

The Life Within

Reflections on Romanticism

Copyright A. S. Kline © 2018 All Rights Reserved.

This work may be freely reproduced, stored, and transmitted, electronically or otherwise, for any non-commercial purpose.

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Mind and Materialism.....	6
2. The Sovereign Self.....	10
3. The Shaping Imagination.....	13
4. Living Nature	17
5. The Restless Spirit	21
6. The Poet as Hero	24
7. The Romantic legacy	26

Introduction

This essay is a brief foray into the notion of the term Romanticism as applied to English poetry. It can also be read as an attempt to survey some of the features common to the major English poets involved; Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge of the older generation, Byron, Shelley and Keats of the younger. The two main exponents of Romanticism in Germany and France, namely Goethe and Chateaubriand, are also considered. The older generation of poets, living longer, spanned the Romantic period with their mature writing, roughly from around 1774 to 1824. The younger poets were active within that period from around 1812 to the early 1820's, the whole movement, in poetry at least, being over in about fifty years, though its main elements continued to influence European poetry throughout the succeeding periods, and into the twenty-first century.

Though the applicability and consistency of the terms Enlightenment and Romanticism have been called into question, there are sufficient common characteristics to render both useful, as long as it is appreciated that there is a wide variation of beliefs and practices among the main representatives of both movements. The Romantic writers however can be seen as a Counter-Enlightenment group, who rejected the direction of the Enlightenment in its excessive pursuit of reason, science and materialist production, while paradoxically supporting its attempts to alter the social order in favour of individual freedom, and natural justice. The latter support was aimed at reform or elimination of traditional sources of power, including in some cases that of orthodox religion. However antipathy to the violence and failures of the French Revolution generally diverted their energies into more personal and apolitical channels.

Despite the description of the Romantic writers as members of a movement, there is nevertheless a wide variation in political and religious views amongst them, and since individuality was a keynote of their creativity, it is not surprising that exceptions can be found to almost every statement about them as a group. A movement that contains within it the later 'Classical' Goethe; the religiously unorthodox Blake; the Catholic and monarchist Chateaubriand; the pantheist Wordsworth; the quasi-atheist Shelley; and the worldly ironist Byron, is hardly unified. Each writer exhibits some or all of the key characteristics to be described, but not necessarily at all stages of their careers. Goethe, renouncing his early novel 'The Sorrows of Young Werther', considered Romanticism as diseased rather than healthy, while the second, more classically oriented, part of 'Faust' counter-

balances the first. Byron, while employing all the trappings of Romanticism when young, ends his career with 'Don Juan', almost an ironic satire on the Romantic ethos.

This brief essay is not a detailed analysis of Romanticism, or of the poets, or of their poetry, but a personal response to a complex group of writers, which may prompt ideas about the general direction of intellectual thought during and since that period. The Counter-Enlightenment does not appear to have ended yet, and while the early twenty-first century may be seen as continuing the progression of Enlightenment ideas throughout secular society and within intellectual discourse, it also contains many elements of the Counter-Enlightenment in the continued adherence to religious beliefs; the emotional rather than scientific aspects of the environmentalist movement; a degree of public resistance to use of the scientific method and an inadequate comprehension of science, though not, in the main, to its associated technologies; concern at excessive industrialisation and urbanisation, coupled with resistance to the implementation of a 'machine' culture; and a corresponding emphasis on the personal and emotional in the arts.

English and American poetry in the early twenty-first century, in particular, seems dominated by descriptive and autobiographical elements, often tinged with nostalgia, and a sense of the passing of the concept of a personal god, rather than by keen intellectual thought and passion; by a more impersonal but more intense analysis of the age; and by universal themes. Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment may therefore be seen as enduring aspects of the modern world, with poetry reflecting many aspects of the Counter-Enlightenment, but in a manner that sees it somewhat disregarded as a source of intellectual ideas, and substantially excluded from the role of social and moral legislator that Shelley claimed for it in his 'Defence of Poetry'.

1. Mind and Materialism

The source of the Romantic movement first appears as a vigorous response by a younger generation to the direction of travel of their age, with its encroaching materialism, which arises from frustration with the fundamental approach of the Enlightenment, namely that the universe is susceptible to rational analysis, and that the fruits of that analysis can satisfy the human need for knowledge and truth, and thereby all other human needs. The Romantic response is inspired intellectually by Kant's re-orientation of philosophy with his critique of the powers of the rational mind (developing or often countering ideas from Descartes, Berkeley, Locke, Hume, and leading to the school of German Idealism).

Kant argued that the mind creates the structure of experience, while even space and time, as the mind knows them, are aspects of thought, the universe existing 'in-itself', independent of human concept. That critique of reason becomes in the arts a critique of established patterns of creation, their formal modes, their content, and the ways of life of their practitioners. It advocates instead new, imaginative and individualistic methods of creation, fresh or vigorously revived forms, meaningful content, and altered attitudes to creativity and life itself. It demands indeed a 'lived' art, the dedication, even sacrifice, of the artist to the act of pure creation, and the integrity of the self as above that of state, social order, and even objective knowledge.

The process involved is painful, demanding, and leads to personal disruption and anguish, an anguish which is present in their most significant works, crucial to their lives, and which in the case of the longer-lived poets must be resisted and eased, or treated with irony, in order to achieve personal resolution and tranquility. Examples of this are the later Classical Goethe; Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquility'; Coleridge's retreat into minor philosophy and Christian teaching; Chateaubriand's *Memoirs* that seek to capture time while bemoaning its passing; and Byron's playful and ironic 'Don Juan'.

The movement's forerunner in England is, decidedly, William Blake, whose individualistic and passionately religious psyche rejects wholesale a universe dominated by Newton's physics (the science developed out of, and advancing beyond, Copernican astronomy and Galilean mechanics); a society enslaved by industrial production and commerce (Wordsworth's 'in getting and spending we lay waste our powers'); a materialist understanding of nature; and a social structure dependent on the exercise of autocratic power by priests, monarchs and all the agents of de-spiritualised control.

Blake's 'Satanic mills' are the mills of pure reason. His 'tyger, burning bright' is the individual and uncontrolled spirit imbued with the divine presence,

which is not necessarily conformable to the accepted moral or 'civilised' view. His celebration of imaginative creation, individual thought, visionary experience, and of a spiritual source of human mental energies beyond the understanding of the science of his age, sets the tone for English poetry, and his long life spans the English Romantic period.

This anti-materialist reaction of the late eighteenth century, while being to a large degree anti-rational and anti-Enlightenment, is also symptomatic of the internal decay of institutionalised religion, which came under heavy and highly-articulate assault from the likes of Paine's 'Age of Reason'. Its guide and hero, as in Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', is Rousseau and not Voltaire. Rousseau seeing in cultures termed 'uncivilised' a source of health-giving natural energy. In many respects therefore the Romantic Movement is a reaction against received Classicism, opposed to any pre-determined wisdom (Blake cries 'Drive your cart and your plough over the bones of the dead!')

Traditional authority, weakened by Enlightenment thinking, receives a cataclysmic shock in the form of the French Revolution, which at its inception, though not perhaps in its ultimate progress, overturns the accepted power networks and destroys the shibboleths of previous ages. Classicism, having been formalised to the point where nothing new emerges, requires a fresh invigoration, a new interpretation, lived through the flesh and truly absorbed by the mind. Indeed, Greek and Roman Classicism does re-awaken in Shelley, Keats and others, who breathe new meaning into its moribund frame, and extract a final sweetness from its imaginative concepts, its literary and mythological conceits, though without ever offering it as a meaningful framework for belief.

That Blake's religious response equally fails to win the day, is not merely because of the idiosyncratic nature of his Christian interpretation, and the obscure nature of his later prophetic books with their invented pseudo-mythological framework and personalised psychic forces, but because of a deeper questioning within the sphere of intellectual thought of the Christian myth, its institutionalised representation, and its wider consequences. The Enlightenment penetrates to that extent, and cannot be ignored by the Romantic writers.

Religion becomes a strange form of literary pantheism in Goethe and Wordsworth, is largely an irrelevance to Byron and Keats, while it turns to a massive scepticism, if not genuine atheism, in the works of Shelley. Only in Chateaubriand and Coleridge, and to some extent the later Wordsworth, does it manifest itself as a fairly traditional piety, though infused with a deeper humanism. Religion appears intellectually as a dead-end, while Romanticism largely paves the way for Baudelaire's irreligious modernity which rises, if it can be said to rise, from Romanticism's ashes. Nevertheless Blake's is a wholly consistent, and potent, reaction to the Enlightenment, and it is simply the failure of the religious

argument (even in the hands of Kant) to convince the intellects of the future which guarantees that Shelley, rather than Blake, represents perhaps the more vital and long-lived core of the Romantic literary movement.

What is common to all the Romantics, at least in their youth (Goethe and Chateaubriand, Coleridge and Wordsworth become more conservative as they age, while Shelley and Keats die young) is a search for the 'lost spirit' of humankind, a mistrust of the rational programme, and a longing for something more than the offerings of materialism in all its aspects; as science, as production, as the mundane reality. Time and space are mentally conceived realms, following Kant's proposal, in which vision, dream, imaginative constructs, and even Baudelairean 'artificial paradises' may be brought into existence by the artist.

That they are conceived by the lone human mind guarantees that they require enormous effort to maintain, are intrinsically fragile and destructible, have no external authority for their existence beyond the creative individual and like-minded individuals, and that their creation and maintenance may ultimately lead the individual artist to crash and burn. Romanticism is therefore unlike literary Classicism which depended on at minimum a mythology, a social order, and received religion, derived from Greece, and later Rome, and refined by Christianity, woven living into the fabric of society, a Classicism which the Romantics are forced to reach out for and lean on for support, even as they attempt to transcend its constraints.

Time and Space, in order to be saved from materialism, need to be vivified, to be brought alive, with significant infusions of spiritual energy, by the creative artist, and by the human being devoid of conventional props. This is especially the case as the Romantic and ultimately Modernist impetus deepens. The older writers may be seen to hold on to, or retreat to, modified forms of religion (Blake and Chateaubriand, Goethe, Wordsworth and Coleridge) as an essential escape from the Enlightenment and the consequences of Romanticism, but they in their youth, and then a succeeding short-lived generation, lay the groundwork for modernity in questioning the basis for human existence and the contemporary social order.

The irony of Romanticism (and this is a crucial point) is that the Romantics seek to transcend the past, yet at the same time, given the Herculean effort involved, and the mental anguish caused, are forced to seek relief in many aspects of that past, even in the form of Enlightenment-led social change, in order to sustain their art and lives. There are therefore many unresolved mental conflicts between the eternal and the transient (as in Shelley's 'Adonais', and Keats' 'Nightingale' and 'Grecian Urn' odes); between self and the received moral order (as in Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner', and Byron's 'Manfred'); between Christianity and paganism (as in Chateaubriand's American romances, *Atala* and *René*); between living Christianity and the orthodoxy (as Blake's 'Jesus, the

eternal human', contrasts with his 'Jehovah'), and between science and anti-science (as in Shelley's personal conflict between his Enlightenment mind and his Romantic heart).

Anti-materialism, with the anguish it causes the human psyche (as pure resistance must always be accompanied by anguish), leads directly to a desire and impulse for flight, a longing for escape from the narrow material world into beauty, love, death, trance, the new, anything beyond the world. This is the impulse behind Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', and his 'Odes'; behind the visionary dream of Coleridge in 'Kubla Khan'; behind Shelley's long poem, seminal to his later work, 'Alastor'. The vision is in general pre-industrial, pre-commercial, pre-enlightenment (following Rousseau's lead), divorced from scientific rationalism, and radically anti-classical (in the sense that while the forms and allusions may be pseudo-classical, the internal anguish and longing is far from Roman stoicism or Greek harmony).

There is a deep anxiety at the heart of Romanticism (akin to those disturbing moments of occasional turmoil or disharmony in Mozart's music) a reminder that 'Et in Arcadia Ego': I too, (Mortality), am present in Arcady'. It is itself an assertion by the Romantic artists that transience, death, conflict, the universe itself are not fully explicable rationally, while love, beauty, and even truth may seem at times to them simply aspects of human thought and emotion, or at worst mere artefacts of human creation. The danger for the Romantics is that they may long for, meet with, yet be abandoned by 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', the dark force within the bright frame; that the 'Triumph of Life' is rather a 'Triumph of Death'; that 'Alastor' is both the archetype and destiny of the Romantic mind.

What if the Ancient Mariner finds no redemption, and must carry the albatross round his neck forever? What if Greek freedom and independence is doomed to die in the wasteland of Missolonghi? What if the apparent tranquility of a mature Goethe, a Wordsworth, or a Coleridge is mere sham or, at best, a falsification of reality? What if all gods are dying, and religion a long drawn-out error, not in its moral effects perhaps, but in its theological core? What if the facts, the reality, the truth of our existence are intrinsically inimical to us? Where, then, is there any authority? How will we save ourselves from Pascal's infinite spaces that terrify or, at best, present an inhuman mindless face to us, an emptiness of meaning that equates, in the human mind, to the void? How will we endure eternity as a species? How will we create a social order that offers us a humane recourse and not merely endlessly conflicting means that thwart and corrupt the desired ends (given that the divine power 'made irreconcilable good and the means of good', as Shelley says)? Anti-materialism implies the ever-present anguish of materialism, and Romanticism anticipates Existentialism as well as Modernity.

Thus the core of the Romantic Movement whether directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, calls in question the fundamental meaning of human existence, and displays anxiety at the possible lack of external meaning, ('Then, what is Life,' cries Shelley, already on the path towards Modernity, and at the logical end of his own literary career). It calls in question all religion; the place of humankind in nature; the value of the imagination and the human spirit; the creative powers; the aspirations of the Enlightenment; the achievements of Classicism.

The Romantic Movement therefore cannot be understood in isolation from the experience and reality of anguish, angst, anxiety, even despair (as in Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner'), it cannot be understood, for example as Goethe or Wordsworth in later life would have us understand it, in tranquility, and as a deistic or pantheistic calm where the darkness is ignored in order to pursue the light, regardless of intellectual rigour; where the concept of deity is maintained as some kind of nebulous force inspiring the universe. In fact the very opposite is true; it can only be understood in anguish, by being lived.

2. The Sovereign Self

The analysis and critique of mind, that begins in England with Locke, and is continued by Hume and Kant's critique, realising as he claimed a 'Copernican Revolution' in metaphysics, provided the impetus, as has been said, for the Romantic Movement. The search for a solid basis for human experience, famously sought by Descartes, ends for Kant in an acceptance of the interrelationship between the external universe of 'things-in-themselves' and the internal universe of human perception and thought. The immediate result is that literary thought turns away from the given, and supposedly pre-existing, absoluteness of scientific truth or religion, and towards the world of the inner self, where authority and inspiration is sought for a fresh intellectual exploration of the universe, a wholesale revision of the social order, and a more complex and individualistic basis for morality.

If reliance cannot be placed on the accepted social framework, on inherited beliefs, or the universal validity of the deductions of pure reason, then the individual mind, granted a new and superior status, must look to its own fundamental integrity as an arbiter of all things. Coleridge's great ode 'Dejection' states: 'I may not hope from outward forms to win the passion and the life, whose fountains are within.' Keats says in one of his letters: 'I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination.' Goethe creates 'Werther', Chateaubriand invents 'René', and Byron his 'Childe Harold',

all as expressions of their authors own individual emotions and thoughts, and as an external embodiment of this new reliance on the experience and perceptions of the solitary self. Shelley's 'Alastor' is a similar representation of the lone poet, while the lone figure of Wordsworth roams the English Lakeland in his poems, and Coleridge sends his Ancient Mariner sailing to unknown seas. Blake's representation of the individual human even flowers into a many-peopled invented mythology, in his Prophetic Books, the characters of which are facets or states of the human imagination, and therefore his own mind, which he sees as embodying the divine mind.

This concept of the individual self, ranged against the backdrop of the external universe, must in its purest implementation derive its sole authority from that same internal self. So Goethe's 'Faust Part I'; Shelley's protagonists; Keats self-projection in the 'Odes'; and Byron's as the 'superfluous human being' Childe Harold, seem to hang above a universal void, wholly empty in that it is free of intent and therefore meaning, though filled with Nature and matter. The only recourse, other than the individual self, for the Romantics, is a residual adherence to religion. Wordsworth's and Goethe's Pantheistic and individualistic 'creeds'; Coleridge's 'redemption' of the Ancient Mariner; and the firm and enduring faith of Chateaubriand are examples of how Romanticism unable to fully digest and assimilate the Enlightenment reacts against it by holding to the basic tenets or extensions of an intellectually doomed Christian theology, and the inherited ethical framework. Amongst these 'religious' solutions are Blake's unique interpretation of Christianity involving Neo-Platonist and Manichean accretions ('All things are comprehended in their eternal forms in the divine body of the saviour, the true vine of eternity, the human imagination.');

Wordsworth's infusion of deity into all things ('a motion and a spirit' a something 'far more deeply interfused'); and Goethe's theatrical, but morally and theologically unconvincing, ending to the second part of 'Faust'.

For the individual, reliant on the self, autobiography now becomes an important component of art. Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' mirrors his later anguished voyage to Malta in 1804, while his notebooks, valuable records of the Romantic mind, are a constant reflection on his own internal being. His other great poems, 'Kubla Khan', 'Frost at Midnight', and 'Dejection', all involve self-reflection and self-projection. Byron's 'Childe Harold', is his own self-exiled alter-ego. Wordsworth in his poems set in Lakeland, and in the 'Prelude', promotes himself as his own hero. Keats' voice is the narrative voice of the 'Odes', and his letters are a vital record of his mind and art. Goethe's 'Werther' is an aspect of his own early self, which he later regretted exhibiting in such a way, while 'Faust' enables him to work his way through Romanticism to Classicism. Chateaubriand's 'René' is a projection of his own self in America. And Shelley is everywhere in his

poems, either speaking in the first person as narrator or as the source of thought and emotion, or embodied in his various protagonists. It is Shelley's 'Prince Athanase' who springs to mind as a symbol of the solitary independent self, and a vital echo of Shelley himself, or at least the person he aspired to be ('His soul had wedded wisdom, and her dower is love and justice, clothed in which he sate, apart from men as in a lonely tower, pitying the tumult of their dark estate').

For those devoid of support from society or a personal god, the Romantic persona involves a search for identity, either alone in imagination as the 'Ancient Mariner', 'Athanase', 'Alastor', or 'Childe Harold' perform it; or in company in the real world with other like-minded individuals as Coleridge and Southey attempted with their unrealised utopian scheme of Pantisocracy; as the Lake School of Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge and others temporarily achieved; as Byron, Shelley and their friends created in Switzerland and Italy; as Keats and his friends realised in Hampstead; as Blake and his artist friends, the Ancients, benefited from in London and Shoreham. Friendship is therefore a key component of the worlds of all the Romantic poets, offsetting the loneliness of the individual self.

Against the backcloth of the given social order, the Romantics, certainly when young, appear as if on a spiritual quest, as the Beat poets appear in the twentieth century, searching for individual but universal solutions among the range of inherited paths, or attempting to forge new ones. In almost every case a shifting panoply of beliefs is exhibited, as we catch the poets, individually, moving from and towards traditional religious and philosophical views: deism and pantheism, scepticism and agnosticism, and even the eighteenth and early nineteenth century version of atheism (something less than the abolition of all gods and deistic interpretations, but equally a denial of all current orthodoxies). Likewise there is a shifting moral and political focus. In Blake, Shelley and Byron there is conscious opposition to current social and moral norms (for example Blake's views on sexual behaviour). In Goethe (promiscuous seduction), Wordsworth (incest and seduction) and Coleridge (opiates) personal behaviours are a covert subversion of the norms, later to be concealed behind their respectable literary personas. Though, espousal of the French revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity swiftly turns to revulsion at its misuse of means.

This is a world in flux, and the poets, who are observers and participants, out of tune with the social order, searching to find their bearings, lacking specific programmes of social change, prove limited in their attitudes to social and political action. Shelley and Byron are perhaps closest to being political voices, but in an individualistic way, and without truly participating in any active mission. By that I suggest that Shelley's radical, occasionally anarchic views, and Byron's involvement in the Greek struggle for independence, are approached much more

from the point of view of personal feeling, the need for inner release, than from any focused attempt at reform. This is not to descry the validity of their moral feelings; their reaction to issues of liberty, corruption, and oppression; or their revulsion from the abuses and misuses of power, but rather to explain the direction of their energies.

The Romantic Movement is indeed all about personal feelings and emotions, often divorced from or contrary to social expectations. Intensity of emotion is more important than clarity of analysis, the self is more vital than the crowd. An almost 'aristocratic' self-validation outweighs common empathy (despite appearances, as in Wordsworth for example, where the pseudo-biographical *Prelude* though presenting its author as in sympathy with the natural and human worlds of the ordinary and commonplace, can be seen as one long egoistic progress, illuminated by visits from the greater pantheistic power that elevates the world and Wordsworth seemingly with it). This is not to wholly condemn the poets, or invalidate their approach, simply to explain their often obsessive self-preoccupation, which is sometimes not uninvolved with their own fame and external image.

The Romantic age is an age of self-definition across Europe. Goethe, Chateaubriand and Byron become cultural representatives of their generations, thereby achieving European fame if not notoriety. Of their own influence, all three are aware. Goethe, as has been said, later condemns the effects of his early work, his 'Sorrows of Young Werther', which spawned an imitative and suicidal group of followers. Chateaubriand savours his renown, but also places it in historical context by means of his *Memoirs* which cover a long and varied life. Byron simply seeks to exploit or evade his, seemingly despising the literary world and fame itself and, out of sheer ennui perhaps, defining his last year by action rather than words (somewhat akin to Rimbaud's abnegation of literature and contemporary French civilisation) in the fighting, or rather the preparation for war, in Greece.

3. The Shaping Imagination

Central to Blake's thought is the power of the mind in its imaginative and visionary aspects. (For example: 'I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create'; 'Man is all imagination, and God is man and exists in us, and we in him. The eternal body of man is the imagination, and that is God himself'; 'What is now proved was once only imagined'; 'The imagination is not a state: it is the human existence itself'; 'Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a shadow.') That same faith in the imagination is present in all the Romantic

creators, in one form or another. It leads to a focus on the imaginative self which can be fascinating and revealing as in the case of the young Coleridge, or somewhat egotistical as in the case of Goethe and Wordsworth, or worldly and ironic as in the case of Byron, or saddening but inspiring as in the case of Keats, or intense, visionary and apocalyptic as in that of Shelley.

Coleridge, in 'Dejection', bemoans the momentary suspension of 'my shaping spirit of imagination.' Keats in his letters claims that: 'Whatever the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not.' And again he says: 'The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth.' Shelley in the 'Defence of Poetry' says: 'Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.' Imagination may be used to escape or transform the human by identification with the personified non-human, for example Keats and his nightingale, or Grecian urn; Shelley and his skylark, or his west wind; or it may be used to reinforce the sacredness of the individual imagination which is to be defended against the corruptions of materialism, as Byron's 'Manfred' resists; or embodied in the human consciousness, as Blake's 'Los', in his prophetic book 'Jerusalem', represents the divine imagination in the 'fallen' material world, where it must engender its own system, based on creativity, rather than be enslaved to another's.

The exercise of imagination is therefore seen as crucial to being a thinking being, and though Blake seemingly denies that imaginative power also to Newtonian science, Goethe, Shelley and others do not. In the Romantics, the imaginative powers are Platonic, in conceiving ideas and ideals beyond the mundane, yet also Aristotelian in being inspired by the natural world. Though religion tends to see imagination as an aspect of the divine working in the human soul, and it is so invoked in the works of Blake, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Coleridge and Wordsworth of the older generation, the younger generation of Byron, Shelley, and Keats reveal a more autonomous view of imagination as a feature of the human mind, irrespective of any divine powers.

Shelley addressing 'Mont Blanc', a symbol of the abiding power or strength of things, standing beyond the transient and perishing, nevertheless says: 'And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, if to the human mind's imaginings silence and solitude were vacancy?' apparently conceding to imagination a power (the thought is derived in part from Berkeley, Locke, Hume and Kant) which does not enable the divine in the fallen world in the manner of Blake, or create a path of identification or escape in the manner of Keats, but is in fact the power of generating, and projecting onto the universe, meaning and purpose, and therefore its essential reality as far as human existence is concerned.

Paradoxically the exercise of imagination, which seeks to achieve the new, is frequently stimulated here by the received tradition, by directions previously taken and then neglected or abandoned. So Blake is energised by the Neo-platonic writers, such as Plotinus; Shelly and Keats, as has been said, find content and structure by revisiting the Greek and Roman classics; Goethe too seeks in Italy a corrective to the northern intellectual climate of his youth; Byron is inspired by ancient Greece, by the Middle East; Chateaubriand ranges history to inform his own Italian and Eastern travels, and his Memoirs; while Goethe, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats turn also to the ballad and folk traditions.

In an age of confusion, demanding, as has been said, self-reliance and self-exploration, the historic backcloth and the works of previous creators are still a source of sustenance and a framework against which the new can be developed and tested. Moreover explicitly non-Christian elements provide symbolic alternatives at a time when orthodox religion is significantly weakened, since, while quasi-religious or at least spiritual in form, they are not so suggestive of Christian thought and ethics that they constrain the writer and thinker excessively. Art needs content and Romanticism has a significant dependence on the matter of Classicism, while nevertheless occupying anti-classical mental states. The effect of this is to create a Romantic Classicism, a Greece and a Rome seen through the lens of history, and imbued with emotional aspects not typical of the ancient classics; or seen from a contemporary perspective. Rather as the Pre-Raphaelite painters create a Medieval world far distant from the raw and robust medieval reality, a world which is a dream-state of the Victorian mind, so the Romantic poets and prose writers create a Classical world of their imagination, the past used as a resource to nourish the present.

Thus, while there is an intense and varied expression of originality: one thinks of Blake's 'Prophetic Books', the evolved structure of Goethe's 'Faust', Chateaubriand's 'American' narratives, Wordsworth's autobiographical 'Prelude', Coleridge's dream-poem 'Kubla Khan', and Byron's medley of Romantic and non-Romantic elements in 'Don Juan'; there is also a considered re-working and re-creation of old forms: and here one thinks of Coleridge's ballad of the Ancient Mariner, Shelley's and Keats' transformation of the ode form, Byron's and Shelley's revisiting of Greek verse drama, Goethe's folk-themed verses and classical elegies and epigrams. Rather like Dante's peopling of his 'Commedia' with co-existent mythological, biblical, historic and contemporary characters in one resonant Christian, and eternal, moment of being, so the Romantic movement blends classical and folk past with Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment thought and imagery to allow the free exercise of the imagination. Romanticism while, therefore, aspiring to creation from nothingness, is never wholly original in

its content. It casts a fresh eye on the creations and human mythologies of the past, while still being inspired by the past in truly original ways.

What counts is the personal voice. There is no mistaking the individuality of the major Romantic writers. While Wordsworth starts from Nature and the people of Lakeland, Coleridge begins from inwardness and dream, Byron from an eighteenth century vigour and wit blended with personal sensitivity and a sense of rejection. Where Blake is all religious vision Keats toys with a deep sense of limitation, with transience, and with the intimations of death. Where Goethe and Chateaubriand look outward and backward to a wider culture, the English Romantics look inward to states of being, metaphysical questioning, and the ethical basis of social order, but with varied approaches and often conflicting conclusions.

Where originality is at its most intense, where the longing for escape, release or resolution is strongest, the Romantics strain to create quasi-magical states, non-human presences and powers, presaging Baudelaire's modernist thoughts regarding 'artificial paradises' and Rimbaud's trancelike 'seasons' with their alchemical flavour and derangements of the senses. 'Kubla Khan', with its 'romantic chasm' is conceived from a dream-state likely fuelled by Coleridge's use of opiates (though it is a highly articulate creation, and not for a moment a chaotic piece of automatic writing). Its protagonist aspires to drink 'the milk of paradise'. Keats' nightingale in its ecstatic state flits among faery leaves through strange vales or sings by the 'foam of perilous seas' on the borders of sleep, dream and waking vision. Blake's quasi-mythological personages are more real and vital to him than the conventional universe ('To me this world is all one continued vision of fancy or imagination.'). Shelley's Ravine of Arve in 'Mont Blanc' and the mountain itself seem more than symbols, they are embodiments, and his Intellectual Beauty is not merely a mental concept but a 'shadow of some unseen power' as Dante (whom Shelley read and translated) conceived 'Beatrice', in the Paradiso of his 'Divine Comedy', as a like embodiment.

Through intensity of emotion and thought, through visionary imagination, through creative energy, the Romantic spirit endeavours to express passion and longing, to grasp the elusive secrets of existence, to extol, create or re-create the paradise that the decay of religion, the critique of mind, and the materialist age, have seemingly destroyed or at best eclipsed. For the older generation forms of natural and religious feeling, whether orthodox, or pantheistic, or visionary, provide solace. For the younger generation, there is a sense that the striving is often a desperate reaching out for the inaccessible and unachievable, in a discourse with the reverse side of nature, its impermanence, fluidity, intentionless ambivalence. Keats contrasts the enduring and the fleeting; Shelley has his vision of the 'Triumph of Life', an overriding Nature that carries all things along in its flood, a revisited Ravine of Arve but without Mont Blanc's strong presence.

And Byron, Shelley, and Keats all die young, before the subtle conservatisms of age can overcome them. There is always, with them, a deep uncertainty. Is the vision mere dream, is the Blakean imaginative human and divine energy insufficient, is the ultimate mental state of insight and ecstatic joy always doomed to revert to a cold reality? 'If a man could pass through paradise in a dream, 'writes Coleridge in his notebook, 'and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awake – Aye! and what then?'

4. Living Nature

The role of Nature in the works and thought of all the Romantic poets is both primal and intense; and when writing of nature they all opt for some form of pantheistic approach, by which either a traditional deity or some power or force, either an unnamed prime mover or indwelling spirit with the attributes of love, beauty or truth (as in Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Adonais', Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', and Keats' Odes) is infused with, interpenetrates, and is identified with the natural world and the human soul or spirit. This is an understandable reaction to the valid threat posed by the full consequences of Enlightenment thought. The universe there operates purely as a Newtonian material manifold: from the atheist perspective, without deity or immaterial spirit; or, in accord with the Deist position, with a deity so absent that, once created, the universe had been left to continue without intervention of any kind.

There is therefore, in the poets (excluding Blake who simply denies that the material world is other than a divine incarnation and affirms it therefore as essentially non-material), both an internal and an external poetic response to the materialistic threat. The internal response is a dependence on nature as a resource and recourse beyond the individual, as in Wordsworth's 'Prelude', or Goethe's 'Faust'; one which eases the pain and suffering of life, stimulates the aesthetic sense, provides a kind of moral guidance, and substitutes for a lost or fading personal god. The external response is an identification of, and celebration of those living elements of nature that support the pantheistic view. This latter leads often to a personalisation of natural forms or beings, and to the sympathetic fallacy of believing nature possessed of intention, either as a force for good or a force for evil; representing perpetual creation and creativity, or perpetual destruction and annihilation.

It can be argued that Shelley's skylark and west wind; Keats' nightingale and Grecian urn; Wordsworth's Lakeland landscapes; are merely entities with attributes that seem to echo the poet's thoughts and emotions (and are therefore

objective correlatives, used in a form of mimesis). However the search for the spirit, that Romanticism represents, goes beyond the mere use of symbol and metaphor, and often represents the identification of the poet with the object or natural force. The poet becomes the object, as it were from the inside, which grants the poetry strength of representation and invocation it would otherwise lack, the process of identification being in part sub-conscious, and a question of feeling rather than articulate thought, though the Romantic poets are particularly good at channelling emotions and feelings within a semi-rational framework.

Nature is seen as living, though perhaps only Goethe and Coleridge, and to a lesser extent Shelley (the latter two poets being strongly influenced in turn by German thought) go as far as articulating Nature as process rather than matter, with matter representing only one aspect of forms in process, as in modern science; the physical fields and forces being another aspect. Goethe indeed set out, with only partial success, to provide a more holistic scientific view, especially in botany, optics and the theory of colour, though his views were not followed through in the English poets. They, in general, are content with a rather nebulous pantheistic understanding of Nature whereby spirit exists within Nature without our being able to articulate how or why. Nature simply remains the source of intense emotion, sublimity, beauty of form, awe, terror, apprehension, and reverence. It somehow embodies the divine spirit (or in Shelley the daemonic spirit) perhaps as an artefact of an absent god, perhaps as that god's invisible dwelling-place. Identifying Nature with spirit also leaves the problem of the role of human beings, who both embody spirit and are a part of Nature, but, especially in Shelley, can be seen as beings at odds with Nature, or at least organised in a social order which is in intense conflict with nature. Romanticism however does not offer, or set out to offer, a complete analysis of either Nature or humankind's relationship to it.

A deeper aspect of the question of spirit in nature is the problem of distinguishing the living from the non-living, or where the boundary of matter lies. Goethe handles this (amusingly) in the second part of 'Faust', where he portrays Homunculus, a spirit developed in a test-tube and therefore embodied in human form through alchemical process (deriving the idea from Paracelsus and others), while conversely Faust desires to become spirit and abandon material form. In the hands of Mary Shelley in her story 'Frankenstein' (the name of her fictional scientist) this becomes the creation of a creature from matter through deliberate experiment, and the unfolding of the (melodramatic) consequences.

In both cases these literary works utilise the idea without confronting it as a major philosophical issue. Coleridge, however, betrays a much deeper anxiety, and often ponders in his notebooks and elsewhere the boundary between the living and non-living. He appears to accept, at various times, that matter exists without being possessed of spirit. Consider for example his lines in 'Frost at Midnight', where the

motion of a film of ash fluttering on the fire-grate ‘gives it dim sympathies with me who live, making it a companionable form, whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit by its own moods interprets, everywhere echo or mirror seeking of itself.’ Here spirit seems embodied in humankind and not in matter, which may possess motion, inner or external process that provides an objective correlative to human thought and feeling, but as an echo or a reflection of thought. Coleridge here initiates the search of later poets for some response from the inanimate universe, though the issue is not followed through in the poem, which ends in a conventional pantheistic approach. Elsewhere in his notebooks and verse he watches a tiny cone of sand in its soundless dance, or notes how the eye follows the line of a mountain, or meditates on the motion of waves, making a conscious attempt to link mind and matter through process, without ever quite articulating the concept of process rather than matter as being at the root of existence.

Wordsworth also comes close occasionally to perceiving process as fundamental, but it is the form and function (repetitive and self-similar), the aspects of process which endure, that he is interested in (see ‘Valediction to the River Duddon’: ‘The form remains the function never dies’) rather than process itself as all in all. Coleridge, with his deeper anxiety, acquired from reading the English and German philosophers, expresses the issue most clearly and finely in ‘Dejection’, where a series of images of Nature in motion (clouds, winds, gliding stars, lingering sunset) only lead him to a conclusion that ‘in our life alone does nature live’ the fountains being ‘within’. The poem then suggests that the human soul itself must envelop the Earth and send out its own self-born music. The soul, but not it seems all of Nature, is here possessed of the divine presence, and Coleridge is moving towards a more conventional religious view and away from pantheism.

Nothing in the Romantic Movement (with its antithesis of the animate and inanimate, of matter and spirit, and its constant desire to vivify Nature, and show evidence of unseen, unknown spiritualised powers driving the universe) suggests that the Romantic poets ever adhered to the modern view of a universe of processes, intentionless and neutral as regards humankind, where the distinction between the inert and the living is a question of convention and definition, based on the form and complexity of the processes involved. And the Darwinian revolution with its concept of human beings as part of the natural continuum, with features derived from previous lineages, is as yet some way ahead of them.

Life, in such a view, is simply a term for beings which demonstrate various evolved characteristics such as invariant self-replication, autonomous growth and purposive behaviour. Such a modernist view is more akin to the original tenets of Buddhism and Taoism; the Tao being the universe as process, and its associated way of life being an adherence to Nature as a set of intentionless modes of being;

while Buddha was clear as to radical impermanence, that is the transient nature of all conventional forms, and their essential emptiness, that is purposelessness. Both systems of thought stress the way in which concepts are imposed by the human mind on Nature, and central to both is a universe filled with forms, experienced by us but intrinsically free of human or divine meaning and purpose, and therefore to be treated at the same moment as both full and empty, meaningful according to our impositions of meaning but also beyond and outside us, and therefore void.

This also corresponds closely to Kant's indication of a world-in-itself outside human concept, and a purposive world of self, created by the characteristics of the mind, or in modern terms the brain as an organ, both as information store and processing unit. The principle of objectivity, of an essentially intentionless universe, is the basis of science and the scientific method since Galileo and Descartes, and supports the conclusion that purposive behaviour is a result of certain processes of natural selection acting on a reproductively invariant form of existence.

The Romantic Movement as a whole, in its attitude to Nature, may therefore be seen as retrogressive, and in conflict in its very essence with the Enlightenment programme involving religion's decline as an intellectual explanation of human existence; with the scientific method; and paradoxically with the logical consequences of Kant's critique.

Conventional time and space, for the Romantics, are in no way simply created by the mind, even though they may seem to express that opinion. Even for Blake, where the world is reality in the human imagination, its reality is created by the divine spirit, and is therefore a reality at odds with Newtonian theory, the scientific project, and the atheist viewpoint. It is not strange that the Romantics' attempt to save appearances (or rather realise the significance of appearances to the human mind where they prompt delight in existence and form, as truth and beauty, a delight that in turn binds us to those appearances, as love) led them to nature poetry.

That poetry was created with love and intensity because the need to vivify nature and rescue it from the disaster (as they perceived it) of materialism, was profound, and their corresponding internal need for a dependable and eternal foundation for their values, for external validation, was equally profound. That they therefore failed to perceive the deeper nature of process; the objective structure and complexity of a human brain open to scientific study and exploration; the characteristics of mind which consists of processes of, and within, that brain; and the self-generated self-chosen characteristics of that mind's values and judgements, is not surprising. This invalidation of their response to the Enlightenment is not a condemnation, but is a recognition of their limitations, since it weakens their verse wherever it argues for the pantheistic solution; when Shelley

in 'Adonais' for example claims that Keats' voice is heard in all Nature's music; or when Keats identifies truth with beauty, though external fact often cannot be reconciled with aesthetics, and the presence of beauty of form in external objects simply reflects the fact that a human mind identified it or sought to place it there; or when Wordsworth waxing lyrical summons up his 'Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe' or his 'Soul, the Imagination of the whole' or forgetting, as Voltaire could not, the sometimes cruel and perverse workings of Nature, is 'well pleased to recognise in nature and the language of the sense, the anchor of my purest thought, the nurse, the guide, the guardian of my heart and soul, of all my moral being.'

Which again is not to say that we fail to find our concepts of love, truth and beauty exemplified, echoed, or mirrored in non-human nature, since they are partly derived through natural selection from our natural heritage, including the creatures that co-exist with us, but it is perhaps to gently accuse the Romantics of failing to apply their fine intellectual capabilities to the fundamental problems of pantheism; the problem of how to reconcile this mysterious invisible spirit of the universe with a scientific method based on reason and experimental truth that fails to show any evidence of such a spirit; the problem of suffering coupled with the concept of a beneficent power; and the lack of evidence for mind, and for any human values or purposes, in the non-living universe that exists beyond ourselves, the creatures, and any beings that may have been produced by natural selection on any other planets.

5. The Restless Spirit

Opposition to the tenets of the Enlightenment and the products of pure reason leads in the young Romantics to frustration with conventional learning and wisdom and the search for other sources of knowledge. Goethe sets the tone with the first part of 'Faust' where, having exhausted the conventional paths to understanding, his protagonist turns to the magical arts in order to achieve personal liberation and grasp the inner workings of living Nature. The frustration is felt as a real inner agony, and Faust now roams the world of action and emotion searching for deeper truth and purpose. This fundamental restlessness, this dissatisfaction, this inability, like Faust's, to 'grasp the moment and call it fair', is evident in all the writers, at least in their youth, arising initially as a discontent with the contemporary social order and its inherited values or lack of them, and then as a more profound unhappiness, prompted by the wider human condition of suffering, limitation, and transience (which was also, of course, the starting point for Buddha's clinical analysis of being).

This restlessness is mental more than physical, though physical journeys, travels and adventures are its counterparts in action. Even the most religious of the

writers, Blake and Wordsworth experience it, and satisfy their urges by creative journeying; Blake in his prophetic books, Wordsworth in his wandering over the Lakeland landscape, and to Switzerland and France. It leads in England to initial sympathies with the political turmoil of the French revolution, and subsequent disappointment at its violent outcome. It prompts Goethe to his 'Italian Journey' in search of the classical world; Chateaubriand to his travels in America, Italy, Greece and Palestine; Byron to his wanderings over Europe, and to Greece; Coleridge to his reading of travel books (prompting 'Kubla Khan' and the semi-magical realm of Xanadu) as well as his difficult trip to Malta (presaged by his 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'). It sees Shelley's sojourns in Switzerland and Italy, and his death off Lerici; and Keats' final journey to Rome. Of course, the reasons for many of these journeys were also external, prompted by self-imposed exile, illness or opportunity, but that is simply to say that circumstance shaped the writers, even as they sought some kind of resolution from circumstance.

The Romantic writers initiate a search for new knowledge, ideas, ideals, worlds, prompted by their frustration, though limited by their mistrust of pure reason and science, and by an inadequate analysis of their own motives and desires. Blake alone is satisfied by his own mental world, and finds a solution in his unorthodox religious view, an immanence of deity in the individual human mind, which fuses in some sense a personalised god with a ubiquitous divine presence in the universe as mental projection. This, although not exactly pantheism, yields similar effects in Blake's attitudes to nature and mental states.

But Goethe in 'Faust', and elsewhere, traces in a sense the archetypal journey that many of the poets undergo, involving love and beauty, woman and nature, a revived classicism, religious doubt or deeper scepticism, pantheistic religion, and a broad humanism directed towards the inadequate social order and the pitiful human condition. This journey is accompanied by various attempts to achieve in real or narrated action what is lacking in intellectual thought. It is not unreasonable to view it as an intrinsically doomed effort, performed at a point in time where deeper appreciation perhaps of the ways of thought of Buddhism and Taoism if the relevant texts had been better translated and more easily available, coupled with a more detailed, rational and critical approach to science, politics and the Enlightenment might have led to greater progress in understanding.

As it is the Romantic restlessness ends in the case of Byron, Shelley, and Keats in frustrated action and thought, and premature death; or in the case of Goethe, Chateaubriand, Wordsworth and Coleridge a personally interpreted Christian orthodoxy or Christianised pantheism. In the one case there is no solution to, or at best an open-ended emotional and intellectual analysis of, the enigmas of life; in the other case there is an emotionally satisfactory but intellectually inadequate resolution, through the recourse to religion. Baudelaire and Rimbaud,

the French modernist heirs to Romanticism, are the poets who first grasp fully the failure of the Romantics' quasi-magical voyage with its illusory islands; the difficulty of sustaining a pantheistic view of a Nature wholly divine and alive, against the encroachments of science; and the impossibility of maintaining artificial paradises for more than the creative instant. Baudelaire, recognising and embracing modernity, ends his poetic life in a frustration that heralds the intellectual death of religion and the end of the search for mental other-worlds, while Rimbaud renounces the whole literary and intellectual enterprise and vanishes into the rigours of a life of mundane action.

It is interesting and understandable, given the reaction to the Enlightenment and Kant's Critique, that truth as a value is talked of but little regarded by the Romantics. There is no ode to truth, or hymn to intellectual rigour; the focus is much more on a traverse of the emotions and feelings, on human affection, aesthetic beauty, and individualised liberty, whether present in humankind or seemingly inherent in Nature; and these are the aspects of Romanticism which best translate to modern experience and remain lasting values of the movement. On the contrary, we have Keats' unfortunate identification of beauty with truth, Shelley's hymn to intellectual beauty as a spiritual power, Wordsworth's endless identifications of wisdom with some loving guiding spirit permeating the world.

We have indeed anxiety, frustration, even despair; we have escape and flight, the wanderings of Alastor and the Mariner, and Childe Harold; we have invocation and prophetic urges; we have calm and resolution; we have a great deal of fine poetry, human virtue, individual suffering and churning of that past of which, Shelley claims, the world is weary. What we do not, and could not reasonably, have is a fully intellectual response to the world of modernity which is just a little too far ahead of the Romantics for them to grasp and address: even Baudelaire and Rimbaud still present a deeply emotional poetic response to the second enlightenment, that of applied science and analysis, in the nineteenth century, and are unable to advance beyond the fracturing of society and the loss of real relationship between humanity and nature, humanity and the universe, which they perceive around them.

The restless spirit of Romanticism brought a new inner mental fluidity, exemplified by the younger Coleridge, where Kant's emphasis on the inner brings into question the externality of all values. We are left with the longing for change (Baudelaire in 'The Voyage' pens it seems a commentary on Romanticism: 'But the true voyagers are those who leave only to move: hearts like balloons, as light, they never swerve from their destinies, and, without knowing why, say, always: 'Flight!'... 'Shall we go, or stay? Stay, if you can stay: Go, if you must.'). The Romantics were cursed with an infinite, indefinable, unappeasable yearning for unachievable goals, a craving for understanding even by means of arcane

knowledge, a demonstration of passionate self-assertion coupled with a deep desire for external validation and authentication. The characteristics of this restlessness are introspection, self-consciousness, inner transformation and a fluid transition through mental states. Poetry is in many respects a perfect vehicle for such characteristics and attitudes; emotion and description, character and narrative being easier to display poetically than intense intellectual thought and the exercise of pure reason. Baudelaire and Rimbaud, in particular, take Romantic restlessness to its inevitable conclusion.

6. The Poet as Hero

‘Make me they lyre, even as the forest is:’ cries Shelley, addressing the West Wind, ‘Be through my lips to un-awakened earth the trumpet of a prophecy!’ ‘Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world,’ he claims, in his ‘Defence of Poetry’; poetry having the power to set the moral and aesthetic stage for the ethical life focussed on love, truth and beauty. His statement, indeed, represents an attempt to portray the creative writer, the committed artist, as effectively a hero of modern life, a claim Baudelaire makes explicit, and later amplifies. Both Byron and Shelley were, for that reason, drawn to the mythological figure of the rebellious Prometheus, and Byron in particular celebrates him as ‘a symbol and a sign to mortals of their fate and force’ claiming that humanity, partly foreseeing its own destiny, may oppose its fate by means of the human spirit ‘and a firm will...triumphant where it dares defy, making death a victory.’ Blake, above all, demands of himself the creation of his own system rather than being enslaved by those of others. Throughout the Romantic Movement its practitioners present themselves as unique individuals, possessed of significant powers or at the least fulfilling the role of literary and intellectual representatives of their generation.

Among the older generation, Goethe’s prolific writings and self-presentation, are aimed at displaying his own mind and emotions as a theatre where the *Zeitgeist* operates. Chateaubriand produces his massive and magnificent ‘Memoirs’ to show all the facets of his own complex personality, in a manner which might seem egotistical if it were not that he presents, like Goethe, the reality of himself and his life as he perceives it, a presentation through which the charm of his honesty outweighs the role he tries to project for himself in history. Blake asserts his world-view in works that are deliberately arcane, demanding of any reader, and an expression of his unique and heroic selfhood. Wordsworth, though he visits Revolutionary France in his youth and does not display any specifically courageous traits there, perceives himself as the most important English poet of his generation and launches his autobiographical *Prelude* on the world, considering his

own inner mental workings and responses sufficiently enthralling to command an audience and confirm his superior powers. Goethe and Chateaubriand undertake foreign adventures, where neither is specifically heroic in action, although Chateaubriand participates in a battle and travels through some relatively wild places, yet both project themselves as undertaking an inner and outer exploration of themselves, and their place in their age, which is of vital importance. Only Byron attempts to strike a truly heroic attitude in action also, though there is a bathos involved in his futile attempts to support the Greek war of independence, and in his sad death, presumably of malaria, at Missolonghi.

It is as heroes of the inner world that the Romantic artists project themselves; creatures of suffering, of emotional response, of anxieties and longings. Shelley wanders heroically through mental realms, searching for love, truth and beauty, achieving rare moments of calm. Coleridge is his own 'Ancient Mariner', struggling more than heroically against the oppression of his opiates habit and his uncertainty as to his literary powers, fearful of failing to set the mark of his own eloquence and intellect on the literature and thought of his times. Keats fights against mortal illness, and (as expressed in 'La Belle Dame Merci', his 'Nightingale' and 'Grecian Urn' odes, and 'The Fall of Hyperion') his doubts as to the power of art and the human imagination to counter transience and suffering.

The Romantic writers perceive themselves (at various times, and not always consistently) as lonely heroes confronting and attempting to turn back the tide of their age. Despite early sympathy with the Enlightenment aims of changing the social order for the better, the poets struggle heroically to counter the influence of new scientific thinking, especially in its materialist Newtonian form; to understand the possibilities of human imagination in the form of art and poetry; and to proclaim imaginative art as a means of comprehending time and eternity, beauty and suffering, truth and illusion, love and despair, and thereby reconciling humanity to transience, pain, the dreamlike nature of our profoundest moments, and the vicissitudes of love.

Part of their heroism is in withstanding the ache of longing for the phantasmal and ambiguous object of love, whether Coleridge's 'Abyssinian Maid' in 'Kubla Khan', Wordsworth's 'Lucy', Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', or Alastor's 'veiled maid' in Shelley's poem; or in enduring the painful desire to grasp beauty, the ephemeral phantom, the dream of which is fragile and transient, the result of 'drinking the milk of Paradise'; or in catching at the non-human song of the nightingale or skylark, or perceiving the enduring loveliness of the spring or autumn seasons. A further part of their heroism, is in their handling of the search for the eternal and enduring, which is not to be found by the exercise of pure reason, but magically as in Goethe's 'Faust', and through invocation, incantation, and assertion as Shelley often attempts it, for example in his 'Ode to the West

Wind', in 'Adonais' and in the 'Chorus from Hellas', or through passionate identification as Keats' displays in his odes.

All too often, for the younger Romantics, the search is in vain, as in Shelley's sonnet 'Lift not the painted veil'. The dream fades, or dies away in a questioning return to reality, as at the end of Keats' 'Nightingale' ode. There are shadows of death and desolation, as well as gleams of delight in love and beauty, casting their gloom over the Romantic search. It proves questionable, as far as Romantic thought is concerned, as to whether it is possible to resist the Enlightenment (with its god removed to some far distance from humanity, beyond the machinery created; with its mobilisation of the non-individualised masses in politics and production; and with the higher values such as love, truth and beauty now dependent on the human mind) merely by poetic force, emotional responsiveness, sensitivity to Nature, and the invocation of unseen spirits from behind the veil.

The heroism then of creating resonant and appealing literary works, with strong form, and challenging content, in such an environment should not be underestimated. The older Romantics may have found ultimate calm in a final recourse to a cultivated classical past, the 'wisdom' of a long and fruitful life, or a personal and pantheistic interpretation of the Christian religion, but the younger poets rarely achieve that luxury. Byron begins and ends in a gentle, sometimes mocking, irony, finding in 'Don Juan' a temporary exit from his ennui and his longing for action not literature, yet irony fails to cloak his frustrated passions, many of which brought him a personal agony that he fails to wholly conceal. Coleridge finds a way to keep his opiate addiction under control, and ends in orthodox religion and philosophical musing, yet it is his earlier struggles and the wonderful poems of 1797/1798 and 1802, 'The Ancient Mariner', 'Kubla Khan', 'Frost at Midnight' and the 'Dejection Ode', along with his notebooks, his record of inner examination, emotional turmoil, and delicate and intricate perception, that are his lasting legacy. Keats achieves momentary calm in the exquisite capturing of natural beauty, yet it is his, and our, perception of the shadow of death, his own sadness at transience, and the torments and enigmas of the labyrinths of passion and thought, that echo from his greatest verse.

7. The Romantic legacy

The Romantic Movement creates beauty, yet leaves everything unresolved. It takes a Baudelaire and a Rimbaud to challenge the whole edifice, in further acts of literary heroism, before the, as yet still recurring, late nineteenth and twentieth century reversion to romanticism or religion. In the Victorians this reversion

appears as a return to religious orthodoxy; in Yeats as Irish historical and mythological romanticism; in Pound as a romanticisation of history and civilisation. In Eliot, Rilke, and also later twentieth century poets, it either appears as a re-assertion of religious or quasi-religious thought, or as the occupation of a wistful descriptive naturalistic poetic space where god is so far absent as to have little impact on humankind, even though the poet cannot actually let go of the religious. This latter perspective, a vague deism, is true even of Wallace Stevens, and of poets such as Snyder and Ginsberg. Though the latter poets' affiliation to religious thought is mainly influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, and does bring the original eastern atheistic analysis of existence into play, their poetry is also loosely cloaked in the trappings of later religiosity and of ritual.

Poetry, it seems, could well do with a new invocation of the Enlightenment, a re-dedication to rational truth and freedom, without relinquishing the dedication to love, beauty, and the natural world, represented by the counter-Enlightenment, and without underestimating the agonies of modernity that the Romantics and later the French Symbolists, the Existentialists and others articulated. Only by combining a dispassionate gaze at the truth of human existence, and the intentionless universe revealed by scientific thought, with the aspirations of the human mind, which is the source of all human values and meaning, can poetry of profound beauty, possessing the power and depth it was granted by Romanticism, but with the clarity of intellectual thought demanded by humanity free of religious thought and concepts, now be created. Such poetry would not be content to embrace modern existence with ironic complacency; or evoke past modes of thought or belief lacking current validity; or vanish into purely personal modes of expression or nostalgic reminiscence, however sensitively performed; or end in linguistic feats of description designed to appeal primarily to the senses, much as the Romantics attempted to breathe life into the inanimate. The creation of poetry encapsulating profound thought would not then be in decline, it would merely prove to have been diverted, for a while, from poetry's most vital aim, which is always to grasp the world in deep perception, and with intellectual force and rigour, and to communicate that perception, of the life within and the reality beyond, in living language.

The Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment (or their component elements if there is an objection to these all-encompassing names) continue to operate in the twenty-first century, as has been indicated above. The Enlightenment has progressed, in Western secular society, through its focus on social justice; in science and technology by means of an intensified deployment of the scientific method; and intellectually in the adoption of a humanistic atheism attuned to the assertion of human values from within. These values are derived from the evolved

human creature, and the inherited environment and culture, without the need for theistic concepts.

The Counter-Enlightenment has also progressed, following the Romantics' path, in its focus on the individual and personal; that is, on the interplay of human emotion and relationship; on the value of natural and aesthetic beauty; and on personal liberty and equality; whether seen as present only in humankind or seemingly inherent in Nature. The religious agenda of the Counter-Enlightenment has however understandably faded, with the increasing scope and depth of the evidence-based scientific programme. This is not to deny the substantial ongoing presence of religion in society, but simply to state that it lacks any corresponding intellectual power in the face of science and rational analysis.

There is indeed co-operation between both streams of thought, for example in the environmentalist view of Nature, where scientific study and science-based action is combined with an emotional commitment to the sacredness of the natural world, which asserts respect for the natural, alongside the equal value of all life. Likewise the importance of the individual has led to a view of the social order as inadequate, and unjust, if it fails to protect the assigned rights of individuals and minorities, or fails to balance the competing demands of various individuals and social groups.

In the above restricted sense, then, neither the Enlightenment nor the Counter-Enlightenment has won the day, and the legacy of Romanticism continues to be incorporated in the wider development of both streams of thought. Equally both streams are to be understood against the background of ongoing human issues and anxieties, to which neither in itself offers, or can offer, complete solutions. Such issues are the creation of values, purpose, and meaning; the problem of violence (mental and physical); the problem of suffering; our existential transience; the social and personal consequences of scientific and technological knowledge; and the inherent fragility of the planet and the human infrastructure. The Enlightenment, just as in the Romantics' day, needs the constant corrective of a Counter-Enlightenment freed from its religious pseudo-solutions. The difficult perception is that both intellectual streams are vital elements required for the future development of the human species.