

ASSOCIATIONISM  
AND THE  
LITERARY IMAGINATION

*From the Phantasmal Chaos*

CAIRNS CRAIG



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LITERARY IMAGINATION

FROM THE PHANTASMAL CHAOS

Cairns Craig

Edinburgh University Press

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Edinburgh University Press Ltd  
22 George Square, Edinburgh

Typeset by the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies,  
University of Aberdeen  
and printed and bound by  
Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 0912 3 (Hardback)

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## Acknowledgments

This book revisits some of the issues I raised in my *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* published in 1982. After that time, my energies, both practical and intellectual, were taken up by the demands of Scottish culture in the dark days after the failure of the devolution referendum on a Scottish parliament in 1979, and almost all of my work since then – from my *History of Scottish Literature* in 1987 to *The Modern Scottish Novel* in 1999 – was directly concerned with Scottish literature and culture. As a result, I did not expect to engage again with issues relating to associationist philosophy and psychology. My return to the aesthetic consequences of British empirical philosophy was inspired first by a conference in honour of George Davie, on the topic of ‘Empiricism and its Legacy’, organised by Alexander Bird in Edinburgh in 1996, and then by an invitation from Jeffrey Andrew Barash to contribute to a special issue of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* which he was editing on the topic of *Mémoire, histoire* in 1998. In working on these I discovered that not only were the implications of associationism more far-reaching than I had previously argued, but that the major criticism of my earlier book – that it was impossible to accept the influence of an eighteenth-century theory of taste on modernist poetry – deserved less credence than I had been prepared to allow it. I am extremely grateful, therefore, to Professors Bird and Barash for their stimulus to my continued exploration of the topic, and to my rediscovery of just how rooted these arguments were in a Scottish context.

Almost all of the research for the book was done in Edinburgh during my time as Head of the English Literature Department, and I hope that it adequately reflects the intellectual and professional support of my former colleagues – especially Randall Stevenson, Ian Campbell, Colin Nicholson, Penny Fielding, Susan Manning, Ken Millard and Aileen Christianson – who, though they may not have realised it, contributed substantially to my thinking

on these matters. And to those colleagues and students in Edinburgh who were members of the ‘Friday Reading Group’ at the Centre for the History of Ideas in Scotland between 1997 and 2005, I am particularly indebted, since many of the issues that this book raises were drawn to my attention in our discussions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottish philosophy and theology. Especially, I would like to thank David Fergusson, Donald Rutherford, Ronald Turnbull, John Gordon, Alex Thomson, Laurence Nicol and Gavin Miller for helping sustain the kind of intellectual community that is all too often impossible in contemporary university environments.

The writing of *Associationism and the Literary Imagination* was supported by sabbatical leave from the University of Edinburgh and by an award from the (then) Arts and Humanities Research Board, to both of whom I am extremely grateful. I am also deeply indebted (as ever) to Jackie Jones and her colleagues at Edinburgh University Press for their patience, as my return to the University of Aberdeen in 2005 disrupted completion of the manuscript. Equally, without the unstinting support of the staff of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Library and Aberdeen University Library the book – at least in this form – would have been impossible. And my special thanks to Jon Cameron of the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen, both for helping create the space in a hectic schedule for getting the book finished and for assistance in completing its production.

The theme of the book is association, and its writing will, for me, always be associated with the person whose life has been entwined with its production – Conan Craig, now aged four. And with the person to whom it is dedicated, my wife Linda.

# Abbreviations

- AC: Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- AET: Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, 2 Vols (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1811; 1790).
- Au: John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 Vols, Vol. I, *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Sillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).
- BL: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 7:1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983; 1817).
- CI: I.A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1934).
- DC: Charles Dickens, *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, ed. Trevor Blount (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).
- DR: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004; 1968).
- E: David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985).
- EHU: David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962; 1777).
- ETEC: Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 Vols (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1902; 1876).
- GET: Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971; 1759).
- HM: James Ward, *Heredity and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

- HPW: Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. R. S. Downie (London: J. M. Dent, 1994).
- ML: M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1958; 1953).
- O: David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (London: S. Richardson, 1749).
- OD: George Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
- PC: I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929).
- PLC: I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge 1967; 1924).
- PP: James Ward, *Psychological Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918).
- PR: I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).
- RN: Thomas Hardy, *Return of the Native* (London: Macmillan, 1974; 1878).
- RX: John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (2nd edition, London: Constable, 1951; 1927).
- T: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888).
- SR: Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Roger L. Tarr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; 1833).
- TL: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964; 1927).
- TS: Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, ed. Graham Petrie (London: Penguin, 1967; 1760).
- TW: Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- U: James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (London: Penguin, 1986).
- VI: W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1970; 1954).
- WIG: Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl*, ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; 1806).
- WW: William Wordsworth, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

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# Introduction:

## A Chain of Associations

In his *Autobiography* John Stuart Mill recounts how, in the autumn of 1826, at the age of twenty, he suffered the onset of a depression – ‘a dull state of nerves . . . unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement’<sup>1</sup> – which was to continue during the following two years. Thirty years later Mill thought that ‘in all probability my case was by no means so peculiar as I fancied it’ but the ‘idiosyncracies of my education had given to the general phenomenon a special character, which made it seem the natural effect of causes that it was hardly possible for time to remove’ (*Au*, 145). Those ‘idiosyncracies’ derived from the theories of his father, James Mill, Scottish psychologist and proponent of the Utilitarian social philosophy of Jeremy Bentham: the elder Mill undertook the education of his son himself, determined to prove that a child could acquire ‘an amount of knowledge in what are considered the higher branches of education, which is seldom acquired (if acquired at all) until the age of manhood’ (*Au*, 33). The younger Mill’s prodigious knowledge of classics and of political economy when only in his teens was apparent testimony to the benefits of his father’s educational practices, giving him what he himself described as the ‘advantage of a quarter of a century over my contemporaries’ – despite the fact that he rated himself in ‘natural gifts’ as ‘rather below than above par’ (*Au*, 33). His precocious emergence as a radical commentator in the *Westminster Review* in the early 1820s suggested someone whose career would be devoted to advancing the political implications of the principles of which

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<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography and Literary Essays, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 Vols, Vol. I, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Sillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 137; hereafter cited in the text as *Au*.

he was himself such an outstanding example. Indeed, when he read Bentham's works in 1821, the younger Mill was convinced that he had discovered his 'object in life; to be a reformer of the world' (*AM*, 37), an object which, he believed, would assure his own happiness by identifying it with 'something durable and distant, in which some progress might be always making, while it could never be exhausted by complete attainment' (*AM*, 137). And yet, in that 'dry heavy dejection of the melancholy winter of 1826–7' (*AM*, 143), it appeared that 'the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down'. The 'happiness' that he had expected to find in his devotion to social reform disappeared: 'The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for' (*AM*, 139).

Ironically, the years of John Stuart Mill's depression were the years when his father was writing the book that codified the psychological principles on which the younger Mill's education had been based – *The Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, eventually published in 1829. For James Mill, in his son's words, all experience can be reduced to 'sensations, ideas of sensation and association' and these between them 'generate and account for the principal complications of our mental nature'.<sup>2</sup> In its analytical reductionism, tracing all the phenomena of mind back to 'sensation' and the way these are associated together as ideas, Mill's psychology stands squarely in the tradition of British empiricism, and the younger Mill's crisis has been read as symptomatic of the flaws in empiricist accounts of the mind. Indeed, it was to the very process of 'analysis' as invoked in James Mill's title that the younger Mill attributed his illness, since analysis 'has a tendency to wear away the feelings' (*AM*, 141), in such a way that though it is 'favourable to prudence and clearheadedness', it is 'a perpetual worm at the root of both the passions and of the virtues' (*AM*, 142).

Mill's crisis has come to be read as more than merely personal. It has been taken to be symbolic of a general crisis in nineteenth-century culture: J. S. Mill was, as F. R. Leavis put it, 'a great representative figure in Victorian intellectual history',<sup>3</sup> and what he represents are the destructive consequences of utilitarianism's conception of the human mind and of the aims and purposes of

<sup>2</sup> James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind, A new edition with notes illustrative and critical by Alexander Bain, Andrew Findlater, and George Grote*, edited with additional notes by John Stuart Mill, 2 Vols (London: Longman, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869; 1829), Vol. 1, x.

<sup>3</sup> F. R. Leavis (ed.), *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), 12.

education. At the very time that Mill was writing his *Autobiography* in the 1850s, utilitarian education was to be famously parodied by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*: ‘Herein lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder. By means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, settle everything somehow, and never wonder’.<sup>4</sup> Dickens’s Gradgrind, who gives voice to this philosophy of ‘reason’, was compared directly with James Mill by Leavis, who regarded John Stuart Mill’s *Autobiography* as the account of a heroic survivor of utilitarianism’s refusal to acknowledge the emotions: ‘he worked indefatigably to correct and complete Utilitarianism by incorporating into it the measure of truth attained by the other side’.<sup>5</sup> In Mill’s struggle towards recovery, in his growing recognition ‘that the passive susceptibilities needed to be cultivated as well as the active capacities’, and that, as a consequence, ‘the cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed’ (*Aut*, 147), Leavis saw a profound support to his own arguments about the importance of a literary education. For it was literature which was crucial to Mill’s recovery: to convey the nature of his depression Mill quotes two lines from Coleridge – ‘Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,/And hope without an object cannot live’ – and he records how this ‘state of my thoughts and feelings made the fact of my reading Wordsworth for the first time (in the autumn of 1828) an important event in my life’ (*Aut*, 149). Wordsworth’s poems provided ‘a medicine for my state of mind’ because ‘they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was then in quest of’ (*Aut*, 151). Push-pin may have been as good as poetry to Bentham, as long as it generated the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but to John Stuart Mill, poetry was productive of a more specific and personal happiness: ‘I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me’ (*Aut*, 153).

The importance of Coleridge in defining for Mill the nature of his illness, and of Wordsworth in helping him recover from it, has been taken as proof of the superiority of the psychology and the aesthetics of the first generation of English romantics over those of Bentham and James Mill. In particular, it has

<sup>4</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; 1854), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Leavis, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, 11–12.

been taken as proof that the ‘associationism’ on which James Mill’s conception of the mind was based could not provide a sufficient foundation for the kind of cultural wholeness towards which the younger Mill was struggling. In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, for instance, Joseph Bristow argues that the elder Mill’s insistence that ‘all mental and moral feelings and qualities, whether of a good or a bad kind, were the results of association’<sup>6</sup> is replaced in the son’s criticism by a belief that ‘the object of poetry is confessedly to act upon the emotions’<sup>7</sup> – as though the latter were entirely incompatible with the former. As a consequence, James Mill’s psychological associationism is generally treated as already outmoded by the time of the publication of the *Analysis* in 1829 – it is, as it were, the last leftover of what is a fundamentally eighteenth-century conception of the mind, one transcended by the developments of the romantic movement. Even so well-founded a book as Alan Richardson’s *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* starts from the assumption that associationism can be no more than a residual element in the development of the new neural science – inaugurated ‘by F.J. Gall in Austria, Pierre-Jean-George Cabanis in France, and Erasmus Darwin and Charles Bell in England’ – which inspired romantic artists by emphasising that ‘that the mind is an active processor, rather than passive register, of experience’.<sup>8</sup> By the 1820s, William Lawrence’s famous lectures on physiology, reveal, for Richardson, ‘how dated the mechanistic, sensationalist psychology of eighteenth-century associationism has become within the London medical community’.<sup>9</sup> Yet, far from discarding his father’s psychology, John Stuart Mill reissued the *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* in 1869, with additional notes by himself and Alexander Bain, one of the key contributors to the development of experimental psychology in mid-Victorian Britain. In his ‘Introduction’ to this edition, Mill defended the integrity of his father’s scientific methodology:

Not only is the order in which the more complex mental phenomena follow or accompany one another, reducible, by an analysis similar in kind to

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Bristow (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ‘Reforming Victorian Poetry: poetics after 1832’, 1–24, 12.

<sup>7</sup> John Stuart Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties’, *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, 344.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

the Newtonian, to a comparatively small number of laws of succession among simpler facts, connected as cause and effect; but the phenomena themselves can mostly be shown, by an analysis resembling those of chemistry, to be made up of simpler phenomena.<sup>10</sup>

And he went on to suggest that from his father's work stemmed the most important developments in contemporary psychology, 'especially the work of two distinguished thinkers in the present generation, Professor Bain and Mr Herbert Spencer; in the writings of both of whom, the Association Psychology has reached a still higher development'.<sup>11</sup> Rather than recovering from the debilitating effects of associationism through the influence of poetry, Mill explained both his own recovery, and poetry itself, by the workings of association as described by his father. Mill's admiration for Coleridge never tempted him to accept Coleridge's *a priori* conception of the mind, and in the essay in which he declared Coleridge to be one of the seminal figures of nineteenth-century thought Mill also declared that 'the truth on this much-debated question lies with the school of Locke and Bentham', since there is 'no ground for believing that anything can be the object of our knowledge except experience'.<sup>12</sup> In an appropriately unassertive footnote he also added (as though the author was someone to whom he had no relation) that 'the solution of the problems of the operation of the mind was best to be found in the *Analysis of the Human Mind* by the late Mr. Mill'.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, John Stuart Mill's *Logic*, which was published in 1843 and which was to become a foundational text for British philosophy and psychology for a generation, vigorously reasserts, as Christopher Turk has noted, 'the classic epistemology of associationsim, and even the organization of his argument follows his father's *Analysis*'.<sup>14</sup>

The construction of intellectual history which has read in John Stuart Mill's crisis of 1826 the overthrow of associationist psychology, as represented by his father's philosophy of the mind, have halted at only the introductory stages of Mill's autobiography: writing of his 'duty to philosophy and the memory of my father' which led to the reissue of the *Analysis*, Mill comments:

<sup>10</sup> Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, Vol. 1, viii.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xviii–xix.

<sup>12</sup> 'Coleridge', *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. X, *Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 128.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Turk, *Coleridge and Mill: A Study of Influence* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), 74.

Having been originally published at a time when the current of metaphysical speculation ran in a quite opposite direction to the psychology of Experience and Association, the *Analysis* had not obtained the amount of immediate success which it deserved, though it had made a deep impression on many individual minds, and had largely contributed, through those minds, to create that more favourable atmosphere for the Association Psychology of which we now have the benefit. (*Au*, 287–8)

Whatever modifications Mill made to Utilitarianism, he remained committed to an associationist psychology, and committed to it as the one which provided the most scientific – and therefore also the most *modern* – account of the mind. Far from having been made redundant by developments in the first third of the nineteenth century, associationism was so much the *dominant* psychological theory of the last third of that century that it is against ‘associationism’ that the new psychologies of the early twentieth century – whether Henri Bergson’s, William James’s or even Sigmund Freud’s – strove to distinguish themselves. To follow the development of nineteenth-century literature, to understand the emergence of modernism and modern literary criticism in the twentieth century, we have to restore to its proper place the dominant intellectual context of both early and late nineteenth-century British culture – an empiricist philosophy and an associationist psychology. And we have to recognise that these were neither eighteenth-century survivals nor, as Rick Rylance has implied, the ‘tired, reluctant, or makeshift’ remains coming at the ‘end of this tradition’,<sup>15</sup> but one of the most vigorous, influential and productive elements in British thought in the second half of the nineteenth century, one whose success in extending the scientific understanding of the mind exerted a profound influence across the whole range of humanistic disciplines.

When John Stuart Mill came, thirty years later, to probe the nature of his depression of 1826, what he discovered was that it was *not* his father’s associative version of the mind that was the problem, but that his analytic emphasis had put severe constraints precisely on the encouragement and development of his *associations*: ‘Analytic habits may thus even strengthen the associations between causes and effects, means and ends, but tend altogether to

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<sup>15</sup> Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187. Rylance actually suggests that ‘it would be wrong to suggest’ such things of Bain’s psychology, but leaves the impression that only Bain’s personal enthusiasm – rather than the intellectual relevance of associationism – prevents their being true.

weaken those which are, to speak familiarly, a *mere* matter of feeling' (*AM*, 143). Such 'mere feelings' could not be enhanced by adopting a transcendentalist philosophy but could be developed only by encouraging certain elements in Mill's own associations in order to produce 'a due balance among the faculties' (*AM*, 147). Thus what is redemptive in Wordsworth's poetry for Mill is not that he learns *new* emotions from it but that it helps him recollect his pre-existing 'love of rural objects and natural scenery, to which I had been indebted . . . for much of the pleasure of my life' (*AM*, 151); rather than the poetry introducing him to nature, it is 'the power of rural beauty' that provided 'a foundation for taking pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry' (*AM*, 151). What poems and nature together prove, for Mill, is not the negation, or even the limitation of his previous intellectual life, but its underlying validity: 'the delight which these poems gave me, proved that with culture of this sort, there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis' (*AM*, 153). In the resolution of his crisis, poetry was not a replacement for Mill's previous beliefs but a justification of them: 'Whom, then, shall we call poets?' he asks in 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties', written in 1833, five years after his recovery from depression. The answer reveals how the associationist psychology of the father remains the foundation of the son's thinking: 'Those who are so constituted, that emotions are the links of association by which their ideas, both sensuous and spiritual, are connected together' (*AM*, 356). 'What constitutes the poet', Mill states later in the same essay, 'is not the imagery nor the thoughts, nor even the feelings, but the law according to which they are called up' (*AM*, 361–2) – the law of association by which 'the succession of his ideas is subordinate to the course of his emotions' (*AM*, 362).

Far from escaping his depression by overthrowing his father's associationist psychology, Mill interpreted his depression *by means* of that associationist psychology. When he insists that there may have been 'greater poets than Wordsworth' in his own age, 'but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what his did', what he acknowledges is that the purpose of the poetry was to recall for him his own earlier memories, to re-activate and strengthen his healthy associations with the world of nature – his 'love of rural objects', his 'ideal of natural beauty' in mountains, learned from his 'early Pyrenean excursion', his 'interest in . . . the common feelings and common destiny of human beings' (*AM*, 152–3). In responding to Wordsworth in this way, Mill is enacting precisely what associationist theories of art insisted on, that our aesthetic experiences are dependent not on the nature of the work of art itself, but on its ability to stimulate our pow-

ers of recollection – poetry ‘is interesting only to those to whom it recalls what they have felt’ (*AM*, 345). What stimulates this associative recall in the reader, however, will have been produced by a mind which is poetic because in it ‘thoughts and images will be linked together’ not by reason or by logic but ‘according to the similarity of feelings which cling to them. A thought will introduce a thought by first introducing a feeling which is allied with it’ (*AM*, 357). The reader’s mind strives to emulate the poet’s mind, which exemplifies, for Mill, ‘a well-known law of association, that the stronger a feeling is, the more quickly and strongly it associates itself with any other object or feeling’ (*AM*, 357). Association is the fundamental law both of the mind and of poetry.

## II

In his ‘Introduction’ to the *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, John Stuart Mill traced the intellectual lineage of his father’s associationism to ‘Hobbes and Locke, who are the real founders of that view of the Mind which regards the greater part of its intellectual structure as having been built up by Experience’, and whose names are ‘identified with the great fundamental law of Association of Ideas’.<sup>16</sup> James Mill’s specific debt, however, was to David Hartley, who ‘was the man of genius who first clearly discerned that this is the key to the explanation of the more complex mental phenomena’,<sup>17</sup> though Hartley’s theories were restricted in their influence by the fact that their ‘publication so nearly coincided with the commencement of the reaction against the Experience psychology, provoked by the hardy scepticism of Hume’.<sup>18</sup> Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* had been published in 1739 (falling, in his own words, ‘dead-born from the press’),<sup>19</sup> a decade before Hartley’s *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* in 1749, and though Hartley does not acknowledge Hume’s influence both were attempts to apply to the human mind – and, in Hartley’s case, to the human brain – the methods that had proved so strikingly successful in Newtonian physics. Hume’s *Treatise* is subtitled ‘An attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning

<sup>16</sup> Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, Vol. I, x.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, x–xi.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>19</sup> David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), xxiv; hereafter cited in the text as *E*.

into Moral Subjects<sup>20</sup> and Hartley acknowledges that his theory ‘is taken from the hints concerning the performance of sensation and motion, which Sir Isaac Newton has given at the End of his *Principia*, and in the *Questions* annexed to his *Optics*’.<sup>21</sup> Both attribute the fundamental organisation of the mind to the ‘association of ideas’, since, as Hume puts it, ‘all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what form it pleases, were it not guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself’ (T, 10). The three forms of those ‘universal principles’ by which the mind moves from one idea to another are ‘resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect’, and these provide ‘a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to shew itself in as many and as various forms’ (T, 12–13). The experimental methods and empirical aims of Newtonian physics can thus be transferred to the mental world, with the ‘hope, therefore, that, by pursuing and perfecting the doctrine of associations, we may some time or other be enabled to analyse all that vast variety of complex ideas, which pass under the name of ideas of reflection, and intellectual ideas, into their simple compounding parts, *i.e.* into the simple ideas of sensation, of which they consist’ (O, 75–6). ‘Association’ governs our emotions – our ‘passions’ – as effectually as it does our ideas; it provides the building blocks of mind and society: understanding its operations will explain the workings of both and provide the resources to shape and organise them better.

If a mid-eighteenth-century public took little notice of Hume’s and Hartley’s theories, the language of ‘association’ was to become, by the end of the century, a common component of philosophical and, indeed, political discourse, and to become central to the tradition that is now generally described as British Empiricism. In the work of the founder of that tradition, John Locke, ‘association’ had played only a minor role. Association was introduced by Locke in the fourth edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1700)<sup>22</sup> as a means of explaining ‘something unreasonable in most men’, something which substituted for the proper working of reason

<sup>20</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888); hereafter cited in the text as T.

<sup>21</sup> David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*, 2 Vols (London: James Leake and Wm. Frederick, 1749), 5; hereafter cited in the text as O.

<sup>22</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book II, Ch. xxxiii, 394.