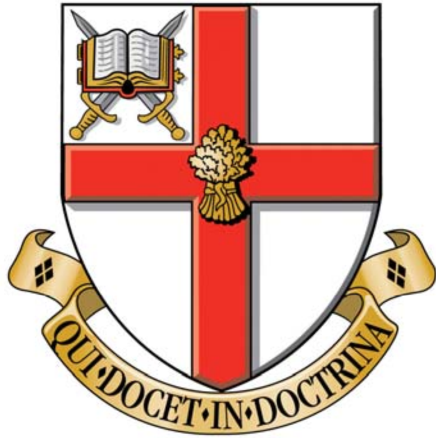

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Volume 2 of 2

The Writing of a Historical Novel (entitled *Chimera*), Together with an Analytical Commentary

Thesis submitted in accordance with
the requirements of the
University of Chester
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Christine Anne Simon

August 2011

Volume 2:
Analytical Commentary

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Christine Simon

The Writing of a Historical Novel (entitled *Chimera*), Together with an Analytical Commentary

Abstract

Chimera is set in England and France in the present day and at the turn of the nineteenth century. Henri de Saint-Gilles was executed as a spy in London in 1813 on the evidence of his friend Richard Turnbull. Two hundred years later the novel's twenty-first-century protagonists, Julia Dalton and Peter Marchmont, are both researching the events surrounding this incident. Marchmont, a delusional café-owner, is convinced that his ancestor Saint-Gilles was wrongly accused and that Turnbull was in fact the spy; since there is no evidence for this version of events, Marchmont has decided to produce it through an elaborate forgery. Dalton, an ambitious postgraduate student who has run out of leads in her research, agrees to pool resources with Marchmont. Her research takes her to Paris, where she meets the eccentric academic Mathias Fournier; together they visit the Château Ruffec, the Saint-Gilles family seat, in the Charente. Here and at the university of Poitiers, they discover documents written by Saint-Gilles's sisters, Rosine and Manon, concerning a visitor to the château in the summer of 1794. This visitor, who is also the father of Rosine's illegitimate son, is subsequently discovered to be Richard Turnbull, a fact which has dramatic implications for Marchmont's understanding of his ancestry. Dalton's boyfriend Miles Carter, a police detective, has meanwhile become suspicious of her relationship with Marchmont and begins his own investigations, looking into Marchmont's past and his connection with the career criminal Drue Paulin whom he has employed to steal documents to order.

In this novel, past and present are interwoven. The historical narrative proceeds through fictional fragments of varying length, such as diaries, letters and memoirs, many of them written by Turnbull. These alternate with the twenty-first-century narrative and occur in the order of their discovery; thus the historical story is not presented chronologically but jumps around in time. It is also incomplete: there are hiatuses in the narrative, some of which are not explained. Running through the novel, but separate from the main narrative, are the sections of Saint-Gilles's trial;

these provide an official version of events which is complicated, and in places contradicted, by the rest of the narrative.

A significant element of the plot concerns Turnbull's hunt for the French spy in 1812. This is narrated in a journal purloined by Dalton early in the novel, but most of which she is unable to decipher until much later. (Her possession of this journal eventually enables her to detect a factual error in Marchmont's forgery which would otherwise have gone unnoticed.) The concept of the past is here complicated by the fact that the events of 1812 are linked in Turnbull's eyes with two significant episodes in his past: the death of his mother in 1788 following her entry into an extreme religious community run by the eccentric preacher Ezekiel Juggins; and an episode of both personal and political significance, only partially explained, which took place in Paris in 1793-94. All the characters involved in these earlier incidents (Juggins, Saint-Gilles and the American John Newman) happen to be in London in the summer of 1812 and are investigated by Turnbull; it is not entirely clear, however, to what extent his official remit masks a personal one.

The open-ended nature of research and the relative nature of time are emphasized by the novel's coda, which takes place in 2028; Dalton receives from Mathias Fournier a copy of two letters written by Richard Turnbull from Paris detailing his meeting in 1825 with the son whom he had believed, on Saint-Gilles's word, to have died at the age of fourteen.

Ambiguity is a major theme in this novel, and to express this the wave-particle complementarity of light has been used, both thematically and as a metaphor. Much of the plot of *Chimera* rests on Turnbull's identity: was he a government agent, a French spy or a mere wandering scholar? Dalton considers the idea that Richard Turnbull might best be understood, like light, in terms of a 'both/and' paradigm rather than an 'either/or' one. The purpose here has been to link forms of duality and ambiguity which have long been recognized in literature (paradox, spying and betrayal, for example) with what appears to be a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the material universe.

One of the intentions underlying this novel was to produce a work which combines plot and suspense with intellectual weight. Through its use of subjective narrative as the means by which the historical plot is advanced, *Chimera* foregrounds the process of research and the slipperiness of narrative, whether historical or fictional. It is meant to raise questions surrounding the nature of textual evidence: the

way in which it influences our view of history; the tension between subjectivity and objectivity; the sometimes tenuous relationship between 'truth' and 'fiction'.

The accompanying analytical commentary consists of five essays. The first examines various aspects of the writing of the novel; it discusses the origins of *Chimera*, some of the influences on it and the narrative techniques and decisions which informed it, including the ways in which the quantum theory of light has been incorporated into the narrative. The remaining four chapters discuss the main areas of research which contributed to the writing of the novel. First, two key texts are analyzed: Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, a polyphonic novel which examines the rise of Nazism in Germany, and John Banville's *The Untouchable*, a roman à clef based on the life of Anthony Blunt. These untypical examples of the amorphous genre of historical fiction share features, both with each other and with *Chimera*; in addition, they demonstrate how history may be incorporated into fiction in an intelligent and imaginative way.

Chapter IV, 'Conventicles and Politics' discusses some of the essential historical research necessary for the writing of *Chimera*. The themes of dissenting religion and political radicalism are central to this novel (they are brought together in the opposition of Richard Turnbull and Ezekiel Juggins); the complex relationship between them in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a defining feature of this period and provided a focus for the historical research carried out during the writing of the novel.

Chapter V of the commentary combines a discussion of both history and science. First, it examines the historical controversy surrounding the nature of light in the early nineteenth century, a controversy touched on by Richard Turnbull in his account of Thomas Young's lecture on light at the Royal Society in 1803. Young's double-slit experiment is then compared with that of Richard Feynman in the twentieth century, and the implications of wave-particle complementarity are discussed.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due first and foremost to the University of Chester for the generous award of a Gladstone Fellowship, without which this project would not have been possible.

Chimera would probably not have seen the light of day – and it would certainly not have been completed – without the help and support of my supervisor, Professor Alan Wall. It has been a great privilege to work with a writer of such proficiency, and Alan's expertise and enthusiasm have enriched all stages of this project. His guidance, critical judgement and patience with my failings, as well as his unwavering belief in the project's completion, have made all the difference.

My thanks are also due to my joint supervisor, Dr Emma Rees, for her continued support and for her extremely detailed and helpful feedback on my work.

It sounds unreasonably hyperbolic to say that the MA in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Chester was a life-changing experience; yet that was the case, and I therefore owe thanks, not only to Dr Ashley Chantler who set up and directed the programme, but to everyone who taught on it.

The English Department at Chester has provided a particularly encouraging and stimulating environment in which to study; I thank the two heads of department I have worked with, Dr Derek Alsop and Professor Chris Walsh, as well as every other member of staff, for their support and enthusiasm.

I am most grateful to Dr Goronwy Tudor-Jones, Reader in High-Energy Physics at the School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, for taking the time to read Chapter V of my commentary and for providing detailed and very helpful feedback.

My children, Phil and Becki Simon, have not only respected my need for long hours of solitude, but have supported me in innumerable ways. Nancy Coope, Sue Ogonovsky and Julie Hinchliffe have provided help and encouragement over the past four years, as have my parents Gwen and Sid Richardson. Thanks are due to all.

Last, though not least, is the debt to my husband Nick Simon, not only for providing constant encouragement and support and for valiantly coping with my obsessiveness, but also for endless conversations about quantum theory, espionage, narrative techniques or whatever I happened to be preoccupied with at the time. It is to him that this thesis is dedicated.

Preface

Every novelist must acknowledge the fact of intertextuality: that every book draws on many other books in complex, subtle and sometimes intangible ways. *Chimera* has undoubtedly been influenced, in ways that are difficult to define, by many years of reading and by many different types of text: works of fiction, both literary and popular; works of history and biography, of popular science, philosophy and religion. In addition, I have drawn consciously on numerous and disparate sources of information: literary, historical and scientific, both primary and secondary. These are discussed in my analytical commentary and listed in the accompanying bibliography.

Chimera also draws on my own experience, though this is implicit rather than explicit; the novel is less an expression of personal experience than an encoding (to some extent inadvertent) of it.

The first fifteen chapters of *Chimera* (Volume 1, Section 1) were submitted as part of my MA in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Chester. Since they are necessary for an understanding of the rest of the novel, they are here included, but they are not intended for assessment for the PhD. The completion of the novel has necessitated some minor changes to the early material. In order to maintain consistency and avoid confusion, the text presented here reflects those changes.

Chapters 16-88 (Volume 1, Section 2) form the part of the novel submitted for assessment for the PhD.

Chapter II of the analytical commentary ('Culture and Barbarism: *Doctor Faustus*, Modernism and the Rise of Fascism') was published in Issue 7 (May 2009) of *The International Literary Quarterly*.

Section 3:

Analytical Commentary

Introduction

The writing of a commentary on one's own novel is not unproblematic. First, there is the matter of critical distance. Most writers who have produced such commentaries – Umberto Eco, Thomas Mann and David Lodge, for example – have allowed a certain amount of time to elapse between the publication of the two works. A discussion of one's own work is perhaps less tricky once it has ceased to be uppermost in the mind; a critical distance is hard to achieve either during the writing or immediately after it. That difficulty notwithstanding, much of this commentary has been written alongside the novel it discusses. This was the result of a decision taken in the early stages of the project, with the aim of encouraging a fertile interplay between its various elements: the research, the writing of the novel and the writing of the commentary. Parts 1 to 4 of the first chapter, which contains a discussion of my own practice, were written towards the end of the writing process; only Part 5 was written after the completion of the novel. Thus there has been a constant overlap of these three elements, with several of the details of the research finding their way into both novel and commentary.

An analytical commentary of this sort has, moreover, to navigate between the forms of general author commentary (which, though interesting and instructive, often leans towards the anecdotal) and the conventional research thesis. It has features in common with both, but is necessarily different. As the formal critical engagement with the fictional work which makes up the nucleus of the PhD project, it must be more than a description for the general reader of the genesis and writing of the novel; yet it differs significantly from the standard research thesis in the fact that it forms part of a larger project and is not concentrated on a single topic.

The critical engagement with one's own novel, however, is not limited to, and does not start with, the writing of an analytical commentary upon it. It is an ongoing process which saturates the whole of the writing. This is an important assertion and deserves some emphasis. What is often described as 'creative' writing (a classification which might, for example, include prose fiction and poetry but not usually works of criticism or the essay) suffers from a troublesome misconception: it is not infrequently considered to be a nebulous process involving the right-brain and a certain gushing immediacy, the main focus of which is self-expression. That imagination and creativity are important factors in writing of all sorts is undeniable;

however, the assumption that they represent the totality of the process masks an important fact. All writing is both creative and critical. A novel is not necessarily more imaginative than an essay or less so than a lyrical poem; they are merely different forms. The converse is also true: a rigorous and ruthless critical scrutiny is indispensible to all writing. 'Creative' writing incorporates what Alan Wall has described as a 'destructive' element: 'When what we call creative writing is bad, it is frequently so not because it is not "creative" enough, but because it is not "destructive" enough'.[1] These are inseparable processes. In this sense, then, critical analysis is an integral part of the writing of the novel, and the analytical commentary to some extent merely formalizes and extends that process.

This commentary is slightly unorthodox in that it does not have as its primary focus an account of the writing of my novel, but rather is structured in a series of thematic clusters. The most relevant aspects of my writing practice, along with a discussion of the origins of *Chimera*, are dealt with in Chapter I, but I have also attempted to produce a commentary which reflects the research demands of the novel. Chapters II-V therefore examine the four main areas of research which informed the writing of *Chimera*; their diverse nature reflects its wide-ranging scope.

Chapter I discusses aspects of the writing of *Chimera* which I considered to be of particular relevance. I start by attempting to give some account of the novel's origins and the themes which underpin it; in particular I discuss the ways in which the metaphor of light relates to the content of the novel and how this is introduced into the narrative. Connected to this is a subject which preoccupied me for some time: the nature of opposites. Since this is central to the novel and its themes, it seemed to demand a short study of its own. Finally, I discuss the use in *Chimera* of pastiche and fragmentation, the presentation of different versions of events and some of the challenges of representing the past in narrative fiction.

It was decided that the initial focus for this project would be a study of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and the ways in which history is used in this polyphonic and demanding novel. This was followed by an analysis of another key text: John Banville's *The Untouchable*, a roman à clef which examines themes of espionage

---

[1] Alan Wall, 'Creative and Destructive Writing', in *Myth, Metaphor and Science* (Chester: Chester Academic Press, 2009), p. 46.

and doubleness and which also mixes history and fiction in an intricate way. These works – not typical specimens of the historical novel – are not obvious choices, yet they demonstrate ways in which a historical subject may be intelligently and imaginatively fictionalized. These two studies form Chapters II and III of this commentary.

It goes without saying that historical research has been a major component of this project, and it would be impracticable to relate all my findings. This research found a specific focus, however, in the study of the complex relationship between religious dissent and political radicalism in Britain at the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. An analysis of this relationship is given in Chapter IV.

During the writing of the novel, it became apparent that, if I wished to develop the metaphor of light in *Chimera*, a deeper understanding of wave-particle complementarity would be necessary. The resulting study, summarized in Chapter V, links the two double-slit experiments devised – over a century and a half apart – by Thomas Young and Richard Feynman. These experiments epitomize the revolutionary changes in the interpretation of the physical universe that took place between the two periods in which *Chimera* is set and which underpin the thematic use of light in the novel.

Chapter I

1. Origins

1.

If there was a single point at which *Chimera* began, it was in August 2005 in the parish church of Aberdaron in North Wales, in front of a display about an obscure Welsh eccentric. A small board briefly summarized the life of a local character who lived at the turn of the nineteenth century. Richard Roberts Jones (1780-1843) was a wandering polyglot who owned nothing but a harp, his books, which he carried about in his numerous pockets, and a horn with which he was said to be able to raise the devil. Known as 'Dic of Aberdaron' or simply 'Dic Aberdaron', Jones had little formal education but developed an extraordinary aptitude for languages, both ancient and modern; he was reputed to have been fluent in at least fourteen of them. He was, however, incapable of settling to any job. Not even teaching was a success; for, though suited to it by his linguistic ability, he was incapacitated by his 'ignorance of the customs and manners of society […] the difficulty of elucidating his meaning from collateral subjects [and] his total neglect of cleanliness in his person and dress'.[2] So he spent most of his life wandering through Wales, with occasional forays into England, 'learning new languages, translating foreign books and working upon ephemeral literary projects.' He was 'befriended by men of substance, who often put him up for a time, lent him books or money, or commissioned translations', but most of his relationships ended in quarrels of one sort or another.[3] His achievements were limited. His only completed work was a Welsh-Greek-Hebrew lexicon, and his extraordinary ability to learn, speak and read new languages seems to have been limited to the technical aspects of grammar and vocabulary; according to William Roscoe he was incapable of analyzing or contextualizing the works he could read and translate with such facility.[4]

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[2] William Roscoe, *Memoir of Richard Roberts Jones, of Aberdaron, in the County of Caernarvon, in North Wales; Exhibiting a Remarkable Instance of a Partial Power and Cultivation of Intellect* (London: T. Cadell, 1822), p. 34 <http://books.google.com/ books?id=kqUEAAAAYAAJ&oe=UTF-8> [accessed 08/06/10].

[3] Jan Morris, *The Matter of Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 189.

[4] Roscoe, *Memoir*, pp. 28-30.

It was only out of thoroughness that I glanced at this display, intending to move on to the much larger and more eye-catching one about Owen Glyndŵr; yet over an hour later, when the church closed and I was forced to leave, I was still mesmerized. It is still difficult to formulate exactly what it was about the character of Richard Jones that so fascinated me. At the time I perceived it as a momentous discovery; a fact which was both disconcerting and at odds with the apparent insignificance of the display and its subject. It had to do with discrepancy, as well as with a tangential relevance to my own life. I was preoccupied at the time with what Tilly Olsen calls the 'circumstances […] which oppose the needs of creation', circumstances discussed and analyzed at length in her book *Silences*: the conflicting demands of work and writing, the necessity of earning a living and the consequent relegation of intellectual and creative activities to the dregs of the day.[5] Dic Aberdaron appealed partly because his lifestyle cut across the expected norms; a drop-out *avant la lettre*, he repudiated the demands of class, financial necessity and society at large. A drastic recourse to the problem of earning a living, but an interesting one.

I did not discover R. S. Thomas's poem 'Dic Aberdaron' till much later; but it is noteworthy that Thomas highlights the discrepancy in Dic's character – the contrast between his tramp-like appearance and his intellectual status – as well as suggesting an enigmatic nature, one which both gives and holds back:

> Telling us so much
>
> it so much the more
> withholds. Who was he?
> The clothes a labourer's
>
> clothes, coarse trousers, torn
> jacket, a mole-skin
> cap. But that volume
> under the arm – a
>
> hedge-poet, a scholar
> by rushlight?[6]

---

[5] Tilly Olsen, *Silences* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2003), p. 17 and *passim*.
[6] R. S. Thomas, 'Dic Aberdaron', in *Welsh Airs* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 46.

This potential ambiguity is absent from Roscoe's *Memoir*, written while Jones was still alive, and which was intended as a means of raising subscriptions for his support.

It is also interesting, given the use I have made of similar devices in *Chimera*, that in his portrayal of Dic, Thomas uses images of light, hints at a recalcitrance and emphasizes Dic's relevance to, or connection with, the present:

> We look
> closer: no soil in
> that eye, but light
>
> generated by a
> mind charging itself
> at its own sources.
> Radiant soul, shrugging
>
> the type's ignorance
> off, he hastens towards
> us, to the future.[7]

'Richard Jones was in all respects a complete failure.' This sentence, which I copied into my notebook, encapsulated what was for me the most important discrepancy surrounding Jones: that between the intrinsic interest of his life and the way in which it might be judged against conventional notions of success, together with what appeared to be a somewhat hostile negativity on the part of the writer. However, coming some years later to the display's source material (the two-page summary of Jones's life in Jan Morris's *The Matter of Wales*), it appeared less judgemental than I had originally assumed. Significantly, Morris describes Jones as 'in all material respects a complete failure'.[8] It is impossible to say now whether I copied the quotation incorrectly or whether the crucial word 'material' had been dropped – deliberately or in error – from the text of the display. This would hardly be worth mentioning, except for the fact that it underlines matters of interpretation and point of view which later came to form one of the main elements of *Chimera*.

So was born the character of Richard Turnbull who was based, albeit very loosely, on Richard Roberts Jones. There were two reasons for my choice not to write

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[7] Thomas, *Welsh Airs*, p. 46.
[8] Morris, *Matter of Wales*, p. 188.

fictionalized biography. The first was pragmatic and had to do with the conflicting demands of research and deadlines: there simply was not enough time to research this obscure character and write the MA assignment which became the first three thousand words of *Chimera*. More importantly, it was less the biographical facts of Jones's life which I wanted to develop than the ideas it suggested. I took various traits from the original character, including his polyglottism, wandering and atheism (and his first name) as well as his most interesting characteristic: his departure from the social norms.

But when I began to write, I had only an impression of the character; he had no voice. The voicing of a work of fiction is perhaps one of its most important aspects; certainly I was incapable of getting the story off the ground before I had located its narrative voice – and there were many false starts. I tried third-person narratives, both limited and omniscient, as well as a first-person account in which Richard Turnbull related his own exploits; but these early sketches were all problematic. Not only did they fail to produce the voice I wanted, but they were reminiscent of the sort of historical fiction I certainly did not want to write: popular historical novels such as those of Catherine Cookson or Georgette Heyer. Perhaps worse, they resembled in places a pastiche of this type of traditional historical novel.

It was only when I hit upon the expedient of telling the story from several different and conflicting viewpoints that it began to take shape. I am not sure how I arrived at this solution; it was an outcome of that trial-and-error process, a serendipity which arose out of endless experimentation. (It is worth emphasizing the usefulness of this haphazard and tentative practice in the early stages of a project. It is sometimes only by putting pen to paper and playing with various styles and scenarios – a time-consuming and seemingly wasteful process – that a story or a voice emerges.)

But ideas seldom arise out of nothing, and two historical novels can be singled out as major influences here. Set in Oxford in the 1660s, Iain Pears's *An Instance of the Fingerpost* (which I had read several years before) consists of four linked first-person narratives, each of which tells the story of Sarah Blundy, and the murder of which she is accused, from a different point of view. Truth – both historical and forensic – emerges from this accumulation of biased, overlapping and sometimes conflicting accounts. The title of this novel refers to Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620), a work which was instrumental in the development of the scientific

method; and here science, history, religion and forensics are combined around what Bacon called 'categories of evidence', most of which are flawed:

> None [of the categories of evidence] conveys certainty, he decides, a conclusion which (one might think) would be devastating for scientists and lawyers alike: historians and theologians have learned to live with this […]. For without certainty what is science except glorified guesswork? And without the conviction of certainty, total and absolute, how can we ever hang anyone with an easy conscience? […] But Lord Bacon did not despair, and claimed one instance of a fingerpost which points in one direction only, and allows of no other possibility. The perfectly independent eye-witness, who has nothing to gain from his revelation […]: this is the nearest we can get to a reliable witness and his testimony may be said to be conclusive, overwhelming all lesser forms. I claim here that status.[9]

So writes the antiquarian Anthony Wood, the last of the novel's four narrators. This preoccupation with ascertaining the facts of an obscure historical event, together with the themes of science and religion, would become central to *Chimera*; at the time they were elements in a novel which I found totally compelling.

Much later, while I was struggling to find a voice for my own narrative, I chanced upon Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. This novel, which also features a murder investigation, uses several layers of narrative: a third-person omniscient narrator; a third-person limited voice which follows the protagonist Elizabeth Cree; Cree's own first-person narration; the diary of her husband John (which is actually a forgery written by Cree); and scenes from Cree's trial for the murder of her husband. I did not record in my notebook exactly when I decided to experiment with a similar layering of narratives for my own piece, but it was a crucial decision. Only once I had abandoned a unified point of view and started to tell the historical story through its protagonists' first-person narratives did it become possible to write it.

The fragmentation of the narrative achieved by this technique was perhaps its most significant aspect. In the first instance this was a practical solution to a problem; but at the same time it reflected my preoccupation with disjunction and fragmentation, with the contradictory impulses of modern culture in which the notion of multiple 'truths' jostles uncomfortably with that of a monolithic 'truth'. A verse of

[9] Iain Pears, *An Instance of the Fingerpost* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 596.

Richard F. Burton, linking fragmentation and truth, was significant here (as was the conjunction between truth and the mirror):

> Truth is the shattered mirror,
> Strown in myriad bits, while each
> Believes his little bit the whole to own.[10]

The final major decision taken in the early stages of the writing was to tell the story on two time planes, so that the historical plot becomes the object of the modern-day protagonists' research. Thomas Mann found that the use of a dual time-frame in *Doctor Faustus* (an early instance of this technique) solved a problem of narration; he used it 'in order to achieve a certain humorous leavening of the sombre material and to make its horrors bearable to myself as well as to the reader'; but also so as 'not to write a novel but a biography'.[11] It enabled him to distance himself and his sophisticated authorial voice from the work, to filter the narration through the voice of another, the naïve and kindly Serenus Zeitblom.[12] My own reasons for using a dual time-frame were different in nature, but the recourse similarly resolved problems of narration. The splitting of the novel into historical and modern narratives emphasizes the subjective nature of the historical narrative (it is a miscellany of documents not unified by a single authorial voice) and raises questions surrounding the nature of textual evidence: its discovery and interpretation, how it influences our view of history, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity, the interplay between 'scientific' and 'literary' techniques in the interpretation of historical documents. At the same time, it enabled a non-chronological sequencing of the historical plot, so that the presentation of the historical documents reflects the order of their discovery rather than the order of events, or the order in which the documents were written. And, as in *Doctor Faustus*, the juxtaposition of historical and modern narratives means that each comments on and reflects the other without the need for authorial comment. There is a counterpoint in *Chimera* between the events, conditions and preoccupations of the historical period and those of the present day. For example, Julia Dalton's first appearance in the novel, in Chapter 2,

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[10] Richard F. Burton, *The Kasidah of Haji Abdu El-Yezdi* (1880), Project Gutenberg <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/8kasi10.txt> [accessed 01/06/2010] (canto VI).
[11] Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 28.
[12] This is discussed more fully in Chapter II, 'Culture and Barbarism'.

immediately follows Elizabeth Fitzroy's letters; the contrast between the situations and the life-experience of these two women is immediately apparent, merely through their proximity.

2.

In his *Journal des faux-monnayeurs* (*Journal of The Counterfeiters*) André Gide acknowledged himself incapable of maintaining a single position in a discussion. 'C'est la pensée, l'émotion d'autrui qui m'habite; […]. J'abondonne aussitôt *mon* point de vue,' he wrote. The upshot of this for his writing was that

> il m'est certainement plus aisé de faire parler un personnage, que de m'exprimer en mon nom propre; […] j'oublie qui je suis, si tant est que je l'aie jamais su. Je deviens l'autre. (Ils cherchent à savoir mon opinion. Mon opinion, je n'en ai cure, je ne suis plus quelqu'un, mais plusieurs.)[13]

Gide is not talking here of a facile use of his characters to express his own ideas; rather of a dramatization of many perspectives through a multiplicity of characters, a phenomenon which Karl Miller would construe as an aspect of duality. In his book *Doubles*, Miller identifies two overlapping manifestations of duality. It may be binary – a union or a dissonance of opposites (the doppelgänger, the double life, Jekyll and Hyde, for example) – but it can also encompass a multiplicity of opposites or alternatives. Miller calls this latter alternative 'Proteus' and connects it with what Keats called 'negative capability': 'Duality includes […] both negative capability and the duplicity of the double life. Its fictions suggest that a man may have two characters, or twelve, and that character is a chameleon or a chimera.'[14] Duality may take many forms, in life as in fiction: secrecy, spying, acting, forgery, the divergence between private and public personae, amongst others, and all of these are relevant to *Chimera*. Although this was not initially a conscious decision but developed from the early writing, duality came to pervade the novel. Richard Turnbull, as we have seen, grew out of discrepancy. But as the work developed I found that most of my other protagonists too were characterized by duality of one sort or another.

---

[13] André Gide, *Journal des faux-monnayeurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp.76-77.
[14] Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 38.

The layering of narrative fragments in *Chimera*, as well as the weaving between past and present, enables a formal exploration of these concepts of discrepancy, duality and opposition. The historical documents form an ironic account not unified by a single point of view: the trial of Henri de Saint-Gilles, Richard Turnbull's writings, Montagu's memoir, John Price's letters, the official documents in the British Library, portray the events of the novel from different perspectives. This is further complicated by the fact that Richard Turnbull's writings (which form the main account in the novel) are fragmented and transitory and cannot be said to present a single view of events or even to reflect a unitary personality. Though Julia Dalton comes to a tentative conclusion regarding the events she investigates, she has to acknowledge that this is not a watertight case. The ironic viewpoint is also a feature of the present-day narratives. Although use is here made of a third-person voice, it is a limited one which relies heavily on the free-indirect style; in other words the authorial voice, and any authority which might accompany it, is diffused. The author is on the one hand absent from the work except as an ordering intelligence, or on the other dispersed throughout it. I am nowhere and everywhere. Like Mann, I have distanced my own voice from the work; like Gide, I have given voice to many characters. (I must admit, however, that although, like Gide, I prefer to explore a multiplicity of viewpoints, my use of this technique in *Chimera* came about, at least in part, for a reason very different from that of Mann: it was a result, less of a need to suppress a strong authorial voice than of a lack of confidence in my ability and my voice as an author.)

3.

The first three thousand words of *Chimera*[15] were written without reference to the quantum theory of light. It was not until I was thinking about the next section of the novel that the first mention of this concept occurs in my notebook. I had made a diagram of the themes of *Chimera*, among which were: 'disguise/masks, duality/duplicity, illusion, self-delusion, the equivocal nature of people, the past, evidence'. In March 2006, during an evening of waiting in A and E, I was struck by

[15] As printed in *Chimera* (MA): Volume I, Chapters 1-3.

the opposition of the ordinary, mundane world of minor and curable injury and that of death and bereavement. Sitting opposite a rack of leaflets which ranged from 'How to deal with sprains' to 'Bereavement – what next?' I wrote in my notebook: 'Two worlds. Like the nature of light – one thing at right angles to another'. In my mind was the standard diagram of light as an electromagnetic wave, in which the electric and magnetic fields are perpendicular to each other.[16] That idea developed into: 'Consider light as a theme', under which I listed various aspects of light which could be relevant to *Chimera*. Among them was the concept of wave-particle complementarity, one which promised to be fruitful as a metaphor in a work which had increasingly to do with duality. Under that I wrote, 'What was the nature of scientific thought on light in 1812?' It was a happy coincidence that Thomas Young's controversial work on light fell during the period in which Richard Turnbull was in London, and I introduced Young's 1803 lecture at the Royal Society into *Chimera* in the form of a letter written by Turnbull.

This letter evolved with the writing of the novel, a fact which demonstrates how an element of the work may develop in significance as the work progresses. In its original form (pp. 29-30, *Chimera* MA) it contains only a very brief description of Young's 1803 lecture and a reference to the 'either/or' debate over the nature of light which was taking place at the time; this was meant to introduce the subject of light in such a way that it functioned not only metaphorically but as part of the novel's content. I later gave it added significance by having Peter Marchmont copy it as part of his handwriting practice in preparation for the creation of his forgery.

After further research on the nature of light, I expanded the fragment which in Chapter 7 is unfinished (Marchmont is interrupted in his reading of it) to include more of Richard Turnbull's thoughts and comments on the lecture and on the wave theory of light (pp. 228-230). It then became a pivotal document in Julia Dalton's analysis of Richard Turnbull in terms of the 'both/and' paradigm of the quantum theory of light in Chapter 43. At the same time I developed its significance as a forgery: in the form in which Dalton sees it, it is a photocopy of Marchmont's copy, his final dry run for the forged notebook, a forgery of an authentic document. Thus the themes of light and duality are intertwined with those of forgery and authenticity.

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[16] See for example Andrew Robinson, *The Last Man Who Knew Everything: Thomas Young, the Anonymous Polymath Who Proved Newton Wrong, Explained How We See, Cured the Sick, and Deciphered the Rosetta Stone, Among Other Feats of Genius* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), p. 175.

4.

Many antecedents had led me to this point and it would be tedious to detail them all. Certainly duality had preoccupied me for a long time. Instances of duality in literature are many and disparate, and a variety of texts had been influential. I give here just a few examples. Catullus's two-line poem 'Odi et amo' expresses the contradictory impulses of love, its tendency to hatred; a phenomenon which, though he cannot explain it, torments him: 'Odi et amo. quare [*sic*] id faciam, fortasse requiris?/nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.'[17] The New Testament is full of paradoxes, for example that in Matthew 16.25: 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it'; those of Saint Paul derive to some extent from Plato. And in Brecht's play *The Good Person of Szechwan*, the protagonist, the kindly prostitute Shen-Te, finds that the only way to cope with the demands made on her is to duplicate herself in the tough alter ego of Shui-Ta.[18] But two influences were particularly significant: the overlapping expressions of late seventeenth-century Jansenist theology in France as found in Pascal's *Pensées* and the tragedies of Racine.

The Racinian tragic heroine is torn between two mutually-exclusive desires. For Phèdre these are love and purity: her illicit love for her stepson Hippolyte conflicts with her desire for a virtuous life. Fulfilment can derive only from the satisfaction of both these mutually-exclusive impulses; the essence of Racine's tragic vision is that a 'both/and' is necessary, whereas only an 'either/or' is available. Phèdre is therefore doomed, balanced precariously between irreconcilable alternatives; an impasse which is underpinned in the play by images of light and dark. Granddaughter of the sun, she is forced to flee the light of day – 'Je me cachais au jour, je fuyais la lumière,' she says; an expression which also stands for the necessary dissimulation caused by her situation – and seek out 'la nuit infernale'.[19]

In Pascal's *Pensées*, an apology for the Christian faith aimed at the sophisticated, intelligent libertine of the late seventeenth century, man's nature and the human condition are seen to be characterized by opposition and duality; this starts from, but

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[17] *The Poems of Catullus*, ed. and trans. by Guy Lee (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 130-31. ('I hate and I love. Perhaps you ask why. I don't know, but I feel it and I am in agony.')
[18] Bertolt Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1985).
[19] Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, IV. 6. 1242, 1277, in *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), pp. 260-61.

goes beyond, the traditional Christian dichotomies of body and soul, flesh and spirit. Man is full of 'contrariétés', or contradictions (such as that of 'instinct et raison, marques de deux natures')[20] and the human condition is characterized by both grandeur and misery. 'Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l'homme? quelle [*sic*] nouveauté, quel monstre, quel chaos, quel sujet de contradictions, quel prodige? […] N'est-il donc pas clair comme le jour que la condition de l'homme est double?'[21] For Pascal, this dichotomy can be resolved only through faith in God; there is then a further contrast in the *Pensées*, between the 'félicité de l'homme avec Dieu' and the 'misère de l'homme sans Dieu'.[22] This latter state we might connect with that depicted so poignantly in the tragedies of Racine.

The original concept of the chimera, in Greek mythology, incorporates ideas of mixture and monstrosity: the chimera was a tripartite animal which, in most depictions, had the head of a lion, the body of a goat and the tail of a serpent.[23] In English the word came to mean a phantasm or a bogy, and by the late sixteenth century it had developed its commonly used figurative sense of 'wild fancy' or 'unfounded conception' (*OED*). All these concepts – mixture, monstrosity, illusion – are central to *Chimera*.

There is yet another duality in the *Pensées* in that the work contains a dialogue, both implicit and explicit, with its intended reader. The famous wager, for example, so often misinterpreted, is an ironic and dialogic text in which Pascal (in a process not unlike that of fiction) enters the mind of his intended reader: the gambling libertine such as Pascal had been before his conversion to Christianity in 1654. The language of the card table and the roulette wheel is used to build up a statistical 'proof' of the wisdom of faith, with the libertine's objections given voice in the text and subsequently answered.

The form of the *Pensées* as well as their content finds an echo in *Chimera*. Left unfinished at Pascal's death, the work is usually published as a collection of fragments of varying length, a complex miscellany of notes towards the projected apology, complete with Pascal's provisional structure, cross-referencing and repetitions. As many commentators have pointed out, the fragmented and provisional

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[20] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Louis Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 513.
[21] Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 515.
[22] Pascal, *Pensées*, *passim*; see for example p. 501.
[23] 'Chimera', *Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008) [on CD].

nature of this work frees it from the linearity of ordinary discursive prose, allowing a greater insight into both its content and its possible structure (or structures). A similar advantage is conferred by the fragmentation of the historical accounts in *Chimera*: events are seen through several optics, to be pieced together by the reader as by the twenty-first-century protagonists.

Other, more recent, influences also played a part, of which one is worth singling out. The score marking for Arvo Pärt's piano solo *Für Alina* reads: 'Calm, exalted, listening to one's inner self.'[24] The term 'inner self' implies a duality within what is commonly perceived as a singularity; and the CD (*Alina*) on which this piece is found stands out in memory because several instances of duality are here intertwined with the metaphoric use of light. The disc contains only two pieces, performed alternately in slightly differing versions. In the second composition, the duet *Spiegel im Spiegel*, the musical themes are bounced back and forth between violin (or cello) and piano; the metaphor of the piece's title draws on the fact that when plane mirrors are placed opposite each other (the 'mirror in a mirror') an infinity of images is produced, bouncing back and forth from one to the other. A duality here produces a plurality. But duality also exists in the interplay between music and listener, to express which Pärt uses a second image, that of the prism: 'I could compare my music to white light which contains all colours. Only a prism can divide the colours and make them appear; this prism could be the spirit of the listener.'[25] Hermann Conen writes of 'the white light of the pure triad' (the piano part of *Spiegel im Spiegel* consists of broken chords based on the triad) and develops Pärt's metaphor of the prism to suggest a double role for the listener: first, to separate the white light of the music into its constituent colours, and then to act as a second prism which reconstitutes the separate colours into white light.[26]

Although none of these sources were conscious in my mind when I started to write (I had even forgotten Pascal's use of the word 'chimera' to describe the nature of man) they formed a background to the writing, a fund of concepts and images which informed the creative process.

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[24] Hermann Conen, 'White Light', trans. by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart in sleeve notes to Arvo Pärt, *Alina* (ECM, 1591 449 958-2, 1999), [n.p.].
[25] Conen, 'White Light'.
[26] Conen, 'White Light'.

2. The Fictional Possibilities of Quantum Ambiguity

As a metaphor, wave-particle complementarity has some interesting possibilities. If in the early nineteenth century light was perceived to be either a wave or a particle, in the early twenty-first century we live with the insights of the quantum revolution which took place at the beginning of the twentieth. Julia Dalton is a scientifically literate researcher whose insight is informed by the 'both/and' paradigm of wave-particle complementarity. So, although she is faced with oppositional readings of Richard Turnbull, her investigations come to centre on an exploration of what it might mean for him to have been 'both/and' rather than 'either/or'.

A traditional 'either/or' interpretation might suggest that Turnbull was a radical who turned government spycatcher for pragmatic reasons, such as to escape detection; or that he might have progressed from early radicalism to later conservatism, as so many did, especially after the French Terror (Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey spring to mind). But this notion might be superseded by a more complex one: Dalton's twenty-first-century insight is that Richard Turnbull, like light, was not one thing or another, but both, depending on which questions she asks of the historical record (always subject to interpretation) and which questions history asked of Turnbull. But what exactly might it mean in actual terms for Richard Turnbull to have been 'both/and' rather than 'either/or'? This is a complex metaphor and it is important to distinguish its implications.

First it is necessary to set aside the problem of historical evidence, its incompleteness and uncertainty. This is a significant topic in *Chimera* and one which intersects the novel's theme of ambiguity; but it is a different matter. Julia Dalton and Peter Marchmont are dealing with an incomplete set of documents written in the first person by obscure historical characters not yet studied by other scholars; the only exceptions to this are two works briefly quoted in the novel: the memoir of Richard Turnbull written by his friend Montagu in 1848 and William Hunter's negative essay on Turnbull written a century later, in 1958. (The latter I based on my interpretation of Morris's account of Richard Jones, quoted earlier; Montagu's *Memoir*, interestingly, bears a passing resemblance to Roscoe's *Memoir of Richard Roberts Jones*, although most of *Chimera* had been written before I came across this work.) The problems of interpretation are many, and tricky; and the matter is complicated by the fact that Marchmont's modus operandi is both less impartial than

Dalton's and is defined by the paradigm of 'either/or' rather than by that of 'both/and'.

Feynman's double-slit experiment shows that all objects have both wave and particle properties; an accurate description of matter has to take into account both these mutually exclusive attributes. And Dalton considers the possibility that an accurate description of Richard Turnbull might have to incorporate the notion that he was both loyal subject and traitor. There are several ways in which this might be possible.

First, Turnbull's notebook hints, and the external evidence discovered by Dalton at the British Library shows, that Turnbull was working simultaneously for the British government and the radical cause. There is evidence (in Turnbull's journals and letters) of the direction in which his primary allegiance lies, but these first-person accounts might be considered unreliable.

'Mr Turnbull, you are either a loyal subject or a traitor,' asks the counsel for the defence in the trial of Henri de Saint-Gilles. 'There is no middle ground. Which is it?' (p. 348). Yet it could be argued that the notion of 'traitor' not only contains a middle ground, but is surrounded by ambiguity. On the surface this word has an unambiguous and generally accepted meaning: 'one who is false to his allegiance to his sovereign or to the government of his country' (*OED*); it is a word which elicits unequivocal expressions of outrage or anger. But delve deeper and the concept may become fuzzy; it is dependent on variables such as place or political ideology. Not only can the same man who is a traitor in England in 1793 become, as Richard Turnbull points out, a loyal subject in France after a short sea-crossing (p. 150), but the term 'traitor' might also be used to describe those Church-and-King loyalists who turned to repressive measures in order to preserve an unjust status quo. This is not just a play with words; it is an ambiguity exemplified in the political events of the day. After the Peterloo massacre in Manchester in 1819, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, expressed the government's view that the meeting in St Peter's Fields was 'an overt act of treason' (large political gatherings – even peaceful and orderly ones such as this – were banned).[27] But the next year Arthur Thistlewood, at his trial for his part in the Cato Street conspiracy, echoed the thoughts of many when he commented

[27] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 750.

of Peterloo that 'high treason was committed against the people at Manchester'.[28] Two years earlier Jonathan Wooler, in his radical periodical *Black Dwarf*, had maintained that the traditional practice of giving out sinecures, together with the abolition of habeas corpus, constituted acts of treason by the government; an accusation which earned him an arrest for seditious libel.[29] This notion finds a counterpart in the motivation of the Cambridge spies, for whom – at least in the early days – Communism seemed to be the answer, not only to Fascist domination in Europe but also to the injustices of the British status quo. Alan Bennett, in the introduction to *Single Spies*, his plays about Guy Burgess (*An Englishman Abroad*) and Antony Blunt (*A Question of Attribution*) makes a similar point; writing of the Government's withholding of information about the Windscale disaster in 1957 he comments:

> It suits governments to make treachery the crime of crimes […] but to conceal information can be as culpable as to betray it. […] Were the politicians and civil servants responsible for this [withholding of information] less culpable than our Cambridge villains? Because for the spies it can at least be said that they were risking their own skins whereas the politicians were risking someone else's.[30]

Here we approach not just a linguistic ambiguity, but a conceptual one too. We may be hard-wired to see things in terms of 'either/or', but reality is perhaps often better described by 'both/and'.

Finally, there is a sense in which Richard Turnbull encapsulates opposing and contradictory features. He is both betrayer and betrayed, as the story reveals; but more importantly, he is a person for whom one persona is not enough. Like the actor and the spy, he takes on a variety of subtle disguises. These are less the pragmatic cloak-and-dagger concealments of popular fiction than an inevitable outworking of his personality – or personalities. Thus, for example, immediately after being recruited as an informer for the radical cause, he recruits himself on the government side (pp. 350-51, p. 361). The double game is for him a *sine qua non*.

All this makes it difficult for Dalton to tell 'which side he was really on' (pp. 275, 283, 362). Depending on which evidence is looked at, or how it is looked at,

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[28] Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 774.
[29] Ben Wilson, *The Laughter of Triumph: William Hone and the Fight For the Free Press* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 202.
[30] Alan Bennett, *Plays: Two* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. x-xi.

Turnbull appears to be government man or radical, loyal subject or traitor. Yet in the real world this is a scenario which makes little sense; one would expect Turnbull, like Schrödinger's cat, to have been – at least in some sense – one thing or another. Dalton tentatively comes to the conclusion that he was a radical who worked underground as a government man (to avoid detection and obtain information useful to the radical cause); but it is just possible, if the evidence is looked at in a different way, that the situation may have been reversed and Turnbull a government man masquerading as a radical.

Turnbull's is a personality which because of its multivalence can only account for itself in fragments; provisional, impermanent and sometimes contradictory, he reflects in himself the fragmented nature of *Chimera*. His failure to complete the coherent and single account of his life has less to do with his procrastination and his inability to finish a task than with his lack of a consistent or unitary viewpoint. He is protean, a man of many personae.

3. Narrative Strategies

Though not a scholarly form, the novel is elastic enough to accommodate the expression of ideas of many sorts. But the quantum theory of light is one of the most recondite of concepts; how then can it be incorporated into a work of creative fiction without that work becoming intolerably recondite itself? In *Chimera*, wave-particle complementarity is used as an underpinning metaphor; it thus pervades the work and demands of its reader at least a modicum of understanding. This gives rise to certain problems. The inclusion and the placing of scientific information need to be handled with care; not only do the facts have to be accurate, but they must be presented in such a way that they enhance the narrative rather than detracting from it. I have therefore tried to insinuate these concepts subtly and obliquely into *Chimera*, using various narrative techniques to emphasize the metaphor of light: the representation of opposition and duality in characters and situations; allusions to the theme of light; an explicit discussion of wave-particle complementarity. Finally, the nature of the novel itself reflects its theme of duality.

1.

Chimera is punctuated by the twenty-one sections of the trial of Henri de Saint-Gilles. These sections are detached from the main narrative; they make up the (fictitious) transcript of Saint-Gilles's Newgate trial, available to both Julia Dalton and Peter Marchmont. As well as providing the generally-accepted 'historical' view of the events dealt with in the novel, the trial – through its adversarial nature and its possible verdicts, guilty or not guilty – is a formal representation of the 'either/or' paradigm. In fact, the reader knows from the beginning of the novel that Saint-Gilles was found guilty; this removes any suspense regarding the outcome of the trial and emphasizes the mutually-exclusive nature of these alternatives. The accuracy of the verdict, however, is brought into doubt during the course of the novel; it is not until the end that the reader is given a probable account of the facts, and much of the narrative also points to a grey area between the alternatives 'guilty' and 'not guilty'. (It has to be said that these nuances were not present in the original conception of *Chimera*, but developed with it. Originally, Saint-Gilles's innocence was merely a factor in Peter Marchmont's delusion. It was only later, as the themes of uncertainty and duality took on greater significance, that Saint-Gilles's status became more uncertain.)

'Duality,' writes Karl Miller, 'is a word which means that there are two of something, and which has also meant that some one thing or person is to be perceived as two.'[31] Although in *Chimera* the major exposition of duality is through Richard Turnbull's divided personality, duality is also portrayed through its other characters; this includes both oppositional contrasts between characters and divisions and dualities within characters.

Dalton and Marchmont are research rivals, both investigating the same historical events from opposite points of view; though wary of each other, they are to some extent dependent on each other for material. More significantly, they are contrary in outlook and in temperament. Although each would express the aim of their research as an engagement with the truth, their notions of that truth and their means of investigating it are divergent. Marchmont's starting-point is the revealed truth of the ghost's revelations, the pre-determined conclusion of Saint-Gilles's innocence and

[31] Miller, *Doubles*, p. 21.

Turnbull's treachery; a version of events which is diametrically opposed to the apparent historical facts revealed in the trial. Convinced of the inerrancy of the ghost's account, Marchmont constructs arguments to discredit anything which does not fit his theory, such as the document given him by Dalton which implies that Saint-Gilles was a champion of the French Revolution in 1793 (p. 202).

Contrasted with Marchmont's reliance on 'the eyes of the soul, of insight, of a quasi-divine Sophia into which he had been initiated' (p. 110) is Dalton's insistence on the supremacy of evidence. However, although her view of history is more 'scientific' – she believes in forming conclusions or hypotheses based on established facts – and although she considers the possibility that Turnbull was in some sense a 'both/and' rather than an 'either/or', she is nonetheless influenced by her own prejudices and preconceptions. Initially resistant to the idea that Richard Turnbull could have been a French spy, she is also suspicious of Marchmont because he is 'creepy and possibly delusional' (p. 196); the fact that this judgement is largely true does not alter the fact that it is instinctive rather than rational.

In addition, both Marchmont and Dalton possess an intrinsic duality. Marchmont, the cheery, urbane and successful proprietor of the Blue Teapot, is also the sly and secretive man driven by his reverence for his ancestor and whose most valid activity in his own eyes involves the creation of a forgery to spread what he sees as the truth. These two sides of Marchmont find a metonymic expression in his physical environment: by day he serves in the Blue Teapot and at night, after a transition period in the in-between area of his private living quarters, he enters his windowless attic; here, in a replica of an early nineteenth-century room, he communes with Saint-Gilles's ghost and concocts his forgery. Saint-Gilles is Marchmont's alter ego; a being he has constructed, from some rather tenuous historical facts, as an other, but who is in fact a projection of himself (pp. 53-54, *Chimera* MA).

Dalton, too, though she is calm, ambitious and determined, is increasingly aware, as the novel progresses and her research increases in complexity, of another aspect to her personality. Despite her aversion for 'spiritual experiences', she has a perplexing vision at the château Ruffec in which she sees Richard Turnbull and the Saint-Gilles sisters walking down the linden alley (pp. 116-17); in a recurring dream she dances the sarabande with an unknown masked man (pp. 147-48). This dream contains three elements of duality: it takes place in a mirrored hall; it points to the murky depths of the unconscious, and it links Dalton with a shadowy man who may be either Richard

Turnbull or Mathias Fournier, both of whom are to some extent problematic elements in her life and whom, to some extent, she conflates.

The sarabande dream also counterpoints, and displaces, Dalton's other recurring dream: that of the dead baby who, she assumes, is the twin sister who died at birth. The fact that she is the survivor of a pair of twins serves to reinforce the idea of doubling.

Both Elizabeth Fitzroy and Manon de Saint-Gilles look to a past in which Richard Turnbull figured, ironically unaware not only of his relationships with other women but of his incapacity to lead a settled life. 'I am outwardly a calm and contented schoolmistress of middling age,' writes Elizabeth; 'but locked inside, hid from view, a turbulent chaos – this second more surely I than the other, the impostor' (p. 11, *Chimera* MA). Manon and Elizabeth are contrasted: whereas Elizabeth makes the most of limited opportunities, Manon rails against her fate and achieves little except to bring about the rupture between Richard Turnbull and her sister Rosine. A character of many oppositions, Manon is desperate to escape the constrictions of her present life, yet lacks the courage or the impetus to do so. She is painfully and resentfully aware of the discrepancy between what she wants and what society wants of her, between the inner and the outer selves. A further opposition – between the youthful and the middle-aged Manon – occurs in her later diary, written in 1819. In this diary she strives to come to terms with the past and with the conditions of her life. But writing the past can also mean rewriting it and, like Richard Turnbull, Manon in the later diary not only discovers, or uncovers, but to some extent reinvents, herself.

Many upper-class men of the Regency period lived a double life, straddling opposing codes of social behaviour: those of genteel domesticity and libertine manliness.[32] The essay 'Conventicles and Politics' (Chapter IV) discusses some of the stark oppositions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: wealth and poverty; power and disenfranchisement; established religion and dissent. Every period has its contrasts and its ironies, and although these dualities are on the one hand no more than a reflection of the process of research – look at anything in enough detail and it loses its unitiariness – they are, as well as being central to

[32] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), p. 111.

Chimera's themes of duality and ambiguity, nonetheless real dichotomies which characterized the age. It is also interesting to note that during this historical period, there was a growing awareness of false political and religious dichotomies, such as the idea that the lower classes were somehow of a different nature from the ruling classes and therefore innately unfit to take part in government.[33] Richard Turnbull spans these debates by his refusal to act according to convention and his crossing of social boundaries, and he comments on them in his journals and letters. 'Are we not all men,' he writes;

> formed of the same stuff, and the wide differences between us only the result of the forces and conditions with which Nature has acted upon us? Like diamond and coal which, as Mr Davy has shown, are essentially the same. (p. 220)

There is of course an added irony here, in that Turnbull ignores the false dichotomy surrounding the nature and role of women. Although his ideas are in many ways proleptic of the modern age, and although he does admit that women can be men's equals, I have stopped short of making him an out-and-out egalitarian such as Godwin or Condorcet. If I had to explain this, which is difficult as the character has in some measure appeared and developed autonomously, I would say that it roots him in his age.

2.

In Peter Marchmont's attic study, the only light is that of candles. On his part this is a deliberate anachronism, so that he might enter as closely as possible into the historical period of his friend and ancestor; on mine it is a means of introducing into the novel one of a series of reminders of the theme of light. These take the form of leitmotifs and allusions, ranging from simple references to light and to phenomena and devices which make use of it (sunshine, lightning, lenses) to more complex metaphors and symbols.

Chimera is set at what may be described as the junction of the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, and the notion of 'enlightenment' pervades the novel, not only in its historical sense, but in the sense of historical documents or evidence coming to

[33] See for example Thompson, *English Working Class*, ch. 16; Wilson, *Laughter of Triumph*, ch. 10.

light; it is on this notion that the plot of *Chimera* rests. Peter Marchmont's statement that 'a notebook has come to light' (p. 200) both reinforces and inverts this idea, since he is here referring to his forgery, a document which, although he is convinced that it expresses the truth and will therefore elucidate, is in fact an obfuscation.

Richard Turnbull's involvement in the early nineteenth-century debate on the nature of light has already been discussed. There is a further reference to this debate in Turnbull's 1812 journal, when he muses on the nature of waves and light after a sea-crossing to France. 'A strange phenomenon, the wave; for, although it travels from one place to another, the medium through which it travels remains in the same place, being merely agitated up and down,' he writes (p. 339). And then:

> The *Christabel*, leaving Dover on 20th October, 1812, sailed upon the waves and arrived in Calais six hours later; unseen inside her the letters which Cptn. Barclay was to deposit with the harbour-master. The packet of letters, displaced from one locus to another, travelled in the manner of Newton's light – a corpuscle hidden in the captain's strong-box. (p. 340)

These are no more than asides in a narrative which deals with Turnbull's hunt for the spy and his investigation of Ezekiel Juggins; but they act as a reminder of wave-particle complementarity and of its relationship to the novel's themes of spying and duplicity. My intention here, as with all such references, is, as Mann does in *Doctor Faustus*, to indicate the concept without labouring it.

Religious dissent was intricately linked with political radicalism in the period in which *Chimera* is set.[34] Christianity carries its own metaphor of light (as well as its own notions of duality and paradox); but to Turnbull, an atheist who admires Paine and Godwin and whose early life has been shadowed by the madcap religion of Ezekiel Juggins, this has become more of a 'murky darkness' (pp. 280, 284).

Mirrors figure throughout *Chimera,* reinforcing the ideas of both light and doubleness. After recovering from a long and near-fatal illness in 1823, Turnbull looks at his reflection; here the mirror brings together the themes of light and duality, together with a passing reference to the ideas of the doppelgänger and the chimera:

> But it seemed as if I were staring another man in the face – one who was at the same time myself and not myself – as if this were not a glass I looked at, but another world,

[34] This is discussed in Chapter IV, 'Conventicles and Politics'.

> in which that other I existed as I in this, but reversed. […]. That man in the glass a stranger to me; I knew him and knew him not. – What is a reflexion? The play of light on a silvered surface, the image which enters the eye, the depth created by the mind on a plane. But the man I saw – a monster. Less a harbinger of death, than a reminder of past transgressions. (p. 220)

In this passage attention is drawn to the mirror and the ideas which underlie it; in contrast, at other points in the novel mirrors are mentioned in passing. Julia Dalton thinks about her sarabande dream (in which mirrors feature) while brushing her teeth and looking at her face in the mirror (p. 194-95); Manon de Saint-Gilles twice describes draping her mirror with fabric in order to avoid seeing her reflection (pp. 72, 248).

Other references to light and to optical devices intensify this effect. It is through a makeshift lens – the bottom of an upturned wine-glass – that Saint-Gilles first appears to Peter Marchmont in the newly-converted attic of the Blue Teapot (p. 40-41, *Chimera* MA). Richard Turnbull compares the act of writing to viewing an event through a distorting lens:

> The act of writing is merely a lens upon that time, which, while we want it to represent with accuracy, yet distorts; a phantasmagoria of people and places which once existed but which now are mere tricks of a lantern, spectres made with lights upon a wall. (p. 301)

And he makes a couple of references to stars he has observed. His comment on the double star Algol (Beta Persei) exemplifies the use of such leitmotifs:

> Overhead, like a silent friend, the star Algol, the demon star, which like a woman is inconstant and changes visibly in brightness. Goodricke said that this fluctuation is caused by duplicity – that Algol is eclipsed by a companion which thus diminishes it; but who can tell? (p. 37, *Chimera* MA)

This is little more than an aside, yet it contains several significant ideas. The name of the star (from the Arabic 'al ghūl', or 'ghoul') points to a mythological past and to the astrology which is part of astronomy's heritage. Turnbull mentions John Goodricke who, with Edward Pigott, first calculated the star's period (they presented their findings to the Royal Society in 1783) and the theory that is usually linked to

Goodricke's name: that Algol is an eclipsing binary star.[35] Turnbull's 'who can tell?' hints at the provisional nature of scientific knowledge; the mention of Algol's binary nature leads to the idea of duplicity. The word 'duplicity' is here used in its literal sense, but it also points to the metaphoric duplicity which underlies the novel. Turnbull's comment, 'like a woman' situates him in his time, as well as providing an ironic comment on his own lack of constancy.

In John Banville's *The Untouchable*, the protagonist Victor Maskell talks of 'the burnished mask', a symbol – reflected in his name – of his duality.[36] *Chimera*, like *The Untouchable*, deals with multiple layers of duplicity: personal and professional, knowing and unconscious. This idea runs through *Chimera* as a metaphor, but in one scene I have used the mask in a literal sense: in Julia Dalton's dream of the sarabande, she finds that both she and her partner are wearing masks. The masked dance is a commonplace of historical fiction, but here it is used to comment on the themes of duplicity and self-duplicity in the novel.

This scene, which was written early (but which was one of the most difficult to write) developed as the work progressed. One of the elements of the dream is anachronism: Dalton dreams of the period she is researching – so the dancers are wearing Regency costume – but the musicians and the dances belong to an earlier time. This was originally an error in my first, hastily-written draft; I allowed it to stand, not only because it reflects the imprecision and confusion of the dream-state, but because it forms an understated comment on the nature of time, which flows in one direction only, and of historical fiction. Dreams are a form of fiction (as well as, in some sense, an expression of truth) but one in which, in contrast to the realist historical novel, factual and historical accuracy are not always relevant.

My initial choice of the sarabande for this scene had to do with its slow and stately nature, which contrasted with the psychological and emotional turmoil lurking beneath the surface of the dream. I subsequently discovered, quite by chance, that this dance which came to be used in stylized form as the third movement of the baroque suite began life in an entirely different form. In 1625 Ben Jonson called it the 'bawdy Saraband';[37] in fact it had been banned in 1583 by the Spanish

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[35] *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Astronomy*, ed. by Michael Hoskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 203.
[36] John Banville, *The Untouchable* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 7.
[37] *OED*, 'saraband' 2.

Inquisition because of its ‘extraordinary obscenity’.[38] This hidden past and subsequent transformation reflect the duality explored in *Chimera*.

3.

Chapter 43, ‘Light’, in which Julia Dalton muses on Thomas Young’s 1803 lecture, is an examination of Richard Turnbull in terms of wave-particle complementarity. This chapter formalizes the metaphor of light which runs through the novel and provides some explanation of the concepts behind it. It links the early nineteenth-century debate on light with the insights of quantum theory. Turnbull’s letter in this chapter describes and discusses Young’s 1803 experiment; Dalton then considers the fact that the ‘either/or’ of 1803 became, in the early twentieth century, a ‘both/and’. At the end of the passage she reflects on her own duality.

Turnbull mentions one of the problems inherent in Young’s wave theory: that in an interference pattern, two rays of light combine to produce darkness (p. 229). This fact was indeed problematic in the early nineteenth century; it is also a useful metaphor. In this letter Turnbull merely reports the incredulity which surrounded this idea at the time; but in a document written towards the end of his life, and which occurs at the end of the novel, he refers to this phenomenon in relation to his own identity:

> Many years ago at the Royal Society I heard Dr Young posit that two rays of light might combine to produce darkness. Bunton, a friend of Jos’s, voiced the thoughts of many when he said this was a ridiculous notion. But Time has proved Dr Young correct; and such have I been, I fear. (p. 430)

The inclusion of such information in a work of fiction is not free from difficulty. A balance must be struck between two extremes: not providing enough information for the reader, and slowing down the pace of the narrative by giving too much; in addition, the passage must not become overly technical. In the letter in Chapter 43, information and explanation are provided through the musings of Turnbull and Dalton, and the theoretical information is interspersed with other related but less

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[38] Richard Hudson and Meredith Ellis Little, ‘Sarabande’, *Grove Music Online* <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/24574?goto=sarabande&type=article&pos=3> [accessed 07/07/10] (para. 3 of 18).

recondite ideas. As well as a discussion of Turnbull in terms of wave-particle complementarity, I have tried to give a flavour of the state of scientific debate in the early 1800s: the problem of authority in science (Newton was held by some to be almost infallible); the condescending attitude of Royal Society members towards the more popular – and populist – Royal Institution; the hostile reaction to Young's theory and Young's consequent abandonment of the study of light.

The chapter ends with a reflection on the nature of time which is relevant to science, history and fiction. Dalton's understanding of Young's lecture and her tentative interpretation of Richard Turnbull as a 'both/and' rather than an 'either/or' are of their time, influenced by the conclusions of quantum theory. All knowledge – including scientific knowledge – is to some extent provisional and subject to revision or modification. What was a passionate – and often ferocious – debate in 1803 was 'resolved' later in the nineteenth century with the work of Maxwell, who established that light was a wave. But as we know, this conclusion was exploded in the early twentieth century; with the advent of quantum theory, light became both wave and particle.

4.

In his *Reflections on The Name of the Rose* Umberto Eco examines the tension inherent in his desire to write a novel which is both enjoyable and avant-garde. These are alternatives which, Eco points out, are often seen to be contradictory: the traditional plot on the one hand; the avant-garde novel, in which such popular elements are frowned upon, on the other.[39] 'Could there be,' he asks, 'a novel which was not escapist and, nevertheless, still enjoyable?'[40] Eco's solution to this problem in *The Name of the Rose* was to take in both these conflicting forms; the result is a tightly-plotted and exciting detective novel, complete with bloodthirsty murders, but one into which the reader has to be 'initiated' through a hundred or so pages of obscure and complex mediaeval history.[41] Moreover, the plot of this novel to some extent subverts the popular detective story. The protagonist, William of Baskerville,

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[39] Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), pp. 59-60.
[40] Eco, *Reflections*, p. 65.
[41] Eco, *Reflections*, p. 41.

manages to solve the murders only by stumbling from one false assumption to another. This is a scenario not unknown to the detective of popular fiction; however, since Baskerville's final conclusion cannot be substantiated, it is ambiguous and may not, in fact, be the correct version of events.[42]

A similar preoccupation has influenced *Chimera*, although I have chosen different means to deal with it. One of my aims has been to write a novel which shares the duality it explores and encapsulates: one which is satisfying in terms of plot and story but which is at the same time a serious intellectual work. *Chimera* is constructed like a thriller, so that each chapter moves the plot forward in some way. There are questions to which the reader wants an answer: What actually happened? Was Henri de Saint-Gilles really the spy, or was he 'framed' by Richard Turnbull? Was Turnbull a spy; if so, which side was he working for? What was the nature of his relationship with Ezekiel Juggins? Will Julia Dalton detect Peter Marchmont's forgeries? But at the same time these questions are points of entry into a discussion about concepts of identity and history, about the nature of truth, fact and fiction. Turnbull's journals and letters are the means by which the reader finds out what happened, but they are also flawed and incomplete accounts, some of which may be deliberately inaccurate. Ranke's concept of history as 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' finds its counterpart in the reader's desire to find out 'what actually happened'; but in this case it is not so easy; a fact which calls attention to the provisional and interpretative nature of history.

But how much information to give the reader? How much ambiguity to leave in the resolution of the novel? There was a tension in *Chimera* between following through the underpinning metaphor of ambiguity and resolving the plots to such an extent that the reader is satisfied. This need for a balance between causality and contingency, between the need to 'tie everything up' and the need for a realism which reflects the contingent nature of life, is a crucial problem in modern fiction. I have tried to achieve this balance in two ways. First, by answering the main questions of the novel, so that Dalton comes to certain conclusions which are the most reasonable given the evidence she has at her disposal. These conclusions are nonetheless tentative and provisional; not only is it possible to read the evidence in a

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[42] Eco, *Reflections*, p. 54 and Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read* (London: Granta Books, 2008), pp. 43-44.

different way, but future discoveries might necessitate a revision. Secondly, I have left some loose ends. The nature of the secret political business between Richard Turnbull, Henri de Saint-Gilles and John Newman in Paris in 1794 is never explicitly stated; in her early diary Manon mentions a M. de Vaubon, suggesting that he had some part in this business (pp. 75, 91), but he does not appear again. It is never established whether Turnbull is involved in the murder of Ezekiel Juggins, although he has both motive and opportunity. This lack of resolution adds to the verisimilitude of the novel and, I believe, does not detract from its overall coherence.

At the beginning of his novel *A Maggot* John Fowles presents a scene which has all the trappings of the conventional historical adventure: a West-country setting, a mysterious group of travellers on horseback, complete with greatcoats, tricorn hats, boots and mud.[43] These details are here used, in a work which crosses the boundaries of genre, to question narrative conventions, and they are to some extent (although not wholly) parodic. But they represent one of the hazards of writing historical fiction. Lace cuffs and buckskin breeches, along with similar 'historical' paraphernalia – however accurate they may be – have become so much the stock-in-trade of popular historical fiction that it is difficult to include them now in a serious novel without either parody or (as in *A Maggot*) a knowing consciousness. The fact that the historical narrative of *Chimera* is mediated through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century documents has conferred several advantages in this respect. It avoids – and often precludes – the inclusion of such details, which can so easily become tiresome. The commonplaces of daily life should here obtrude only as much or as little into the historical narrative as they do into the contemporary one. Manon de Saint-Gilles mentions the *chemise de la reine* in her diary, but this is only to point out her sister's preoccupation with clothes rather than with current events (p. 79). Richard Turnbull describes a scene in Wallbrook in 1792 because it is significant to him in his state of heightened awareness (p. 161). I wanted, in this scene, to give an impression of the bustle and turmoil of late eighteenth-century London, but I have tried to do it as naturally as possible, not as a 'set-piece'.

At the same time I have – as Banville has done in *The Untouchable* – incorporated into *Chimera* several references to the popular genre of spy fiction: secret plots,

[43] John Fowles, *A Maggot* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), p. 7.

covert surveillance, trickery, coded letters. These elements have become the clichés of this genre; but this is partly because they are the stuff, not just of fictional spying, but of the real thing. (Invisible ink – which does not appear in *Chimera* because I thought it irredeemably clichéd – was in fact an important means of communication between spies and their handlers, not only at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, but at least until the end of the Second World War.)[44] Yet these elements also reflect the theme of duality in *Chimera*; the letters produced at Saint-Gilles's trial, for example, which are written in cipher (pp. 166-68), are a reminder of the possibility of double meanings. The crucial parts of Richard Turnbull's journal are written in what would have been a transparent code to most educated readers of his day; a fact which comments, perhaps, on his contradictory desire both to hide and to reveal himself.

Julia Dalton says to Mathias Fournier, commenting on his quotation from André Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, 'I don't think anyone can ring true. I think the human personality is so complex that a unitary authenticity is impossible' (p. 251). The modern world's interest in spies, agents and undercover policemen, as well as its preoccupation with that other manifestation of doubleness or multiplicity, actors, perhaps says something not just about unstable political situations (the Cold War or the War on Terror) but about a deep-seated fascination with and uncertainty surrounding the concept of identity in the modern world. This trend is parallel, but opposite, to that which tends towards simple answers and monolithic, unchanging truth. The human mind seems to want both these things.

There is a final paradox in *Chimera*, one not available to the reader: it was not written in the order in which it appears. This has entailed two procedures: some of the narratives, such as Richard Turnbull's account of his mother's death and his time in London, were written sequentially and then split up; but much of the novel was written non-sequentially – largely as fragments – and then woven together. Thus the final order – the way in which the historical plot unfolds – although it appears to be random and contingent, is the result of rigorous arrangement.

[44] J. C. Masterson, *The Double-Cross System in the War of 1939-1945* (London: Folio, 2007), pp. 174-75 and *passim*.

4. A Note on Opposites

One thing can so easily become its opposite. A profound truth, as Niels Bohr was fond of remarking, is one whose opposite is also true. In Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, Adrian Leverkühn's cerebral and avant-garde music, which 'pushed to the very limits of musical erudition, technique, intellectuality', comes also to encapsulate the barbarism he despises, just as Fascism encapsulates both the super-modern and the primitive.[45] The ambiguity surrounding Joanna Southcott and Richard Brothers (discussed in Chapter IV) seems to derive, not just from the readings they are given (sympathetic or hostile) but from inherent oppositions in their ideas. Opposition and duality are, it seems, an integral part of the human psyche; Leverkühn's *Apocalypsis cum figuris* reveals 'the beast in man as well as his sublimest leanings' (*Doctor Faustus*, p. 381).

In his essay 'On the Uncanny', Freud examines the semantic development of the word 'heimlich', showing how it came to signify both its original sense (homely, known, familiar) and its opposite (hidden, secret, dangerous).[46] William Empson, in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, argues that poetry (here the work of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poets such as Shakespeare, Donne and Crashaw) is best interpreted, not by selecting from among several possible – and often contradictory – senses of a word, but by taking all these senses into account, even when they are diametrically opposite. Empson's seventh and final type of ambiguity is 'when the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind'.[47] This framework is developed by Jonathan Bate who, in *The Genius of Shakespeare*, shows that Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* makes sense only if it is interpreted as ambiguous; in other words if a 'both/and' paradigm is applied to it rather than a traditional 'either/or' one.[48] Bate also points out that it is no coincidence that Empson developed his ideas on ambiguity in the 1920s, just as the new physics was making its mark; Empson had in fact studied

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[45] Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. by Helen Lowe-Porter (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. 384.
[46] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 121-62 (p. 134). See also p. 67 of this commentary.
[47] William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Pimlico, 2004), p. 192.
[48] Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1998), pp. 299-311.

mathematics before turning to English, and thus approached literature with an awareness of quantum ambiguity.[49]

But the concept of 'opposite' in the sense of 'diametrically opposed' is, as Empson points out, a relatively recent usage. According to the *OED*, the earliest uses of the word refer to physical position: in mathematics, astrology and astronomy, or topography; for example, opposite angles, an opposite shore, or the zenith and the nadir. The sense of 'contrary in nature, character, or tendency; diametrically different' dates only from 1580, and includes such oppositions as heaven and hell, self-love and charity, 'two opposite descriptions of character' and 'opposite witnesses'.

This semantic progression camouflages a distinction between what may be considered two types of opposites: those which are mutually exclusive and those which have common characteristics and may be considered as points on a spectrum. The *OED* definition of 'opposite' in its sense of sense of 'contrary in nature [...] diametrically different' quotes from *Othello*: 'You Mistris, That haue the office opposite to Saint Peter, And keepe the gate of hell'. Heaven and hell are mutually exclusive categories; but another quotation in the *OED* (from Lyly's *Euphues*) points to a different sort of opposite: 'So began we to be more opposit in opinions: He graue, I gamesome; he studious, I carelesse.' Here we have an implication of some sort of scale, and with it the possibility of gradation or merging.

Some opposites are in fact mutually exclusive and non-overlapping. Zenith and nadir are distinct. In chromosomal terms male and female are dissimilar and discrete entities: an X-chromosome is different from a Y. A wave is fundamentally and irrevocably different from a particle.

But grave and gamesome, studious and careless are not mutually exclusive qualities, and the comparative 'more opposit' implies a range rather than two discrete categories. A spectrum contains categories which can be thought of as discrete, but it is itself a continuum. If we take the physical example of the electromagnetic spectrum, we note that radio waves are different from gamma rays (opposite ends of the electromagnetic spectrum), or that red light is different from blue (opposite ends of the visible spectrum). However, the categories of the spectrum progress smoothly one to another; although there is a point at which X-rays become gamma-rays, or red

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[49] Bate, *Genius*, pp. 312-14.

light becomes orange, these points of transition are to some extent arbitrary and the shift is incremental. Moreover, the properties of the categories in the spectrum derive from variations in magnitude of similar attributes, rather than from intrinsically different attributes. Radio waves have long wavelength and low frequency (and thus low energy); gamma rays have short wavelength and high frequency (high energy).

So why is this important? The human mind seems to be hard-wired to think in terms of the 'either/or' of binary oppositions: black/white, good/bad, true/false. This is perhaps an evolutionary strategy; matters of survival usually demand 'either/or' answers. 'Our brains,' writes Richard Dawkins, 'evolved in a world where most things do fall into discrete categories.'[50] However, this mode of thinking can be problematic in the complex world we now inhabit, and sometimes leads to the imposition of mutually-exclusive categories onto concepts which are more accurately represented as gradations on a spectrum (a fallacy which Dawkins calls 'discontinuous thinking').[51] Masculinity and femininity, unlike the chromosomal distinction of male and female, are distinctions which allow both mixture and scale. Skin colour, once the crude categories of black and white are left behind, is seldom easily categorized.

But wave-particle complementarity shows that even mutually-exclusive categories may be correlative. We live in a world which on the macroscopic scale obeys Newton's laws (quantum effects being in most cases so small as to be negligible for practical purposes) and in which discrete categories often apply: one object is distinct from another; individuals are often unequivocally guilty of a crime. Yet it is also true that the perpetrators of crime may at the same time be its victims, or that a traitor may be motivated by loyalty to, as well as by hatred of, the country he has betrayed. Quantum theory is esoteric and recondite; but the issue of 'both/and' and 'either/or' cuts into many contemporary debates. The fundamentalist dichotomies not only of certain types of religion, but also of certain types of politics and the tabloid press are characterized by false 'either/or' divisions. Quantum ambiguity perhaps points to the fact that in certain cases an optic of 'both/and' is more accurate than one of 'either/or'.

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[50] Richard Dawkins, *The Ancestor's Tale* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), p. 261.
[51] For example, Dawkins, *The Ancestor's Tale*, p. 252.

5. A Final Hotchpotch: Pastiche, History and the Arrow of Time

1.

'Pastiche' is an interesting word. It derives from the Italian 'pasticcio', which means, firstly, 'a medley of various ingredients; a hotchpotch, farrago, jumble' (*OED*). *Chimera* is in this sense a pastiche, since its historical narrative proceeds through a montage of fragments held together by the framework of its twenty-first-century narrative.

One of the results of this fragmentation is that different versions of events are presented throughout the novel. In her 1794 diary, Manon de Saint-Gilles reports a pleasurable hour of conversation with Richard Turnbull in the library at the château Ruffec (p. 79). Turnbull, however, comments on this incident in a letter written after visiting Ruffec in 1825; he remembers 'being forced to endure an hour of conversation with her [Manon] before dinner, when I had hoped to be alone' (p. 433). Although this is a minor incident it highlights the importance of subjectivity and point of view in the narration of the past. The event itself (the conversation) is established as a fact, but its interpretation is coloured both by subjective assumptions and – in Turnbull's account – by the potential errors of memory.

Similarly, there is some discrepancy between the accounts in Turnbull's notebook and those in Saint-Gilles's trial. Turnbull's trip to Paris in October 1812, for example, is recounted twice: once in his testimony at the trial (pp. 328-29) and later in his journal (p. 343). Apart from the differences here of form and register (the formality of the trial, the confessional tone of the journal) there is also a factual discrepancy: in his testimony Turnbull says he spends three days in Paris, but the journal account suggests a longer stay. Given that he appears to have a personal, as well as an official, agenda for this visit to Calais and Paris, it might be assumed that this unexplained discrepancy covers some unspecified clandestine activity.

Part of the narrative interest of *Chimera* hinges on the identity of the French spy. Although it seems that Saint-Gilles was in fact that spy, the situation is more complex than the official version of events would suggest. Turnbull is not a mere wandering scholar who happened to turn spycatcher; his relationship with Saint-Gilles goes back to a series of events, touched on in the trial, which took place in Paris in 1793 and 1794. In addition, the documents discovered by Julia Dalton at the

British Library present snippets of information regarding his involvement with the machinery of state, suggesting that he was some sort of double agent; a suggestion backed up by comments in his journal. Peter Marchmont's forgery reveals yet another version of events. The reader knows this to be a forgery, although it does in fact contain some authentic material; but to Marchmont it represents an accurate interpretation of the known facts – and might have been accepted as such by Dalton, but for the inconsistent account of Anna Turnbull's death, which she knows is erroneous.

Different versions of events also occur in the twenty-first-century narrative; these are events which might be described as 'non-historical' but they illustrate the problems of interpretation and even of knowing. 'You've fallen in love with an illusion; you've joined up the dots and got the wrong picture,' Julia says to Miles; his 'interpretation' of her is wide of the mark (p. 297). (She might in fact have made the same remark to Marchmont in a different context.) And Jean-Michel Fournier's account of his relationship with Carmen Broussard is, as Véronique points out, subject to bias. 'At one level', comments Mathias Fournier, 'it's very much like history. [...] Versions of events, fiercely held and conflicting, which an outsider, like a historian, has to interpret' (p. 267).

That these accounts do not add up to a single unified narrative reflects the problematic nature of determining 'truth', a problem intensified when that truth is historical. The discipline of history combines a scientific aspect – the discovery and analysis of factual evidence – with a more fluid, interpretative process which acknowledges the importance of subjective, ideological and personal biases. Moreover, it is subject not only to differences of interpretation but to revision. Simon Schama notes how, until the second half of the twentieth century, those few accounts which existed of the September massacres of 1792 – a horrific event during the French Revolution in which approximately half the prison population of Paris was indiscriminately slaughtered – glossed over the barbaric nature of the killings, emphasizing either a 'counter-revolutionary martyrology' or 'impersonal historical forces' which played down the level of violence and the role of individual responsibility.[52] Schama suggests that the failure to acknowledge the magnitude of this event derived from a reluctance amongst historians to confront the human

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[52] Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Viking, 1989), p. 631.

capacity for brutality; it was only after 1945, when 'European history was again disabused of the notion that modernity somehow confers exemption from bestiality', that the ample primary sources for the massacre began to be comprehensively examined.[53]

'The reconstitution of the past in the historian's mind is dependent on empirical evidence,' wrote E. H. Carr in 1961. 'But it is not in itself an empirical process, and cannot consist in a mere recital of facts'.[54] Historical facts are subject to bias and manipulation, not only because their analysis can never be entirely objective (historians being subject to cultural and ideological influences) but because primary sources themselves are often the result of selection and bias, whether conscious or unconscious.[55] And narrative, through which history is often mediated, never presents a completely objective account of events. In fact narrative history shares certain features with fiction: an exploration of the interconnectedness of occurrences through the complex patterns of causality and contingency, the importance of personality in shaping the course of events, the conscious or unconscious biases of the writer. This is a view of history which has gained increasing ground in a postmodern age in which concepts of textual indeterminacy and of multiple truth sit, not always comfortably, beside that of evidence-based scientific accuracy.

This question of bias is equally relevant to the interpretation of the historical novel, which must take into account not only the depiction of the historical period concerned, but the ideas which prevailed at the time of writing, as well as the particular preoccupations of its author. Dennis Wheatley's *The Rising Storm*, published in 1949, is a novel about the early stages of the French Revolution which contains a meticulously researched (and tediously detailed) examination of the Revolution's causes; yet there is not a single mention, let alone discussion, of the injustices suffered under the ancien régime by the common people. This omission becomes less surprising when we understand that for Wheatley, writing not long after the Second World War, there was a connection between the violence of the French mob and its desire for power, and that of the Fascist and Communist regimes which had recently inflicted such damage on Europe. Wheatley puts the following speech into Talleyrand's mouth:

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[53] Schama, *Citizens*, p. 636.
[54] E. H. Carr, *What is History?* ed. by R. W. Davies, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 22.
[55] Carr, *What is History?*, pp. 16-23.

> This year [1789], for the first time in history, the proletariat has become conscious of its power. The fall of the French monarchy is a threat to all others, and a new kind of war may result. Instead of Kings fighting Kings there may be a bloody clash of ideologies in which class will fight class, throughout […] Europe. In such a war no true democracy could survive, and the proletarian leaders will inevitably be men of utter ruthlessness; dictators, driving their peoples on with a tyranny and ferocity greater than they have ever suffered under any King.[56]

Here the French Revolution becomes a cipher for the situation of Europe in the 1940s. The account is not devoid of accuracy: it was generally considered at the time that Louis XVI's fall threatened monarchy in general (although it has to be pointed out that Louis had not yet fallen in 1789); and successive revolutionary governments did see France's war with surrounding nations in what might be called ideological terms. However, the anachronistic (Marxist) vocabulary used here by Talleyrand ('proletariat', 'ideologies', 'class') gives the lie to Wheatley's position, as does the idea that Talleyrand was a champion of 'true democracy' (whatever that might have meant in 1789).

Chimera explores the tension surrounding these notions of objective reality, evidence, knowability and bias. The structural irony produced by its multiple subjective accounts not only builds suspense but points to the complexity and potential unreliability of narrative accounts. History is here presented in layers of narrative, filtered through consciousness and memory or, in places, through a deliberate desire to obfuscate or deceive. Richard Turnbull comments on the difficulty of accurately representing the past in narrative: 'in the telling, an event is not merely recounted but recreated; pulled out of its time and place, it comes to have an existence of its own within the patterns of the words inked upon the page' (p. 300). Yet history is nonetheless an evidence-based discipline and the matter of evidence an important one. Julia Dalton, although she realizes that the documents could possibly be read in a different way and that her conclusions may have to be revised in the light of new evidence, nonetheless comes to a tentative conclusion based on the facts at her disposal.

[56] Dennis Wheatley, *The Rising Storm* (London: Hutchinson, 1957), pp. 317-18.

2.

But, returning to the definition of the word ‘pastiche’, we note that it also denotes ‘a picture or design made up of fragments pieced together or copied with modification from an original, or in professed imitation of the style of another artist’. In this sense too – in its deliberate imitation of a historical style – *Chimera* is a pastiche.

I have already mentioned that my original drafts were unworkable; paradoxically, the solution to the problem of producing writing which read like a parody of the popular historical novel involved, not only the juxtaposition of diverse texts, but the use of an imitative historical style. This was something which, once I had hit upon the idea, came relatively easily; in fact, the historical sections of *Chimera* were the least difficult to write. I already had a ‘historical’ style submerged in memory, having spent many an evening of adolescence writing (by candlelight) in a style consciously modelled on those of Jane Austen and the Brontës. Moreover, the use of a historical voice allowed me to lay aside my own and in some sense to be, or at least to take on the characteristics of, my historical protagonists. (Writing perhaps allows one to express, or to deal with the need to be, a protean being. Like religious ecstasy or certain forms of insanity – or like acting and spying – it may allow one to stand outside oneself and in some sense to assume another persona or even a multiplicity of personae.)

But, having once made the decision to write in this way, it was imperative that the style should replicate the language of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as accurately as possible. Throughout the writing of *Chimera* I have tackled this in two ways. First, through a reading of contemporary sources – diaries, letters, essays, fiction – which provided examples, not only of the style, syntax and vocabulary of the period, but of its thought patterns. This ongoing reading has kept the cadences of the language accessible and ready to be drawn upon, but the texts have also provided invaluable factual information. To take just one example, a pamphlet written in 1800 by Dr John Haygarth not only provides a sample of an early nineteenth-century learned style, but is fascinating in its own right. Haygarth describes the experiments he carried out to test the efficacy of ‘Perkins’s tractors’, an expensive cure-all for which extravagant claims were made; this was possibly the first double-blind trial in medicine (performed without the encumbrances of ethical approval or patient consent) and its conclusions anticipate later work on

psychosomatic disorders and the placebo effect. Haygarth also comments on the friction between evidence and belief which is part of the substance of *Chimera.*[57]

Secondly, I have relied heavily on the *Oxford English Dictionary* for information on the usage and precise dating of specific words and expressions. Although facilitated by the advanced search features on the CD-ROM version of the dictionary, this was at times a slow and complex (though very interesting) process which involved tracing the usage of the various senses of a word through time. In my rough draft of Samuel Roberts's letter to William Wickham in 1792 (p. 361), I had jotted down the words 'infiltrate' and 'penetrate' to express the sense of 'work one's way into an organization in order to spy or inform on it'. But, though both these words were in use, in various senses, well before 1792, the sense I required dates from 1934 and 1962 respectively; in my final version I therefore resorted to the expression 'inform on'. In addition, *Chimera*'s historical documents cover a period of nearly sixty years, from 1787 (Anna Turnbull's letter) to 1846 (William Montagu's account of Turnbull's death); it was necessary to bear in mind the date of each document, since a word, or specific sense of a word, in use in 1813, for example, might not have been in use in 1794.

To a certain extent this was a mechanical task, but it also became a foray into the history of the English language. The quotations in the *OED* provided examples of usage over time and often revealed words or phrases I had not come across. For example, when checking to establish whether the phrase 'narrow-minded' was in use in 1812, I came across the phrase 'narrow-minded bigotry', which was exactly the sort of expression I needed to express Turnbull's disgust at the suppression of Shelley's pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* (p. 287).

In 1835 Richard Turnbull, referring to the events of 1813, uses the word 'débâcle' (p. 210), the first recorded use of which in this figurative sense in English is dated by the *OED* to 1848. After consideration, I let this stand. Since Turnbull is fluent in French, it is not impossible that he might use the word in this way. It was already used figuratively in French in 1788 to mean a 'sudden revolution in public or business affairs' and is noted in its now usual sense of 'sudden and unexpected

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[57] John Haygarth, M.D., *Of the Imagination, as a Cause and as a Cure of Disorders of the Body; Exemplified by Fictitious Tractors, and Epidemical Convulsions* (Bath: R. Crutwell, 1800), The James Lind Library <http://oldjll.sustainabilityforhealth.org/trial_records/19th_Century/haygarth/pamphlet/haygarth_memorial.html> [accessed 01/02/11].

change which brings disorder and confusion' in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* of 1835 (and was presumably in use before that).[58]

Accuracy of this sort is important (although, like Peter Marchmont, I have probably let slip more than one inadvertent error) and is part of a wider issue in the writing of historical fiction. 'The generally debased standard of historical fiction,' wrote Peter Ackroyd in 1986, 'springs from the fact that most novelists think it sufficient to create approximately the right "atmosphere". But the important things are the details. Without details nothing can live.'[59] Yet this demand for historical verisimilitude must be held in tension with the fact that the representation (or re-presentation) of a historical period, including a recreation of its linguistic style, can perhaps only ever be an approximation. Though we can, by extensive and detailed research, build up with some accuracy a picture of a past age, it is probably impossible to recreate its parameters exactly. 'These dead are dead,' wrote Louis MacNeice,

> And how one can imagine oneself among them
> I do not know;
> It was all so unimaginably different
> And all so long ago.[60]

Though MacNeice's ancient Greeks are further back in time than the protagonists of the more amply documented Napoleonic period, this represents a difference of degree rather than of essence. Though I have striven to depict my period with accuracy, to do more than 'merely use facts of the past to embroider a kind of writing which has nothing to do with history' (as E. H. Carr characterized both historical fiction and propaganda),[61] the fact remains that it is to some extent impossible to know what life was really like in a past age.

Moreover, the imitation of a historical style is in another sense dangerous territory for the writer of historical fiction. 'Pastiche dialogue,' writes Alan Wall, 'is

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[58] Jean-François Férand, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (1787-1788); *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 6th edn (1835); in *Dictionnaires d'Autrefois,* The ARTFL Project, University of Chicago <http://artflx.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=debacle&headword =&docyear=ALL&dicoid=ALL> [accessed 09/02/10].
[59] Peter Ackroyd, *The Collection*, ed. by Thomas Wright (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001), pp. 395-96.
[60] Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 31.
[61] Carr, *What is History?,* p. 29.

frequently embarrassing. Once a writer starts littering the page with *thees* and *thous* and ampersands, the ghost of Errol Flynn can soon be seen striding the battlements.'[62] The Scarlet Pimpernel, exclaiming 'Zounds!' at every turn, now appears risibly dated; and even Antony Burgess's mock-Elizabethan style in *A Dead Man in Deptford* – a knowing and well-researched recreation of the language of the late sixteenth century – borders on the awkward.[63] But, if executed skilfully – and it is possible to replicate the linguistic patterns of past writing with a high level of accuracy by an intensive study of the many sources available – the historical style has certain advantages. It can conjure a past age without the need for description or explanation; Ackroyd notes that when he wrote *Hawksmoor*, the alternation of an early eighteenth-century style with a late twentieth-century one produced a dialogue between the two periods which went beyond simple depiction:

> Two worlds were created, related and yet still apart. Just as the structure and vocabulary of eighteenth-century writing still inform our own, so the past in the book seemed to inform and to animate the present; just as twentieth-century prose is both more capacious and yet more standardized than that of the eighteenth century, so the world which modern prose described in my novel seemed more noticeably to reflect that ambiguous condition.[64]

My use of the trial of Francis Henry de la Motte for high treason in 1780 (recorded in the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey*) illustrates some of the difficulties and dangers of this enterprise.[65] De la Motte's trial was the nearest in time of the high-treason trials to that of Saint-Gilles and was of particular relevance because the accused was a French émigré convicted of passing information to the French. A lengthy trial reported in detail (it numbers over 63,000 words), it provided examples of the language of the courtroom, information regarding the conduct of trials, and facts relating to espionage in the late eighteenth century. I borrowed from it certain details, such as the packets of letters carried to France by a sea-captain who becomes disenchanted when he discovers their contents. However, since this trial predates that

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62 Alan Wall, *Writing Fiction* (London: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 127.
63 Anthony Burgess, *A Dead Man in Deptford* (London: Hutchinson, 1993).
64 Ackroyd, *The Collection*, p. 380.
65 Francis Henry de La Motte, Royal Offences > treason, 11 July 1781, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey,* reference t17810711-1 <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?ref=t17810711-1> [accessed 12/11/07].

of Saint-Gilles by thirty-three years, I also read other trials from the early 1800s in case there were significant differences of diction.

When I started to write Saint-Gilles's trial I borrowed heavily the expressions and vocabulary of the Old Bailey trials; there was a certain hypnotic exhilaration in doing this, as if in reproducing these forms (which, since the reports are largely verbatim, approach the authentic speech of the period) I was somehow establishing a contact with that era. Later, however, I came to see that the result was somewhat stilted and awkward; the style was 'over-antiqued' and cumbersome, and ran the danger of appearing parodic. I thus made changes so that it read more fluently; this mainly involved using syntactic forms current in the early nineteenth century but which were closer or identical to modern usage. For example, 'And what form took these documents?' became 'And what was the nature of these documents?' (p. 165); 'Why was you asked?' became 'Why did he ask you?' (p. 224). In the summings-up, however (ch. 85), I have lifted phrases verbatim from the original text, such as the words used by the defence barrister and the Solicitor-General to address the jury (pp. 420-23) and the Solicitor-General's definition of high treason (p. 422); the formulaic nature of these expressions seemed to demand this.

3.

The historical novel becomes complicated by the passage of time. When Mann wrote *Doctor Faustus*, he made use of current events which are now firmly established as history. This shifting perspective is an inescapable feature of historical fiction and I have attempted to reflect on it in *Chimera*. In the real world, time's arrow flies in one direction only; yet in fiction, as in the discipline of history, we are not bound by this unidirectional flow; moreover, the novel may distort time and manipulate the order of events. In *Chimera*, there is an obvious interplay between the past of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the contemporary setting of the novel; but within each of these narratives there is a movement between past and present. In the historical narratives the 'present' shifts with the documents under examination and is seen to be connected through chains of causality with the past. The events of 1813 are a watershed in Richard Turnbull's life, one to which he returns time and

again in his later writings, but these events have their root in the earlier experiences of 1793-1794 and perhaps also in those of 1787-1788.

The twenty-first-century narrative of *Chimera* also includes glimpses of the past lives of Julia Dalton and Peter Marchmont: Dalton's dead twin, her relationship with her cousin; Marchmont's troubled childhood and unsuccessful marriage. These flashbacks, as well as providing background information about the characters, also enrich the sense of time in the novel, highlighting the fact that the notion of 'history' may encompass personal as well as political or national events.

I have narrated some of the scenes in *Chimera* in the pluperfect tense. Dalton's journey to London on the Eurostar, for example (pp. 271-75), is narrated in the simple past tense, the normal tense of fiction; but intertwined with this narrative are her memories of the evening before, narrated in the pluperfect. (Since it can become tedious if overused, I have limited its use, although it is sufficient to establish the time-frames of this chapter.) The treatment of this scene as an anterior event filtered through memory underlines the passage of time in *Chimera* and reflects Turnbull's memoirs, which are similarly filtered through memory. And with the coda at the end of the novel, I have attempted a similar effect. Here the time-frame is pushed into the future, giving a slightly different optic on the events experienced so dramatically by Dalton and Marchmont in the preceding sections of the novel and emphasizing the relative nature of past, present and future; what to a reader in 2011 is the future will after 2028 become the past.

Chimera also presents (like *Doctor Faustus*, albeit on a smaller scale) a panorama of historical events, giving a sense of history in general. Ghislaine de Montauban briefly mentions her exploits in the French Resistance; the members of the Society of the Fifteenth of December have a variety of interests, merely touched on but which draw attention to different historical periods. Taking my cue from Mann, I have tried not to labour these snippets, merely inserting them into the text. However, in two cases I decided that more explanation was needed than I had originally planned. Mention is made of the early Middle Ages through the sculpted panel, on the façade of Angoulême cathedral, depicting scenes from the *Chanson de Roland* (p. 113). The detail is significant on more than one level. This twelfth-century *chanson de geste* is itself a fictional manipulation of history (it narrates, albeit with significant changes, events which took place in 778) in which treachery is a significant element. Moreover, the work is underpinned by an 'either/or' ideology, expressed in Roland's

dictum ‘Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit’ (‘Pagans are wrong, Christians are right’);[66] the rigid over-simplification of this dichotomy – which reflects attitudes of the crusading centuries as much as it does those of Charlemagne’s time – resonates with what Jean Sévillia calls ‘the triumph of manicheism’ in our own world, a phenomenon he connects with a simplistic ‘either/or’ interpretation of history for propagandist ends.[67] It seemed unlikely that many readers would be aware of these somewhat esoteric facts, so I inserted some of them briefly into the conversation between Dalton and Mathias Fournier (p. 113). Similarly, I have added a brief account of the history of the sarabande in Julia Dalton’s musings on her dream (pp. 195).

This is necessarily an incomplete account of the genesis and writing of *Chimera*; a complete one might be as long as the novel itself.

In any work of fiction there is a gap between authorial intention and a reader’s perception; it is difficult for a writer to judge, immediately after completion of the work, the effectiveness of the techniques employed; and impossible to know whether any reader will see in the work what she has intended. That, however, is not my task here; nor should it be.

[66] *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. by F. Whitehead (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), LXXIX. 1015, p. 30.
[67] Jean Sévillia, *Historiquement correct: Pour en finir avec le passé unique* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), p. 12.

Chapter II

To classify Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947) as 'historical' touches not only on its own problematic nature, but also on that of the wide and amorphous genre of historical fiction. The principal theme of *Doctor Faustus* is the rise of Fascism in Germany, a period of history which for Mann was in fact hardly history at all; when he began the novel, many of the events he was exploring might have been more accurately classed as current affairs. *Doctor Faustus* is, moreover, wide-ranging in both content and form. It incorporates many facets of history, yet its characters are fictional; it combines the realism of the Bildungsroman with myth and allegory; its focus is an exploration of the German psyche. We might, in fact, profitably characterize *Doctor Faustus* as 'fictional history', a term used by Alan Wall to describe fiction in which 'history is employed to facilitate the creation of fictional characters' and which foregrounds 'not the historical but the fictional possibilities it provides for the fictive to go about its anarchic business'.[68]

At first glance *Doctor Faustus* appears to have little connection with my own work, in either form or content, except for the fact that it combines fiction and history; it is also very different from the novel I wanted to produce. Yet it contains much which is relevant and from which I learnt in a practical way for my own writing. (*Chimera*, too, might better be categorized as 'fictional history' than as 'historical fiction'.)

There is also a more specific relevance. A connection may be drawn between the period of Fascism and that of the French Revolution which forms the historical setting of *Chimera*. If in the late eighteenth century, following the Enlightenment, there was an energetic optimism regarding the potential of humanity (in 1788 Joseph Priestley viewed human history as 'a progress towards a state of greater perfection')[69] the events surrounding the Second World War and its attendant atrocities called into question the attainability of both progress and perfection. The mob violence which was an enduring and unresolved problem during the French

[68] Alan Wall, forthcoming introduction to Michael Moorcock, *Byzantium Endures* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012); quoted from typescript supplied by the author.
[69] Quoted in Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background: Studies in the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), p. 201.

Revolution,[70] and that Revolution's swift decline into bloodshed and tyranny, prefigure the course of many subsequent revolutions. What Mann called a 'dark, mythological realm' seems to be as integral to the human psyche as the Enlightenment qualities of reason and liberalism.[71]

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[70] Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 623, 637.
[71] Mann, *Genesis,* p. 40.

Culture and Barbarism: *Doctor Faustus*, Modernism and the Rise of Fascism

> Here no one can follow me who has not as I have experienced in his very soul how near aestheticism and barbarism are to each other.[72]

1.

Few writers of historical fiction can have been as ambitious as Thomas Mann, whose stated aim in his novel *Doctor Faustus* was ‘to write nothing less than the novel of my era, disguised as the story of an artist’s life’.[73] His ‘biography’ of the fictional composer Adrian Leverkühn represents the situation of the artist at a particular juncture of history and stands allegorically for the plight of Mann’s Germany. Although the original conception for the story of ‘the syphilitic artist: as Doctor Faust who has sold himself to the Devil’ dates from 1905,[74] by the time Mann came to take up the idea for *Doctor Faustus*, both his outlook and the world around him had changed. The original idea, overlaid with historical and political concerns, came to incorporate an exploration of the rise of Nazism while retaining the theme of the artist’s predicament in the modern period. Either of these subjects could form the basis of a substantial novel; the result is a work which defies categorisation, containing interwoven elements of history, social realism, biography and autobiography, allegory and myth.

Mann’s interposition between himself and his subject of an intermediate narrator, the inexperienced biographer Serenus Zeitblom, does not preclude the use of some carefully-selected narrative techniques which enable the seamless interweaving of history with the other elements of the novel. The use of the Faust myth, as well as enabling the symbolic pairing of Faust with Germany and with Leverkühn, creates a link between three significant points in German cultural history,[75] spanning the era labelled by Zeitblom as ‘the epoch of bourgeois humanism’ (p. 359). The original Faust of the 1587 chapbook can be seen as a Renaissance man whose pact with the devil signals the increasing power of rational, secular enquiry over the control of the

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[72] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 380. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[73] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 34.
[74] Mann’s notebook entry, 1905, quoted by T. J. Reed in the introduction to *Doctor Faustus*, p. xiii.
[75] See Michael Beddow, *Thomas Mann: Doctor Faustus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 11-14.

church. The culmination of post-Renaissance culture is represented by Goethe's Faust (*Faust*: Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832) who also stands for its main branches of learning.[76] Mann's own version of the bedevilled magus, Adrian Leverkühn, is located at what his creator saw as the nadir of Western civilisation: a decadent age which has bred all manner of foul ideologies. This structure is reinforced by Adrian Leverkühn's conscious modelling of his life on that of the chapbook Faust and by subtle references to Goethe in the text. The devil situates Leverkühn's pact within this historical context when he compares the artistic possibilities of past and present: 'What he in his classical decades could have without us, certainly, that, nowadays, we alone have to offer' (p. 241).

Much of the representation of history in *Doctor Faustus* turns on Mann's handling of time. The use of Zeitblom enabled a narration on two time planes, which Mann called 'double time'.[77] This is now a common device in historical fiction; it was less so in the 1940s when Mann was writing. Zeitblom's biography of his friend Leverkühn spans the period from 1885 to 1940, but this life story is interspersed with reports and comments on the events of the Second World War during the period in which Zeitblom is writing: from May 1943 to April 1945. In Chapter 33, the biographical narrative has reached the fall of Germany at the end of the First World War, but Zeitblom begins his chapter with an account of the impending fall of Germany in 1944:

> The time of which I write was for us Germans an era of national collapse, of capitulation, of uprisings due to exhaustion, of helpless surrender into the hands of strangers. The time in which I write, which must serve me to set down these recollections here in my silence and solitude, this time has a horribly swollen belly, it carries in its womb a national catastrophe compared with which the defeat of those earlier days seems a moderate misfortune, the sensible liquidation of an unsuccessful enterprise. (p. 343)

This counterpoint between writer and subject, between time depicted and time of depiction, which echoes the nature of history itself, allows not only the interpolation into the novel of Zeitblom's outraged and despairing comments on fascism and the Second World War (with a vehemence and a simplicity which would have been difficult for Mann, the sophisticated man of letters) but, more subtly, a comparison

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[76] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Faust the Theologian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p 7.
[77] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 119.

by juxtaposition of his present time with the events of the period narrated in the biography, allowing the one to comment on and enlighten the other. The Nazi Germany of Zeitblom's present is the product of those years of the Second Reich and the Weimar Republic which form the subject of his biography; but this is implied rather than stated, shown rather than explained. It is, in fact, though Mann does not define it as such, an instance of montage.

At the same time, this device – the interweaving of Leverkühn's life and times and those of his biographer – underpins Leverkühn's symbolic function. Chapter 33 continues with a discussion of the humiliation of Germany following the end of the First World War, after which the narrative swings back to Leverkühn in 1918: 'Leverkühn […] was unusually ailing at this time, in a way that had something humiliating in its torments' (p. 343). This parallel runs through the novel; Leverkühn's mental and physical health is mirrored by and mirrors the condition of Germany till the final end of both: the defeat of Germany; the collapse, insanity and death of Leverkühn.

Earlier, in Chapter 26, the ingenuous Zeitblom comments on this layering of time:

> I do not know why this double time-reckoning arrests my attention or why I am at pains to point out both the personal and the objective, the time in which the narrator moves and that in which the narrative does so. This is a quite extraordinary interweaving of time-units, destined, moreover, to include even a third: namely, the time which one day the courteous reader will take for the reading of what has been written; at which point he will be dealing with a threefold ordering of time: his own, that of the chronicler, and historic time. (p. 256)

This passage could be read as a paradigm of the historical novel in general, to which each generation of readers brings the shifting interpretations of its own time, and of those novels written in a dual time-frame in particular. In fact, the 'historic time' in *Doctor Faustus* is not limited to the period from 1885 to 1940, but includes also a panorama of German history, stretching back to the late Middle Ages, sketched out and alluded to throughout the novel. This is Zeitblom's 'epoch of bourgeois humanism', the decline of which is described and discussed throughout the novel:

> I felt that an epoch was ending, which had not only included the nineteenth century, but gone far back to the end of the Middle Ages, to the loosening of scholastic ties, the emancipation of the individual, the birth of freedom. (p. 359)

One of the ways in which this sense of 'historic time' is established is through the loci of the novel. Halle, Leipzig and Munich, cities in which Adrian Leverkühn lives, are significant in Germany's theological, musical and political history. Kaisersaschern, the fictitious little town where Zeitblom and Leverkühn were born and from whose influence Leverkühn can, significantly, never quite escape, functions as a symbol of Germanness. A historic town which 'had kept a distinctively mediaeval air', in Zeitblom's childhood it was 'practical, rational, modern' (p. 34), its mediaeval characteristics superseded by modern enlightened virtues. But the past here prefigures later developments, just as the 'crude instruments of torture' (p. 33) in the town's museum are not only vestiges of a less enlightened age, but a reminder that beneath the surface lurks an older, unenlightened, psychology which predates Zeitblom's humanism. It is precisely, implies Zeitblom, this *völkisch* (folkish) and archaic layer of the German psyche, easily roused to 'deeds of sinister significance' (p. 35), which has aided the rise of fascism. It is significant also that the devil, appearing to Leverkühn in 1911 or 1912,[78] characterises their shared world as 'pure Kaisersaschern, good old German air, from anno MD or thereabouts' (p. 235). It is no coincidence, either, that this meeting with the devil takes place in a sixteenth-century house in the ancient town of Palestrina, birthplace of the eponymous composer whose work forms part of the heyday of counterpoint, that technique which characterises western music from the late Middle Ages and which Leverkühn is about to abolish.

Mann is adept at throwing into his narrative subtle and complex references which serve to reinforce the novel's sense of history. In the description of Adrian Leverkühn's work room at Pfeiffering, mention is made of a Savonarola chair which stands at his work table (p. 261). Though deceptively simple, this reference is nonetheless highly significant. The Savonarola chair is an antique form and thus stands for the past. But of the various names by which it can be known (X-chair, scissors-chair, Dante chair, Luther chair, Savonarola chair) Mann chose 'Savonarola', thus conjuring an array of historical references. Savonarola, notorious for his religious and political zeal, his anti-humanist stance, his book burnings and destruction of what he saw as immoral art, carries sinister resonances for an opponent of Hitler who had witnessed the Nazi book burnings of 1933 and the

[78] The uncertainty is Zeitblom's.

Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) exhibitions of 1937. The reference, however, is equivocal, since it is underlaid with the notion of Savonarola's opposition to what he saw as a corrupt regime. Subtle references of this sort abound, but they are not laboured; Mann expects much of his reader.

Music in *Doctor Faustus* is 'only a paradigm for something more general, only a means to express the situation of art in general, of culture, even of man and the intellect itself in our so critical era'; nonetheless, the history of western music is treated in detail and runs through *Doctor Faustus* like the history of Germany.[79] In the lectures of Kretschmar and the conversations between Zeitblom and Leverkühn, the reader is presented with the development from monody (monophony) to polyphony, the seminal innovations of Beethoven and the consequent difficulty of creating anything new; the development of chromaticism and the problematic nature of Wagner's compositions. Leverkühn's work, though it reflects the *Zeitgeist*, also encapsulates the history of western music, of which it is both the culmination and the overturning.

2.

Doctor Faustus is 'embedded […] in the pressure and tumult of outward events'.[80] Characteristically, this statement describes both the narrative itself and the process of writing it. Zeitblom puts pen to paper to begin the biography of Adrian Leverkühn on 23 May 1943, the same day on which Mann started to write *Doctor Faustus*.[81] The events which formed a backdrop to Mann's writing of the novel become Serenus Zeitblom's 'time in which I write'. This is typical of what Mann called his 'montage technique',[82] by which he means the mixing of real events and characters into the fictional narrative. 'I was constantly amazed,' he wrote, 'by the way its [the novel's] fantastic mechanisms drew upon factual, historical, personal, and even literary data. As in the "panoramas" shown in my childhood, palpable reality was for ever

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[79] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 37.
[80] Mann, *Genesis*, pp. 9-10.
[81] Mann, *Genesis,* p. 29 and *Doctor Faustus,* p. 1. The Everyman edition of Lowe-Porter's English translation has May 27, but this is a misprint; the German text has May 23. Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2008), p. 7.
[82] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 29.

indistinguishably merging into painted perspectives and illusion'.[83] To some extent this process is inherent in the writing of fiction, although Mann does seem to have taken the borrowing from reality – and other sources – to extremes. His research for the novel, detailed in *Genesis,* was vast, wide-ranging and eclectic. It covered both written and human sources (he relied heavily on Theodor Adorno, a fellow German exile and at that time a neighbour of Mann's in California, to advise on musical matters) and was both planned and circumstantial; he asked questions, wrote letters, read books, but also made use of chance findings. The project 'arrogated for its own purposes all that reality brought my way'.[84]

What Mann calls montage includes the covert use of historically attested characters. Adrian Leverkühn is so closely connected with Nietzsche, in terms both of life events (the brothel incident and subsequent syphilitic infection, the manic-depressive moods) and of ideology (the problem of the modern artist, burdened with an excess of knowledge, no longer able to follow traditional paths and thus forced to create works which exploit the primitive) that Nietzsche cannot appear in the novel as an autonomous historical character.[85] Such borrowings, or 'theft from reality',[86] as Mann called them, are historically accurate but take on meanings of their own in the novel. Leverkühn's knowing infection with syphilis – he disregards Esmeralda's warnings about her infected state (p. 157) – is drawn from Nietzsche's life,[87] but it becomes part of Leverkühn's self-modelling on Faust and is seen as the vehicle for both his creative success and his final collapse. Similarly, Schönberg is precluded from appearing in the novel, since Leverkühn 'invents' Schönberg's twelve-tone system. This highly rational and intellectual method of composition, which removes from the process a great deal of problematic subjectivity as well as the traditional need for tonality, offers a way out of the paradoxical restrictions of post-Romantic individual freedom and thus becomes a solution to the artist's dilemma. It is, however, one which, in its leaning towards the over-ordered, fascistic and barbaric, echoes Germany's political solution.

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[83] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 29.
[84] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 25.
[85] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 30.
[86] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 32.
[87] Mann apparently believed, from his reading of certain biographies, that Nietzsche had knowingly contracted syphilis (Beddow, *Thomas Mann*, p. 34).

Mann incorporated into *Doctor Faustus* significant elements of his own experience, thus creating an overlap between personal and political history. The depiction of German society in the first half of the twentieth century owes some of its cogency to the fact that Adrian Leverkühn's formative period was Mann's own. The semi-bohemian circles of Munich, the problems of artistic creation, the experience of life during the Second Reich and the Weimar Republic, are all mined from his own past. Clarissa Rodde's suicide is drawn from that of one of Mann's sisters; the angelic child Echo is closely (and courageously) based on the author's favourite grandson. This borrowing from reality, which underpins the conventional realism of the novel and contributes to its verisimilitude, also provides a detailed picture of the cultural roots of Nazism amongst the middle classes.

3.

Mann's use of a narrator allows the life-story of Adrian Leverkühn to be filtered through the pen of the mild, earnest and sometimes unintentionally comic humanist scholar Serenus Zeitblom. The themes of the novel – the Faust myth and the pact with the devil, the rise of Nazism, music and the predicament of the artist in the modern age – are all played out through Leverkühn; Zeitblom is the powerless onlooker to both his friend's tragedy and that of Germany. This narrative dichotomy is symbolic of Germany: the old-style rational, cultured humanism versus the new, tortured national psychology which has made a pact with its own devil, Hitler. But at the same time it represents the author's divided self.[88] Mann does not stand aloof from his country's historical catastrophe; on the contrary, he recognises that it was something in which he had himself participated. *Doctor Faustus* is in part an exploration of his own complicity, bound up with the artistic problems of the early years of the twentieth century. Mann had noted in 1938 that he himself possessed the 'tendencies of the time, in the air long before the word "Fascist" existed' and that they 'served its moral preparation. I had them in me as much as anyone'.[89] It was ideas such as these, expressed by Mann in his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*,

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[88] Reed, Introduction to *Doctor Faustus,* p. xv.
[89] Letter from Mann to Agnes. E. Meyer, 30 May 1938, quoted in Reed, Introduction to *Doctor Faustus*, p. xv.

written during the First World War, which led to the dispute with his brother Heinrich; a reconciliation took place only after Thomas had abandoned the possibility of being non-political.

For Mann, the cultural had become political; there is an implication that the social decline he depicts and the disaster of Germany's descent into Nazism are not only inevitable and parallel, but causally connected. 'Certainly in Germany, so he [Mann] would write after the German catastrophe, [… the] spiritual, cultural, emotional impulse – was the prime moving force, and political action only came after, as its expression and instrument.'[90] Mann concentrates not on the big 'forward step which history has taken', but on its 'reflexes in everyday life'.[91] He places less emphasis on a textbook analysis of Hitler's rise to power – we are not presented with the Beer Hall Putsch or jackboots goose-stepping through Berlin – than on its underlying cultural, psychological and intellectual roots. The personal stories of the Rodde daughters and of Rudi Schwerdtfeger are tragic endings symptomatic of 'the final stage of a society'[92] and are prefigured by Zeitblom's liberal use of prolepsis, lending the narrative a sense of inevitable doom and imbuing both personal and political events with the same relentless fatality.

But Mann's historical analysis is always, however loosely, a function of his characters and their situations; from the student discussions at Halle to the conversations of the Kridwiss circle, it is knitted into the narrative. A telling example is provided early in the novel, when Zeitblom muses on the relationship between the intellectual and the daemonic. He was first struck by the daemonic as a necessary element of culture during his youthful travels in Greece:

> When from the Acropolis I looked down upon the Sacred Way on which the initiates marched, adorned with the saffron band, with the name of Iacchus on their lips; again, when I stood at the place of initiation itself, […] I experienced by divination the rich feeling of life which expresses itself in the initiate veneration of Olympic Greece for the deities of the depths; often, later on, I explained to my pupils that culture is in very truth the pious and regulating, I might say propitiatory entrance of the dark and uncanny into the service of the gods. (pp. 7-8)

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[90] T. J. Reed, 'Mann and History', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-21 (p. 5).
[91] Georg Lukács, *Essays on Thomas Mann* (London: The Merlin Press, 1964), p. 15.
[92] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 107.

Though there is much of importance here, it is understated, slipped in amongst the apparently rambling memories of an old man. The uneasy relationship between the rational and the daemonic is seen to be historically rooted in the western mind. This reference is central to the novel: in Zeitblom's view, one of the significant problems of modern Germany is that it has let in too much of the 'dark and uncanny', at the expense of the reasoned and intellectual; but it is a typically oblique reference.

Zeitblom's 'uncanny' in this passage is undoubtedly a reference to Freud's concept of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*). The uncanny is that which arouses fear or unease because it contains elements which are both known and unknown. Freud notes, through the development of the word *heimlich* from 'homely' to 'concealed', the semantic shift by which *heimlich* ('familiar' or 'homely') comes to mean its opposite ('unfamiliar', 'uncanny'); it 'becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich'*.[93] Freud suggests that the sense of the uncanny derives from the resurgence of repressed impressions or ideas: either childhood complexes (in the individual) or primitive beliefs long since superseded by reason (in a society or a culture).[94] We may see here a parallel with Adrian Leverkühn's ambiguous music, in which a primitive and barbaric element resurfaces despite its highly rational nature; and with the Nazis' deliberate exploitation of archaic, *völkisch* beliefs.

Zeitblom, now an old man facing the destruction of Germany, makes a further reference to the ancient world, in a bitterly ironic comment on the short duration of Hitler's Reich:

> Our 'thousand-year' history, refuted, reduced *ad absurdum*, weighed in the balance and found unblest, turns out to be a road leading nowhere, or rather into despair, an unexampled bankruptcy, a *descensus Averno* lighted by the dance of roaring flames. (p. 462)

Aeneas's 'descensus Averno' was a journey back into the past – to consult his dead father, Anchises – and into the future: Anchises would enlighten his son on the nature of his destiny.[95] This interconnection of past and future is part of the overall

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[93] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 134.
[94] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 147.
[95] In Book VI of the *Aeneid.* Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. by G. P. Gould, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 520-21.

substance of *Doctor Faustus*, but also notable here is the layering of concepts: the juxtaposition of the classical underworld – a place in which good and evil are mixed – with the flames of the Christian hell – an unequivocal place of punishment for the wicked. We might connect this juxtaposition and progression of ideas with Zeitblom's concept of the 'daemonic', quoted above. Although there is no distinction in *Doctor Faustus* between the 'daemonic' and the 'demonic', there exists in the use of the word 'daemonic' an implied degeneration, from the 'daemonic' as a dangerous but necessary component of the intellectual life, artistic genius included (one thinks of Socrates's guiding spirit), to the 'demonic' evil of fascism. However unavoidable or necessary the 'daemonic' may be, both Leverkühn and Germany, in their combination of the primitive and the radically modern, have slipped into the 'demonic'.

4.

Fascism, however, was not the only system in the first half of the twentieth century to exploit the 'dark and uncanny', the primitive and the equivocal. The artist's life as exemplified by Adrian Leverkühn may on one level be a vehicle for Mann's socio-political analysis, but it is nonetheless a major constituent of the novel in its own right. For, in addition to investigating Germany's political crisis and the country's descent into Nazism, *Doctor Faustus* is an exploration of the era's particular artistic problems, which can be summed up in the word 'modernism'. The juncture of history at which Mann's Faustus finds himself was critical not just for politics but for the arts too. 'Why does almost everything seem to me like its own parody?' Leverkühn asks of his mentor Kretschmar at the decisive point in his career, when he is about to abandon theology (which he had taken up in an attempt to escape the need for parody) for musical composition. 'Why must I think that almost all, no, all the methods and conventions of art today *are good for parody only?*' (p. 135). This expression of the difficulty of making art in 1905 is met, in Kretschmar's reply paraphrased by Zeitblom, with an even clearer statement of the problems:

> Art needed just his sort today [... Leverkühn's temperament] belonged only in part to the private personality; for the rest it was of an extra-individual nature, the expression

> of a collective feeling for the historical exhaustion and vitiation of the means and appliances of art, the boredom with them and the search for new ways. (p. 136)

It is against this background, then, that Leverkühn's musical career and his pact with the devil are played out. Living during the period of what may be called 'high modernism', Leverkühn faces, broadly speaking, the same artistic problems as Joyce and Kafka, Mondrian and Duchamp. With the exhaustion and consequent unacceptability of traditional forms, few choices are left: parody, which is equally unacceptable; the destructive abolition of traditional forms (as in Dada); or the creation of radically new ones. Adrian Leverkühn's breakthrough, the twelve-tone system, is just such a radically new form and places its creator firmly within the modernist camp.

But Leverkühn's position as an exemplar of extreme modernism is at odds with his allegorical function. His career runs parallel to recent national history; his pact with the devil, period of creativity and subsequent madness are also Germany's; but this is no one-sided correspondence. Paradoxically, Leverkühn's music would doubtless have met the same fate as that of its actual creator, Schönberg: in Nazi Germany atonal compositions were classed as *entartete Musik* (degenerate music) and their performance banned. Indeed, one of the reasons that Zeitblom gives for desiring German defeat in the war is that only then will his friend's music see the light of day (p. 28).

The opposition between these two readings of Leverkühn is nowhere more apparent than in Zeitblom's discussion of his friend's *Apocalypsis cum figuris.* This masterpiece is specifically connected, through the intertwining narratives which comprise the three sections of Chapter 34, with the proto-fascist ideas of the Kridwiss circle meeting in Munich in the 1920s: the need, enforced by the decline of bourgeois humanism, for an alternative ideology, one which sees itself as ultra-modern and which combines an element of Social Darwinism with the control of the masses by barbarism and primitive 'mythical fictions' (p. 373). Yet, though it epitomises those ideas, the *Apocalypsis* is a complex avant-garde work, such as would have been vilified by the members of the Kridwiss circle. It is in fact largely misunderstood, and incurs 'the reproach both of blood-boltered barbarism and of bloodless intellectuality!' (p. 381).

This complex linkage and opposition of ideas is underscored by a simile used by Zeitblom in describing both the new ideology and the *Apocalypsis*. In this work, musical conventions have moved full circle, so that dissonance stands for spirituality and pure harmony for hell. (Similarly, the buildings of Auschwitz made use of classical symmetry; a fact used by the artist Kitaj, in whose 'If Not, Not' the Auschwitz gatehouse in the background forms a startling contrast with what Kitaj called the 'scattered fragments' in the rest of the picture.)[96] Zeitblom uses this idea of 'full circle' to connect the *Apocalypsis* with the ideas which form its backdrop. First, to flag up the simultaneously progressive and regressive nature of this ideology:

> It was an old-new world of revolutionary reaction, in which the values bound up with the idea of the individual [...] were entirely rejected and shorn of power [...] – not, let me say, in a reactionary, anachronistic way as of yesterday or the day before, but so that it was like the most novel setting back of humanity into mediævally theocratic conditions and situations. That was as little reactionary as though one were to describe as regression the track round a sphere, which of course leads back to where it started. (pp. 375-76)

And later, to justify in the *Apocalypsis* the combination of old and new, on which the charge of barbarism rests:

> But surely this is by no means an arbitrary combination; rather it lies in the nature of things: it rests, I might say, on the curvature of the world, which makes the last return unto the first. (p. 383)

The unresolved tension between these two uses of the simile pinpoints the uncomfortable consonance between modernism and fascism, forms which, however different they appear on the surface, both contain a 'combination of very new and very old' (p. 383). Fascism, itself a manifestation of modernity, had common ground with modernism in the arts. Like Futurism, it exalted modern technological phenomena – the railway system, speed, the radio and film – while at the same time making use of primitive folk-motifs. Radical in its break with the past and with traditional forms, it was consciously experimental, a new form of government for a new age. The fact that some modernists embraced fascism – Ezra Pound, for example – serves only to reinforce the connection.

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[96] R. B. Kitaj, catalogue note on 'If Not, Not' for the retrospective exhibition of his work in 1994-1995, in *R. B. Kitaj*, ed. by Richard Morphet (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), p. 120.

For Mann, the correlation between fascism and modernism would appear to be barbarism. While we might expect an old-fashioned liberal bourgeois like Zeitblom to be disturbed by any non-traditional music, it has to be noted that Mann himself found an element of barbarism in Schönberg's music. He agreed with Adorno that the 'rigorous rational analysis' of Schönberg's approach nonetheless resulted in 'just the converse of rationality. Over the head of the artist, as it were, the art is cast back into a dark, mythological realm'.[97]

The concept of barbarism features in the wider discussion surrounding the effects of technology on modern art and culture during the 1930s and 1940s. To many intellectuals of this period, the popularisation of culture and the control of the masses through mass media were a cause for concern. Walter Benjamin noted the fascists' use of film to make politics into a spectacle for the masses: 'The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life'.[98] Yet such effects were also apparent in the United States; Adorno and Horkheimer wished to explain 'why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism'[99] – a barbarism that had as much to do with Hollywood and the commodification of culture as with mass rallies and Hitler's voice over the radio.[100] The personal tragedy of Adrian Leverkühn is that his attempt to resolve the problem of artistic sterility – what Mann called 'the desperate situation of art: the most vital factor'[101] – results in an art which, though refined and cerebral, shares elements with a system he would despise.

The question remains whether *Doctor Faustus* is a modernist novel. Though it discusses the problems of modernism, it lacks the experimental techniques of novels such as *Ulysses* or *The Waves.* The conceit of the simple schoolmaster writing the biography of his beloved friend – a device which goes back to the early days of the novel and which Mann found beneficial to the writing process – not only produces a discontinuity between author and reader but allows an outward form which,

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[97] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 40.
[98] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 1095-1113 (p. 1108).
[99] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), p. xi.
[100] 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, pp. 120-67.
[101] Mann, *Genesis*, p. 38.

superficially at least, relies on traditional techniques. Serenus Zeitblom, out-and-out traditionalist that he is, would never think of using anything but the conventional, realist modes. Yet Mann, discussing his work in relation to that of Joyce, was at pains to identify himself with the modernists, while at the same time acknowledging the greater accessibility and popularity of traditional forms.[102] These matters, especially the tension between avant-garde and popular forms, are still relevant to the writer of historical fiction today.

Georg Lukács praised *Doctor Faustus* precisely for the fact that it is not a modernist work: though its two time-sequences lend it a superficial resemblance to some modernist novels, the fact that both time frames are 'objective realities' forming 'one unified time sequence' makes it a conventional realist novel. Deploring the 'wildest orgies' of the modernist treatment of time, with its 'extreme subjective distortion of reality', Lukács finds the fracturing of form in modernism unacceptable; however ironized, it is only conventional realist forms, treating time as a 'social and historical unity', which permit the disclosure of reality. *Doctor Faustus* is, claims Lukács, a supreme example of this socially responsible realist novel.[103]

However, if we scratch beneath the surface of *Doctor Faustus*, we find a more intricate fabric. It was Bakhtin who said that the novel absorbs all forms and is a supremely effective vehicle for expressing the complex nature of truth; a dictum exemplified in the elaborate polyphonic structure of *Doctor Faustus*. Its hybrid nature has already been noted; in fact, what we have in *Doctor Faustus* is an amalgam of several forms and styles. Like many another Bildungsroman, it recounts the life of its subject in detail from childhood, but this authentic and accurate social realism is only one strand of the novel. Allegory forms a major element: Adrian Leverkühn is paralleled with Faust and with Germany. The Faust myth forms a template for the novel; in addition the language of myth and fairy tale is used to imbue seemingly ordinary elements of the narrative with mythical significance. Leverkühn's life, for example, is 'marked by fate' (p. 151); his seeking out of the prostitute Esmeralda a year after his visit to the Leipzig brothel is described by Zeitblom as a 'fateful event' (p. 155), prefigured at the end of the preceding chapter by the comment, 'Adrian was to return to the place whither the betrayer had led him'

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[102] Mann, *Genesis*, pp. 75-76.
[103] Lukács, *Essays*, pp. 78, 80, 84.

(p. 150). The tragedies of the Rodde daughters and of Rudi Schwerdtfeger are moved forward by traditional (and melodramatic) plot-driven dramas characteristic of the realist novel. There are Kretschmar's lectures on the history of music (that on Beethoven is taken from Adorno's essay 'Beethoven's Late Style')[104] and much of Zeitblom's narrative consists of reportage: for example, the accounts of the Roddes's semi-bohemian salon and the theological lectures of professors Schlepfuss and Kumpf at Halle university. Though he did not define it as such, Mann's use of these different representational modes – a collage of novelistic and essayistic forms – nonetheless constitutes an instance of montage, one more akin to that used by Eisenstein in his films and by Brecht in his *episches Theater*. Like his use of 'double time', Mann's montage and juxtaposition create a layering effect, akin to that fragmentation of narrative which is a distinctive feature of the modernist work.

Categories, however, are not always useful, and *Doctor Faustus* is in any case too complex and heterogeneous a work to be easily pigeonholed. Whether or not it is relevant to the problem of fascism in the modern world,[105] and though it makes heavy demands of its reader (one could be forgiven for wondering if it would be accepted for commercial publication these days), as the novel of an era it is an extraordinary engagement with history.

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[104] Fredric Jameson, 'Allegory and History: On Rereading *Doktor Faustus*', in *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 113-33 (p. 116).

[105] For a discussion of fascism in modern India, for example, see Jairus Banaji, 'The Political Culture of Fascism', South Asia Citizens' Web (2002) <http://www.sacw.net/new/BanajiSept02.html> [accessed 14/02/08]. It is interesting that Banaji shares Mann's view of fascism as an ideology nurtured not only by political conditions but by widespread cultural and psychological tendencies.

Chapter III

The spy is someone who by profession has, or simulates, multiple identities. In the first series of the BBC's *Spooks,* the MI5 agents keep the belongings which pertain to their undercover personae (passports, credit cards and the like) in small boxes, to be got out when needed and put away again when a persona is finished with. While its portrayal of the workings of MI5 no doubt leans towards the far-fetched, *Spooks* contains some interesting insights into the complexities of the double life of the secret agent, and these 'identity boxes' might be seen as a symbol of that compartmentalization of personae which characterizes so many spies both real and fictional.[106]

Antony Blunt was a man of such compartmentalization: Director of the Courtauld Institute, Keeper of the King's (later the Queen's) Pictures, he was also a spy and a homosexual when these were not only illegal but considered by many to be traitorous in equal degree.[107] John Banville's novel *The Untouchable* is a roman à clef based on the life of Blunt and the other Cambridge spies. Victor Maskell (who stands for Blunt) is, as his name implies, a man of masks and multiple personae; he is also, like my own protagonist Richard Turnbull, a betrayer betrayed, a spy who trades in secrets but from whom significant information is withheld. *The Untouchable* is therefore relevant to my own work through its historical nature and its exploration of the themes of spying, duality and betrayal.

This novel bears certain resemblances to *Doctor Faustus*: it has two narrative strands and most of its action takes place in the 1930s and 1940s (Maskell, narrating in 1979, looks back on his past life); its protagonist is, moreover, an amalgam of two historically-attested characters. *The Untouchable* has both a political and a personal focus: it explores the phenomenon of the Cambridge spies in the thirties, along with matters of class and ideology, and links these with an exploration of personal relationships; the dualistic practices of homosexuality and spying link these two spheres. Also significant for my own work is the fact that this is a serious literary

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[106] *Spooks*, series 1, dir. by Bharat Nalluri (Kudos Productions/BBC, 2002), episodes 1 and 2 [on DVD].
[107] Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 193-96.

novel which manifests an awareness of the popular novelistic forms – traditional historical and spy fiction – with which it is connected.

Spying History in John Banville's *The Untouchable*

'Yet if I had not stepped into the spate of history, what would I have been?'[108]

1.

History, in one form or another, pervades *The Untouchable*. Much of the novel is set during an extraordinary period in British history, when the Soviets, taking advantage of relatively lax security in MI5, managed a massive infiltration of the British establishment.[109] The life of Anthony Blunt – as that of his fictional reincarnation Victor Maskell – not only intersected this period, but was defined by it and to some extent epitomized it.

In *The Untouchable* personal and political history combine. Victor Maskell tells the story of his life between the late twenties (his first meeting with Nick Brevoort in 1929) and the late fifties (his interrogations by MI5 officers after his first exposure); this account is interspersed with details of his childhood. More emphasis, however, is given to the period up to May 1941 (narrated in sections 1 and 2). The third and last section of the novel covers the years from 1945 to c.1955. This skewing reflects the importance of the earlier years, which comprised the formative period of Maskell's life: his recruitment by the Soviets and the majority of his espionage activity. This is a period sketched out with evocative detail. Maskell's comment on the pronunciation of the word 'hello' – 'That was how chaps said it in those days: *hull* not *hell*' (p. 9) – not only emphasizes the gap in time between his account (1979) and the events being narrated (1929), foregrounding the historical nature of the narrative, but through the use of the outdated word 'chaps' also reinforces its male ethos.

The period evoked with most nostalgic detail, however, is that immediately preceding the Second World War. Into passages reminiscent of Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*, itself an evocative account of the autumn of 1938, Maskell injects his own personality and preoccupations, so that these descriptions are both historical set-pieces and metonymic statements about himself:

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[108] Banville, *The Untouchable*, p. 46. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[109] Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 168-73.

> London that autumn [1938] had an abstracted, provisional air; the atmosphere was hectic and hollow, like that of the last day of school term, or the closing half-hour of a drunken party. People would drift off into silence in the middle of a sentence and look up at the tawny sunlight in the windows and sigh. The streets were like stage-sets, scaled down, two-dimensional […]. It was all so banal, these hackneyed signs and wonders. Fear was banal. (pp. 77-78)

It is significant that Maskell perceives London as a stage-set; the image of theatricality, which recurs throughout the novel, is one of the devices used to highlight the theme of duality. The theatrical quality of espionage, the necessity and the possibility of taking on alternative identities, is one of its allurements for Maskell, whose later life becomes 'a kind of hectic play-acting in which I took all the parts' (p. 315).

> You are never required to *be yourself*; whatever you do, there is another, alternative you standing invisibly to one side, observing, evaluating, remembering. This is the secret power of the spy […]; it is the power to be and not be, to detach oneself from oneself, to be oneself and at the same time another. (p. 143)

The allusion to *Hamlet* here is also telling. Hamlet's 'to be, or not to be'[110] is a binary opposition; part of the lure of spying for Maskell is that it removes the mutual exclusivity of the either/or opposition; the 'or' has become an 'and'.

But Maskell's narrative, not unlike Serenus Zeitblom's, is also punctuated by references to earlier historical periods. The fact that, like Anthony Blunt, Maskell is a Poussin scholar, means that much of his professional life revolves around the study of the seventeenth century. Maskell quotes Poussin writing about the execution of Charles I: 'It is a true pleasure to live in a century in which such great events take place, provided that one can take shelter in some little corner and watch the play in comfort' (p. 198). Maskell goes on to discuss his own life in terms of Poussin's stoicism, commenting that this remark by Poussin 'is expressive of the quietism of the later Stoics, and of Seneca in particular' (p. 198); but the reference is also an implied comparison between his own time and that of Poussin: the period of the English Civil War, like the years between the First and Second World Wars, was a time of political upheaval and fiercely-held positions for and against established values.

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[110] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), III. 1. 55.

Poussin's work, however, looks back to earlier historical periods, both biblical and classical. Anthony Blunt owned Poussin's *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, bought for him by Victor Rothschild in 1931.[111] Victor Maskell acquires a Poussin in a similar way (bought the same year by Leo Rothenstein) but in the novel this becomes a fictitious painting entitled *The Death of Seneca* (pp. 41-44). This shift from a biblical to a classical theme not only underlines Maskell's preoccupation with Stoicism, but emphasizes the concepts of duplicity and equivocality in the novel. The historical Seneca was not only the Stoic philosopher who is depicted in the painting dying a calmly heroic death, but also, as Maskell is quick to point out in an early interview with Miss Vandeleur, a dual if not duplicitous character: this advocate of asceticism happened to make a fortune from money-lending in Britain, 'which means, as Lord Russell has wittily pointed out, that Queen Boadicea's rebellion was directed against capitalism as represented by the Roman Empire's leading philosophical proponent of austerity. Such are the ironies of history' (p. 27). This duplicity is reflected in the twentieth century both by Maskell himself and by Nick Brevoort, the high-ranking politician whose life as a Soviet spy has been far more successful than Maskell's.

The reference to Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* adds a historical authenticity to Maskell's assessment of Seneca, but it is possibly also an attempt to justify his own duplicity, in its revelation that such double-dealing has not only existed throughout history but has been embraced by such venerable characters as Seneca. Maskell's words are an accurate paraphrase of Russell's, which are: 'The heroic Queen Boadicea, if this is true, was heading a rebellion against capitalism as represented by the philosophic apostle of austerity.'[112] Interestingly, he omits Russell's 'if this is true', thus removing the possibility of doubt in the matter.

[111] Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (London: Macmillan, 2001), p. 87.
[112] Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 267. (Neither Banville nor Russell note the anachronism of the word 'capitalism' here.)

2.

The English Civil War was not the only period which possessed similarities to the Communist/Fascist dichotomy of the 1930s. Early in his memoir Maskell comments on the attitude towards the proletariat of upper-class Communist sympathizers like himself, through a comparison with the period of the French Revolution:

> We were like those Jacobin mobs in the early days of the French Revolution, who would go surging through the streets of Paris in a rage for fraternity, clasping the Common Man to their breasts so fiercely they knocked the stuffing out of him. (p. 48)

This is the first of a small series of subtle references to this period scattered through *The Untouchable*. The Rothenstein fortune was amassed during the Napoleonic wars, significantly through the running of intelligence networks. This fact is historically true of the Rothschilds (Leo Rothenstein is based on Victor Rothschild), but it is given significance in the novel, both as a reflection of the Soviet spy network and as a comment on the equivocal foundations of elements of the British establishment. And in his description of the 1950s, contrasting what he sees as the dreariness and hypocrisy of heterosexual marriage with the excitements of gay sex, Maskell states, ‘O my friends! – to be queer was very bliss’ (p. 353), an obvious echo of Wordsworth’s ‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive’.[113] This is a similar technique to that used by Mann (in his reference to the Savonarola chair, for example); these are not laboured references and it would be easy to miss them. They seem to point to a deliberate conflation of the Russian and French Revolutions. There are similarities between these periods; not only in terms of political upheaval and fiercely-held convictions, but also in the way in which both revolutions turned from initial euphoria and rapid social change to terror and repression. Both revolutions prompted much support amongst upper-class enthusiasts, whose relationship with the ‘common man’ was as ambivalent as Maskell’s, and the effects of both were long-lasting and momentous. Most significantly, perhaps, these periods engendered a great deal of espionage. In contrast to the 1930s, however, Britain in the 1790s was characterized by ruthless counter-espionage; Maskell mentions, for example, Blake’s

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[113] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), X. 692, in *The Prelude: The Four Texts*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 440.

imprisonment by a group of soldiers who suspected that he and his friend Stothard were French spies (pp. 401-02).[114]

Connected with this interpolation into the narrative of references to earlier periods of history is Maskell's use of prolepsis, the mention of events which occurred after the period he is narrating but which are 'historical' in terms of the period of writing (1979). In a description of a meeting at Cambridge, for example, he mentions 'a chap called Wilkins, I've forgotten his first name, weedy type with glasses and a bad case of psoriasis, who was to die at El Alamein in command of a tank' (p. 55). And into his account of a conversation with Mrs Brevoort he slips the information that 'her brother and his wife and their three children were to perish in Treblinka' (p. 95). These comments complicate the historical perspective, juxtaposing pasts and futures and emphasizing the relative nature of the concept of history: what was an unknown future in 1938 is a well-worn past in 1979.

This manipulation of time-sequences is possible because of the way in which *The Untouchable* is structured. The novel is narrated by an elderly Maskell looking back on his life. As in *Doctor Faustus*, there are two time-planes to Maskell's narration: the historical past (from the early 1930s to the 1950s) and Maskell's present (1979-80). His story, in which both personal and national events are inextricably mingled, is filtered through his own (potentially inaccurate) memory and his desire for self-justification. Although there is relatively little action in the novel's present (much of the present-day narrative consists of Maskell's meetings with Miss Vandeleur and of musings on the past), the juxtaposition allows contrast and comment. An IRA bomb in London in 1979, for example, prompts Maskell to compare the Irish terrorists with his own group of political activists: 'We should have been like that. We should have had no mercy, no qualms. We would have brought down a whole world' (p. 232). This is a complex observation: Maskell betrays his approval of the IRA's action through his use of the word 'glorious' to describe the bomb damage; but is his continuing contempt of the establishment a function of his lasting communism, of his Irish background, or both?

For Maskell, however, there is unfinished business in the present. He has been unaware of Nick Brevoort's involvement as a Soviet spy; ironically, throughout much of the novel Nick appears to have 'sold out', turning from his early socialist

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[114] See also Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), p. 73.

enthusiasm to a successful career as a Tory MP (a career which echoes Maskell's own as a successful art historian); becoming the 'Sir Nicholas' of Miss Vandeleur's questions, as opposed to the 'Nick' of Maskell's memories. Maskell finds out at the end of the novel that, not only was it Nick who had betrayed him the previous year, but that he had been sacrificed in order to protect Nick's status as a spy. This throws a question mark not only over Maskell's view of the past, but over the process of narration itself. Maskell's account is unreliable, not just because he is an ex-spy with a fallible memory and an agenda of self-justification, but because he is not, until the end of the narrative, in possession of all the facts. To some extent this echoes the nature of history, which is often a provisional account mediated through narrative and modified as new evidence comes to light.

Maskell's narrative is fragmentary and jumps between past and present; it leaves gaps in the time-sequence and his reminiscences are somewhat rambling, albeit coherent enough to present a more or less complete picture of the salient events of his life. He calls his account 'a scrapbook of memories […] an autobiography, notes toward' (p. 57); this fragmentation and the provisionality of the narrative emphasize the fragmentation and provisionality, not only of modern narrative, but of modern life too. The historical novel is often as much a comment on the age it is written in as it is an exploration of the historical period examined;[115] nothing, perhaps, sums up more aptly the irony of the modern world as the life of a spy. 'In my world, there are no simple questions, and precious few answers of any kind,' writes Maskell. Like Adrian Leverkühn, Maskell represents the predicaments of his age: the problems of achieving authenticity, the prevalence of the divided self.

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[115] See, for example, Lion Feuchtwanger, 'The Purpose of the Historical Novel', trans. by John Ahouse, *Feuchtwanger's Writings*, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library <http://www.usc.edu/ libraries/ archives/arc/libraries/feuchtwanger/writings/historical.html> [accessed 02/10/2009] (para. 4 of 21).

3.

It is clear that on the one hand *The Untouchable* follows closely the historical details of Anthony Blunt's life. Victor Maskell is an art historian who becomes director of the Courtauld Institute ('the Institute' in the novel) and Keeper of the King's Pictures; he is recruited by the Soviets and works for MI5 during the Second World War. By the time of his narrative, he is an old man who drinks gin and is given to tears. The other spies of Blunt's entourage are likewise present: Guy Burgess (Boy Bannister), Donald MacLean (Philip MacLeish), Victor Rothschild (Leo Rothenstein).

On the other hand, Banville's treatment of his subject involves some major departures from the historical facts. Maskell, like Blunt, is the son of a clergyman, but he is also Irish, an outsider to the English establishment with which he later develops such an ambivalent relationship. Maskell's ancestors were 'the mighty O Measceoils […] who just in time to avoid the ravages of the Famine had changed their religion and Anglicised the family name and turned themselves into Yeats's hard-riding country gentlemen' (p. 77): a reconstruction of identity which prefigures Maskell's own as both English gentleman and spy.

Much of Maskell's childhood and family history are in fact based on the life of Louis MacNeice: his Irish background, the early death of his mother, his Down's-syndrome brother Freddie.[116] MacNeice was an exact contemporary of Blunt and a good friend from his days at Marlborough (they shared a room); but he does not appear in *The Untouchable*, much as Schönberg and Nietzsche cannot feature in *Doctor Faustus*.

Instead, Maskell has a lifelong friendship with Nick Brevoort, whom he first meets in an idyllic Oxford scene in 1929. Nick ('the Beaver') and his sister Vivienne ('Baby') constitute the biggest and most significant departure from the actuality of Blunt's life, one in which the major themes of *The Untouchable* are reflected: sex, espionage and betrayal. Maskell's complex relationship with both brother and sister is central to the novel and serves to accentuate these themes. It is Nick to whom Maskell is sexually attracted, his only real love; even after Nick has become 'a

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[116] Joseph McMinn, *The Supreme Fictions of John Banville* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 143.

typical High Tory grandee, portly, pinstriped', Maskell confesses that 'I still loved him, helplessly, hopelessly' (p. 310). Baby functions as an *alter ego* for Nick, representing him in a sexually acceptable form. (When he meets the Brevoorts, Maskell is unaware of his homosexuality; Nick, in any case, like MacNeice, is heterosexual.) Maskell's abrupt decision to marry Vivienne is explained by her closeness and resemblance to her inaccessible brother; it is significant that Maskell makes this decision after he has seen her at a post-party gathering dressed in men's clothes, so that at first he does not recognize her. He comments: 'As I watched them […] brother and sister seemed to merge and separate and merge again, dark on dark and pale on glimmering pale, Pierrot and Pierrette' (p. 85).

The introduction into the novel of Nick and Vivienne serves also to intensify its theme of betrayal. Each member of the Nick-Vivienne-Maskell trio is guilty of betrayal of one sort or another. Maskell abandons his wife and children, first to his war work and his spying, later to his homosexual relationships. This is mirrored by Vivienne's affair with Querrell, adultery providing a reflection of the spying life, albeit one which is less socially reprehensible than Maskell's political treachery. Nick's is perhaps the greatest perfidy of all.

Querrell, the sleazy novelist based on Graham Greene, is another interesting, though complex, departure from historical fact. Banville's depiction of him is jaundiced and savage; Querrell is, perhaps, the only unequivocally nasty character in the novel. He links the personal and political aspects of Maskell's life, betraying him through his affair with Vivienne and by revealing Maskell's identity to MI5 in 1951.

Whereas Anthony Blunt had been aware of his homosexuality since his school days, Maskell realizes his leanings only after marriage and fatherhood. Blunt's homosexuality played a major part in preparing him for a life of spying: the criminalization of a large part of his identity, the need for secrecy, secret assignations, the sense of not being accepted.[117] For Maskell, however, it is the spying which prepares him for the homosexuality:

> When I began to go in search of men it was already familiar to me; the covert, speculative glance, the underhand sign, the blank exchange of passwords, the hurried, hot unburdening – all, all familiar. Even the territory was the same, the public

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[117] Carter, *Anthony Blunt*, p. 177.

lavatories, the grim, suburban pubs, the garbage-strewn back alleyways, and, in summer, the city's dreamy, tenderly green, innocent parks. (p. 316)

But, although the order of these events is reversed in the novel, the link between the two is the same. Both, during the period Maskell is recalling, demand a double life involving secrecy; both are illegal activities and attract social opprobrium. Maskell thrives on this; it is not just his sex life but also his spying which produces 'the aphrodisiac properties of secrecy and fear' (p. 353).

Banville's departures from historical fact, like his use of anachronism, emphasize the fictionality of *The Untouchable*. These are not historical lapses but deliberate modifications, made in order to shape the narrative and to accentuate the themes – especially those of betrayal and the divided self – with which Banville is chiefly concerned.[118] This is one of the advantages of the roman à clef; it allows both an accurate depiction of historical facts and a departure from those facts which does not incur the charge of historical inaccuracy. It is itself a manifestation of duality. These characters and events are both 'true' and 'not true'; fact and fiction are here integrated in a complex way.

However, it is not merely in Maskell's triangular relationship with Nick and Vivienne that the theme of betrayal is enacted. *The Untouchable* explores many levels of betrayal, political and personal, few of them simple. The novel begins the day after Maskell has been exposed as a traitor; he has betrayed his country, with all the accompanying outrage of media and popular opinion which that entails. This, however, is merely the 'public version' of Maskell, in which, significantly, he does not recognize himself (p. 6). Paradoxically, it is through what he calls the 'burnished mask' (p. 7) that he best realizes his identity.

It is not only his wife, children and country which Maskell betrays, but his Irish family too; each of his visits to Carrickdrum intensifies the level of this betrayal, emphasizing the extent to which he has turned his back on his Irish background and remade himself as an English gentleman. But Maskell is a betrayer betrayed, in ways which go beyond the historical facts of Blunt's life: by his wife, by Querrell, by Nick. Nick has succeeded where Maskell has failed; he has maintained a water-tight double life of which Maskell has no inkling. It was to protect Nick – the spy in

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[118] McMinn, *Supreme Fictions*, p. 155.

Parliament – that Maskell has been forced to make the transition from pillar of the establishment to 'traitor' and 'criminal' (p. 15).

The irony of this demarcation between 'traitor' and 'loyal subject' is intensified by other instances of duplicity and treachery throughout the novel. 'What have I done,' complains Maskell, 'to be so reviled, in a nation of traitors, who daily betray friends, wives, children, tax inspectors?' (p. 104). Leo Rothenstein, another member of the Cambridge spy circle who has never been exposed, inherits the family fortune and becomes rich and powerful. Even the Royal Family is not free of duplicity: in 1945 Maskell is sent on a mission to Regensburg in Bavaria to retrieve incriminating pro-Nazi documents written by the Duke of Windsor (pp. 320-31). (Blunt carried out an almost identical mission to Friedricshof, near Frankfurt, although the supposition that its aim was to retrieve letters written by the Duke is possibly unfounded.)[119] Almost everyone Maskell comes into contact with is guilty of some form of duplicity or hypocrisy, from the Irish bishop who wants nothing to do with finding a home for Maskell's brother Freddie (p. 239), to the Church of England's sponsorship of a school trip to visit a Hitler Youth camp (p. 80). In fact, says Maskell, the only people he knows who have 'no wickedness' are his step-mother Hettie, a provincial anachronism who has spent her life in obscure good works, and 'poor Freddie', whose disability prevents these sorts of complex deceits (p. 67). T. S. Eliot, mentioned briefly, is, like Maskell, a 'lifelong, obsessive dissembler' (p. 82); in fact his transformation of himself into an English gentleman mirrors Maskell's own.

4.

At the end of *The Untouchable*, the ageing Victor Maskell goes to visit his old friend and brother-in-law Nick Brevoort, taking a gun with which he intends to kill Nick – an act of revenge for the latter's betrayal – and then himself. He ends up carrying the gun through London in a string bag and realizes only too late that he is still (as W. H. Auden was in the habit of doing during his last days in Oxford) wearing his carpet slippers. This comic – or tragi-comic – image, a million miles away from the urbane

[119] Carter, *Anthony Blunt*, pp. 311-17.

manliness of a James Bond or a Richard Hannay, is typical of *The Untouchable*'s subversion of the traditional genres of spy fiction and historical fiction.

Maskell alludes to these genres throughout his narrative, often through the use of archaic vocabulary. At Regensburg, 'liveried footmen came and went wordlessly on creaking shoon' (p. 333); and at a meeting with his old handler Oleg in 1951 'dreamy lovers drifted across the greensward arm in arm' (p. 356). On one level, these references are mere nods towards the traditional genres, an ironic contrast between those narratives – in which good and evil are usually well-differentiated – and this modern-day narrative with its multiple layers of deceit and betrayal, equivocation and irony. When Maskell discusses the conventional view of the spy early in his account, he mocks and distances himself from the clichés of the traditional form:

> Now such words – spy, agent, espionage, etc. – have always given me trouble. They conjure in my mind images of low taverns and cobbled laneways at night with skulking figures in doublet and hose and the flash of poniards. I could never think of myself as a part of that dashing, subfusc world. Boy, now, Boy had a touch of the Kit Marlowes about him, all right, but I was a dry old stick, even when I was young. (p. 22)

Maskell's narrative counters the notions of espionage found in popular fiction, not only by showing its realistically seamy side, but also by emphasizing the complex and equivocal motivation of the spy. Yet later he contradicts this view:

> All the commentators nowadays […] underestimate the adventure-story element in the world of espionage. Because real secrets are betrayed, because torturers exist, because men die […] they imagine that spies are somehow both irresponsible and inhumanly malign […], when really what we most resembled were those brave but playful, always resourceful chaps in school stories […]. That, anyway, is how we saw ourselves […] We considered ourselves to be *good*, that is the point. (p. 154)

And he can only recall the drive to Kent with Boy Bannister, immediately before the defection of Bannister and Macleish, in terms of the classic adventure story: 'I see […] Boy and me, two grim-faced figures tensed behind the windscreen, lit from below, jaws set and eyes fixed unblinkingly upon the onrushing road. I too have read my Buchan and my Henty' (p. 362). In fact, the final revelation of Nick's treachery (both personal and political) and Maskell's subsequent confrontation with him, echo the format of the spy story. Intertextual references such as these point to an awareness that, however different *The Untouchable* is from traditional spy fiction,

and however much the traditional form is here subverted, this paradigm to some extent defines as well as informs Maskell's narrative.

5.

In *The Untouchable* three themes converge: espionage, homosexuality and art. Each of these was present in the life of Anthony Blunt. The necessary double life of the homosexual in the thirties, forties and fifties is reflected in that of the spy. And art becomes a symbol of authenticity. The focus for this is Maskell's Poussin painting *The Death of Seneca*. This painting becomes a leitmotif in the novel, not only in terms of its content (mentioned above) but also of its fate.

At the beginning of his narrative, Maskell acknowledges the metaphoric significance of his Poussin, likening the process of writing his memoir to the restoration of a painting:

> I realise that the metaphor is obvious: attribution, verification, restoration. I shall strip away layer after layer of grime – the toffee-coloured varnish and caked soot left by a lifetime of dissembling – until I come to the very thing itself and know it for what it is. My soul. My self. (p. 7)

The fact that he then bursts into ironic laughter at the notion of discovering his true self highlights his awareness both of his own disingenuousness and of the ambiguity of such concepts as the true self.

The fate of the Poussin counterpoints events in Maskell's life. The news that 'someone at the valuers has raised a question as to its authenticity; preposterous, of course' (p. 384) occurs immediately before his account of his interviews by Skryne, the MI5 interrogator, after the first revelation of his identity as a spy. And at the end of the novel Maskell is told the picture is a fake. The connection of Maskell's inauthenticity with that of his beloved picture is obvious:

> Just now a most unpleasant exchange over the telephone with an impudent young man at the valuers. Outrageous imputations. He actually used the word fake. Do you realise, I said, who I am? And I swear I heard him stifle a snigger. (p. 396)

This metaphor of authenticity in art (a gift to anyone writing about Blunt) is similarly used by Alan Bennett in his play *A Question of Attribution*. Asked by the Queen,

apropos of the *Triple Portrait* once supposed to have been by Titian, whether it is 'part of your function, Sir Anthony, to prove that my pictures are fakes?', Blunt replies: 'Because something is not what it is said to be, Ma'am, does not mean it is a fake. It may just have been wrongly attributed', a double entendre which refers obviously to his own position.[120]

Other Poussin paintings are similarly emblematic of Maskell's relationship with historical events. The *Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* is linked to the fall of Barcelona in the Spanish Civil War: Maskell is studying 'the curious pair of severed heads' in the foreground of the picture when this event is announced, and comments that it was 'as if the two events, the real and the depicted, were equally far off from me in antiquity, the one as fixed and finished as the other' (p. 155).

Towards the end of his narrative, Maskell comments that 'art was the only thing in my life that was untainted' (p. 316). Although he has to qualify this statement ('a suspicion of fraudulence always attended the moment'), it is nonetheless true that it is in relation to art that he attains the greatest degree of self-awareness. 'Have I any authenticity at all?' he asks after one discussion of the place of art in his life; 'or have I double dealt for so long that my true self has been forfeit? My true self. Ah.' (p. 317). The spy fascinates, and is perhaps emblematic of modernity, because he reflects the uneasiness surrounding the concept of the self; an uneasiness which also characterizes my historical protagonist Richard Turnbull.

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[120] Bennett, *Plays: Two*, p. 333.

Chapter IV

Chimera is set in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because Dic Aberdaron, the inspiration for Richard Turnbull, lived at that time; yet it was a period about which I had only a limited knowledge. It was therefore necessary to carry out a great deal of historical research in order to situate *Chimera* convincingly in its time.

Richard Roberts Jones was an atheist and 'enjoyed expressing horrifyingly subversive views to the soldiers of the [Dover] garrison'.[121] Richard Turnbull's radical atheism was, in the early stages of writing, little more than a vague impression inspired by this comment, but it fitted with the general non-conformity and obstreperousness of his character and I decided to develop it. As the plot of *Chimera* advanced, the madcap preacher Ezekiel Enwright – later reincarnated as Ezekiel Juggins – came to play a significant role in Turnbull's past. However, both Juggins's religion and Turnbull's radical atheism were problematic since I had little idea of their historical authenticity. It was therefore necessary to verify the accuracy of these characters; had these traits not been authentic, the text would have had to be revised.

It turned out, however, that I had hit on a combination which was not only possible during the period 1780-1815, but which to a large extent defined it. Turnbull's radical atheism and Juggins's outlandish Christianity proved to be largely accurate. Turnbull would have been at home rubbing shoulders with members of the circle around the radical publisher Joseph Johnson in the late eighteenth century, figures such as William Godwin, Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft; or with William Hone, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt in the early nineteenth. And Ezekiel Juggins, although his peculiar brand of dissenting Christianity is entirely fictional, would not have been out of place alongside Richard Brothers, Joanna Southcott or any other of the idiosyncratic evangelists of the time.

I examined the history of Brothers and Southcott in some detail as these two dissenting preachers, both of whom attracted a large following, not only exemplified the religious fervour and diversity of the age but also encapsulated a certain ambiguity. Delusional and deranged they may have been, but in the doctrines of both

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[121] Morris, *Matter of Wales*, p. 189.

there existed elements which ran counter, not only to religious dogma but also to political orthodoxy.

The resulting study, documented here as ‘Conventicles and Politics’, proved to be a rewarding area of research; not only did it provide an insight into the religious and political background of the time, but the complex relationship between the two also helped to focus the historical research I carried out. This investigation exemplifies the tricky and potentially unending nature of historical research: in an area which has generated a vast number of sources, it was possible within the confines of this project to examine only a limited number.

Conventicles and Politics

1. Introduction

Voltaire, writing in the 1730s, described England as 'the land of sects'. 'As a free man,' he remarked, 'an Englishman goes to Heaven by the path of his own choosing.'[122] Had he been around in the 1790s, he would still have been wondering at the peculiarly British tendency to sectarianism. Yet, though the religious freedom so admired by Voltaire in England was real, especially when contrasted with the repressive hold of the church in France, it was nonetheless relative. The Act of Toleration of 1689 had granted to most dissenters the right to worship according to their conscience and to build their own places of worship, but they were effectively barred from the full rights of citizenship.[123] Appointment to public office and entry to the two English universities were dependent, following the Test Act of 1673, on receiving Holy Communion according to Anglican rites and subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Although in practice these regulations were less strictly applied as the eighteenth century progressed, this constituted a bending of the rules rather than a solution to the problem.[124]

The use of the word 'conventicle' to describe dissenting places of worship is significant. The *Oxford English Dictionary* charts its development: originally a diminutive of the Latin 'conventus', it developed in English both a neutral and a negative sense. The word was first attached to civil or political meetings and only later to religious ones. This religious sense, derived from a mediaeval Latin use describing small gatherings of heretics, came to denote meetings of nonconformist sects when these were illegal, but was carried over after their legalization. This, along with the implied scorn inherent in the diminutive, points to the ambiguous mix of tolerance and disapprobation afforded to dissenters.

This period is characterized, however, not just by its proliferation of dissenting sects, but by their peculiar and complex relationship with the radical politics of the day. Of course, politicized sectarianism was not a new phenomenon in Britain; the obvious parallel is with the Civil War period. Many of the sects which made up 'old

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[122] Voltaire, *Lettres Philosophiques* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), p. 14 (my translation).
[123] 'Toleration Act', *Encyclopædia Britannica*.
[124] 'Test Act', *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

dissent' (including Quakers, Baptists and Presbyterians) traced their origins to the non-conformist groups of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, groups which, like their eighteenth-century counterparts, also developed or flourished during times of revolution and political upheaval and which expressed 'political ideas in a religious form'.[125] Commenting on the Unitarian Richard Price's 'Discourse on the Love of Our Country', delivered in 1789, Edmund Burke emphasizes this connection, comparing Price with the sixteenth-century preacher Hugh Peters and assuming a direct link between their styles of preaching and their revolutionary objectives:

> That sermon is in a strain which I believe has not been heard in this kingdom […] since the year 1648, when a predecessor of Dr Price, the Reverend Hugh Peters, made the vault of the king's own chapel at St James's ring with the honour and privilege of the Saints, who, with the 'high praises of God in their mouths, and a *two*-edged sword in their hands, were to execute judgment on the heathen, and punishments upon the *people*; to bind their *kings* with chains, and their *nobles* with fetters of iron.'[126]

To the opponents of both dissenting religion and radical politics, a ready-made negative link was available in the connection between Puritanism and English regicide. George Lynam, one of the government spies who infiltrated the London Corresponding Society, noted in his report of a meeting held on 5 February 1793: 'Bambridge […] says, there are certain religious societies in the kingdom, almost in every town, whose sentiments lead them strictly to republicanism; they are numerous in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, Manchester, Hull, Derbyshire, and particularly in London'.[127] While the report may not be entirely trustworthy, it illustrates the widespread association between deviant religion and deviant politics at a time when for many this association was a source of unease.

Although the old dissenting sects had, with increasing acceptance and prosperity, lost some of their original unorthodox fervour, many of them had survived. In late eighteenth-century London their members were mostly artisans and petty tradesmen (like the family of William Blake) who lived in 'thickly-peopled working-class quarters' and drew on a tradition of radical unorthodoxy.[128] A plethora of other sects

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[125] A. L. Morton, *The Matter of Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1966), p. 100.
[126] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 94.
[127] *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799*, ed. by Mary Thale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 48.
[128] Morton, *Matter of Britain*, p. 99.

had also sprung up through the eighteenth century; these, according to John Wesley, held 'most unexpected and unorthodox ideas'.[129]

Sectarian radicalism occurred within a wider context of political radicalism with which it interacted in a complex way. The degree of change called for by political radicals ranged from moderate lobbying for reform to outright calls for revolution, but broadly speaking most radicals held common aims. First, the repeal of the Test Acts and the removal of enforced subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles – in other words, the granting of full rights of citizenship – and second, various political demands such as the extension of the franchise and the rooting out of corruption in the voting system (rotten boroughs and placemen, for example).[130] To separate these as 'religious' and 'political' aspirations, however, would be to ignore the interweaving of religious dissent and politics which is one of the defining features of the age.

Although the established church was broad, embracing both high and low and steering 'a *via media* between Rome and Geneva',[131] its opponents saw it as corrupt, both in itself and in its buttressing of the state and, by implication, of state corruptions. The fact that it allowed some fudging between public and private views, as long as its formalities were seen to be fulfilled, was not enough for many dissenters. In contrast to Burke's view that 'religion' (i.e. English Protestantism) is first of all the buttress of the state, 'the basis of all civil society, and the source of all good and comfort',[132] Gilbert Wakefield, a radical Unitarian, commented: 'I see Religion employed as a State engine of despotism and murder by a set of men, who are worse than heathens and infidels in their lives.'[133] But, despite the fact of the church's establishment, Burke spoke for many when he expressed the view that religion and politics should be kept separate, that 'politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement. No sound ought to be heard in church but the healing voice of Christian charity'.[134]

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[129] Quoted in Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 128.
[130] Simon Schama, *A History of Britain: The Fate of Empire: 1776-2000* (London: BBC, 2002), p. 41.
[131] Jim Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 172.
[132] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 186.
[133] Quoted in E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 60.
[134] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 94.

A crude generalization gives us Church and King, Whig opposition and Radical dissent, but this belies the overlapping and intertwining of dissent and radicalism during a period which was a melting-pot for both. Some dissenting sects (strict Methodists, for example) had no interest in political or social reform; some reformers, however, thought that radical dissent did not go far enough. As for the sects themselves, there was a bewildering array; Robert Southey in 1807 rattled off the names of forty-three of them in a mischievous jingle;[135] John Evans, in his tolerant account written at the turn of the nineteenth century, lists thirty-eight 'Christian sects', as well as those pariahs of the time, atheists and deists.[136] Although many sects allowed a certain diversity of belief, for those who found the practices or doctrines of existing groups not to their liking, secession was the normal recourse. Burke censured Price for his active encouragement of new sects:

> If the noble *Seekers* should find nothing to satisfy their pious fancies in the old staple of the national church, or in all the rich variety to be found in the well-assorted warehouses of the dissenting congregations, Dr Price advises them to improve upon non-conformity; and to set up, each of them, a separate meeting-house upon his own particular principles.[137]

Dan Taylor had done just this when in 1770, unable to find a Baptist gathering evangelical enough for him, he founded the Baptist New Connexion;[138] similarly, Methodist autocracy resulted in secessions in 1797 (Methodist New Connexion), 1811 (Primitive Methodists) and 1815 (Bible Christians).[139]

The most significant doctrinal difference between dissenting groups centred on the Trinity. Most believed in the Trinity as expounded in the creed of Saint Athanasius: three persons united in one Godhead, a mystery revealed and incapable of rational explanation. In this they held common ground with Catholics and most Anglicans, against the minorities on both sides who were not Trinitarians. In fact, this issue caused a rapprochement between Trinitarian dissenters and Anglicans; in a parliamentary speech in 1779, Sir Roger Newdigate reported that some dissenters were hostile to an increase of toleration 'because, under the pretext of relieving them

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[135] Robert Southey, *Letters from England* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), p. 159.
[136] John Evans, *A Sketch of the Denominations of the Christian World; Accompanied with a Persuasive to Religious Moderation*, 9th edn (London: B. Crosby, 1804), contents list.
[137] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 95.
[138] Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 38.
[139] Rupert E. Davies, 'Methodism', *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

from subscription [to the Thirty-Nine Articles] it would let in the anti-Trinitarians, the Anabaptists, and all manner of sects'.[140]

The reasons for the link between dissent and radicalism are many. All Protestant theology, by its historical nature, contains a potential element of subversion; however authoritarian many of the Protestant groups became, the Reformation's emphasis on the right and duty of each individual to read and interpret the Scriptures for himself carries the seeds of anti-authority. In one sense, also, all religious dissent held undertones of political radicalism, whether or not it was overtly radical or political: since Church and State in Britain were inextricably linked, to dissent from one implied a rejection of the other. Furthermore, dissenting theology itself had disquieting political overtones. The belief, common to many sects, and deriving from the antinomian tradition, that all were in equal need of salvation and that God existed in all, had radical implications for social equality.[141] The Duchess of Buckingham recognized this when she wrote of the Methodists to the Countess of Huntingdon:

> Their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinctured with impertinence and disrespect towards their Superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth.[142]

2. Methodism and Unitarianism: Two Extremes

The gamut of dissent extended from the mystical and 'enthusiastic' on one hand to 'rational dissent' on the other. Rational dissent had grown up in the eighteenth century as a function of the Enlightenment; 'natural religion', which derived evidence for God from nature rather than from revelation, stood against what Gilbert Wakefield called 'the despicable trumpery of priestcraft and superstition', in which was included the mysteries of revealed religion as well as the hierarchy of the established church.[143] The government of dissenting sects varied likewise, from the hierarchical and authoritative to the quasi-democratic.

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[140] Smyth, *Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 174.
[141] Morton, *Matter of Britain*, p. 117.
[142] Quoted in Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 46.
[143] Quoted in Thompson, *Witness*, p. 60.

This range of styles is exemplified by two sects: Methodism and Unitarianism. Methodism, the great revivalist movement of the late eighteenth century, cuts across all these debates in a complex way and itself exhibits paradoxical features. It bore all the hallmarks of nonconformist enthusiasm, a quality which distinguished many of the dissenting sects but which was frowned on both by other sects and by the established church. The word 'enthusiasm', from the Greek '*entheos*' ('possessed by a god', later developing the sense 'in God') was used in the eighteenth century to denote a specific type of religious experience. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines this sense of 'enthusiasm' as 'ill-regulated or misdirected religious emotion, extravagance of religious speculation'; a definition which itself contains some of the disparagement attached to the concept. Connected to the notion that each believer had a personal relationship with God, enthusiasm often expressed itself in exuberant forms of worship considered unseemly by outsiders. John Evans noted that the Wesleyan Methodists' meetings included 'religious phrenzy, [...] groanings and vociferations, an uncommon degree of tumult and confusion'; the Welsh jumpers not only '*jump*[ed] until they were quite exhausted', but indulged in 'loud talking, [...] loud singing, repeating the same line or stanza over and over thirty or forty times, [...] violent agitations'; behaviour considered excessive even by the eirenic and tolerant Evans, who commented: 'It is fervently to be wished that such fanaticism may not continue long.'[144]

Methodism was reviled by many of the regular clergy, some of whom had a hand in, or turned a blind eye to, anti-Methodist riots; yet it remained within the established church until 1795. It appealed to the socially marginalized – especially to the new industrial workers, some of whom felt they had been abandoned by the established church, others of whom ignored or were untouched by its missionary activity – and its doctrines (especially universal salvation and the equality of all souls before God) were radical; however, mainstream Methodism was politically conservative, advocating submission to the secular authorities and laying emphasis on happiness in the next life. In its pure form, Methodism had no truck with either social reform or political radicalism. John Wesley, himself a high Tory who cast God in the same image, sought to impose tight control over his movement, a trend which continued after his death. In the late 1790s a significant increase in the power

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[144] Evans, *Sketch of the Denominations*, pp. 174, 179.

wielded by the Methodist hierarchies resulted in disagreements and eventual secessions. Alexander Kilham's New Connexion seceded in 1797; the potentially riotous Primitive Methodists were expelled in 1811. Although Kilham's secession originated in a disagreement over the apportioning of power between superintendents and church members, Wesley and other leaders saw in it the successful removal of the politically radical element from the movement.[145]

The retrograde tendency within Methodism is illustrated by the attitude of mainstream Methodists to the teaching of writing and to women preachers. In 1812 the autocratic minister Jabez Bunting banned the teaching of writing in Sunday schools. Reading was an acceptable skill for the flock to acquire, since it was necessary for studying the Bible; writing, however, was 'a "secular art" from which "temporal advantage" might accrue' and was therefore a dubious activity.[146] This act is paralleled by the evangelical Anglican Hannah More's refusal to allow the teaching of writing in her schools for the poor in Somerset, since it would breed dissatisfaction with their place in life.[147]

Dr Johnson had famously compared a woman preacher to 'a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all'.[148] Originally, the Methodist church, like the Quakers, allowed women to preach; a practice of some significance which implied a relaxation of traditional prejudices towards women, as well as allowing them an outlet for both spiritual and intellectual talents. This privilege, however, was rescinded in 1803, when women were limited to addressing female-only meetings under strict conditions.[149]

All these developments illustrate the mainstream Methodist emphasis on a narrow spirituality, and stand in opposition both to what E. P. Thompson calls 'the very anarchy of Old Dissent, with its self-governing churches and its schisms'[150] and to the increasing social awareness amongst the marginal populations from which Methodism drew its converts. Methodism stood at one end of the spectrum of

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[145] Roger Wells, 'English Society and Revolutionary Politics in the 1790s', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. by Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 188-226 (p. 199).
[146] Thompson, *English Working Class,* p. 389.
[147] S. J. Skedd, 'Hannah More', *DNB* (2004).
[148] James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D.* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1963), p. 328.
[149] The John Rylands University Library, 'The Role of Women within Methodism: The Historical Background' <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/specialcollections/collections/methodist/using/womeninmethodism/roleofwomen/> [accessed 19/02/09] (para. 5 of 9).
[150] Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 39.

religious and political dissent, being enthusiastic in one and conservative in the other, and to some extent replicating the well-worn hierarchies of power and authority. Methodists 'fell ambiguously between Dissent and the Establishment, and did their utmost to make the worst of both worlds,' comments Thompson; a judgement no doubt coloured by his own experience as the son of Methodist missionaries.[151]

Overt atheists were few (William Godwin was an exception), but many freethinkers, such as the circle around the radical publisher Joseph Johnson, became Unitarians or deists. These groups constitute the other extreme of the dissenting spectrum; the most threatening, perhaps, to the establishment, not least because of their rejection of the Trinity. The denial of Christ's divinity was a potential threat to the priesthood, the monarchy and all other 'divinely-inspired' hierarchies. To Wesley it was 'poison'.[152] Unitarianism allowed the retention of a belief in a providential supreme being, but dispensed with the more mystical elements of traditional religion. Many – though not all – Unitarians rejected the supernatural, such as miracles or the personal intervention of the deity in the affairs of individuals. Joseph Priestley combined the seemingly contradictory beliefs that, although death destroyed the whole being, there would nonetheless be a resurrection at the last day; typically, however, he interpreted this resurrection not as a miracle but as an act of God according to 'some natural law unknown to us'.[153]

Most importantly, Unitarians rejected both revealed and enthusiastic religion; they emphasized reason and progress and, although not numerous, exerted a significant influence as social critics and reformers. Their academies delivered a practical and modern curriculum to students barred from the traditional universities. Many supported the French Revolution in its early days, seeing in its popular overthrow of monarchy and aristocracy an example of what might be achieved in Britain.

Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, finished hours before his incarceration in the Luxembourg prison at the height of the Terror on 8 December 1793, is not only the most lucid expression of late eighteenth-century deism, but illustrates the complex nature of belief and the way it was perceived at the time. Slated by opponents as an expression of atheism, in England it was declared blasphemous and banned, with

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[151] Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 385.
[152] Schama, *Fate of Empire,* p. 40.
[153] Willey, *Eighteenth-Century Background*, p. 176.

harsh penalties for those who published or sold it. (This, however, merely made it more highly sought after on the black market.)[154] Yet its aim was, as Paine explained to Samuel Adams, to prevent the people of France 'running headlong into atheism', to provide a modern credo for the enlightened on both sides of the Channel.[155]

It is a mark of the extent to which religious thought had progressed at the end of the eighteenth century that this work, seen by some even today as radical, was considered by many English Unitarians, among them Priestley and Wakefield, as a plagiarism of ideas they had been propounding for years.[156] However, as with Paine's *Rights of Man* before it, *The Age of Reason* highlights the tension surrounding the political issues of enlightenment for the masses and the use of religion as a means of social control. Much of the furore surrounding its publication was not so much theological as social; many of its detractors disliked not so much its expression of deism as the fact that it was aimed at a largely lower-class readership who, if not kept in check by Christianity, might descend into wholesale immorality and lawlessness.[157] Without the moralizing influence of orthodox religion, it was argued, the moral fabric of society would be eroded.[158] Paine deplored what he saw as this cynical use of religion, not least because its emphasis on future rewards bred resignation to present social evils (a useful tool for the state because it maintained the status quo and minimized the risk of revolt); he wished to free the populace from the consequences of established religion, which tended to 'terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize human power and profit',[159] in order to increase efforts for social reform.[160]

Central to deism was a radical view of the Bible and in particular an emphatic rejection of the Old Testament. Contrary to the traditional Christian view that the Bible is the inspired word of God, Paine described the Old Testament as a 'history of

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[154] Craig Nelson, *Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Birth of Modern Nations* (London: Profile Books, 2007), pp. 263, 267-68.
[155] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, p. 260.
[156] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, pp. 263, 267.
[157] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, p. 266.
[158] The debate over religion as a necessary basis of morality is still current; see, for example, Paul Kurtz, ' "Yes" to Naturalism, Secularism, and Humanism', *Free Inquiry*, 27 (2007), pp. 4-7 (p. 6).
[159] Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896; repr. [n.p.]: Standard Publications, 2007), p. 22.
[160] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, p. 263.

wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind'.[161] *The Age of Reason* criticizes many biblical accounts as brutal, unfactual or superstitious. The basis of deism is not faith in a collection of ancient texts, but awe in the face of the universe; the Supreme Being is best worshipped through the study of Nature, which is His work: 'Do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the scripture, which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the Creation.'[162] The outcome of this was moral living coupled with a concern for others, which included the improvement of living conditions in the here and now.

The Age of Reason had many critics and sparked many responses. Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* answers Paine's objections to the biblical narratives in a welter of minutiae based on the self-reflexive argument that the Bible is to be trusted because it is the word of God.[163] Hannah More produced her *Village politics: addressed to all the mechanics, journeymen, and day labourers, in Great Britain*, followed over the next few years by her 'Cheap Repository Tracts', which did for the establishment cause what Paine's writings did for the radical one, seeking to educate the masses through publications written expressly for them and sold at affordable prices.[164]

3: The French Revolution: Hope and Optimism

By the time Paine was writing *The Age of Reason*, the Terror had engulfed France and supporters of the French Revolution were having to rethink their initial optimism. But up to that point, it had seemed as if a new day was dawning in Europe. Richard Price, in his 'Discourse on the Love of our Country', captured the sense of excitement and optimism felt by supporters of the French Revolution in its early days:

> Be encouraged, all ye friends of freedom, and writers in its defence! The times are auspicious. Your labours have not been in vain. Behold kingdoms, admonished by you, starting from sleep, breaking their fetters, and claiming justice from their

[161] Paine, *Age of Reason*, p. 34. Paine refers here to what he calls 'the Bible', but it is clear (e.g. from p. 38) that he means only the Old Testament.
[162] Paine, *Age of Reason*, p. 45.
[163] Richard Watson, *An Apology for the Bible in a Series of Letters Addressed to Thomas Paine* (Philadelphia: W. Young, Mills & Son, 1796; repr. [Whitefish, MT]: Kessinger, [2007]), pp. 59-60.
[164] Skedd, 'Hannah More', *DNB*.

> oppressors! Behold, the light you have struck out, after setting AMERICA free, reflected to FRANCE, and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes, and warms and illuminates EUROPE![165]

This optimism exemplifies the sense of apocalypse which characterized this period, one of extreme dynamism not only in politics but in the wider culture of literature, philosophy and the arts. Wordsworth's 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive' echoed the excitement of many who felt that justice, freedom and equality could be achieved in their lifetime.[166] The American Revolution, with its Declaration of the Rights of Man and its establishment of a republic, seemed to have demonstrated what could be achieved in terms of social change; Price's optimism typifies the reaction of many radicals and dissenters, who hoped that Britain might follow the French example.

In a manner typical of this period, this sense of dynamism and apocalypse characterized both the political and the religious spheres. In its religious form, it manifested itself in chiliasm – the belief that Christ's thousand-year reign was imminent – as preached by the likes of Richard Brothers and Johanna Southcott; but a similar concept was translated into politics. Political millenarianism was often expressed metaphorically in biblical terms, as in Price's 'Discourse'; but in some cases, it overlapped with a religious millenarian belief. Thomas Hardy, the founder of the London Corresponding Society and a passionate advocate of radical social reform, 'believed that Ezekiel 21 ("Her priests have violated my law ... Her princes are like wolves") was a reference to France [...] The "reign of the Beast of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power", he wrote, "is almost at an end – Thanks to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe" '.[167] Dissenting religion and radical politics alike offered hope and fulfilment to the disenfranchised, the poor and the marginalized.

Britain was polarized by the French Revolution. Pro-Revolution radicals opposed the Church-and-King party who, like Burke, saw in the Revolution a threat to traditional British values (the rule of law, property rights, class distinctions) and to the established church. The part played by Methodism in the prevention of revolution in England in the 1790s is now a matter of debate amongst historians, but it is certain that it was instrumental in the counter-revolution, both in its strict submission to

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165 Richard Price, *Political Writings*, ed. by D. O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 195-96.
166 Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), X. 692, p. 440.
167 Thale, *Selections*, p. 307, note 40.

temporal authority and in its unquestioning acceptance of the status quo.[168] With the Terror, however, came disappointment and the fading of millenarian anticipation: the bright hopes which had surfaced in 1789 were crushed as the Revolution descended first into regicide and tyranny, then into Directory and Empire.

4. Wars of Words

This was an age of furious and rapid debate, much of which was carried out through publications: both pamphlets and longer texts, often hastily written and rushed through the press, often priced affordably to ensure a wide circulation. Text was answered by text, resulting in a criss-crossing of publications and ideas as writers responded angrily and passionately to the latest expression of opinion. Subsequent editions were augmented by replies to more recent publications. Price's 'Discourse' was answered by Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* to which there were several responses, most famously by Paine (*Rights of Man*) and Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*). Early in 1793, Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, published his 'Appendix' to a reprint of a 1785 sermon; this answers Paine's *Rights* and was later published as 'The Wisdom and Goodness of God in Having made both Rich and Poor'. In it, Watson states that 'peasants and mechanics are as useful to the State as any other order of men; but their utility consists in their discharging well the duties of their respective stations; it ceases when they affect to become legislators'; an argument which sparked angry and passionate responses from both Paine and Wordsworth. In his 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', Wordsworth urged radical reform in the wake of the French Revolution and argued that the property qualification should be removed from the franchise.[169] Paine responded to Watson's pamphlet both in his 'Answer to Bishop Llandaff' and in his *Agrarian Justice*, commenting in the latter that 'it is wrong to say God made *rich* and *poor*; He made only male and female; and He gave them the earth for their inheritance'.[170]

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[168] Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 45-50.
[169] John Rieder, *Wordsworth's Counterrevolutionary Turn: Community, Virtue and Vision in the 1790s* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1997), p. 42.
[170] Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (Oxford: Routledge, 1989), p. 198.

Richard Price's 'Discourse', a sermon preached on 4 November 1789 at the Old Jewry meeting house, followed the centenary celebration of the English Revolution of 1688 (the 'Glorious Revolution') and was addressed to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain. This was, however, less than four months after the storming of the Bastille and Price connected the two revolutions, rejoicing in the fact that the spirit of the American Revolution had been brought to Europe.

Attitudes to the French Revolution were connected to views of the English Revolution of 1688. Price, in common with most radicals, considered that 'though the [English] Revolution was a great work, it was by no means a perfect work'; there were still rights to be gained, such as the repeal of the Test Laws.[171] The 'Discourse' includes an exhortation to lobby for just representation, justifying its demands with reference to scripture and ending on a typical note of defiance and optimism:

> Tremble, all ye oppressors of the world! Take warning all ye supporters of slavish governments and slavish hierarchies! […] You cannot now hold the world in darkness. […] Restore to mankind their rights and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together.[172]

Although he does not advocate violent revolution, or demand a republic as Paine was later to do, Price boldly states a democratic belief that choice of government belongs to the people. This right, he says, derives from the English Revolution, which encapsulated three important principles:

> First, the right to liberty of conscience in religious matters.
> Secondly, the right to resist power when abused. And
> Thirdly, the right to chuse [*sic*] our own governors, to cashier them for misconduct, and to frame a government for ourselves.[173]

Burke took particular umbrage at this last right, articulating in his *Reflections* – perhaps the most forceful and lucid expression of the Church-and-King position – the belief held by many Whigs that the 1688 Revolution was all-sufficient; its purpose had not been to overturn the established order, but to

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[171] Price, *Political Writings*, p. 191.
[172] Price, *Political Writings*, p. 196.
[173] Price, *Political Writings*, pp. 189-90.

preserve the ancient laws, constitution and liberties of the country.[174] Despite his earlier support of the American Revolution, Burke now held a conservative view, believing that the good in a civilization derived from old power and the preservation of the status quo, from the twin merits of the 'spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of [established] religion'.[175] The pyramidal model of British society, with a hereditary monarch and aristocracy at the top and the masses at the bottom, had worked for centuries; change was therefore unnecessary.[176]

Burke saw in the French Revolution only what he called, in a letter of 12 November 1789, the 'total political extinction of a great civilized Nation situated in the heart of this our Western system'.[177] Ignorant of or indifferent to the gross injustices and the real suffering imposed by the supposedly civilized on the masses, who did not share in the 'privileges, franchises and liberties' conferred by the English system,[178] he wrote without irony in January 1790 of the necessity of preserving what he calls the 'morem majorum' in Britain.[179] The fact that voting rights were linked to property and therefore limited to wealthy men was far from being an injustice; a strong ('protective') government could only be had if those in power possessed both ability and property; ability without property was a dangerous mix.[180]

If George III praised Burke for his *Reflections*, commenting, 'You have supported the cause of the Gentlemen',[181] Paine's *Rights of Man* was a battle-cry on behalf of ordinary, unpropertied working men. Published in February 1791 by the radical J. S. Jordan, *Rights* sold 50,000 copies in the three months following its publication. Paine took an extreme position, extolling the virtues of republicanism and pointing out injustices glossed over by Burke, such as the corruptions of the voting system, chartered towns and monopolies.[182] Taking Burke to task over the causes of the French Revolution, he identifies these –

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[174] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 117.
[175] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 211.
[176] Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 103-06.
[177] Quoted by Conor Cruise O'Brien in the introduction to Burke's *Reflections*, p. 16.
[178] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 119.
[179] Burke, *Reflections*, introduction, p. 17.
[180] Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 140-42.
[181] Burke, *Reflections*, introduction, p. 18 (footnote).
[182] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (New York: Penguin, 1985), pp. 73-74.

and hence the Revolution's justification – in 'the hereditary despotism of the established government'.[183] Burke's veneration for 'government' (any sort, as long as it is strong) blinds him to the suffering caused by specific governments: 'Mr Burke must compliment all the governments in the world, while the victims who suffer under them, whether sold into slavery, or tortured out of existence, are wholly forgotten.'[184]

Price's 'Discourse' and Paine's *Rights,* written in the early days of the French Revolution, can praise the rational origins of the Revolution and its relative lack of bloodshed. Both capture the mood of euphoric optimism of the early 1790s. Burke, however, was uncannily prescient in his early prediction (the *Reflections* were published in 1790) that the French Revolution would result in extensive bloodshed, end in a military dictatorship and necessitate a long and bloody war. He also correctly foresaw the difficulties of forming a 'free government' and the problems of anarchy and mob rule.[185]

Much of the political debate of this time centres on two major issues: the concept of the state and the place of the masses. For Burke, society is a contract: 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born', part of 'the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher nature [...] each in their appointed place'.[186] This notion, which glances in Rousseau's direction, is akin to the mediaeval great chain of being and is equally immovable. Burke's view of the state and of the significance of the English Revolution rests on this contract between past, present and future. The idea of a people choosing its own governors is a 'seditious, unconstitutional doctrine'.[187] In fact, in their choice of William and Mary following the 1688 Revolution, 'the English nation did at that time most solemnly renounce and abdicate it [the right to select kings] for themselves, and for all their posterity for ever', neatly precluding any major change in the form of government.[188] In response to this notion Paine is scathing:

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[183] Paine, *Rights*, p. 47.
[184] Paine, *Rights*, p. 49.
[185] Burke, *Reflections*, introduction, p. 71; pp. 126, 374.
[186] Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 194-95.
[187] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 110.
[188] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 104.

> He [Burke] says, "that the people of England utterly disclaim such a right, and that they will resist the practical assertion of it with their lives and fortunes." That men should take up arms, and spend their lives and fortunes, *not* to maintain their rights, but to maintain that they have *not* rights, is an entirely new species of discovery, and suited to the paradoxical genius of Mr Burke.[189]

To those who believe that the hereditary monarchy is all-sufficient, Paine replies that the English monarchy and government have in William the Conqueror a very dubious precedent, which

> united fraud to force, and set up an idol which they called *Divine Right,* and which, in imitation of the Pope, who affects to be spiritual and temporal, and in contradiction to the Founder of the Christian religion, twisted itself afterwards into an idol of another shape, called *Church and State*.[190]

The very notion of 'hereditary legislation is as inconsistent as that of hereditary judges, or hereditary juries; and as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or an hereditary wise man; and as ridiculous as an hereditary poet-laureate'.[191]

To Price's view that a nation ought to be able to cashier its rulers for misconduct, Burke replies that the king (as well as the commons and the lords) 'can never be called to account for their conduct'; they merely embody the law, which the people are to obey.[192] This fundamental difference in attitude to the populace was a defining feature of this debate. For Burke, only disaster could result from 'warm and inexperienced enthusiasts' meddling in politics, rather than 'great lawyers and great statesmen'.[193] (His use of the word 'enthusiasts' here implies a similarity with the unseemly excesses of dissenting religion.) The wide division between rulers and ruled could not be crossed; the masses, uneducated and lacking experience or wisdom (and apparently incapable of developing these qualities), would become dangerous with power in their hands. As had been seen during the Gordon Riots of 1780, mob rule was an ever-present danger. It is in this context that Burke's infamous phrase 'swinish multitude' appears. Although he used the expression with the indefinite article ('learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a

[189] Paine, *Rights*, p. 40.
[190] Paine, *Rights*, p. 70.
[191] Paine, *Rights*, p. 83.
[192] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 115.
[193] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 100.

swinish multitude')[194] and therefore did not necessarily consign all the populace to this category, the phrase was picked up by outraged champions of popular liberty and led to a flurry of publications with titles which alluded to it, such as Thomas Spence's *Pig's Meat; or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*; James Parkinson's *An address to the Honourable Edmund Burke from the Swinish Multitude* and Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People; or Hog's Wash*.

These were the people for whom *Rights of Man* had provided such a powerful summary of ideas. Paine believed that the people were the only true source of power in a state. His analysis of the masses is rational and modern: he sees the causes of that mob behaviour which so dismayed and frightened the ruling powers, but differentiates between the 'mob' and the 'people'. Mob behaviour, he maintains, derives largely from bad government; the false exaltation of a minority, the 'puppet-show of state and aristocracy' whose brutal and brutalizing punishments easily turn the people into a mob.[195]

Price, too, while not defending violence, saw that it was inequalities in education and thinking – rather than any essential difference – which characterized the masses:

> Why are the nations of the world so patient under despotism? […] Enlighten them and you will elevate them. Shew [*sic*] them they are *men* and they will act like *men.* Give them just ideas of civil government and let them know that it is an expedient for gaining protection against injury and defending their rights, and it will be impossible for them to submit to governments which, like most of those now in the world, are usurpations on the rights of men and little better than contrivances for enabling the *few* to oppress the *many*.[196]

The Church-and-King party saw such calls for popular rights as a 'levelling' tendency; a word which harks back to the Civil War period. Paine approached this from the opposite position, commenting that 'France has not levelled, it has exalted.'[197] Many of the polite classes saw no difference between two possible consequences of popular enfranchisement, both of which occurred in France: on the one hand an enlightened people rejecting the status quo and demanding – or seizing – a share in the nation's power; and, on the other, the anarchy and bloodshed of mob

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[194] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 173.
[195] Paine, *Rights*, pp. 57-59.
[196] Price, *Political Writings*, p. 181.
[197] Paine, *Rights*, p. 80.

rule. James Sayers's caricature of 1790, 'The Repeal of the Test Act', which shows Priestley and Paine amongst others, is significant because it demonstrates the way in which the opponents of radical dissent nervously confused legitimate and peaceful demands for reform with the threat of revolution.[198]

If *Rights of Man* is the best-known of the ripostes to Burke's *Reflections*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* was the first.[199] This work anticipates her more famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by including in its analysis of the political and social issues raised by Burke a discussion of their relevance to women. Wollstonecraft argues, for example, that hereditary succession, primogeniture and arranged marriages, aimed at securing property and maintaining dynasties, are detrimental to men and women alike.[200] Women, of course, were marginalized in more ways than men. Some education was available to women of the upper classes, but none could vote and there is little in the impassioned literature surrounding the extension of the franchise which includes them. Although the London Corresponding Society ambiguously lobbied for the 'universal' franchise for every 'individual', and although there was at least one group of women who met to discuss political reform, serious demands for an extension of the franchise were limited to non-criminal men of sound mind.[201]

Wollstonecraft's analysis and commentary are as scathing and lucid as Paine's and expressed in a similarly down-to-earth and accessible language; she castigates Burke not just for a style which contains 'empty rhetorical flourishes' but for the fact that these mask social wrongs.[202] Their views are diametrically opposed: whereas Burke maintains that only bloodshed will result from a slippage of power to the masses, Wollstonecraft sees excessive authority as detrimental: 'There is no end to this implicit submission to authority – some where [*sic*] it must stop, or we return to barbarism.'[203]

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[198] Iain McCalman, 'New Jerusalems: prophecy, Dissent and radical culture in England, 1786-1830', in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 312-34 (p. 314).
[199] Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Virago, 2006), p. 141.
[200] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 20-24.
[201] Thale, *Selections*, pp. 10, 83.
[202] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, pp. 29, 55.
[203] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 13.

Although she stands against established religion, which she describes as ‘pomp, weakness, Gothic drapery’ and sees the redistribution of church property in France as beneficial, Wollstonecraft is nonetheless at pains to stress that her ideas, if unorthodox, are not inconsistent with religion.[204] Like Paine, however, she takes issue with the use of religion to buttress the status quo and keep the poor in thrall by the threat of hell:

> Why is our fancy to be appalled by terrific perspectives of a hell beyond the grave? – Hell stalks abroad; – the lash resounds on the slave’s naked sides; and the sick wretch, who can no longer earn the sour bread of unremitting labour, steals to a ditch to bid the world a long good night.[205]

5. Pitt’s Terror and the LCS

One of the prime dangers of revolution for Burke was the thinking behind it, which had to be stamped out at all costs; the *Reflections* advocates a government-financed counter-revolution to ‘mould public opinion’, a move which Burke later described as a ‘religious war’ and a ‘new crusade’. The state must suppress revolutionary speech or writing; judges, he wrote to his brother, ‘should directly censure the circulation of treasonable Books, factious Federations and any communication or communion with wicked and desperate people in other Countries’.[206]

At the heart of the ensuing crackdown implemented by William Pitt’s government was Paine’s *Rights of Man,* Part 2. The biggest bestseller after the Bible,[207] it aroused immense anxiety amongst conservatives. Home Secretary Henry Dundas warned Parliament that its ideas were being ‘sedulously inculcated throughout the kingdom’. It was less its content, however, than its readership which was problematic. The attorney-general commented that he found no reason to prosecute Part 1 as it was limited to educated readers; Part 2, however, was seditious because it was also accessible to the potentially dangerous lower classes.[208] Had the attorney-general looked carefully at Part 1, however, he would have seen that, though its price might

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[204] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication,* pp. 33, 48, 49, 59.
[205] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 60.
[206] Burke, *Reflections*, introduction, pp. 51, 60-61.
[207] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, p. 220.
[208] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, pp. 226-27.

have been off-putting, both its style and content were aimed at ordinary people. In contrast to Burke's traditional grandiose style, which featured complex sentences, abstruse vocabulary and (often untranslated) classical references, Paine in both parts of *Rights* used a deliberately simple style with demotic vocabulary, no Latin or Greek and most French expressions translated. He wrote not just about but for the multitude.

In May 1792 the government issued a royal proclamation against 'wicked and seditious writings' which specifically targeted *Rights of Man,* Part 2.[209] Paine escaped a traitor's death only because he escaped to France; his trial for the treasonous offence of sedition was conducted *in absentia*, with a verdict of guilty. When challenged in Parliament by the Whig leader Charles James Fox, Prime Minister William Pitt explained that 'principles had been laid down by Mr Paine which struck at hereditary nobility, and which went to the destruction of monarchy and religion, and the total subversion of the established form of government'.[210] Unsurprisingly, this did nothing to diminish the book's popularity.

This was the beginning of what came to be known as 'Pitt's reign of terror', an attack on what were seen as seditious and revolutionary tendencies in an attempt to prevent unrest in Britain. (Both revolution and civil war were considered to be imminent dangers.)[211] The crackdown operated on two main levels. First, a propaganda campaign in the loyalist press, accompanied by a wave of popular activism directed against radicals of all sorts and focussed on 'Jacobins'[212] and supporters of Paine; this was often accompanied by mob violence connived at or instigated by government or local officials. Loyalist associations were formed, such as John Reeves's 'Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Levellers and Republicans', a name which shows the extent of the correlation – supposed or real – between religious dissent and political radicalism. Although radicals and dissenters were not the only targets of this Association, many suffered as a result of its activities.[213] Effigies of Paine were hanged and burned in the streets,

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[209] Nelson, *Thomas Paine,* p. 227.
[210] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, pp. 228, 233-34, 244-46.
[211] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, pp. 226-27.
[212] A word used loosely in England to denote anyone who had, or was suspected of having, revolutionary leanings.
[213] Smyth, *Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 197.

along with copies of his *Rights*.[214] This outbreak of violence echoed that of 1791, when Joseph Priestley's house and laboratory had been destroyed in a weekend of mob rioting and looting in Birmingham; the trigger for these riots was the dinner held to commemorate the second anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, on 14 July 1791. Priestley, a Unitarian minister and an outspoken supporter of the French Revolution, had, like Price and Paine, been the subject of much loyalist propaganda.

Secondly, several draconian laws were passed, aimed at suppressing radical thought and action. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended in 1794 and not reinstated till 1801. Henry de La Haye Symonds was one of many publishers convicted for selling *Rights of Man*; his sentence was two years' imprisonment, a fine of £20 and a total of £300 in sureties for his good behaviour upon release.[215] Harsh sentences were issued for minor crimes such as careless utterances; William Hudson was found guilty of uttering 'seditious words' in a coffee-house after drinking punch and spirits (he had called the king a 'German Hog-butcher') and sentenced to two years' imprisonment in Newgate, a fine of £200 and a total of £400 in sureties.[216]

Many radical clubs were shut down; government spies infiltrated those which survived, such as the London Corresponding Society. Though not the first of the radical corresponding societies, the LCS was the most tenacious. Composed largely of members of the masses so despised by Burke, it was for the most part an affiliation of artisans and workers, although its members included the odd gentleman, barrister and physician.[217] It was tolerant and all-encompassing in that its membership was limited neither by rank nor religious affiliation; any man was accepted who could answer 'yes' to three questions (recorded by Thomas Hardy in his account of the society's origins):

> Question first. Are you convinced that the parliamentary Representation of this Country is at present inadequit [*sic*] and imperfect?

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[214] Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, p. 228.

[215] Henry de La Haye Symonds, Royal Offences > seditious libel, 20th February 1793, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, ref. t17930220-58 < http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/ browse.jsp?ref=t17930220-58> [accessed 05/02/09].

[216] William Hudson, Royal Offences > seditious words, 4th December 1793, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, ref. t17931204-54 <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?ref=t17931204-54> [accessed 18/04/09].

[217] Only a random list of 347 members survives; Thale, *Selections*, p. xix.

Question 2d. Are you thoureoughly perswaded [*sic*] that the welfare of these kingdoms requires that every person of *Adult* years in possession of his reason and not incapacitated by crimes should have a vote for a Member of parliament?
Question 3d. Will you endeavour by all justifiable means to promote such reformation in parliament. [*sic*][218]

This lobbying for parliamentary reform, and in particular for universal male suffrage, attracted much state interest. Detractors of the LCS accused it of extremism. Some of its pronouncements were radical (the House of Commons was described as 'an Usurped Power')[219] and government spies often reported that its aims included armed struggle; spy Gosling, for example, was party to a conversation about muskets, pikes and guns, claiming that one member had said 'if they could not obtain it [parliamentary reform] by fair means they would by Force'.[220] The official stance, however, was opposed to violence; even language which might be construed as seditious was officially banned at meetings.[221]

In the sense that the LCS accepted any who agreed with its political aims, religion was unproblematic; members were drawn from a wide spectrum of religious persuasions and their particular beliefs were considered irrelevant to the matter of political reform. The General Committee's opinion in November 1796 was that 'no difference in religious opinion could make any alteration in the course of universal suffrage and annual parliaments which was the inherent right of Britons'.[222] Although the key players of the society were mostly dissenters, atheists or deists, many members belonged to the Church of England. There was even a large contingent of Methodists: six complete divisions (a division numbered anything from thirty to forty-six men, sometimes more)[223] as well as several hundreds scattered over other divisions. However, a conflict arose between religious and non-religious factions within the society. Richard Lee, a radical publisher but also a Methodist, was expelled along with John Bone for refusing to sell Paine's *Age of Reason* and Volney's *Ruins*.[224] In September 1795, Methodist members of the Society demanded 'the expulsion of Atheists and deists from the Society & that they should not be

[218] Thale, *Selections*, p. 8.
[219] Thale, *Selections*, p. 11.
[220] Thale, *Selections*, p. 141.
[221] Thale, *Selections*, p. xxvi.
[222] Thale, *Selections*, p. 375.
[223] Thale, *Selections*, p. xxiv.
[224] Thale, *Selections*, p. 306, note 40.

reeligalbe [re-eligible] 'till a twelvemonths [*sic*] probation. if [*sic*] this request was not complied with they said they would certainly secede from the Society'. This motion having been defeated, the Methodists – in a move which echoes the practice of the dissenting sects – promptly seceded, forming a spin-off group called the Friends of Religious and Civil Liberty.[225]

A pre-requisite for the electoral reform demanded by the LCS was the education of its members in political matters; to this end a wealth of printed material was made available to members. The Society published numerous texts of its own, including the two periodicals *The Politician* (1794-1795) and *The Moral and Political Magazine* (1796-1797); it reprinted political works considered to be of importance, such as John Hawles's *The Englishman's Right* (first published in 1680), and provided copies of seminal books, chief among which was *Rights of Man*.[226]

The 'Treason Trials' of 1794 evinced the strength of feeling on both sides of this debate. Thomas Hardy and twelve other members of the LCS and the Society for Constitutional Information, considered to be the most dangerous of the radicals, were arrested for high treason in May 1794 and imprisoned. Only three, however, were brought to trial (Hardy, John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall) and these were acquitted, to massive public rejoicing.[227] The LCS, although seriously weakened, both through discouragement and internal strife, struggled on and was shut down only by an Act of Parliament which outlawed it specifically by name in July 1799.[228]

6. Politics and Religion: Types of Ambiguity

The peculiar and idiosyncratic combination of religious and political radicalism during this period is exemplified in the ministries of two very different dissenting preachers: Richard Brothers (1757-1824) and Joanna Southcott (1750-1814).

Brothers, a retired naval lieutenant on half pay, believed that he was (by metempsychosis) the nephew of Jesus Christ, styling himself 'Prince and Prophet of the Hebrews'. It was, he claimed, only his intervention with the Almighty in 1791 which averted the destruction of London in a fit of divine wrath. In 1795, he believed

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[225] Thale, *Selections*, p. 308.
[226] Thale, *Selections*, pp. viii, xxv, 76.
[227] Thale, *Selections*, pp. 233-34.
[228] Thale, *Selections*, p. xviii.

himself to have been tasked by God to lead a mass exodus of the lost tribes of Israel (amongst whom were many Britons) from Britain to Palestine, where he was to rebuild Jerusalem and initiate a messianic rule of peace; to this end, he expected King George III to abdicate the throne in his favour. Later that year, however, Brothers was arrested and convicted on a charge of criminal lunacy; for the next eleven years he was confined to Fisher House, a private asylum in Islington.[229]

Nearly twenty years after Brothers's abortive exodus, a sixty-four-year-old virgin named Joanna Southcott – a former Devon maidservant – claimed to be pregnant with Shiloh, the son of God. This was the culmination of a tempestuous ministry which had started with millenarian visions in 1792 but which gained widespread attention only at the turn of the century. In Brothers's absence, many of his former disciples turned their allegiance to Southcott, some of them setting her up in London in the early years of the nineteenth century. Upon her many devotees Southcott imposed the dictates of her heavenly 'voice', which often caused her to erupt in outbursts of anger on behalf of the Almighty.[230]

Both these prophets attracted thousands of supporters from amongst the populace. On one level, their ministries can be seen as nothing more than straightforward instances of self-delusion or psychosis; the madcap fringe of a society in crisis, an expression of apocalyptic hope which attracts the desperate. Unruly times breed prophets and cranks; Brothers and Southcott were no exception. However, if we approach them from a different angle, a different picture emerges. These prophets may have drawn bigger crowds and had a higher profile than many others; but, viewed against the apocalyptic fervour of the age, they were not so unusual.

Brothers's cranky mission had a political edge which was consistent with the complex blend of religious dissent and radical politics of the time. His prophecies contain a mixture of biblical idiom and late eighteenth-century millenarianism, much of it vague enough to be immediately applicable in such troubled times. In his pamphlet *Brother's* [*sic*] *Prophecy of all the Remarkable and Wonderful Events which will come to pass*, he wrote:

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[229] Southey, *Letters*, pp. 427-33; Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 127-29; Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Richard Brothers', *DNB*.
[230] Southey, *Letters*, pp. 433-46; Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 420-28; Sylvia Bowerbank, 'Joanna Southcott', *DNB*.

> The proud and lofty shall be humbled […]; but the righteous and poor shall flourish on the ruins of the wicked. [...] The pestilence shall sweep away the Locusts that eat up the harvest of Industry; and the Earthquake shall swallow up the monstrous *Leviathan*, with all his train. In all these things the poor, the honest, the virtuous, and the patriotic, shall rejoice.[231]

On the one hand, this is no more than a nebulous regurgitation of biblical sayings, but Brothers's concern for the deserving poor can be seen as a reflection of a growing social awareness at this time. His choice of vocabulary is interesting and perhaps significant. Is 'Leviathan' here merely a vague biblical metaphor, or does it refer to the social machinery, as in Hobbes? Does 'patriotic' have its normal sense of 'loyal to one's country' or is it imbued with the new French nuance of 'pro-revolutionary'? In the inflammatory atmosphere of the 1790s, these potentially revolutionary concepts were not to go unnoticed. Likewise, Brothers's refusal to sign a document which contained the words 'our Sovereign Lord' in reference to George III (he considered them blasphemous)[232] could be interpreted as nothing more than a somewhat immoderate religious loyalty, an absolute allegiance to a heavenly king whose sovereignty ought not to be challenged by an earthly one. However, Brothers was not the only one to be rocking the boat of monarchy during these years. Paine too had a dim view of kingship; in *Common Sense* (1776) he had written:

> In England a king hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation and set it together by the ears. […] Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived.[233]

And in *Rights of Man* (1790) he extolled the virtues of republicanism:

> Conquest and tyranny transplanted themselves with William the Conqueror from Normandy into England, and the country is yet disfigured with the marks. May then the example of all France contribute to regenerate the freedom which a province of it destroyed![234]

Although Paine's rationalist and deist stance meant that he was diametrically opposed to Brothers, and although his ideology was more fully reasoned and

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[231] Quoted in Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 128.
[232] Stunt, 'Richard Brothers', *DNB*.
[233] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* and *Common Sense* (New York: Everyman's Library, 1994), p. 262.
[234] Paine, *Rights*, p. 76.

developed, we may nonetheless discern in both approaches, and their concern with change and social justice, a consonance or a variation on a theme. Paine, like Brothers, was an object of establishment wrath because of his undue influence on the populace. By 1795, Pitt's government was struggling with defeats in the war with France, crop failures and popular discontent. Brothers's high profile and the large press coverage that went with it, his religious fervour with its possible political overtones, and the fact that he was visited by members of the London Corresponding Society,[235] all meant that his imprisonment had as much to do with what the authorities saw as his destabilizing effect on the populace as it did with his religious views and his 'madness'. This ambiguity surrounding his status is reflected in the government's confusion over the nature of the charge on which Brothers was imprisoned: originally apprehended for treason, this was subsequently changed to criminal lunacy.[236]

Joanna Southcott permits a similar dual interpretation. On the surface she is the quintessential religious fanatic, complete with paroxysms, crazy prophecies and bossy dicta. Like those of Brothers, many of her prophecies are nothing more than a mishmash of biblical phrases superficially adapted to the current situation. The following is typical:

> O England! England! the axe is laid to the tree, and it must and will be cut down; ye know not the days of your visitation [...] The midnight hour is coming for you all, and will burst upon you. I warn you of dangers that now stand before you, for the time is at hand for the fulfilment of all things.[237]

But Southcott too exemplifies the oppositional patterns of the period. Her ministry was not as overtly political as that of Brothers; by the time of her greatest influence, in the early years of the nineteenth century, millenarianism had – in the wake of the war with France and the clampdown on British radicalism – to some extent retreated once more to the religious arena. And, like the Methodists to whom she once belonged, Southcott laid emphasis on a purely spiritual salvation and reward in the next life. She nonetheless saw herself as a champion of the poor. 'I hear the cries of

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[235] Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 129.
[236] Deborah Madden, 'The religious politics of prophecy: Or, Richard Brothers's *Revealed Knowledge* confuted', *History of European Ideas*, 34, Issue 2 (2008) 270-284 (p. 273). < http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/01916599> [accessed 11/05/09].
[237] Quoted in Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 422.

the poor, complaining they are starving to death,' she wrote to the Reverend Pomeroy, vicar of St Kew in Cornwall in 1800.[238] And she (or her 'voice'), in a mixture of biblical idiom and topical comment similar to that of Brothers, cursed those leaders ('shepherds') who neglected the plight of the poor:

> My charges will come heavy against them, and my judgements must be great in the land, if they starve the poor in the midst of plenty. [...] What I said of Nineveh, Sodom and Gomorrah, what I said of Tyre and Sidon [...] are now charges against the shepherds of England.[239]

E. P. Thompson even sees in one of her verses 'an echo' of Paine, who in *Common Sense* had described William the Conqueror as 'a French bastard landing with an armed banditti':[240]

> For I'll cut off the bastard race,
> And in their stead the true heirs place
> For to possess the land.[241]

Southcott may be seen as a representative of the marginalized, women and the lower classes alike. Her calling bypassed the traditional requirements of spiritual leadership: university education and ordination on the one hand (i.e. wealth, social standing and a willingness to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles) and maleness on the other. To some extent this is consonant with the general dissenting experience, which emphasized a personal relationship with God and the equality of souls (with all the political undertones which that entailed); but in her insistence that God had chosen not only a member of the lower classes but a woman to be his mouthpiece, she parts company even with most of the dissenting sects. 'I will conquer in woman's form,' her voice told her in June 1804.[242] Whatever the psychological processes by which Southcott became convinced that she was a channel for God's voice, her ministry is of interest from a feminist as well as a political standpoint. 'If the woman is not ashamed of herself, the Devil cannot shame her,' she wrote, thus showing

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[238] Bowerbank, 'Joanna Southcott', *DNB*.
[239] Quoted in Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 424.
[240] Paine, *Rights of Man* and *Common Sense*, p. 262.
[241] Quoted in Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 423.
[242] Letter to William Sharp, quoted in Bowerbank, 'Joanna Southcott', *DNB*.

herself to be, in some degree at least, a sister to the more rational and enlightened Mary Wollstonecraft.[243]

It also needs to be noted that it was not only 'madmen' and 'old, vulgar, and illiterate' women who shared the ideas of Brothers and Southcott.[244] Although their main appeal was to the poor and disenfranchised, those for whom religion offered the only consolation, members of the educated classes numbered amongst the devotees of both. Nathaniel Halhed, M.P. and Sanskrit scholar, was a vocal supporter of Brothers both in and out of Parliament. And William Sharp exemplifies the transition of allegiance from Brothers to Southcott which took place after the former's incarceration. Sharp, a friend of William Blake (himself a man of unorthodox views and prophetic vision, albeit on a different intellectual and artistic plane), was a radical engraver who belonged to Joseph Johnson's circle. In 1795 he produced an engraving of Brothers, under which he placed the unequivocal caption: 'Richard Brothers, Prince of the Hebrews: Fully believing this to be the Man whom GOD has appointed, I engrave his likeness.'[245] Sharp was a member of the group responsible for Southcott's establishment in London; this group of seven, of whom six were followers of Brothers and three were Anglican clergymen, had travelled to Exeter in order to sound her out; they returned convinced of her authenticity. The well-to-do Jane Townley opened her London home to Southcott and offered her maidservant to act as Joanna's secretary.

7. Conclusion

'To defend the Bible in this year 1798,' Blake wrote angrily on the title page of Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, 'would cost a man his life. The Beast and the Whore rule without control.'[246] With Pitt's terror much of the drive for reform lost its edge. Though it did not disappear, it ceased to be seen as a readily-attainable goal; as the Napoleonic wars dragged on, the dynamic optimism and millennial hopes of the 1790s faded. Some laid their radicalism aside; others went underground, often

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[243] Quoted in Southey, *Letters*, p. 445.
[244] Southey's descriptions of Brothers and Southcott respectively; *Letters*, pp. 428 and 433.
[245] Stunt, 'Richard Brothers', *DNB*.
[246] Morton, *Matter of Britain*, p. 86.

finding less direct ways in which to express their ideas.[247] Thomas Bewick channelled his radical ideas into his works on natural history;[248] several of the illustrations to his *British Birds*, for instance, contain moving vignettes of the socially marginalized and the disenfranchised.[249] But these are static images which convey little idea of the possibility of reform. Although in the early years of the nineteenth century, through the turbulent years of Luddism (1811-1812), the Pentrich uprising (1817) and Peterloo (1819), the grass-roots struggle for reform continued, resurfacing in later movements such as Chartism, the peculiar and dynamic combination of dissent and radicalism which characterized the 1790s was gone for ever.

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[247] Morton, *Matter of Britain*, p. 86.
[248] Schama, *Fate of Empire*, pp. 31-33.
[249] For example, Thomas Bewick, *A History of British Birds, vol. II* (London: Longman, 1816), p, iii. <http://books.google.com/books?id= PAkAAAAAQAAJ&pg=PR1&dq> [accessed 13/11/08].

Chapter V

The decision to use the wave-particle complementarity of light as a metaphor to express concepts of duality in *Chimera* occurred relatively early in the writing process, and began with minor references and motifs such as the fragment of Richard Turnbull's letter recounting his visit to the Royal Society in 1803 (pp. 29-30, *Chimera* MA) and the mention of candles in Peter Marchmont's attic study (p. 8, *Chimera* MA). In the first instance this was no more than a spontaneous incorporation into the text of an idea which reflected one of my areas of interest, but it soon grew into a major area of study.

Coleridge, who attended Humphrey Davy's lectures at the Royal Institution in 1802 'to enlarge my stock of metaphors', understood the potential of science as a source of inspiration.[250] This potential has not diminished; yet science remains, as Alan Wall points out, an under-exploited resource in the writing of fiction.[251] It was perhaps easier in Coleridge's day for an educated amateur to keep abreast of the latest scientific developments, something which has become increasingly challenging in our own age. Moreover, science is difficult and its effective use in fiction, whether as metaphor, historical background or theme, carries with it certain pitfalls. Above all, details must be accurate. If the writer is not a scientific expert but merely an interested amateur, as I am, this can be problematic and necessitates thorough research. (Coleridge took sixty pages of notes at Davy's lectures.)[252] The problem is compounded when the subject in question is one as esoteric as wave-particle complementarity, a subject which even some physicists are not entirely comfortable with.

I thus expended a significant proportion of time and effort on this area. The essay 'Thomas Young and the Implications of the Double-Slit Experiment' contains the results of my research into Young's and Feynman's double-slit experiments, research which combined the historical and the scientific.

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[250] Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: HarperPress, 2008), p. 288.
[251] Wall, *Writing Fiction*, p. 143.
[252] Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, p. 288.

Thomas Young and the Implications of the Double-Slit Experiment

1.

The Royal Society's Bakerian lecture for 1803 was given on 24 November by Thomas Young and was entitled 'Experiments and Calculations Relative to Physical Optics'. In it, Young described an experiment he had conducted 'on the fringes of colours accompanying shadows'.[253] This apparently innocuous experiment not only reignited the debate on the nature of light, unleashing a torrent of impassioned criticism, but prefigured one of the strangest developments in modern physics.

Young made a small hole in a window shutter and placed over this a piece of thick paper which he had pierced with a fine needle. Light passing thus through a small gap diverges into a cone; into this small 'cone of diverging light' Young placed 'a slip of card, about one-thirtieth of an inch in breadth' (approximately 0.85 mm) and observed its shadow, both on the opposite wall and on 'other cards held at different distances' in the beam of light. On each side of the shadow made by the card were fringes of colours. The shadow itself was 'divided by similar parallel fringes […] differing in number, according to the distance at which the shadow was observed, but leaving the middle of the shadow always white'.[254]

The patterns Young was here observing were caused by diffraction; this is 'the slight spreading of a light beam into a pattern of light and dark bands when it passes through a narrow slit or past the edge of an obstruction'.[255] He correctly inferred from these results that light was acting as a wave – diffraction and interference patterns are exhibitions of wave behaviour – and gave the first section of this lecture the heading 'Experimental Demonstration of the General Law of the Interference of Light'.

In his *Letters to a German Princess,* written between 1760 and 1762, Leonhard Euler had asked of the sun's light, 'What are these rays? That is, beyond question,

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[253] Thomas Young, 'The Bakerian Lecture. Experiments and Calculations relative to physical Optics', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society,* 94, 1 (January 1, 1804). <http://rstl.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/94/1.1.full.pdf+html> [accessed 09/12/09] (p. 1).
[254] Young, 'The Bakerian Lecture', p. 2.
[255] *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of Science*, ed. by Sharon Brimblecombe, Diana Gallannaugh and Catherine Thompson (Oxford: Helicon, 1998), pp. 226-27.

one of the most important inquiries in physics.'[256] The nature of light was still unresolved by the time Young performed his experiment. There were two alternatives: light was either a stream of particles, or corpuscles as Newton had called them, or it was a wave. Many scientists held strong views on the subject, the two camps being divided along roughly national lines.[257] In his *Opticks,* Newton had suggested that light was a stream of tiny particles emitted from the light source like miniature bullets. This particle hypothesis carried the weight of his authority and was championed by the majority of British scientists. On the continent, however, most followed Huygens and Euler in favouring the wave theory.

At the time of Young's experiment, neither hypothesis could give a totally convincing account of the observed phenomena of light. The particle hypothesis seemed to offer a better explanation of propagation in straight lines, and reflection could be adequately explained by both hypotheses; the wave hypothesis, however, provided a more satisfactory explanation for refraction, diffraction and the phenomenon we now call Newton's rings. (These are a set of concentric coloured rings observed when a slightly convex lens is placed on a flat glass plate, thus creating a gap of varying depth, and illuminated from above by a beam of white light.) Newton's explanation of refraction had it that light must travel faster in water than in air, although the opposite would be expected now since water is the denser medium. Diffraction, he said, was the effect of rays of light – composed of corpuscles – 'in passing by the edges and sides of bodies, [being] bent several times backward and forwards, with a motion like that of an eel. And do not the three fringes of colored [*sic*] light […] arise from three such bendings?'[258] Although with hindsight these ideas appear somewhat bizarre, the evidence available at the time was far from conclusive. And to complicate matters, Newton himself, in the 'Queries' of the *Opticks*, had allowed for the possibility of light as a wave. His use of the corpuscular model to explain two phenomena – Newton's rings and the combined reflection and refraction of light from a surface such as water – involved particles

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[256] Quoted in Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 99.

[257] The *OED* dates the first recorded use of the word 'scientist' to 1834, and it was still not in wide use in 1840. I have nonetheless used this word throughout in preference to the historically accurate but cumbersome 'natural philosopher' – a term which in any case appears only to have been used of gentlemen.

[258] Quoted in Robinson, *The Last Man*, pp. 101-02.

which existed in different states, or ‘fits’: ‘fits of easy reflection’ and ‘fits of easy transmission’. However, to explain these fits, Newton made use of a wave concept.[259]

The embryo of Young’s ideas on light can be seen in a paper written in January 1800, entitled ‘Sound and Light’. Although this paper deals principally with sound, sections X and XI refer to light. Much of the debate on light at this time made use of an analogy with sound, which was known to propagate itself as a wave. This was initially a fruitful analogy, but caused problems later on because sound and light are different types of wave. A wave may be defined as a transfer of energy ‘from one point to another without any particle of the medium being permanently displaced; particles merely oscillate about their equilibrium positions’.[260] Sound is a longitudinal wave: a wave in which the motion of the particles is in line with the direction of propagation of the wave. Light, on the other hand, is a transverse wave, in which the motion of the particles is at right angles to the direction of propagation.[261] In Section X of his ‘Sound and Light’ paper, entitled ‘The analogy between light and sound’, Young states the problems caused by the Newtonian (particle) hypothesis: it does not provide an explanation for the uniform velocity of light or for combined reflection and refraction; nor does it explain the phenomenon of Newton’s rings. Section XI of the paper deals with the interference of sound waves; and, although Young stops short of suggesting that these phenomena of light may also be explained by the interference of waves, the juxtaposition was perhaps fruitful. What is certain is that by the next year, when he wrote on the subject in *Nicholson’s Journal*, he was a cautious undulationist, writing ‘I am of opinion that light is probably the undulation of an elastic medium’. In this article he notes that the wave theory explains as well as the particle theory the observed phenomena of light, and in fact provides a better explanation for two of them: diffraction and ‘all the phenomena of the colours of thin plates’ (such as Newton’s rings).[262]

By November 1801, in his paper ‘On the Theory of Light and Colours’, which introduced his ideas on three-colour vision, Young is already discussing the

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[259] Robinson, *The Last Man*, pp. 99-101.
[260] *Chambers Science and Technology Dictionary,* ed. by Peter M. B. Walker (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1988), p. 963.
[261] Walker, *Chambers Science and Technology Dictionary*, pp. 533, 920.
[262] George Peacock, *Life of Thomas Young, M.D., F.R.S., &c., and One of the Eight Foreign Associates of the National Institute of France* (London: John Murray, 1855), p. 131.

interference of light waves, although he does not use the word 'interference' itself. He approaches this by analogy with sound waves, and describes the effect as observed in water waves. (In 1802 he was to demonstrate this interference effect in a ripple tank, a piece of apparatus he had invented.)[263]

The concept of interference explained the colours seen in Newton's rings without the contrived and awkward explanations put forward by Newton. Young (correctly) deduced that the colours of the rings were a result of the constructive interference of specific wavelengths of light, the other wavelengths (colours) being eliminated by destructive interference. (Constructive interference occurs when the waves are 'in phase', i.e. when the crests and troughs of the waves coincide, thus intensifying their effect. Destructive interference occurs when the waves are 'out of phase': the crest of one wave coincides with the trough of another and the waves thus cancel each other out.) Young even went further and calculated the wavelengths of the seven basic spectral colours. However, the evidence he presented in his 1801 paper was not enough to convince those who still believed in Newton's less elegant but still influential hypothesis.

Young believed that his paper of November 1803, 'Experiments and Calculations Relative to Physical Optics' provided clinching evidence for the wave theory of light, beginning it with the following words: 'I have found so simple and so demonstrative a proof of the general law of the interference of two portions of light […] that I think it right to lay before the Royal Society, a short statement of the facts which appear to me so decisive.'[264] Since diffraction is a property of waves and not of particles, the diffraction fringes he had observed could only be caused if light were a wave.

2.

However, Young's experiments were the subject of three vituperative attacks in the newly-launched *Edinburgh Review.* Two of these appeared in January 1803: one on his paper 'On the Theory of Light and Colours' (read to the Royal Society in 1801 and published in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1802) and another on a second paper by Young on the same subject, published in the same volume of the

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[263] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 107.
[264] Young, 'The Bakerian Lecture', p. 1.

Transactions. The third review appeared in 1804 and dealt with Young's 1803 paper 'Experiments and Calculations Relative to Physical Optics'. Although all three reviews were anonymous, Young correctly identified the reviewer as Henry Brougham.

Brougham's criticism is of interest not just for its arguments, but for the insights it gives into the scientific culture of the day. His first review, aggressive from the start, accuses Young's work of being unscientific and retrograde:

> But we have of late observed in the physical world a most unaccountable predilection for vague hypothesis daily gaining ground; and we are mortified to see, that the Royal Society, forgetful of those improvements in science to which it owes its origin, and neglecting the precepts of its most illustrious members, is now, by the publication of such papers, giving the countenance of its high authority to dangerous relaxations in the principles of physical logic. We wish to raise our feeble voice against innovations, that can have no other effect than to check the progress of science, and renew all those wild phantoms of the imagination which Bacon and Newton put to flight from her temple. We wish to recal [*sic*] philosophers to the strict and severe methods of investigation pointed out by the transcendant [*sic*] talents of those illustrious men, and consecrated by their astonishing success.[265]

Brougham is here expressing a valid concern for the integrity of science, significantly invoking the authority of two of its most important British proponents. But in his subsequent criticism of Young's competence as a scientist, he makes an interesting but spurious distinction between what he considers to be valid and invalid scientific practice. Taking Young to task for having revised his ideas on a couple of topics (the crystalline lens of the eye and the colours caused by refraction in 'mixed plates'), Brougham draws a distinction between 'a discovery in mathematics, or a successful induction of facts', which should be published immediately, and 'an hypothesis', which is 'a work of fancy, useless in science, and fit only for the amusement of a vacant hour; […] as it requires continual polishing, touching, and retouching, in order to adapt it to the phenomena'.[266] Significantly, Newton (in the 'General Scholium' of the second edition of the *Principia*) had written, 'Non fingo hypotheses,' or 'I do not make hypotheses'. This was a response to a criticism of the first edition of the *Principia*, that gravity – which is invisible and acts over huge

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[265] Henry Brougham, 'The Bakerian Lecture on the Theory of Light and Colours. By Thomas Young, M.D. F.R.S.', *Edinburgh Review,* 1 (1803), 450-456 (pp. 450-51).
[266] Brougham, 'The Bakerian Lecture', p. 451.

distances – was an occult force. Newton's argument here was that since the cause of gravity was not apparent, it would be improper to speculate on it. He draws a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable scientific procedures. Science ('natural philosophy') – he writes – proceeds through 'particular propositions […] inferr'd from the phænomena, and afterwards render'd general by induction'; hypotheses, 'whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy'.[267] And in the *Opticks* he wrote, 'My design in this book is not to explain the propositions of light by hypotheses, but to propose and prove them by reason and experiments.'[268] This is not entirely true of his own practice, but there are in fact two issues here. The first has to do with a central principle of scientific practice: the effort to free it from speculative assumptions. The second is semantic: the word 'hypothesis', according to the *OED*, has two senses: first, 'a proposition [...] stated (without any reference to its correspondence with fact) merely as a basis for reasoning or argument'; and second

> a supposition put forth to account for known facts; *esp.* in the sciences, a provisional supposition from which to draw conclusions that shall be in accordance with known facts, and which serves as a starting-point for further investigation by which it may be proved or disproved and the true theory arrived at.

Newton uses the word 'hypothesis' in the first sense (he defines it as 'whatever is not deduc'd from the phænomena'). However, as both Young and his biographer Peacock subsequently pointed out, science – unlike mathematics – proceeds by the successive refining of hypotheses (in the second sense) rather than by the discovery of hard-and-fast 'truth'. (A similar confusion between a general and a scientific usage exists today around the word 'theory'. In order to remove the possible connotations of conjecture and speculation from the phrase 'theory of evolution', Richard Dawkins coins the word 'theorum' to denote 'a hypothesis that has been confirmed or established by observation or experiment'.)[269] Brougham also assumes that scientists first do experiments which show them the 'truth'; whereas in fact it is

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[267] 'The General Scholium to Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*', trans. by Andrew Motte, *The Newton Project Canada* (2004) <http://www.isaacnewton.ca/gen_scholium/scholium.htm> [accessed 07/12/09] (para. 5 of 6). (Newton never himself published an English edition of his great work.)
[268] Quoted in Joel Levy, *Newton's Notebook: The Life, Times and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009), p. 128.
[269] Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (London: Bantam, 2009), pp. 9-13.

more usual for experiments to be devised in order to test a hypothesis, which is then confirmed, modified or abandoned in the light of the evidence.[270]

Although in his second review Brougham is less offensive (but no less critical), he reverts to invective in his third, which appeared in volume 5 of the *Edinburgh Review* in October 1804. He writes of Young's law of interference as 'one of the most incomprehensible suppositions that we remember to have met with in the history of human hypotheses'. Young's paper contained 'more fancies, more blunders, more unfounded hypotheses, more gratuitous fictions, all upon the same field on which Newton trod, all from the fertile, yet fruitless, brain of the same eternal Dr Young.'[271] This exaltation of Newton as possibly infallible is reminiscent of that of Aristotle in the two millennia before the scientific revolution. Aristotle's ideas concerning the physical world – originally consistent with observed data – became so codified into an all-encompassing doctrine, ratified by the Church, that it was difficult to disagree with it even long after conflicting observational evidence had been gathered.

Young's hypothesis was correct, yet there were several factors which prevented its being taken entirely seriously. In the first place the experiment itself, with its slips of card held up in a beam of light, was somewhat clumsy. And although the card used was very thin, it was not thin enough to produce the most obvious diffraction patterns. There was also a conceptual difficulty that many scientists found unacceptable: how could two rays of light combine to produce darkness? In addition, although from his experiment on Newton's rings Young had made careful measurements and calculated the wavelengths of monochromatic light, his other experiments lacked quantitative data. The experiment on interference 'lacked the kind of precision and mathematical rigor [*sic*] increasingly expected by physicists.[272]

[270] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 117.
[271] Quoted in Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 116.
[272] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 170. (*OED* dates the use of the word 'physicist' in this sense to 1840.)

3.

Young answered Brougham's criticisms in a pamphlet published in November 1804: 'Reply to the Animadversions of the Edinburgh Reviewers', a measured response which largely confined itself to a discussion of the scientific issues raised by Brougham, such as the function of hypothesis and theory in science.[273] However, although he maintained an interest in the subject of light, keeping abreast of new developments and writing an article on it for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,[274] he abandoned his experiments, turning to other areas of study (such as the deciphering of the Rosetta stone) and building up his medical practice. He also decided that any future publications on scientific matters, except medical ones, would be anonymous. This is generally considered to be a result of the distress occasioned by Brougham's criticisms, and there is no doubt that this was a major influencing factor. At the same time, however, Young's abandonment of light was not entirely out of character. He did have a tendency to flit from one subject to another; not without doing useful work, but without the same degree of focus as someone whose interests were less encyclopaedic, or whose income depended on achievements within one professional field. What is certain is that his work on interference was all but forgotten; it was rarely referred to between 1804 and 1816. Only with the more mathematical work of Arago and Fresnel in the next decade of the nineteenth century was convincing evidence obtained for the wave theory. From 1808 new experiments were performed and by the 1820s most scientists had been won over. Much of this work centred on the phenomenon of polarization. Young had continued to follow developments in optics, writing reviews of others' work and discussing ideas in his correspondence. In a letter to Arago in 1817 he suggested an explanation of polarization by positing that light might be a longitudinal wave with a small transverse component. Fresnel learnt of this idea from Arago and also developed Young's earlier work on interference and diffraction. Fresnel's work, which was underpinned with rigorous mathematics, showed by 1821 that light is in fact a wave, but a transverse one, and explained virtually all the phenomena of light in terms of the wave theory.[275]

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[273] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 116.
[274] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 171.
[275] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 170.

Many histories of science take it as read that Young's experiment, although it met with some incredulity and hostility in the first instance, 'proved' the nature of light, and that scientific truth progressed smoothly from one concept to the next. John Gribbin, for example, states that 'the progress of science was not held up because similar evidence in support of the wave model came almost immediately from (perhaps appropriately) Britain's bitterest foe at the time, France'.[276] Although in the long term this was the case, it was almost twenty years before the work of Fresnel established the wave theory, and the actual process was often one of bitter conflict. The row between Young and Brougham was echoed in a similar disagreement between Arago (an undulationist) and Biot (a corpuscularist) in 1822 over the polarization of light. Peacock comments that 'Arago attacked the *rival* theory of Biot […] with so much vehemence both of language and argument, that the friendship between them […] was permanently dissolved.'[277] In an effect similar to that of Brougham's earlier criticism of Young, this enmity obscured the work carried out by Fresnel – work which was crucial to the establishment of the wave theory.

That theory did gain ground, however. Fizeau showed in 1850 that the speed of light is slower in water than in air, thus providing further evidence against the corpuscular theory, which had predicted the opposite.[278] And the work of James Clerk Maxwell in the 1860s was conclusive. Maxwell unified the theories of electricity and magnetism and showed that light is a form of electromagnetic radiation. It was impossible, he wrote, 'to avoid the inference that light consists in the transverse undulations of the same medium which is the cause of electric and magnetic phenomena.'[279]

4.

Running through Brougham's reviews is a contrast between the scientific hero Newton and the upstart Young who had dared to tread on the hallowed 'field on which Newton trod'. Brougham was perhaps irked by the fact that the experiment reported in Young's 1803 paper, in which light is passed through a shutter, was

[276] John Gribbin, *Science: A History: 1543-2001* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), p. 406.
[277] Peacock, *Life of Thomas Young*, p. 387.
[278] Gribbin, *Science*, p. 425.
[279] Quoted in Cyril Domb, 'James Clerk Maxwell', *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

reminiscent of Newton's classic experiment with the prism. And the title of Young's 1801 paper, 'On the Theory of Light and Colours', echoed that of Newton's 1672 paper, 'A Letter of Mr. Isaac Newton […]; containing his New Theory about Light and Colors [*sic*]'.[280] (In Pope's famous epitaph the whole of Newton's work is encapsulated in an image of 'enlightenment': 'Nature and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night./GOD said, *Let Newton be!* and all was Light.')[281] Newton's authority did carry considerable weight, despite the fact that his ideas on the nature of light were not conclusive. By the time of Young's experiments, Britain was at war with France and there was an added element of patriotism in supporting Newton's particle hypothesis over what was seen as the 'continental' undulatory idea.[282] (Nationalistic concerns were to play a similar part in resistance to Einstein's ideas during the Great War; Eddington – a pacifist Quaker – was one of the few in Britain to take Einstein's work seriously.)

However, Brougham's attitude to Newton's authority is contradictory. He drops the names of Newton and other scientific heavyweights of the past into his reviews, in a way which is probably meant to be intimidating. On the one hand, he accuses Young of using Newton to give weight to his own theories, pointing out the importance of Newton's status:

> Those who are attached, as all may be with the greatest justice, to every doctrine which is stamped with Newtonian approbation, will probably be disposed to bestow on these considerations so much the more of their attention, as they appear to coincide more nearly with Newton's own opinions.[283]

Yet later, when accusing Young of twisting Newton's ideas to bolster his own, Brougham denies the weight of authority in science at all:

> We are far from meaning to admit the criterion of authority appealed to by our author. We hold the highest authority to be of no weight whatever in the court of Reason; and we view the attempt to shelter this puny theory under the sanction of great names, as a

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[280] The Newton Project, University of Sussex <http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/ NATP00006> [accessed 29/10/09].
[281] 'Intended for Sir ISAAC NEWTON, in Westminster-Abbey', in *Pope: Poetical Works*, ed. by Herbert Davis (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 651.
[282] John Gribbin, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat* (London: Black Swan, 1991), p. 17.
[283] Brougham, 'The Bakerian Lecture', p. 453.

desperate effort in its defence, and a most unwarrantable appeal to popular prejudice.[284]

This issue of authority is a significant one in science, but Brougham's criticisms of Young also have a personal element, which perhaps explains their exaggerated nature. It is likely that Brougham bore a grudge against Young as a result of events which had taken place some years earlier. Young had reviewed a mathematical paper by Brougham published in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1798. Significantly, he had criticized Brougham for the fact that he had 'proceeded too far in animadverting on the writings of Newton, Barrow, and other eminent mathematicians'.[285] Peacock saw a link between Young's earlier criticism of Brougham and the latter's scathing comments in 1803 and 1804:

> Though [… Young's] particular criticism referred to was just, it was somewhat flippant and ungracious, and was probably not without its influence in provoking the severe retaliatory treatment which Young's own Memoirs [papers] shortly afterwards experienced at the hands of one who, not himself invulnerable, was armed at all points, and always prepared to come to close quarters with his enemies.[286]

We perceive here a hint of Brougham's character; this belligerence was to stand him in good stead in his career as a radical lawyer. In fact, though Brougham does not come well out of this disagreement with Young, he was later to gain a reputation as an eloquent friend and protector of radicals against government repression. He defended John and Leigh Hunt on more than one occasion for libels in their weekly *Examiner*, most famously in their trial in December 1812 for libel against the Prince Regent (which resulted nonetheless in two years' imprisonment for each defendant).[287]

In fact the two had crossed swords even earlier: in 1795 Brougham had criticized Young's first Royal Society paper. Added to this was Brougham's disappointment that, despite the support of one of the secretaries of the Society, Sir Charles Blagden, he had failed to realize his ambition of entry into the Society until well after Young

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[284] Brougham, 'The Bakerian Lecture', p. 454.

[285] This remark was made by Dr Robison of Edinburgh in the *Philosophical Transactions* (1800) in response to a paper by Young which criticized Robert Smith's 'Treatise on Harmonics'. Peacock, *Life of Thomas Young*, p. 129.

[286] Peacock, *Life of Thomas Young,* p. 130.

[287] Nicholas Roe, *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt* (London: Pimlico, 2005), pp. 175-81.

was elected. ‘It seems only too probable,’ comments Robinson, ‘that Brougham perceived the polymathic Young to be a scientific rival, whom he envied – a Mozart to his Salieri.’[288]

5.

This episode reveals some interesting details about the nature of scientific practice in the early nineteenth century. The fact that both Brougham and Young had other forms of employment was not at all anomalous. Unlike today, this was an age when educated amateurs could not only understand the latest scientific debates, but could – and often did – make significant contributions themselves.

In Brougham’s reviews we also catch a glimpse of the conflict between the Royal Society and the Royal Institution. Young, as well as being foreign secretary of the Royal Society, was professor of natural philosophy at the Royal Institution, an establishment about which Brougham is scathing:

> We demand if the world of science, which Newton once illuminated, is to be as changeable in its modes, as the world of taste, which is directed by the nod of a silly woman, or a pampered fop? Has the Royal Society degraded its publications into bulletins of new and fashionable theories for the ladies, who attend the Royal Institution? *Proh pudor!* Let the professor continue to amuse his audience with an endless variety of such harmless trifles; but, in the name of Science, let them not find admittance into that venerable repository, which contains the words of Newton, and Boyle, and Cavendish, and Maskelyne, and Herschell [*sic*].’[289]

There was some concern about the Royal Institution and its aim of popularizing science. Many scientists of the day saw the Institution less as a scientific establishment than as a place of fashionable entertainment (it welcomed ‘ladies’); it was certainly considered inferior to the Royal Society. Gillray’s cartoon of a lecture at the Royal Institution (‘Scientific researches! New discoveries in PNEUMATICKS! – or – an Experimental Lecture on the Powers of Air’) captures the raucous and farcical atmosphere which its detractors considered to be the norm at the Institution.[290] Brougham states a concern for the scientific honour of the Royal

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[288] Robinson, *The Last Man*, pp. 118-19.
[289] Brougham, ‘The Bakerian Lecture’, p. 452.
[290] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 92.

Society; he is unhappy that 'paltry and unsubstantial' papers are slipping in which are unworthy of the Society's prestige, and worries that this is causing a decline in the Society's reputation; he implores it to vet its papers more thoroughly, so as to 'cease to give its countenance to such vain theories as those which we find mingled, in this volume [the Society's *Transactions*], with a vast body of important information.'[291]

6.

Young is also celebrated for a second experiment, described in his monumental digest of scientific thought, *A Course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy and the Mechanical Arts,* published in 1807. This is his 'double slit experiment', in which a beam of homogeneous (single-colour) light is passed through two very small slits in a screen and the resulting pattern observed on a 'surface placed so as to intercept them'.[292] This pattern is an alternation of dark and light bands, similar to that obtained from the earlier experiment with the slips of card. In this experiment the two beams of light passing through the two slits interfere with each other, the light bands on the screen occurring as a result of constructive interference and the dark bands as a result of destructive interference.

Although this experiment, like its predecessor, provides convincing evidence for the wave theory of light and is often considered to be Young's *coup de grâce* in the establishment of that theory, there is no definitive evidence that he actually performed it. Historians of science are divided on the matter.[293] The experiment was not submitted to the Royal Society and the only written account of it is tucked away in the *Course of Lectures*. One historian, Nahum Kipnis, believes that Young did perform the experiment but with the slits too far apart to obtain interference patterns.[294] (In this case, he would have observed diffraction patterns, as in the earlier single-slit experiment. However, since diffraction is also an exhibition of wave behaviour, this would not alter the conclusion that light is behaving as a wave.)

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[291] Henry Brougham, 'An Account of some Cases of the Production of Colours not hitherto described. By Thomas Young, M.D. &c.', *Edinburgh Review,* 1 (1803), 457-460 (p. 459).
[292] Quoted in Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 122.
[293] Robinson, *The Last Man*, pp. 123-24.
[294] Robinson, *The Last Man*, p. 124.

That this experiment may have been a thought-experiment gives it a curious resonance with a later, even more famous, one. In Richard Feynman's double-slit experiment (originally a thought experiment, although it was later performed, giving the results he had predicted) electrons, rather than a beam of light, are fired through the two slits. Since electrons are sub-atomic particles, they would be expected to behave as particles and accumulate in two heaps opposite each of the slits. In fact, something very strange happens: on the screen appears an interference pattern similar to that obtained in Young's double-slit experiment. In other words, the electrons are behaving as waves.[295] It may be inferred from this that electrons have both wave and particle properties. The same results are obtained when photons (particles of light) are used. And in fact, this wave/particle duality, or complementarity, extends not just to electrons and light but to all objects. Ask wave questions and you get wave answers; ask particle questions and you get particle answers.[296] Like one of those black and white pictures which reveal an old hag or a beautiful young woman depending on how you look at it, reality is characterized by an inherent ambiguity.

Also at the heart of the quantum world is uncertainty. Although in the electron double-slit experiment the final pattern is always the same, it is impossible to predict the behaviour of any single electron. The individual motions of the particles are unpredictable. It is possible to predict the behaviour of large numbers of particles (what may be called the 'statistical model') but not that of individual ones (the 'dynamic model'). Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that it is impossible to know simultaneously the position and the momentum of a particle (such as an electron). This is not to do with any inadequacy of equipment or of experimental methods, but is an inherent property of nature.[297]

But that is not the only strange outcome of the double-slit experiment. The same result (i.e. an interference pattern, the result of wave-behaviour) is obtained even if only one electron is released at a time. This would suggest that somehow each electron passes through both slits.[298] However, if the experiment is set up in such a way that individual electrons are 'observed' (detected) as they pass through the slits, it is found that each electron passes through either one slit or the other, and the

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[295] See Goronwy Tudor Jones and Alan Wall, 'The Most Beautiful Experiment' in Alan Wall, *Myth, Metaphor and Science* (Chester: Chester Academic Press, 2009), pp. 89-92.
[296] Jones and Wall, 'The Most Beautiful Experiment', p. 89.
[297] Gribbin, *Schrödinger's Cat*, pp. 119-20.
[298] Gribbin, *Schrödinger's Cat*, pp. 170-71.

interference pattern disappears. What appears on the screen in this case is the pattern of distribution which would be obtained if, for example, bullets were being fired.[299] The act of observation changes the outcome, since it introduces energy into the experiment which changes the state of the object.[300] 'The observer interacts with the system [the experimental apparatus] to such an extent that the system cannot be thought of as having independent existence.'[301]

Despite the fact that for the behaviour of objects on the everyday level, the uncertainty involved is minute and therefore insignificant, these results have radical implications for our understanding of nature. Because the macro world consists of atoms whose component particles behave according to quantum rules, it follows that all material reality is in some sense underpinned by the strange concepts of quantum theory.[302]

Many scientific developments have come about only after a battle with what appears to be self-evident. That the earth is hurtling around the sun at approximately thirty kilometres per second is not obvious; nor is the fact that what we understand as solid matter is composed of minute particles which themselves consist largely of empty space. But the discoveries of quantum theory defy not only what we think of as 'common sense' but much of what we have come to understand as 'reasonable'. Although scientists are comfortable with its technological applications (many of which are now indispensable to modern life, such as lasers and the electronics of the computer, the mobile phone, the programmable washing machine and so on) many would admit that even they themselves cannot comprehend the realities behind quantum theory.[303] In contrast to the early years of the nineteenth century, our own age is characterized both by an increasing specialization in all areas of knowledge and by a reconditeness in science which makes much of it difficult to access. This is in part a result of the mathematicization of science. It is interesting that Zajonc sees the division between scientists and non-scientists – between those who understand the mathematics and those who do not – as being in existence as early as 1773, the date of Euler's confrontation with Diderot at the court of Catherine the Great in St

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[299] Jones and Wall, 'The Most Beautiful Experiment', p. 94.
[300] Jones and Wall, 'The Most Beautiful Experiment', p. 96.
[301] Gribbin, *Schrödinger's Cat*, p. 160.
[302] Gribbin, *Schrödinger's Cat*, pp. 146-47.
[303] Gribbin, *Schrödinger's Cat*, ch. 7.

Petersburg. The great *philosophe* was incapable of answering Euler's 'proof' of the existence of God, since it was expressed in the form of an equation.[304]

But the difficulty of science as exemplified in wave-particle complementarity does not exonerate us from the responsibility of trying to understand it. Science is, after all, an explanation of the way the material world works. Non-scientists may have to make do with a purely linguistic expression, with what Maxwell called 'the tenuity and paleness of a symbolic [i.e. analogic] expression'; but even Maxwell conceded that 'scientific truth' could be expressed by such means.[305]

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[304] Zajonc, *Catching the Light*, p. 113.
[305] Quoted in Gribbin, *Science*, pp. 429-30.

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