude: it has a resonance of the descriptive term 'imaginary', meaning 'literally untrue', but is also of course an evaluative term, meaning 'visionary' or 'inventive'.

Since we ourselves are post-Romantics, in the sense of being products of that epoch rather than confidently posterior to it, it is hard for us to grasp just what a curious historically particular idea this is. It would certainly have seemed so to most of the English writers whose 'imaginative vision' we now reverently elevate above the merely 'prosaic' discourse of those who can find nothing more dramatic to write about than the Black Death or the Warsaw ghetto. Indeed it is in the Romantic period that the descriptive term 'prosaic' begins to acquire its negative sense of prosy, dull, uninspiring. If what does not exist is felt to be more attractive than what does, if poetry or the imagination is privileged over prose or 'hard fact', then it is a reasonable assumption that this says something significant about the kinds of society in which the Romantics lived.

The historical period in question is one of revolution: in America and France the old colonialist or feudalist regimes are overthrown by middle-

class insurrection, while England achieves its point of economic 'take-off', arguably on the back of the enormous profits it has reaped from the eighteenth-century slave trade and its imperial control of the seas, to become the world's first industrial capitalist nation. But the visionary hopes and dynamic energies released by these revolutions, energies with which Romantic writing is alive, enter into potentially tragic contradiction with the harsh realities of the new bourgeois regimes. In England, a crassly philistine Utilitarianism is rapidly becoming the dominant ideology of the industrial middle class, fetishizing fact, reducing human relations to market exchanges and dismissing art as unprofitable ornamentation. The callous disciplines of early industrial capitalism uproot whole communities, convert human life into wage-slavery, enforce an alienating labour-process on the newly formed working class and understand nothing which cannot be transformed into a commodity on the open market. As the working class responds with militant protest to this oppression, and as troubling memories of revolution across the Channel still haunt their rulers, the English state reacts with a brutal political repressiveness which converts England, during part of the Romantic period, into what is in effect a police state. 1

In the face of such forces, the privilege accorded by the Romantics to the 'creative imagination' can be seen as considerably more than idle escapism. On the contrary, 'literature' now appears as one of the few enclaves in which the creative values expunged from the face of English society by industrial capitalism can be celebrated and affirmed. 'Imaginative creation' can be offered as an image of non-alienated labour; the intuitive, transcendental scope of the poetic mind can provide a living criticism of those rationalist or empiricist ideologies enslaved to 'fact'. The literary work itself comes to be seen as a mysterious organic unity, in contrast to the fragmented individualism of the capitalist marketplace: it is 'spontaneous' rather than rationally calculated, creative rather than mechanical. The word 'poetry', then, no longer refers simply to a technical mode of writing: it has deep social, political and philosophical implications, and at the sound of it the ruling class might quite literally reach for its gun. Literature has become a whole alternative ideology, and the 'imagination' itself, as with Blake and Shelley, becomes a political force. Its task is to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies. Most of the major Romantic poets were themselves political activists, perceiving continuity rather than conflict between their literary and social commitments.

Yet we can already begin to detect within this literary radicalism another, and to us more familiar, emphasis: a stress upon the sovereignty and autonomy of the imagination, its splendid remoteness from the merely prosaic

matters of feeding one's children or struggling for political justice. If the 'transcendental' nature of the imagination offered a challenge to an anaemic rationalism, it could also offer the writer a comfortingly absolute alternative to history itself. Indeed such a detachment from history reflected the Romantic writer's actual situation. Art was becoming a commodity like anything else, and the Romantic artist little more than a minor commodity producer; for all his rhetorical claim to be 'representative' of humankind, to speak with the voice of the people and utter eternal verities, he existed more and more on the margins of a society which was not inclined to pay high wages to prophets. The finely passionate idealism of the Romantics, then, was also idealist in a more philosophical sense of the word. Deprived of any proper place within the social movements which might actually have transformed industrial capitalism into a just society, the writer was increasingly driven back into the solitariness of his own creative mind. The vision of a just society was often enough inverted into an impotent nostalgia for the old 'organic' England which had passed away. It was not until the time of William Morris, who in the late nineteenth century harnessed this Romantic humanism to the cause of the working-class movement, that the gap between poetic vision and political practice was significantly narrowed.!

It is no accident that the period we are discussing sees the rise of modern 'aesthetics', or the philosophy of art. It is mainly from this era, in the work of Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Coleridge and others, that we inherit our contemporary ideas of the 'symbol' and 'aesthetic experience', of 'aesthetic harmony' and the unique nature of the artefact. Previously men and women had written poems, staged plays or painted pictures for a variety of purposes, while others had read, watched or viewed them in a variety of ways. Now these concrete, historically variable practices were being subsumed into some special, mysterious faculty known as the 'aesthetic', and a new breed of aestheticians sought to lay bare its inmost structures. It was not that such questions had not been raised before, but now they began to assume a new significance. The assumption that there was an unchanging object known as 'art', or an isolatable experience called 'beauty' or the 'aesthetic', was largely a product of the very alienation of art from social life which we have already touched on. If literature had ceased to have any obvious function - if the writer was no longer a traditional figure in the pay of the court, the church or an aristocratic patron - then it was possible to turn this fact to literature's advantage. The whole point of 'creative' writing was that it was gloriously useless, an 'end in itself' loftily removed from any sordid social purpose. Having lost his patron, the writer discovered a substitute in the poetic.' It is, in fact, somewhat improbable that the *Iliad* was art to the ancient Greeks in the same sense that a cathedral was an artefact for the Middle Ages or Andy

Warhol's work is art for us; but the effect of aesthetics was to suppress these historical differences. Art was extricated from the material practices, social relations and ideological meanings in which it is always caught up, and raised to the status of a solitary fetish.

At the centre of aesthetic theory at the turn of the eighteenth century is the semi-mystical doctrine of the symbol." For Romanticism, indeed, the symbol becomes the panacea for all problems. Within it, a whole set of conflicts which were felt to be insoluble in ordinary life – between subject and object, the universal and the particular, the sensuous and the conceptual, material and spiritual, order and spontaneity – could be magically resolved. It is not surprising that such conflicts were sorely felt in this period. Objects in a society which could see them as no more than commodities appeared lifeless and inert, divorced from the human subjects who produced or used them. The concrete and the universal seemed to have drifted apart: an aridly rationalist philosophy ignored the sensuous qualities of particular things, while a short-sighted empiricism (the 'official' philosophy of the English middle class, then as now) was unable to peer beyond particular bits and pieces of the world to any total picture which they might compose. The dynamic, spontaneous energies of social progress were to be fostered, but curbed of their potentially anarchic force by a restraining social order. The symbol fused together motion and stillness, turbulent content and organic form, mind and world. Its material body was the medium of an absolute spiritual truth, one perceived by direct intuition rather than by any laborious process of critical analysis. In this sense the symbol brought such truths to bear on the mind in a way which brooked no question: either you saw it or you didn't. It was the keystone of an irrationalism, a forestalling of reasoned critical enquiry, which has been rampant in literary theory ever since. It was a *unitary* thing, and to dissect it – to take it apart to see how it worked – was almost as blasphemous as seeking to analyse the Holy Trinity. All of its various parts worked spontaneously together for the common good, each in its subordinate place; and it is therefore hardly surprising to find the symbol, or the literary artefact as such, being regularly offered throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an ideal model of human society itself. If only the lower orders were to forget their grievances and pull together for the good of all, much tedious turmoil could be avoided.

To speak of 'literature and ideology' as two separate phenomena which can be interrelated is, as I hope to have shown, in one sense quite unnecessary. Literature, in the meaning of the word we have inherited, *is* an ideology. It

has the most intimate relations to questions of social power. But if the reader is still unconvinced, the narrative of what happened to literature in the later nineteenth century might prove a little more persuasive.

If one were asked to provide a single explanation for the growth of English studies in the later nineteenth century, one could do worse than reply: 'the failure of religion'. By the mid-Victorian period, this traditionally reliable, immensely powerful ideological form was in deep trouble. It was no longer winning the hearts and minds of the masses, and under the twin impacts of scientific discovery and social change its previous unquestioned dominance was in danger of evaporating. This was particularly worrying for the Victorian ruling class, because religion is for all kinds of reasons an extremely effective form of ideological control. Like all successful ideologies, it works much less by explicit concepts or formulated doctrines than by image, symbol, habit, ritual and mythology. It is affective and experiential, entwining itself with the deepest unconscious roots of the human subject; and any social ideology which is unable to engage with such deep-seated a-rational fears and needs, as T. S. Eliot knew, is unlikely to survive very long. Religion, moreover, is capable of operating at every social level: if there is a doctrinal inflection of it for the intellectual elite, there is also a pietistic brand of it for the masses. It provides an excellent social 'cement', encompassing pious peasant, enlightened middle-class liberal and theological intellectual in a single organization. Its ideological power lies in its capacity to 'materialize' beliefs as practices: religion is the sharing of the chalice and the blessing of the harvest, not just abstract argument about consubstantiation or hyperdulia. Its ultimate truths, like those mediated by the literary symbol, are conveniently closed to rational demonstration, and thus absolute in their claims. Finally religion, at least in its Victorian forms, is a *pacifying* influence, fostering meekness, self-sacrifice and the contemplative inner life. It is no wonder that the Victorian ruling class looked on the threatened dissolution of this ideological discourse with something less than equanimity.

Fortunately, however, another, remarkably similar discourse lay to hand: English literature. George Gordon, early Professor of English Literature at Oxford, commented in his inaugural lecture that 'England is sick, and . . . English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State.'⁵ Gordon's words were spoken in our own century, but they find a resonance everywhere in Victorian England. It is a striking thought that had it not been for this dramatic crisis in mid-

nineteenth-century ideology, we might not today have such a plentiful supply of Jane Austen casebooks and bluffer's guides to Pound. As religion progressively ceases to provide the social 'cement', affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together, 'English' is constructed as a subject to carry this ideological burden from the Victorian period onwards. The key figure here is Matthew Arnold, always preternaturally sensitive to the needs of his social class, and engagingly candid about being so. The urgent social need, as Arnold recognizes, is to 'Hellenize' or cultivate the philistine middle class, who have proved unable to underpin their political and economic power with a suitably rich and subtle ideology. This can be done by transfusing into them something of the traditional style of the aristocracy, who as Arnold shrewdly perceives are ceasing to be the dominant class in England, but who have something of the ideological wherewithal to lend a hand to their middle-class masters. State-established schools, by linking the middle class to 'the best culture of their nation', will confer on them 'a greatness and a noble spirit, which the tone of these classes is not of itself at present adequate to impart'.⁶

The true beauty of this manoeuvre, however, lies in the effect it will have in controlling and incorporating the working class:

It is of itself a serious calamity for a nation that its tone of feeling and grandeur of spirit should be lowered or dulled. But the calamity appears far more serious still when we consider that the middle classes, remaining as they are now, with their narrow, harsh, unintelligent, and unattractive spirit and culture, will almost certainly fail to mould or assimilate the masses below them, whose sympathies are at the present moment actually wider and more liberal than theirs. They arrive, these masses, eager to enter into possession of the world, to gain a more vivid sense of their own life and activity. In this their irrepressible development, their natural educators and initiators are those immediately above them, the middle classes. **If** these classes cannot win their sympathy or give them their direction, society is in danger of falling into anarchy."

Arnold is refreshingly unhypocritical: there is no feeble pretence that the education of the working class is to be conducted chiefly for their own benefit, or that his concern with their spiritual condition is, in one of his own most cherished terms, in the least 'disinterested'. In the even more disarmingly candid words of a twentieth-century proponent of this view: 'Deny to working-class children any common share in the immaterial, and presently they will grow into the men who demand with menaces a communism of the material.'⁸ If the masses are not thrown a few novels, they may react by throwing up a few barricades.

Literature was in several ways a suitable candidate for this ideological enterprise. As a liberal, 'humanizing' pursuit, it could provide a potent antidote to political bigotry and ideological extremism. Since literature, as we know, deals in universal human values rather than in such historical trivia as civil wars, the oppression of women or the dispossession of the English peasantry, it could serve to place in cosmic perspective the petty demands of working people for decent living conditions or greater control over their own lives, and might even with luck come to render them oblivious of such issues in their high-minded contemplation of eternal truths and beauties. English, as a Victorian handbook for English teachers put it, helps to 'promote sympathy and fellow feeling among all classes'; another Victorian writer speaks of literature as opening a 'serene and luminous region of truth where all may meet and expatiate in common', above 'the smoke and stir, the din and turmoil of man's lower life of care and business and debate.'" Literature would rehearse the masses in the habits of pluralistic thought and feeling, persuading them to acknowledge that more than one viewpoint than theirs existed – namely, that of their masters. It would communicate to them the moral riches of bourgeois civilization, impress upon them a reverence for middle-class achievements, and, since reading is an essentially solitary, contemplative activity, curb in them any disruptive tendency to collective political action. It would give them a pride in their national language and literature: if scanty education and extensive hours of labour prevented them personally from producing a literary masterpiece, they could take pleasure in the thought that others of their own kind – English people – had done so. The people, according to a study of English literature written in 1891, 'need political culture, instruction, that is to say, in what pertains to their relation to the State, to their duties as citizens; and they need also to be impressed sentimentally by having the presentation in legend and history of heroic and patriotic examples brought vividly and attractively before them'." All of this, moreover, could be achieved without the cost and labour of teaching them the Classics: English literature was written in their own language, and so was conveniently available to them.

Like religion, literature works primarily by emotion and experience, and so was admirably well-fitted to carry through the ideological task which religion left off. Indeed by our own time literature has become effectively identical with the opposite of analytical thought and conceptual enquiry: whereas scientists, philosophers and political theorists are saddled with these drably discursive pursuits, students of literature occupy the more prized territory of feeling and experience. Whose experience, and what kinds of feeling, is a different question. Literature from Arnold onwards is

the enemy of 'ideological dogma', an attitude which might have come as a surprise to Dante, Milton and Pope; the truth or falsity of beliefs such as that blacks are inferior to whites is less important than what it feels like to experience them. Arnold himself had beliefs, of course, though like everybody else he regarded his own beliefs as reasoned positions rather than ideological dogmas. Even so, it was not the business of literature to communicate such beliefs directly – to argue openly, for example, that private property is the bulwark of liberty. Instead, literature should convey *timeless* truths, thus distracting the masses from their immediate commitments, nurturing in them a spirit of tolerance and generosity, and so ensuring the survival of private property. Just as Arnold attempted in *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible* to dissolve away the embarrassingly doctrinal bits of Christianity into poetically suggestive sonorities, so the pill of middle-class ideology was to be sweetened by the sugar of literature.

There was another sense in which the 'experiential' nature of literature was ideologically convenient. For 'experience' is not only the homeland of ideology, the place where it takes root most effectively; it is also in its literary form a kind of vicarious self-fulfilment. If you do not have the money and leisure to visit the Far East, except perhaps as a soldier in the pay of British imperialism, then you can always 'experience' it at second hand by reading Conrad or Kipling. Indeed according to some literary theories this is even more real than strolling round Bangkok. The actually impoverished experience of the mass of people, an impoverishment bred by their social conditions, can be supplemented by literature: instead of working to change such conditions (which Arnold, to his credit, did more thoroughly than almost any of those who sought to inherit his mantle), you can vicariously fulfil someone's desire for a fuller life by handing them *Pride and Prejudice*.

It is significant, then, that 'English' as an academic subject was first institutionalized not in the Universities, but in the Mechanics' Institutes, working men's colleges and extension lecturing circuits. English was literally the poor man's Classics – a way of providing a cheapish 'liberal' education for those beyond the charmed circles of public school and Oxbridge. From the outset, in the work of 'English' pioneers like F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley, the emphasis was on solidarity between the social classes, the cultivation of 'larger sympathies', the instillation of national pride and the transmission of 'moral' values. This last concern – still the distinctive hallmark of literary studies in England, and a frequent source of bemusement to intellectuals from other cultures – was an essential part of the ideological project; indeed the rise of 'English' is more or less concomitant with an historic shift in the very meaning of the term 'moral', of which

Arnold, Henry James and F. R. Leavis are the major critical exponents. Morality is no longer to be grasped as a formulated code or explicit ethical system: it is rather a sensitive preoccupation with the whole quality of life itself, with the oblique, nuanced particulars of human experience. Somewhat rephrased, this can be taken as meaning that the old religious ideologies have lost their force, and that a more subtle communication of moral values" one which works by 'dramatic enactment' rather than rebarbative abstraction, is thus in order. Since such values are nowhere more vividly dramatized than in literature, brought home to 'felt experience' with all the unquestionable reality of a blow on the head, literature becomes more than just a handmaiden of moral ideology: it *is* moral ideology for the modern age, as the work of F. R. Leavis was most graphically to evince.

The working class was not the only oppressed layer of Victorian society at whom 'English' was specifically beamed. English literature, reflected a Royal Commission witness in 1877, might be considered a suitable subject for 'women . . . and the second- and third-rate men who . . . become schoolmasters. T The 'softening' and 'humanizing' effects of English, terms recurrently used by its early proponents, are within the existing ideological stereotypes of gender clearly feminine. The rise of English in England ran parallel to the gradual, grudging admission of women to the institutions of higher education; and since English was an untaxing sort of affair, concerned with the finer feelings rather than with the more virile topics of *bona fide* academic 'disciplines', it seemed a convenient sort of non-subject to palm off on the ladies, who were in any case excluded from science and the professions. Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, first Professor of English at Cambridge University, would open with the word 'Gentlemen' lectures addressed to a hall filled largely with women. Though modern male lecturers may have changed their manners, the ideological conditions which make English a popular University subject for women to read have not.

If English had its feminine aspect, however, it also acquired a masculine one as the century drew on. The era of the academic establishment of English is also the era of high imperialism in England. As British capitalism became threatened and progressively outstripped by its younger German and American rivals, the squalid, undignified scramble of too much capital chasing too few overseas territories, which was to culminate in 1914 in the first imperialist world war, created the urgent need for a sense of national mission and identity. What was at stake in English studies was less English *literature* than *English* literature: our great 'national poets' Shakespear and Milton, the sense of an 'organic' national tradition and identity to which new recruits could be admitted by the study of humane letters. The reports of

educational bodies and official enquiries into the teaching of English, in this period and in the early twentieth century, are strewn with nostalgic back-references to the 'organic' community of Elizabethan England in which nobles and groundlings found a common meeting-place in the Shakespearian theatre, and which might still be reinvented today. It is no accident that the author of one of the most influential Government reports in this area, *The Teaching of English in England* (1921), was none other than Sir Henry Newbolt, minor jingoist poet and perpetrator of the immortal line 'Play up! play up! and play the game!' Chris Baldick has pointed to the importance of the admission of English literature to the Civil Service examinations in the Victorian period: armed with this conveniently packaged version of their own cultural treasures, the servants of British imperialism could sally forth overseas secure in a sense of their national identity, and able to display that cultural superiority to their envying colonial peoples."

It took rather longer for English, a subject fit for women, workers and those wishing to impress the natives, to penetrate the bastions of ruling-class power in Oxford and Cambridge. English was an upstart, amateurish affair as academic subjects went, hardly able to compete on equal terms with the rigours of Greats or philology; since every English gentleman read his own literature in his spare time anyway, what was the point of submitting it to systematic study? Fierce rearguard actions were fought by both ancient Universities against this distressingly dilettante subject: the definition of an academic subject was what could be examined, and since English was no more than idle gossip about literary taste it was difficult to know how to make it unpleasant enough to qualify as a proper academic pursuit. This, it might be said, is one of the few problems associated with the study of English which have since been effectively resolved. The frivolous contempt for his subject displayed by the first really 'literary' Oxford professor, Sir Walter Raleigh, has to be read to be believed.¹⁴ Raleigh held his post in the years leading up to the First World War; and his relief at the outbreak of the war, an event which allowed him to abandon the feminine vagaries of literature and put his pen to something more manly - war propaganda - is palpable in his writing. The only way in which English seemed likely to justify its existence in the ancient Universities was by systematically mistaking itself for the Classics; but the classicists were hardly keen to have this pathetic parody of themselves around.

If the first imperialist world war more or less put paid to Sir Walter Raleigh, providing him with an heroic identity more comfortingly in line with that of his Elizabethan namesake, it also signalled the final victory of English studies at Oxford and Cambridge. One of the most strenuous

antagonists of English – philology – was closely bound up with Germanic influence; and since England happened to be passing through a major war with Germany, it was possible to smear classical philology as a form of ponderous Teutonic nonsense with which no self-respecting Englishman should be caught associating. England's victory over Germany meant a renewal of national pride, an upsurge of patriotism which could only aid English's cause; but at the same time the deep trauma of the war, its almost intolerable questioning of every previously held cultural assumption, gave rise to a 'spiritual hungering', as one contemporary commentator described it, for which poetry seemed to provide an answer. It is a chastening thought that we owe the University study of English, in part at least, to a meaningless massacre. The Great War, with its carnage of ruling-class rhetoric, put paid to some of the more strident forms of chauvinism on which English had previously thrived: there could be few more Walter Raleighs after Wilfred Owen. English Literature rode to power on the back of wartime nationalism; but it also represented a search for spiritual solutions on the part of an English ruling class whose sense of identity had been profoundly shaken, whose psyche was ineradicably scarred by the horrors it had endured. Literature would be at once solace and reaffirmation, a familiar ground on which Englishmen could regroup both to explore, and to find some alternative to, the nightmare of history.

The architects of the new subject at Cambridge were on the whole individuals who could be absolved from the crime and guilt of having led working-class Englishmen over the top. F. R. Leavis had served as a medical orderly at the front; Queenie Dorothy Roth, later Q. D. Leavis, was as a woman exempt from such involvements, and was in any case still a child at the outbreak of war. I. A. Richards entered the army after graduation; the renowned pupils of these pioneers, William Empson and L. C. Knights, were also still children in 1914. The champions of English, moreover, stemmed on the whole from an alternative social class to that which had led Britain into war. F. R. Leavis was the son of a musical instruments dealer, Q. D. Roth the daughter of a draper and hosier, I. A. Richards the son of a works manager in Cheshire. English was to be fashioned not by the patrician dilettantes who occupied the early Chairs of Literature at the ancient universities, but by the offspring of the provincial petty bourgeoisie. They were members of a social class entering the traditional Universities for the first time, able to identify and challenge the social assumptions which informed its literary judgements in a way that the devotees of Sir Arthur Quiller

Couch were not. None of them had suffered the crippling disadvantages of a purely literary education of the Quiller Couch kind: F. R. Leavis had migrated to English from history, his pupil Q. D. Roth drew in her work on psychology and cultural anthropology. I. A. Richards had been trained in mental and moral sciences.

In fashioning English into a serious discipline, these men and women blasted apart the assumptions of the pre-war upper-class generation. No subsequent movement within English studies has come near to recapturing the courage and radicalism of their stand. In the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else. English was not only a subject worth studying, but *the* supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation. Far from constituting some amateur or impressionistic enterprise, English was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence — what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the vital centre of the most essential values — were thrown into vivid relief and made the object of the most intensive scrutiny. *Scrutiny* was the title of the critical journal launched in 1932 by the Leavises, which has yet to be surpassed in its tenacious devotion to the moral centrality of English studies, their crucial relevance to the quality of social life as a whole. Whatever the 'failure' or 'success' of *Scrutiny*, however, one might argue the toss between the anti-Leavisian prejudice of the literary establishment and the waspishness of the *Scrutiny* movement itself, the fact remains that English students in England today are 'Leavisites' whether they know it or not, irremediably altered by that historic intervention. There is no more need to be a card-carrying Leavisite today than there is to be a card-carrying Copernican: that current has entered the bloodstream of English studies in England as Copernicus reshaped our astronomical beliefs, has become a form of spontaneous critical wisdom as deep-seated as our conviction that the earth moves round the sun. That the 'Leavis debate' is effectively dead is perhaps the major sign of *Scrutiny's* victory.

What the Leavises saw was that if the Sir Arthur Quiller Couches were allowed to win out, literary criticism would be shunted into an historical siding of no more inherent significance than the question of whether one preferred potatoes to tomatoes. In the face of such whimsical 'taste', they stressed the centrality of rigorous critical analysis, a disciplined attention to the 'words on the page'. They urged this not simply for technical or aesthetic reasons, but because it had the closest relevance to the spiritual crisis of modern civilization. Literature was important not only in itself, but because it encapsulated creative energies which were everywhere on the defensive in

modern 'commercial' society. In literature, and perhaps in literature alone, a vital feel for the creative uses of language was still manifest, in contrast to the philistine devaluing of language and traditional culture blatantly apparent in 'mass society'. The quality of a society's language was the most telling index of the quality of its personal and social life: a society which had ceased to value literature was one lethally closed to the impulses which had created and sustained the best of human civilization. In the civilized manners of eighteenth-century England, or in the 'natural', 'organic' agrarian society of the seventeenth century, one could discern a form of living sensibility without which modern industrial society would atrophy and die.

To be a certain kind of English student in Cambridge in the late 1920s and 1930s was to be caught up in this buoyant, polemical onslaught against the most trivializing features of industrial capitalism. It was rewarding to know that being an English student was not only valuable but the most important way of life one could imagine - that one was contributing in one's own modest way to rolling back twentieth-century society in the direction of the 'organic' community of seventeenth-century England, that one moved at the most progressive tip of civilization itself. Those who came up to Cambridge humbly expecting to read a few poems and novels were quickly demystified: English was not just one discipline among many but the most central subject of all, immeasurably superior to law, science, politics, philosophy or history. These subjects, *Scrutiny* grudgingly conceded, had their place; but it was a place to be assessed by the touchstone of literature, which was less an academic subject than a spiritual exploration coterminous with the fate of civilization itself. With breathtaking boldness, *Scrutiny* redrew the map of English literature in ways from which criticism has never quite recovered. The main thoroughfares on this map ran through Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson, the Jacobean and Metaphysicals, Bunyan, Pope, Samuel Johnson, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Austen, George Eliot, Hopkins, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence. This *was* 'English literature': Spenser, Dryden, Restoration drama, Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Shelley, Byron, Tennyson, Browning, most of the Victorian novelists, Joyce, Woolf and most writers after D. H. Lawrence constituted a network of 'B' roads interspersed with a good few cul-de-sacs. Dickens was first out and then in; 'English' included two and a half women, counting Emily Bronte as a marginal case; almost all of its authors were conservatives.

Dismissive of mere 'literary' values, *Scrutiny* insisted that how one evaluated literary works was deeply bound up with deeper judgements about the nature of history and society as a whole. Confronted with critical approaches

which saw the dissection of literary texts as somehow discourteous, an equivalent in the literary realm to grievous bodily harm, it promoted the most scrupulous analysis of such sacrosanct objects. Appalled by the complacent assumption that any work written in elegant English was more or less as good as any other, it insisted on the most rigorous discrimination between different literary qualities: some works 'made for life', while others most assuredly did not. Restless with the cloistered aestheticism of conventional criticism, Leavis in his early years saw the need to address social and political questions: he even at one point guardedly entertained a form of economic communism. *Scrutiny* was not just a journal, but the focus of a moral and cultural crusade: its adherents would go out to the schools and universities to do battle there, nurturing through the study of literature the kind of rich, complex, mature, discriminating, morally serious responses (all key *Scrutiny* terms) which would equip individuals to survive in a mechanized society of trashy romances, alienated labour, banal advertisements and vulgarizing mass media.

I say 'survive', because apart from Leavis's brief toying with 'some form of economic communism', there was never any serious consideration of actually trying to *change* such a society. It was less a matter of seeking to transform the mechanized society which gave birth to this withered culture than of seeking to withstand it. In this sense, one might claim, *Scrutiny* had thrown in the towel from the start. The only form of change it contemplated was education: by implanting themselves in the educational institutions, the Scrutineers hoped to develop a rich, organic sensibility in selected individuals here and there, who might then transmit this sensibility to others. In this faith in education, Leavis was the true inheritor of Matthew Arnold. But since such individuals were bound to be few and far between, given the insidious effects of 'mass civilization', the only real hope was that an embattled cultivated minority might keep the torch of culture burning in the contemporary waste land and pass it on, via their pupils, to posterity. There are real grounds for doubting that education has the transformative power which Arnold and Leavis assigned to it. It is, after all, *part* of society rather than a solution to it; and who, as Marx once asked, will educate the educators? *Scrutiny* espoused this idealist 'solution', however, because it was loath to contemplate a political one. Spending your English lessons alerting schoolchildren to the manipulateness of advertisements or the linguistic poverty of the popular press is an important task, and certainly more important than getting them to memorize *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. *Scrutiny* actually founded such 'cultural studies' in England, as one of its most enduring achievements. But it is also possible to point out to students that

advertisements and the popular press only exist in their present form because of the profit motive. 'Mass' culture is not the inevitable product of 'industrial' society, but the offspring of a particular form of industrialism which organizes production for profit rather than for use, which concerns itself with what will sell rather than with what is valuable. There is no reason to assume that such a social order is unchangeable; but the changes necessary would go far beyond the sensitive reading of *King Lear*. The whole *Scrutiny* project was at once hair-raisingly radical and really rather absurd. As one commentator has shrewdly put it, the Decline of the West was felt to be avertible by close reading." Was it really true that *literature* could roll back the deadening effects of industrial labour and the philistinism of the media? It was doubtless comforting to feel that by reading Henry James one belonged to the moral vanguard of civilization itself; but what of all those people who did not read Henry James, who had never even heard of James, and would no doubt go to their graves complacently ignorant that he had been and gone? These people certainly composed the overwhelming social majority; were they morally callous, humanly banal and imaginatively bankrupt? One was speaking perhaps of one's own parents and friends here, and so needed to be a little circumspect. Many of these people seemed morally serious and sensitive enough: they showed no particular tendency to go around murdering, looting and plundering, and even if they did it seemed implausible to attribute this to the fact that they had not read Henry James. The *Scrutiny* case was inescapably elitist: it betrayed a profound ignorance and distrust of the capacities of those not fortunate enough to have read English at Downing College. 'Ordinary' people seemed acceptable if they were seventeenth-century cowherds or 'vital' Australian bushmen.

But there was another problem, too, more or less the reverse of this. For if not all of those who could not recognize an enjambement were nasty and brutish, not all of those who could were morally pure. Many people were indeed deep in high culture, but it would transpire a decade or so after the birth of *Scrutiny* that this had not prevented some of them from engaging in such activities as superintending the murder of Jews in central Europe. The strength of Leavisian criticism was that it was able to provide an answer, as Sir Walter Raleigh was not, to the question, why read Literature? The answer, in a nutshell, was that it made you a better person. Few reasons could have been more persuasive than that. When the Allied troops moved into the concentration camps some years after the founding of *Scrutiny*, to arrest commandants who had whiled away their leisure hours with a volume of Goethe, it appeared that someone had some explaining to do. If reading literature did make you a better person, then it was hardly in the direct ways

that this case at its most euphoric had imagined. It was possible to explore the 'great tradition' of the English novel and believe that in doing so you were addressing questions of fundamental value - questions which were of vital relevance to the lives of men and women wasted in fruitless labour in the factories of industrial capitalism. But it was also conceivable that you were destructively cutting yourself off from such men and women, who might be a little slow to recognize how a poetic enjambement enacted a movement of physical balancing.

The lower-middle-class origins of the architects of English are perhaps relevant here. Nonconformist, provincial, hard-working and morally conscientious, the Scrutineers had no difficulty in identifying for what it was the frivolous amateurism of the upper-class English gentlemen who filled the early Chairs of Literature at the ancient Universities. These men were not their kind of men: they were not what the son of a shopkeeper or daughter of a draper would be especially inclined to respect, as a social elite who had excluded their own people from the ancient Universities. But if the lower middle class has a deep animus against the effete aristocracy perched above it, it also works hard to discriminate itself from the working class set below it, a class into whose ranks it is always in danger of falling. *Scrutiny* arose out of this social ambivalence: radical in respect of the literary-academic Establishment, coterie-minded with regard to the mass of the people. Its fierce concern with 'standards' challenged the patrician dilettantes who felt that Walter Savage Landor was probably just as charming in his own way as John Milton, at the same time as it posed searching tests for anyone trying to muscle in on the game. The gain was a resolute singleness of purpose, uncontaminated by wine-tasting triviality on the one hand and 'mass' banality on the other. The loss was a profoundly ingrown isolationism: *Scrutiny* became a defensive elite which, like the Romantics, viewed itself as 'central' while being in fact peripheral, believed itself to be the 'real' Cambridge while the real Cambridge was busy denying it academic posts, and perceived itself as the vanguard of civilization while nostalgically lauding the organic wholeness of exploited seventeenth-century farm labourers.

The only sure fact about the organic society, as Raymond Williams has commented, is that it has always gone.'? Organic societies are just convenient myths for belabouring the mechanized life of modern industrial capitalism. Unable to present a political alternative to this social order, the Scrutineers offered an 'historical' one instead, as the Romantics had done before them. They insisted, of course, that there was no literal returning to the golden age, as almost every English writer who has pressed "the claims of some historical utopia has been careful to do. Where the organic society lingered

on for the Leavisites was in certain uses of the English language. The language of commercial society was abstract and anaemic: it had lost touch with the living roots of sensuous experience. In really 'English' writing, however, language 'concretely enacted' such felt experience: true English literature was verbally rich, complex, sensuous and particular, and the best poem, to caricature the case a little, was one which read aloud sounded rather like chewing an apple. The 'health' and 'vitality' of such language was the product of a 'sane' civilization: it embodied a creative wholeness which had been historically lost, and to read literature was thus to regain vital touch with the roots of one's own being. Literature was in a sense an organic society all of its own: it was important because it was nothing less than a whole social ideology.

The Leavisian belief in 'essential Englishness' - its conviction that some kinds of English were more English than others - was a kind of petty-bourgeois version of the upper-class chauvinism which had helped to bring English to birth in the first place. Such rampant jingoism was less in evidence after 1918, as ex-servicemen and state-aided middle-class students began to infiltrate the public-school ethos of Oxbridge, and 'Englishness' was a more modest, home-spun alternative to it. English as a subject was in part the offshoot of a gradual shift in class tone within English culture: 'Englishness' was less a matter of imperialist flag-waving than of country dancing; rural, populist and provincial rather than metropolitan and aristocratic. Yet if it excoriated the bland assumptions of a Sir Walter Raleigh on one level, it was also in complicity with them on another. It was chauvinism modulated by a new social class, who with a little straining could see themselves as rooted in the 'English people' of John Bunyan rather than in a snobbish ruling caste. Their task was to safeguard the robust vitality of Shakespearean English from the *Daily Herald*, and from ill-starred languages such as French where words were not able concretely to enact their own meanings. This whole notion of language rested upon a naive mimeticism: the theory was that words are somehow healthiest when they approach the condition of things, and thus cease to be words at all. Language is alienated or degenerate unless it is crammed with the physical textures of actual experience, plumped with the rank juices of real life. Armed with this trust in essential Englishness, latinate or verbally disembodied writers (Milton, Shelley) could be shown the door, and pride of place assigned to the 'dramatically concrete' (Donne, Hopkins). There was no question of seeing such re-mapping of the literary terrain as simply one arguable *construction* of a tradition, informed by definite ideological preconceptions: such authors, it was felt, just did manifest the essence of Englishness.

The literary map was in fact already being drawn elsewhere, by a body of criticism which influenced Leavis greatly. In 1915 T. S. Eliot had come to London, son of an 'aristocratic' St Louis family whose traditional role of cultural leadership was being eroded by the industrial middle class of their own nation.¹ Repelled like *Scrutiny* by the spiritual barrenness of industrial capitalism, Eliot had glimpsed an alternative in the life of the old American South – yet another candidate for the elusive organic society, where blood and breeding still counted for something. Culturally displaced and spiritually disinherited, Eliot arrived in England, and in what has rightly been described as 'the most ambitious feat of cultural imperialism the century seems likely to produce',¹⁹ began to carry out a wholesale salvage and demolition job on its literary traditions. The Metaphysical poets and Jacobean dramatists were suddenly upgraded; Milton and the Romantics were rudely toppled; selected European products, including the French Symbolists, were imported.

This, as with *Scrutiny*, was much more than a 'literary' revaluation: it reflected nothing less than a whole political reading of English history. In the early seventeenth century, when the absolute monarchy and the Anglican church still flourished, poets like John Donne and George Herbert (both conservative Anglicans) displayed a unity of sensibility, an easy fusion of thought and feeling. Language was in direct touch with sensory experience, the intellect was 'at the tip of the senses', and to have a thought was as physical as smelling a rose. By the end of the century, the English had fallen from this paradisaic state. A turbulent civil war had beheaded the monarch, lower-class puritanism had disrupted the Church, and the forces which were to produce modern secular society – science, democracy, rationalism, economic individualism – were in the ascendant. From about Andrew Marvell onwards, then, it was downhill all the way. Somewhere in the seventeenth century, though Eliot is unsure of the precise date, a 'dissociation of sensibility' set in: thinking was no longer like smelling, language drifted loose from experience, and the upshot was the literary disaster of John Milton, who anaesthetized the English language into an arid ritual. Milton was also, of course, a puritan revolutionary, which may not have been entirely irrelevant to Eliot's distaste; indeed he was part of the great nonconformist radical tradition in England which produced F. R. Leavis, whose quickness to endorse Eliot's judgement of *Paradise Lost* is thus particularly ironic. After Milton, the English sensibility continued to dissociate itself into separate halves: some poets could think but not feel, while others could feel but not think. English literature degenerated into Romanticism and Victorianism: by now the heresies of 'poetic genius',

'personality' and the 'inner light' were firmly entrenched, all anarchic doctrines of a society which had lost collective belief and declined into an errant individualism. It was not until the appearance of T. S. Eliot that English literature began to recuperate.

What Eliot was in fact assaulting was the whole ideology of middle-class liberalism, the official ruling ideology of industrial capitalist society. Liberalism, Romanticism, protestantism, economic individualism: all of these are the perverted dogmas of those expelled from the happy garden of the organic society, with nothing to fall back on but their own paltry individual resources. Eliot's own solution is an extreme right-wing authoritarianism: men and women must sacrifice their petty 'personalities' and opinions to an impersonal order. In the sphere of literature, this impersonal order is the Tradition.^P Like any other literary tradition, Eliot's is in fact a highly selective affair: indeed its governing principle seems to be not so much which works of the past are eternally valuable, as which will help T. S. Eliot to write his own poetry. This arbitrary construct, however, is then paradoxically imbued with the force of an absolute authority. The major works of literature form between them an ideal order, occasionally redefined by the entry of a new masterpiece. The existing classics within the cramped space of the Tradition politely reshuffle their positions to make room for a newcomer, and look different in the light of it; but since this newcomer must somehow have been in principle included in the Tradition all along to have gained admission at all, its entry serves to confirm that Tradition's central values. The Tradition, in other words, can never be caught napping: it has somehow mysteriously foreseen the major works still unwritten, and though these works, once produced, will occasion a revaluation of the Tradition itself, they will be effortlessly absorbed into its maw. A literary work can be valid only by existing in the Tradition, as a Christian can be saved only by living in God; all poetry may be literature but only some poetry is Literature, depending on whether or not the Tradition happens to flow through it. This, like divine grace, is an inscrutable affair: the Tradition, like the Almighty or some whimsical absolute monarch, sometimes withholds its favour from 'major' literary reputations and bestows it instead on some humble little text buried in the historical backwoods. Membership of the club is by invitation only: some writers, such as T. S. Eliot, just do discover that the Tradition (or the 'European mind', as Eliot sometimes calls it) is spontaneously welling up within them, but as with the recipients of divine grace this is not a question of personal merit, and there is nothing much you can do about it one way or the other. Membership of the Tradition thus permits you to be at once authoritarian and self-abnegatingly humble, a

combination which Eliot was later to find even more possible through membership of the Christian Church.

In the political sphere, Eliot's advocacy of authority took various forms. He flirted with the quasi-fascistic French movement *Action Française*, and made a few rather negative references to Jews. After his conversion to Christianity in the mid-1920s he advocated a largely rural society run by a few 'great families' and a small elite of theological intellectuals much like himself. Most people in such a society would be Christian, though since Eliot had an extremely conservative estimate of most people's ability to believe anything at all, this religious faith would have to be largely unconscious, lived out in the rhythm of the seasons. This panacea for the redemption of modern society was being offered to the world roughly at the time when Hitler's troops were marching into Poland.

The advantage of a language closely wedded to experience, for Eliot, was that it enabled the poet to bypass the deadly abstractions of rationalist thought and seize his readers by the 'cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts'." Poetry was not to engage the reader's mind: it did not really matter what a poem actually *meant*, and Eliot professed himself to be quite unperturbed by apparently outlandish interpretations of his own work. Meaning was no more than a sop thrown to the reader to keep him distracted, while the poem went stealthily to work on him in more physical and unconscious ways. The erudite Eliot, author of intellectually difficult poems, in fact betrayed all the contempt for the intellect of any right-wing irrationalist. He shrewdly perceived that the languages of middle-class liberal rationalism were exhausted: nobody was much likely to be convinced by talk of 'progress' or 'reason' any more, not least when millions of corpses lay on the battlefields of Europe. Middle-class liberalism had failed; and the poet must delve behind these discredited notions by evolving a sensory language which would make 'direct communication with the nerves'. He must select words with 'a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires',²² suggestively enigmatic images which would penetrate to those 'primitive' levels at which all men and women experienced alike. Perhaps the organic society lived on after all, though only in the collective unconscious; perhaps there were certain deep symbols and rhythms in the psyche, archetypes immutable throughout history, which poetry might touch and revive. The crisis of European society - global war, severe class-conflict, failing capitalist economies - might be resolved by turning one's back on history altogether and putting mythology in its place. Deep below finance capitalism lay the Fisher King, potent images of birth, death and resurrection in which human beings might discover a common

identity. Eliot accordingly published *The Waste Land* in 1922, a poem which intimates that fertility cults hold the clue to the salvation of the West. His scandalous avant-garde techniques were deployed for the most arriere-garde ends: they wrenched apart routine consciousness so as to revive in the reader a sense of common identity in the blood and guts.

Eliot's view that language had become stale and unprofitable in industrial society, unsuitable for poetry, had affinities with Russian Formalism; but it was also shared by Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme and the Imagist movement. Poetry had fallen foul of the Romantics, become a mawkish, womanly affair full of gush and fine feeling. Language had gone soft and lost its virility: it needed to be stiffened up again, made hard and stone-like, reconnected with the physical world. The ideal Imagist poem would be a laconic three-line affair of gritty images, like an army officer's rapped-out command. Emotions were messy and suspect, part of a clapped-out epoch of high-flown liberal-individualist sentiment which must now yield to the dehumanized mechanical world of modern society. For D. H. Lawrence, emotions, 'personality' and the 'ego' were equally discredited, and must give way to the ruthlessly impersonal force of spontaneous-creative Life. Behind the critical stance, once again, was politics: middle-class liberalism was finished, and would be ousted by some version of that tougher, masculine discipline which Pound was to discover in fascism.

The *Scrutiny* case, at least at first, did not take the road of extreme right-wing reaction. On the contrary, it represented nothing less than the last-ditch stand of liberal humanism, concerned, as Eliot and Pound were not, with the unique value of the individual and the creative realm of the interpersonal. These values could be summarized as 'Life', a word which *Scrutiny* made a virtue out of not being able to define. If you asked for some reasoned theoretical statement of their case, you had thereby demonstrated that you were in the outer darkness: either you felt Life or you did not. Great literature was a literature reverently open to Life, and what Life was could be demonstrated by great literature. The case was circular, intuitive, and proof against all argument, reflecting the enclosed coterie of the Leavisites themselves. It was not clear what side Life put you on in the General Strike, or whether celebrating its vibrant presence in poetry was compatible with endorsing mass unemployment. If Life was creatively at work anywhere then it was in the writings of D. H. Lawrence, whom Leavis championed from an early date; yet 'spontaneous-creative life' in Lawrence seemed happily to co-exist with the most virulent sexism, racism and authoritarianism, and few of the Scrutineers seemed particularly disturbed by the contradiction. The extreme right-wing features which Lawrence shared with Eliot and Pound - a raging contempt for liberal and democratic values, a slavish

submission to impersonal authority were more or less edited out: Lawrence was effectively reconstructed as a liberal humanist, and slotted into place as the triumphant culmination of the 'great tradition' of English fiction from Jane Austen to George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad.

Leavis was right to discern in the acceptable face of D. H. Lawrence a powerful critique of the inhumanity of industrial capitalist England. Lawrence, like Leavis himself, was among other things an inheritor of the nineteenth-century lineage of Romantic protest against the mechanized wage-slavery of capitalism, its crippling social oppressiveness and cultural devastation. But since both Lawrence and Leavis refused a political analysis of the system they opposed, they were left with nothing but talk about spontaneous-creative life which grew more stridently abstract the more it insisted on the concrete. As it became less and less apparent how responding to Marvell around the seminar table was to transform the mechanized labour of factory workers, the liberal humanism of Leavis was pressed into the arms of the most banal political reaction. *Scrutiny* survived until 1953, and Leavis lived until 1978; but in these later stages *Life* evidently entailed a fierce hostility to popular education, an implacable opposition to the transistor radio and a dark suspicion that 'telly-addiction' had much to do with demands for student participation in higher education. Modern 'technologico-Benthamite' society was to be condemned unreservedly as 'cretinized and cretinizing': this, it seemed, was the final consequence of rigorous critical discrimination. The later Leavis was to regret the passing of the English gentleman; the wheel had come full circle.

Leavis's name is closely associated with 'practical criticism' and 'close reading', and some of his own published work ranks with the most subtle, pioneering English criticism that the century has seen. It is worth pondering this term 'practical criticism' a little further. Practical criticism meant a method which spurned belle-lettristic waffle and was properly unafraid to take the text apart; but it also assumed that you could judge literary 'greatness' and 'centrality' by bringing a focused attentiveness to bear on poems or pieces of prose isolated from their cultural and historical contexts. Given *Scrutiny's* assumptions, there was really no problem here: if literature is 'healthy' when it manifests a concrete feel for immediate experience, then you can judge this from a scrap of prose as surely as a doctor can judge whether or not you are sick by registering your pulse-beat and skin-colour. There was no need to examine the work in its historical context, or even discuss the structure of ideas on which it drew. It was a matter of assessing

the tone and sensibility of a particular passage, 'placing' it definitively and then moving on to the next. It is not clear how this procedure was more than just a more rigorous form of wine-tasting, given that what the literary impressionists might call 'blissful' you might call 'maturely robust'. If Life seemed altogether too broad and nebulous a term, the critical techniques for detecting it seemed correspondingly too narrow. Since practical criticism in itself threatened to become too pragmatic a pursuit for a movement concerned with nothing less than the fate of civilization, the Leavisites needed to underpin it with a 'metaphysic', and found one ready to hand in the work of D. H. Lawrence. Since Life was not a theoretical system but a matter of particular intuitions, you could always take your stand on these in order to attack other people's systems; but since Life was also as absolute a value as you could imagine, you could equally use it to lambast those utilitarians and empiricists who could see no further than their noses. It was possible to spend quite a lot of time crossing from one of these fronts to another, depending on the direction of the enemy fire. Life was as remorseless and unquestionable a metaphysical principle as you could wish, dividing the literary sheep from the goats with evangelical certainty; but since it only ever manifested itself in concrete particularities, it constituted no systematic theory in itself and was consequently invulnerable to assault.

'Close reading' is also a phrase worth examining. Like 'practical criticism' it meant detailed analytic interpretation, providing a valuable antidote to aestheticist chit-chat; but it also seemed to imply that every previous school of criticism had read only an average of three words per line. To call for close reading, in fact, is to do more than insist on due attentiveness to the text. It inescapably suggests an attention to *this* rather than to something else: to the 'words on the page' rather than to the contexts which produced and surround them. It implies a limiting as well as a focusing of concern - a limiting badly needed by literary talk which would ramble comfortably from the texture of Tennyson's language to the length of his beard. But in dispelling such anecdotal irrelevancies, 'close reading' also held at bay a good deal else: it encouraged the illusion that any piece of language, 'literary' or not, can be adequately studied or even understood in isolation. It was the beginnings of a 'reification' of the literary work, the treatment of it as an object in itself, which was to be triumphantly consummated in the American New Criticism.

A major link between Cambridge English and the American New Criticism was the work of the Cambridge critic I. A. Richards. If Leavis sought to redeem criticism by converting it into something approximating a religion, thus carrying on the work of Matthew Arnold, Richards sought in his

works of the 1920s to lend it a firm basis in the principles of a hard-nosed 'scientific' psychology. The brisk, bloodless quality of his prose contrasts suggestively with the tortuous intensity of a Leavis. Society is in crisis, Richards argues, because historical change, and scientific discovery in particular, has outstripped and devalued the traditional mythologies by which men and women have lived. The delicate equipoise of the human psyche has therefore been dangerously disturbed; and since religion will no longer serve to retrim it, poetry must do the job instead. Poetry, Richards remarks with stunning off-handedness, 'is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos'.²³ Like Arnold, he advances literature as a conscious ideology for reconstructing social order, and does so in the socially disruptive, economically decaying, politically unstable years which followed the Great War.

Modern science, Richards claims, is the model of true knowledge, but emotionally it leaves something to be desired. It will not satisfy the mass of the people's demand for answers to the questions 'what?' and 'why?', contenting itself instead with answering the question 'how?'. Richards himself does not believe that 'what?' and 'why?' are genuine questions, but he generously concedes that most people do; and unless some pseudo-answers are supplied to such pseudo-questions society is likely to fall apart. The role of poetry is to supply such pseudo-answers. Poetry is an 'emotive' rather than 'referential' language, a kind of 'pseudo-statement' which appears to describe the world but in fact simply organizes our feelings about it in satisfying ways. The most efficient kind of poetry is that which organizes the maximum number of impulses with the minimum amount of conflict or frustration. Without such psychic therapy, standards of value are likely to collapse beneath the 'more sinister potentialities of the cinema and the loud-speaker'."

Richards's quantifying, behaviourist model of the mind was in fact part of the social problem to which he was proposing a solution. Far from questioning the alienated view of science as a purely instrumental, neutrally 'referential' affair, he subscribes to this positivist fantasy and then lamely seeks to supplement it with something more cheering. Whereas Leavis waged war on the technologico-Benthamites, Richards tried to beat them at their own game. Linking a defective utilitarian theory of value to an essentially aestheticist view of human experience (art, Richards assumes, defines all the most excellent experiences), he offers poetry as a means of 'exquisitely reconciling' the anarchy of modern existence. If historical contradictions cannot be resolved in reality, they can be harmoniously conciliated as discrete psychological 'impulses' within the contemplative mind. Action is not

especially desirable, since it tends to impede any full equilibrium of impulses. 'No life,' Richards remarks, 'can be excellent in which the elementary responses are disorganized and confused.' Organizing the lawless lower impulses more effectively will ensure the survival of the higher, finer ones; it is not far from the Victorian belief that organizing the lower classes will ensure the survival of the upper ones, and indeed is significantly related to it.

The American New Criticism, which flourished from the late 1930s to the 1950s, was deeply marked by these doctrines. New Criticism is generally taken to encompass the work of Eliot, Richards and perhaps also Leavis and William Empson, as well as a number of leading American literary critics, among them John Crowe Ransom, W. K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Monroe Beardsley and R. P. Blackmur. Significantly, the American movement had its roots in the economically backward South—in the region of traditional blood and breeding where the young T. S. Eliot had gained an early glimpse of the organic society. In the period of American New Criticism, the South was in fact undergoing rapid industrialization, invaded by Northern capitalist monopolies; but 'traditional' Southern intellectuals like John Crowe Ransom, who gave New Criticism its name, could still discover in it an 'aesthetic' alternative to the sterile scientific rationalism of the industrial North. Spiritually displaced like T. S. Eliot by the industrial invasion, Ransom found refuge first in the so-called Fugitives literary movement of the 1920s, and then in the right-wing Agrarian politics of the 1930s. The ideology of New Criticism began to crystallize: scientific rationalism was ravaging the 'aesthetic life' of the old South, human experience was being stripped of its sensuous particularity, and poetry was a possible solution. The poetic response, unlike the scientific, respected the sensuous integrity of its object: it was not a matter of rational cognition but an affective affair which linked us to the 'world's body' in an essentially religious bond. Through art, an alienated world could be restored to us in all its rich variousness. Poetry, as an essentially contemplative mode, would spur us not to change the world but to reverence it for what it was, teach us to approach it with a disinterested humility.

Like *Scrutiny*, in other words, New Criticism was the ideology of an uprooted, defensive intelligentsia who reinvented in literature what they could not locate in reality. Poetry was the new religion, a nostalgic haven from the alienations of industrial capitalism. The poem itself was as opaque to rational enquiry as the Almighty himself: it existed as a self-enclosed object, mysteriously intact in its own unique being. The poem was that which could not be paraphrased, expressed in any language other than itself:

each of its parts was folded in on the others in a complex organic unity which it would be a kind of blasphemy to violate. The literary text, for American New Criticism as for I. A. Richards, was therefore grasped in what might be called 'functionalist' terms: just as American functionalist sociology developed a 'conflict-free' model of society, in which every element 'adapted' to every other, so the poem abolished all friction, irregularity and contradiction in the symmetrical cooperation of its various features. 'Coherence' and 'integration' were the keynotes; but if the poem was also to induce in the reader a definite ideological attitude to the world - one, roughly, of contemplative acceptance - this emphasis on internal coherence could not be pushed to the point where the poem was cut off from reality altogether, splendidly revolving in its own autonomous being. It was therefore necessary to combine this stress on the text's internal unity with an insistence that, through such unity, the work 'corresponded' in some sense to reality itself. New Criticism, in 'other words, stopped short of a full-blooded formalism, awkwardly tempering it with a kind of empiricism - a belief that the poem's discourse somehow 'included' reality within itself.

If the poem was really to become an object in itself, New Criticism had to sever it from both author and reader. I. A. Richards had naively assumed that the poem was no more than a transparent medium through which we could observe the poet's psychological processes: reading was just a matter of recreating in our own mind the mental condition of the author. Indeed much traditional literary criticism had held this view in one form or another. Great literature is the product of Great Men, and its value lies chiefly in allowing us intimate access to their souls. There are several problems with such a position. To begin with, it reduces all literature to a covert form of autobiography: we are not reading literary works as literary works, simply as second-hand ways of getting to know somebody. For another thing, such a view entails that literary works are indeed 'expressions' of an author's mind, which does not seem a particularly helpful way of discussing *Little Red Riding Hood* or some highly stylized courtly love lyric. Even if I do have access to Shakespeare's mind when reading *Hamlet*, what is the point of putting it this way, since all of his mind that I have access to is the text of *Hamlet*? Why not just say instead that I am reading *Hamlet*, as he left no evidence of it other than the play itself? Was what he 'had in mind' different from what he wrote, and how can we know? Did he himself know what he had in mind? Are writers always in full possession of their own meanings?

The New Critics broke boldly with the Great Man theory of literature, insisting that the author's intentions in writing, even if they could be recovered, were of no relevance to the interpretation of his or her text. Neither

were the emotional responses of particular readers to be confused with the poem's meaning: the poem meant what it meant, regardless of the poet's intentions or the subjective feelings the reader derived from it.²⁶ Meaning was public and objective, inscribed in the very language of the literary text, not a question of some putative ghostly impulse in a long-dead author's head, or the arbitrary private significances a reader might attach to his words. We shall be considering the pros and cons of this viewpoint in Chapter 2; meanwhile, it should be recognized that the New Critics' attitudes to these questions were closely bound up with their urge to convert the poem into a self-sufficient object, as solid and material as an urn or icon. The poem became a spatial figure rather than a temporal process. Rescuing the text from author and reader went hand in hand with disentangling it from any social or historical context. One needed, to be sure, to know what the poem's words would have meant to their original readers, but this fairly technical sort of historical knowledge was the only kind permitted. Literature was a solution to social problems, not part of them; the poem must be plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into a sublime space above it.

What New Criticism did, in fact, was to convert the poem into a fetish. If I. A. Richards had 'dematerialized' the text, reducing it to a transparent window on to the poet's psyche, the American New Critics rematerialized it with a vengeance, making it seem less like a process of meaning than something with four corners and a pebbledash front. This is ironic, since the very social order against which such poetry was a protest was rife with such 'reifications', transforming people, processes and institutions into 'things'. The New Critical poem, like the Romantic symbol, was thus imbued with an absolute mystical authority which brooked no rational argument. Like most of the other literary theories we have examined so far, New Criticism was at root a full-blooded irrationalism, one closely associated with religious dogma (several of the leading American New Critics were Christians), and with the right-wing 'blood and soil' politics of the Agrarian movement. Yet this is not to suggest that New Criticism was hostile to critical analysis, any more than was *Scrutiny*. Whereas some earlier Romantics tended to bow low in reverent silence before the unfathomable mystery of the text, the New Critics deliberately cultivated the toughest, most hard-headed techniques of critical dissection. The same impulse which stirred them to insist on the 'objective' status of the work also led them to promote a strictly 'objective' way of analysing it. A typical New Critical account of a poem offers a stringent investigation of its various 'tensions', 'paradoxes' and 'ambivalences', showing how these are resolved and integrated by its solid structure. If poetry was

to be the new organic society in itself, the final solution to science, materialism, and the decline of the 'aesthetic' slave-owning South, it could hardly be surrendered to critical impressionism or soggy subjectivism.

New Criticism, moreover, evolved in the years when literary criticism in North America was struggling to become 'professionalized', acceptable as a respectable academic discipline. Its battery of critical instruments was a way of competing with the hard sciences on their own terms, in a society where such science was the dominant criterion of knowledge. Having begun life as a humanistic supplement or alternative to technocratic society, the movement thus found itself reproducing such technocracy in its own methods. The rebel merged into the image of his master, and as the 1940s and 1950s drew on was fairly quickly coopted by the academic Establishment. Before long, New Criticism seemed the most natural thing in the literary critical world; indeed it was difficult to imagine that there had ever been anything else. The long trek from Nashville, Tennessee, home of the Fugitives, to the East Coast Ivy League universities had been accomplished.

There were at least two good reasons why New Criticism went down well in the academies. First, it provided a convenient pedagogical method of coping with a growing student population." Distributing a brief poem for students to be perceptive about was less cumbersome than launching a Great Novels of the World course. Second, New Criticism's view of the poem as a delicate equipoise of contending attitudes, a disinterested reconciliation of opposing impulses, proved deeply attractive to sceptical liberal intellectuals disoriented by the clashing dogmas of the Cold War. Reading poetry in the New Critical way meant committing yourself to nothing: all that poetry taught you was 'disinterestedness', a serene, speculative, impeccably even-handed rejection of anything in particular. It drove you less to oppose McCarthyism or further civil rights than to experience such pressures as merely partial, no doubt harmoniously balanced somewhere else in the world by their complementary opposites. It was, in other words, a recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo. There were, naturally, limits to this benign pluralism: the poem, in Cleanth Brooks's words, was a 'unification of attitudes into a hierarchy subordinated to a total and governing attitude'.²⁸ Pluralism was all very well, provided that it did not violate hierarchical order; the varied contingencies of the poem's texture could be pleasurably savoured, so long as its ruling structure remained intact. Oppositions were to be tolerated, as long as they could finally be fused into harmony. The limits of New Criticism were essentially the limits of liberal democracy: the poem, John Crowe Ransom wrote, was 'like

a democratic state, so to speak, which realizes the ends of a state without sacrificing the personal character of its citizens'.²⁹ It would be interesting to know what the Southern slaves would have made of this assertion.

The reader may have noticed that 'literature', in the work of the last few critics I have discussed, has imperceptibly slid over into 'poetry'. The New Critics and I. A. Richards are almost exclusively concerned with poems; T. S. Eliot stretches to the drama but not to the novel; F. R. Leavis deals with the novel but examines it under the rubric of 'dramatic poem' - that is, as anything but the novel. Most literary theories, in fact, unconsciously 'foreground' a particular literary genre, and derive their general pronouncements from this; it would be interesting to trace this process through the history of literary theory, identifying the particular literary form which is being taken as a paradigm. In the case of modern literary theory, the shift into poetry is of particular significance. For poetry is of all literary genres the one most apparently sealed from history, the one where 'sensibility' may play in its purest, least socially tainted form. It would be difficult to see *Tristram Shandy* or *War and Peace* as tightly organized structures of symbolic ambivalence. Even within poetry, however, the critics I have just reviewed are strikingly uninterested in what might rather simplistically be called 'thought'. The criticism of Eliot displays an extraordinary lack of interest in what literary works actually *say*: its attention is almost entirely confined to qualities of language, styles of feeling, the relations of image and experience. A 'classic' for Eliot is a work which springs from a structure of shared beliefs, but what these beliefs are is less important than the fact that they are commonly shared. For Richards, bothering with beliefs is a positive obstacle to literary appreciation: the strong emotion we feel on reading a poem may *feel*/like a belief, but this is just another pseudo-condition. Only Leavis escapes this formalism, with his view that the complex formal unity of a work, and its 'reverent openness before life', are facets of a single process. In practice, however, his work tends to divide between 'formal' criticism of poetry and 'moral' criticism of fiction.

I have mentioned that the English critic William Empson is sometimes included in New Criticism; but he is in fact much more interestingly read as a remorseless opponent of their major doctrines. What makes Empson seem a New Critic is his lemon-squeezing style of analysis, the breathtaking off-hand ingenuity with which he unravels ever finer nuances of literary meaning; but all this is in the service of an old-fashioned liberal rationalism deeply at odds with the symbolist esotericism of an Eliot or Brooks. In his major works *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951) and *Milton's God* (1961), Empson turns a

cold douche of very English common sense on such fervid pieties, evident in his deliberately flattened, low-keyed, airily colloquial prose style. Whereas New Criticism sunders the text from rational discourse and a social context, Empson impudently insists on treating poetry as a species of 'ordinary' language capable of being rationally paraphrased, a type of utterance in continuity with our usual ways of speaking and acting. He is an unabashed 'intentionalist', reckoning into account what the author probably meant and interpreting this in the most generous, decent, English sort of way. Far from existing as an opaquely enclosed object, the literary work for Empson is open-ended: understanding it involves grasping the general contexts in which words are socially used, rather than simply tracing patterns of internal verbal coherence, and such contexts are always likely to be indeterminate. It is interesting to contrast Empson's famous 'ambiguities' with New Criticism's 'paradox', 'irony' and 'ambivalence'. The latter terms suggest the economic fusion of two opposite but complementary meanings: the New Critical poem is a taut structure of such antitheses, but they never really threaten our need for coherence because they are always resolvable into a closed unity. Empsonian ambiguities, on the other hand, can never be finally pinned down: they indicate points where the poem's language falters, trails off or gestures beyond itself, pregnantly suggestive of some potentially inexhaustible context of meaning. Whereas the reader is shut out by a locked structure of ambivalences, reduced to admiring passivity, 'ambiguity' solicits his or her active participation: an ambiguity as Empson defined it is 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.'" It is the reader's response which makes for ambiguity, and this response depends on more than the poem alone. For I. A. Richards and the New Critics, the meaning of a poetic word is radically 'contextual', a function of the poem's internal verbal organization. For Empson, the reader inevitably brings to the work whole social contexts of discourse, tacit assumptions of sense-making which the text may challenge but with which it is also in continuity. Empson's poetics are liberal, social and democratic, appealing, for all their dazzling idiosyncrasy, to the likely sympathies and expectations of a common reader rather than to the technocratic techniques of the professional critic.

Like all English common sense, Empson's has its severe limitations. He is an old-style Enlightenment rationalist whose trust in decency, reasonableness, common human sympathies and a general human nature is as winning as it is suspect. Empson engages in constant self-critical questioning of the gap between his own intellectual subtlety and a simple common humanity: 'pastoral' is defined as the literary mode in which both can genially co-exist,

though never without an uneasy ironic self-consciousness of the incongruity. But the irony of Empson, and of his favoured form of pastoral, are also signs of a deeper contradiction. They mark the dilemma of the liberal-minded literary intellectual of the 1920s and 1930s, aware of the gross disparity between a now highly specialized form of critical intelligence and the 'universal' preoccupations of the literature on which it goes to work. Such a baffled, ambiguous consciousness, aware of the clash between pursuing ever finer poetic nuances and the economic depression, is able to resolve those commitments only by faith in a 'common reason' which may in fact be less common and more socially particular than it looks. Pastoral is not exactly Empson's organic society: it is the looseness and incongruity of the form, rather than any 'vital unity', which attracts him, its ironic juxtapositions of lords and peasants, the sophisticated and the simple. But pastoral does none the less provide him with a kind of imaginary solution to a pressing historical problem: the problem of the intellectual's relation to 'common humanity', the relation between a tolerant intellectual scepticism and more taxing convictions, and the social relevance of a professionalized criticism to a crisis-ridden society.

Empson sees that the meanings of a literary text are always in some measure promiscuous, never reducible to a final interpretation; and in the opposition between his 'ambiguity' and New Critical 'ambivalence' we find a kind of early pre-run of the debate between structuralists and post-structuralists which we shall explore later. It has also been suggested that Empson's concern for authorial intentions is in some ways reminiscent of the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl.³¹ Whether or not this is true, it provides a convenient transition to the next chapter.

Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory

Any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure. From a strictly theoretical point of view this is not, in fact, where we might choose to begin.¹ It would be in many ways preferable if we could begin from a proposition which originally was equally central, equally authentic: namely the proposition that social being determines consciousness. It is not that the two propositions necessarily deny each other or are in contradiction. But the proposition of base and superstructure, with its figurative element, with its suggestion of a definite and fixed spatial relationship, constitutes, at least in certain hands, a very specialized and at times unacceptable version of the other proposition. Yet in the transition from Marx to Marxism, and in the development of mainstream Marxism itself, the proposition of the determining base and the determined superstructure has been commonly held to be the key to Marxist cultural analysis.

Now it is important, as we try to analyse this proposition, to be aware that the term of relationship which is involved, that is to say 'determines', is of great linguistic and real complexity. The language of determination and even more of determinism was inherited from idealist and especially theological accounts of the world and man. It is significant that it is in one of his familiar inversions, his contradictions of received propositions, that Marx uses the word 'determines'. He is opposing an ideology that had been insistent on the power of certain forces outside man, or, in its secular version, on an abstract determining consciousness. Marx's own proposition explicitly denies this, and puts the origin of determination in men's own activities. Nevertheless, the particular history and continuity of the term serves to remind us that there are, within ordinary use—and this is true of most of the major European languages—quite different possible meanings and implications of the word 'determine'. There is, on the one hand, from its theological inheritance, the notion of an external cause which totally predicts or prefigures, indeed totally controls a subsequent activity. But there is also, from the experience of social practice, a notion of determination as setting limits, exerting pressures.

Now there is clearly a difference between a process of setting limits and exerting pressures, whether by some external force or by the internal laws of a particular development, and that other process in which a subsequent content is essentially prefigured, predicted and controlled by a pre-existing external force. Yet it is fair to say, looking at many applications of Marxist cultural analysis, that it is the second sense, the notion of prefiguration, prediction or control, which has often explicitly or implicitly been used.

Superstructure: Qualifications and Amendments

The term of relationship is then the first thing that we have to examine in this proposition, but we have to do this by going on to look at the related terms themselves. 'Superstructure' has had most attention. People commonly speak of 'the superstructure', although it is interesting that originally, in Marx's German, the term is in one important use plural. Other people speak of the different activities 'inside' the superstructure or superstructures. Now already in Marx himself, in the later correspondence of Engels, and at many points in the subsequent Marxist tradition, qualifications have been made about the determined character of certain superstructural activities. The first kind of qualification had to do with delays in time, with complications, and with certain indirect or relatively distant relationships. The simplest notion of a superstructure, which is still by no means entirely abandoned, had been the reflection, the imitation or the reproduction of the reality of the base in the superstructure in a more or less direct way. Positivist notions of reflection and reproduction of course directly supported this. But since in many real cultural activities this relationship cannot be found, or cannot be found without effort or even violence to the material or practice being studied, the notion was introduced of delays in time, the famous lags; of various technical complications; and of indirect-

¹ Revised text of a lecture given in Montreal, April 1973.

ness, in which certain kinds of activity in the cultural sphere—philosophy, for example—were situated at a greater distance from the primary economic activities. That was the first stage of qualification of the notion of superstructure: in effect, an operational qualification. The second stage was related but more fundamental, in that the process of the relationship itself was more substantially looked at. This was the kind of reconsideration which gave rise to the modern notion of ‘mediation’, in which something more than simple reflection or reproduction—indeed something radically different from either reflection or reproduction—actively occurs. In the later twentieth century there is the notion of ‘homologous structures’, where there may be no direct or easily apparent similarity, and certainly nothing like reflection or reproduction, between the superstructural process and the reality of the base, but in which there is an essential homology or correspondence of structures, which can be discovered by analysis. This is not the same notion as ‘mediation’, but it is the same kind of amendment in that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is not supposed to be direct, nor simply operationally subject to lags and complications and indirectnesses, but that of its nature it is not direct reproduction.

These qualifications and amendments are important. But it seems to me that what has not been looked at with equal care, is the received notion of the base. And indeed I would argue that the base is the more important concept to look at if we are to understand the realities of cultural process. In many uses of the proposition of base and superstructure, as a matter of verbal habit, ‘the base’ has come to be considered virtually as an object, or in less crude cases, it has been considered in essentially uniform and usually static ways. ‘The base’ is the real social existence of man. ‘The base’ is the real relations of production corresponding to a stage of the development of material productive forces. ‘The base’ is a mode of production at a particular stage of its development. We make and repeat propositions of this kind, but the usage is then very different from Marx’s emphasis on productive activities, in particular structural relations, constituting the foundation of all other activities. For while a particular stage of the development of production can be discovered and made precise by analysis, it is never in practice either uniform or static. It is indeed one of the central propositions of Marx’s sense of history that there are deep contradictions in the relationships of production and in the consequent social relationships. There is therefore the continual possibility of the dynamic variation of these forces. Moreover, when these forces are considered, as Marx always considers them, as the specific activities and relationships of real men, they mean something very much more active, more complicated and more contradictory than the developed metaphorical notion of ‘the base’ could possibly allow us to realize.

Base and Productive Forces

So we have to say that when we talk of ‘the base’, we are talking of a process and not a state. And we cannot ascribe to that process certain fixed properties for subsequent deduction to the variable processes of the superstructure. Most people who have wanted to make the ordinary proposition more reasonable have concentrated on refining the

notion of superstructure. But I would say that each term of the proposition has to be revalued in a particular direction. We have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.

It is worth observing one further implication behind the customary definitions. 'The base' has come to include, especially in certain 20th-century developments, a strong and limiting sense of basic industry. The emphasis on heavy industry, even, has played a certain cultural role. And this raises a more general problem, for we find ourselves forced to look again at the ordinary notion of 'productive forces'. Clearly what we are examining in the base is primary productive forces. Yet some very crucial distinctions have to be made here. It is true that in his analysis of capitalist production Marx considered 'productive work' in a very particular and specialized sense corresponding to that mode of production. There is a difficult passage in the *Grundrisse* in which he argues that while the man who makes a piano is a productive worker, there is a real question whether the man who distributes the piano is also a productive worker; but he probably is, since he contributes to the realization of surplus value. Yet when it comes to the man who plays the piano, whether to himself or to others, there is no question: he is not a productive worker at all. So piano-maker is base, but pianist superstructure. As a way of considering cultural activity, and incidentally the economics of modern cultural activity, this is very clearly a dead-end. But for any theoretical clarification it is crucial to recognize that Marx was there engaged in an analysis of a particular kind of production, that is capitalist commodity production. Within his analysis of that mode, he had to give to the notion of 'productive labour' and 'productive forces' a specialized sense of primary work on materials in a form which produced commodities. But this has narrowed remarkably, and in a cultural context very damagingly, from his more central notion of *productive forces*, in which, to give just brief reminders, the most important thing a worker ever produces is himself, himself in the fact of that kind of labour, or the broader historical emphasis of men producing themselves, themselves and their history. Now when we talk of the base, and of primary productive forces, it matters very much whether we are referring, as in one degenerate form of this proposition became habitual, to primary production within the terms of capitalist economic relationships, or to the primary production of society itself, and of men themselves, material production and reproduction of real life. If we have the broad sense of productive forces, we look at the whole question of the base differently, and we are then less tempted to dismiss as superstructural, and in that sense as merely secondary, certain vital productive social forces, which are in the broad sense, from the beginning, basic.

Uses of Totality

Yet, because of the difficulties of the ordinary proposition of base and superstructure, there was an alternative and very important development, an emphasis primarily associated with Lukàcs, on a social 'totality'. The totality of social practices was opposed to this layered notion of a base and a consequent superstructure. This totality of practices is compatible with the notion of social being determining consciousness, but it does not understand this process in terms of a base and a superstructure. Now the language of totality has become common, and it is indeed in many ways more acceptable than the notion of base and superstructure. But with one very important reservation. It is very easy for the notion of totality to empty of its essential content the original Marxist proposition. For if we come to say that society is composed of a large number of social practices which form a concrete social whole, and if we give to each practice a certain specific recognition, adding only that they interact, relate and combine in very complicated ways, we are at one level much more obviously talking about reality, but we are at another level withdrawing from the claim that there is any process of determination. And this I, for one, would be very unwilling to do. Indeed, the key question to ask about any notion of totality in cultural theory is this: whether the notion of totality includes the notion of intention. For if totality is simply concrete, if it is simply the recognition of a large variety of miscellaneous and contemporaneous practices, then it is essentially empty of any content that could be called Marxist. Intention, the notion of intention, restores the key question, or rather the key emphasis. For while it is true that any society is a complex whole of such practices, it is also true that any society has a specific organization, a specific structure, and that the principles of this organization and structure can be seen as directly related to certain social intentions, intentions by which we define the society, intentions which in all our experience have been the rule of a particular class. One of the unexpected consequences of the crudeness of the base/superstructure model has been the too easy acceptance of models which appear less crude—models of totality or of a complex whole—but which exclude the facts of social intention, the class character of a particular society and so on. And this reminds us of how much we lose if we abandon the superstructural emphasis altogether. Thus I have great difficulty in seeing processes of art and thought as superstructural in the sense of the formula as it is commonly used. But in many areas of social and political thought—certain kinds of ratifying theory, certain kinds of law, certain kinds of institutions, which after all in Marx's original formulations were very much part of the superstructure—in all that kind of social apparatus, and in a decisive area of political and ideological activity and construction, if we fail to see a superstructural element we fail to recognize reality at all. These laws, constitutions, theories, ideologies, which are claimed as natural, or as having universal validity or significance, simply have to be seen as expressing and ratifying the domination of a particular class. Indeed the difficulty of revising the formula of base and superstructure has had much to do with the perception of many militants—who have to fight such institutions and notions as well as fighting economic battles—that if these institutions and their ideologies are not perceived as having

that kind of dependent and ratifying relationship, if their claims to universal validity or legitimacy are not denied and fought, then the class character of the society can no longer be seen. And this has been the effect of some versions of totality as the description of cultural process. Indeed I think that we can properly use the notion of totality only when we combine it with that other crucial Marxist concept of 'hegemony'.

The Complexity of Hegemony

It is Gramsci's great contribution to have emphasized hegemony, and also to have understood it at a depth which is, I think, rare. For hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology, but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci put it, even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social experience very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure. For if ideology were merely some abstract imposed notion, if our social and political and cultural ideas and assumptions and habits were merely the result of specific manipulation, of a kind of overt training which might be simply ended or withdrawn, then the society would be very much easier to move and to change than in practice it has ever been or is. This notion of hegemony as deeply saturating the consciousness of a society seems to be fundamental. And hegemony has the advantage over general notions of totality, that it at the same time emphasizes the facts of domination.

Yet there are times when I hear discussions of hegemony and feel that it too, as a concept, is being dragged back to the relatively simple, uniform and static notion which 'superstructure' in ordinary use had become. Indeed I think that we have to give a very complex account of hegemony if we are talking about any real social formation. Above all we have to give an account which allows for its elements of real and constant change. We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified. That is why instead of speaking simply of 'the hegemony', 'a hegemony', I would propose a model which allows for this kind of variation and contradiction, its sets of alternatives and its processes of change.

But one thing that is evident in some of the best Marxist cultural analysis is that it is very much more at home in what one might call *epochal* questions than in what one has to call *historical* questions. That is to say, it is usually very much better at distinguishing the large features of different epochs of society, as between feudal and bourgeois, or what might be, than at distinguishing between different phases of bourgeois society, and different moments within the phases: that true historical process which demands a much greater precision and delicacy of analysis than the always striking epochal analysis which is concerned with main lineaments and features.

Now the theoretical model which I have been trying to work with is this. I would say first that in any society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective. This implies no presumption about its value. All I am saying is that it is central. Indeed I would call it a corporate system, but this might be confusing, since Gramsci uses 'corporate' to mean the subordinate as opposed to the general and dominant elements of hegemony. In any case what I have in mind is the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived. That is why hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. But this is not, except in the operation of a moment of abstract analysis, in any sense a static system. On the contrary we can only understand an effective and dominant culture if we understand the real social process on which it depends: I mean the process of incorporation. The modes of incorporation are of great social significance, and incidentally in our kind of society have considerable economic significance. The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment. Moreover, at a philosophical level, at the true level of theory and at the level of the history of various practices, there is a process which I call the *selective tradition*: that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture. The processes of education; the processes of a much wider social training within institutions like the family; the practical definitions and organisation of work; the selective tradition at an intellectual and theoretical level: all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture, and on them, as experienced, as built into our living, its reality depends. If what we learn there were merely an imposed ideology, or if it were only the isolable meanings and practices of the ruling class, or of a section of the ruling class, which gets imposed on others, occupying merely the top of our minds, it would be—and one would be glad—a very much easier thing to overthrow.

It is not only the depths to which this process reaches, selecting and organizing and interpreting our experience. It is also that it is continually active and adjusting; it isn't just the past, the dry husks of ideology which we can more easily discard. And this can only be so, in a complex

society, if it is something more substantial and more flexible than any abstract imposed ideology. Thus we have to recognize the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture. This has been much under-emphasized in our notions of a superstructure, and even in some notions of hegemony. And the under-emphasis opens the way for retreat to an indifferent complexity. In the practice of politics, for example, there are certain truly incorporated modes of what are nevertheless, within those terms, real oppositions, that are felt and fought out. Their existence within the incorporation is recognizable by the fact that, whatever the degree of internal conflict or internal variation, they do not in practice go beyond the limits of the central effective and dominant definitions. This is true, for example, of the practice of parliamentary politics, though its internal oppositions are real. It is true about a whole range of practices and arguments, in any real society, which can by no means be reduced to an ideological cover, but which can nevertheless be properly analysed as in my sense corporate, if we find that, whatever the degree of internal controversy and variation, they do not exceed the limits of the central corporate definitions.

But if we are to say this, we have to think again about the sources of that which is not corporate; of those practices, experiences, meanings, values which are not part of the effective dominant culture. We can express this in two ways. There is clearly something that we can call alternative to the effective dominant culture, and there is something else that we can call oppositional, in a true sense. The degree of existence of these alternative and oppositional forms is itself a matter of constant historical variation in real circumstances. In certain societies it is possible to find areas of social life in which quite real alternatives are at least left alone. (If they are made available, of course, they are part of the corporate organization.) The existence of the possibility of opposition, and of its articulation, its degree of openness, and so on, again depends on very precise social and political forces. The facts of alternative and oppositional forms of social life and culture, in relation to the effective and dominant culture, have then to be recognized as subject to historical variation, and as having sources which are very significant, as a fact about the dominant culture itself.

Residual and Emergent Cultures

I have next to introduce a further distinction, between *residual* and *emergent* forms, both of alternative and of oppositional culture. By 'residual' I mean that some experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation. There is a real case of this in certain religious values, by contrast with the very evident incorporation of most religious meanings and values into the dominant system. The same is true, in a culture like Britain, of certain notions derived from a rural past, which have a very significant popularity. A residual culture is usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture, but one has to recognize that, in real cul-

tural activities, it may get incorporated into it. This is because some part of it, some version of it—and especially if the residue is from some major area of the past—will in many cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense in those areas. It is also because at certain points a dominant culture cannot allow too much of this kind of practice and experience outside itself, at least without risk. Thus the pressures are real, but certain genuinely residual meanings and practices in some important cases survive.

By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part—and yet not part—of effective contemporary practice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture now is to anything that can be seen as emergent. We have then to see, first, as it were a temporal relation between a dominant culture and on the one hand a residual and on the other hand an emergent culture. But we can only understand this if we can make distinctions, that usually require very precise analysis, between residual-incorporated and residual not incorporated, and between emergent-incorporated and emergent not incorporated. It is an important fact about any particular society, how far it reaches into the whole range of human practices and experiences in an attempt at incorporation. It may be true of some earlier phases of bourgeois society, for example, that there were some areas of experience which it was willing to dispense with, which it was prepared to assign as the sphere of private or artistic life, and as being no particular business of society or the state. This went along with certain kinds of political tolerance, even if the reality of that tolerance was malign neglect. But I am sure it is true of the society that has come into existence since the last war, that progressively, because of developments in the social character of labour, in the social character of communications, and in the social character of decision, it extends much further than ever before in capitalist society into certain hitherto resigned areas of experience and practice and meaning. Thus the effective decision, as to whether a practice is alternative or oppositional, is often now made within a very much narrower scope. There is a simple theoretical distinction between alternative and oppositional, that is to say between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light. This is usually the difference between individual and small-group solutions to social crisis and those solutions which properly belong to political and ultimately revolutionary practice. But it is often a very narrow line, in reality, between alternative and oppositional. A meaning or a practice may be tolerated as a deviation, and yet still be seen only as another particular way to live. But as the necessary area of effective dominance extends, the same meanings and practices can be seen by the dominant culture, not merely as disregarding or despising it, but as challenging it.

Now it is crucial to any Marxist theory of culture that it can give an adequate explanation of the sources of those practices and meanings. We can understand, from an ordinary historical approach, at least some of

the sources of residual meanings and practices. These are the results of earlier social formations, in which certain real meanings and values were generated. In the subsequent default of a particular phase of a dominant culture, there is then a reaching back to those meanings and values which were created in real societies in the past, and which still seem to have some significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration and achievement, which the dominant culture under-values or opposes, or even cannot recognise. But our hardest task theoretically, is to find a non-metaphysical and a non-subjectivist explanation of emergent cultural practice. Moreover, part of our answer to this question bears on the process of persistence of residual practices.

Class and Human Practice

We do have indeed one source to hand from the central body of Marxist theory. We have the formation of a new class, the coming to consciousness of a new class. This remains, without doubt, quite centrally important. Of course, in itself, this process of formation complicates any simple model of base and superstructure. It also complicates some of the ordinary versions of hegemony, although it was Gramsci's whole object to see and to create by organization the hegemony of a proletarian kind which is capable of challenging the bourgeois hegemony. We have then one central source of new practice, in the emergence of a new class. But we have also to recognize certain other kinds of source, and in cultural practice some of these are very important. I would say that we can recognize them on the basis of this proposition: that no mode of production, and therefore no dominant society or order of society, and therefore no dominant culture, in reality exhausts human practice, human energy, human intention. Indeed it seems to me that this emphasis is not merely a negative proposition, allowing us to account for certain things which happen outside the dominant mode. On the contrary, it is a fact about the modes of domination that they select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice. The difficulties of human practice outside or against the dominant mode are, of course, real. It depends very much whether it is in an area in which the dominant class and the dominant culture have an interest and a stake. If the interest and the stake are explicit, many new practices will be reached for, and if possible incorporated, or else extirpated with extraordinary vigour. But in certain areas, there will be in certain periods practices and meanings which are not reached for. There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognize. This gives us a bearing on the observable difference between, for example, the practices of a capitalist state and a state like the contemporary Soviet Union in relation to writers. Since from the whole Marxist tradition literature was seen as an important activity, indeed a crucial activity, the Soviet state is very much sharper in investigating areas where different versions of practice, different meanings and values, are being attempted and expressed. In capitalist practice, if the thing is not making a profit, or if it is not being widely circulated, then it can for some time be overlooked, at least while it remains alternative. When it becomes oppositional in an explicit way, it does, of course, get approached or attacked.

I am saying then that in relation to the full range of human practice at any one time, the dominant mode is a conscious selection and organization. At least in its fully formed state it is conscious. But there are always sources of real human practice which it neglects or excludes. And these can be different in quality from the developing and articulate interests of a rising class. They can include, for example, alternative perception of others, in immediate personal relationships, or new perceptions of material and media, in art and science, and within certain limits these new perceptions can be practised. The relations between the two kinds of source—the class and the excluded human area—are by no means necessarily contradictory. At times they can be very close, and on the relations between them, much in political practice depends. But culturally and as a matter of theory the areas can be seen as distinct.

Now if we go back to the cultural question in its most usual form—what are the relations between art and society, or literature and society?—in the light of the preceding discussion, we have to say first that there are no relations between literature and society in that abstracted way. The literature is there from the beginning as a practice in the society. Indeed until it and all other practices are present, the society cannot be seen as fully formed. A society is not fully available for analysis until each of its practices is included. But if we make that emphasis we must make a corresponding emphasis: that we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws. They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process. Indeed one way of emphasizing this is to say, to insist, that literature is not restricted to operating in any one of the sectors I have been seeking to describe in this model. It would be easy to say, it is a familiar rhetoric, that literature operates in the emergent cultural sector, that it represents the new feelings, the new meanings, the new values. We might persuade ourselves of this theoretically, by abstract argument, but when we read much literature, over the whole range, without the sleight-of-hand of calling Literature only that which we have already selected as embodying certain meanings and values at a certain scale of intensity, we are bound to recognize that the act of writing, the practices of discourse in writing and speech, the making of novels and poems and plays and theories, all this activity takes place in all areas of the culture.

Literature appears by no means only in the emergent sector, which is always, in fact, quite rare. A great deal of writing is of a residual kind, and this has been deeply true of much English literature in the last half-century. Some of its fundamental meanings and values have belonged to the cultural achievements of long-past stages of society. So widespread is this fact, and the habits of mind it supports, that in many minds 'literature' and 'the past' acquire a certain identity, and it is then said that there is now no literature: all that glory is over. Yet most writing, in any period, including our own, is a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture. Indeed many of the specific qualities of literature, its capacity to embody and enact and perform certain meanings and values, or to create in single particular ways what would be otherwise merely general truths, enable it to fulfil this effective function

with great power. To literature, of course, we must add the visual arts and music, and in our own society the powerful arts of film and of broadcasting. But the general theoretical point should be clear. If we are looking for the relations between literature and society, we cannot either separate out this one practice from a formed body of other practices, nor when we have identified the particular practice can we give it a uniform, static and ahistorical relation to some abstract social formation. The arts of writing and the arts of creation and performance, over their whole range, are parts of the cultural process in all the different ways, the different sectors, that I have been seeking to describe. They contribute to the effective dominant culture and are a central articulation of it. They embody residual meanings and values, not all of which are incorporated, though many are. They express also and significantly some emergent practices and meanings, yet some of these may eventually be incorporated, as they reach people and begin to move them. Thus it was very evident in the sixties, in some of the emergent arts of performance, that the dominant culture reached out to transform them or seek to transform them. In this process, of course, the dominant culture itself changes, not in its central formation, but in many of its articulated features. But then in a modern society it must always change in this way, if it is to remain dominant, if it is still to be felt as in real ways central in all our many activities and interests.

Critical Theory as Consumption

What then are the implications of this general analysis for the analysis of particular works of art? This is the question towards which most discussion of cultural theory seems to be directed: the discovery of a method, perhaps even a methodology, through which particular works of art can be understood and described. I would not myself agree that this is the central use of cultural theory, but let us for a moment consider it. What seems to me very striking is that nearly all forms of contemporary critical theory are theories of *consumption*. That is to say, they are concerned with understanding an object in such a way that it can profitably or correctly be consumed. The earliest stage of consumption theory was the theory of 'taste', where the link between the practice and the theory was direct in the metaphor. From taste you got the more elevated notion of 'sensibility', in which it was the consumption by sensibility of elevated or insightful works that was held to be the essential practice of reading, and critical activity was then a function of this sensibility. There were then more developed theories, in the 1920's with Richards, and later in New Criticism, in which the effects of consumption were studied directly. The language of the work of art as object then became more overt. 'What effect does this work ("the poem" as it was ordinarily described) have on me?' Or, 'what impact does it have on me?', as it was later to be put in a much wider area of communication studies. Naturally enough, the notion of the work of art as *object*, as *text*, as an isolated artifact, became central in all these later consumption theories. It was not only that the practices of *production* were then overlooked, though this fused with the notion that most important literature anyway was from the past. The real social conditions of production were in any case neglected because they were believed to be at best secondary. The true relationship was always

between the taste, the sensibility or the training of the reader and this isolated work, this object 'in itself as it really is', as most people commonly put it. But the notion of the work of art as object had a further large theoretical effect. If you ask questions about the work of art seen as object, they may include questions about the components of its production. Now, as it happened, there was a use of the formula of base and superstructure which was precisely in line with this. The components of a work of art were the real activities of the base, and you could study the object to discover these components. Sometimes you even studied the components and then projected the object. But in any case the relationship that was looked for was one between an object and its components. But this was not only true of Marxist suppositions of a base and a superstructure. It was true also of various kinds of psychological theory, whether in the form of archetypes, or the images of the collective unconscious, or the myths and symbols which were seen as the *components* of particular works of art. Or again there was biography, or psycho-biography and its like, where the components were in the man's life and the work of art was an object in which components of this kind were discovered. Even in some of the more rigorous forms of new criticism and of structuralist criticism, this essential procedure of regarding the work as an object which has to be reduced to its components, even if later it may be reconstituted, came to persist.

Objects and Practices

Now I think the true crisis in cultural theory, in our own time, is between this view of the work of art as object and the alternative view of art as a practice. Of course it is at once objected that the work of art *is* an object: that various works have survived from the past, particular sculptures, particular paintings, particular buildings, and these are objects. This is of course true, but the same way of thinking is applied to works which have no such specific material existence. There is no *Hamlet*, no *Brothers Karamazov*, no *Wuthering Heights*, in the sense that there is a particular great painting. There is no *Fifth Symphony*, there is no work in the whole area of music and dance and performance, which is an object in any way comparable to those works in the visual arts which have survived. And yet the habit of treating all such works as objects has persisted because this is a basic theoretical and practical presupposition. But in literature, especially in drama, in music and in a very wide area of the performing arts, what we have are not objects but *notations*. These notations have to be interpreted in an active way, according to particular conventions. But indeed this is true over an even wider field. The relationship between the making of a work of art and the reception of a work of art, is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of social organization and relationship, and this is radically different from the production and consumption of an object. It is indeed an activity and a practice, and in its accessible forms, although it may in some arts have the character of a material object, it is still only accessible through active perception and interpretation. This makes the case of notation, in arts like drama and literature and music, only a special case of a much wider truth.

What this can show us here about the practice of analysis is that we have to break from the notion of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions. Often these two processes may in part resemble each other: in many other cases they are of radically different kinds. And I would conclude with an observation on the way this distinction bears on the Marxist tradition of the relation between primary economic and social practices, and cultural practices. If we suppose that what is produced in cultural practice is a series of objects, we shall, as in most current forms of sociological-critical procedure, set about discovering their components. Within a Marxist emphasis these components will be from what we have been in the habit of calling the base. We shall isolate certain features which we can so to say recognize *in component form*, or we will ask what processes of transformation or mediation these components have gone through before they arrived in this accessible state. But I am saying that we should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice. When we find ourselves looking at a particular work, or group of works, often realizing, as we do so, their essential community as well as their irreducible individuality, we should find ourselves attending first to the reality of their practice and the conditions of the practice as it was then executed. And from this I think we ask essentially different questions. Take for example the way in which an object is related to a genre, in orthodox criticism. We identify it by certain leading features, we then assign it to a larger category, the genre, and then we may find the components of the genre in a particular social history (although in some variants of Marxist criticism not even that is done, and the genre is supposed to be some permanent category of the mind). It is not that way of proceeding that seems to be required. The recognition of the relation of a collective mode and an individual project—and these are the only categories that we can initially presume—is a recognition of related practices. That is to say, the irreducibly individual projects that particular works are, may come in experience and in analysis to show resemblances which allow us to group them into collective modes. These are by no means always genres. They may exist as resemblances within and across genres. They may be the practice of a group in a period, rather than the practice of a phase in a genre. But as we discover the nature of a particular practice, and the nature of the relation between an individual project and a collective mode, we find that we are analysing, as two forms of the same process, both its active composition and its conditions of composition, and in either direction this is a complex of extending active relationships. This means, of course, that we have no built-in procedure of the kind which is indicated by the fixed character of an object. We have the principles of the relations of practices, within a discoverably intentional organization, and we have the available hypotheses of dominant, residual and emergent. But what we are actively seeking is the true practice which has been alienated to an object, and the true conditions of practice—whether as literary conventions or as social relationships—which have been alienated to components or to mere background. As a general proposition this is only an emphasis, but it seems to me to suggest at once the point of break and the point of departure, in practical and theoretical work, within an active and self-renewing Marxist cultural tradition.