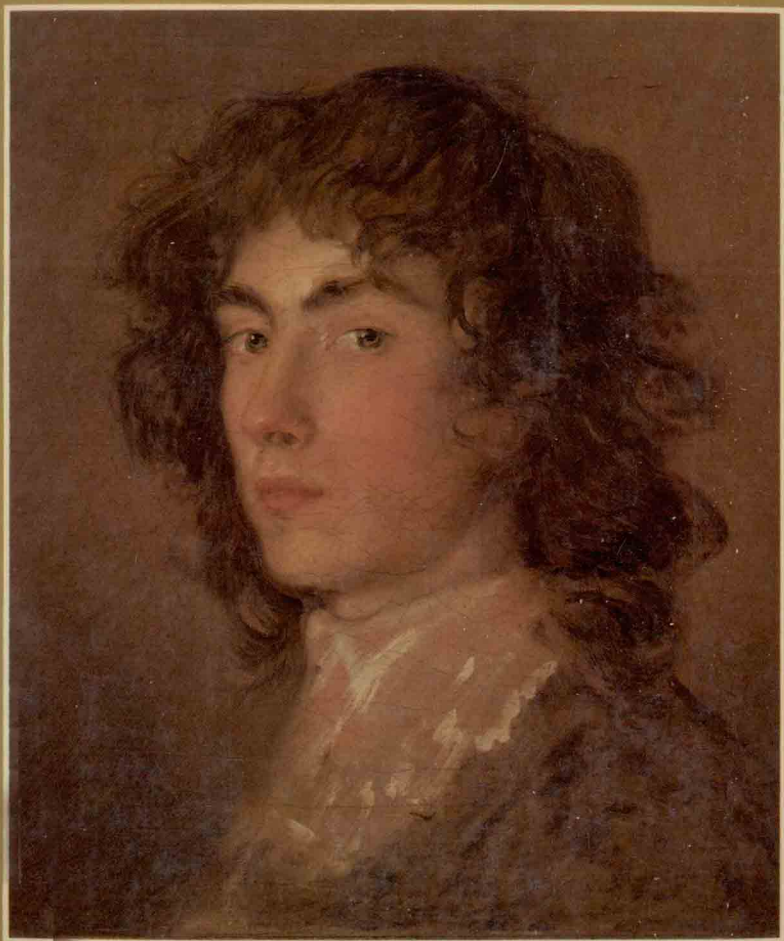


ROBERT BAGE HERMSPRONG



THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



ROBERT BAGE

Hermesprong

or

Man As He Is Not



Edited with an introduction by

PETER FAULKNER

Oxford New York

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1985

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

London New York Toronto

Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi

Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo

Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town

Melbourne Auckland

and associated companies in

Beirut Berlin Ibadan Mexico City Nicosia

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

*Introduction, Select Bibliography, Chronology, and
Notes © Peter Faulkner 1985*

First published 1796

*First issued as a World's Classics paperback 1985
with editorial apparatus*

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without
the prior permission of Oxford University Press*

*This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way
of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover
other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser*

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Bage, Robert

Hermesprong. — (The World's classics)

I. Title II. Faulkner, Peter

823'.6[F] PR4049.B5

ISBN 0-19-281688-8

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bage, Robert, 1728-1801.

Hermesprong. (The World's classics)

Bibliography: p.

I. Faulkner, Peter. II. Title.

PR4049.B5H4 1985 823'.6 84-20712

ISBN 0-19-281688-8 (pbk.)

*Printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Limited
Aylesbury, Bucks*

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT BAGE'S *Hermesprong* is one of the liveliest and most entertaining political novels in English, although its publishing history has restricted knowledge of it to a small readership. First published in 1796, it had several early editions;¹ but after the Chiswick Press edition of 1828, it was not to reappear until 1951, and then only in a small edition. The Folio Society edition of 1960 was also not large. It is much to be hoped that the present edition will make possible its acceptance as one of the most interesting—and by far the most amusing—of the contributions to the great political debate in England that followed the French Revolution of 1789.

It was as a political work that *Hermesprong* was certainly regarded at the time. The reviewer who praised it most highly, William Taylor in the *Monthly Review*, related it to other works expressing the 'new philosophy', such as Voltaire's *L'Ingénu* and Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* of 1792.² When the tide of opinion had turned against radical ideas in the early nineteenth century, the comments reveal the change. Writing in 1810, Mrs Barbauld informed her readers in a preface to the novel: '*Hermesprong* is democratical in its tendency. It was published at a time when sentiments of that nature were prevalent with a large class of people, and was much read.'³ Sir Walter Scott, who included three of Bage's novels in his *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* in 1824, felt it necessary to point out Bage's 'speculative errors' as well as his culpable laxity in treating female sexual irregularities (a point which will be discussed later). But he argued that the quality of the characterization and style greatly exceeded the danger from such errors—though considering it necessary to remind the reader that 'a good jest is no argument'.⁴ When the

¹ It was pirated in Dublin in 1796; the Minerva Press published a revised edition in 1799, and a third in 1809; an unauthorized edition was published in Philadelphia in 1803; Mrs Barbauld included it in *The British Novelists*, 1810, reprinted 1820; Chiswick Press 1828. This edition is photographed from the 1951 Turnstile Press edition.

² *The Monthly Review*, XXI (September 1796), 21–4.

³ Anne Barbauld, 'Preface, biographical and critical' to *Man as He Is Not, or Hermesprong* in *The British Novelists*, XLVIII (F. & J. Rivington, London, 1810), p. 2.

⁴ Scott, 'Prefatory Memoir to Bage' in *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library*, vol. IX, *Novels of Swift, Bage and Cumberland* (Hurst, Robinson and Co., London, 1824), pp. xxxiii–iv.

preface came out as part of *The Lives of the Novelists* in the following year, Scott was criticized by the *Quarterly Review* for reprinting 'a very inferior novelist' of dangerous subversive views: '[Bage] systematically made his novels the vehicle of all the anti-social, anti-moral and anti-religious theories that were then but too much in vogue among the half-educated classes in this country.'⁵ This emphasizes the extent to which Bage's novels belonged to a particular social and political situation that can be explored through an account of his life; it also makes particularly impressive the irony and comic detachment with which Bage treated political issues in the novel itself.

Robert Bage was born in 1728 in the hamlet of Darley on the outskirts of Derby. He learnt his father's trade, that of paper-maker, married Elizabeth Woolley of Mickleover at the age of twenty-three, and was able to buy a small mill in the Staffordshire village of Elford, on the River Tame between Lichfield and Tamworth, probably in 1753. Here he lived quietly and industriously for some fifty years. William Godwin described the Bages's house as being 'floored, every room below stairs, with brick, and like that of a common farmer in all respects. There was, however, the river at the bottom of the garden, skirted with a quickset hedge, and a broad green walk.'⁶ Most of our information about Bage comes through William Hutton, a Birmingham bookseller and writer, who was a business associate and, indeed, after 1761, Bage's sole customer, taking and selling all the paper Bage produced at Elford. Hutton later recorded that he paid Bage an annual average of £500 and in forty-five years 'he never gave me one cause of complaint'.⁷ Hutton in fact seems to have done very well from their arrangement, becoming a leading citizen of the rapidly expanding Birmingham of the time, whose history he enthusiastically wrote. Bage's other local friends included Erasmus Darwin, who settled at Lichfield in 1756 and was prominent as doctor, scientist, poet, and man of radical ideas.⁸

Bage's social position was thus that of a working paper-miller in the Midlands at a time when industrial development was largely seen as progressive and desirable. Josiah Wedgwood's pottery at Etruria was becoming very well known; Matthew Boulton was joined by James Watt at his Soho Manufactory in 1774, and the business expanded rapidly. On an intellectual plane, the Lunar Society⁹ met locally from 1766 onwards for the discussion of scientific topics, and over the years its

⁵ *Quarterly Review*, XXXIV (September 1826), 367.

⁶ C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin. His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London, 1876), I, pp. 262-3.

⁷ 'Memoir of Robert Bage' in *Monthly Magazine*, XIII (1802), 479.

⁸ See D. King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin 1731-1802* (London, 1963), *passim*.

⁹ See R. E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham* (Oxford, 1963), especially Parts II and III.

members included, in addition to Darwin, Wedgwood, Boulton and Watt, the writers R. L. Edgworth and Thomas Day, and the scientists James Keir, John Whitehurst and Joseph Priestley—who was also well known as a Unitarian minister and theological controversialist. Whether Bage knew all these distinguished people personally is impossible to determine, but his enthusiasm for their outlook is expressed in the novel *Man as He Is* (1792), where he refers to Priestley, Keir and Darwin, and to Birmingham as 'a place scarcely more distinguished for useful and ornamental manufacture, than for gentlemen who excel in natural philosophy, in mechanics, in chemistry'.¹⁰ Thus it is clear that Bage was in touch with contemporary ideas, and his novels themselves give plentiful evidence of his wide reading. His familiarity with the ruling class in the countryside would have been much less, but it is interesting to note that the landowner to whom he sold his mill in 1766, while retaining the tenancy, was the Earl of Donegall.¹¹ Donegall bought Fisherwick Hall in Staffordshire in 1758, and between 1766 and 1774 lavishly reorganized his estate with the help of 'Capability' Brown, the noted landscape-planner, building a large Palladian mansion and planting 100,000 trees. He achieved an English barony in 1790 and an Irish marquise in 1791, and must have been known to Bage as a striking example of the conspicuous consumer deplored by Augustan moralists, and later by Jane Austen.

Bage seems to have kept mainly to his mill, though there is evidence of an unsuccessful involvement in 'an iron manufactory' from about 1765 to 1780, resulting in a heavy financial loss. It was his need to distract himself from this loss that Bage gave to Godwin as the unusual motive for his having started to write novels when in his fifties.¹² *Mount Henneth* appeared in 1782, to be followed by *Barham Downs* in 1784, *The Fair Syrian* in 1787 and *James Wallace* in 1788. These four epistolary novels were quite well received in the reviews, coming at a time when, as J. M. S. Tompkins succinctly puts it, 'the chief facts about the novel' were 'its popularity as a form of literature, and its inferiority as a form of art'.¹³ The novels suggest Bage's familiarity with his great predecessors, Fielding, Richardson, Smollett and Sterne, but have definite characteristics of their own, notably a preoccupation with social and political ideas for which the epistolary form is unhelpful. Nevertheless, they are often amusing as well as doctrinaire in their dramatization of an underlying contrast between upper-class values, associated with a self-indulgent and

¹⁰ *Man as He Is* (London, 1792), II, p. 216.

¹¹ See G. E. Cokayne (ed.), *The Complete Peerage*, IV (London, 1916), p. 392.

¹² Kegan Paul, *Godwin*, op. cit., I, p. 263.

¹³ J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London, 1932), p. 1.

irresponsible aristocracy, and the realistic and humane behaviour of the middle classes. In *Mount Henneth* the hero is a self-made merchant who establishes a happy community at Henneth Castle, a mercantile version of the conventionally rural myth of communal felicity. In *Barham Downs*, though on a smaller scale, a similar ideal is enacted: 'Beauty without pride. Generosity without ostentation. Dignity without ceremony. And Honour without folly.'¹⁴ *The Fair Syrian*, as its title implies, has more exotic elements, including the Turkish harem, but again it works by contrasts. French pre-Revolutionary society is condemned for its extravagance and sophistication, which are contrasted with American simplicity and integrity. The hero, Sir John Amington, is a model country gentleman who discovers, while serving in the British Army in America, the injustice of the cause for which he is fighting. He rejoices in the success of the American colonists, represented by a sturdy Quaker farmer who eloquently asserts American egalitarianism: 'Every man feels himself a Man.'¹⁵ *James Wallace* again ends with the establishment of a community of the good, but the last words of the novel are given to the unrepentant aristocrat Sir Everard Moreton, whose praise of his Parisian companions and denunciation of the rest makes clear the novel's class basis:

Debauchers and sharpers! good Captain Fanbrook! Tolerably illustrious too, some of them, for birth and family. In the grace of God I believe they are not equal to the upright merchants of Liverpool; nor do they get up matrimony so sweetly: But for the manufactures of wit, mirth and good-humour—I doubt the abilities of your artists must fall short; and curse me if I don't prefer these looms to those for the weaving of saints . . .¹⁶

Bage, by contrast, is the representative voice of the 'upright merchants' of late eighteenth-century England.

One further aspect of these early novels should be noted: the remarkable liberality in the treatment of sexual morality. In *Mount Henneth* Mr Foston arrives at the wrecked house of a Persian merchant in India too late to save the merchant's daughter Caralia from being raped by soldiers. Later, Foston wishes to court the girl, but she holds back on the grounds that she has read in novels that the loss of a woman's 'honour' is irretrievable. Addressing her father, Foston rejects her attitude: 'It is to be found in books, Sir; and I hope, for the honour of the human intellect, little of it will be found anywhere else.'¹⁷ Later, a

¹⁴ *Barham Downs* (G. Wilkie, London, 1784), II, p. 342.

¹⁵ *The Fair Syrian* (J. Walter, London, 1787), I, p. 30.

¹⁶ *James Wallace* (1788; *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library*, IX, 1824), p. 508.

¹⁷ *Mount Henneth* (T. Lowndes, London, 1782), I, p. 221.

female character reflects on the prevailing 'double standard' of morality: 'But in this good town, no one now, I perceive, affixes the idea of criminality to male incontinence. All the guilt, and all the burden of repentance, fall upon the poor woman. Such are the determinations of men.'¹⁸ In *Barham Downs*, the sixteen-year-old Kitty Ross is seduced by a rakish aristocrat; later the shrewd lawyer William Wyman does not hesitate to marry her. In *The Fair Syrian* Honoria Warren is sold into a harem and although she miraculously preserves her virginity, she becomes friendly with the Georgian Amina, who argues that it is better to submit to the inevitable. When Honoria speaks of her fear in the harem, saying, 'The idea fills me with horror. I prefer death a thousand times,' Amina replies, 'And I prefer a thousand times—to death.'¹⁹ Lady Bembridge, whose husband is a rake and a gambler, is allowed to seek an absolute separation from him, thus questioning the conventional assumption about her husband's rights. *James Wallace* criticizes the rakish Sir Everard ('A wife, Lamounde, for affairs of state; but for affairs not of state, a maid—a maid'²⁰), but is otherwise less concerned with sexual morality. Nevertheless, it can be seen how prominent Bage's liberal ideas are in this area.

If such ideas seem commonplace today, they were certainly not so at the time, as the outraged response of the normally humane Scott suggests. He deplores Bage's 'dangerous tendency to slacken the rein of discipline upon a point where, perhaps, of all others, Society must be benefitted by their curbing restraint'.²¹ Fielding and Smollett may have allowed their heroes to be 'rakes and debauchees', but Bage has gone much further; he has 'extended that licence to females' and he 'seems at times even to sport with the ties of marriage'.²² Scott's attitude to Kitty Ross shows vividly how seriously—and, from a modern point of view, how wrong-headed—he took the issue of virginity. He concedes that it is possible to imagine a girl being seduced 'under circumstances so peculiar as to excite great compassion', so that it might be reasonable for her eventually to be admitted into society as 'a humble penitent'. But her 'fall' would never have to be forgotten:

Her disgrace must not be considered as a trivial stain, which may be communicated by a husband as an exceeding good jest to his friend and correspondent; there must be, not penitence and reformation alone, but humiliation and abasement, in the recollection of her errors. This the laws of society demand even from the unfortunate;

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 31.

¹⁹ *The Fair Syrian*, II, p. 69.

²⁰ *James Wallace*, p. 467.

²¹ Scott, 'Prefatory Memoir to Bage', *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

²² *Ibid.*

and to compromise further would open a door to the most unbounded licentiousness.²³

Since Scott is so fair-minded in his overall treatment of Bage's novels, this passage stands out vividly to appal the modern reader. The measure of our distance from Scott's righteous indignation and unconscious male chauvinism must be our pleasure in Bage's humane and generous treatment of sexual morality, and his evident sympathy with the woman's point of view.

Bage's last two novels, *Man as He Is* (1792) and *Hermesprung; or, Man as He Is Not* (1796), belong to the decade following the French Revolution of 1789. As the titles suggest, the fictional methods are different—in the earlier novel, an attempt at realism, in the later, a more stylized approach—but both reflect the increasing political tensions of the period. The French Revolution was initially broadly welcomed in England, but as time passed and the extent of its claims became clearer, the Establishment, led by Pitt's Ministry, became more and more hostile, while the supporters of the Revolution were represented as becoming more and more extreme; public opinion became polarized.²⁴ The opposition is most vividly seen in literature by the sweeping reactionary rhetoric of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), answered by many radicals but most powerfully by Thomas Paine in *The Rights of Man* (1791 and 1792) and, more obliquely and intellectually, by William Godwin in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793).

The political history of the period, which can be only briefly summarized here, shows the same increasing polarization. A number of organizations had come into existence seeking reform of various kinds, such as the County Associations of the 1770s and the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. These groups were followed by others with more directly political aims: the Society for Constitutional Information (1780), the Society of Friends of the People (1792) and the London Corresponding Society (1792). In May 1792 a Royal Proclamation was issued against seditious publications, and *The Rights of Man* was declared a seditious libel in December of that year. Meanwhile, in November 1792, was founded the Association for the Protection of Property against Republicans and Levellers. The declaration of war with France in February 1793 made it easy to represent radical opinions as disloyalty, and the course of the Revolution, with the execution of the King and of Marie Antoinette followed by the Reign of Terror of 1794, alienated many English people who, like Wordsworth

²³ *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

²⁴ See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; Harmondsworth, 1968), especially Part I, 'The Liberty Tree', for much of the historical information in this section.

and Coleridge, had initially welcomed the Revolution. To go on putting forward radical criticisms of society demanded courage and conviction, but it was nevertheless done both in pamphlets and literary works such as Godwin's novel *Things as They are; or Caleb Williams* (1794) and Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792) and *Hugh Trevor* (1794-7). Bage's later works must be seen in this context, which has recently been thoroughly and thoughtfully discussed by Gary Kelly in *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805*; but we can also see the continuity of his work and its provincial basis.

The closeness of these concerns to Bage is strikingly demonstrated by the fact that it was in Birmingham in July 1791 that one of the most alarming and protracted riots of the decade took place. The radicals of the area held a dinner to celebrate 'the ideas of 1789'. News of the dinner was circulated beforehand, and a mob of anti-radicals gathered. The magistrates failed to disperse the mob, which destroyed the Old and New Meeting Houses of the Unitarians (whose minister was Joseph Priestley), as well as the houses and property of many leading radicals.²⁵ Even Bage's friend William Hutton, a prosperous man but by no means a radical, suffered. He fled with his wife and children to Tamworth, where he was given hospitality on the strength of his friendship with Bage. On 25 July 1791 Bage wrote Hutton a sympathetic and concerned letter about the situation:

In this country, it is better to be a churchman, with just as much common sense as heaven has been pleased to give on average to Esquimaux, than a dissenter with the understanding of a Priestley or a Locke. I hope, Dear Will, experience will teach thee this great truth and convey thee to peace and orthodoxy, pudding and stupidity. Since the riots, in every company I have had the misfortune to go into, my ears have been insulted with the bigotry of 50 years back—with, damn the presbyterians—with church and king huzza—and with true passive obedience and non-resistance—and may my house be burnt too, if I am not become sick of my species, and as desirous of keeping out of its way, as was ever true hermit.²⁶

This is the situation referred to in Dr Blick's sermon in Chapter XXIX of *Hernsprong*, and it helps to make clear the reasons for the more emphatic political note in the later novels. *Man as He Is* appeared in 1792, and is the story of Sir George Paradyne, a young man of good family, seeking a way of life. The choice is between the pursuit of pleasure, as

²⁵ See Thompson, op. cit. p. 79; he cites R. B. Rose, 'The Priestley Riots of 1791', *Past and Present* (November 1960), pp. 68-88.

²⁶ Birmingham Public Library, Local Studies Library, MSS 486802, 25 July 1791; for a fuller quotation see P. Faulkner, *Robert Bage* (Boston, 1974), p. 26.

proclaimed by George's rakish friend John Lake Fielding and embodied in Lady Ann Brixworth, a fashionable beauty, and the more responsible attitude encouraged by his tutor Mr Lindsay and represented by the heroine, Cornelia Colerain. As Sir George is shown as a young man with normal appetites (rather like Tom Jones), he takes some time to learn to abjure fashion for sense. Interestingly, Birmingham plays a part in the scheme of ideas, as a contrast to both London and Paris. At one point, Sir George comes to Birmingham, which is praised in the terms quoted earlier for its manufacturers and scientists.²⁷ Like other travellers of the time, Sir George goes to visit a local factory, where in the exhibition room are displayed views of Southampton; these are found to be the work of the gifted and industrious Cornelia, now living in the neighbourhood, who seems to have become something like the only female member of the Lunar Society referred to earlier. The proprietor of the factory tells Sir George that she has dined with him twice: 'When I have been favoured with the company of Dr. Priestley; with that of Mr. Keir, the well-known translator and elucidator of Macquer's Chemistry; or the celebrated author of the botanic garden.'²⁸ (Erasmus Darwin published his scientific poem *The Botanic Garden* in 1789 and 1791.)

Thus the values of the 'upright commerciants of Liverpool' upheld in *James Wallace* are here further supported, and Bage sees no contradiction in making his landed-gentleman hero eventually commit himself to these values rather than those of the decadent aristocracy. His position is thus not extreme. Nevertheless, Bage does mount a direct attack on the leading conservative spokesman of the time, Edmund Burke. While travelling in Italy, Sir George meets a Miss Zaporo, a rigid Roman Catholic who believes that any extension of civil liberty would be disastrous: 'We should have seen no more of that generous loyalty to rank.'²⁹ The 'I' narrator then breaks into the novel to draw attention to the closeness of these 'enlarged and liberal sentiments' to those of Burke's *Reflections*. The narrator ironically gives praise to Burke's eloquence, referring particularly to the famous passage in which Burke compares Marie Antoinette to a star and laments the passing of chivalric ideals at her execution: 'I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards, to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult!' The narrator then claims to have discussed the passage with a friend:

I was quoting this with a generous enthusiasm to an old friend who

²⁷ See above, p. ix.

²⁸ *Man as He Is*, op. cit., II, pp. 219-20; James Keir (who presided at the dinner preceding the Birmingham Riots in 1791) translated the then well-known scientific work of the French chemist Macquer in 1771.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 71. Cf. Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, p. 91.

lives a very retired life, and troubles himself but little about the politics of this world. The muscles of his face contracted into a sort of grin—'Ten thousand pens,' said he, 'must start from their ink-stands, to punish the man who dares attempt to restore the empire of prejudice and passion. The age of chivalry, heaven be praised, is gone. The age of truth and reason has commenced, and will advance to maturity in spite of cants or bishops.'³⁰

Although the narrator wryly dissociates himself from the views of his 'old friend'—'I did not invite my friend to dinner'³¹—the reader is led to see the extravagance and inappropriateness of Burke's ideas in the modern world where law rather than knight-errantry is the method for creating social justice. Although Bage retains his lightness of touch in many parts of *Man as He Is*, the novel situates its social and political discriminations directly in the controversies of the decade.

This is equally true of *Hermesprong*, published in 1796, by which time the war with France and the developments there had combined with internal events in England to make the position of radicals even less comfortable. Spies and informers were widely employed by the Ministry. In Scotland the judges, led by Lord Braxfield, were particularly hostile, and in August 1793 the leading Scottish radical Thomas Muir was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. Braxfield told the jury that no proof was required for the assumption 'the British Constitution is the best that ever was since the creation of the world, and it is not possible to make it better'.³² In September T. F. Palmer, a Unitarian minister in Dundee, was convicted for belonging to the Dundee Friends of Liberty and encouraging the reading of Paine, and sentenced to seven years' transportation.³³ In November and December a National Convention was held in Edinburgh, with delegates from many parts of Britain. Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald were sent by the London Corresponding Society. Together with the Scottish secretary of the Convention, W. Skirving, they were arrested and tried. Eventually all three were sentenced to fourteen years' transportation.³⁴

In England juries were less inclined to follow the Ministry's policy, but in May 1794 leaders of both the Society for Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society were arrested, and a Committee of Secrecy appointed to examine them. Meanwhile, Habeas Corpus was suspended. However, when the radicals were

³⁰ *Man as He Is*, IV, p. 73.

³¹ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 75.

³² See Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 140.

brought for trial in October on a charge of treason, first Thomas Hardy, then Horne Tooke, and then (in December) John Thelwell were acquitted, and the rest, including the writer Thomas Holcroft, were freed.³⁵ But there was no change in Pitt's policy, which aimed to discredit the radicals by identifying them with the republicanism of Paine and the extremism of the French Jacobins. In 1795 the high price of corn and dissatisfaction with the progress of the war seemed to favour the radicals, but the Ministry raised strong hostility towards them in connection with an incident when the King's coach was attacked on the way to the State Opening of Parliament in October.³⁶ As a direct result, Pitt introduced in November further repressive measures, known as the Two Acts.³⁷ By the first, the Treasonable Practices Act, it became a treasonable offence to incite hatred of the Constitution; and by the second, the Seditious Meetings Act, no meetings of more than fifty people could be held without a magistrate's permission. Despite widespread opposition outside Parliament, the Two Acts received the Royal Assent in December, and—with the suspension of Habeas Corpus—were successful in greatly reducing radical activity.

For Bage the period was discouraging, as his surviving letters to Hutton show. When a book by Priestley was published in January 1793, Bage welcomed it, but noted: 'at present—Nothing from him will be attended to. No man's ear is open to anything but Church & King—and Damn the French—and Damn the Presbyterians. I abstain from all society, because respect for my moral principles is scarce sufficient to preserve me from insult on account of my political.'³⁸

As a working paper-miller, Bage was also well aware of the economic problems resulting from the war with France. His letters to Hutton reflect his difficulties over increasing taxation, the rising costs of raw materials, and the need of the workers for higher pay to offset increased prices. In September 1794 he writes: 'This very morning, my men with mighty clamour demand an increase of wages. I am under necessity of complying, for they are low, but thou, much more than I, have the advantage of it.'³⁹ By Christmas, he is writing with more characteristic sprightliness, but the situation remains the same:

Eat my breakfast quietly, you monkey? So I do, when my house don't smoak, or my wife scold, or the newspapers tickle me into irritation, or my men clamour for another increase of wages—for I have granted

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 148–9.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

³⁸ Birmingham MSS, *op. cit.*, 24 January 1793.

³⁹ Ibid., 27 September 1794.

one of about £20 per Annum. But I must get my bread by eating as little of it as possible, for my Lord Pitt will want all I can screw of Overplus.⁴⁰

Despite these problems (which are perhaps reflected in Hermsprong's argument with the miners at the end of the novel), Bage was able to produce his most succinct and entertaining novel, *Hermsprong; or, Man as He Is Not*, published by the Minerva Press in early 1796 and favourably received by its few reviewers.⁴¹

The novel must speak for itself, but three aspects may perhaps be emphasized here. First, the method. William Taylor, the early reviewer who referred to 'Voltaire's Huron' as a source for the novel,⁴² was clearly right to do so, as was Walter Scott in suggesting the relationship of Bage's 'quaint, facetious, ironical style'⁴³ to French didactic writers like Diderot and Voltaire. Voltaire's fables were early translated and widely known in England. Translations of *L'Ingénu* (with various titles) appeared in 1768, 1771 and 1786. Voltaire's hero is a young Frenchman, brought up in America as an 'Indian', who comes to France eager to learn about the country. His radical frankness and honesty lead him into numerous troubles, including a period in the Bastille, from which he is released only when the woman he loves sacrifices her virtue to a powerful aristocrat. The fable—cautiously set in 1689—is a witty exposure of repressive aspects of the *ancien régime*, making use of a central figure with characteristics recognizably those of the Noble Savage. Bage's novel clearly takes over some of this material, including its hero's background, but places it in an English context and provides a more romantic ending. The influence of Voltaire can be felt in the witty style as well as the overall plan, and also in the oriental anecdote which Mr Sumelin discusses with his unimaginative wife in Chapter XLII. In following the master of the non-realistic fable, Bage was allowing himself a freedom of approach well suited to his satirical purposes, which rest on the sharp contrast drawn between the State and Church Establishment, represented in caricature by Lord Grondale and Dr Blick, and the various liberal or radical alternatives represented by Hermsprong, Gregory Glen (the narrator whose presence reveals the complementary influence of Laurence Sterne), Mr Sumelin, and Maria Fluart.

The second point for emphasis relates to Miss Fluart, whose liveliness and independence make her a fitting climax to Bage's series of sympathetic heroines. In the earlier novels Bage was consistently liberal

⁴⁰ Ibid., 7 December [1794?].

⁴¹ *The Analytical Review*, XXIV (1796), 68; *The British Critic*, VII (April 1796), 430; *The Monthly Review*, XXI (September 1796), 21–4.

⁴² Taylor, *Monthly Review* op. cit., p. 21.

⁴³ Scott, 'Prefatory Memoir', op. cit., p. xxvi.

in his attitude to women. Here their position is both dramatized and discussed in similar terms. During dinner at the Sumelins' house in Chapter XLIII the discussion deals with the lives and education of women, and Mr Sumelin (and later the narrator) refers explicitly to Mary Wollstonecraft. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* had been published in 1792, so that feminist ideas were part of the controversial atmosphere of the times. Bage shows himself both interested in and concerned for women's emancipation. Like many early novelists, he makes use of a contrasting pair of female heroines, one sweet, the other vivacious. (We may think of Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Anna Howe*, and later Jane Austen's *Jane* and *Elizabeth Bennet*—whose family situation resembles to a considerable extent that of the Sumelin family.) In *Hermesprong*, Caroline Campinet is so consistently sweet and virtuous that the reader's interest focuses much more on Maria Fluart, whose ready wit is as attractive as her determined actions. Her remark to Sir John and Sir Philip in Chapter LX is strikingly to the point: 'Our obligations to men are infinite. Under the name of father, or brother, guardian, or husband, they are always protecting us from liberty.' Her treatment of Lord Grondale combines comedy with morality as she outmanœuvres him in the pavilion in Chapter XXXV, and she proves quite equal to the final crisis in Chapter LXVIII by producing a pistol—a deed of which it is hard to think any other heroine in English literature capable until recent times. Moreover, when the plot involves *Hermesprong* and Caroline in the conventional ending of marriage, Maria Fluart remains alone, 'not yet willing "to buy herself a master" '.

Thirdly, in the politics of the novel, the relative importance given to America and France should be noticed as evidence of Bage's moderate radicalism. There is no doubt at all of his hostility to the repressive politics of the Ministry, as represented in *Hermesprong's* trial in Chapter LXXII with its resort to law rather than justice, or to the whole Establishment, as embodied in Lord Grondale. The choice of Cornwall (an area well away from Bage's Midlands) as the setting may, as Stuart Tave has suggested, be accounted for by that county's reputation for over-representation in Parliament and saleable boroughs;⁴⁴ Bage must also have known of the troubles at the Poldice mine in 1795 due to rising food prices and low wages, and perhaps of Sir Francis Bassett, whose success in putting down food rioting in Redruth in the following year was rewarded with the title of Baron de Dunstanville of Tehidy.⁴⁵ It has been suggested too by Dr Kelly that Dr Blick should be seen as a version of Dr Samuel Horsley, the peroration of whose sermon to the House of Lords in January 1793 on the danger of the revolutionary spirit brought the

⁴⁴ Tave, p. 3.

⁴⁵ See F. E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London, 1959; 1975), p. 267.

whole assembly to its feet 'in rapt enthusiasm'⁴⁶—though Horsley's views were those widely promulgated from the pulpits of the Established Church at the time.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, Bage was not a young man whose political attitude was shaped by the French Revolution. His commitment had been made and articulated much earlier, and involved a continuing respect for the values of the American Revolution, as accepted by Sir John Amington in *The Fair Syrian*. In 1796 this enabled Bage to offer a radical perspective that did not have to underwrite every action of the increasingly repressive French government. In the discussion with the Sumelins in Chapter VIII Hermsprong presents a balanced account of recent developments in France; in Chapter XLIII he praises America as the best society ('still at an immense distance from the ultimatum'), a view he repeats and develops in Chapter LXXVII through a detailed criticism of English society; this culminates in his suggestion of taking his friends to establish a community in America. Although the conventional romantic ending of the novel, with its revelation of Hermsprong's parentage, makes this unnecessary, the values contained in the proposal remain valid: American freedom, toleration and adventurousness are endorsed as against the narrow restrictiveness of the English Establishment. The final suggestion of the novel that these values can actually be upheld in England itself, given good will and determination, is evidence of Bage's moderation—and indeed of a subdued optimism particularly courageous in 1796.

PETER FAULKNER

⁴⁶ G. Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford, 1976), p. 105.

⁴⁷ For other relevant sermon titles see W. T. Laprade, *England and the French Revolution 1789-1797* (1909; New York, 1970), especially pp. 154-7, and notes thereto.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ALTHOUGH I have been unable to contact them, I am grateful to the Turnstile Press and Mr Vaughan Wilkins, on whose edition of *Hermesprong* this is based. I should also like to thank Stuart Tave who has kept the flame of Bage scholarship alight with his edition of *Hermesprong*, which I have drawn on to supplement my own scholarship. I am indebted also to a number of friends and colleagues who have encouraged my interest in Bage over the years.