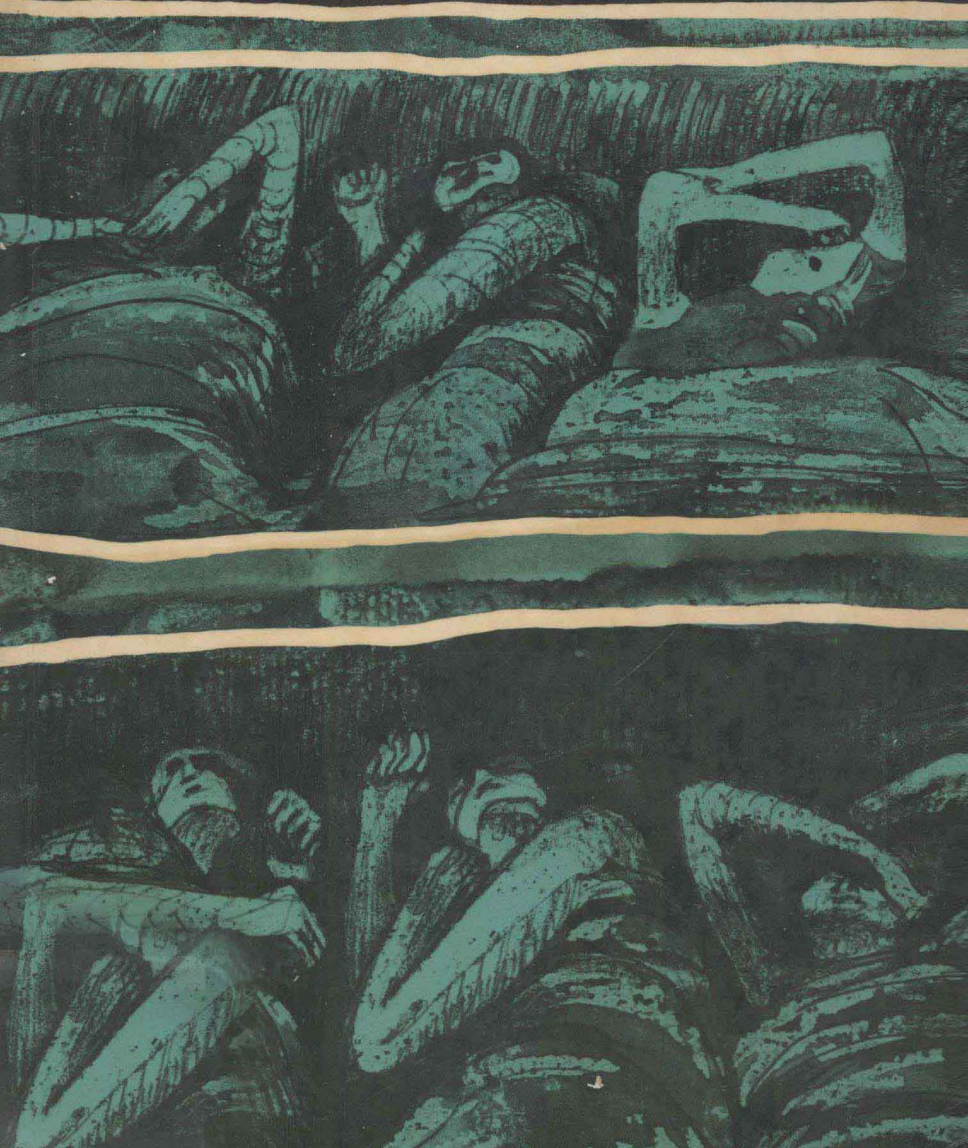


# Twentieth-Century British Poetry

*A Critical Introduction*

John Williams



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John Williams

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# Preface

This book offers a critical introductory study of British poetry from 1900 to the present day. While it is intended as a guide for those encountering the period for the first time, readers already familiar with the general outline of ideas that have fashioned the evolution of poetry during this period, and with the poetry itself, are invited to re-examine a number of critical assumptions that have developed, particularly in the light of the way the Romantic Movement of the previous century may be understood to have influenced twentieth-century poetry. An important part of the discussion therefore is concerned with the theoretical debate, from the consequences of Matthew Arnold's influential critique of Romanticism in the second half of the nineteenth century, through to the often controversial contemporary debate on literary theory, and the function of criticism.

Any book which aims to be both an introduction, and relatively brief, inevitably creates a problem of coverage. Studies in contemporary British poetry have tended recently to embark at 1945. The decision here to look at the whole century is important in so far as it makes possible a detailed assessment of crucial pre-1945 influences on subsequent work; but equally it intensifies the problem of deciding what, and what not, to include. The danger is that such a book becomes little more than an annotated list, or, in order to do justice to individual poets and poems, the choice becomes so selective as to lose sight of any overall picture.

In the present case, though omissions have inevitably and regrettably been necessary, the recognized canon of 'important' or 'influential' work finds its place alongside some less predictable poetry that may at least stimulate discussion and reappraisal. The need for close textual readings rather than purely descriptive accounts has certainly not been abandoned, and the intention here is both to help and encourage those using this book primarily in its introductory capacity, and to engage the well prepared reader with key issues in the texts themselves.

The main rationale for selection from a period in which so much poetry has been written, and in which so much has been written about poetry, stems from the initial Modernist critique of Romanticism in the early twentieth century, and the subsequent reappraisal of the Romantic Movement which coincided with the influence of Surrealism in Britain between

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the wars. The complexity of the Romantic Movement itself presents a problem in this respect, and the first chapter is designed partly to show just how variable a commodity nineteenth-century Romanticism became. The fact remains that throughout this century, important literary movements and trends have defined themselves often with a very specific sense of reference to Romanticism.

The latter part of Chapter 1 considers this situation with reference to W.B. Yeats and the Symbolist Movement, and to Thomas Hardy's response to nineteenth-century Romanticism. The theme is continued in Chapter 2 through a reading of Imagist and Modernist poetry, indicating the significance of T.E. Hulme's and Ezra Pound's unequivocal condemnation of the Romantic Movement for a full understanding of Modernism as it established itself primarily through the poetry and criticism of T.S. Eliot. Equally important here is the influence of the First World War, and its major poets.

In Chapter 3, the Marxist poetry of the Auden group in the 1930s, arguably containing elements of a Romantic reaction to Modernism, is considered alongside the 'neo-Romanticism' of the same period, which was profoundly antagonistic to the Auden group, and which reached its climax with the outbreak of war in 1939.

After the war, the work of poets who became identified with what in the mid 50s had become known as The Movement, in many ways typified the general trend of post-war British poetry. Movement poetry subsequently became increasingly associated (much to his dislike) with the work in particular of Philip Larkin, and represents a critical reaction against a pre-war theory and practice of poetry characterized by Romantic/Surrealist excess. The final chapter considers some of the major responses to Movement poetry, many of which imply the need for a rediscovery of elements of imaginative perception that had first begun to appear in a form accessible to the contemporary reader in the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The recourse which many major post-war British poets have had to the poetry and criticism of that period, notably Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney, indicates the perpetuation of a debate which has informed British poetry for the last 200 years, and, given the inevitable shifts in context and emphasis, seems destined to continue for a long time to come.

### A Note on Texts

Details of poems and secondary sources given in footnotes refer where possible to readily available editions. Footnotes also indicate abbreviated versions to be used subsequently within the text. The abbreviations are also indexed to facilitate finding full details in the relevant footnote. A brief bibliography of the main anthologies used, and of further secondary texts will be found at the end of the book. As an additional aid to reference, there is a separate index of poets referred to, which incorporates also reference to the poems discussed.

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### **Acknowledgements**

The responsibility for whatever errors this book may include is of course wholly mine, but I would like to thank the following for attempting to help me keep those errors to a minimum: firstly the publishers, whose help and advice have been invaluable; numerous friends and colleagues who were prepared to discuss issues and give advice on texts and sources; I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the 'Auden class' of 1986 at Thames Polytechnic for a series of formal and informal discussions which were a source of great help as well as enjoyment; and last but not least, I am indebted to my wife for putting up with me during the protracted birth-pangs occasioned by the writing of this book, while she herself was far more patiently preparing to give birth to our daughter.

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# 1

## The Romantic Heritage

The starting point for most discussions of English literature in the twentieth century is to agree with the historian's verdict that the early 1900s was a period of crisis. The precise nature and seriousness of that crisis – both politically and in the arts – remains a matter for debate. The purpose of the first chapter of this book is to prepare the ground for a consideration of Modernism in British poetry between 1900 and 1930. Fully to understand Modernism, we need to look at both the literary and social contexts of the crisis to which poets of that period were consciously responding. For our contextual understanding to be of any real use it is necessary – however briefly – to refer back to the sense of crisis registered by poets in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to take account of the way they responded then.

It has been argued that the first two decades of the twentieth century, the latter dominated by the impact of the First World War, saw the final demise of an ideal of cultural and social order established as far back as the sixteenth century, an ideal rooted in an agrarian, rural concept of social stability, and more often than not expressed in a cultural language which reserved its highest regard for Classical art forms associated with ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>1</sup> At no time was the Classical model a more dominant feature in English literature than during the eighteenth century, the so-called Augustan period, when imitations and translations of Juvenal, Horace and Virgil abounded, and virtually every poet who aspired to greatness planned epic works in the manner of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), itself modelled on the blank verse of the fifteenth-century Italian poet, Tasso.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the emergence in England of the Romantic Movement, challenging in part at least the hegemony of eighteenth-century Augustan Classicism, and where not aggressively challenging, certainly registering a sense of profound uncertainty. It was impossible to avoid the conclusion that the established literary models seemed inadequate to the poet's needs, a development

<sup>1</sup>V. de S. Pinto, *Crisis In English Poetry*, London: Hutchinson (1967) pp. 99–100. Hereafter Pinto.

inevitably linked to the fact that new and far-reaching debates were surfacing with regard to the political ordering of society. The literary crisis associated in the first instance with the poetry of William Blake, but also identified in the work of so-called 'late Augustans' like Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Gray and George Crabbe, and subsequently with William Wordsworth in the 1790s and early 1800s, is generally closely identified with the political events of the period which came to have their focal point in the French Revolution.

The literary crisis of the early twentieth century expressed itself in many respects as a response to the initial impact of the Romantic Movement on English literature, and to the way Romanticism had subsequently influenced literary evolution. M.H. Abrams has suggested that Romanticism is for the most part little more than 'a convenient fiction for the historian',<sup>2</sup> and it is important to realize at the outset that we are not looking at a coherently classifiable body of literature. Blake certainly expressed considerable hostility towards art founded on Classical principles, and championed the northern European tradition of 'Gothic' form which he understood as encouraging far more the free play of imaginative ideas and individual genius. This was by no means wholly characteristic of the views of other major Romantic poets, however; Wordsworth was a life-long admirer of Alexander Pope (1688-1744), a major figure in the Augustan Classical tradition of the early eighteenth century, while Shelley's commitment to the study of Classical philosophy and literature, notably Plato and Aeschylus, influenced much – if not all – of his work.

Just what the Romantic Movement was, and more importantly, what it had meant for literature (especially in the realm of poetry), provided the subject for a debate that in due course became profoundly influential in shaping the nature of Modernist poetry after 1900. In the mid nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold's critique of the Romantic Movement stressed the intimate relationship between 'English poetry of the first quarter of this century' and 'the immense stir of the French Revolution'. Arnold's central thesis was that involvement with the 'political, practical character' of Revolutionary politics diverted Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth from the intellectual pursuits they required to produce truly great work: 'This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth, even, profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety.'<sup>3</sup> The fault lies not so much with the poets themselves, however, as with the society that nurtured them; a society immersed in ideas engendered by the French Revolution would not have a 'national glow of life and thought . . . as in the Athens of Pericles, or the England of Elizabeth. That was the poet's

<sup>2</sup>M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1953) p. 100. Hereafter *Abrams*.

<sup>3</sup>Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (1865), 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *Selected Prose*, ed. P.J. Keating, Penguin Books (1970). Quotations above p. 136 and pp. 134-5. Hereafter *Arnold*.

weakness' (Arnold p. 135). The creative impulses of Byron and Wordsworth 'had their source in a great movement of feeling, not in a great movement of mind' (Arnold p. 136). 'Feeling' implied a development of individualism; 'a great movement of mind', on the other hand, suggests a collective consciousness on the part of society of which the poet becomes the mouthpiece. This distinction must be clear if we are to understand the twentieth-century Modernist critique of Romanticism put forward by T.S. Eliot.

Arnold was drawing attention to the quality for which Romanticism is best known, an emphasis on emotion and a free play of imagination; what he found distasteful in this was the extent to which it indicated a degree of anti-intellectualism on the part of the Romantics; thus his complaint that 'Wordsworth cared little for books' (Arnold p. 135).

What prompted poets at the turn of the eighteenth century to explore what Wordsworth himself called 'the essential passions of the heart'<sup>4</sup> to the extent they did, was a sense of dissociation from society that was already becoming evident in the work of many late Augustan poets. Both Goldsmith (in *The Deserted Village*, 1770) and Gray (in the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, 1750) portray themselves as poets who are victims of the decay of a rural social order. Goldsmith's lament is two-fold: firstly, for the depopulation of the countryside, and the increasing, morally unhealthy attractions of city life, and secondly for the fact that this leaves him with no 'public' for his poetry. In the past, the work of poets was understood to have been intimately bound up with every aspect of society, a conviction that assumed society – regardless of its recognized inequalities of degree – to be ultimately an organically whole body. Here lay the attraction that the Augustan poets of the Roman Empire had for an eighteenth-century Classical, 'Augustan' poet like Samuel Johnson. Blake was one of the first poets of the period to insist that, given the way English society was changing (like ancient Rome, its acquisitive, materialistic era of Empire building was drawing to a justly fraught close) the Augustan model appeared increasingly decadent and anachronistic. The divisions within society between rich and poor, between those who had a stake in the political nation and the many who did not, were of a harmfully destructive order.

Wordsworth's diagnosis, expressed in his 'Preface' to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, was that Augustan poetic form, admirable in its inception, had degenerated into a poetic language which poets used primarily to address their immediate patrons, themselves and other poets. We can get some idea of the situation if we compare the following lines by a successful eighteenth-century poet, Thomas Warton (1728–90), written in 1750, with the prophetic note struck by Blake in the first of his *Songs of Experience* (c. 1794). In 'Ode, Sent to a Friend', Warton wrote:

<sup>4</sup>'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones, London: Methuen (1965), p. 245.

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Ah, mourn, thou loved retreat! No more  
Shall classic steps thy scenes explore!  
When morn's pale rays but faintly peep  
O'er yonder oak-crowned airy steep,  
Who now shall climb its brows to view  
The length of landscape, ever new,  
Where Summer flings, in careless pride,  
Her varied vesture far and wide?  
Who mark, beneath, each village-charm,  
Or grange, or elm-encircled farm;  
The flinty dovecot's crowded roof,  
Watch'd by the kite that sails aloof;  
The tufted pines, whose umbrage tall  
Darkens the long-deserted hall;  
The veteran beech, that on the plain  
Collects at eve the playful train;  
The cot that smokes with early fire,  
The low-roof'd fane's embosom'd spire?

Blake wrote:

Hear the voice of the bard,  
Who present, past, and future sees –  
Whose ears have heard  
The Holy Word  
That walked among the ancient trees,  
  
Calling the lapsed soul  
And weeping in the evening dew –  
That might control  
The starry pole  
And fallen, fallen light renew.

The most obvious contrast lies in the decorative and obviously dated language of Warton's lines ('morn', 'yonder', 'umbrage', 'fane') where the poet's task appears primarily that of a beautifier, over against the direct and relatively plain language of Blake insisting on the bardic role of the poet, a prophet with authority to pronounce on the major issues of life. One of Warton's chief instruments of beautification is to describe the countryside in recognizably Classical terms; he recasts it to resemble paintings of Italian landscapes then so popular with the English aristocracy and well-to-do middle class. His fashionable lament that 'No more/Shall classic steps thy scenes explore' does not stop him from complying with the tradition. Equally his claim that the landscape is 'ever new' must be set against his intention to describe it in terms instantly recognizable and acceptable to his readership.

It is with these tendencies in particular that we find Wordsworth arguing in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, using by way of illustration Thomas Gray's sonnet, 'In vain to me the smiling mornings shine'. In defiance of the genteel taste and poetic language of the time, Wordsworth suggests that Gray (1716-71) should refer to the sun *as* the sun, and that he gains nothing from dressing it up as 'reddening Phoebus'. Like Blake, Wordsworth recognized that fundamental changes were taking place in society, and consequently his determination to reclaim a central position for the poet led him towards the conviction that poetry was an essentially natural form of expression, rooted in common experience and born of deeply felt emotions. It was the means whereby potentially destructive divisions might be bridged. For Wordsworth it became a matter of bridging, not one of radically reordering society. The poet was the person capable of giving proper expression to such common feelings and sensations. The emphasis on Nature in Wordsworth's poetry arose from his search for the permanent and therefore most trustworthy sources of emotion. The environment of the growing cities did not provide this, the permanent forms of Nature did.

Paradoxically, therefore, while attempting to recapture a public voice for poetry, a voice which expressed a collective consciousness, the Romantic Movement was equally responsible for personalizing poetry in its concern for matters which had as much to do with responses and feelings on the part of individuals, as with awareness operating on a collective, social plain. 'Wordsworth,' writes Abrams, 'may also be accounted the critic whose highly influential writings, by making the feelings of the poet the centre of critical reference, mark a turning-point in English literary theory' (Abrams p. 103).

Identifying what seems an inherent contradiction within Romanticism between its public, often moralizing posture, and its tendency towards intense introversion can often carry with it a degree of censure; alternatively it may be argued that its great strength lay precisely in the way that contradictions and tensions were recognized and revealed. Certainly Wordsworth came to believe that for his generation the lessons of the French Revolution lay in unmasking the inadequacy of purely political, material schemes of social regeneration; such ideals – based in man's confidence in the power of his own reason – were doomed to failure unless they operated in conjunction with the deeply considered spiritual, emotional needs of the individuals who went to make up that society. Yet within his work there remains evidence of the suspicion that there might after all be a solution to the problem by way of direct, decisive, essentially political action, rather than through the 'wise passiveness' he strove to cultivate. The poem in which he uses that phrase, 'Expostulation and Reply', along with its companion-piece in *Lyrical Ballads*, 'The Tables Turned', deals with precisely that theme; and repeatedly his awareness of a personal dilemma where wise passivity and political action were concerned surfaces in his creative work, as here in a later, unfinished autobiographical poem, *Home at Grasmere*:

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I cannot at this moment read a tale  
Of two brave Vessels matched in deadly fight  
And fighting to the death, but I am pleased  
More than a wise Man ought to be; I wish,  
I burn, I struggle, and in soul am there.<sup>5</sup>

The suspicion remained that 'wise passiveness' in a poet might effectively become simply passive withdrawal. By the end of the nineteenth century there were those (including Yeats) prepared to argue that, if the Romantic Movement had been a genuinely creative artistic force at its inception, the tendency to opt for withdrawal had brought about its degeneration into a movement characterized by morbid sentimentality, while the ambition of poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley to create through their poetry the intellectual climate in which a society in moral and political decline might achieve regeneration had long since been lost in a welter of emotionalism. By 1906, when the *Times Literary Supplement* was reviewing Sturge Moore's *Poems*, the following assessment of Romanticism was relatively commonplace: 'In all the arts romantic ideas and emotions seem to have lost their savour, and now they only satisfy sentimentalists.'<sup>6</sup> Decadence, introversion and insubstantiality were among the charges levelled at late Victorian poets like Swinburne, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde.

Arnold had regretted the 'political, practical character' of Romanticism, implying that great art, while not divorced from its social and political context, operated above the level of day-to-day political considerations. For a cultural model he offered his own idealized vision of the Classical world, and of England in the late sixteenth century. By the turn of the nineteenth century, mid-Victorian poetry (Arnold's included) was being criticized for its habit of tedious moralizing, and also – given by then the emergence of figures like Swinburne, Beardsley and Wilde – for its tendency to encourage the less healthy, escapist aspects of Romanticism. In addition to this there was criticism aimed specifically at late nineteenth-century poetry where Romanticism was understood to have spawned a thoroughly unwholesome school of self-indulgent, morally corrupt writers and artists of the kind W.S. Gilbert ridiculed with such relish in his libretto for the comic opera, *Patience* (1881).

In general terms, therefore, it is possible to see how the critical conditions existed for a comprehensive reaction against Romanticism as represented by the entire period from Wordsworth through to the so-called Decadents of Edwardian England. The Modernist movement, initiated by

<sup>5</sup>*Home at Grasmere*, ed. Beth Darlington, Brighton: Harvester (1977) pp. 96–8 11.929–33. MS 'B' 1806.

<sup>6</sup>*TLS* 18 May, 1906. It is worth noting here that the article is quoted in full in *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, two vols., ed. A. Bjork, London: Macmillan (1885) Vol. II pp. 304–6.

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the Imagists before the First World War, and dominated by T.S. Eliot after the war, took up this position. Before the war the chief proponents of Imagism were advocating the virtues of brevity and clarity that they associated with Classicism, and Modernism encouraged the critical reappraisal of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century English literature.

The over-all situation was by no means one of a clear break with Romanticism, however. Criticism of late nineteenth-century Romanticism bore a strong resemblance in many ways to the Romantic reaction against late Augustan poetry, not least in its suspicion of sentimentalism. The sense of poetry losing its voice where matters of immediate social and political import were at stake echoed the anxieties of Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley; and Wordsworth's dilemma where the respective virtues of passivity and action were concerned was not to be obliterated by the Modernist wish to turn from a politically informed sense of history towards the goal of an impersonal, intellectualized concept of the universality of art. The post-Modernist period of the 1930s was dominated to a significant degree by W.H. Auden, who, up to the outbreak of the Second World War, published poetry that urged a return to the centre of the political stage for poets committed to the fight against Fascism. In its way, this can be seen as a restatement of the initial Romantic dilemma; Auden, like Wordsworth, was only too well aware that he was in fact writing for a relatively small company of like-minded intellectuals, and like Wordsworth, he was by no means secure in his personal political commitment.

Of the major poets to emerge at the turn of the century, both W.B. Yeats and Thomas Hardy were far from rejecting out of hand the Romantic heritage of English poetry, though both were prepared to be critical of the emanations of Romanticism that had evolved during the nineteenth century.

In his essay *The Symbolism of Poetry* (1900), Yeats (1865–1939) complained that the prevailing critical climate of the times had become dominated by a journalistic frame of mind capable only of contemplating literature in the light of its immediate impact. He saw this superficial critical view being extended to include all great writers of the past. The belief existed, he wrote, that even creative geniuses of the stature of Shakespeare 'talked of wine and women and politics, but never about their art, or never quite seriously about their art'.<sup>7</sup> Yeats's own determination to present art as having always possessed a potentially profound significance for society, and artists as far more 'serious' people than they were given credit for, did not mean that he wished to distance himself completely from the generation of poets who had emerged since Tennyson had ceased to publish in the late 1880s. He owed much to the lyric poetry of the late Victorians, notably that inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite movement, even as Wordsworth had been indebted to many poets of the late Augustan period who brought increasing degrees

<sup>7</sup> *The Symbolism of Poetry*, in *W.B. Yeats: Essays and Introductions*, London: Macmillan (1961), pp. 153–64. Hereafter *Symbolism*.

of 'sensitivity' to their work. Yeats was also like Wordsworth in that he wished to insist upon the seriousness of the creative process. Our understanding of this may be helped by remembering that where Wordsworth's generation were influenced in this respect by the experience of major political events, Yeats was a committed Irish Nationalist, one who was constantly reviewing the relationship between what he called 'the divine life' and 'the outer life' of the poet; a distinction not without its similarity to Wordsworth's juxtaposition of wise passivity and political commitment (*Symbolism* p. 155).

In the late 1930s, he continued to disparage Victorian poetry, notably that of Tennyson; the Wordsworthian commitment to a social and political role for the poet had degenerated into 'Victorian rhetorical moral fervour' where 'the most famous poetry was often a passage in a poem of some length, perhaps of great length, a poem full of thoughts that might have been expressed in prose.' Tennyson, in common with Swinburne, Arnold and Browning, were at fault in having 'admitted so much psychology, science, moral fervour' into their work.<sup>8</sup>

Just as Wordsworth in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* had claimed that emotions summoned up by 'the beautiful and permanent forms of nature' were to liberate poetry from its attachment to the shallow rhetoric of late eighteenth-century picturesque writing, so Yeats came to believe that the rediscovery of Symbolism for poetry would liberate the art from a growing tendency to 'lose itself in externalities of all kinds, in opinion, in declamation, in picturesque writing' (*Symbolism* p. 155). Against the background of the Irish Nationalist movement Yeats fostered a belief in the power of folk-memory, a collective consciousness capable of uniting the otherwise disparate sections of modern society with its complex class structures, and an ever growing urban population which promoted a very different cultural ambiance from that associated with rural community life. As it was impossible to find contemporary themes of a unifying nature in modern society, the poet's task was to invoke through the use of symbols an often submerged awareness of a national identity. Unity is a recurring point of reference for Yeats when he attempts to discuss 'the continuous indefinable symbolism which is the substance of all style':

... when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. (*Symbolism*, p. 157)

The new poetry, wielding its symbolic power, Yeats believed, would unite 'big house and hovel, college and public house, civil servant - his Gaelic certificate in his pocket - and international bridge-playing women', reminding them all that 'they belong to one nation.'<sup>9</sup> Cairns Craig has

<sup>8</sup>*Modern Poetry: A Broadcast*, in Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, op. cit., pp. 491-508.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry*, London: Croom Helm (1982), p. 276. Hereafter *Craig*.



argued that Yeats's belief in the power of memory to resolve a 'multi-tudousness . . . into unity' is closely linked to the associationist theories of memory that were so influential on poets of the early Romantic period, painfully aware as they were of the divisive forces at work in their own society (*Craig* p. 276). 'This model of the "one in many" and "many in one"', David Simpson has pointed out, 'is a dominant paradigm in Romantic thought.'<sup>10</sup>

Yeats, profoundly influenced in this early part of his career by the poetry and philosophy of Blake, was attempting to reassert, as his Romantic forbears had done, the essential unity of all things; and just as one major stylistic innovation wrought by the Romantic Movement was the rediscovery of the ballad and short lyric form for serious poetic discourse, so Yeats, in search of a form which would invoke symbolic echoes of a unifying folk-memory, turned from the tedious length of moralizing Victorian verse to ballads of often remarkable lyrical intensity:

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?  
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,  
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,  
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:  
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place  
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,  
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,  
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:  
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,  
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;  
He made the world to be a grassy road  
Before her wandering feet.  
(*'The Rose of the World'*, from *The Rose*, 1893)

The world of history, the 'labouring world', is transient; it is the 'dream'. Beauty, the ultimate truth symbolized by 'the rose of the world', is depicted in a pastoral landscape, passing through the world on 'a grassy road', neither to be created nor destroyed by it.

Blake, reanimating 'Gothic' form to contend against the tyranny of Classical art, was, like Yeats, looking to what he understood as a national heritage of poetry. *Lyrical Ballads*, the volume of poetry by Wordsworth and Coleridge first published in 1798, sought to re-establish a style which

<sup>10</sup>David Simpson, *Wordsworth and the Figurings of the Real*, London: Macmillan (1982), p. 122.