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Contents

Notes on contributors ix

Introduction i

i	Classical standards in the period PAUL H. FRY	7
2	Innovation and modernity ALFREDO DE PAZ (trans. Albert Sbragia)	29
3	The French Revolution DAVID SIMPSON	49
4	Transcendental philosophy and Romantic criticism DAVID SIMPSON	72
5	Nature HELMUT J. SCHNEIDER	92
6	Scientific models JOEL BLACK	115
7	Religion and literature E. S. SHAFFER	138
8	Language theory and the art of understanding KURT MUELLER-VOLLMER	162
9	The transformation of rhetoric DAVID WELLBERY	185
10	Romantic irony GARY HANDWERK	203
11	Theories of genre TILOTTAMA RAJAN	226
12	Theory of the novel MARSHALL BROWN	250

13	The impact of Shakespeare JONATHAN ARAC	272
14	The vocation of criticism and the crisis of the republic of letters JON KLANCHER	296
15	Women, gender and literary criticism THERESA M. KELLEY	321
16	Literary history and historicism DAVID PERKINS	338
17	Literature and the other arts HERBERT LINDENBERGER	362

Bibliography 387

Index 448

I

Classical standards in the period

PAUL H. FRY

If this topic should seem either too piecemeal or too self-evident to include in a general volume on romantic criticism, it may help to recall that for René Wellek the status of neoclassical criticism among the Romantics is the crucial issue that makes the second volume of his *History of modern criticism* possible: 'I think we must recognize that we can speak of a general European Romantic movement only if we take a wide over-all view and consider simply the general rejection of the neoclassical creed as a common denominator.'¹ But possibly this claim only deepens suspicion. Arthur Lovejoy had famously argued that no criterion of any kind was common to all Romanticisms, and Wellek, who wrote his equally famous rebuttal of Lovejoy while at work on volume two, would have been especially eager at that time to uphold the legitimacy of broad period definitions.² Can the exceptions, we may ask – Byron and Chateaubriand, for example – ever be acceptably rationalized from any standpoint, not just Lovejoy's?

Nevertheless, whatever one might feel moved to say on other occasions, this is clearly not the place for the postmodern insistence that only an atomism vastly exceeding even Lovejoy's can do justice to the complexity of literary history (and in any case, Musset had already said that about 'Romanticism' in 1824!³). One must do what one can, aided in this case by the easily overlooked precision of Wellek's claim: we can try at first to agree, tentatively, that what the spirit of the Romantic age rejects is the neoclassical, not necessarily the Classical or the texts of antiquity, and proceed from there. It may finally be possible to show, however, that there is something even more telling, more truly characteristic and self-defining, albeit more varied, about the Romantic reception of Classical antiquity itself.

¹ René Wellek, *A history of modern criticism: 1750–1950*, vol. II: *The Romantic age*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955, p. 2.

² See Arthur Lovejoy, 'On the discrimination of Romanticisms' (1924), and René Wellek, 'The concept of "Romanticism" in literary history: the term "Romantic" and its derivatives', 1949, conveniently anthologized in *Romanticism: points of view*, Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (eds.), Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

³ Lovejoy approvingly cites Alfred de Musset's *Lettres de Dupuis et Cotonet* as the '*reductio ad absurdum* of efforts to define romanticism' (*Romanticism*, Gleckner and Enscoe (eds.), p. 66n.).

By 'Neoclassical' in this contrastive context we conventionally understand the domination of taste by Opitz and Gottsched in Germany, Boileau in France and Pope together with other verse essayists on criticism like Roscommon in England (it has been wittily observed that the neoclassical is the moment when poetry and criticism are one). The difference between the neoclassical and the Classical is for the most part self-explanatory (as between Pope and Homer, or even between Pope and Virgil), but much harder to maintain, as we shall see, when one considers the reception of the Classical texts of criticism – Horace obviously, but also Longinus, who was popularized by Boileau, and Aristotle most problematically of all. When Wordsworth so disturbingly says, 'Aristotle, I have been told . . .', then misunderstands what he has been 'told'⁴ while purporting to agree with it, even though the Preface to *Lyrical ballads* taken as a whole is the most radically anti-Aristotelian piece of critical speculation one could imagine, our perplexity is not just focussed on the sociohistorical interest that attaches to Wordsworth's alleged ignorance (and cheerful willingness to confess it) against the backdrop of earlier literary institutions, but also on the simple question what is meant by 'Aristotle': is this the neoclassical Stagyrite or is it the ancient sage who upholds the honour of poetry against the attack of Plato? And how significant can it be that Wordsworth seems in this place to have the latter figure in mind, since elsewhere he seems certainly to anticipate the modern consensus that Plato is proto-romantic while Aristotle is proto-neoclassical?⁵

Taking it as given, however, that in most cases we know what is meant by the Neoclassical, all will agree that the clearest instance of the 'Romantic' rejection of this 'creed', uttered in the name of the classical Apollo, can be found in Keats's 'Sleep and poetry' (1817), where a diatribe against poets who 'sway'd about upon a rocking horse, / And thought it Pegasus' concludes as follows:

A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
And did not know it, – no, they went about,
Holding a poor, decrepid standard out

⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical ballads*', in *Wordsworth: poetical works*, Thomas Hutchinson (ed.), Ernest de Selincourt (rev. edn), London: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 737.

⁵ 'The English', Wordsworth is said to have remarked in conversation, 'with their devotion to Aristotle, have but half the truth; a sound philosophy must contain both Plato and Aristotle.' Cited from *Old friends: memories of old friends, being extracts from the journals and letters of Caroline Fox*, Horace N. Pym (ed.) (1884) in *The critical opinions of William Wordsworth*, Markham L. Peacock, Jr (ed.), Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1950, p. 76.

Mark'd with most flimsy mottos, and in large
The name of one Boileau!⁶

Even here qualifications are in order. By 1819 Keats himself was reading (and imitating here and there in *Lamia*) the poetry of Dryden. Hence even though there was a widespread tendency to follow Johnson in considering Dryden a more dynamic poet than Pope (just as Homer and Shakespeare were thought more dynamic than Virgil and Jonson), it must be granted nonetheless that within the space of two years Keats's taste had become more catholic. Also, this is the very passage which more than anything else earned Keats the scorn of the 'Romantic' Byron.

Still and all, the passage remains exemplary: the contempt for rules presumed – *qua* rules – to be mechanical and arbitrarily superimposed is after all an undeniable hallmark of Romanticism. Many Romantic texts could be cited in which the decline from the Classical to the neoclassical is seen precisely as the transformation of the normative from internal necessity to external constraint. And undoubtedly among the English Romantics, always with the loud exception of Byron and likewise excluding such contemporaries as the verse essayist on criticism William Gifford, the poetry of Pope was considered competent at best and even subject to the question – first raised in a more defensive spirit by Johnson – whether indeed it was poetry at all.⁷ The arch-villain was Pope's Homer. It must come as a shock to any reader of Keats's sonnet on Chapman's Homer that he had already read Pope's Homer, which 'made no impression on him'⁸; and we have also Wordsworth's belief (appearing in an 1808 letter to Scott encouraging Scott's edition of Dryden and therefore saying whatever could be said *in favour* of Dryden and his period) that '[I]t will require yet half a century completely to carry off the poison of Pope's Homer'.⁹

In the English tradition it is hard to point to a time when the Neoclassical, or 'pseudo-classical',¹⁰ was not already under attack. Sir William Temple's *Essay of poetry* (1690) is a case in point, with its indictment of the 'Moderns' for being too lapidary in matters of style and diction; and the increasingly Longinian element I have elsewhere identified in Dryden's

⁶ John Keats, *The poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 74.

⁷ For argument that this was a received idea, imposed merely by the hegemony of Wartonian literary history and not fully consistent with the actual continuity of certain romantic and neoclassical tenets, see Robert Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope: a study in literary historiography*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, *passim*.

⁸ Gilbert Highet, *The Classical tradition: Greek and Roman influences on Western literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 416.

⁹ *The letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: the middle years, Part 1: 1806–1811*, Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), Mary Moorman (rev.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p. 191.

¹⁰ The expression, referring to Opitz, is L. A. Willoughby's: *The Romantic movement in Germany*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1966, p. 7.

late prefaces¹¹ is an advance critique of any dogged adherence to regularity – the sort of thing expressed most woodenly, for example, by the ‘Modern’ Charles Gildon among Dryden’s near contemporaries. As Walter Jackson Bate put it, ‘the Moderns in general felt, not that the Ancients were too bound by rules, but that they were not correct enough in their observance of them’.¹² But the Moderns never got the better of any exchange of opinion even in their own time, and it remains the case that the strictly neoclassical in England is to a large extent a straw man. This is not to say that the Restoration and Queen Anne ethos was always already preromantic. Certain invariants can be pointed to, such as the fact that throughout this period – as it was commonplace to complain by the time of Mme de Staël, for example – critical analysis and even textual emendation was always aimed at ‘faults’ rather than ‘beauties’, suggesting a completely unshaken faith in the juridical power of standards, if not perhaps always exactly the same ones. By the same token it is telling, I think, that Bishop Thomas Warburton’s treatise on the origin of language, *The divine legation of Moses* (1741), shies away from the idea (typified in Herder and Rousseau a generation later and still current in Shelley) that the language directly emergent from prelinguistic rude noises was chiefly poetic metaphor. Any extravagance of figure in primitive language was owing rather, Warburton argued, to ‘rusticity of conception’,¹³ and speakers advanced towards a civilized indulgence in metaphor only through a succession of stages. And again, it is unwise to assume that Pope’s brave disorder producing a grace beyond the reach of art is an endorsement of anything approaching what was later considered sublime, although the nod to Longinus is clear enough. ‘Grace’ evokes ‘*gratia*’, the ‘*je ne sais quoi*’, a safety-valve for latitude invoked throughout the seventeenth century, rather than the sublime, which plays an equivalent role in the eighteenth.¹⁴

But if even these exceptions serve in some measure to demonstrate that the neoclassical was never more than a tendency in the history of English taste, that is after all what has long been thought. If Pope’s Longinus

¹¹ Paul H. Fry, *The reach of criticism: method and perception in literary theory*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983, pp. 87–124; Fry, ‘Dryden’s earliest allusion to Longinus’, *ELN* 19 (1981), 22–4.

¹² Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: premises of taste in eighteenth-century England*, New York: Harper, 1946, p. 32.

¹³ Quoted by René Wellek, *The rise of English literary history*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1941, p. 88. The striking verbal anticipation serves precisely to show that no doctrine could invert the values of Wordsworth more completely.

¹⁴ See Samuel Holt Monk, “A Grace beyond the reach of Art”, *Journal of the history of ideas* 5 (1944), pp. 131–50. I think I was wrong to suggest in *The reach of criticism* (p. 83) that this concept looks forward to Hazlitt’s *gusto*. Hazlitt looks back rather to the Renaissance emphasis on *enargeia*, I now feel – a doctrine which has relatively little to do with *sprezzatura*, etc.

is scarcely that of, say, John Dennis ('Sir Tremendous Longinus'), he is perhaps still more recognizable in Pope (if only as an alter ego in *Peri Bathous*) than he is in Boileau, even though the latter published his translation and commentary on Longinus together with his own *Art poétique* in 1674. Boileau's main emphasis falls on what Longinus has to say about harmony and rhythm (*synthesis*), chiefly in chapter 39 of the *Peri Hupsous*, and very little on those formally disruptive verbal devices, such as scrambled or disconnected word order, which chiefly influenced English taste. As Bate argues (*Classic to Romantic*, p. 170), and as Robert Southey boasted in *Specimens of the later English poets* (1807) while disparaging neoclassicism, the English had a great literary Renaissance to look back upon.¹⁵ Its benchmark was the irregular Shakespeare rather than the elegant Racine (a famous debate that Stendhal was the first French writer to decide in favour of the English). The Germans of the early eighteenth century, meanwhile, had only Baroque models to imagine themselves capable of polishing. However, the Germans themselves began a retreat from the neoclassical norm when the Swiss critics Bodmer and Breitinger drew on Addison to introduce a taste for English poetry in the tradition of Milton, resulting in a degree of preromantic sentiment, from Haller to Klopstock, that can well be compared with what happened in England between Thomson and Cowper.

It is a question, in fact, and one which harbours much of what remains to be said on this topic, whether the 'Romantic' view of the neoclassical is not really rather at bottom 'preromantic', precisely because the distinction between the neoclassical and the Classical was not really available until the German theorists of the 1790s began to articulate a notion of the Romantic understood in contrast with a frame of mind to be respected, not disparaged – namely, the Classical. And once the cordiality toward Classicism in Schiller, Goethe, the Schlegels and Hegel emerged, in tandem with English neohellenism and the pervasive contrast everywhere between Greece and Rome (of which more below), the neoclassical tended to become, apart from the jejune truculence of Keats, not just a straw man but a dead horse.

A few remarks on the reception of Longinus may make this clearer, while showing that the issue is not just a matter of contrasting Greece and Rome. The authority of Longinus was highest, and perhaps equally high, both in the neoclassical moment and in the preromantic reaction against it; yet before this period, in the Renaissance to which the Romantics looked back in overlooking the Age of Pope, and likewise after this period in the age of Romanticism itself, Longinus is scarcely heard of. It is important

¹⁵ See Southey, ed., *Specimens of the later English poets*, 3 vols., London: Longman, 1807, 1: xxiii–xxx1.

to see the implications of this fact. An obscure English translation of Longinus in the early seventeenth century by Thomas Hall went unread (Milton mentions Longinus in *Of education*, but we strongly suspect that he had not read him), and only Boileau's French version began the vogue which was sustained by Leonard Welsted's translation of 1712. And then, as the century reaches its close, Longinus is still mentioned from time to time by the first major Romantic writers and their successors, but he has obviously ceased to matter.

This is not hard to explain. Somewhat resembling the revisionary readers of Longinus in recent times (Thomas Weiskel, Neil Hertz and the present writer, for example), the critics and poets who took Longinus seriously understood the 'sublime' (or lofty, or elevated) as an effect of rhetoric serving to broaden and diversify the possibilities of an exercise, verse-writing, which remained at bottom, after Aristotle, a *techné*, or craft. This is not quite the view of poetry either before or after this period, times when psychological forces that are not exclusively formal are more broadly acknowledged – as indeed they are, it should be said, in the text of Longinus itself. Both *enargeia* – as I have said – and *energeia* matter greatly to the Renaissance; and in the later eighteenth century, when the sublime becomes increasingly psychological in successive analyses from Burke to Kant, no longer residing either in the external world or in the texture of language but standing disclosed as nothing other than the power of mind itself, it comes to be replaced by another term, 'imagination', which then becomes the place-holder indicating the value of the meta-formal in the period that contrasts its own achievement with the Classical rather than the neoclassical. Wordsworth in a letter of 1825 sums up what has happened by emphasizing that an interest in Longinus, binding the neo-classical and the preromantic together, must at bottom be an interest in rhetoric:

one is surprised that it should have been supposed for a moment, that *Longinus* writes upon the Sublime, even in our vague and popular sense of the word – What is there in Sappho's ode that has any affinity with the sublimity of Ezekiel or Isaiah, or even Homer or Eschylus? Longinus treats of animated, impassioned, energetic or if you will, elevated writing – of these, abundant instances are to be found in Eschylus and Homer – but nothing would be easier than to show, both by positive and negative proof, that his *hupsous* when translated sublimity deceives the english Reader, by substituting an etymology for a translation. Much of what I observe you call sublime, I should call grand or dignified.¹⁶

Perhaps this evidence of a certain critical distance from preromanticism in the period succeeding it will indicate in part why the neoclassical can

¹⁶ *The letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: the later years, part 1: 1821–1828*, Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), Alan G. Hill (rev.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 335.

appear to be rehabilitated in extraordinary cases like that of Byron, whose 1821 controversy with William Lisle Bowles about the value of Pope's poetry shows him to have outgrown, or in any case survived beyond, the literary historiography of the Wartons in which the much older Bowles is still completely entangled. Bowles in his biography of Pope disparages Pope's anthropocentrism (viewed implicitly as irreligious) and his failure to appreciate the sublimity of the natural world. Byron retorts, in a series of letters to his publisher intended for circulation, that all landscape is barren without the traces of human history, and he is able to do so because he can spontaneously suppose, in the aftermath of Kant on the sublime rather than the Wartons on the Spenserian tradition, that the sublime is located in the human mind and not in the inhuman world. He can take the lawlessness of imagination, of Renaissance overreaching, for granted, thus freeing himself to reconsider whether or not the technical and moral legacy of Pope's poetry is not after all superior to its preromantic alternatives – including, as he misreads it, the 'lake poetry' of Wordsworth and his generation. But the author of *Don Juan* II–III, with its evocation of a knowingly lost idyll, is finally closer to the neohellenism of Shelley and Keats than the neoclassicism of Pope. Byron's is the Romantic distance from lost harmony, not the preromantic distance from cultural artifice. A. W. Schlegel is reputed to have said of Herder that 'his researches on the subject of popular and legendary poetry seem to have led him to the conclusion that the Muse can only be successfully cultivated by her rudest votaries',¹⁷ and here again one sees the contrast between the preromantic backlash against any and all refinement (with all the Wertherism of *Sturm und Drang* rejecting even the archaic vigour of Homer in favour of Ossian) and the cordial dialogue of the generation called Romantic, here in the voice of Schlegel, with Classicism.

All of which is merely to endorse, in some measure, the commonplace revision of a commonplace: the Romantic reaction against Classical standards should not be exaggerated. But we should also be cautious not to assert, as John O. Hayden does, that it has been exaggerated in the past. In attacking M. H. Abrams's canonical analysis of the shift from mimetic to 'expressive' critical standards in *The mirror and the lamp*, Hayden argues that the 'Romantics' (i.e., presumably, Coleridge read a certain way rather than Wordsworth read a certain way) were interested not in the expressive but rather in 'creative theory', which he then commandeers for mimesis in order to extend the influence of Aristotle through the Romantic period.¹⁸ But a lamp shines *on* something; Abrams actually

¹⁷ H. G. Fiedler (ed.), A. W. Schlegel's *lectures on German literature from Gottsched to Goethe* (1833 notes by George Toynbee), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1944, p. 35.

¹⁸ John O. Hayden, *Polestar of the ancients: the Aristotelian tradition in Classical and English literary criticism*, Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1979, esp. pp. 168–9.

drives no such wedge between the expressive and the creative, hence leaves far less room for disagreement than Hayden believes.

No one has ever wanted to claim, *pace* Hayden, that the Romantics abandoned Aristotle – although it will be necessary to show in what follows that they distanced themselves from him. The traditional claim has always been, rather, that they reinterpret him (as an organicist rather than a mechanist) and in some cases, as hierophants of the fragmentary, disagree with his emphasis on teleological unity. Again, to be sure, Wordsworth's willingness to admit, or pretend, that he had never read the *Poetics* makes for an interesting chapter in the history of changing cultural institutions. While it is fair enough to point out, with Gilbert Highet, that 'Shelley knew more Greek than Pope. Goethe knew more Greek than Klopstock' (*The Classical tradition*, p. 355), it is still more relevant to remember, with John Hodgson, that 'the proportion and probably the absolute number of readers, at least, who did not require translations of . . . Classical authors was rapidly decreasing' in the time of Wordsworth.¹⁹ However great or small the Romantic turn away from Classical standards may have been, what is much less open to dispute is simply that the knowledge of Classical standards was diminishing as the demographics of literacy changed – and that this was one reason why young writers like Keats (and apparently Wordsworth) could emphasize originary strength more boldly than was hitherto imaginable. When Edward Young calls for 'Original Composition' in 1759, he knows that educated persons answering to the name of poet will need to suppress their intimacy with ancient writings in order not to imitate them. For a Wordsworth or a Keats the effort of suppression – at least of ancient poets and, still more, of ancient critics – need not have been as exhausting.

Perhaps the safest thing to say about the paradigm aspect of the Romantic attitude toward Classical standards is that, in contrast with the preromantic attitude, it is highly unstable. Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel are thought to be largely in agreement about the Classical tradition, for example (and it was Friedrich who began, like Nietzsche, as a Classical philologist); yet whereas Friedrich could criticize Goethe for the neoclassicism of the *Propyläen*, his brother could adopt the supremely neoclassical tactic of criticizing Aristotle for generic laxity in judging epic by the rules of tragedy. Alongside the volatility of such views there is the instinct for compromise which seems aimed precisely at discouraging the penchant for extremes. Thus one finds Friedrich Schlegel saying things like 'It is equally fatal for the mind to have a system, and to have none. One will simply have to decide to combine the two'; or again: 'All Romantic studies

¹⁹ John Hodgson, "'Was it for this . . .?': Wordsworth's Virgilian questionings", *Texas studies in literature and language* 33 (1991), p. 133.

should be made Classical; all Classical studies should be made Romantic.’²⁰ Just so, in Wellek’s words, Madame de Staël in *De l’Allemagne* wants ‘German literature more regular, more tasteful, and French literature less circumscribed by rigid conventions, freer to indulge in flights of imagination’ (*History of modern criticism*, II, 229).

Responsibility for this sort of balancing act, with its faith in the efficacy of dialectics, can be traced perhaps most directly to Friedrich Schiller’s letters *On the aesthetic education of man* (1795), with its terms traceable in turn to Kant’s *Critique of judgement* (1790). In Schiller’s text notions of ‘system’ and ‘the classical’ are aligned with the *Formtrieb* of categorical reason (but also with the idolization of reason in the French Revolution), while the asystematic and the Romantic lean toward the *Stofftrieb*, the sensuous empiricism, of the understanding (allegorizing the baser instincts that inspired the French Revolution). ‘Aesthetic education’, which for Schiller as for Goethe is nothing other than the neutralization of revolutionary instincts by flexibility of mind (Schiller’s *Spieltrieb*), leads to compromise formations that precisely and fully anticipate the Romantic cordiality toward the Classical. For example: ‘The important thing . . . is to disassociate caprice from the physical and freedom from the moral character; to make the first conformable with law, the second dependent on impressions.’²¹ In the ultimate formulations of the contrast between *Klassik* and *Romantik*, as we shall see, the physical and the moral tend to change places, each remaining in a state of estrangement from the other, but the lines once drawn remain unchanged; and the ensuing state of dialectical interdependency is what keeps the romantic in German thought from being viewed progressively at any time as an advance over some prior perspective.

The Romantic outlook, then, was thought in a sense to be necessary, an emergent historical determination, yet no one until Stendhal, the first who willingly called himself a Romantic, was prepared to assert that it was necessarily better than the Classical outlook. Indeed, starting from Schiller’s sense (in *On naive and sentimental poetry*, 1795) that the only belated options of the ‘sentimental’ poet are the alienated and unheroic genres of idyll, elegy, and satire, and continuing right through to Hegel’s ‘unhappy consciousness’, Romanticism is understood as an almost foolish crisis of estrangement, an extreme deracination of the ideal from the ground of reality. In certain passages of these writers, T. E. Hulme’s caricature of Romanticism a century later is already in place; it ‘flies away into

²⁰ Both aphorisms are quoted by Ernst Behler in important articles on this topic – the former in ‘Problems of origin in literary history’, *Theoretical issues in literary history*, David Perkins (ed.), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 15; and the latter in ‘The origins of Romantic literary theory’, *Colloquia Germanica* 2 (1968), 121.

²¹ Friedrich Schiller, *On the aesthetic education of man*, Reginald Snell (trans.), New York: Ungar, 1965, p. 30.

the circumambient gas'.²² Many of the writers we call Romantic in fact see themselves not as Romantic but as postromantic, very much on analogy with our own self-conception as postmodern; they look back to the period from Dante to Shakespeare and Cervantes as Romantic, just as Hegel in the *Phenomenology of mind* identifies unhappy consciousness not with any contemporary state of things but with the emergence of Christianity. To this issue I shall return in conclusion.

The very fact that these writers see themselves as being in a position to perform comparative analysis shows them standing, or professing to stand, outside and above any fixed viewpoint, distanced perhaps from any fully authentic voice but possessed thereby of the quality that Byron according to Lady Blessington called *mobilité*,²³ that Keats called negative capability and Hazlitt gusto – and that Friedrich Schlegel twenty years earlier called irony. (It was not until 1811 that Coleridge introduced the classic-romantic distinction in England, and several more years passed before Staël's English sojourn and John Black's translation of A. W. Schlegel's lectures made the terms familiar. In his letters to Goethe of this period Byron asks him what he makes of the distinction. Perhaps this is why it took so much longer for volatility of perspective to become a feature of English Romantic thinking.) Although Friedrich Schlegel called the novels of Jean Paul Richter 'the only romantic products of an unromantic age',²⁴ Jean Paul's work seems to us rather to be very much of its moment; and it is strange likewise to us that Stendhal was willing to call himself Romantic in *Racine and Shakespeare* yet seems to embody, in his novels, precisely that mercuric instability of viewpoint (one finds it also in Kleist and in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*) which for sheer mobility exceeds even the play of dialectic in, say, Byron or Pushkin or Heine – and is more subtle also than the 'dialogism' or 'novelization' of poetic genres that the Bakhtinian approach to this period so obviously adopts from Friedrich Schlegel.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that in some respects on the present view it would be appropriate to fold the important poetry and criticism of Wordsworth back into the preromantic. Blake, who reads even Wordsworth as a pernicious classicist 'hired', like Reynolds, 'to depress art',²⁵ but is perhaps also best viewed as himself preromantic just for that reason, constitutes another broad exception. Most of the writers

²² T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism' in *Criticism: the major texts*, Walter J. Bate (ed.), New York: Harcourt, 1970, p. 566.

²³ Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington*, London: R. Bentley, 1834, p. 67.

²⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on poetry and literary aphorisms*, Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (trans.), Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968, p. 95.

²⁵ William Blake, *The poetry and prose of William Blake*, David V. Erdman (ed.), Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970, p. 625.

who are considered Romantic, however, but who consider themselves to be poised, or trapped, somewhere between the Romantic and the Classical, do fully realize that the Classical for better or worse is a historically delimited moment that can only be reentered by completely artificial means. I do not feel that Todorov sufficiently recognizes the self-consciousness of this period when he writes, albeit instructively:

One is already romantic if one writes the history of the passage from the classics to the romantics; or is still classical if one perceives the two as simple variants of a unique essence. Whatever solution is chosen, the writer adopts the viewpoint proper to one of these periods in order to judge – and distort – the other.²⁶

I would say that it is not distortion but nostalgia that one encounters in this moment. Part of the fate, the historical determinism, experienced by the writers of the period called Romantic, was the sense of historical determination itself – the historicism with which the rise of responsible philology had imbued them. Historicism distanced them from the Classical in two ways: it made the cultural aspect of what Keats called the grand march of intellect seem irreversible without necessarily seeming progressive ('Why the Arts are not progressive' was not just Hazlitt's theme); and it introduced a sense of the relativity of values that was itself in conflict with the universality of classical standards. Anyone who valued the Classical as a contrastive term, in other words, was in some measure anticlassical. (The same is true, incidentally, of the 'traditional', the vanishing social ideal which occasions the pathos both of Scott's historical fiction and of Balzac's *Comédie humaine*.) The implications of the relative view, ordinarily expressed as ambivalence, are for the first time embraced in behalf of the Romantic by Stendhal in *Racine and Shakespeare*: romanticism, he says, is 'the art of giving to the people literary works which in the present state of their customs and beliefs are capable of giving the most pleasure possible', while 'classicism, on the contrary, gives them the literature which yielded the most pleasure possible to their great-grandparents'.²⁷ Yet it is Stendhal's very celebration which announces, in turn, the coming obsolescence of the Romantic. The absence of this sort of covert historicist caveat in the rebellious literary manifestoes of the early twentieth century may serve usefully to indicate the way in which

²⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the symbol*, Caroline Porter (trans.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 289. Quoted in a similar context by Thomas Vogler, 'Romanticism and literary periods: the future of the past', *New German critique* 38 (1986), p. 133.

²⁷ 'Le romantisme est l'art de présenter aux peuples les œuvres littéraires qui, dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible. Le classicisme, au contraire, leur présente la littérature qui donnait le plus grand plaisir à leurs arrière-grands-pères.' Stendhal (Henri Beyle), *Racine et Shakespeare*, Henri Martineau (ed.), Paris: Le Divan, 1928, p. 43.

Modernism, unlike romanticism, attempted to reenter the timeless classical paradise by artificial means.

By way of penance for having ventured a generalization about Wordsworth in this context which in most ways will seem intelligible enough (the 'real language of men' and 'the beautiful and permanent forms of nature' can scarcely be thought subject to change (Preface, *Wordsworth*, p. 735), yet there is very little that is Classical, or even cognizant of the Classical, about the way in which they are conceived), I must now confess that perhaps the fullest and most interesting historicist contrast between Classical objectivity and Romantic subjectivity is to be found in Wordsworth himself – in the fascinating and too often overlooked 'Letter to a friend of Burns':

Our business is with [the books of classical writers], – to understand and to enjoy them. And, of poets more especially, it is true – that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished. It should seem that the ancients thought in this manner; for of the eminent Greek and Roman poets, few and scanty memorials were . . . ever prepared; and fewer still are preserved. It is delightful to read what, in the happy exercise of his own genius, Horace chooses to communicate of himself and his friends; but I confess I am not so much a lover of knowledge, independent of its quality, as to make it likely that it would much rejoice me, were I to hear that records of the Sabine poet and his contemporaries, composed upon the Boswellian plan, had been unearthed among the ruins of Herculaneum . . . Far otherwise is it with that class of poets, the principal charm of whose writings depends upon the familiar knowledge which they convey of the personal feelings of their authors. This is eminently the case with the effusions of Burns'.²⁸

And, the reader exclaims somewhat unwarily, with the relentlessly autobiographical effusions of Wordsworth! There is in Wordsworth the disclaimer, to be sure, that such feelings are valueless if they are not common to all, the poet being 'a man speaking to men' (Preface, *Wordsworth*, p. 737), and we know that Wordsworth might not have extended such a disclaimer to at least some of the feelings of Burns (hence the hint of condescension in the special pleading he thinks Burns deserves); but nevertheless, the historicism Wordsworth recommends in this passage is after all more radical than most modern readers, reading as 'theorists', formalist or psychoanalytic, would care to espouse. It is as though we were enjoined, in keeping with Wordsworth's tone, to read the works of one period in the spirit of a rigorous anti-intentionalist and the works of another in the spirit of a gossip columnist; and, surprisingly in that the opinions are Wordsworth's, we cannot deny, no matter which reading

²⁸ *The prose works of William Wordsworth*, 3 vols., A. B. Grosart (ed.), rev. edn, New York: AMS Press, 1967, II: 111–12.

practice more closely resembles our own, that it is the former on which he confers more dignity.

There is one issue that at least arguably restores stability to the relationship between the Romantic and the Classical; and to that issue – again – I shall turn in conclusion. In the meantime, however, there is more to be said about the instability I have emphasized in contrast with the much more paradigmatic preromantic reception of the neoclassical. As a case in point, yielding little but confusion at least on first view, consider the effect on Homer's reputation of Friedrich August Wolf's pioneering *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), the first work of scholarship to argue authoritatively for the multiple and anonymous authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Before Wolf, a consensus had been building about Homer: he was a splendidly 'regular' poet, exercising a command over the three unities that exceeded even Aristotle's grasp of the matter (this is the view of Gildon and others); but he was also, in contrast with Virgil, endowed with 'genius', and the character of his writing was 'rapid', 'impetuous', 'nervous' and bursting with energy (this is already the view of Dryden and Pope, and is rarely challenged in the ensuing decades). Here again the neoclassical and the preromantic are fixed in relation to one another, often in this case even without conflict, although there were many in the 'Augustan' age who preferred Virgil (whose *lacrimae rerum* were not romanticized until the late nineteenth century), and many in the later period who preferred Homer insofar as he himself was not considered too neoclassical for the taste of *Sturm und Drang*. All of these commonplaces, which are gathered together by Johnson among the maxims of his Dick Minim the Critick in the *Idler*, persisted throughout the period when a growing, increasingly historicist understanding of Homer was being achieved, prior to Wolf, by Thomas Blackwell (*Enquiry into the life and writings of Homer*, 1735) and Robert Wood (*Essay on the original genius and writings of Homer*, 1769).

One effect of Wolf's book was somewhat to diminish the reputation of Homer at just the time when one might have expected it to flourish – and when, indeed, he continued frequently to be compared with Shakespeare. (Schiller contemporaneously with Wolf somewhat equivocally celebrates Homer as the lone exemplar of the Naive Poet, but this is already perhaps part of the complication I wish to emphasize.) The fact is, Homer simply was not mentioned or thought about as often as he was before the 1790s. Keats's awed fascination in his sonnet of 1816 should be read in part as a not wholly convincing protest against the dominance of the epic tradition by Milton in the preceding period.²⁹ For reasons famously enunciated by

²⁹ See my reading of this sonnet in *A defense of poetry: reflections on the occasion of writing*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 147–52.

Milton's Satan and echoed by Romantic practice, the mind had come to be 'its own place', supplanting the outward shows of human events, and Milton replaced Homer in the same way that the imagination replaced rhetorical and scenic sublimity. Undoubtedly the role of Milton was much greater in England than in Germany (although it had been Milton mediated by Addison who had altered German taste at an earlier period), but there too Homer appears to have lost ground.

Perhaps the most important reason for these changes will emerge, again, in the context of my concluding remarks, but I think Wolf has something to do with it as well. 'Literary men', says Highet, 'found Wolf's book discouraging' (*The Classical tradition*, p. 385), and he points to Goethe's 'Homer wider Homer' as a sign of their frustration.³⁰ It is true, as Ernst Behler remarks, that to 'dissolve an individual author into a collective entity governed by a "popular spirit" or a "spirit of the age" was not unusual during the Romantic period: the Song of the Nibelungen, Shakespeare's dramas, and the fairy tales collected by the Grimm brothers come to mind' ('Problems of origin', p. 18). And no doubt this tendency is not unrelated to the – again anti-classical – preoccupation with the fragment first theorized by the Jena circle. But at the same time, the decomposition of Homer posed a severe challenge to ideas of original genius and organic unity. If in the latter case various theories of the symbol could mediate the fragmentary and the holistic, it was more difficult to explain (by reading Plato, for example, without the help of neoplatonic revisionism) how 'genius' could remain a plausibly originary concept when separated from what Coleridge called 'the shaping spirit of imagination' ('Dejection: an ode', 1802). One can see this issue vexing much of Coleridge's poetry around the time that saw the publication of Wolf's treatise: the 'one all-conscious Spirit, which informs / With absolute ubiquity of thought / . . . All his involv'd Monads' ('The destiny of nations', 1796, lines 44–7) is one such effort, as is 'what if all of animated nature / Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd' ('The eolian harp', 1795). 'But where', wrote Fichte to Friedrich Schlegel in 1800, 'did the source for the first artist, who had nothing before himself, come from?'³¹

That poems hitherto considered to be works of genius, in sum, could still impress themselves upon the reader in all their apparent self-sufficiency meant finally either that doctrines of creative genius were not at the heart of the matter after all (confirming the mimetic standards of Classicism) or that these poems were not quite as pluperfect as they had been held to be (further eroding the authority of ancient standards). It is again

³⁰ Goethe fears that 'you cannot establish that there is a Homer before Homer' in 'On German architecture', *Essays on art and literature*, John Gearey (ed.), Ellen and Ernest von Nordhoff (trans.), New York: Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 8.

³¹ Quoted in Behler, 'Problems of origin', p. 14.

Wordsworth, this time the older Wordsworth writing to Henry Nelson Coleridge in 1830, who manages to combine these views while reflecting the sea-change in Homer's reputation most fully: 'the books of the Iliad were never intended to make one Poem, and . . . The Odyssey is not the work of the same man or exactly of the same age. [Homer is] second only to Shakespeare, . . . But at the same time I cannot think but that you in some points overrate the Homeric Poems, especially the manners' (*Letters: the later years, part II*, pp. 318–19). There are two different and seemingly contradictory tendencies at work in this passage, conspiring to a single end. First, the denial that original genius belongs to any single author plainly reduces the value of the work; yet at the same time the work's putative loss of unity seems to recall to mind the classical standard of unity which has less to do with creativity than with such imitative considerations as 'manners'. That both these tendencies are nevertheless characteristically Romantic – together with the historicism implicit in the by then widespread belief that the *Odyssey* is a later poem – can be demonstrated by contrasting them with their preromantic equivalents: whereas Wordsworth's Homer is not Classical enough because the knowledge that 'he' is without creative unity apparently colours the question of mimetic unity in the Homeric poems as well, the Homer of Goethe's *Werther*, by contrast, is too Classical because he is too closely linked to notions of calm and noble simplicity made fashionable by Winckelmann. Ossian is the truer voice of feeling for *Werther* even though, or perhaps because, very few admirers of the Ossianic poems believed Macpherson's claim that Ossian was a single author.

The history of Virgil's reputation throughout this period is less complex and varied. He was despised as a courtier in radical moods (by Hugo in exile, for example) and praised with lukewarmth on more dispassionate occasions as a 'moon of Homer' (by Hugo in the Preface to *Cromwell*³²), while running beneath it all was an admiration for Virgil's sheer talent as a poet that was difficult to express except in the sincere but only faintly perceptible flattery of imitation. The Virgilian – and Horatian – georgic conventions of stationing the scene and the viewer's movement through the scene (*Iam . . . Iam.*) that are so much a part of preromantic loco-descriptive and *Spaziergang* poetry can still be felt in Keats's 'To autumn' ('And . . . And . . . And now'); and in general it is this side of Virgil (his pathos, again, not yet having become focal) that Romanticism exploits. As Bruce Graver summarizes the matter, 'Virgilian didacticism becomes Wordsworthian description'.³³ In speaking of Milton as Wordsworth's precursor, it is well to remember, as Graver reminds us ('Wordsworth's

³² Victor Hugo, *Préface to Cromwell*, Paris: Larousse, 1949, p. 40.

³³ Graver, 'Wordsworth's georgic beginnings', *Texas studies in literature and language* 33 (1991), p. 146.

georgic beginnings', 154), that Wordsworth considered Milton to have formed his blank verse on the model of Virgil's hexameters.

Most obviously, though, it remains to ask how and to what extent Romantic taste altered the authority of ancient literary criticism. The somewhat surprising eclipse of Longinus I have discussed; but then Longinus's influence had not been as venerable as that of Horace and Aristotle: ancient, yes, but only recently canonized, with the result that in important ways other oft-cited names such as Scaliger, Heinsius and Corneille could easily seem better established. The Horace of the odes was never wholly out of favour (Wordsworth nearly always spoke well of him, for example), but the didactic Horace, especially the author of the *De arte poetica*, almost entirely ceased to matter as an arbiter even though many Horatian snippets remained in the language as nearly anonymous idioms and proverbs. Horace's fate in this regard is simply that of neoclassicism, and perhaps more broadly (outside of France) the fate of Roman culture in general. That there were almost literally two Horaces in the Romantic period can be found reflected in the remarkable wording of Shelley's Preface to *The revolt of Islam* (where incidentally Longinus is, again, a mere critic, hardly the patron saint of preromanticism): 'Longinus could not have been a contemporary of Homer, nor Boileau of Horace.'³⁴ Here the analogy can only hold if Horace the critic and direct precursor of Boileau has been so completely forgotten that the momentary confusion felt by a modern reader simply doesn't enter Shelley's mind.³⁵

I have already outlined the traditional approach to the Romantic reception of Aristotle: either he simply fades, partially, from view, or he is recuperated, no longer the guardian of 'regularity', as a theorist of organic form. This is the Aristotle of Wordsworth and Coleridge, respectively. Aristotle's fate in Wordsworth's Preface we have witnessed; but in fact he makes a livelier appearance in the 'Intimations ode', a programmatically platonic poem based on the tenth book of the *Republic* (not just the Myth of Er but also the attack on poets), in which Aristotle is challenged as it were in advance from the standpoint of Plato's critique of imitation as chameleonic role-playing:

And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time the 'humorous stage'
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,

³⁴ *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols., Neville Rogers (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon, 1975, II: 104.

³⁵ In a unique study of this topic, *The influence of Horace on the chief poets of the nineteenth century*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1916, Mary Rebecca Thayer argues that in this passage Shelley 'deliberately disregards Horace as a literary critic' (p. 41), but I think Shelley simply forgets that anyone might consider Horace a literary critic.

That Life brings with her in her equipage;
 As if his whole vocation
 Were endless imitation.

(101–7)

The quotation entailing the theory of Humours is from Samuel Daniel, but is coloured, I think, by the slight forward anachronism of Jonson's usage and that of his successors, thus reinforcing the neoclassicism of the role played by Aristotle – advocate of role-playing for six-year-olds – in contrast with the visionary oneness of the antitheatrical platonist infant. The most important engagement with Aristotle in the Preface is not 'Aristotle, I have been told', after all, but the claim made for the *Lyrical ballads* themselves that 'the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, not the action and situation to the feeling' (Preface, *Wordsworth*, p. 735). This makes *dianoia* (thought) with some admixture of *ethe* (character or role) paramount in importance over *praxis* (action), whereas Aristotle had listed these elements of poetic composition in the opposite order. This is indeed what is revolutionary about Wordsworth's treatment of the traditional ballad (in some measure qualifying Robert Mayo's well-known demonstration that the poems in this volume were characteristic of their time); and there is no passage that more clearly illustrates what we conventionally call the romantic turn toward subjectivity. The 'Prospectus to *The Recluse*', making 'the Mind of Man – / My haunt, and the main region of my song' (*Wordsworth*, p. 590), performs the same service for epic.

Organicism, so important to Herder, to Goethe's *Pflanzenlehre*, and to the Schlegels, only appears fully formed, Wellek argues, in Coleridge and Hugo outside of Germany (*History of modern criticism*, II, p. 3). It is this strain in Romanticism that has attracted the most dialectically inclined scholars, from Orsini to McFarland, who have typically been Coleridgeans. Wellek himself distinguishes between emotive Romanticism, plainly associated with Wordsworth, from which little of theoretical value can be expected, and 'the establishment of a dialectical and symbolist view of poetry', the foundational credo of which is Coleridge's definition of the Symbol in *The statesman's manual*, together with the apotheosis of the imagination as 'esemplastic power'. Now, in all such thinking at this period it must be admitted that the influence of Aristotle is largely implicit – a symptom, it might be retorted, of his fading from view rather than of his reinterpretation. But however much or little Coleridge the literary theorist may have had Aristotle continuously in mind, the organicist *Poetics* which emerged in the seminal modern translation and commentary by S. H. Butcher (1894) and which continued to hold sway throughout the floruit of the New Criticism and of Wellek himself, is really quite inconceivable without the mediatory influence of Coleridge.

The key passages are the ones in which Aristotle insists that the 'parts' of a tragedy have a necessary order that cannot be rearranged, and says also that you cannot have an animal (*zoon*) that is too long or short. Although it seems quite obvious to recent commentators that the interdict against exchanging parts is grossly macroscopic (you cannot have your exodos before your parodos, for example, but you can put a metaphor anywhere you like as long as there are not too many), and that the passage allegedly concerning organic animal life is actually about a *schema* or blueprint of an animal, this was by no means obvious to the disciples of Butcher. They thought such passages were redolent of Coleridgean thinking. But the only place in Coleridge where Aristotle actually surfaces in this context, chapter 17 of the *Biographia literaria*, may be said perhaps to give comfort to both sides. The footnote, which says among other things that 'Aristotle has . . . required of the poet an involution of the universal in the individual', can be said to have given rise to the organicist revision; but the footnote is written to warn the reader away from believing that the main text, which says in Aristotle's name that 'the persons of poetry must be clothed with generic attributes', is covertly neoclassical: 'Say not that I am recommending abstractions.'³⁶ And yet, if one places this passage in its entirety (poetry is ideal, it admits no accidents, and so on) alongside Johnson's rescue of Shakespeare from the strictures of Rymer and Voltaire ('His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men'³⁷), there is no doubt that it is Coleridge who is the more 'neo-classical', the more high-mimetic, of the two.

It is possible to make too much of this. Not just Johnson, whose argument against the Unities was borrowed by Stendhal, but Lessing, Diderot and others had produced relatively low-mimetic revisions of Aristotle in order to reflect the new fashion for a *drame bourgeois* – or, in Johnson's case, simply to accommodate the spectator's legitimate craving for novelty ('all pleasure consists in variety'), and perhaps also to support his own taste for the novels of Richardson. Coleridge may well have felt that these doctrines of imitation were simply unphilosophical, or worse, reflective of the empiricist drift towards Associationism against which Aristotle's *De anima* is invoked as a safeguard earlier in the *Biographia* (ch. 5). Still and all, if this is the case then it is not in fact Aristotle from whom Coleridge chiefly derives his undoubted emphasis on organic form in many other places; and it cannot be said unreservedly therefore that there is a 'Romantic' Aristotle until the end of the nineteenth century (when a Romantic Virgil also emerges), owing largely to the influence of Coleridge but owing very little to his imputed Aristotelianism.

³⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia literaria*, George Watson (ed.), New York: Everyman, 1971, p. 191.

³⁷ Johnson, 'Preface to *Shakespeare*', in *Criticism: the major texts*, Bate (ed.), p. 210.

And so I think it fair to say after all, without much qualification, that the authority of Aristotle weakens in the Romantic period together with that of Longinus and Horace. The two Greeks were read through the eyes of an earlier generation, but without that generation's enthusiasm; and this made them seem Roman (perhaps also because they were read frequently in Latin if not in modern languages). The neoclassical filter through which their views were strained and which also produced their forbidding image as arbiters and legislators was rarely if ever set aside. Thus Aristotle and Longinus could benefit little from neohellenism and from the increasingly generalized and graecophile contrasts between Greece and Rome. 'It was the claim of the romanticists', writes Harry Levin, 'that their school had purified the Greek tradition by repudiating Rome . . . [And] gradually the formalistic and pedantic elements came to be identified with Latin culture'.³⁸ And yet from Rome – as in Dante – there arose the very phenomenon that finally estranged the Romantic generation most conclusively from the Classical, and more particularly from the earthbound idyll that was Greece: namely, Christianity. This progression was so clear to Madame de Staël that she reversed the usual evaluative contrast between Greece and Rome and insisted that, with its more refined customs and elegant manners, Rome actually represented a step forward toward the emergence of Christianity – with its improvement in the position of women.

The 'atheist' Shelley too insists in his 'Defence of poetry' that the age of chivalry with its Christian backdrop marks a step forward in the treatment of women. Strange as it may seem to modern ears that placing women on a pedestal answered somehow to a feminist impulse, that is how Shelley and his contemporaries read Dante. Goethe's early modern Faust shares the salvation of Dante's Pilgrim ('Das Ewig-Weibliche / Zieht uns hinan'), and even Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of women*, with its thesis that women should be better educated to be better companions for men, seems poorly situated for discerning the condescension of this exaltation. 'Homage for genuine female worth' was part of the Christian and northern Romantic spirit, thought A. W. Schlegel.³⁹ It was not Gretchen or Beatrice, though, but the Virgin with whom they interceded who accords this new, and newly glamorous, role to women at the historical moment in question – and who is also the key factor stabilizing the Classic-Romantic dialectic we have been studying. Just as Dante parts company with Virgil at the utmost height of Purgatory in order to transcend earthly imperfection, so Romanticism somewhat sadly consigns the earthly finitude even of the most idyllic Classical moment to the irreversibility of

³⁸ Levin, *The broken column: a study in Romantic Hellenism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931, p. 20.

³⁹ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *A course of lectures on dramatic art and literature*, John Black (trans.), London: Bohn, 1846, p. 25.

the past. Hence, also, the subordination of Homer to Milton, who repeatedly expels the Classical gods, always with evident reluctance.

The alignment of Romanticism with Christianity is perhaps most obvious in France and Germany: Madame de Staël's insistence that Romantic poetry 'owes its birth to the union of chivalry and Christianity'⁴⁰ corresponds to *Le génie du christianisme*, in which Chateaubriand interestingly says that 'only with Christianity does there come a feeling for landscape in itself, apart from man'; while the increasingly devout Catholicism of the brothers Schlegel seems simply to confirm Hegel's scheme, in which Romanticism is a late recrudescence, mediated by 'Scepticism', of that Unhappy Consciousness estranged from Spirit which in its essence is Christianity. Perhaps the definitive pronouncement against the classical in this respect is that of A. W. Schlegel in his *Lectures on dramatic art and literature*: 'But however highly the Greeks may have succeeded in the Beautiful, and even in the Moral, we cannot concede any higher character to their civilization than that of refined and ennobled sensuality' (*A course of lectures*, p. 24). But the English too came around to these views. Hazlitt accepts Schlegel's terms, including his distinction between a Doric temple and Westminster Abbey; and Coleridge for his part likewise identifies Romanticism with the emergence of Christianity, its Christian characteristics being 'its realism, its picturesque qualities [here is the "gothic" element], its diversity and complexity, its striving toward the infinite, its subjectivity, and its imagination'.⁴¹

The apparently more secular mythopoetic strain even of the neo-hellenist English Romantics rests on a comparable structure. 'The late remorse of love' is Byron's revision of the classical Nemesis in the Forgiveness Curse he hurls from the Coliseum (*Childe Harold* iv, with Byron's 'nympholepsy' theme culminating here in the story of Numa and Egeria), and a similar revocation of a curse in Shelley inspires *das Ewig-Weibliche* (Asia, the spirit of love) to unbind the Prometheus of Aeschylus. The whole burden of the classical idyll in *Don Juan* II is its bittersweetness – its fragility, finitude, and blindness; while in 'Defence of poetry' Shelley, in announcing that 'the great secret of morals is love'⁴² introduces the binding ingredient that enables the perception of similitude in dissimilitude called metaphor, an ingredient that must first have emerged, in the logic of Shelley's historiography, when chivalry introduced amorous idealism. Keats would appear to constitute a partial exception here, at least insofar as he can be said to chant a 'poetry of

⁴⁰ Baroness de Staël-Holstein, *Germany*, 2 vols., London: John Murray, 1814, I: 304.

⁴¹ Herbert Weisinger, 'English treatment of the Classic-Romantic problem', *Modern language quarterly* 7 (1946), p. 482.

⁴² Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's poetry and prose*, Donald Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (eds.), New York: Norton, 1982, p. 487.

earth' ('On the grasshopper and the cricket') that owes little to anything but a powerfully naturalistic reading of the early Wordsworth and to an idiosyncratically unqualified embrace of the Classical by way of Lemprière's *Dictionary*. But even in Keats the characteristic tensions persist. The too obviously mechanical synthesis of Cynthia and the Indian Maid at the end of *Endymion* is no doubt meant to rebuke the unhappy consciousness of the poet-idealist who turns his back on an Arab Maiden in Shelley's *Alastor*, but it remains a clumsy manoeuvre that leaves Peona for one in an unpromising state of bewilderment – and if in a later and more graceful effort the casement is left open at night to restore the Warm Love to Psyche, Cupid has nevertheless not yet appeared. The complete failure of Thea in the mediatory role in the first *Hyperion*, together with the substitution of the grimly forbidding Moneta for Thea in the second, should not prevent us from seeing that in fact everywhere in Keats's mythopoetic work the structure of feminine intercession remains intact, a structure that is carried forward from the mariolatry of early Christianity.

This then is the most decisive Romantic departure from the Classical. 'Love' had long been understood as a 'modern' improvement on the Classical (as in Racine and Corneille, or in the 'heroic dramas' introduced by Dryden and Davenant), but the pathos of neoclassical love was more likely to be destructive than redemptive. The salvific immanence of the feminine differs likewise from the Classical invocation of the muse precisely in that the Nine after all never really 'descend'. The poet calls on one of them simply in order to designate a generic expectation and then gets on with his business. Classical heroines too have a different niche. *The aeneid*, Dante's model in so many other respects, offers the point of contrast: Aeneas is not led forth by Creusa but leads her, hence loses her; he is led astray by Dido and has no relation at all to the demure Lavinia, whose romantic adoration by Turnus is of no more use to him than the evasive tactics of his sister Juturna. Venus, meanwhile, playing the role of Athena in *The odyssey*, belongs in the trickster-companion tradition that Classical mythopoeisis appears to share with the folklore of yet more ancient cultures rather than with early Christianity. Pretty clearly, the price women pay for their ennoblement by Romanticism is the loss of cleverness and personality. If in Classical comedy the heroine tended to be resourceful and the hero faceless, in the metaphysical comedies of Christianity and Romanticism the opposite tendency emerges – in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as much as anywhere else. Whereas the Classical goddess (who could as easily be a god like Hermes) either helps or hinders, the Romantic mediatrix either inspires self-help (most painfully in the case of Keats's Moneta) or fails to do so.

Having thus isolated a constant thread running through the Romantic turn from Classicism, it remains for me to ask in conclusion whether the

self-definitions of Romanticism – and more particularly the very word itself – reflect its consonance with early Christianity. Remembering the reluctance of the Romantics to call themselves Romantic, even as they acknowledge their part in the estrangement from the Classical, we should not be surprised to find the word consistently linked to medieval and early modern developments. It comes, depending on the account, either from ‘romance’, the mixture of Latin with modern languages, or from *roman*, the novel, which mixes the Classical genres into the *genus universale* celebrated in Friedrich Schlegel’s *Dialogue on the novel*. In either mixture, what comes into prominence is the fragment. The preponderance of deliberately or inadvertently unfinished texts during this period is the formal corollary of certain themes: the feeling of estrangement from – among other things – the wholeness of the Classical outlook, together with the feeling that language can exist at best only in a synecdochic relation to the infinite, like Coleridge’s ‘symbol’, and at worst only as a scrap or shard the very inadequacy of which proclaims the infinite as absence. The last word, then, to which I have already alluded, may be given to Blake. When Wordsworth wrote of how ‘exquisitely the individual Mind / . . . To the external World / Is fitted’, and vice versa, Blake responded, in his famous marginalium, ‘You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted I know better & Please your Lordship’ (*Poetry and prose*, p. 656). In Blake’s eyes Wordsworth’s naturalism makes a classicist of him, and aligns his view of mind and world to the aristocratic habits of perception that had for so long claimed the harmoniousness of classical study as a private fiefdom. A glance at Wordsworth’s Preface alone, where aristocratic habits of diction are rejected, and where even Aristotle is treated as a stranger, may convince us that Blake is wrong. But the example shows perhaps as clearly as any the distance that Romanticism has travelled from Classical standards.