

*By the same Author*

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CULTURE AND SOCIETY  
THE LONG REVOLUTION  
MODERN TRAGEDY  
COMMUNICATIONS  
DRAMA FROM IBSEN TO BRECHT  
THE ENGLISH NOVEL  
FROM DICKENS TO LAWRENCE

*Novels*

BORDER COUNTRY  
SECOND GENERATION

# THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY



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*For the country workers  
who were my grandparents*

*James Bird*

*Mary Ann Lewis*

*Joseph Williams*

*Margaret Williams*



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R. W.

## *Country and City*

'Country' and 'city' are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities. In English, 'country' is both a nation and a part of a 'land'; 'the country' can be the whole society or its rural area. In the long history of human settlements, this connection between the land from which directly or indirectly we all get our living and the achievements of human society has been deeply known. And one of these achievements has been the city: the capital, the large town, a distinctive form of civilisation.

On the actual settlements, which in the real history have been astonishingly varied, powerful feelings have gathered and have been generalised. On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times.

Yet the real history, throughout, has been astonishingly varied. The 'country way of life' has included the very different practices of hunters, pastoralists, farmers and factory farmers, and its organisation has varied from the tribe and the manor to the feudal estate, from the small peasantry and tenant farmers to the rural commune, from the *latifundia* and the plantation to the large capitalist enterprise and the state farm. The city, no less, has been of many kinds: state capital, administrative base, religious centre, market-town, port and mercantile depot, military barracks, industrial concentration. Between the cities of ancient and medieval times and the modern metropolis or conurbation there is a connection of name and in part of function, but nothing like identity. Moreover, in our own world, there is a wide range of settlements between the traditional poles of country and city: suburb, dormitory town, shanty town, industrial estate. Even the idea of the village, which seems simple, shows in actual history a wide variation: as to size and character, and internally in its variation between dispersed and nuclear settlements, in Britain as clearly as anywhere.

In and through these differences, all the same, certain images and



associations persist; and it is the purpose of this book to describe and analyse them, to see them in relation to the historically varied experience. For practical reasons I take most of my examples from English writing, though my interests go much wider. It ought in any case to be clear that the English experience is especially significant, in that one of the decisive transformations, in the relations between country and city, occurred there very early and with a thoroughness which is still in some ways unapproached. The Industrial Revolution not only transformed both city and country; it was based on a highly developed agrarian capitalism, with a very early disappearance of the traditional peasantry. In the imperialist phase of our history the nature of the rural economy, in Britain and in its colonies, was again transformed very early: dependence on a domestic agriculture dwindled to very low proportions, with no more than four per cent of economically active men now engaged in farming, and this in a society which had already become the first predominantly urban-dwelling people in the long history of human settlements. Since much of the dominant subsequent development, indeed the very idea of 'development' in the world generally, has been in these decisive directions, the English experience remains exceptionally important: not only symptomatic but in some ways diagnostic; in its intensity still memorable, whatever may succeed. For it is a critical fact that in and through these transforming experiences English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still predominantly rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of the older ideas and experiences still remarkably persist. All this gives the English experience and interpretation of the country and the city a permanent though of course not exclusive importance.

This importance can be stated, and will have to be assessed, as a general problem. But it is as well to say at the outset that this has been for me a personal issue, for as long as I remember. It happened that in a predominantly urban and industrial Britain I was born in a remote village, in a very old settled countryside, on the border between England and Wales. Within twenty miles, indeed at the end of a bus route, was in one direction an old cathedral city, in the other an old frontier market town but only a few miles beyond it the first industrial towns and villages of the great coal and steel area of South Wales. Before I had read any descriptions and interpretations of the changes and variations of settlements and ways of life, I saw them on the ground, and working, in unforgettable clarity. In the course of education I moved to another city, built round a university,

and since then, living and travelling and working, I have come to visit, and to need to visit, so many great cities, of different kinds, and to look forward and back, in space and time, knowing and seeking to know this relationship, as an experience and as a problem. I have written about it in other ways but also I have been slowly collecting the evidence to write about it explicitly, as a matter of social, literary and intellectual history.

This book is the result, but though it often and necessarily follows impersonal procedures, in description and analysis, there is behind it, all the time, this personal pressure and commitment. And since the relation of country and city is not only an objective problem and history, but has been and still is for many millions of people a direct and intense preoccupation and experience, I feel no need to justify, though it is as well to mention, this personal cause.

Thus at once, for me, before the argument starts, country life has many meanings. It is the elms, the may, the white horse, in the field beyond the window where I am writing. It is the men in the November evening, walking back from pruning, with their hands in the pockets of their khaki coats; and the women in headscarves, outside their cottages, waiting for the blue bus that will take them, inside school hours, to work in the harvest. It is the tractor on the road, leaving its tracks of serrated pressed mud; the light in the small hours, in the pig-farm across the road, in the crisis of a litter; the slow brown van met at the difficult corner, with the crowded sheep jammed to its slatted sides; the heavy smell, on still evenings, of the silage ricks fed with molasses. It is also the sour land, on the thick boulder clay, not far up the road, that is selling for housing, for a speculative development, at twelve thousand pounds an acre.

As I said, I was born in a village, and I still live in a village. But where I was born was under the Black Mountains, on the Welsh border, where the meadows are bright green against the red earth of the ploughland, and the first trees, beyond the window, are oak and holly. Where I live now is in the flat country, on a headland of boulder clay, towards the edge of the dikes and sluices, the black earth of the Fens, under the high East Anglian skies.

That physical contrast is continually present to me, but it is not the only contrast. Within that Black Mountain village, as again here, there is a deep contrast in which so much feeling is held: between what seems an unmediated nature—a physical awareness of trees, birds, the moving shapes of land—and a working agriculture, in which much of the nature is in fact being produced. Both kinds of hedgerow, there on its earthbank, here on the flat or with a lining ditch, together with the oaks and hollies or the elms and thorns that follow their lines, have been seen and planted and tended by men. At the end

of the lane by the cottage where I was a child, there is now a straight wide motor road where the lorries race. But the lane also has been set, stoned, driven over: it is a mark on the land of no more than two generations, since a young builder married the daughter of a farmer and was given a corner of a field on which to build their house, and then his workshop with the lane to it, and then neighbouring houses, and then successive workshops converted to new houses; the first workshop was my parents' first home. In the field with the elms and the white horse, behind my own present home, there are faint marks of a ninth-century building, and a foot below the grass there is a cobbled road, that resists the posts being driven, today, for a new wire fence.

This country life then has many meanings: in feeling and activity; in region and in time. The cobbles under the field are older than the university to which the bridletrack leads, five miles under thin thorn hedges, across the open and windy fields, past Starvegoose Wood. The foot of earth over them is a millennium, in one kind of reckoning. But the lane in that Black Mountain village, now so different both from the motor road and from the shaded lane I remember, is recent: about as far back as when my father, at twelve, went to work as a boy on a farm. I have the farmer's reference when he left: the shaky, rounded writing that he was honest and willing; and what he left for was to be a boy porter on the railway: that line of four through the valley, old road, tramroad, new road, railway: the cuttings and embankments moving like foothills; settled and familiar, laid a hundred years ago. When I was born he was a signalman, in the box in the valley: part of a network reaching to known named places, Newport and Hereford, and beyond them London, but still a man in the village, with his gardens and his bees, taking produce to market on a bicycle: a different network, but it was a bicycle he went on, to a market where the farmers came in cars and the dealers in lorries: our own century. He had been as much born to the land as his own father, yet, like him, he could not live by it. That man, Joseph, my grandfather, was a farmworker until middle age, when he lost his job and with it his cottage, and became a roadman: cutting and clearing along a length of the road that led away to the Midlands, to other cities. One uncle lived in London; another in Birmingham; we moved, as a family, on visits and holidays, between country and city, in our own direct relationships. We were a dispersed family, along the road, the railway, and now letters and print. These were the altering communications, the altering connections, between country and city, and between all the intermediate places and communities, the intermediate or temporary jobs and settlements.

So this country life had its meanings, but these changed in them-

selves and changed in relation to others. In the south-west, at nights, we used to watch the flare, over the black ridge of Brynarw, of the iron furnaces of industrial South Wales. In the east now, at nights, over the field with the elms and the white horse, I watch the glow of Cambridge: a white tinged with orange; and in the autumn, here, the stubble fields are burned, sometimes catching the thorn hedges, and when I saw this first at night I took it as strange accidental fire. My own network, from where I sit writing at the window, is to Cambridge and London, and beyond them to the postmark places, the unfamiliar stamps and the distant cities: Rome, Moscow, New York.

The lights of the city. I go out in the dark, before bed, and look at that glow in the sky: a look at the city while remembering Hardy's Jude, who stood and looked at the distant, attainable and unattainable, Christminster. Or I remember Wordsworth, coming from high country to London, and saying from Westminster Bridge:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty:  
This city now doth, like a garment, wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

It is true that this was the city before the rush and noise of the working day, but the pulse of the recognition is still unmistakable, and I know that I have felt it again and again: the great buildings of civilisation; the meeting-places; the libraries and theatres, the towers and domes; and often more moving than these, the houses, the streets, the press and excitement of so many people, with so many purposes. I have stood in many cities and felt this pulse: in the physical differences of Stockholm and Florence, Paris and Milan: this identifiable and moving quality: the centre, the activity, the light. Like everyone else I have felt also the chaos of the metro and the traffic jam; the monotony of the ranks of houses; the aching press of strange crowds. But this is not an experience at all, not an adult experience, until it has come to include also the dynamic movement, in these centres of settled and often magnificent achievement. H. G. Wells once said, coming out of a political meeting where they had been discussing social change, that this great towering city was a measure of the obstacle, of how much must be moved if there was to be any change. I have known this feeling, looking up at great buildings that are the centres of power, but I find I do not say 'There is your city, your great bourgeois monument, your towering structure of this still precarious

civilisation' or I do not only say that; I say also 'This is what men have built, so often magnificently, and is not everything then possible?' Indeed this sense of possibility, of meeting and of movement, is a permanent element of my sense of cities: as permanent a feeling as those other feelings, when I look from the mountain at the great coloured patchwork of fields that generations of my own people have cleared and set in hedges; or the known living places, the isolated farms, the cluster of cottages by castle or church, the line of river and wood and footpath and lane; lines received and lines made. So that while country and city have this profound importance, in their differing ways, my feelings are held, before any argument starts.

But then also, specifically, I came from a village to a city: to be taught, to learn: to submit personal facts, the incidents of a family, to a total record; to learn evidence and connection and altering perspectives. If the walls of the colleges were like the walls of parks, that as children we had walked round, unable to enter, yet now there was a gate, an entry, and a library at the end of it: a direct record, if I could learn to read it. It is ironic to remember that it was only after I came that I heard, from townsmen, academics, an influential version of what country life, country literature, really meant: a prepared and persuasive cultural history. I read related things still, in academic books and in books by men who left private schools to go farming, and by others who grew up in villages and are now country writers: a whole set of books, periodicals, notes in the newspapers: country life. And I find I keep asking the same question, because of the history: where do I stand in relation to these writers: in another country or in this valuing city? That problem is sharp and ironic in its cultural persistence.

But there was more to Cambridge than that. An ambivalence certainly: a university of scholars and teachers but also of coaches and placemen, on their way to higher places; a world of men extending human knowledge and bringing light to nature and to the lives of others; a world of other men contracted in sympathy, telling their qualifying paradigms inside the walls, in an idle and arrogant observation and consumption. The university, to my family, had been equally foreign, whether it was Cambridge or Bologna. But there was also the Cambridge of Stourbridge Fair, once the leading market of the country: 'the prodigious resort of the trading people of all parts of England' as Defoe described it in the 1720s; 'a prodigious complex of people' and also a model, to Bunyan, for *Vanity Fair*. When I returned much later, as a Fellow of a College, I found I was by virtue or default of an intellectual appointment an aspect, an unwilling member, of a collective and perpetual landlord, and I was asked,

politely, to attend tenants' lunches, which I could never stomach. I remembered Arthur Young on the University of Cambridge:

its revenue £16000 a year and for 1s 6d a member can sit down to a dinner such as a gentleman with £1000 a year cannot often give with prudence.

Defoe had followed one road out:

on the edge of the Fens, to Huntingdon, where it joins the great north road; on this side it is all an agreeable corn country, as above, adorned with several seats of gentlemen.

Young, in 1791, had followed another:

Taking the road from Cambridge to St Neot's, view six or seven miles of the worst husbandry, I hope, in Great Britain. . . . There seems somewhat of a coincidence between the state of cultivation within sight of the venerable spires of Cambridge and the utter neglect of agriculture in the establishment of that University.

That is the road I now drive on, coming home from the university. The fields are well farmed now. But in the next village west, Cobbett saw, in 1822, something

which very much resembles almost a village of the same size in Picardy, where I saw the women dragging harrows to harrow in the corn. Certainly this village resembles nothing English except some of the rascally rotten boroughs in Cornwall and Devonshire, on which a just Providence seems to have entailed its curse. The land just about here does seem to be really bad. The face of the country is naked. The few scrubbed trees that now and then meet the eye, and even the quick-sets, are covered with a yellow moss. All is bleak and comfortless; and, just on the most dreary part of this most dreary scene, stands almost opportunely, 'Caxton Gibbet', tendering its one friendly arm to the passers-by. It has recently been fresh-painted, and written on in conspicuous characters, for the benefit, I suppose, of those who cannot exist under the thought of wheat at four shillings a bushel.

That, too, is different now, but whenever I consider the relations between country and city, and between birth and learning, I find this history active and continuous: the relations are not only of ideas and experiences, but of rent and interest, of situation and power; a wider system.

This then is where I am, and as I settle to work I find I have to resolve, step by slow step, experiences and questions that once moved like light. The life of country and city is moving and present: moving in time, through the history of a family and a people; moving

in feeling and ideas, through a network of relationships and decisions.

A dog is barking—that chained bark—behind the asbestos barn. It is now and then: here and many places. When there are questions to put, I have to push back my chair, look down at my papers, and feel the change.

## *A Problem of Perspective*

The initial problem is one of perspective. A few years ago I was sent a book for review: a country book, in a familiar idiom, that I would normally have enjoyed reading. But there in front of the experience was a formula:

A way of life that has come down to us from the days of Virgil has suddenly ended.

In detail, certainly, this was curious. From Virgil? Here? A way of country life?

But in outline, of course, the position was familiar. As it is put in a memorable sentence, in the same book:

A whole culture that had preserved its continuity from earliest times had now received its quietus.

It had happened, it seemed, in the last fifty years: say since the First World War. But this raised a problem. I remembered a sentence in a critically influential book: Leavis and Thompson's *Culture and Environment*, published in 1932. The 'organic community' of 'Old England' had disappeared; 'the change is very recent indeed'. This view was primarily based on the books of George Sturt, which appeared between 1907 and 1923. In *Change in the Village*, published in 1911, Sturt wrote of the rural England 'that is dying out now'. Just back, we can see, over the last hill.

But then what seemed like an escalator began to move. Sturt traced this ending to two periods: enclosure after 1861 and residential settlement after 1900. Yet this at once takes us into the period of Thomas Hardy's novels, written between 1871 and 1896 and referring back to rural England since the 1830s. And had not critics insisted that it was here, in Hardy, that we found the record of the great climacteric change in rural life: the disturbance and destruction of what one writer has called the 'timeless rhythm of agriculture and the seasons'? And that was also the period of Richard Jefferies, looking back from the 1870s to the 'old Hodge', and saying that there had been more change in rural England in the previous half-century—that is, since the 1820s—than in any previous time. And wasn't George Eliot, in *Mill on the Floss* (1860) and in *Felix Holt* (1866), looking back, similarly, to the old rural England of the 1820s and early 1830s?



But now the escalator was moving without pause. For the 1820s and 1830s were the last years of Cobbett, directly in touch with the rural England of his time but looking back to the happier country, the old England of his boyhood, during the 1770s and 1780s. Thomas Bewick, in his *Memoir*, written during the 1820s, was recalling the happier village of his own boyhood, in the 1770s. The decisive change, both men argued, had happened during their lifetimes. John Clare, in 1809, was also looking back—

Oh, happy Eden of those golden years

—to what seems, on internal evidence, to be the 1790s, though he wrote also, in another retrospect on a vanishing rural order, of the ‘far-fled pasture, long evanish’d scene’.

Yet still the escalator moved. For the years of Cobbett’s and of Bewick’s boyhood were the years of Crabbe’s *The Village* (1783)

No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain,  
But own the Village Life a life of pain

and of Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1769)

E’en now, methinks, as pondering here I stand  
I see the rural virtues leave the land.

And by ordinary arithmetic, in the memory of Sweet Auburn—

loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheer’d the labouring swain,  
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,  
And parting summer’s lingering blooms delay’d;  
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please

—back we would go again, over the next hill, to the 1750s.

It is clear, of course, as this journey in time is taken, that something more than ordinary arithmetic and something more, evidently, than ordinary history, is in question. Against sentimental and intellectualised accounts of an unlocalised ‘Old England’, we need, evidently, the sharpest scepticism. But some at least of these witnesses were writing from direct experience. What we have to inquire into is not, in these cases, historical error, but historical perspective. Indeed the fact of what I have called the escalator may be an important clue to the real history, but only when we begin to see the regularity of its pattern.

It is worth, perhaps, getting on the escalator again, since all we have done so far is to move ‘Old England’ and its timeless agricultural rhythms back from the early twentieth century to the middle of the eighteenth century. When we remember ‘our mature, settled eighteenth century’, we may not, after all, have made very much difference to

the ordinary accounts. Shall we then go back to Philip Massinger, in the early 1620s, in *The City Madam* and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*? Here the new commercialism is breaking the old landed settlement and its virtues. Here is the enclosing and engrossing Sir Giles Overreach. Here is the corruption of an older rural civilisation:

Your father was  
An honest country farmer, goodman Humble,  
By his neighbours ne'er called Master. Did your pride  
Descend from him?

We can't say, but we can go on back to Bastard's *Chrestoleros*, in 1598, where the same complaints are being made, or, if we are asked to assume that the disturbance occurred at the turn of the century, to Thomas More's *Utopia*, in 1516, where another old order is being destroyed:

For looke in what partes of the realme doth growe the fynest and therefore dearest woll, there noblemen and gentlemen, yea and certeyn abbottes, holy men no doubt, not contenting them selves with the yearely revenues and profytes, that were wont to grow to theyr forefathers and predecessours of their landes, nor beyng content that they live in rest and pleasure nothinge profiting, yea much noyinge the weale publique, leave no ground for tillage, thei inclose all into pastures; thei throw doune houses; they plucke downe townes, and leave nothing standynge, but only the churche to be made a shepehouse. And as though you lost no small quantity of grounds by forestes, chases, laundes and parkes, those good holy men turne all dwellinge places and all glebeland into desolation and wildernes.

Except that then, of course, we find ourselves referred back to the settled Middle Ages, an organic society if ever there was one. To the 1370s, for example, when Langland's *Piers Plowman* sees the dissatisfaction of the labourers, who will not eat yesterday's vegetables but must have fresh meat, who blame God and curse the King, but who used not to complain when Hunger made the Statutes. Must we go beyond the Black Death to the beginning of the Game Laws, or to the time of Magna Carta, when Innocent III writes:

the serf serves; terrified with threats, wearied by corvees, afflicted with blows, despoiled of his possessions?

Or shall we find the timeless rhythm in Domesday, when four men out of five are villeins, bordars, cotters or slaves? Or in a free Saxon world before what was later seen as the Norman rape and yoke? In a Celtic world, before the Saxons came up the rivers? In an Iberian world, before the Celts came, with their gilded barbarism? Where indeed shall we go, before the escalator stops?

One answer, of course, is Eden, and we shall have to look at that well-remembered garden again. But first we must get off the escalator, and consider its general movement.

Is it anything more than a well-known habit of using the past, the 'good old days', as a stick to beat the present? It is clearly something of that, but there are still difficulties. The apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede, have some actual significance, when they are looked at in their own terms. Of course we notice their location in the childhoods of their authors, and this must be relevant. Nostalgia, it can be said, is universal and persistent; only other men's nostalgias offend. A memory of childhood can be said, persuasively, to have some permanent significance. But again, what seemed a single escalator, a perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement: Old England, settlement, the rural virtues—all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question. We shall need precise analysis of each kind of retrospect, as it comes. We shall see successive stages of the criticism which the retrospect supports: religious, humanist, political, cultural. Each of these stages is worth examination in itself. And then, within each of these questions, but returning us finally to a formidable and central question, there is a different consideration.

The witnesses we have summoned raise questions of historical fact and perspective, but they raise questions, also, of literary fact and perspective. The things they are saying are not all in the same mode. They range, as facts, from a speech in a play and a passage in a novel to an argument in an essay and a note in a journal. When the facts are poems, they are also, and perhaps crucially, poems of different kinds. We can only analyse these important structures of feeling if we make, from the beginning, these critical discriminations. And then the first problem of definition, a persistent problem of form, is the question of pastoral, of what is known as pastoral.

*Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral*

(i)

No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain,  
But own the Village Life a life of pain.

This couplet of Crabbe's, which opens the second book of *The Village*, is a significant introduction to the character of the general problem. Where did it come from, that tone of apology about verse? Who was it aimed at, that insistence on the truth? Crabbe's poem, *The Village*, needs to be read between these questions.

By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,  
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.

Truth again, and against poetry. Whatever we may later ask about Crabbe's England, it is clear that the contrast in his mind is not between rural England past and present, but between true and false ways of writing. More generally, the contrast he is forcing is between a tradition of pastoral poetry and his own intention of realism. He assumes, certainly, that there was once a basis for what he knew as pastoral, but in classical times, not in his own or recent England:

Fled are those times, when in harmonious strains  
The rustic poet praised his native plains:  
No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse,  
Their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse.

It is a literary tradition, that of neo-classic pastoral, that is being formally rejected: 'mechanick echoes of the Mantuan song'. Or, as Crabbe originally wrote, before Johnson's amendment of his lines:

In fairer scenes, where peaceful pleasures spring,  
Tityrus the pride of Mantuan swains might sing;  
But, charmed by him, or smitten with his views,  
Shall modern poets court the Mantuan muse?  
From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray,  
Where Fancy leads, or Virgil led the way.

Johnson weakened this by amending the last lines to 'where Virgil, not where Fancy, leads the way'. It would have been better if Crabbe had not needed, as in practice he did, Johnson's help.

'A way of life that has come down to us from the days of Virgil.'

But if it is the continuity of a settled agriculture, it is from very much earlier than that. The literary reference, for a presumed social fact, is the really significant structure. It is symptomatic of the confusion which surrounds the whole question of 'pastoral'.

For if we look back into literature for significant writing about country life, we are taken many centuries beyond Virgil to the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, to the ninth century before Christ. And what we find there, in a very particular structure of customs and beliefs, is an epic of husbandry, in the widest sense: the practice of agriculture and trading within a way of life in which prudence and effort are seen as primary virtues. The recommendations are made within the mythical structure of the loosing of evils, among them the evil of hard work, from Pandora's jar, and the influential chronology of the five ages, from the first golden age in which:

remote and free from evil and grief . . . (mortal men) had all good things, for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint.

We shall see the long influence of this myth of the Golden Age, but for Hesiod, at the beginning of country literature, it is already far in the past. Three other ages have intervened, and it is the character of his own 'iron age' that determines his recommendation of practical agriculture, social justice and neighbourliness. It is from the 'life of pain' that these practices can deliver a working community.

The Greek bucolic poets are very much later: some six centuries. It is in the Hellenistic world of the third century before Christ that 'pastoral', in any strict sense, emerges as a literary form. Its landscape is not the Boeotia of Hesiod, but the Sicily of Theocritus and Moschus, the Greek islands, and Egypt; the literary centre of the movement is Alexandria. Thus 'pastoral' already has a different base: the tenth Idyll of Theocritus has a background of sowing and harvesting, but this is an exception; the normal work is the herding of goats, sheep and cattle. The working year of Hesiod, ploughing, tending vineyards, keeping pigs and sheep and goats, is thus already significantly altered. It is generally assumed that literary pastoral developed from singing competitions in local peasant communities; but as it emerges in Theocritus, though this form is often retained, a degree of elaboration and artifice, most evident in the use of literary dialects, is evident everywhere. At the same time the working context of the Idylls is recognisable and at times insistent. Thus we read on the first appearance of the long figure of Lycidas:

He was a goatherd, nor could one that saw him have mistaken him, for beyond all he looked the goatherd. On his shoulders he wore the tawny skin of a thick-haired shaggy goat reeking of

fresh curd, and round his breast an aged tunic was girt with a broad belt; in his right hand he grasped a crooked club of wild olive.

The Rustic Singers of Idyll IX only begin their songs when they have set the calves beneath the cows and the bulls to run with the barren heifers.

The couch of fair skins, by the cool stream, on which Daphnis lies, is made from the herd driven over a cliff by a gale. This is the oxherd's 'ease', and the goatherd's 'wealth of dreamland' is

many a ewe and many a she-goat, and fleeces from them lying at my head and my feet. And on my fire of oaklogs puddings boil, and dry acorns roast there in wintry weather.

Wolves, foxes, locusts and beetles are as much part of the experience as balm and rockrose and apples and honey. The herdsman who goes to the festival, in Idyll IV, leaves thin bulls and calves, for he has 'fallen in love with cursed victory'. Within the beautiful development of the pastoral songs this sense of a simple community, living on narrow margins and experiencing the delights of summer and fertility the more intensely because they also know winter and barrenness and accident, is intensely present:

as spring is sweeter than winter, as apple than sloe; as the ewe is deeper of fleece than her lamb.

Of course, as the tradition developed, it was possible to extract, for their evident delight, the invocations of summer: from Hesiod—

When the cardoon flowers and the loud cicada sings  
perched on a tree . . .  
. . . O give me then  
the shade of a rock, with Biblis' wine set by,  
and bread of the best, and the milk of goats drained dry;

or from Theocritus:

All rich delight and luxury was there:  
Larks and bright finches singing in the air;  
The brown bees flying round about the well;  
The ring-dove moaning; everywhere the smell  
Of opulent summer and of ripening-tide:  
Pears at our feet and apples at our side  
Rolling in plenteousness; in piles around  
Branches, with damsons burdening to the ground  
Strewn for our feast.

At a very much later date, this could be seen, by false extraction, as the essence, the only essence, of pastoral. But as we move from Theocritus to Virgil, two centuries later, in the first century before Christ, we find a continuity of pastoral which in and through its literary elaboration maintains its contact with the working year and with the real social conditions of country life. Virgil's *Eclogues* are in one sense more idealised, as they are also more elaborate, than the idylls of Theocritus; but the rural disturbance of his own Italy often breaks through into the poetically distant Arcadia. Thus in Eclogue I, Meliboeus' familiar invocation—

Ah fortunate old man, here, among hallowed springs  
And familiar streams you'll enjoy the longed-for shade,  
the cool shade.

Here, as of old, where your neighbour's land marches  
with yours,

The sally hedge, with bees of Hybla sipping its blossom,  
Shall often hum you gently to sleep. On the other side  
Vine-dressers will sing to the breezes at the crag's foot;  
And all the time your favourites, the husky-voiced wood  
pigeons

Shall coo away, and turtle-doves make moan in the elm tops

is in explicit contrast to his own condition, as an evicted small farmer:

But the rest of us must go from here and be dispersed—  
To Scythia, bone-dry Africa, the chalky spate of the Oxus,  
Even to Britain—that place cut off at the very world's end.  
Ah, when shall I see my native land again? after long years,  
Or never?—see the turf-dressed roof of my simple cottage,  
And wondering gaze at the ears of corn that were all my  
kingdom.

To think of some godless soldier owning my well-farmed  
fallow,

A foreigner reaping these crops! To such a pass has civil  
Dissension brought us . . .

No more singing for me.

Again, in Eclogue IX, the pastoral singing is directly related to the hopes and fears of the small farmers under threat of confiscation of their land:

Oh, Lycidas, that I should have lived to see an outsider  
Take over my little farm—a thing I had never feared.  
And tell me, 'You're dispossessed, you old tenants, you've  
got to go'.

We're down and out. And look how Chance turns the  
tables on us—

These are *his* goats (rot them) you see me taking to market.

Poetry itself might seek to protect the land and its customary farmers, but under the pressure of violence and the consequences of war, as the ex-soldiers are resettled by large-scale confiscation,

poems such as ours, *Lycidas*, stand no more chance than doves if an eagle comes.

And we remember that Virgil himself was the son of a smallholder whose land was threatened by just such a confiscation.

Thus the contrast within Virgilian pastoral is between the pleasures of rural settlement and the threat of loss and eviction. This developed, in its turn, into a contrast already familiar from some earlier literature, in times of war and civil disturbance, when the peace of country life could be contrasted with the disturbance of war and civil war and the political chaos of the cities. It depends very much how this contrast is made. It can be a present fact, as in *Eclogues* I and IX. It can be a living retrospect, as in the sad memories of *Meliboeus*. Or it can begin to be built into a wider system of ideas: a scheme of the past or of the future. In some passages of the *Georgics*, for example at the end of Book 2, there is the note of idealisation, of extended retrospect, which was to become so characteristic. The pastoral landscape of *Theocritus* had been immediate and close at hand: just outside the walls of the city. The Golden Age of *Hesiod* had been a mythical memory, contrasting with the iron time of modern men, in which labour is necessary and is admired. A transmutation occurs, in some parts of *Virgil*, in which the landscape becomes more distant, becomes in fact *Arcadia*, and the Golden Age is seen as present there, at once summoned and celebrated by the power of poetry:

For them, far from the strife of arms, the earth, ever just, pours an easy living on the land of its own accord. . . . By their own will the trees and the fields bear produce, and he picks it. His peace is secure and his living cannot fail.

It is only a short step from a natural delight in the fertility of the earth to this magical invocation of a land which needs no farming. But it is a step that is sometimes taken, though only in isolated passages, in the complicated movement of the *Georgics*: that prolonged and detailed description and celebration of the farmer's year; of his tools, his methods, his dangers, his enemies, his skills and his lifetime's efforts. What needs to be emphasised is not only the emergence of the idealising tone, but also that it is not yet abstracted from the whole of a working country life. Yet at the same time the idyllic note is being sounded in another context: that of the future: of a restoration, a second coming, of the golden age; one that is even politically imminent, as in *Eclogue* IV:



Goats shall walk home, their udders taut with milk, and  
 nobody  
 Herding them; the ox will have no fear of the lion . . .  
 . . . Then shall grapes hang wild and reddening on thorn  
 trees  
 And honey sweat like dew from the hard bark of oaks . . .  
 . . . The soil will need no harrowing, the vine no pruning-  
 knife  
 And the tough ploughman may at last unyoke his oxen.

This magical Utopian vision is a prophecy: 'run looms and weave the future'. And it thus includes within its celebration the consciousness of the very different present from which the restoration will be a release.

So that even in these developments, of classical pastoral and other rural literature, which inaugurate tones and images of an ideal kind, there is almost invariably a tension with other kinds of experience: summer with winter; pleasure with loss; harvest with labour; singing with a journey; past or future with the present. The achievement, if it can be called that, of the Renaissance adaptation of just these classical modes is that, step by step, these living tensions are excised, until there is nothing countervailing, and selected images stand as themselves: not in a living but in an enamelled world. Thus the retrospect of Meliboeus, on the life he is forced to leave, becomes the 'source' of a thousand pretty exercises on an untroubled rural delight and peace. Even more remarkably, the famous second Epode of Horace—the *Beatus Ille* to which a thousand poems of happy rural retreat are confidently traced—had its crucial tension commonly excised. The celebration of herds and honey and fruit and clear streams, far from war and the city and the cold practice of usury, had been in Horace the sentimental reflection of a usurer, thinking of turning farmer, calling in his money and then, at the climax of the poem, lending it out again. The first conscious and then conventional excision of this irony is a fact even more important than the nominal and thematic continuity.

All traditions are selective: the pastoral tradition quite as much as any other. Where poets run scholars follow, and questions about the 'pastoral' poetry or the poetry of 'rural retreat' of our own sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are again and again turned aside by the confident glossing and glozing of the reference back. We must not look, with Crabbe and others, at what the country was really like: that is a utilitarian or materialist, perhaps even a peasant response. Let us remember, instead, that this poem is based on Horace, Epode II or Virgil, Eclogue IV; that among the high far names are Theocritus and Hesiod: the Golden Age in another sense.

It is time that this bluff was called. Academic gloss has made such a habit of tracing influences that it needs the constant correction of a Coleridge, to those

who seem to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things as fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would therefore charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank.

(Preface to *Christabel*)

And how much more is this necessary when the presumed sources, the other men's tanks, have been so altered and simplified that nobody can easily see what has happened, meanwhile, to the water.

(ii)

We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing its miseries.

When Pope could say that, the 'tradition' had been altered. 'No longer truth, though shown in verse.' The long critical dispute, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, on the character of pastoral poetry had this much, at least, as common ground. What was at issue was mainly whether such an idyll, the delightful Pastoral, should be referred always to the Golden Age, as Rapin and the neo-classicists argued; or to the more permanent and indeed timeless idea of the tranquillity of life in the country, as Fontenelle and others maintained. In the former case, because it was the Golden Age, there was really peace and innocence. In the latter, there could still be an idea of these, a conventional literary illusion in native and contemporary scenes:

exposing to the Eye only the Tranquility of a Shepherd's Life, and dissembling or concealing its meanness, as also in showing only its Innocence, and hiding its Miseries.

It is with this in mind that we can understand Crabbe:

But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace  
The poor laborious natives of the place,  
And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,  
On their bare heads and dewy temples play;  
While some, with feebler heads and fainter hearts,  
Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts:  
Then shall I dare these real ills to hide  
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?

The question 'shall I dare?' carries the felt outrage, at one of those critical moments, a crisis of perspective, when habits, institutions and experiences clash. Who are they, who dare in this way, to whom Crabbe addresses himself?

Oh trifle not with wants you cannot feel,  
 Nor mock the misery of a stinted meal;  
 Homely, not wholesome, plain, not plenteous, such  
 As you who praise would never deign to touch.  
 Ye gentle souls, who dream of rural ease,  
 Whom the smooth stream and smoother sonnet please;  
 Go! if the peaceful cot your praises share,  
 Go look within, and ask if peace be there.

They are a numerous company, these pretenders to simplicity. It is possible to follow a direct line from Virgil, at the end of which, as in the English 'Augustans', the eclogue has become a highly artificial and abstracted form: its simplicities wholly external. But the line runs also from the *Georgics*, and in Politian and Alamanni, for example, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, there is inspiration as well as imitation: the verse of Politian's *Rusticus* is in Latin but the working year he describes is that of the Tuscan peasant; Alamanni's *La Coltivazione* is a modern Italian equivalent to the working descriptions of country life of the *Georgics*.

Yet 'pastoral', with its once precise meaning, was undergoing in the same period an extraordinary transformation. Its most serious element was a renewed intensity of attention to natural beauty, but this is now the nature of observation, of the scientist or the tourist, rather than of the working countryman. Thus the descriptive element in original pastoral could be separated out, and a whole tradition of 'nature poetry', strong and moving in these separated ways, could be founded to go on its major course, over several centuries into our own time. The other main element was very different: pastoral became theatrical and romantic, in the strict senses. The pastoral romance, from Boccaccio to Sannazzaro's *Arcadia* (c. 1500), was a new form, in which the eclogue and natural description were absorbed into the essentially different world of an idealised romantic love. That the shepherds in pastoral had sung love-songs was the nominal basis, but the shepherds and nymphs who now begin to appear are lay figures in an aristocratic entertainment. The pastoral drama, beginning with Tasso's *Aminta* (1572), is similarly the creation of a princely court, in which the shepherd is an idealised mask, a courtly disguise: a traditionally innocent figure through whom, paradoxically, intrigue can be elaborated. This filigree game, which continued as a form of aristocratic entertainment as late as Marie Antoinette, and which has left its physical legacy in its thousands of painted porcelain

figures, has more connection, obviously, with the real interests of the court than with country life in any of its possible forms.

Yet this was not always realised. Pope took the game for the fact, in his essay on pastoral, and recommended description

not . . . as shepherds at this day really are but as they may be conceiv'd to have been; when the best of men follow'd the employment.

If courtiers played shepherd long enough, original shepherds must have been aristocrats.

But the offered simplicity was not only this kind of fancy dress. A second real interest of the time found its way into pastoral: the medieval and post-medieval habit of allegory. Puttenham in 1589 argued that the Eclogue was devised

not of purpose to counterfeit or represent the rustical manner of loves or communications: but under the vaile of homely persons, and in rude speeches, to insinuate and glance at great matters.

He went on to say that this was true of Virgil, and this is the exact process of selective cultural adaptation. Virgil, like Hesiod, could raise the most serious questions of life and its purposes in the direct world in which the working year and the pastoral song are still there in their own right. What happened in the aristocratic transformation was the reduction of these primary activities to forms, whether the 'vaile' of allegory or the fancy dress of court games. It is a significant change, but it has been so prepotent—though its impulses, one would think, had been so long dead—that the ordinary modern meaning of pastoral, in the critical discourse of otherwise twentieth-century writers, has been derived from these forms, rather than from the original substance or from its more significant successors. 'Pastoral' means, we are told, the simple matter in which general truths are embodied or implied: even a modern proletarian industrial novel can be pastoral in this sense! But while as a critical procedure for understanding, say, Spenser, this is fair enough, its extension is absurd, and the absurdity has a point. As in so many other areas of English literary thought, there has been an effective and voluntary congealment at the point of significant historical transition, from a feudal to a bourgeois world. If pastoral is only a disguise or an allegory, Crabbe's question has no point; it is no more than a rude noise. But Crabbe's is a question which has to be answered, if the reality of a major transition is to be acknowledged and understood.

For the pastoral of the courts and of the aristocratic houses was not, as it came through, the really significant development. Isolated in time and in status, its modes and its realities are quite easily

understood. What is much more significant is the internal transformation of just this artificial mode in the direction and in the interest of a new kind of society: that of a developing agrarian capitalism. Neo-pastoral as a court entertainment is one thing; neo-pastoral in its new location, the country-house and its estate, is quite another. We must follow the development of the artificial eclogue and idyll, but we shall only arrive at the decisive transition when these have been relocated, in a new ideology, in the country-house.

## (iii)

Poets have often lent their tongues to princes, who are in a position to pay or to reply. What has been lent to shepherds, and at what rates of interest, is much more in question. It is not easy to forget that Sidney's *Arcadia*, which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants. The elegant game was then only at arm's length—a rough arm's length—from a visible reality of country life.

There were, of course, other pastoral metaphors. The good shepherd was a permanently available Christ-figure, the loving pastor, who could be set against the corruption of the church. There are English examples of this in the May and July and September eclogues of Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar*. More generally, by what seems an obvious association, the life of the shepherd could be made to stand for the life of nature and for natural feeling. This convention was worked to a thread, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but in some of the shorter poems there is a freshness which is only rarely present in the elaborated figures and devices of drama and romance; it is still a known country, and not merely Arcadia.

In the merry month of May,  
In a morn by break of day,  
Forth I walk'd by the wood-side,  
When as May was in his pride.

But this verse of Nicholas Breton's, in which the lovers by the wood are suddenly Phillida and Coridon, is less characteristic than the crystal fountains, the scorched vales, and the madrigal birds which are the ordinary neo-pastoral setting. The metaphor holds, in feeling, in the conscious ambiguity of Marlowe's

belt of straw and ivy-buds  
With coral clasps and amber studs.

But there is a more permanent interest in the way in which the neo-pastoral metaphor tries to authenticate itself in observed nature.

The court toy and the hyperbole of feeling are returned, with some loss and some gain, to the country walk. It is at this point, more significantly than when the neo-pastoral convention was a total literary artifice, that the difficult inquiry begins.

There had of course already been counter-pastoral, of a kind. The working shepherd, already present in the Towneley *Secunda Pastorum* in his figurative and in his actual role above Bethlehem, was present again in the winter song in *Love's Labour's Lost*. But the ordinary counter was Raleigh's to Marlowe: the relentless intrusion of time on that endless neo-pastoral May:

But Time drives flocks from field to fold,  
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold.

Had joys no date, nor age no need, the pastoral appeal would convince.

What is then interesting is the movement beyond romantic love, the perpetual neo-pastoral May, to the way of life as a whole: a new metaphor, in the English country, for the oldest rural ideal. Not the nymphs and shepherds of neo-pastoral romance, in their courtly love in the parks and gardens; but the quiet, the innocence, the simple plenty of the countryside: the metaphorical but also the actual retreat. Traditional images were of course immediately available: the Golden Age and Paradise. It is interesting to see Michael Drayton in his poem *To the Virginian Voyage* locating both in a colony:

*Virginia,*  
Earth's only paradise.  
  
Where nature hath in store  
Fowl, venison, and fish,  
And the fruitfull'st soil  
Without your toil  
Three harvests more,  
All greater than your wish . . .  
  
. . . To whom the Golden Age  
Still nature's laws doth give,  
No other cares attend,  
But them to defend  
From winter's rage  
That long there doth not live.

This kind of vision becomes a commonplace. There is a very pure form of it in an anonymous late-seventeenth century poem:

How beautiful the World at first was made  
Ere Mankind by Ambition was betray'd.  
The happy Swain in these enamell'd Fields  
Possesses all the Good that Plenty yields;  
Pure without mixture, as it first did come,

From the great Treasury of Nature's Womb.  
 Free from Disturbance here he lives at ease  
 Contented with a little Flock's encrease,  
 And covered with the gentle wings of Peace.  
 No Fears, no Storms of War his Thoughts molest,  
 Ambition is a stranger to his Breast;  
 His Sheep, his Crook, and Pipe, are all his Store,  
 He needs not, neither does he covet more.

Here we can see the simple vision of natural plenty reabsorbed into a moral attitude with social implications: transferred from its classical sources to the 'enamell'd Fields'. And country life, as traditionally, is an innocent alternative to ambition, disturbance and war. There are countless poems which offer this view, sometimes dreamy, sometimes rapt. As in these lines from Charles Cotton's aptly named poem *The Retirement*:

Good God! how sweet are all things here!  
 How beautifull the Fields appear!  
 How cleanly do we feed and lie!  
 Lord what good hours do we keep!  
 How quietly we sleep!  
 What peace! What unanimity!

This is a form of that persistent desire to get away from what is seen as the world, or from what, more interestingly, is seen as other people. The 'we' of the lines quoted is by the end of the same poem 'I':

Lord! would men let me alone,  
 What an over-happy one  
 Should I think my self to be.

This note can be heard again in Abraham Cowley's *The Wish*, in an explicit contrast with 'this great *Hive, the City*':

Oh, *Fountains*, when in you shall I  
 My self, eas'd of unpeaceful thoughts, espy?  
 Oh *Fields!* Oh *Woods!* when, when shall I be made  
 The happy Tenant of your shade?

And it is then interesting to see the steady inclusion, in what at one extreme is a simple unlocalised reverie, of another quality from contemporary social experience and desire.

Cowley sees the realised self as the 'happy tenant'. This is partly the absorption of actual social and economic relations into the natural vision, as in John Hall's *Pastorall Hymne*:

Great Lord, from whom each Tree receives,  
 Then pays againe as rent, his leaves.

There is a strange poem by Richard Lovelace, *Elinda's Glove*, in which the romantic compliment is made wholly from this kind of imagery:

Thou snowy Farme with thy five Tenements!  
 Tell thy white Mistris here was one  
 That call'd to pay his dayly Rents:  
 But she a gathering Flowers and Hearts is gone,  
 And thou left void to rude Possession.

But grieve not pretty *Ermin* Cabinet,  
 Thy Alabaster Lady will come home;  
 If not, what Tenant can there fit  
 The slender turnings of thy narrow Roome,  
 But must ejected be by his owne doome?

Then give me leave to leave my Rent with thee;  
 Five kisses, one unto a place. . . .

Here, through the elaboration of the conceit, we see momentarily more of actual seventeenth-century country life than in the poems of retirement. Yet an increasing location in an actual social estate can be seen in some of the later poems: it is that of the small independent freeholder. There is Nahum Tate's

Grant me, indulgent Heaven! a rural seat  
 Rather contemptible than great.

Or Pomfret's:

I'd have a clear and competent estate  
 That I might live genteely, but not great:  
 As much as I could moderately spend:  
 A little more, sometimes, t'oblige a friend.  
 Nor should the sons of poverty repine  
 Too much at fortune, they should taste of mine.

Or Pope's unqualified version of Horace:

Happy the man whose wish and care  
 A few paternal acres bound  
 Content to breathe his native air  
 In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,  
 Whose flocks supply him with attire;  
 Whose trees in summer yield him shade,  
 In winter fire.

The unworked-for providence of nature, that mythical or utopian image, is now, significantly, acquiring a social dimension: a 'clear and



competent estate', well supplied with hired help. As in Matthew Green's

A farm some twenty miles from town  
 Small, tight, salubrious and my own:  
 Two maids, that never saw the town,  
 A serving man not quite a clown,  
 A boy to help to tread the mow,  
 And drive, while t'other holds the plough. . . .

When economic reality returns, it is again absorbed into the natural vision:

And may my humble dwelling stand  
 Upon some chosen spot of land. . . .  
 Fit dwelling for the feather'd throng  
 Who pay their quit-rents with a song.

What we can see happening, in this interesting development, is the conversion of conventional pastoral into a localised dream and then, increasingly, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, into what can be offered as a description and thence an idealisation of actual English country life and its social and economic relations. It was against this, as well as against the conventional simplicities of literary neo-pastoral, that Crabbe was making his protest.

(iv)

For it is not only a question of formal or informal pastoral, which, as I have said, are quite easily recognised. There is a more difficult case, in some important poems which have been commonly read as describing an actual rural economy: an existing social base for the perpetual peace and innocence of the neo-pastoral dream. These are the poems of country houses, which Cowley had celebrated as a part of Nature, in *Solitude*:

Hail, old Patrician Trees, so great and good!  
 Hail, ye Plebeian under wood!  
 Where the Poetique Birds rejoyce,  
 And for their quiet Nests and plenteous Food,  
 Pay with their grateful voice.

Hail the poor Muses richest Manor Seat!  
 Ye Country Houses and Retreat,  
 Which all the happy Gods so Love,  
 That for you oft they quit their Bright and Great  
 Metropolis above.

Here the wood, the birds, the poets and the gods are seen literally (the figure is so complete) as the social structure—the natural order—

of seventeenth-century England. It is interesting to compare Fanshawe, writing directly of the actual situation, when the gentry were being ordered back to their estates in 1630. What he sees is

one blest Isle:  
Which in a sea of plenty swam  
And Turtles sang on ev'ry Bough,  
A safe retreat to all that came,  
As ours is now.

That is the familiar image of a smiling country.

Yet we, as if some Foe were here,  
Leave the despised fields to Clowns,  
And come to save ourselves as 'twere  
In walled Towns.

And so they must go back:

The sap and blood o' th' land, which fled  
Into the Root, and choakt the Heart,  
Are bid their quick'ning power to spread,  
Through ev'ry part.

It is the image that Milton more generously developed, drawing on the associated image of culture as natural growth, in his appeal for a national education: 'communicating the natural heat of Government and Culture more distributively to all extreme parts, which now lie num and neglected'. Fanshawe, in his return, foresees the breeding of another Virgil (that reference was dominant), but his main appeal is more direct:

Nor let the Gentry grudge to go  
Into those places whence they grow.

It is a way of seeing the crisis of seventeenth-century rural England, but of course it also reminds us that Cowley's 'bright and great metropolis' was not quit as often or as naturally as all that.

Yet at the centre of the structure of feeling which is here in question—a relation between the country houses and a responsible civilisation—are the poems to actual places and men: notably Ben Jonson's *Penshurst* and *To Sir Robert Wroth*, and Thomas Carew's *To Saxham*. These are not, in any simple sense, pastoral or neo-pastoral, but they use a particular version of country life as a way of expressing, in the form of a compliment to a house or its owner, certain social and moral values.

How blest art thou, canst love the countrey, Wroth,  
Whether by choice, or fate, or both;  
And, though so neere the citie, and the court,  
Art tane with neither's vice, nor sport.

The life of a country gentleman is thus celebrated as an explicit contrast to the life of the court and the city. The figures of city lawyer, city capitalist, and courtier, are brought in to point the moral.

In Wroth's rural economy, as the poem proceeds and as

the rout of rurall folke come thronging in

there is an emphasis on the absence of pride and greed and calculation. And then Jonson can turn, positively, to identify and localise the pastoral convention:

Such, and no other, was that age of old,  
Which boasts t'have had the head of gold.

But is it really so, past the lattice of compliment? Has a neo-pastoral vision acquired a social base, in a Tudor country house? Some critics have taken it so, but the complexity of *To Penshurst* would in any case make us pause. For what is most remarkable about it, in any open reading, is its procedure of definition by negatives:

Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show  
Of touch, or marble; nor canst boast a row  
Of polish'd pillars, or a roofof gold:  
Thou hast no lantherne, wherof tales are told;  
Or stayre, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile,  
And these grudg'd at, art reverenc'd the while . . .  
. . . And though thy walls be of the countrey stone,  
They' are rear'd with no man's ruine, no mans grone,  
There's none, that dwell about them, wish them downe . . .  
. . . Now, Penshurst, they that will proportion thee  
With other edifices, when they see  
Those proud ambitious heaps, and nothing else,  
May say, their lords have built, but thy lord dwells.

This declaration by negative and contrast, not now with city and court but with other country houses, is enough in itself to remind us that we can make no simple extension from Penshurst to a whole country civilisation. The forces of pride, greed and calculation are evidently active among landowners as well as among city merchants and courtiers. What is being celebrated is then perhaps an idea of rural society, as against the pressures of a new age; and the embodiment of this idea is the house in which Jonson has been entertained.

This is where the comparison with Carew's *To Saxham* is particularly relevant. For there too, as it happens, there is a definition by negatives, though now in a different house:

Thou hast no Porter at the door  
 T'examine, or keep back the poor;  
 Nor locks nor bolts; thy gates have been  
 Made only to let strangers in.

Or again, more subtly:

The cold and frozen air had sterv'd,  
 Much poore, if not by thee preserv'd,  
 Whose prayers have made thy Table blest  
 With plenty, far above the rest.

The island of Charity is the house where the poet himself eats; but that it is an island, in an otherwise harsh economy, is the whole point of the successive compliments.

We need not refuse Jonson and Carew the courtesy of their lucky exceptions: their Penshurst and Saxham 'rear'd', unlike others, 'with no man's ruine, no mans grone'; with none, 'that dwell about them', wishing them 'downe'. There were, we need not doubt, such houses and such men, but they were at best the gentle exercise of a power that was elsewhere, on their own evidence, mean and brutal. The morality is not, when we look into it, the fruit of the economy; it is a local stand and standard against it.

It is of course clear that in each of the poems, though more strongly and convincingly in Jonson, the social order is seen as part of a wider order: what is now sometimes called a natural order, with meta-physical sanctions. Certainly nothing is more remarkable than the stress on the providence of Nature, but this, we must see on reflection, is double-edged. What kind of wit is it exactly—for it must be wit; the most ardent traditionalists will hardly claim it for observation—which has the birds and other creatures offering themselves to be eaten? The estate of Penshurst, as Jonson sees it:

To crowne thy open table, doth provide  
 The purpled pheasant with the speckled side:  
 The painted partrich lyes in every field  
 And, for thy messe, is willing to be kill'd.

Carew extends this same hyperbole:

The Pheasant, Partridge, and the Lark  
 Flew to my house, as to the Ark.  
 The willing Oxe, of himselfe came  
 Home to the slaughter, with the Lamb,  
 And every beast did thither bring  
 Himselfe to be an offering.  
 The scalie herd, more pleasure took  
 Bath'd in the dish than in the brook.

In fact the wit depends, in such passages, on a shared and conscious point of view towards nature. The awareness of hyperbole is there, is indeed what is conventional in just this literary convention, and is controlled and ratified, in any wider view, by a common consciousness. At one level this is a willing and happy ethic of consuming, made evident by the organisation of the poems around the centrality of the dining-table. Yet the possible grossness of this, as in Carew (a willing largeness of hyperbole, as in so many Cavalier poems, as the awareness of an alternative point of view makes simple statement impossible) is modified in Jonson by a certain pathos, a conscious realisation of his situation:

And I not faine to sit (as some, this day,  
At great men's tables) and yet dine away.  
Here no man tells my cups; nor, standing by,  
A waiter, doth my gluttony envy:  
But gives me what I call, and lets me eate.

It is difficult not to feel the relief of that. Indeed there is more than a hint, in the whole tone of this hospitable eating and drinking, of that easy, insatiable exploitation of the land and its creatures—a prolonged delight in an organised and corporative production and consumption—which is the basis of many early phases of intensive agriculture: the land is rich, and will be made to provide. But it is then more difficult to talk, in a simple way, of a 'natural order', as if this was man in concert with nature. On the contrary: this natural order is simply and decisively on its way to table.

Of course, in both Jonson and Carew, though again more convincingly in Jonson, this view of the providence of nature is linked to a human sharing: all are welcome, even the poor, to be fed at this board. And it is this stress, more than any other, which has supported the view of a responsible civilisation, in which men care for each other directly and personally, rather than through the abstractions of a more complicated and more commercial society. This, we are told, is the natural order of responsibility and neighbourliness and charity: words we do not now clearly understand, since Old England fell.

Of course one sees what is meant, and as a first approximation, a simple impulse, it is kindly. But the Christian tradition of charity is at just this point weak. For it is a charity of consumption only, as Rosa Luxemburg first pointed out:

The Roman proletarians did not live by working, but from the alms which the government doled out. So the demands of the Christians for collective property did not relate to the means of production, but the means of consumption.

And then, as Adrian Cunningham has argued, this version of

charity—of loving relations between men expressed as a community of consumption, with the Christian board and breaking of bread as its natural images, and the feast as its social consummation—was prolonged into periods and societies in which it became peripheral or even damaging. A charity of production—of loving relations between men actually working and producing what is ultimately, in whatever proportions, to be shared—was neglected, not seen, and at times suppressed, by this habitual reference to a charity of consumption, an eating and drinking communion, which when applied to ordinary working societies was inevitably a mystification. All uncharity at work, it was readily assumed, could be redeemed by the charity of the consequent feast. In the complex of feeling and reference derived from this tradition, it matters very much, moreover, that the name of the god and the name of the master are significantly single—our Lord.

Any mystification, however, requires effort. The world of Penshurst or of Saxham can be seen as a moral economy only by conscious selection and emphasis. And this is just what we get: not only in the critical reading I have referred to, but in Jonson's and Carew's actual poems. There were of course social reasons for that way of seeing: the identification of the writers, as guests, with the social position of their hosts, consuming what other men had produced. But a traditional image, already becoming complicated, was an indispensable poetic support. It is not only the Golden Age, as in Jonson to Sir Robert Wroth, though Penshurst, in its first positive description, is seen through classical literature: the woods of Kent contain Dryads and Pan and Bacchus, and the providing deities of the charity are Penates. More deeply, however, in a conventional association of Christian and classical myth, the provident land is seen as Eden. This country in which all things come naturally to man, for his use and enjoyment and without his effort, is that Paradise:

The early cherry, with the later plum,  
Fig, grape and quince, each in his time doth come:  
The blushing apricot, and woolly peach  
Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach.

Except that it is not seen as Paradise; it is seen as Penshurst, a natural order arranged by a proprietary lord and lady. The manipulation is evident when we remember Marvell's somewhat similar lines in *The Garden*:

The Nectaren, and curious Peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,  
Insar'd with flowers, I fall on grass.

Here the enjoyment of what seems a natural bounty, a feeling of paradise in the garden, is exposed to another kind of wit: the easy consumption goes before the fall. And we can then remember that the whole result of the fall from paradise was that instead of picking easily from an all-providing nature, man had to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow; that he incurred, as a common fate, the curse of labour. What is really happening, in Jonson's and Carew's celebrations of a rural order, is an extraction of just this curse, by the power of art: a magical recreation of what can be seen as a natural bounty and then a willing charity: both serving to ratify and bless the country landowner, or, by a characteristic reification, his house. Yet this magical extraction of the curse of labour is in fact achieved by a simple extraction of the existence of labourers. The actual men and women who rear the animals and drive them to the house and kill them and prepare them for meat; who trap the pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who plant and manure and prune and harvest the fruit trees: these are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order. When they do at last appear, it is merely as the 'rout of rurall folke' or, more simply, as 'much poore', and what we are then shown is the charity and lack of condescension with which they are given what, now and somehow, not they but the natural order has given for food, into the lord's hands. It is this condition, this set of relationships, that is finally ratified by the consummation of the feast. It is worth setting briefly alongside this a later description of a country feast, by one of the labourers: Stephen Duck, in the late 1720s:

A Table plentifully spread we find,  
 And jugs of humming Ale to cheer the Mind,  
 Which he, too gen'rous, pushes round so fast,  
 We think no Toils to come, nor mind the past.  
 But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat,  
 When the same Toils we must again repeat;  
 To the same Barns must back again return,  
 To labour there for Room for next Year's Corn.

It is this connection, between the feast and work, that the earlier images significantly obscure, taking the passing moment in which anyone might forget labour and acquiesce in 'the Cheat', and making it 'natural' and permanent. It is this way of seeing that really counts. Jonson looks out over the fields of Penshurst and sees, not work, but a land yielding of itself. Carew, characteristically, does not even look:

Though frost, and snow, lock'd from mine eyes  
 That beauty which without door lyes . . .  
 . . . Yet (Saxham) thou within thy gate  
 Art of thy selfe so delicate,

So full of native sweets, that bless  
 Thy roof with inward happiness;  
 As neither from, nor to thy store,  
 Winter takes ought, or Spring adds more.

So that here not only work, but even the turning produce of the seasons, is suppressed or obscured in the complimentary mystification: an innate bounty: 'native sweets'. To call this a natural order is then an abuse of language. It is what the poems are: not country life but social compliment; the familiar hyperboles of the aristocracy and its attendants.

The social order within which Jonson's and Carew's poems took conventional shape was in fact directly described, in another kind of country poem, of which Herrick's *The Hock-Cart* (1648) is a good example. Here the fact of labour is acknowledged:

Come Sons of Summer, by whose toile  
 We are the Lords of Wine and Oile:  
 By whose tough labours, and rough hands,  
 We rip up first, then reap our lands.  
 Crown'd with the eares of corne, now come,  
 And to the Pipe, sing Harvest home.

But this is that special kind of work-song, addressed to the work of others. When the harvest has been brought home, the poem continues:

Come forth, my Lord, and see the Cart.

This lord is (in the poem's address) the 'Right Honourable Lord Mildmay, Earle of Westmorland', and Herrick places himself between the lord and the labourers to make explicit (what in Jonson and Carew had been implicit and mystified) the governing social relations. The labourers must drink to the Lord's health, and then remember all to go back to work, like the animals:

Ye must revoke  
 The patient Oxe unto the Yoke  
 And all goe back unto the plough  
 And Harrow (though they're hang'd up now)  
 And, you must know, your Lord's word's true,  
 Feed him ye must, whose food fills you.  
 And that this pleasure is like raine  
 Not sent ye for to drowne your paine  
 But for to make it spring againe.

It is crude in feeling, this early and jollying kind of man-management, which uses the metaphors of rain and spring to see even the drink as a way of getting more labour (and more pain). But what is there on the surface—

Feed him ye must, whose food fills you



—is the aching paradox which is subsumed in the earlier images of natural bounty. It is perhaps not surprising that *The Hock-Cart* is less often quoted, as an example of a natural and moral economy, than *Penshurst* or *To Saxham*. Yet all that is in question is the degree of consciousness of real processes. What Herrick embarrassingly intones is what Jonson and Carew mediate. It is a social order, and a consequent way of seeing, which we are not now likely to forget.

## *Three around Farnham*

In this period of change, it mattered very much where you were looking from. Points of view, interpretations, selections of realities, can now be directly contrasted. In history it is a period of rural society. In literature it is a complex of different ways of seeing even the same local life.

Imagine a journey, for example, round a thirty-mile triangle of roads, in the turning years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is on the borders of Hampshire and Surrey: six miles from Selborne to Chawton; ten miles from Chawton to Farnham; fourteen miles from Farnham back to Selborne. In 1793, in Selborne, Gilbert White died. In 1777, when White had been keeping his famous journal for nine years, a boy of fourteen, William Cobbett, ran away from his father's small farm at Farnham. Cobbett was to ride back through these villages, many times, and in the 1820s to write his *Rural Rides*. When Gilbert White died, Jane Austen, not far away, in another parsonage, was beginning to write her novels of country society. From 1809, in Chawton, she was beginning to publish and to write her mature works. In this small locality, overlapping within a generation, there were these three people, three writers, who could hardly be more different. Both the country seen and the idea of the country vary so much in their work that we are forced, as we read them, into a new kind of consciousness.

What Cobbett gives us is detailed social observation, from the point of view of the condition of the majority of men. He combined Arthur Young's attention to the detailed practice of a working agriculture with a more persistent social questioning and observation. Thus in 1821:

(West of Uphusband):

. . . a group of women labourers, who were attending the measurers to measure their reaping work, presented such an assemblage of rags as I never before saw even amongst the hoppers at Farnham, many of whom are common beggars. I never before saw *country* people, and reapers too, observe, so miserable in appearance as these. There were some very pretty girls, but ragged as colts and as pale as ashes.

(Near Cricklade):

. . . The labourers seem miserably poor. Their dwellings are little better than pig-beds, and their looks indicate that their food is not nearly equal to that of a pig. Their wretched hovels

are stuck upon little bits of ground *on the road side*, where the space has been wider than the road demanded. In many places they have not two rods to a hovel. It seems as if they had been swept off the fields by a hurricane, and had found shelter under the banks on the road side! Yesterday morning was a sharp frost; and this had set the poor creatures to digging up their little plots of potatoes. . . . And this is '*prosperity*', is it?

The great merit of Cobbett's observation is its detail. This included the facts of local variation:

(Near Gloucester):

. . . The labourers' dwellings, as I came along, looked good, and the labourers themselves pretty well as to dress and healthiness. The girls at work in the fields (always my standard) are not in rags, with bits of shoes tied on their feet and rags tied round their ankles, as they had in Wiltshire.

This is a new voice, in a radical shift of social viewpoint:

The landlords and the farmers can tell their own tale. They tell their own tale in remonstrances and prayers, addressed to the House. Nobody tells the tale of the labourer.

This consciousness of viewpoint, of a class viewpoint, marks the distance from most previous accounts; and where Cobbett had been preceded, as in part by Crabbe, the range of detail brings in a world that marks the essential preparation for transition from the sympathetic poem to the realistic novel.

We remember Crabbe as we see Cobbett considering the relations between poverty and the quality of land:

(In Kent):

What a difference between the wife of a labouring man here, and the wife of a labouring man in the forests and woodlands of Hampshire and Sussex! Invariably have I observed that the richer the soil, and the more destitute of woods; that is to say, the more purely a corn country, the more miserable the labourers.

It was in the cornlands that capitalist farming was most developed. It is on this contrast of social conditions that Cobbett insists:

The labouring people look pretty well. They have pigs. They invariably do best in the *woodland* and *forest* and *wild* countries. Where the mighty grasper has *all under his eye*, they can get but little.

This was the social basis of his opposition to enclosures: not what happened to production, as a total figure, but what happened, in detail, to the people and the land. It was in this sense that he observed:

This place presents another proof of the truth of my old observation: *rich land* and *poor labourers*.

Or again, comparing the disadvantage of wage-labour with the old system of feeding and lodging (the farmers 'cannot keep their work-people *upon so little* as they give them in wages'), he insisted:

The land produces, on an average, what it always produced, but there is a new distribution of the produce.

What was happening meanwhile to the landowners, and to their social structure, as rural capitalism extended? Cobbett looked very carefully at this, and made a familiar distinction between

a resident *native* gentry, attached to the soil, known to every farmer and labourer from his childhood, frequently mixing with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost, practising hospitality without ceremony, from habit and not on calculation; and a gentry, only now-and-then residing at all, having no relish for country-delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of speculation, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and their pursuits, and relying, for influence, not upon the good will of the vicinage, but upon the dread of their power. The war and paper-system has brought in nabobs, negro-drivers, generals, admirals, governors, commissaries, contractors, pensioners, sinecurists, commissioners, loan-jobbers, lottery-dealers, bankers, stock-jobbers; not to mention the long and *black list* in gowns and three-tailed wigs. You can see but few good houses not in possession of one or the other of these. These, with the parsons, are now the magistrates.

It is an impressive list and Cobbett gives several names as examples. The fact that there had been the same kind of invasion, from at least the sixteenth century, must qualify the account. What Cobbett does not ask is where the 'invaders' came from. Many of them, in fact, were the younger sons of that same 'resident native gentry', who had gone out to these new ways to wealth, and were now coming back. Yet, 'native' or 'invader', the pressure on rents, and so through the tenant-farmer on the labourer, was visibly and dramatically increasing. Cobbett shortens the real time-scale, but then sees what is happening, as agrarian capitalism extends. He identifies money—first silver and gold, and then paper—as the agent of change. At first:

its consequences came on by slow *degrees*; it made a transfer of property, but it made that transfer in so small a degree, and it left the property quiet in the hands of the new possessor for so long a time, that the effect was not violent, and was not, at any rate, such as to uproot possessors by whole districts, as the hurricane uproots the forests.

This is an under-estimate of change from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but what Cobbett is intent to record is the visible disturbance of his own time:

the *small gentry*, to about the *third* rank upwards (considering there to be five ranks from the smallest gentry up to the greatest nobility) are *all gone*, nearly to a man, and the small farmers along with them. The Barings alone have, I should think, swallowed up thirty or forty of these small gentry without perceiving it. They, indeed, swallow up the biggest race of all; but innumerable small fry slip down unperceived, like caplins down the throats of the sharks, while these latter *feel* only the cod-fish.

As clearly as anyone in the whole record Cobbett raises the familiar complaint about the reduction of intermediate classes in the rural economy. But while he sees this happening, he simultaneously introduces a new criterion of judgement. Identifying with the labourer, making 'always my standard' the girls at work in the fields, Cobbett sees the ruin of the small owners and some tenant farmers, but then says of the small gentry, with a new harshness:

So that, while they have been the active, the zealous, the efficient instruments, in compelling the working classes to submit to half-starvation, they have at any rate been brought to the most abject ruin themselves: for which I most heartily thank God.

Or again, of the farmers:

Here is much more than enough to make me rejoice in the ruin of the farmers; and I do, with all my heart, thank God for it; seeing that it appears absolutely necessary, that the present race of them should be totally broken up, in Sussex at any rate, in order to put an end to this cruelty and insolence towards the labourers, who are by far the greater number.

This is the hard anger which Cobbett shared with many of the labourers of his time, against the nearest targets to hand. It is the mood of the Bread or Blood riots of East Anglia in 1816, or of the widespread revolt of the labourers—the campaigns of 'Captain Swing'—in 1830. Cobbett noticed, in this, that he might have 'laid on the lash without a due regard to many', and he reflected:

Born in a farm-house, bred up at the plough-tail, with a smock-frock on my back, taking great delight in all the pursuits of farmers, liking their society, and having amongst them my most esteemed friends, it is natural that I should feel, and I do feel, uncommonly anxious to prevent, as far as I am able, that total ruin which now menaces them. But the labourer, was I to have no feeling for him? Was he not my *countryman* too? And was I not to feel indignation against those farmers, who had had

the hard-heartedness to put the bell round his neck, and thus wantonly insult and degrade the class to whose toils they owed their own ease?

This conflict of loyalties, and yet the final determination, marks a crucial stage. It was often the case in the forced food-levies, the riots for a minimum wage, the rick-burnings, that the immediate targets, the farmers, had little enough to give, under the pressure for rents of the more safely removed and protected landowners. It is significant indeed that, in these disturbances, dispossessed and ruined and hard-pressed farmers often joined the rioting labourers. But this was the characteristic of a developing capitalist order in the land. The riots indeed mark the last stage of the *local* confrontation, in immediate and personal terms. Such disturbances had necessarily to be succeeded by the organisation of class against class, in trade unionism and in its associated political movements. The structure of feeling that had held in direct appeal and in internal moral discrimination—the moral case, the moral warning, of such verse as Goldsmith's or Crabbe's—was now necessarily transformed into a different order of thinking and feeling. The maturity of capitalism as a system was forcing systematic organisation against it.

This development, so crucial in the social history of rural England, has its consequence in a new kind of country writing, of which Cobbett is the outrider: a change of convention, so that the interaction of classes, now the decisive history, can begin to be described: no longer in reflection, but in a newly typical action. This is the crucial bearing of the transformation of fiction into a new kind of novel, which was to become, from the 1830s, the dominant literary form. Cobbett described and campaigned, as a reporter and finally as a tribune. His change of viewpoint, and the changes to which he so vividly responded, are the first important signs of a new method in literature.

But this change in the novel did not happen in Cobbett's time. Through his middle years, while the social changes were happening, Jane Austen was writing from a very different point of view, from inside the houses that Cobbett was passing on the road. When he was writing about the disappearance of the small gentry he was riding through Hampshire, not far from Chawton. It was also in Hampshire that he made his list of the new owners of country-houses and estates, from nabobs to stock-jobbers. We can find ourselves thinking of Jane Austen's fictional world, as he goes on to observe:

The big, in order to save themselves from being '*swallowed up quick*' . . . make use of their *voices* to get, through place, pension, or sinecure, something back from the taxes. Others of them *fall in love* with the *daughters* and *widows* of paper-money people, big brewers, and the like; and sometimes their daughters *fall in love*

with the paper-money people's sons, or the fathers of those sons; and whether they be Jews, or not, seems to be little matter with this all-subduing passion of love. But the *small gentry* have no resource.

This is a very different tone from anything that Jane Austen wrote, but it forces us to ask, as it were from the other side of the park wall: what were the conditions and the pressures within which she brought to bear her no less sharp observation; what was the social substance of her precise and inquiring personal and moral emphases?

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that Jane Austen chose to ignore the decisive historical events of her time. Where, it is still asked, are the Napoleonic wars: the real current of history? But history has many currents, and the social history of the landed families, at that time in England, was among the most important. As we sense its real processes, we find that they are quite central and structural in Jane Austen's novels. All that prevents us from realising this is that familiar kind of retrospect, taking in Penshurst and Saxham and Buck's Head and Mansfield Park and Norland and even Poynton, in which all country houses and their families are seen as belonging, effectively, to a single tradition: that of the cultivated rural gentry. The continual making and remaking of these houses and their families is suppressed, in this view, for an idealising abstraction, and Jane Austen's world can then be taken for granted, even sometimes patronised as a rural backwater, as if it were a simple 'traditional' setting. And then if the social 'background' is in this sense 'settled', we can move to an emphasis on a fiction of purely personal relationships.

But such an emphasis is false, for it is not personal relationships, in the abstracted sense of an observed psychological process, that preoccupy Jane Austen. It is, rather, personal *conduct*: a testing and discovery of the standards which govern human behaviour in certain real situations. To the social considerations already implicit in the examination of conduct, with its strong sense and exploration of the adequacy of social norms, we must add, from the evidence of the novels, a direct preoccupation with estates, incomes and social position, which are seen as indispensable elements of all the relationships that are projected and formed. Nor is this a preoccupation within a settled 'traditional' world; indeed much of the interest, and many of the sources of the action, in Jane Austen's novels, lie in the changes of fortune—the facts of general change and of a certain mobility—which were affecting the landed families at this time.

Thus it would be easy to take Sir Thomas Bertram, in *Mansfield Park*, as an example of the old settled landed gentry, to be contrasted with the new 'London' ways of the Crawfords (this is a common

reading), were it not for the fact that Bertram is explicitly presented as what Goldsmith would have called 'a great West Indian': a colonial proprietor in the sugar island of Antigua. The Crawfords may have London ways, but the income to support them is landed property in Norfolk, and they have been brought up by an uncle who is an admiral. Sir Walter Elliott, in *Persuasion*, belongs to a landed family which had moved from Cheshire to Somerset, and which had been raised to a baronetcy in the Restoration, but his income, at this time, will not support his position; his heir-presumptive has 'purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth'; and the baronet is forced to let Kellynch Hall to an admiral, since, as his lawyer observes:

This peace will be turning all our rich naval officers ashore. They will be all wanting a home. . . . Many a noble fortune has been made during the war.

The neighbouring Musgroves, the second landowning family, are, by contrast,

in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new.

Darcy, in *Pride and Prejudice*, is a landowner established for 'many generations', but his friend Bingley has inherited £100,000 and is looking for an estate to purchase. Sir William Lucas has risen from trade to a knighthood; Mr Bennett has £2000 a year, but an entailed estate, and has married the daughter of an attorney, whose brother is in trade. Knightley, in *Emma*, owns Donwell Abbey, and Martin, one of the new gentlemen farmers, is his tenant. The Woodhouses have little land but Emma will inherit £30,000, 'from other sources'. Elton, the vicar, has some independent property, but must make his way as he could, 'without any alliances but in trade'. Mr Weston belongs to a 'respectable family which for the last two or three generations had been rising into gentility and property'; he marries, through the militia, the daughter of 'a great Yorkshire family', and when she dies enters trade and purchases 'a little estate'. Harriet, finally revealed as the daughter of 'a tradesman, rich enough' marries her gentleman-farmer with the reasonable 'hope of more, of security, stability, and improvement'. The Coles live quietly, on an income from trade, but when this improves become 'in fortune and style of living, second only to the Woodhouses, in the immediate neighbourhood'. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the Dashwoods are a settled landowning family, increasing their income by marriages, and enlarging the settlements of their daughters; they are also enclosing Norland



Common, and buying up neighbouring farms; the necessary cashing of stocks for enclosure and engrossing affect the rate of the family's immediate improvement. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland, the daughter of a clergyman with two good livings and a considerable independence, goes with a local landowning family, the Allens, to Bath, and in that sharply observed social exchange meets the son of the family which has owned the Abbey estates since the dissolution of the monasteries; his sister has married on the 'unexpected accession' of her lover 'to title and fortune'.

To abstract this social history is of course to describe only the world of the novels within which the more particular actions begin and end. Yet it must be clear that it is no single, settled society, it is an active, complicated, sharply speculative process. It is indeed that most difficult world to describe, in English social history: an acquisitive, high bourgeois society at the point of its most evident interlocking with an agrarian capitalism that is itself mediated by inherited titles and by the making of family names. Into the long and complicated interaction of landed and trading capital, the process that Cobbett observed—the arrival of 'the nabobs, negro-drivers, admirals, generals' and so on—is directly inserted, and is even taken for granted. The social confusions and contradictions of this complicated process are then the true source of many of the problems of human conduct and valuation, which the personal actions dramatise. An openly acquisitive society, which is concerned also with the transmission of wealth, is trying to judge itself at once by an inherited code and by the morality of improvement.

The paradox of Jane Austen is then the achievement of a unity of tone, of a settled and remarkably confident way of seeing and judging, in the chronicle of confusion and change. She is precise and candid, but in very particular ways. She is, for example, more exact about income, which is disposable, than about acres, which have to be worked. Yet at the same time she sees land in a way that she does not see 'other sources' of income. Her eye for a house, for timber, for the details of improvement, is quick, accurate, monetary. Yet money of other kinds, from the trading houses, from the colonial plantations, has no visual equivalent; it has to be converted to these signs of order to be recognised at all. This way of seeing is especially representative. The land is seen primarily as an index of revenue and position; its visible order and control are a valued product, while the process of working it is hardly seen at all. Jane Austen then reminds us, yet again, of the two meanings of improvement, which were historically linked but in practice so often contradictory. There is the improvement of soil, stock, yields, in a working agriculture. And there is the improvement of houses, parks, artificial landscapes, which absorbed

so much of the actually increasing wealth. Professor Habakkuk has observed that

English landowners as a whole were a class of consumers, and the greater parts of their borrowings were contracted for non-productive purposes, to provide dowries, to fund short-term debts contracted as a result of extravagant living, to build mansions; the borrowings for enclosures, for example, were usually a small part of total indebtedness.

This is not to deny the function of many landowners in agricultural improvement, but to set it in its actual social context. It is the essential commentary on what can be abstracted, technically, as the agricultural revolution: that it was no revolution, but the consolidation, the improvement, the expansion of an existing social class.

Cultivation has the same ambiguity as improvement: there is increased growth, and this is converted into rents; and then the rents are converted into what is seen as a cultivated society. What the 'revolution' is for, then, is this: this apparently attainable quality of life. Jane Austen could achieve her remarkable unity of tone—that cool and controlled observation which is the basis of her narrative method; that lightly distanced management of event and description and character which need not become either open manipulation or direct participation—because of an effective underlying and yet unseen formula: improvement is or ought to be improvement. The working improvement, which is not seen at all, is the means to social improvement, which is then so isolated that it is seen very clearly indeed.

It is not seen flatteringly. The conversion of good income into good conduct was no automatic process. Some of the conscious improvers are seen as they were: greedy and calculating materialists. But what is crucial is that the moral pretension is taken so seriously that it becomes a critique: never of the basis of the formula, but coolly and determinedly of its results, in character and action. She guides her heroines, steadily, to the right marriages. She makes settlements, alone, against all the odds, like some supernatural lawyer, in terms of that exact proportion to moral worth which could assure the continuity of the general formula. But within this conventional bearing, which is the source of her confidence, the moral discrimination is so insistent that it can be taken, in effect, as an independent value. It is often said, by literary historians, that she derives from Fielding and from Richardson, but Fielding's genial manipulative bluff and Richardson's isolating fanaticism are in fact far back, in another world. What happens in *Emma*, in *Persuasion*, in *Mansfield Park*, is the development of an everyday, uncompromising morality which is in the end separable from its social basis and which, in other

hands, can be turned against it. It is in this sense that Jane Austen relates to the Victorian moralists, who had to learn to assume, with increasing unease from Coleridge to George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, that there was no necessary correspondence between class and morality; that the survival of discrimination depended on another kind of independence; that the two meanings of improvement had to be not merely distinguished but contrasted; or, as first in Coleridge, that cultivation, in its human sense, had to be brought to bear as a standard *against* the social process of civilisation. In these hands, decisively, the formula broke down: improvement was not improvement; not only not necessarily, but at times in definite contradiction. Jane Austen, it is clear, never went so far; her novels would have been very different, involving new problems of structure and language, if she had. But she provided the emphasis which had only to be taken outside the park walls, into a different social experience, to become not a moral but a social criticism. It is this transformation, and its difficulties, that we shall meet in George Eliot.

We must here emphasise again the importance of Cobbett. What he names, riding past on the road, are classes. Jane Austen, from inside the houses, can never see that, for all the intricacy of her social description. All her discrimination is, understandably, internal and exclusive. She is concerned with the conduct of people who, in the complications of improvement, are repeatedly trying to make themselves into a class. But where only one class is seen, no classes are seen. Her people are selected though typical individuals, living well or badly within a close social dimension. Cobbett never, of course, saw them as closely or as finely; but what he saw was what they had in common: the underlying economic process. A moral view of that kind had to come from outside, and of course when it came the language was rougher and harder. The precise confidence of an established world gave way to disturbing, aggressive and conflicting voices.

It was not a new experience; it had been there all the time, but only rarely recorded:

We are men formed in Christ's likeness, and we are kept like beasts.

For Toils scarce ever ceasing press us now;  
Rest never does, but on the Sabbath, show;  
And barely that our Masters will allow.

Here I am, between Earth and Sky—so help me God. I would sooner lose my life than go home as I am. Bread I want and Bread I will have.

What we have done now is Soar against our Will but your harts is so hard as the hart of Pharo. . . . So now as for this fire you must not take it as a front, for if you hadent been Deserving it wee should not have dont.

The first voice is from the fourteenth century; the second from the early eighteenth; the third and fourth from the early nineteenth century, in a new general crisis. It is a radically different morality from that of Jane Austen, but it is insisiently moral, in its own general language. It is the voice of men who have seen their children starving, and now within sight of the stately homes and the improved parks and the self-absorbed social patterns at the ends of the drives.

Cobbett and Jane Austen mark two ways of seeing, two contrasted viewpoints, within the same country. Each kind of observation, however, is social, in the widest sense. But as we make our imaginary journey, on that triangle of roads, we discover, in Gilbert White, a different kind of observation, yet one of no less significance in the development of country writing. Anyone who lives in the country can experience at times, or seem to experience, an unmediated nature: in a direct and physical awareness of trees, birds, the moving shapes of land. What is new in Gilbert White, or at least feels new in its sustained intensity, is a development from this; a single and dedicated observation, as if the only relationships of country living were to its physical facts. It is a new kind of record, not only of the facts, but of a way of looking at the facts: a way of looking that will come to be called scientific:

The next bird that I procured (on the 21st of May) was a male red-backed butcher-bird, *lanius collurio*. My neighbour, who shot it, says that it might easily have escaped his notice, had not the outcries and chattering of the white-throats and other small birds drawn his attention to the bush where it was: its crow was filled with the legs and wings of beetles . . .

. . . The ousel is larger than a blackbird, and feeds on haws; but last autumn (when there were no haws) it fed on yew-berries: in the spring it feeds on ivy-berries, which ripen only at that season, in March and April.

These descriptions are from the formal letters published in *The Natural History of Selborne*. In tone and attention, over a lifetime, they compose a new kind of writing. It is not that White lacked what can be called 'powers of description'. When a natural event included an emotional response, as in the fearful summer of 1783, he could write to its level:

The sun, at noon, looked as blank as a clouded moon, and shed a rust-coloured ferruginous light on the ground, and floors of

rooms; but was particularly lurid and blood-coloured at rising and setting. All the time the heat was so intense that butchers' meat could hardly be eaten on the day after it was killed; and the flies swarmed so in the lanes and hedges that they rendered the horses half frantic, and riding irksome.

It is simply, as the reading of his *Journal* over twenty-five years from 1768 to 1793 will confirm, that his customary mode of attention was outward: observing, inquiring, annotating, classifying. The quality of his feeling for the life around him is unquestionable; it is the devoted and delighted attention of a lifetime, from which anybody living in the country can still learn. But it is not what can easily be confused with it from many earlier and some later observations, the working of particular social or personal experience into the intricacies of things seen. White may remind us at times of Arthur Young and the other contributors to the *Annals of Agriculture*, in the close and detailed precision of his notes and observations. But what he is observing is not a working agriculture, except incidentally; it is a natural order, in a new sense: a physical world of creatures and conditions. While Cobbett and Jane Austen, in their different ways, were absorbed in a human world, Gilbert White was watching the turn of the year and the myriad physical lives inside it: nature in a sense that could now be separated from man.

It is a complicated change, and we must try to see its relation to a whole set of other changes which, through the eighteenth century, and then again in the generation of Cobbett and Jane Austen but in quite different ways, were bringing about a transformation of attitudes and feelings towards observed nature: new kinds of interest in landscape, a new self-consciousness of the picturesque, and beyond these and interacting with the more social observations, the new language, the new poetry, of Wordsworth and Clare.

## *Pleasing Prospects*

A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation. It is possible and useful to trace the internal histories of landscape painting, landscape writing, landscape gardening and landscape architecture, but in any final analysis we must relate these histories to the common history of a land and its society. And if we are to understand the changes in English attitudes to landscape, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this is especially necessary. We have many excellent internal histories, but in their implicit and sometimes explicit points of view they are ordinarily part of that social composition of the land—its distribution, its uses, and its control—which has been uncritically received and sustained, even into our own century, where the celebration of its achievements is characteristically part of an elegy for a lost way of life.

Significantly, also, the history of English landscape in the eighteenth century has been, in the standard accounts, foreshortened. Reading some of these histories you might almost believe—you are often enough told—that the eighteenth-century landlord, through the agency of his hired landscapers, and with poets and painters in support, invented natural beauty. And in a way, why not? In the same ideology he invented charity, land-improvement and politeness, just as when he and his kind went to other men's countries, such countries were 'discovered'.

But the real history is very much more complicated. It was an application, in special social and economic circumstances, of ideas which were in themselves very far from new. Yet as always, in such cases, the particular application, in a real social context, had new and particular effects.

'Pleasing prospects': the characteristic eighteenth-century phrase has the necessary double meaning. For we must not suppose that the wonder, the significance and the pleasure of observed shapes and movements of land were invented by specialisation to a prospect. As far back as we have literature these feelings are recorded, and we can be certain that many more men than writers have looked with intense interest at all the features and movements of the natural world: hills, rivers, trees, skies and stars. Many kinds of meaning, philosophical and practical, have been derived from these long generations of observing. But the moment came when a different kind of observer

felt he must divide these observations into 'practical' and 'aesthetic', and if he did this with sufficient confidence he could deny to all his predecessors what he then described, in himself, as 'elevated sensibility'. The point is not so much that he made this division. It is that he needed and was in a position to do it, and that this need and position are parts of a social history, in the separation of production and consumption.

The self-conscious observer: the man who is not only looking at land but who is conscious that he is doing so, as an experience in itself, and who has prepared social models and analogies from elsewhere to support and justify the experience: this is the figure we need to seek: not a kind of nature but a kind of man. He has a long and intricate history. He is there, in his own context, in the bucolic poets and in the earliest eclogues. He is there, identifiably, in Petrarch, who, as Burckhardt told us, climbed Mont Ventoux in Provence to see the panorama but when he had got to the top remembered a conflicting model, in a passage from Augustine:

men go forth and admire lofty mountains and broad seas and roaring torrents and the ocean and the course of the stars, and forget their own selves while doing so.

He is there in Aeneas Sylvius, describing the view from the Alban Hills and setting up his court on Monte Amiata. Castles and fortified villages had long commanded 'prospects' of the country below them. It was in more settled times that what was explicitly looked for was not the movement of enemies or strangers but the view itself: the conscious scene. Yet we have to remember that we do not know, from the times of disturbance, what was seen, what appreciated, in the long hours of watching, by generations of men. Most of the men who did the watching have left no records.

What we can say with certainty is that, from very early in history, such views were arranged as well as incidentally or accidentally found. In Egypt, in Mesopotamia and in China landscapes were designed; in Babylon especially there were arranged parks, avenues, gardens and fountains. Characteristically these arrangements were related to centres of power, and they have a long formal succession, down to Versailles and its modern imitations. But there is also a less noticed succession, to the private villas and then the country-houses of less centralised, less specifically hierarchical civilisations. There is a significant social difference: the villas of Italy, in which much of the creation of neo-pastoral literature occurred, were built with their rural surroundings and prospects in direct relation to the cities, as alternative country homes; while in England, for example, they were more scattered territorial seats, though the money for their building

was significantly often derived from profit at court. Parks, originally woodlands enclosed for preserving and hunting game, were made in England from at latest the tenth century, and there was a significant increase in their number, in direct relation to the new country palaces, in the sixteenth century. Much of the enclosing of land and the building of houses was done at the expense of whole villages and cornfields that were cleared. The English landlords of the eighteenth century, following the same procedures, had these generations of predecessors in imposition and theft.

But there is still a transition from the hunting woodland to the landscape park. It is not easy to date this. There are examples (Compton Wynyates and Audley End) from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the systematic transformation occurs mainly in the eighteenth century and after. It is possible, in analysis, to separate the deer park, the imposing setting and the landscaped view, but in many real cases these types were combined, though in the later centuries the main game preserves—again with great damage to other men's settlements and livelihoods—were moved further and further out. It is into this complex of territorial establishment that we must re-insert the self-conscious development of landscape and what is called the 'invention' of scenery.

The main argument is well known. Eighteenth-century landlords, going on the Grand Tour and collecting their pictures by Claude and Poussin, learned new ways of looking at landscape and came back to create such landscapes as prospects from their own houses: create, that is, in the sense of hiring Brown ('the peasant') or Kent or Repton. Certainly we have to notice a change of taste in the laying-out of decorative grounds: from the seventeenth-century formal gardens under French and Italian and Dutch influence to the park landscapes of the eighteenth-century improvers. But to call this the invention of 'landscape' or of 'scenery' is to confuse the whole development. It is an ironic insularity to suppose that eighteenth-century Englishmen consciously imitating seventeenth-century Italian painters were 'discovering' scenery. But in any case the whole movement was more general.

The English idea of landscape was taken directly from the Dutch, and it is worth noting that the first great artistic composition of landscape in a mode adaptable to the physical characteristics of English land was the Dutch school of the seventeenth century, of van Ruysdael and Hobbema. To the English improvers this art, with its close associations with bourgeois improvement and with scientific inquiry into nature and into modes of perception, was a close analogue. When men could produce their own nature, both by the physical means of improvement (earth-moving with new machines;



draining and irrigation; pumping water to elevated sites) and by the understanding of the physical laws of light and thence of artificial viewpoints and perspectives, there was bound to be a change from the limited and conventionally symbolic and iconographic decoration of the land under immediate view.

Paradise, originally a Persian walled garden, is already in Milton:

a happy rural seat of various view

and the flowers, 'worthy of Paradise',

not nice Art

In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature born  
Poured forth profuse.

Marvell at Appleton House, where there was a formal symbolic garden, had said of the water-meadows:

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

an interesting image not only because the meadows are seen as landscape but because the sense of artifice—the seventeenth-century uses of mirror and perspective to compose and embellish landscape—is consciously present. Pope, pioneering and recommending a new style of gardening, against the artificial symmetries represented by Timon's villa, was also perceptually conscious, in a mode derived as much from science as from art:

You look thro' a sloping Arcade of Trees, and see the Sails  
on the River passing suddenly and vanishing, as thro' a Per-  
spective Glass.

His 'Genius of the Place', an apparent standard for 'natural' fidelity, is on closer examination an invitation to arrange and rearrange nature according to a point of view:

Let not each beauty ev'ry where be spy'd,  
Where half the skill is decently to hide.

For what was being done, by this new class, with new capital, new equipment and new skills to hire, was indeed a disposition of 'Nature' to their own point of view. If we ask, finally, who the genius of the place may be, we find that he is its owner, its proprietor, its improver. Charles Cotton, in 1687, had written of the beauties of the gardens at Chatsworth and said, in his climax:

But that which crowns all this, and does impart  
A lustre far beyond the Power of Art,  
Is the great Owner. He, whose noble mind  
For such a Fortune only was designed.

The genius of the place was the making of a place: that socially resonant word which echoed through the eighteenth century and which Jane Austen picked up, ironically, in the improving talk of Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*:

By such improvements as I have suggested . . . you may give it a higher character. You may raise it into *a place*.

The taste for Claude and Poussin, the earthworks and waterworks and tree-planting of Brown and Kent and Repton, the conscious creations of Stourhead and the Leasowes, are then parts of this wider movement: means and episodes within it. Looking from art to landscape we can see many conscious imitations of particular scenes: the bands of light and shade and water, as in the canvas compositions; the buildings and groves to give verticals and points of emphasis; the framing of views by dark foregrounds of trees, as in Claude and Poussin but also as in theatre scenery, where the proscenium frame and the movable flats were being simultaneously developed. It is right to note these similarities and correspondences, and the degree of conscious imitation tells us much about the cultural mediocrity of the class, at the level of real art and literature. But in their own real terms they were not dependent. Cotton had already observed at Chatsworth:

The Groves whose curled brows shade ev'ry lake  
Do everywhere such waving Landskips make  
As Painter's baffled Art is far above  
Who waves and leaves could never yet make move.

It was that kind of confidence, to make Nature move to an arranged design, that was the real invention of the landlords. And we cannot then separate their decorative from their productive arts; this new self-conscious observer was very specifically the self-conscious owner. The clearing of parks as 'Arcadian' prospects depended on the completed system of exploitation of the agricultural and genuinely pastoral lands beyond the park boundaries. There, too, an order was being imposed: social and economic but also physical. The mathematical grids of the enclosure awards, with their straight hedges and straight roads, are contemporary with the natural curves and scatterings of the park scenery. And yet they are related parts of the same process—superficially opposed in taste but only because in the one case the land is being organised for production, where tenants and labourers will work, while in the other case it is being organised for consumption—the view, the ordered proprietary repose, the prospect. Indeed it can be said of these eighteenth-century arranged landscapes not only, as is just, that this was the high point of agrarian



It was the view for which Cowper seems to have invented our word 'scenery', and the consciousness of looking at the view is, within this convention, intrinsic:

Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain  
 Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,  
 Conducts the eye along its sinuous course  
 Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,  
 Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms,  
 That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;  
 While far beyond, and overthwart the stream  
 That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,  
 The sloping land recedes into the clouds;  
 Displaying on its varied side the grace  
 Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tow'r,  
 Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
 Just undulates upon the list'ning ear,  
 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.

It is in the act of observing that this landscape forms; the river 'conducts the eye'; the sloping land 'displays' its grace; the stream 'inlays' the vale. It is a beautiful picture, in the strict sense. Its sense of possession, from a separated vantage-point, is a genuinely abstract aesthetic, and there are hundreds of similar cases. The order was being projected while it was also being composed. At the centre of the society the conjunction was direct. In its marginal observers it became a poetic or pictorial convention.

And then, with apparent suddenness, a different question was put: by another poet, again looking out over the land, feeling its calm composition but finding the very fact of calm disturbing:

'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs  
 And vexes meditation with its strange  
 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill and wood,  
 This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,  
 With all the numberless goings on of life  
 Inaudible as dreams.

This disturbing meditation, by Coleridge, is a sign of a break in the conventional order. The real relations between man and nature, the real existence of the observer and of those whom he could see only dissolved into a landscape, returned as a problem: of identity, of perception and of nature itself.

## *The Green Language*

There is the separation of possession: the control of a land and its prospects. But there is also a separation of spirit: a recognition of forces of which we are part but which we may always forget, and which we must learn from, not seek to control. In these two kinds of separation the idea of Nature was held and transformed.

'Why', asked Addison, 'may not a whole Estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent Plantations. A man might make a pretty Landskip of his own Possessions.'

Wordsworth, almost a century later, took as the centre of his world not a possessive man but a wondering child:

Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,  
An inmate of this active universe:  
For feeling has to him imparted power  
That through the growing faculties of sense  
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind  
Create, creator and receiver both,  
Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds.

Two principles of Nature can then be seen simultaneously. There is nature as a principle of order, of which the ordering mind is part, and which human activity, by regulating principles, may then rearrange and control. But there is also nature as a principle of creation, of which the creative mind is part, and from which we may learn the truths of our own sympathetic nature.

This active sympathy is the real change of mind, the new consciousness if only in a minority, in the very period in which the willed transformation of nature, not only of land and water but of its raw materials and its essential elements, was to enter a new phase, in the processes we now call industrial. The agrarian confidence of the eighteenth century had been counterpointed, throughout, by feelings of loss and melancholy and regret: from the ambivalence of Thomson to the despair of Goldsmith. Now, with Wordsworth, an alternative principle was to be powerfully asserted: a confidence in nature, in its own workings, which at least at the beginning was also a broader, a more humane confidence in men.

This movement is not, at first sight, very easy to distinguish from what, in the second half of the eighteenth century, is an evident

alteration of taste. It is significant and understandable that in the course of a century of reclamation, drainage and clearing there should have developed, as a by-product, a feeling for unaltered nature, for wild land: the feeling that was known at the time as 'picturesque'. It is well known how dramatically the view of the Alps altered, from Evelyn's 'strange, horrid and fearful crags and tracts', in the mid-1640s, or Dennis's 'Ruins upon Ruins, in monstrous Heaps, and Heaven and Earth confounded' in 1688, to the characteristic awed praise of mid and later eighteenth-century and nineteenth- and twentieth-century travellers:

Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff but is pregnant with religion and poetry.

(Gray, 1739)

Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!  
Who made you glorious as the Gates of Heaven  
Beneath the keen full moon?

(Coleridge, 1802)

In the course of the change, comparable districts in Britain—the Lake District, from the 1760s under the influence of Dalton and Brown; the Wye Valley and South Wales, the Scottish Highlands, North Wales, the New Forest, from the 1780s, under the direct influence of William Gilpin—became places of fashionable visiting and even of pilgrimage. Johnson's attitude to the Highlands—

the appearance is that of matter, incapable of form or usefulness, dismissed by nature from her care and left in its original elemental state

—seemed left far behind. That Nature was an improver; the new Nature is an original. But we are bound to remember that most, though not all, of these tours to wild places were undertaken by people who were able to travel because 'nature' had not left their own lands in an 'original elemental state'. The picturesque journeys—and the topographical poems, journals, paintings and engravings which promoted and commemorated them—came from the profits of an improving agriculture and from trade. It is not, at this level, an alteration of sensibility; it is strictly an addition of taste. Like the landscaped parks, where every device was employed to produce a natural effect, the wild regions of mountain and forest were for the most part objects of conspicuous aesthetic consumption: to have been to the named places, to exchange and compare the travelling and gazing experiences, was a form of fashionable society. That in the course of the journeys some other experiences came we know well enough from Wordsworth and others; but it is Wordsworth who makes what for him is the vital distinction:

even in pleasure pleased  
 Unworthily, disliking here, and there  
 Liking, by rules of mimic art transferred  
 To things above all art; but more—for this,  
 Although a strong infection of the age,  
 Was never much my habit—giving way  
 To a comparison of scene with scene,  
 Bent overmuch on superficial things,  
 Pampering myself with meagre novelties  
 Of colour and proportion: to the moods  
 Of time or season, to the moral power,  
 The affections and the spirit of the place  
 Insensible.

The conventional 'awe' of wild places, that Johnson in the Highlands had described as

terror without danger . . . one of the sports of fancy, a voluntary agitation of the mind, that is permitted no longer than it pleases is something that Wordsworth had known, when he

sought *that* beauty, which, as Milton sings,  
 Hath terror in it.

But he had learned a more general perception:

When every day brought with it some new sense  
 Of exquisite regard for common things.  
 And all the earth was budding with these gifts  
 Of more refined humanity . . .  
 . . . a spirit, there for me enshrined  
 To penetrate the lofty and the low.

It is a complicated movement, including many feelings which were already familiar, but now united, even forced, into a principle of human respect and human community.

It is right to stress some continuity from Thomson and the eighteenth-century tradition. There is the use of the country, of 'nature', as a retreat and solace from human society and ordinary human consciousness:

I well remember that those very plumes,  
 Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,  
 By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,  
 As once I passed, into my heart conveyed  
 So still an image of tranquillity,  
 So calm and still, and looked so beautiful  
 Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,  
 That what we feel of sorrow and despair  
 From ruin and from change, and all the grief  
 That passing shows of Being leave behind,  
 Appeared an idle dream.

Characteristically, in this, it is the lonely observer who 'passes', and what he sees is a 'still life': an image against stress and change.

There is also continuity in a different dimension: the recognition, even the idealisation, of 'humble' characters, in sympathy, in charity and in community. *Michael* is subtitled 'a pastoral poem', and it is so in the developed sense of the description of a rural independence—the shepherd and his family who are

as a proverb in the vale  
For endless industry

—and its dissolution by misfortune, lack of capital, and final sale:

The Cottage which was nam'd the Evening Star  
Is gone, the ploughshare has been through the ground  
On which it stood; final changes have been wrought  
In all the neighbourhood. . . .

It is significant that Wordsworth links the 'gentle agency' of Nature with the fellow-feeling which binds him to such men as Michael: the link we observed in Thomson. Wordsworth often came closer to the actual men, but he saw them also as receding, moving away into a past which only a few surviving signs, and the spirit of poetry, could recall. In this sense the melancholy of loss and dissolution, which had been so marked in late eighteenth-century country writing, is continued in familiar terms.

But there is also an important development in Wordsworth: a new emphasis, corresponding to just this view of history, on the dispossessed, the lonely wanderer, the vagrant. It is here that the social observation is linked to the perceptions of the lonely observer, who is also the poet. The old Cumberland beggar, in the poem of that title, is a later version of the old man whom Crabbe had observed, but the change of viewpoint is remarkable. He is not now evidence of the lack of community—of the village as a life of pain. On the contrary, more truly separated from its life in any direct way, he concentrates in himself, in his actual vagrancy, the community and charity which are the promptings of nature. It is in giving to him that fellow-feeling is kept alive. It is 'Nature's law' that none should exist divorced from:

a spirit and pulse of good,  
A life and soul to every mode of being  
Inseparably link'd.

The beggar is the agent of this underlying, almost lost community:

And while, in that vast solitude to which  
The tide of things has led him, he appears  
To breathe and live but for himself alone,  
Unblam'd, uninjur'd, let him bear about



The good which the benignant law of heaven  
Has hung around him, and, while life is his,  
Still let him prompt the unletter'd Villagers  
To tender offices and pensive thoughts.

The spirit of community, that is to say, has been dispossessed and isolated to a wandering, challenging if passive, embodiment in the beggar. It is no longer from the practice of community, or from the spirit of protest at its inadequacy, but from

this solitary being,  
This helpless wanderer

that the instinct of fellow-feeling is derived. Thus an essential isolation and silence and loneliness have become the only carriers of nature and community against the rigours, the cold abstinence, the selfish ease of ordinary society.

It is a complex structure of feeling, but in its achievement a decisive phase of what must still be called country writing has been inaugurated. There is still the strong sense of observed nature as:

a pastoral Tract,  
Like one of these, where Fancy might run wild,  
Though under skies less generous and serene;  
Yet there, as for herself, had Nature fram'd  
A pleasure-ground.

But the decisive development is towards that landscape in which:

The elements and seasons in their change  
Do find their dearest fellow-labourer there,  
The heart of man, a district on all sides  
The fragrance breathing of humanity,  
Man free, man working for himself, with choice  
Of time, and place, and object.

These are the phrases of an actual rural independence, of the kind which had been directly observed in Cumberland, and then seen as threatened by change. But under the new stress there is a simultaneous affirmation and abstraction of 'Man', of 'Humanity':

A solitary object and sublime  
Above all height . . .  
. . . Thus was Man  
Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes . . .  
. . . Remov'd, and at a distance that was fit.

The figure thus seen is at first the shepherd, moving and working in the mountains, but is then the idea of human nature—

the impersonated thought,  
The idea or abstraction of the Kind

—which sustains the poet against ‘the deformities of crowded life’ and the distorted images of men in a pressing society. The labourer now merged with his landscape, a figure within the general figure of nature, is seen from a distance, in which the affirmation of Nature is intended as the essential affirmation of Man. It is in this spirit, at once separated and affirming a submerged general connection—

Sea, hill and wood,  
This populous village! Sea and hill and wood  
With all the numberless goings on of life  
Inaudible as dreams

—that a new emphasis is placed on the act of poetry itself, the act of creation; as Wordsworth described it so often, or as Coleridge put it, from the disturbance within the apparent calm:

And would we aught behold, of higher worth,  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the earth.

It is not now the will that is to transform nature; it is the lonely creative imagination; the man driven back from the cold world and in his own natural perception and language seeking to find and recreate man.

This is the ‘green language’ of the new poetry. The phrase is actually used by John Clare, in a poem called, significantly, *Pastoral Poesy*:

A language that is ever green  
That feelings unto all impart,  
As hawthorn blossoms, soon as seen,  
Give May to every heart.

The conjunction is present also in Wordsworth’s famous *Lines Written A Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*:

Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye and ear, both what they half create  
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

This is, in a new sense, the ‘green pastoral landscape’:

Here, if need be, struggling with storms, and there  
 Strewing in peace life's humblest ground with herbs  
 At every season green, sweet at all hours.

This is the philosophical conclusion; the climax, in *The Prelude*, of the formation of 'a Poet's mind'. But it was a new kind of poet, as it was a new kind of nature, that was now being formed.

John Clare, as a young labourer, had been excited beyond his capacity of explanation by some lines from Thomson's *Spring*:

Come gentle Spring, ethereal mildness come,  
 And from the bosom of yon dripping cloud,  
 While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower  
 Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.

This can be read now as a theatrical invocation: a symbolic abstraction of the exalted movement of the seasons. But we can follow both a continuity and a transformation if we read, with it, some of Clare's developed verse:

From dark green dumps among the dripping grain  
 The lark with sudden impulse starts and sings  
 And mid the smoking rain  
 Quivers her russet wings.

The personified season has become the directly seen lark, but the movement is the same: the investment of nature with a quality of creation that is now, in its new form, internal; so that the more closely the object is described, the more directly, in a newly working language and rhythm, a feeling of the observer's life is seen and known, and the bird is the feeling, in the created poem.

Closer description of nature—of birds, trees, effects of weather and of light—is a very marked element in this new writing. Any anthology of natural descriptions would draw very heavily on verse and prose written since 1780. It is often a prolonged, rapt, exceptional description: an intricate working of particularity, as opposed to the more characteristic attribution of single identifying qualities in most earlier writing. This is clearly in part related to more intense observation, but we have only to compare it with the writing of men who were only (though remarkably) intent observers to realise what else is happening. Thus it would be easy to establish some kind of correlation between, say, Wordsworth and Clare on the one hand, and Gilbert White of Selborne on the other; an intense devotion to watching and describing nature is evident in all three men. Yet we have only to remember Gilbert White to see the essential differences:

The ousel is larger than a blackbird, and feeds on haws . . .

That close observation and description is of a separated object, another creature. It is at the opposite pole from the human separation of Wordsworth and Clare: a separation that is mediated by a projection of personal feeling into a subjectively particularised and objectively generalised Nature.

This movement is well known, as a fact of literary history. But Clare is in every way a deeply significant figure, for in him there is not only the literary change but directly, in his person and his history, the inwardness of the social transformation.

He was in no way the first of the labourer poets. Stephen Duck, as we saw, had written one fine poem before the court and the church and neo-classicism patronised and emasculated him. He had been followed by others, under a similar patronage: James Woodhouse the cobbler, who helped Shenstone lay out *The Leasowes*; Robert Dodsley the weaver; Robert Tattersal the bricklayer; Mary Collier the washer-woman; William Falconer the sailor; Ann Yearsley the milk-seller, who was encouraged to publish as Lactilla:

No vallies blow, no waving grain uprears  
Its tender stalk to cheer my coming hour.

Robert Bloomfield ran away, at fourteen, from his work as a farmboy and became a cobbler in London, and in 1800 published *The Farmer's Boy*, with considerable effect, not excluding a description of him as 'our own more chaste Theocritus'. *The Farmer's Boy* is an honest imitation of Thomson's *Seasons*. Bloomfield was, he said, 'determined that what I said on Farming should be EXPERIMENTALLY true' but though his details have this accuracy of experience they are enclosed within a kind of external pointing and explanation, as in the general figure of Giles who has been projected from his own more immediate memories:

Who could resist the call? that Giles had done  
Nor heard the birds, nor seen the rising sun,  
Had not Benevolence, with cheering ray,  
And Greatness stooped, indulgent to display  
Praise which does surely not to Giles belong  
But to the objects that inspired his song.

The creeping humility is an acquired taste. If it now provokes either anger or contempt we must not make the mistake of attacking Bloomfield but the men, the class, who reduced him and many thousands of others to this anxious obeisance. In a non-poetical manner he had his own very different feelings, as when he attacked a remark of Windham's:

the *common people* of his native country, are a rough set no doubt,  
but I dislike the doctrine of keeping them in their dirt, for though

it holds good as to the preservation of potatoes, it would be no grateful reflection to good minds to know that a man's natural abilities had been smother'd for want of beeing able to read and write. How can we consistently praise the inestimable blessing of letters and not wish to extend it.

The smothering, indeed, was all too general and conscious.

To make the Society Happy and People Easy under the meanest Circumstances, it is requisite that great numbers of them should be Ignorant as well as Poor,

as Mandeville had expressed it, in a dominant attitude that lasted well into the nineteenth century. The taking-up for patronage may seem to contradict the smothering, but it was only another form of it. What was imposed on the labourer-poets was a definition of learning and cultivation, and more critically a definition of poetry, which, as it happened, was as mediocre as it was arrogant. Bloomfield could hardly get at his real experience because an external attitude had been consciously interposed—

Live, trifling incidents, and grace my song,  
That to the humblest menial belong

—and even at his best he is constrained within a verse convention that is syntactically that of an observer rather than a participant: the third-person abstraction and personification of other men who labour; the ratification by literary allusion; the required periphrastic gesture:

Dried fuel hoarded is his richest store  
And circling smoke obscures his little door:  
Whence creeping forth, to duty's call he yields,  
And strolls the Crusoe of his lonely fields.  
On whitethorns towering, and the leafless rose  
A frost-nipped feast in bright vermilion glows;  
Where clust'ring sloes in glossy order rise,  
He crops the loaded branch—a cumbrous prize.

Moreover the possibilities of development were conditioned by the fact of patronage; the extravagant praise was so regularly followed by neglect, at a time when a decent independence was no easier in literature than on the land itself. Bloomfield turned to *Rural Tales*, in the simpler style of the ballads, and Clare thought his *Richard and Kate* made him 'the first of Rural Bards in this country'. Also, for money, he turned to topographical tourist poems: as it happens going to my own native country, looking at mountains I have known all my life. What he makes of that landscape, in formal description, is not important; it is a catalogue of picturesque epithets. But he could say, with more feeling:

Must scenes like these expand,  
 Scenes so magnificently grand,  
 And millions breathe, and pass away  
 Unblessed, throughout their little day,  
 With one short glimpse? By place confined,  
 Shall many an anxious ardent mind,  
 Sworn to the Muses, cower its pride,  
 Doomed but to sing with pinions tied?

It is his own observation of a real experience, and it is not surprising that he moves at once to a contrast with Burns, in a different culture. It is as he touches his own limitations, in a whole social experience that the strength he had tamed shows through.

John Clare's life must be seen in the same context. It is more tragic but also more urgent: more tragic because more urgent. We can properly see it, up to a certain point, in the context of rural change and the familiar association of Clare with the loss by enclosures. But to see it fully we shall have to go beyond this, to the experience and the poetic development which he shared with Wordsworth, in a much wider social change.

We can of course find in Clare, in an explicit way, strongly felt responses to the visible aspects of recent rural change. For example in the 'May' of the *Shepherd's Calendar*:

Old may day where's thy glories gone  
 All fled and left thee every one  
 Thou comst to thy old haunts and homes  
 Unnoticed as a stranger comes . . .  
 . . . While the new thing that took thy place  
 Wears faded smiles upon its face  
 And where enclosure has its birth  
 It spreads a mildew oer her mirth.

In 'October' the surviving gipsies are observed:

On commons where no farmers claims appear  
 Nor tyrant justice rides to interfere.

Or again, in more conscious argument, in *The Village Minstrel*:

There once were lanes in nature's freedom dropt,  
 There once were paths that every valley wound—  
 Inclosure came, and every path was stopt;  
 Each tyrant fix'd his sign where paths were found,  
 To hint a trespass now who cross'd the ground:  
 Justice is made to speak as they command;  
 The high road now must be each stinted bound:  
 —Inclosure, thou'rt a curse upon the land,  
 And tasteless was the wretch who thy existence plann'd. . . .

O England! boasted land of liberty,  
 With strangers still thou mayst thy title own,  
 But thy poor slaves the alteration see,  
 With many a loss to them the truth is known:  
 Like emigrating bird thy freedom's flown,  
 While mongrel clowns, low as their rooting plough,  
 Disdain thy laws to put in force their own;  
 And every village owns its tyrants now,  
 And parish-slaves must live as parish kings allow

. . . Ye fields, ye scenes so dear to Lubin's eye,  
 Ye meadow-blooms, ye pasture-flowers, farewell!  
 Ye banish'd trees, ye make me deeply sigh,  
 Inclosure came, and all your glories fell.

There is an interesting edge of anger in the description of the enclosing gentry as 'mongrel clowns', but also, of course, a familiar displacement: the ancient liberty of England is being suppressed, not by the visible and active landowners, but by 'low' and, as it would seem, alien 'tyrants'. It is how Goldsmith had seen an earlier phase of the change; rural England then was

a picture of Italy just before its conquest by Theodoric the Ostrogoth.

In the actual scale of the regulated conquest of land which enclosure, among other procedures, represented, this persistent image of invading barbarians is understandable. But the harder fact, that these barbarians were well-born Englishmen, is characteristically displaced. And then it is very much to the point that the first general word chosen to describe the instigators of the 'curse' of enclosure is 'tasteless'. This connects with that structure of feeling which was beginning to form, from Goldsmith to the poets of the Romantic movement, and which is particularly visible in Clare: the loss of the 'old country' is a loss of poetry; the cultivation of natural feeling is dispossessed by the consequences of improved cultivation of the land; wealth is not only hard and cruel but tasteless.

Clare was very young when he wrote, in *Helpstone*, a familiar rural elegy and retrospect. Its terms are especially interesting, since it is 'industry' (in its earlier meaning of work) which belongs to the old world, and 'wealth' to the new:

Sweet rest and peace! ye dear, departed charms,  
 Which industry once cherishe'd in her arms;  
 When ease and plenty, known but now to few,  
 Were known to all, and labour had its due.

We need not ask when, for the point of the memory is the contrast:

Accursed Wealth! o'er-bounding human laws,  
 Of every evil thou remains't the cause:  
 Victims of want, those wretches such as me,  
 Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee:  
 Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed,  
 And thine our loss of labour and of bread.

As a way of seeing the dispossession of labour by capital, this is exact. But it is set in a structure of feeling in which what wealth is most visibly destroying is 'Nature': that complex of the land as it was, in the past and in childhood, which both ageing and alteration destroy. There are the scenes of what is really an older agriculture—

Thou far fled pasture, long evanish'd scene!  
 Where nature's freedom spread the flow'ry green . . .  
 . . . Where lowing oxen roam'd to feed at large,  
 And bleating there the Shepherd's woolly charge. . . .

—alongside the more primitive land which is being directly altered, the brooks diverted, the willows felled, in drainage and clearance.

Over a century and a half I can recognise what Clare is describing: particular trees, and a particular brook, by which I played as a child, have gone in just this way, in the last few years, in an improved use of marginal land. And then what one has to consider is the extension of this observation—one kind of loss against one kind of gain—into a loss of 'Nature'. It is not only the loss of what can be called—sometimes justly, sometimes affectedly—a piece of 'unspoiled' country. It is also, for any particular man, the loss of a specifically human and historical landscape, in which the source of feeling is not really that it is 'natural' but that it is 'native':

Dear native spot! which length of time endears . . .  
 Nay e'en a post, old standard, or a stone  
 Moss'd o'er by age, and branded as her own  
 Would in my mind a strong attachment gain,  
 A fond desire that they might there remain;  
 And all old favourites, fond taste approves,  
 Griev'd me at heart to witness their removes.

And then what is most urgently being mourned—the 'old favourites' approved by 'fond taste'—is a loss of childhood through a loss of its immediate landscape:

But now, alas! those scenes exist no more;  
 The pride of life with thee, like mine, is o'er.

It is wholly understandable that this was written at the age of sixteen. A way of seeing has been connected with a lost phase of living, and the association of happiness with childhood has been



developed into a whole convention, in which not only innocence and security but peace and plenty have been imprinted, indelibly, first on a particular landscape, and then, in a powerful extension, on a particular period of the rural past, which is now connected with a lost identity, lost relations and lost certainties, in the memory of what is called, against a present consciousness, Nature. The first feeling is so urgent that it inevitably connects widely with other experience:

His native scenes! O sweet endearing sound!  
 Sure never beats a heart, howe'er forlorn,  
 But the warm'd breast has soft emotions found  
 To cherish the dear spot where he was born:  
 E'en the poor hedger, in the early morn  
 Chopping the pattering bushes hung with dew,  
 Scarce lays his mitten on a branching thorn,  
 But painful memory's banish'd thoughts in view  
 Remind him, when 'twas young, what happy days he knew.

And the transition is then almost unnoticed, as in *Joys of Childhood*:

Dull is that memory, vacant is that mind,  
 Where no sweet vision of the past appears.

Living in this connecting feeling, Clare recognised, even while he created, the conversion of particular memories into the generalising 'sweet vision of the past'. His most crucial recognition, relating quite centrally to the tradition we have been examining, comes in another verse of the same poem:

Fancy spreads Edens wheresoe'er they be;  
 The world breaks on them like an opening flower,  
 Green joys and cloudless skies are all they see;  
 The hour of childhood is a rose's hour. . . .

The natural images of this Eden of childhood seem to compel a particular connection, at the very moment of their widest generality. Nature, the past and childhood are temporarily but powerfully fused:

In nature's quiet sleep as on a mother's breast.

The plough that disturbs this nature connects with the hardest emotions of maturity: dispossession, the ache of labour, the coldness of the available world: a complex of feeling and imagery in the experience of this man and of everyone; of each personal generation and of this generation in history. But what is then achieved, against this experience of pain, is a way of feeling which is also a way of writing:

A language that is ever green

—the language of what Clare now recreates as 'pastoral poesy', in the title of the poem from which the line comes. This is a radical development of language and of the idea of literature; its strength in its connecting feelings of human warmth and community, in a time of real dispossession, eviction and social division; its paradoxical weakness in the making of this connection through withdrawal into 'nature', into the 'Eden' of the heart, and into a lonely, resigned and contemplative love of men:

Unruffled quietness hath made  
A peace in every place,  
And woods are resting in their shade  
Of social loneliness.

It is wholly understandable, this development of responses to a disturbing history and an altering landscape: the real scenes of both at once dissolved and recreated in images which carry the meanings and yet compose a way of seeing that suppresses them. As so often in romantic poetry, it is the survival of human feeling in a factual dispossession:

While threshing in the dusty barn  
Or squashing in the ditch to earn  
A pittance that would scarce allow  
One joy to smooth my sweating brow  
Where drop by drop would chase and fall  
Thy presence triumphed over all.

The presence is poetry, speaking to and for the humanity of the hedger, the thresher, the man actually altering the landscape in the service and for the gain of others; but distorted by its very loneliness into an opposition to that noise of the world, the noise of actual exploitation and, ironically, of direct response to it:

Bred in a village full of strife and noise,  
Old senseless gossips, and blackguarding boys,  
Ploughmen and threshers, whose discourses led  
To nothing more than labour's rude employs,  
'Bout work being slack, and rise and fall of bread  
And who were like to die, and who were like to wed.

It is from this actual village, where a community lives under pressure, that the poet withdraws to the quiet of nature, where he can speak for his own and others' humanity, through remembered ballads and contemplated scenes; a speaking silence from which he is torn, bitterly and desperately, to put what he has written back into the noise of the market: profit, malice, envy; a fashionable contempt for his simplicity; and then again, but now virtually breaking the mind,

into the speaking silence of the neglected poet, the man alone with nature and with poverty, recreating a world in his green language:

I am, but what I am  
Who cares or knows?

It was as far as the mind could go, within that structure. Any new direction required an alteration of structure and of essential convention. Clare marks the end of pastoral poetry, in the very shock of its collision with actual country experience. He could not accept Lamb's characteristic advice, which had tamed so many: 'transplant Arcadia to Helpstone. The true rustic style, the Arcadian English, I think is to be found in Shenstone.' He is, rather, the culmination, in broken genius, of the movement which we can trace from a century before him: the separation of Nature from the facts of the labour that is creating it, and then the breaking of Nature, in altered and now intolerable relations between men. What we find in Clare is not Jonson's idealisation of a landscape yielding of itself, nor Thomson's idealisation of a productive order that is scattering and guarding plenty. There was a conscious reaction to this, in Goldsmith, in Langhorne, and in Crabbe. But there was also an unconscious reaction, to a country from which any acceptable social order had been decisively removed. Clare goes beyond the external observation of the poems of protest and of melancholy retrospect. What happens in him is that the loss is internal. It is to survive at all, as a thinking and feeling man, that he needs the green language of the new Nature.

## *Change in the City*

But there is a wider reason for the stress of the change. Men accustomed to seeing their immediate environment through received intellectual and literary forms had by the eighteenth century to notice another dramatic alteration of landscape: the rapidly expanding and changing city. It is characteristic that a minor poet, Charles Jenner (1736-74) should attempt a series of 'Town' or 'London' *Eclogues*; but now the absence of pastoral images had a different bearing:

I spy no verdant glade, no gushing rill,  
No fountain gushing from the rocky hill.

He was walking on the outskirts of expanding London:

Where'er around I cast my wand'ring eyes  
Long burning rows of fetid bricks arise,  
And nauseous dunghills swell in mould'ring heaps  
While the fat sow beneath their covert sleeps.

His conclusion is a simple negation:

Since then no images adorn the plain  
But what are found as well in Gray's Inn Lane  
Since dust and noise inspire no thought serene  
And three-horse stages little mend the scene  
I'll stray no more to seek the vagrant muse  
But ev'n go write at home and save my shoes.

It is fortunate that this was an exceptional response. As London grew, dramatically, in the eighteenth century, it was being intensely observed, as a new kind of landscape, a new kind of society.

Yet it was at first difficult to separate what was new from traditional images of the city. In Thomson, for example, there is an interesting combination of new and old attitudes. There is the conventional contrast with the innocence of the country, as here in *Autumn*:

This is the life which those who fret in guilt  
And guilty cities never knew—the life  
Led by primeval ages uncorrupt.

Connecting with this, but developing more specific complaints:

The city swarms intense. The public haunt,  
Full of each theme and warm with mixed discourse,  
Hums indistinct. The sons of riot flow

Down the loose stream of false enchanted joy  
To swift destruction.

(*Winter*)

But this moral view, of waste and profligacy, allows room for the contrast not only with innocent nature but also with civilised industry. The celebration of production, which had embraced the land, now extends to the city:

Full are thy cities with the sons of art;  
And trade and joy, in every busy street,  
Mingling are heard; even Drudgery himself  
As at the car he sweats, or, dusty, hews  
The palace stone, looks gay.

(*Summer*)

And Thomson could extend this celebration of industry to a full positive view of the city:

Hence every form of cultivated life  
In order set, protected, and inspired  
Into perfection wrought. Uniting all,  
Society grew numerous, high, polite,  
And happy. Nurse of art, the city reared  
In beauteous pride her tower-encircled head;  
And stretching street on street, by thousands drew,  
From twining woody haunts, or the tough yew  
To bows strong-straining, her aspiring sons.

Then commerce brought into the public walk  
The busy merchant; the big warehouse built;  
Raised the strong crane; choked up the loaded street  
With foreign plenty; and thy stream, O Thames,  
Large, gentle, deep, majestic, king of floods!  
Chose for his grand resort.

(*Autumn*)

This celebration combines a bourgeois sense of achieved production and trade with an Augustan sense of civilised order. And because it does so, it can be turned, very quickly, into one of the newly emphasised fears of the city: the fear of the mob joining the older fear of the city's avarice:

Let this through cities work his eager way  
By legal outrage and established guile,  
The social sense extinct; and that ferment  
Mad into tumult the seditious herd,  
Or melt them down to slavery.

The legal and financial superstructure of the celebrated trade and industry is then seen as of a piece with riot and sedition, in an activity that has turned into a ferment.

It was within this difficult complex that eighteenth-century observers developed their views of the city, and especially, for it was the leading city of the world, of London. Voltaire saw the pursuit of industry and urbane pleasure as the marks of the city and therefore of civilisation itself. The golden age and the Garden of Eden, lacking industry and pleasure, were not virtuous but ignorant: the city, and especially London, was the symbol of progress and enlightenment, its social mobility the school of civilisation and liberty:

Rival of Athens, London, blest indeed  
That with thy tyrants had the wit to chase  
The prejudices civil factions breed.  
Men speak their thoughts and worth can win its place . . .  
In London, who has talent, he is great.

Adam Smith, rather differently, saw the city as securing and extending the industry of the country: a centre of freedom and order but liable to its very dependence as a market and manufacturing centre liable to breed a volatile and insecure people. This came nearer to the real contradictions of London. On the one hand, in polite literature, there was a new urbanity, including even the conventional rural gesture in the world of Pope and Johnson and Swift. But theirs was an isolated London, though Johnson, in his imitation of Juvenal, could see the city through other eyes. On the other hand, in Hogarth and Fielding, Gay and Defoe, there was a darker reality. Hogarth's *Gin Lane* brings us nearer to mid-eighteenth-century London than any urbane formulation; and whether it is the moral contrast of his *Industry and Idleness* and of Lillo's *The London Merchant*, or the ambivalent low-life vigour of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* or Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, the sense of the actuality of London is at the opposite pole from the ideal of civilised order. The 'insolent rabble', 'the insolence of the mob', the 'idle, profligate and debauched' workmen are commonplaces of middle-class observation. The thieving-shops, the stews and the rookeries, the fetid cellars and the dangerous tenements, formed a large part of the visitor's or middle-class observer's sense of this 'rival of Athens'.

What is then compounded in this view is a contradictory reality of vice and protest, of crime and victimisation, of despair and independence. The contrasts of wealth and poverty were not different in kind from those of the rural order, but were more intense, more general, more evidently problematic, in their very concentration into the feverishly expanding city. The 'mob' was often violent, unpredictable, capable of being used for reaction, but it was also a name that overlaid, as George Rudé has shown, 'movements of social protest in which the underlying conflict of poor against rich' was

clearly visible. In the time of Wilkes, for example, these popular protests were on the side of liberty where the civilised order of London was against it.

At the same time this complexity had acquired, in the city, a physical embodiment. As Fielding observed in 1751:

whoever considers the Cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast increases of their suburbs, the great irregularity of their buildings, the immense numbers of lanes, alleys, courts and bye-places, must think that had they been intended for the very purpose of concealment, they could not have been better contrived.

It is then ironic to reflect that much of the physical squalor and complexity of eighteenth-century London was a consequence not simply of rapid expansion but of attempts to control that expansion. For complex reasons, ranging from fear of the plague to fear of social disorder—itsself a transference and concentration in London of the disturbances of the rural economy—there had been repeated attempts to limit the city's growth. From the first phase of its rapid expansion, in the late sixteenth century, when a proclamation of 1580 came out against new buildings, through the seventeenth century controls on trade and further proclamations against building, to as late as 1709, when a Bill against new houses was attempted, there was a prolonged struggle, by ruling-class interests, to restrain the growth of London, and in particular to prevent the poor settling there. Under the statutes and proclamations there was usually an explicit exception for houses 'fit for inhabitants of the better sort'. Poor people and vagrants, the casualties of a changing rural economy, or the hard-pressed or ambitious seeing in London some escape from their subordinate destiny, were the explicit objects of exclusion from the developing city. Yet the general changes were of an order which made exclusion impossible. Not only the retinues of servants but many thousands of others flooded in, and the main consequence of the limitations was a long-continued wave of overcrowded and insecure speculative building and adaptation within the legal limits: forced labyrinths and alleys of the poor. And this was happening as part of the same process as the building of town mansions, the laying out of squares and fashionable terraces: the 'Georgian' London now so often abstracted. As indeed so often, a ruling class wanted the benefits of a change it was itself promoting, but the control or suppression of its less welcome but inseparable consequences. Much of the complaint against London (and much of the praise) has to be read in this double sense.

This is true of the image of the 'Great Wen', which can be found well before Cobbett's more famous description:

London, the Metropolis of Great Britain, has been complained of for ages as a kind of monster, with a head enormously large, and out of all proportion to its body. And yet, at the juncture when this complaint was first made (about 200 years ago) the buildings of London hardly advanced beyond the City bounds. . . . If therefore the increase of buildings, begun at such an early period, was looked upon to be no better than a wen or excrescence upon the body-politic, what must we think of those numberless streets and squares which have been added since!

That is Tucker in 1783. The image of the 'monster', of the diseased 'wen', was to be used again and again as London continued to expand. But the real implications of the image were not always seen as clearly as Cobbett saw them. What the expansion of London actually indicated was the true condition and development of the country as a whole. If it was seen as monstrous, or as a diseased growth, this had to be traced back to the whole social order. But of course it was easier to denounce the consequences and ignore, or go on idealising, the general condition.

London was already a city of half a million inhabitants in 1660, at a time when the next largest city was Bristol with some thirty thousand. Between 1700 and 1820 it rose to a million and a quarter. This was the centralisation of political power; the replacement of feudalism by an agrarian aristocracy and then an agrarian bourgeoisie, with all the effects in modernisation of the land; the immense development of mercantile trade: these outstanding developments had acquired, over the generations, an unstoppable momentum: a concentration and demand which then fed on itself. The nineteenth-century city, in Britain and elsewhere, was to be the creation of industrial capitalism. Eighteenth-century London was the astonishing creation of an agrarian and mercantile capitalism, within an aristocratic political order. At each stage it drew in much of the rest of the country: the drovers bringing their cattle from Wales or Scotland for its meat; gangs of girls walking from North Wales to pick its strawberries; and more fundamentally, beyond those organised in extraordinary journeys of thousands in search of work or of a place to hide; refugees from disturbance or a no less tolerable rigidity. What induced them, Arthur Young asked, to 'quit their healthy clean fields for a region of dirt, stink and noise?' He could have found part of his answer in the condition of the villages, and in the expulsion of population which the 'improving' social order had enforced. He saw another part of the answer in the course of his question:

Young men and women in the country fix their eye on London as the last stage of their hope. . . . The number of young women that fly there is incredible.



An unequal interaction between country and city was now far advanced and pervasive. There was the recourse to law, to the capital market and to the marriage market, in the consolidation and extension of the landlords. There was the promotion of distilling, as a remedy for what Defoe, in 1713, called the 'disaster' of the over-production of corn. Gin Lane, in this way, ran back to the country-houses ('the distilling of corn is one of the most essential things to support the landed interest', *Review*, 9 May 1713). All around London itself, the country was transformed to supply the city: grain for the people and hay for the horses; pigs on the waste lands (as Jenner saw in his *Eclogue*); fruit and vegetables and milk. It was not the later case of an industrial centre being fed by its rural hinterland. It was a case of a capital city drawing the character of an economy and a society into its extraordinary centre: order and chaos both.

For London was not, in the later sense, an industrial city. It was a capital centre of trades and of distribution: of skilled craftsmen in metals and in print; of clothing and furniture and fashion; of all the work connected with shipping and the market. All these trades developed in its expansion, though there were many local changes. A significant characteristic of the eighteenth-century development was an expansion of what was noted in 1749 as the 'gainful branches of agency, factorage, brokerage, negotiation and insurance for the other parts of the kingdom'. There were 'agents, factors, brokers, insurers, bankers, negotiators, discounters, subscribers, contractors, remitters, ticket-mongers, stock-jobbers and . . . a great variety of other dealers in money, the names of whose employments were wholly unknown to our forefathers'. A 'Computation of the Increase of London', in 1719, noted the importance of the growth of Public Funds as leading to 'new offices and societies', bringing 'great numbers of other people to live in and about London'. By comparison with the established trades and crafts, themselves responsive to the increases in wealth and trade and display, this financial business was that of a minority. But it underlines the specific significance which, allied to its concentration of political power, the capital was acquiring. The new industrial city, when it came in the North, would be a creation of one or two kinds of work, and in its physical characteristics would reflect this singular emphasis. London, quite apart from its historical variety, was plural and various: not only in the sense of its hundreds of trades but in the sense that it was managing and directing so much of other people's business. A dominant part of the life of the nation was reflected but also created within it. As its population grew it went into deficit, not only in food but in the balance of material production; but this was much more than compensated by the fact

of its social production: it was producing and reproducing, to a dominant degree, the social reality of the nation as a whole.

It was in this still eighteenth-century sense that Blake, himself a craftsman and a Londoner, saw the capital city:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow . . .

He had originally written 'dirty' street and 'dirty' Thames, and these would have been evident enough; but what he adds is the perception of 'chartering': the organisation of a city in terms of trade. Suddenly, within this, he sees the capital in a new way: not the riot, the noise or the monstrous wen of earlier and contemporary observation; but an organisation, a systematic state of mind:

. . . And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man  
In every Infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

The cries, the fears and the bans would all have been evident, but Blake now generalises them to an imposed and yet self-imposed organised repression: 'the mind-forg'd manacles'. What he then sees, dramatically, are the submerged connections of this capital system:

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls;  
And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlot's curse  
Blasts the new born Infant's tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

This is very far from the traditional way of seeing innocence in the country, vice in the city. The innocence and the vice are in and of the city, in its factual and spiritual relations. The palace which impressively symbolises power has to be seen as running with blood: the real but suppressed relationship is made visible, as also in the conventions of church and marriage against the reality of those who suffered and were despised and outcast. It is not just an observation of, say, the chimney-sweepers; before Blake wrote there had been vigorous and partly successful campaigns against the appalling conditions of the chimney-sweeping children. It is a making of new connections, in the whole order of the city and of the human system

it concentrates and embodies. This forcing into consciousness of the suppressed connections is then a new way of seeing the human and social order as a whole. It is, as it happens, a precise prevision of the essential literary methods and purposes of Dickens.

It is worth stressing this in Blake, since although he inherits many eighteenth-century pastoral images, in his whole work he transforms them to elements of a general condition. The simplifying contrast between country and city is then decisively transcended. It is significant that one of his best-remembered phrases is 'England's green and pleasant land', but this is not the language of rural retrospect or retreat. The whole purpose of his struggle is, as he says, to build 'Jerusalem/In England's green and pleasant land': to build the holy as against the unholy city.

There are then interesting connections and contrasts with Wordsworth, whose seventh book of *The Prelude*, 'Residence in London', is one of the major early records of new ways of seeing the city. Wordsworth's narrative includes experiences more various than Blake's visions, but there are two more immediate differences. Wordsworth sees the city with his country experience behind him and shaping his vision; he then sees it in ways that relate to Blake, but with the specific character of the city, as an exceptional kind of social organisation, dominant.

Wordsworth begins with the ordinary attitude of those who have lived at a distance from London: 'of wonder and obscure delight' in its history and its marvels. Even then, he tells us, he wondered

how men lived  
Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still  
Strangers, nor knowing each the other's name.

But the sense of wonder and attraction was dominant, and he recalls his moment of arrival, when 'having thridded the long labyrinth of the suburban villages' he entered its 'vast dominion' and, amazed that anything 'external to the living mind should have such mighty sway', felt a 'weight of ages', 'power growing under weight'. This was

the vast metropolis  
Fount of my country's destiny and the world's;  
That great emporium, chronicle at once  
And burial-place of passions, and their home  
Imperial, their chief living residence.

This an authentic way of seeing not just a city but the capital city, embodying and directing the whole country. But Wordsworth also sees the city in older ways. Love does not easily thrive:

Among the close and overcrowded haunts  
Of cities, where the human heart is sick

and while 'the roar continues' in the streets

Escaped as from an enemy, we turn  
Abruptly into some sequestered nook;

as Thomson had recommended, for the country against the city  
hearing:

At distance safe, the human tempest roar.

But these feelings are not at the centre of Wordsworth's experience  
of London. In quite new ways he tries to describe the city as a form  
of society; the

endless stream of men and moving things! . . .  
. . . the quick dance,  
Of colours, lights and forms; the deafening din;  
The comers and the goers face to face.  
Face after face.

This is direct observation of a new set of physical and sense relationships:  
a new way of seeing men in what is experienced as a new kind  
of society. It is in this sense, of a new kind of alienation, that he  
reflects in ways that compare with but are different from Blake:

O Friend! one feeling was there which belonged  
To this great city, by exclusive right;  
How often, in the overflowing streets,  
Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said  
Unto myself, 'The face of every one  
That passes by me is a mystery!'  
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed  
By thoughts of what and whither, when and how,  
Until the shapes before my eyes became  
A second-sight procession, such as glides  
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams.  
And all the ballast of familiar life,  
The present, and the past; hope, fear; all stays,  
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man  
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.

These important lines are, I believe, the first expression of what has  
since become a dominant experience of the city. Blake saw a common  
condition of 'weakness and woe'. Wordsworth saw strangeness, a  
loss of connection, not at first in social but in perceptual ways: a  
failure of identity in the crowd of others which worked back to a loss  
of identity in the self, and then, in these ways, a loss of society itself,  
its overcoming and replacement by a procession of images: the 'dance  
of colours, lights and forms', 'face after face' and there are no other  
laws. No experience has been more central in the subsequent literature  
of the city.

But it can go either way, from this perceptual confusion, this confession of mystery. Wordsworth immediately extended it to a received idea: the mystery of all human life, as in the identity label around the neck of the blind beggar, which he saw as a 'type' of the limits of human knowledge. This is less interesting than the original dissolution, but it is a characteristic factor of this kind of experience that it cannot easily be sustained. Every kind of philosophical and social attitude is poised to enter the very vacuum it has created. Wordsworth followed his own sense of mystery with the kind of denunciation of the 'crowd', the 'masses', which has become so familiar. The unnatural confusion is:

what the mighty City is itself  
 To all except a straggler here and there,  
 To the whole swarm of its inhabitants;  
 An undistinguishable world to men,  
 The slaves unrespited of low pursuits,  
 Living amid the same perpetual flow  
 Of trivial objects, melted and reduced  
 To one identity, by differences  
 That have no law, no meaning and no end.

In the 1850 version he softened but did not essentially change this contemptuous blocking; its stereotype is one dominant way in which the social and perceptual confusion has gone. But there is another way, which has also remained important. Looking back on the experience, he proposed a different way of seeing, which historically has been crucial:

. . . that among the multitudes  
 Of that huge city, oftentimes was seen  
 Affectingly set forth, more than elsewhere  
 Is possible, the unity of men,  
 One spirit over ignorance and vice  
 Predominant, in good and evil hearts  
 One sense for moral judgements, as one eye  
 For the sun's light.

This historically liberating insight, of new kinds of possible order, new kinds of human unity, in the transforming experience of the city, appeared, significantly, in the same shock of recognition of a new dimension which had produced the more familiar subjective recoil. The objectively uniting and liberating forces were seen in the same activity as the forces of threat, confusion and loss of identity. And this was how, through the next century and a half, the increasingly dominant fact of the city was to be both paradoxically and alternatively interpreted.

For the transformation was on the point of becoming general.

The special case of London, though it would remain of outstanding significance, was about to be joined by many other cases, in ways that both connect and confuse. London was a capital, a centre of civilisation in the oldest sense, as Wordsworth himself had seen it:

This City now doth like a garment wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie  
Open unto the fields and to the sky—  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

As I said earlier, this is the city before the noise of the working day and also before the smoke of its later development. But it is a permanent way of seeing any historical city: its public buildings and its defining centres of culture and learning. Paris, still half the size of London, was about to enter a period of major growth; Naples, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, St Petersburg, Budapest, Moscow were to follow. The cities of civilisation, in this capital sense, were moving into a significantly renewed expansion and cultural importance. But other kinds of city were expanding even more rapidly. In England, in the course of the Industrial Revolution, even London's continuing and rapid growth must be compared with the still more rapid, the explosive growth of the new industrial cities of the North. London between 1821 and 1841 grew by twenty per cent; Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield by more than forty per cent; Bradford by sixty-five per cent. Ways of seeing the city, in its historical and capital sense, had been, as we have noted, various. The sheer scale of London when it stood almost alone, had provoked the sense of a new human dimension, a new kind of society. But the industrial cities were something different again. Though still in their early stages they announced even more decisively than the growth of capitals, the new character of the city and the new relations between city and country.

## Appendix

'Country', as a word, is derived from *contra* (against, opposite) and has the original sense of land spread out over against the observer. In the thirteenth century it acquired its modern meanings of a tract or region, and of a land or nation. In Tindale in 1526 it is contrasted with the city: 'tolde it in the cyte, and in the countre' (Mark v, 14). 'City' had by this time become normal usage for a large town, though derived from *civitas*, which was in its turn derived from *civis* (a citizen in the sense of a national). *Civitas* had meant community, and was so applied to the tribes of Gaul; later it was the name of an ecclesiastical district. In Old English it became interchangeable with *burh* and was more commonly used in this sense than *urbs*, which had been nearer the modern sense. In Middle English it became common and in the reign of Henry VIII was made equivalent to the seat of a cathedral, a usage since surpassed.

From the late sixteenth century, as the general history would lead one to expect, there are more frequent and more pointed contrasts of 'city' and 'country'. 'Countryman' and 'country people' in the rural sense date from this period, as do 'country-house' and 'country-seat'. 'Countryfied' follows in the mid-seventeenth century; 'bumpkin' and 'country bumpkin' from the same period. 'Countryside' is an eighteenth- to nineteenth-century development, in its modern sense. 'Rural' and 'rustic' are present as physical descriptions from the fifteenth century but acquire social implications, mainly specialising in 'rustic' and 'rusticity' from the late sixteenth century. 'Urbane' similarly extended from its sixteenth-century physical sense to its modern social implications, first recorded in the early seventeenth century.

'Metropolis' had been the chief town or the seat of a bishop from the sixteenth century; 'metropolitan' is still mainly physical until the eighteenth century, when it begins to take on its modern social implications. 'Suburban', similarly, has a physical sense from the early seventeenth century, and a social sense from the early nineteenth.

'Farm' was originally a fixed payment, then from the sixteenth century, by extension, a holding of land on lease, and so to the modern meaning. 'Commuter' is a late nineteenth-century railway term, from the ticket bought at a commuted rate. 'Conurbation' first appears in the mid-twentieth century. 'Pastoral', with a root sense of feeding, as in 'pasture', is in common use for shepherds from the fourteenth century, and has an almost contemporary analogical meaning for priests. 'Pastoral' in its social and literary senses comes from the late sixteenth century, which can be seen as the decisive period in the formation of the structure of meanings in the words which describe my main theme.

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