

特別寄稿

THE VICTORIANS AND HISTORY

Andrew Sanders

To many Victorians the past was decidedly *not* another country. It was an intensely various country, generally European in its constitution, its traditions and its geography, but it was a familiar country. It appeared to be readily visitable, and it seemed to be self-evidently contiguous with the present. The past stood boldly before readers of history and historical novels and dramas as monitory, for it offered both an example and a warning to the present. Victorian readers knew, of course, that in the past men and women did things differently, but what the Ancient Romans, or the Plantagenets, or Renaissance Florentines or Scottish Covenanters did, and how and why they did it, was a matter both of fascination and of vital modern concern. Or so historians, historical novelists and historical dramatists aspired to believe.

Perhaps the most significant reason behind this fascination with history lay in the fact that the first Victorian generation had witnessed what many of them recognised as unprecedented change in the physical and political world about them. This sentiment was famously described by Thackeray in his *Roundabout Paper* of October 1860 entitled *De Juventute*. For Thackeray the coming of the railways in the 1830s seemed to demarcate one age from another and not just his own youth from his middle-age:

We who have lived before the railways were made, belong to another world. In how many hours could the Prince of Wales drive from London to Brighton, with a light carriage built expressly, and relays of horses longing to

gallop the next stage?

... It was only yesterday; but what a gulf between now and then! *Then* it was the old world. Stage-coaches, more or less swift, riding-horses, pack-horses, highwaymen, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue, and so forth - all these belong to the old period. I will concede a halt in the midst of it, and allow that gunpowder and printing tended to modernise the world. But your railroad starts a new era, and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one. We are of the time of chivalry as well as the Black Prince or Sir Walter Manny. We are of the age of steam.ⁱ

For Thackeray, the railway seems to have accelerated the passage of time even more so than the inventions of gunpowder and the printing press, speeding the modern world away from the Prince Regent and his post-chaise as much as from the Druids and the Ancient Britons. In a sense the Prince Regent can now be equated both with the Black Prince and, even more abstrusely, a Druid.

What Thackeray appears to be implying in his *De Juventute* is that, rather than finding themselves *déraciné*, his contemporaries felt the need to explore and establish roots. Nineteenth-century readers may have spurred an urgency in knowing from whence they had come, but the roots examined by Victorian historians were neither exclusively racial nor national in their pursuit of knowledge. Patriotism was self-evidently not enough. As a perusal of any of his novels suggests, Thackeray for one remained fascinated by the history of British influence in the country of his birth, India. The professional historians who were his contemporaries would have readily acknowledged their debts to the recent German renovators of their discipline, Niebuhr, Müller and Ranke, and to those French historians whose analyses of the disjunctions of modern civilisation and politics were to prove so influential (Michelet, Guizot and Thiers). It should not be forgotten that the most provocative, but nonetheless seductive, study of the racial, social and cultural consequences of the Norman invasion of England was

the work of a Frenchman, Augustin Thierry, whose *Histoire de la conquête d'Angleterre par les Normands, de ses causes, et ses suites* was published in Paris in 1825.ⁱⁱ Thierry's work helped develop the myth, fostered by Sir Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe*, of the Norman influx as the *fons et origo* of the modern class system.ⁱⁱⁱ In their various ways British historians of the nineteenth century were both to counter old myths and to foster new ones in equal measure.^{iv} Although an undertow of Protestant nationalism might strike latter-day readers as a constant feature of British history writing, and although that writing might now be viewed as emphatically 'eurocentric' in its world-view, the enterprise of many prominent and once respected Victorian historians was very far from insular. Notable British historians of the period were severally to publish substantial studies of Jewish history from Old Testament times to the Napoleonic era (Henry Hart Milman, 1830), of Greece (Connop Thirlwall, 1835-44; George Grote, 1846-56), of Rome (Thomas Arnold, 1838), of Medieval Christianity (Henry Hart Milman, 1840, 1855), of the Papacy (Mandell Creighton, 1882-1894), of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe (W. E. H. Lecky, 1865), of the French Revolution (Thomas Carlyle, 1837), and of the life of Frederick the Great (Thomas Carlyle, 1858-65).^v If we add to this list John Ruskin's expansive study of the history, the art and the architecture of Venice, *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), it can be seen how variously intelligent British readers were drawn into an intellectual participation in a European-wide debate about the unsteady development of Judaeo-Christian civilization. Perhaps more significantly, these readers were also bidden to respond to the ever present challenges presented to them by the very idea of progressive development. As Jerome H. Buckley has noted of the perception of Time in the Victorian period: 'Whatever the historian's effort to achieve objectivity, public change could seldom for long be contemplated with a calm detachment; it called for evaluation as advance or decline, change for the better or change for the worse.'^{vi}

There was, however, a great deal of contemporary stress laid on the special conditions which had given rise to the constitutional distinction of Britain and to

the social and geographical circumstances which were deemed to have given Britons an advantageous edge in developing their Empire, their Commerce, and their Industry. No Victorian historian was more influential, or persuasive about the nature of Britain's *mission civilisatrice* than Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859, created first Baron Macaulay in 1857). Macaulay's biographer, his nephew the historian Sir George Otto Trevelyan, recognized the breadth of his uncle's achievement as 'a man of letters ... a statesman, a jurist and a brilliant ornament of society' but he added that there were also tens of thousands of readers 'whose interest in history and literature he has awakened and informed by his pen.'^{vii} In his own day Macaulay was perhaps best known for his enduringly popular poems *The Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) and for his much reprinted *Essays* (written for the *Edinburgh Review* from 1825 and first collected in 1843). Given his insistent reiterations of Protestant England's providential progress it is strange to recall that in his review of Leopold von Ranke's *History of the Popes* (1840) Macaulay archly prophesied that the Papacy might 'still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of vast solitude, take his stand of [sic] a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St Paul's.' It was an apocalyptic idea, not of Papal durability, but of British vulnerability, which appears to have haunted the Victorian imagination.^{viii} The suggestion that London might one day share the fate of ancient Rome and become a curiosity in the eyes of its former colonials does not, however, form the keynote of Macaulay's masterpiece, *The History of England* (five vols. 1848-61). The book is centred instead on the idea of progressive political development. Macaulay's title is effectively a misnomer, for he was determined to focus his historical attention on the late seventeenth-century 'Glorious Revolution' and to describe not just the complex fortunes of England in the period, but also those of Scotland, Ireland and, by extension, the American colonies as each is shown to be vitally bound up with the burgeoning prosperity and constitutional development of the United Kingdom. Macaulay's great innovation as a writer of history was to describe social patterns which lay beyond political and military ones. He stated his intention with an opening declaration:

It will be my endeavour to relate the history of the people as well as the history of the government, to trace the progress of useful and ornamental arts, to describe the rise of religious sects and the changes of literary taste, to portray the manners of successive generations, and not to pass by with neglect even the revolutions which have taken place in dress, furniture, repasts, and public amusements. I shall cheerfully bear the reproach of having descended below the dignity of history, if I can succeed in placing before the English of the nineteenth century a true picture of the life of their ancestors.

Macaulay conspicuously, and very effectively, drew on sources and influences, notably literary sources, which lay beyond the customary archival or documentary domain of historians.^{ix} Macaulay had in one of his earlier essays accredited his innovatory method to the influence of the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Despite his evident admiration of the *Waverley Novels*, Macaulay the historian seems to take brief exception to Scott's act of intelligent trespass:

To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle ... to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture, these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist.^x

Macaulay was, in fact, re-appropriating what he felt properly belonged to the historian, but he was doing so by adopting something of the method and the narrative technique of Scott and his imitators. Where he differed was in his determination to 'draw from the occurrences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom.' Where, in telling a story, the novelist merely 'showed', the scrupulous historian was obliged to pause to analyse, to interpret

and to teach.^{xi}

Macaulay's great 'set pieces' (his analysis of the condition of England in 1685, say, or his accounts of the landing of William of Orange or the Battle of the Boyne) are therefore integrally linked to his grand intellectual theme, again first expressed in the *Essays*, that 'the history of England is emphatically the history of progress'. It was 'the history of a constant movement of the public mind, of a constant change in the institutions of a great society.'^{xii} This insistent argument, articulated with the recent passage of the Reform Bill in 1832 and the reforming zeal of the post-Reform Whig government in mind, stands as one of the central pillars of Macaulay's own political agenda. The study of the past, and the analytical interpretation of selected data, provide the present with a firm justification for its espousal of gradual development. The struggles between Crown and Parliament in the middle of the seventeenth century, and the effective triumph of Parliament over a reassertive, and potentially tyrannical, Crown in the reign of James II, had set an agenda for the steady and 'constant' change in the political and social institutions of Great Britain. Macaulay's articulation of the idea of the organic development of the constitution and of society alike was the founding principle of what was subsequently dubbed the 'Whig Interpretation of History'.^{xiii} Macaulay, raised to the peerage by a grateful Lord Palmerston and buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey after his untimely death, did not live to finish his *History* as he had initially aspired to do. He was unable to extend his survey of the consequences of what victorious Whigs had styled the 'Glorious Revolution' into the eighteenth century and to observe its impact on such phenomena as the Act of Union with Scotland, on Jacobitism and on the American Revolution. Significantly enough it was yet another novelist, Thackeray, the author of *Henry Esmond* and *The Virginians*, who at his publisher's suggestion, toyed with the idea of assuming Macaulay's historical mantle until he too was defeated by death.^{xiv}

Thomas Carlyle, caricatured by Anthony Trollope as 'Dr. Pessimist

Anticant', was an historian of a very different stamp to Macaulay. For Carlyle the observation of contemporary society suggested far less evidence of happy and enlightened progress; the study of history too demanded not so much a consideration of the State of England in 1685 as a desperate attempt to diagnose the ills of England in the mid-nineteenth century by placing those ills in an unflattering perspective. Where Macaulay sought to congratulate the English on their political achievement, Carlyle took pleasure in disconcerting them. There was little love lost between the two men, Carlyle glibly dismissing his rival as 'the sublime of commonplace'.^{xv} Seemingly appropriately, Macaulay the man struck him as having little of the physically heroic about him, largely because Macaulay the historian had failed to recognize what Carlyle saw as the dynamic of history: heroism itself.

Like his rival, Carlyle had first established his reputation, and had first outlined the principles on which he was to work, in a series of essays in contemporary journals. Amongst the most influential of these are 'Signs of the Times' (*Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1829) and 'On History' (*Fraser's Magazine*, 1830). The former, with its self-consciously apocalyptic title, reflects on a then current fascination with millenarianism before crucially defining the modern age as 'The Mechanical Age' and 'The Age of Machinery'. Carlyle sees this defining mechanical principle as evident in all aspects of national life from its economics to its theology, from its aesthetics and its literature to its politics and its morals:

Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions, — for Mechanism of one sort or another, do they hope and struggle. Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical character.^{xvi}

Carlyle is not dispraising either science or technology, but he is observing a

society losing its old bearings and failing to embrace the moral and intellectual consequences of the new. To balance this dystopian vision of the present he suggests in the essay 'On History' that the study of the past may offer both examples and lessons. 'Before Philosophy can teach by Experience', he argues, 'the Philosophy has to be in readiness, the Experience must be gathered and intelligibly recorded.' What he means here by 'experience' is History and History he insists is 'the essence of innumerable Biographies'.^{xvii} This 'biographical' bias was to shape all of Carlyle's historical enterprise.

The significance of biography as a means of exploring historical experience is very much evident in Carlyle's series of public lectures, delivered in May 1840 and published in the following year under the title *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. The lectures deal with male heroism as a variously historical, religious, aesthetic and social phenomenon (gods, prophets, poets, priests, writers and leaders). His 'heroes' have all 'shaped themselves in the world's history' as 'the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, or whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain'.^{xviii} Carlyle's last two lectures ('The Hero as Man of Letters' and 'The Hero as King') most directly address the social and political issues of his own day. His men of letters (Dr. Johnson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Robert Burns) are all 'new' men, all of them of humble origin who rose to eminence through intellectual effort and without the benefit of patronage. His 'kings' (Cromwell and Napoleon) are equally self-made breakers of moulds. A king, for Carlyle, is the *Ableman*, a proto-Nietzschean *Übermensch*, who sweeps away tired conventions by dint of his inspired will. Thus the taciturn Cromwell 'drives towards the practical and practicable ... a man with his whole soul *seeing*, and struggling to see' while that 'far inferior sort', Napoleon, is possessed of 'a certain instinctive ineradicable feeling for reality' until an equally instinctive 'fatal-charlatan element' got the upper hand.^{xix} A strong anti-democratic, or at least anti-populist, bias runs through the lectures as it does through *Past and Present* (1843), a work very much directed at the problems besetting what Carlyle himself termed the

'Condition of England'. The work is divided into four parts: a singularly provocative 'Proem' which attacks modern economic and social complacency; an extended study of the twelfth-century 'heroic' Abbot Samson of St Edmundsbury; a various view of work and the 'modern worker' and, finally, a 'Horoscope' which attempts to disturb the present-day with dire warnings of a collapse into moral anarchy. In one sense *Past and Present* seeks to challenge those amongst Carlyle's contemporaries (such as the Catholic architect and cultural polemicist, A. W. N. Pugin) who sought to portray the state of art and society in the Middle Ages as infinitely tidier and happier than in the Godless present. For Carlyle, the past is neither a lost Golden Age nor a monitory prologue; it is simply history, vivid, resonant but essentially irretrievable. Having rejected any nostalgia for the past, the book consistently sets out to disconcert the present by offering a series of pithy diagnoses of its multiple social ills and shortcomings.

Carlyle's historical method is essentially that of a zealous preacher obsessed with failed vocations in the past, present woes and a pending Armageddon. His complex, often extremely experimental language echoes that of the Old Testament prophets, the Reformation divines and Roman orators. He does not rant (though some readers find him repugnant), but he calls steadily and aggressively for repentance, renewal and a restored sense of mission. His complex masterpiece, *The French Revolution* (1837) had a considerable impact on his times (Charles Dickens, for one, rashly claimed in 1851 to have read it five hundred times!)^{xx} Something of that impact was undoubtedly the consequence of the nineteenth-century's troubled fascination with the events of the Revolution, its political innovation as much as its prolific blood-letting, but Carlyle offered much more than an account of those events: his narrative is at once compellingly dramatic, intricately detailed and decidedly *epic* in its sweep.^{xxi} In an important way *The French Revolution* is the true fulfilment of what Carlyle had earlier aspired to: history as the 'essence of innumerable Biographies' built as it is around a series of portraits of major Revolutionary figures and drawing on fragments of eye-witness accounts, letters, journals, pamphlets, memoirs and auto-

biographies. But what tends to stick in the memory are its great set-pieces, the accounts of the fall of the Bastille, the Royal Family's enforced journey to Paris in 1789, the Flight to Varennes, the storming of the Tuileries in 1792, the execution of Louis XVI or the demise of Robespierre (whom Carlyle had famously dubbed the 'sea-green incorruptible'). Nothing in Carlyle's later achievement as an historian, whether as editor of Cromwell's letters and speeches or as the biographer of Frederick the Great, really rivals the innovative narrative genius of *The French Revolution*.

Carlyle's often pessimistic prognostications about the decline and fall of civilisations are to some degree echoed in John Ruskin's superbly and elegantly digressive *The Stones of Venice* (3 vols. 1851-53). Ruskin was inclined to refer to Carlyle simply as his 'master', remarking to J. A. Froude on one occasion that he felt that this 'master' had, like some classical god, been 'born in the clouds and struck by the lightning'.^{xxii} *The Stones of Venice* is a study not simply of the surviving monuments of painting, sculpture, architecture and design created by Venice at the height of its power, but of its steady decline (Ruskin first saw the city nearly forty years after it had lost its independence and when its decayed buildings were languishing under Austrian rule). Ruskin's extended 'essay', as he modestly describes it, is neither pure history nor pure art history (though the latter discipline barely existed in his time). It is a novel form of social and cultural archaeology assembled by scrupulous and meditative observation. As Ruskin insists in his Preface, when it came to studying the architecture of Venice 'every date in question was determinable only by internal evidence', obliging him to examine not just 'every one of the older palaces, stone by stone, but every fragment throughout the city which afforded any clue to the formation of its styles.'^{xxiii} Its celebrated opening paragraph, however, disconcertingly inter-relates past, present and future and links history to prophecy:

Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre,

Venice and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction.^{xxiv}

This is as much Jonah preaching to Nineveh as a future New Zealander seeking out the evidence of Venetian decay in London rather than broken Roman arches. Ruskin insistently aspires to *read* buildings as the truest indicators of the quality of a civilisation. As an interpreter he variously interweaves history and politics, aesthetics and economics, theology and geology. His stylistic effects can be both disconcerting and dazzling, for as one early reader, Charlotte Brontë, found there is an earnestness in *The Stones of Venice* which was likely to make Utilitarians (and, we presume, some historians) 'fume and fret over his deep, serious, and (*they will think*) fanatical reverence for art.'^{xxv} This 'reverence' may lead Ruskin into inflating certain *idées fixes* into universal truths (he is insistent, for example, that the inception of Venice's moral and imperial decay coincides with its first flirtation with the Renaissance). As the shrewd George Eliot remarked, despite the 'stupendous specimens of arrogant absurdity' in his work Ruskin's 'grand doctrines of truth and sincerity in art, and the nobleness and solemnity of our human life, which he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet, must be stirring up young minds in a promising way.'^{xxvi} The very intensity of his vision was to inspire generations of these young minds to use their eyes, as much as their intellects, in articulating their relationship to the past.

Ruskin's work obliged his vast number of Victorian disciples to respond to a semi-exotic aesthetic and to a faded imperial dream both of which lay beyond their immediate and insular experience. To many responsive readers, however, it was the national past which impinged most readily and vividly on their perception of their present condition and on their future destinies. For J. A. Burrow the thirty years between 1848 and 1878 were marked by 'a remarkable flower-

ing of English narrative history' and by an 'elaboration in the interpretation of what arguably had been the three great crises in the history of the English as a nation.' These three crises were the Norman Conquest, the Reformation and the Revolution of 1688.^{xxvii} In relation to these critical periods Burrow discusses Macaulay's *History*, William Stubbs's *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development* (3 vols. 1873-1878), Edward Augustus Freeman's *The History of the Norman Conquest* (4 vols. 1867-1879) and James Anthony Froude's *The History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (12 vols. 1856-1870). Burrow is well aware that his chosen historians have distinctive historical, philosophical and, to some degree, religious (i.e. liberal Protestant) agendas. All four were also determined to correct popular misconceptions (Freeman, for example, set out to undermine Augustin Thierry's idea of a continuing class conflict between aristocratic Normans and plebeian Saxons). All also sought to re-map and re-colonise territory which had all too often been occupied by ill-informed, romantically-inclined poets or unscholarly writers of literary fiction. For Macaulay, as we have seen, the prime villain remained the enduringly popular Sir Walter Scott and the 'Wizard of the North' had fostered a remarkable literary progeny. As one Victorian critic remarked, Scott's work began 'from the full light of his own days' and had gone back 'century after century ... [and] had, in all, a range of about eight centuries through which he roamed, as in his proper domain...'^{xxviii} Scott had dealt with issues pertaining to the Norman Conquest (in *Ivanhoe* of 1820 and *Count Robert of Paris* of 1832), with Reformation Scotland (in *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* both 1820), Elizabethan England (in *Kenilworth* of 1821) and Puritan England (in *Woodstock* of 1826) and with the prelude to and the consequences of the Glorious Revolution in Scotland and England in a whole succession of novels (*Waverley* of 1814, *Old Mortality* of 1816, *Rob Roy* of 1817, *Pevelevil of the Peak* of 1823).

Scott's Victorian successors and imitators maintained the rivalry with the historians knowing that there was a ready and receptive audience for their work.

History seemed to be the proper province of novelists determined to show off their intellectual credentials. Historical fiction was, as one critic remarked, capable of uniting 'the learning of the historian with the fancy of the poet', but, equally persuasively, it could judiciously edit, discarding 'from human annals their years of tedium' while bringing prominently forward 'their eras of interest'.^{xxix} It was not therefore only the modern poet-dramatist who could aspire to inherit Shakespeare's mantle as the imaginative delineator of national history: so too might the nineteenth-century novelist. The Victorian sense of intimacy with the past was in part the result of a sentiment that readers of historical fiction were able to *participate* imaginatively in the experience of their ancestors.

The work of Burrow's mid-century historians can be readily paralleled in that of their novelist and dramatist contemporaries. The Norman Conquest was variously dealt with in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings* (1848), in Charles Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* (1866), in Tennyson's verse-drama *Harold* (1876), and, somewhat less memorably, in General Sir Charles Napier's historical romance, *William the Conqueror* (published posthumously in 1858 in an edition by the military historian Sir William Napier). William Harrison Ainsworth's sensationalist Gothic dabbings in Reformation history (such as *The Tower of London* of 1841 and *Windsor Castle* of 1843) were to be outclassed in terms of verisimilitude by two works notably influenced by J. A. Froude, Kingsley's swashbucklingly Protestant diatribe *Westward Ho!* (1855) and Tennyson's drama *Queen Mary* (1875). The continental origins of Reformation thought were also explored in Charles Reade's fictional study of Erasmus's immediate forebears, *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861) while the intrigues related to the captivity of Mary, Queen of Scots (and to the Queen's 'unknown' daughter) figure in the prolific Charlotte M. Yonge's *Unknown to History* (1882). Although the Glorious Revolution itself proved less of a draw to English novelists, events anterior to it figure in R. D. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* (1869) and Arthur Conan Doyle's *Micah Clarke*

(1887) (both set at the time of the Monmouth rebellion) and its immediate consequences are explored in Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq. A Colonel in the service of Her Majesty Queen Anne* (1852).^{xxx}

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that these were the only critical moments in national history to have inspired Victorian writers. For many poets history did not even have to be *real* history. Tennyson's epic re-cycling Arthurian legend in his *Idylls of the King* (1842-1891) may have become the most ambitious literary reconstruction of the world of Camelot, but its subject matter was far from unique. Matthew Arnold's 'Tristram and Iseult' appeared in the *Poems* of 1852, William Morris's *The Defence of Guinevere and Other Poems* was published in 1858 and Robert Stephen Hawker's extraordinary blank verse *Quest of the Sangraal* in 1864. Tennyson was to turn to documented history in his second, and, in its time, most popular historical drama *Becket* (1884), the martyred Archbishop proving to be one of Sir Henry Irving's most admired roles. The spiritual certainties, and the rich architectural and visual culture of the later Middle Ages had, since the late eighteenth-century increasingly assumed the character of a lost golden age. To some nineteenth-century commentators, notably William Cobbett and A. W. N. Pugin, the Reformation ruptured more than religious continuities: it marked a watershed which was at once social and aesthetic. As Pugin wrote in the preface to the expanded second edition of his *Contrasts* in 1842 'the real origin of both the revived Pagan and Protestant principles is to be traced to the decayed state of faith throughout Europe in the fifteenth century which led men to dislike, and ultimately forsake, the principles and architecture which originated in the *self-denying Catholic principle, and admire and adopt the luxurious styles of ancient Paganism.*' Paganism and Protestantism, Renaissance and Reformation were all of them 'monsters'.^{xxxi} Pugin brought his point home through a series of devastating satirical plates contrasting sturdy medieval churches with paltry, gimcrack modern ones. One of his most biting successful plates shows a great, but idealised fifteenth-century almshouse (based on St Cross near Winchester) juxtaposed

with a Benthamite panopticon workhouse. Another shows two 'contrasted' pictures of towns. The 'Catholic' town of 1440 is a model of piety, the towers and spires of its parish churches and monasteries piercing the sky; the same blighted town in 1840 has broken spires, the neglected ruins of an abbey and a skyline now dominated by factory chimneys; where there was once an open space there is now a penitentiary, where there was once a stone bridge and a chapel, there is now an iron toll-bridge. The decay of the happy old order is meant to be self-evident. A similar nostalgia for a lost age also informs Benjamin Disraeli's otherwise forward-looking political novels of the 1840s. In *Sybil* of 1845, for example, the ruins of Marney Abbey proclaim 'a place where all the rights of hospitality were practised; where the traveller, from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim, asked the shelter and the succour that were never denied, and at whose gate, called the Portal of the Poor, the peasants on the Abbey lands, if in want, might appeal each morn and night for raiment and for food.' No need, therefore, for grudgingly given poor relief and for Union Workhouses. For some Victorian writers the England of the later Plantagenets, as much as the England of Arthur, was a dreamy land of chivalric gestures, noble piety and knightly bounty; for others, more crucially, pre-Reformation England was a land blessedly free of machines and applied Utilitarianism.^{xxxii} William Morris, who began his artistic career dreaming Medieval dreams, was never to lose his vision of a pre-industrial Earthly Paradise. When this vision was shot through with the Socialist principles he had imbibed from reading Marx, as it is in *News From Nowhere* of 1891, Morris lovingly explores a post-industrial future in which society has been transformed by a return to self-sufficient artistic communities in which swords have been beaten into beautifully crafted ploughshares.

Certain raw national wounds of the more recent past had an evident currency in the social and constitutional debates associated with the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884. The political and religious divisions the English Civil War were, for example, to figure significantly in C.W. Cope's murals in the Peers' Corridor in the newly completed Palace of Westminster (commissioned

1853 and completed 1867). The period of the 'English Revolution' was to prove equally stimulating to writers.^{xxxiii} In the reformist 1830s Robert Browning felt that the subject of his historical tragedy *Strafford* (1837), the struggle between autocracy and representative government, was very much 'in the air'.^{xxxiv} An alternative, and partisan, picture of loyalty to Church and King is explored in Frederick Marryat's *The Children of the New Forest* of 1847, while writers influenced by the Oxford Movement, such as J. H. Shorthouse in his *John Inglesant* (1880), were drawn to a period in which the soul and the culture of the Church of England were tested to the extreme. For the greatest Scottish writer of the last third of the nineteenth century, Robert Louis Stevenson, three great adventure stories, *Kidnapped* (1886), its sequel *Catriona* (1893) and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) reveal a deep fascination with the fissures in Scots culture produced by the extended period of Jacobite unrest that had earlier so preoccupied Sir Walter Scott.

The influence of contemporary historiography on the historical novel was not, of course, confined to fiction that dealt exclusively with 'the matter of Britain'. The long shadow of Edward Gibbon's provocative and often contentious *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* falls over the work of Victorian sceptics and Christian apologists alike. The history of the declining Roman Empire was read both in terms of loss and gain, of ends and beginnings. It is the small body of fleeing Christians who represent the emergent future at the end of Bulwer-Lytton's widely admired *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) while the persecution of the early Church forms the subject of Cardinal Wiseman's *Fabiola: A Tale of the Catacombs* (1854) and of John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman's *Callista: A Sketch of the Third Century* (1856). Wilkie Collins's first published novel, *Antonina, Or the Fall of Rome* (1850), has a Christian heroine beset by pagan Romans and pagan Goths alike. Far less sympathetic pictures of primitive Christianity are offered in Kingsley's assertively Protestant *Hypatia, Or Old Foes with a New Face* (1853: the new faces of the 'old foes' being those of Victorian Catholics and Tractarian divines) and in

Walter Pater's infinitely more ambiguous philosophical romance *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). The national aspirations and the anti-Papal struggles of the Italian *Risorgimento* were to inspire both Bulwer-Lytton's *Rienzi: The Last of the Tribunes* (1835) and George Eliot's intensely scholarly *Romola* (1863). The latter story, set in the politically tangled Florence of Savonarola, has a Positivist historical perspective which allowed Eliot to express a greater frankness about the loss of religious faith and the independence of a central woman character than she felt able to do in her novels set in the nineteenth century.^{xxxv} To the chagrin of some latter-day historians and of twentieth-century Marxian critics the most enduringly popular, and influential, of Victorian historical novels remains Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Dickens's debt to Carlyle is evident throughout the narrative, but the distinctiveness of the novel lies largely in the fact that the few *real* historical personalities who appear in the novel figure only glancingly. What Dickens seeks to represent is not Revolution as a creative act but as a supremely disruptive element in the experience of fictional characters who are caught up in an intensely plotted moral drama. These characters are also haunted, even more weightily than Scrooge is, by the ghosts of the past, the present and the yet-to-come. Public and private histories are interlinked. Time does not necessarily heal: it catches characters out and it is they who are obliged to work out a process of reconciliation for themselves.

In *Waverley* Scott had famously presented his readers with a story set 'sixty years since'. His perspective remained (and remains) useful in the sense that the gap of two generations allows for some detachment from disruptive historical experience. Some Victorian writers (George Eliot in *Adam Bede* of 1859, for example, or Elizabeth Gaskell in *Sylvia's Lovers* of 1863) readily adopted Scott's perspective. Others, particularly those who explored aspects of their own lives in fiction, found themselves obliged to cross back from the railway era in which they were writing to that 'other world' — the age of the stage-coach. In these latter cases, however, a private history (such as David Copperfield's) rarely seems to take on the weight of 'History' proper. When Thackeray spoke

in 1860 of the ‘gulf between now and then’, his readers would still primarily have celebrated him as the author of *Vanity Fair* of 1847-48. *Vanity Fair* is not autobiographical but its setting in the raffish England of George IV does, almost dangerously, impinge on the early Victorian decades. Much of what Thackeray describes was still living memory to readers of the generation of the novelist’s own parents. There is certainly a good deal of detachment in the narrative, an achievement enhanced by the novel’s narrator’s decidedly quizzical irony, but the ‘then’ and the ‘now’ are in fact far less distinguished from one another than they are, say, in *Esmond* or *The Virginians*. Nevertheless, *Vanity Fair* seems emphatically to be set in another world. It seems to deny the continuities which many of its first readers must readily have recognized (an aspect of the novel reinforced by the fact that Thackeray’s illustrations show his characters in early-Victorian rather than Regency dress). The advances of the railway age may have appeared to accelerate the passage of time but Thackeray was also well aware of the fact that he was animating what the writer Alan Bennett has almost disarmingly described as ‘that remotest of periods, the recent past.’^{xxxvi}

Notes

- i W. M Thackeray, *De Juventute* (*Cornhill Magazine*, October 1860). Reprinted in *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray* (Centenary Biographical Edition). London. John Murray, 1911. Vol. XX, p. 72. Sir Walter Manny (*d.* 1372) established the London Charterhouse for Carthusian monks in 1371 and thus, indirectly, proved to be the originator of the school at which Thackeray was educated.
- ii Translated into English by William Hazlitt as the *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans* (2. vols., London 1847).
- iii For a further discussion of this issue see Andrew Sanders, “‘Utter Indifference’? : the Anglo Saxons in the nineteenth-century novel’ in eds. Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg, *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge Studies in Anglo Saxon England 29).Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2000. pp. 157-173.
- iv For general discussions of historical myth-making and the ‘invention of tradition’ see eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* . Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1983 and J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-century Writing*. Oxford. The Clarendon Press. 1994.

- v For what remains the most useful general survey of nineteenth century historians see G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*. London. Longmans, Green & Co. 1913.
- vi Jerome H. Buckley, ‘The Four Faces of Victorian Time’ in ed. C. A. Patrides, *Aspects of Time*. Manchester. Manchester University Press. 1976. p.64.
- vii Sir George Otto Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (1876) (Popular Edition). London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1893. p.2.
- viii Anthony Trollope was to give the title *The New Zealander* to a collection of essays written in 1855-56 (but not published until 1972) and the last plate of Gustave Doré’s *London* (1872) shows the New Zealander at work amid the ruins.
- ix One subsequent historian who took issue with Macaulay’s method is Hugh Trevor-Roper who complained that ‘some of his most entertaining and most damaging passages can be discredited as resting not on historical evidence but on literary exaggeration.’ Introduction to Lord Macaulay, *The History of England* (Penguin English Library). Harmondsworth, Penguin Books. 1979. p.39.
- x Thomas Babington Macaulay, ‘Hallam’ (September 1828), *Critical and Historical Essays* (Eighth Edition). 3 vols. London, Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans. 1864. Vol. 1 pp.113-14.
- xi *Ibid.* p.114.
- xii ‘Sir James Mackintosh’ (July 1835). *Ibid.* Vol. 2 p. 226.
- xiii For a general summary of this ‘Whig Interpretation’ see Trevor-Roper’s Introduction to the *History of England*. See also J. W. Burrow’s fine account of Macaulay’s influence in his *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1981.
- xiv See Gordon N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Age of Wisdom 1847-1863*. London. Oxford University Press. 1958. p. 372.
- xv See Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1983. p. 382. Carlyle was prepared to admit that Macaulay had a ‘truly wonderful historical *memory*’ but he added that he had ‘not ... the least tincture of greatness or originality or any kind of superior merit except neatness of expression.’ J. A. Froude records Carlyle as describing the ‘irremediable, commonplace nature of the man ... a squat, thickset, low-browed, short, grizzled little man of fifty’. He then added: ‘These be thy gods, O Israel!’. James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of his Life in London 1834-1881*. 1834-1881. 2 Vols. London. Longmans, Green & Co. 1891. Vol.1, p.465.
- xvi Thomas Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’ , reprinted in *Scottish and other Miscellanies* (Everyman’s Library) . London. Dent. 1967. pp.228-29.
- xvii ‘On History’, reprinted in *English and other Critical Essays* (Everyman’s Library). London. Dent. 1964. p. 82.
- xviii *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* (Everyman’s Library) London. Dent. 1956. p. 239.
- xix *Ibid.* pp. 440, 442, 463, 464.
- xx Letter to John Forster, Summer 1851. *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (The Pilgrim Edition) Vol. 6 1850-1852 eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson & Nina

- Burgis. Oxford. The Clarendon Press. 1988. p.452.
- xxi For a fine analysis of Carlyle's achievement see John Clubbe, 'Carlyle as Epic Historian' in eds. James R. Kincaid & Albert J. Kuhn, *Victorian Literature and Society: Essays Presented to Richard D. Altick*. Ohio State University Press. 1994. pp119-145.
- xxii E.T. Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin* (2 vols). London. George Allen & Company, Ltd. 1911. Vol. 1. p. 475-6. See also Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years 1819-1859*. New Haven and London. Yale University Press. 1985. pp. 150-51.
- xxiii John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (3 vols). London. Smith, Elder and Co. 1851-53. Vol. 1 'The Foundations'. Preface pp. v-vi.
- xxiv Ibid. p. 1.
- xxv Quoted by Hilton, *op. cit.* p. 149.
- xxvi George Eliot was initially addressing her comments about Ruskin's 'absurdity' to his *Political Economy of Art*. See J. W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*. New Edition. Edinburgh and London. William Blackwood & Sons. ND. p. 239.
- xxvii J. A. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. Paperback edn. 1983. p. 1.
- xxviii David Masson, *British Novelists and their Styles: Being a Critical Sketch of the History of British Prose Fiction*. Cambridge. Macmillan & Co.. 1859. p. 167.
- xxix Archibald Allison, 'The Historical Romance'. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Vol. LVIII (September 1845) p.341.
- xxx For these and other historical novels of the period see, Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880*. London. Macmillan. 1978. See also Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore and London. The Johns Hopkins Press. 1971. For fiction dealing with the Norman Conquest see also Andrew Sanders, 'Some Aspects of the Use of Anglo-Saxon subject matter in Victorian Literature' (unpublished Cambridge M. Litt. Thesis, 1975).
- xxxi A.W. Pugin, *Contrasts: or A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; shewing the present decay of Taste*. London. Charles Dolman. 1841. p. iii.
- xxxii For general studies of Victorian Medievalism see Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-century Literature*. London. Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1971 and Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*. New Haven and London. Yale University Press. 1981.
- xxxiii For these murals see ed. Maurice Bond, *Works of Art in the House of Lords*. London. Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 1980. pp.92- 101.
- xxxiv Mrs Sutherland Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*. London, Smith, Elder & Co.. 1891. p.88.
- xxxv For *Romola* see eds. Caroline Levine and Mark Turner, *From Author to Text: Re-Reading George Eliot's Romola*. Aldershot. Ashgate. 1998.
- xxxvi Alan Bennett, 'Bad John' reprinted in *Writing Home* (Paperback edn.) London. Faber & Faber. 1998. p. 497.