...tion. You cannot now hold the world in darkness ... reforma- against increasing light and liberality. Restore to mankind their rights, and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together.

Thomas Warton (1728–1790)

...n was a man of taste and genius,' ...His sonnets I cannot help prefer- ...the language.'[1] Given the distin- ...tion of sonneteering in English ...embraced Surrey, Shakespeare, Daniel and Wyatt, to say nothing ...his own time, Hazlitt's endorse- ...may seem odd to us, if not down- ...ut it stands as a reminder of ...among the Romantics.

...mas Warton the elder (c.1688– ...Younger was to become one of ...ts and literary historians of his ...at Trinity College, Oxford, where ...Fellow and Tutor (1751 on- ...fessor of Poetry (1757–67), and ...fessor of History (1785). Though ...t Laureate in 1785 much of his ...y then behind him – and in many ...nduring achievement turned out to ...of Poetry (1774–81). Three vol- ...lished by the time he died, and ...of a fourth were printed during ...were not to be published until ...others in 1824. The History ...medieval and sixteenth-century poetry, and anticipated the Romantic movemen... in its shift away from the neo-classicism of earli... periods.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were not 21 at hi... death (Wordsworth was up at Cambridge, Coler- idge a schoolboy at Christ's Hospital in London), but they knew his poetry, and like many othe... young writers found their interest in the sonnet aroused by his efforts. They recognized the influ- ence of *To the River Lodon* on Bowles's *To the Itchin* and Smith's *To the River Arun* (see pp. 95–6), a tradition which would inform Coler- idge's *To the River Otter* (pp. 598–9) and Words- worth's address to the Derwent in the *Two-Part Prelude*.

Further reading

The Correspondence of Thomas Warton ed. David Fairer (Athens, Ga., 1995).

David Fairer, 'Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, and the Recovery of the Past', in *Thomas Gray: Contemporary Essays* ed. W. B. Hutchings and William Ruddick (Liverpool, 1993), pp. 146–70.

A. Harris Fairbanks, ' "Dear Native Brook": Coleridge, Bowles, and Thomas Warton the Younger', *TWC* 6 (1975) 313–15.

Ah! what a weary race my feet have run
  Since first I trod thy banks with alders crowned,
  And thought my way was all through fairy ground
  Beneath thy azure sky and golden sun,
Where first my muse to lisp her notes begun.[2] 5
  While pensive memory traces back the round
  Which fills the varied interval between,
  Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.
Sweet native stream, those skies and suns so pure
No more return to cheer my evening road; 10
  Yet still one joy remains – that not obscure,
Nor useless, all my vacant days have flowed,
  From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature,
  Nor with the muse's laurel[3] unbestowed.

Edmund Burke (1729–1797)

Burke founded modern Conservative thought in Britain, and has an important place in the intellectual history of Romanticism. He was raised in an atmosphere of religious tolerance – his father was a Protestant, his mother a Catholic. A native of Dublin, he was brought up as a Protestant and graduated from Trinity College (1747–8) before moving to London where he studied law at the Middle Temple in 1750. But he would never be called to the bar because literary work was always more to his taste than academic study.

He was only 19 when he composed one of his most influential and important works, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which explores the nature of 'negative' pleasures – the mixed experience of pleasure and pain, attraction and terror. Its central innovation was to question the classical ideal of clarity, arguing that vagueness and obscurity were more evocative of the unknown and the infinite. Fear (a desirable sensation for Burke) is diminished by knowledge, but heightened by veiled intimations – something he demonstrates by citing Milton's description of Death, where 'all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible and sublime to the last degree'. This was nothing less than a revolution in artistic and literary thought, and besides providing a licence for the popular cult of the Gothic would have a tremendous impact on the Romantic poets; see, for instance, Wordsworth's climbing of Snowdon (pp. 566–70), De Quincey's account of opium

Notes

TO THE RIVER LODON

[1] The River Loddon runs through Basingstoke, where Warton was born, and where his father was vicar and headmaster of the Grammar School.

[2] *Where first . . . begun* Warton lived in Basingstoke until 1744, when he matriculated at Trinity College, Oxford, and his earliest poems were composed there. His earliest known poem is *Birds Nesting in Dunsfold Orchard*, written when he was seven or eight.

[3] *muse's laurel* i.e. poetic fame. Warton was well established as a major poet by the time he became Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1757.

addiction (pp. 812–18), Byron's *Childe Harold* Canto III (pp. 852–87) and Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* (pp. 1071–3).

In 1765 Burke was appointed secretary to the Marquis of Rockingham, then Prime Minister, entering Parliament in the same year as MP for Wendover. A Whig, he was not afraid to champion liberal causes. He favoured liberty of commerce and defended the rights of the colonies, especially America – a subject on which he published. He opposed the control exercised over Parliament by allies of George III; supported the cause of Irish Catholics; campaigned for the emancipation of British India and the abolition of the slave-trade. His efforts to halt slavery in British colonies won him the admiration and friendship of Hannah More and the Bluestockings. By this time he had acquired the reputation of an orator; it was said that 'he was the most eloquent man of his time: his wisdom was greater than his eloquence.'[1]

He was 60 by the time the Bastille fell in July 1789. The storming of Versailles in October, and Price's *Discourse* (see pp. 4–6) led him to compose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The selections below include quintessential passages from it, including his lament for the age of chivalry and his paean to Marie Antoinette, 'glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy'. It is interesting to compare his view of her with that of Charlotte Smith in her poem, *The Emigrants* (see p. 100).

His Whig colleagues (particularly Charles James Fox) were horrified by his abandonment of liberal politics, and *Reflections* alienated him from them. In subsequent works, he would go further, advising the government to suppress free opinions at home. This apparent inconsistency can be explained by the fact that the American Revolution (which he supported) was, as he saw it, fought on behalf of traditional rights and liberties which the English government had infringed. The new French Revolution was intended to introduce a new order of things based on a bogus rationalistic philosophy. To him, it seemed that liberty was championed as a metaphysical abstraction; equality was contrary to nature and therefore impossible to achieve; while fraternity was so much 'cant and gibberish'.

Unlike Rousseau, Burke saw man as essentially evil. In his view society had to depend on safeguards which had stood the test of time; hence his support of Englishness, and his view that the English form of government, for all its faults, was divinely sanctioned. If this seems eccentric, it is worth remembering that the *Reflections* has remained an enduringly popular work. Priced at three shillings (the equivalent of £10 or US$18 today), it sold 30,000 copies in the first two years of publication. It was quickly translated into both French and German, and its arguments became common currency in ideological discourse of the 1790s. It was in response that Thomas Paine composed his manifesto for republicanism, *The Rights of Man* (1791–2).

At the time *Reflections* appeared, Wordsworth was (as he later recalled) 'hot' in the radical cause, and reacted with outrage, composing among other things a defence of regicide entitled 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', which fortunately for him was not published. (Had it been, it would have precipitated his arrest and imprisonment.) In later years he came to revise his judgement, valuing Burke for his achievement as a conservative philosopher, and he inserted a tribute to him in *The Prelude* (see p. 579). Though Coleridge seems not to have held Burke in particularly high regard, his later prose works, *Lay Sermons* (1816–17) and *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830), were strongly influenced by him.

Notes

[1] This phrase is quoted by Hazlitt in his 1807 essay on Burke, but no source has ever been traced.

Of all the Romantics, Hazlitt was perhaps one of the most openly admiring: Burke was one of his heroes, along with Rousseau. He loved him for his oratory and subtlety of thought, even if he did not always agree with what he said. 'I cannot help looking upon him as the chief boast and ornament of the English House of Commons', he wrote, adding that he was a 'man of clear understanding, of strong sense, and subtle reasoning'.[2]

Further reading

David Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), chapter 3.

David Bromwich, 'Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*', in *A Companion to Romanticism* ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1998), pp. 113–21.

Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge, 1993).

William Hazlitt, 'Character of Mr Burke, 1807', *Political Essays* (1819).

Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (London, 1992).

Jane Stabler, *Burke to Byron, Barbauld to Baillie, 1790–1830* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 16–30.

Obscurity

From A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757)

To make anything very terrible,[1] obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Everyone will be sensible of this who considers how greatly night adds to our dread in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins (of which none can form clear ideas) affect minds, which give credit[2] to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings.

Those despotic governments which are founded on the passions of men – and principally upon the passion of fear – keep their chief as much as may be from the public eye. The policy has been the same in many cases of religion; almost all the heathen temples were dark. Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans[3] at this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship. For this purpose too the druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks.[4]

No person seems better to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things (if I may use the expression) in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity, than Milton. His description of Death in the second Book is admirably studied; it is astonishing with what a gloomy pomp, with what a significant and expressive uncertainty of strokes and colouring he has finished the portrait of the king of terrors.

Notes

[2] Wu iv 280–1. For more on Hazlitt's fascination with Burke, see David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New Haven, 1999).

OBSCURITY

[1] *terrible* terrifying.

[2] *credit* credibility.

[3] *the Americans* Red Indians.

[4] *For this purpose . . . spreading oaks* In the 18th century it was believed, erroneously, that druids performed human sacrifices in woods. They were frequently described doing so in antiquarian or poetic works.

The other shape
(If shape it might be called) that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either. Black he stood as night,
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
And shook a deadly dart. What seemed his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.
(Paradise Lost ii 666–73)

In this description all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible and sublime to the last degree.

History will record . . . [1]

From Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)

History will record that on the morning of the 6th of October 1789, the King and Queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite, and troubled, melancholy repose. From this sleep the queen was first startled by the sentinel at her door, who cried out to her to save herself by flight – that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give – that they were upon him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the Queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked and, through ways unknown to the murderers, had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a King and husband not secure of his own life for a moment.

This King, to say no more of him, and this Queen, and their infant children (who once would have been the pride and hope of a great and generous people) were then forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses. Thence they were conducted into the capital of their kingdom.

Two had been selected from the unprovoked, unresisted, promiscuous slaughter, which was made of the gentlemen of birth and family who composed the king's bodyguard. These two gentlemen, with all the parade of an execution of justice, were cruelly and publicly dragged to the block and beheaded in the great court of the palace. Their heads were stuck upon spears and led the procession, whilst the royal captives who followed in the train were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell in the abused shape of the vilest of women. After they had been made to taste, drop by drop, more than the bitterness of death in the slow torture of a journey of twelve miles, protracted to six hours, they were, under a guard composed of those very soldiers who had thus conducted them through this famous triumph, lodged in one of the old palaces of Paris, now converted into a bastille for kings.[2]

Notes

History will Record

[1] This lurid account of what took place at Versailles, when a mob stormed the royal palace and escorted Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to Paris, is vividly recounted by Burke.

[2] *one of the . . . for kings* the Tuileries.

Is this a triumph to be consecrated at altars? to be commemorated with grateful thanksgiving? to be offered to the divine humanity with fervent prayer and enthusiastic ejaculation? These Theban and Thracian orgies,[3] acted in France and applauded only in the Old Jewry,[4] I assure you, kindle prophetic enthusiasm in the minds but of very few people in this kingdom, although a saint and apostle, who may have revelations of his own and who has so completely vanquished all the mean superstitions of the heart, may incline to think it pious and decorous to compare it with the entrance into the world of the Prince of Peace, proclaimed in a holy temple by a venerable sage, and not long before not worse announced by the voice of angels to the quiet innocence of shepherds.

The age of chivalry is gone

From Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)

I hear that the august person[1] who was the principal object of our preacher's triumph,[2] though he supported himself, felt much on that shameful occasion. As a man, it became him to feel for his wife and his children, and the faithful guards of his person that were massacred in cold blood about him; as a prince, it became him to feel for the strange and frightful transformation of his civilized subjects, and to be more grieved for them than solicitous for himself. It derogates little from his fortitude, while it adds infinitely to the honour of his humanity. I am very sorry to say it, very sorry indeed, that such personages are in a situation in which it is not unbecoming in us to praise the virtues of the great.

I hear, and I rejoice to hear, that the great lady,[3] the other object of the triumph, has borne that day (one is interested that beings made for suffering should suffer well), and that she bears all the succeeding days, that she bears the imprisonment of her husband, and her own captivity, and the exile of her friends, and the insulting adulation of addresses, and the whole weight of her accumulated wrongs, with a serene patience, in a manner suited to her rank and race, and becoming the offspring of a sovereign distinguished for her piety and her courage; that, like her, she has lofty sentiments; that she feels with the dignity of a Roman matron; that in the last extremity she will save herself from the last disgrace; and that, if she must fall, she will fall by no ignoble hand.

It is now sixteen or seventeen years[4] since I saw the Queen of France, then the dauphiness,[5] at Versailles, and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in – glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy. Oh what a revolution! and what a heart must I have to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such

Notes

[3] *Theban and Thracian orgies* Thebes, the principal city of Boeotia, was associated in Greek legend with Dionysiac orgies, which were commonly believed to have been imported from Thrace. The orgiastic rites of Cotys were also introduced to Athens from Thrace.

[4] *applauded only in the Old Jewry* where Richard Price delivered his sermon and discourse.

THE AGE OF CHIVALRY IS GONE

[1] *the august person* Louis XVI.

[2] *our preacher's triumph* a tart reference to Richard Price's discourse.

[3] *the great lady* Marie Antoinette.

[4] *sixteen or seventeen years* Burke visited France in 1773.

[5] *dauphiness* wife of the dauphin (eldest son of the King of France).

disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone.

That of sophisters,[6] economists, and calculators[7] has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise, is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.

This mixed system of opinion and sentiment had its origin in the ancient chivalry; and the principle, though varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs, subsisted and influenced through a long succession of generations even to the time we live in. If it should ever be totally extinguished, the loss I fear will be great. It is this which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world.[8] It was this which, without confounding ranks, had produced a noble equality and handed it down through all the gradations of social life. It was this opinion which mitigated kings into companions and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power, it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a domination, vanquisher of laws, to be subdued by manners.

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly. Regicide, and parricide,[9] and sacrilege are but fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence[10] by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father are only common homicide; and if the people are by any chance or in any way gainers by it, a sort of homicide much the most pardonable, and into which we ought not to make too severe a scrutiny . . .

We are but too apt to consider things in the state in which we find them, without sufficiently adverting to the causes by which they have been produced and possibly may be upheld. Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and

Notes

[6] *sophisters* specious philosophers (such as Rousseau).

[7] *calculators* mathematicians.

[8] *the antique world* Burke looks back to Ancient Greece and Rome.

[9] *parricide* murder of one's ruler.

[10] *jurisprudence* the legal system.

all the good things which are connected with manners and with civilization have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles and were, indeed, the result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy, the one by profession, the other by patronage, kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and confusions, and whilst governments were rather in their causes than formed. Learning paid back what it received to nobility and to priesthood, and paid it with usury, by enlarging their ideas and by furnishing their minds. Happy if they had all continued to know their indissoluble union and their proper place! Happy if learning, not debauched by ambition, had been satisfied to continue the instructor, and not aspired to be the master! Along with its natural protectors and guardians, learning will be cast into the mire and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.[11]

On Englishness

From Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)

I almost venture to affirm that not one in a hundred amongst us participates in the 'triumph' of the Revolution Society.[1] If the King and Queen of France and their children were to fall into our hands by the chance of war in the most acrimonious of all hostilities (I deprecate such an event, I deprecate such hostility), they would be treated with another sort of triumphal entry into London. We formerly have had a king of France in that situation;[2] you have read how he was treated by the victor in the field, and in what manner he was afterwards received in England. Four hundred years have gone over us, but I believe we are not materially changed since that period.

Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not (as I conceive) lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century, nor as yet have we subtilized[3] ourselves into savages.[4] We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress amongst us.[5] Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that *we* have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made in morality – nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty which were understood long before we were born, altogether as well as they will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law on our pert loquacity.[6]

Notes

[11] *the hoofs of a swinish multitude* This was a particularly inflammatory remark, the inspiration of many angry responses in satirical pamphlets and periodicals. Thomas Spence called one of his periodicals *Pig's Meat or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, each bearing a frontispiece showing a pig trampling on the orb and sceptre.

On Englishness

[1] *the 'triumph' of the Revolution Society* Richard Price delivered his *Discourse* to the London Revolution Society on 4 November 1789 (see pp. 4–6).

[2] *We formerly have had . . . situation* John II of France, captured by the Black Prince at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, died in captivity, London, 1364.

[3] *subtilized* refined.

[4] *savages* Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) had written in praise of primitive man for living according to innate need, unspoilt by the inequality and over-refinement found in 'civilized' societies.

[5] The writings of Rousseau, François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–78), and Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715–71) strongly influenced revolutionary thought and action in the eighteenth century.

[6] *pert loquacity* impudent chatter.

In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments[7] which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors[8] of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly[9] morals. We have not been drawn and trussed[10] in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man. We preserve the whole of our feelings still native and entire, unsophisticated[11] by pedantry and infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God. We look up with awe to kings, with affection to parliaments, with duty to magistrates, with reverence to priests, and with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is *natural* to be so affected; because all other feelings are false and spurious, and tend to corrupt our minds, to vitiate our primary morals, to render us unfit for rational liberty, and (by teaching us a servile, licentious, and abandoned insolence) to be our low sport for a few holidays, to make us perfectly fit for, and justly deserving of slavery, through the whole course of our lives.

You see, sir,[12] that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess that we are generally men of untaught[13] feelings, that instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they *are* prejudices. And the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them.

We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason,[14] because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. Many of our men of speculation,[15] instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek (and they seldom fail), they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason – because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision – sceptical, puzzled and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.

Society is a Contract

From Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)

Society is indeed a contract.[1] Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure, but the state ought not to be considered as

Notes

[7] *inbred sentiments* innate feelings.

[8] *monitors* reminders.

[9] *manly* humane.

[10] *drawn and trussed* After disembowelling (drawing) a bird, its wings were pinned to its sides with skewers (trussing).

[11] *unsophisticated* uncontaminated.

[12] *sir* Richard Price.

[13] *untaught* natural, spontaneous.

[14] *reason* Radicals placed their faith in the redemptive power of reason; the culmination of that argument would be Godwin's *Political Justice* (see pp. 153–5).

[15] *speculation* intelligence, wisdom.

SOCIETY IS A CONTRACT

[1] *Society is indeed a contract* In his *Contrat social* (1762), Rousseau had argued that genuine political society could only be formed through a social pact, or free association of intelligent human beings who choose the kind of government to which they will owe allegiance. Burke invokes Rousseau's notion so as to revise it.

nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature.

It is a partnership in all science,[2] a partnership in all art,[3] a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends[4] of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations,[5] it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world[6] according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures each in their appointed place. This law is not subject to the will of those who, by an obligation above them and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law. The municipal corporations of that universal kingdom[7] are not morally at liberty at their pleasure, and on their speculations of a contingent improvement wholly to separate and tear asunder the bands of their subordinate community, and to dissolve it into an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles.

It is the first and supreme necessity only, a necessity that is not chosen but chooses, a necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits no discussion and demands no evidence, which alone can justify a resort to anarchy. This necessity is no exception to the rule because this necessity itself is a part too of that moral and physical disposition of things to which man must be obedient by consent or force. But if that which is only submission to necessity should be made the object of choice, the law is broken, nature is disobeyed, and the rebellious are outlawed, cast forth, and exiled from this world[8] of reason, and order, and peace, and virtue, and fruitful penitence, into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow.

These, my dear sir, are, were, and I think long will be the sentiments of not the least learned and reflecting part of this kingdom. They who are included in this description form their opinions on such grounds as such persons ought to form them; the less enquiring receive them from an authority which those whom providence dooms to live on trust need not be ashamed to rely on. These two sorts of men move in the same direction, though in a different place. They both move with the order of the universe. They all know or feel this great ancient truth: 'Quod illi principi et praepotenti deo qui omnem hunc mundum regit, nihil eorum quae quidem fiant in terris acceptius quam concilia et caetus hominum jure sociati quae civitates appellantur.'[9] They take this tenet of the head and heart not from the great name which it immediately bears, nor from the greater from whence it is derived, but from that which alone can give true weight and sanction to any learned opinion: the common nature and common relation of men.

Notes

2 *science* knowledge.

3 *art* skill.

4 *ends* aims, objectives.

5 *in many generations* i.e. it takes many generations.

6 *the visible and invisible world* i.e. earth and heaven.

7 *The municipal corporations of that universal kingdom* i.e. the universe (heaven as well as earth).

8 *nature is disobeyed . . . world* Burke's parallel is with Adam and Eve, cast out of Eden for eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

9 'To the great and all-powerful God who rules this entire universe, nothing is more pleasing than the unions and gatherings of men bound together by laws that are called states' (Cicero, *Dream of Scipio* III 5 [13]).

Persuaded that all things ought to be done with reference, and referring all to the point of reference to which all should be directed,[10] they think themselves bound (not only as individuals in the sanctuary of the heart, or as congregated in that personal capacity) to renew the memory of their high origin and caste; but also in their corporate character to perform their national homage to the institutor and author and protector of civil society, without which civil society man could not by any possibility arrive at the perfection of which his nature is capable, nor even make a remote and faint approach to it.

They conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection. He willed therefore the state; He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection. They who are convinced of this His will (which is the law of laws and the sovereign of sovereigns) cannot think it reprehensible that this our corporate fealty and homage, that this our recognition of a signiory paramount[11] (I had almost said this oblation[12] of the state itself), as a worthy offering on the high altar of universal praise, should be performed as all public solemn acts are performed – in buildings, in music, in decoration, in speech, in the dignity of persons, according to the customs of mankind, taught by their nature; that is, with modest splendour, with unassuming state, with mild majesty and sober pomp.

For those purposes they think some part of the wealth of the country is as usefully employed as it can be, in fomenting[13] the luxury of individuals. It is the public ornament; it is the public consolation; it nourishes the public hope. The poorest man finds his own importance and dignity in it, whilst the wealth and pride of individuals at every moment makes the man of humble rank and fortune sensible of his inferiority, and degrades and vilifies his condition. It is for the man in humble life – and to raise his nature, and to put him in mind of a state[14] in which the privileges of opulence will cease, when he will be equal by nature, and may be more than equal by virtue – that this portion of the general wealth of his country is employed and sanctified.

I assure you I do not aim at singularity.[15] I give you opinions which have been accepted amongst us from very early times to this moment, with a continued and general approbation, and which indeed are so worked into my mind that I am unable to distinguish what I have learned from others from the results of my own meditation.

William Cowper (1731–1800)

The loss of his mother when he was 6, and persecution by an older boy at school, led to a mental imbalance from which Cowper (pronounced 'Cooper') was to suffer for the rest of his life. For a while in early manhood he was set for a successful career as a lawyer or politician, but though called to the bar in 1754, he made no attempt to practise. His tendency to depression was exacerbated when his father forbade him to marry Theodora Cowper, his cousin. When he was

Notes

[10] *the point of reference to which all should be directed* God.
[11] *signiory paramount* executive authority.
[12] *oblation* devotional offering.
[13] *fomenting* encouraging.
[14] *a state* heaven.
[15] *singularity* eccentricity.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809)

Writer, deist and American revolutionary leader, Tom Paine was one of the foremost political thinkers of his time. A former corset-maker and customs officer, he emigrated to America at the age of 37 in 1774 to be swept up in what was to become the American War of Independence. Two years later he published *Common Sense*, the first appeal for independence, to popular acclaim, selling 120,000 copies within three months. His forthright account of British government as a 'monarchical tyranny' marked him out as a republican: 'it is the pride of kings which throws mankind into confusion,' he wrote.

After America's victory, he returned briefly to England (May–September 1789), and went from there to France, where he became an associate of Thomas Jefferson and member of the Lafayette circle. Burke having published *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790, Paine composed what was to be one of the most effective responses to it, *The Rights of Man* (1791–2). Beginning with the idea that good government is founded on reason, Paine argued that democracy – a society in which all men have equal rights and in which leadership depends on talent and wisdom – is better than aristocracy. In the course of his argument he demonstrates that a hereditary monarchy is prone to 'ignorance and incapacity'; establishes republicanism as the only logical and fair method of government; champions the American experience on the grounds that 'the nation, through its constitution, controls the whole government'; and proposes the institution of welfare support for the elderly, sick and impoverished.

The Rights of Man is a passionate argument for humane, fair and democratic government, but it is hard not to be struck by how much remains controversial within a British context. If that is so now, it must have seemed rebarbative to Pitt's increasingly repressive government, particularly given its immediate popularity: it sold 200,000 copies in 1791–3, many in cheap editions designed for working people. Not surprisingly, the government banned *The Rights of Man* in September 1792 and issued an order for Paine's arrest. He narrowly escaped and fled to Paris; he was charged with sedition in his absence and sentenced to death in December – a sentence that would have been carried out had he returned.

Already a member of the National Assembly, he took an active part in the governmental affairs of France. Significantly, he voted against the execution of Louis in January 1793, an act that earned him no friends among those responsible for the Reign of Terror that summer. In December he was imprisoned in the Luxembourg gaol to await execution, where his health declined. Eluding the guillotine by chance, he was released in November 1794 and remained in France for several years before returning to America in 1802. He died at his home in New Rochelle in 1809 from a fever contracted in prison; the whereabouts of his remains are unknown.

Paine's prose, written with a clarity and conviction that surpasses anything to be found in the work of his contemporaries, rings out as an articulate and well-reasoned defence of republicanism. In 'Freedom of Posterity' he refutes Burke's argument that the English are bound to the constitutional monarchy established by their forefathers at the time of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. 'On Revolution' argues that a revolution is needed to abolish 'Monarchical sovereignty' and shift power to the hands of the people. 'Republicanism' argues for what Paine felt to be the only system 'established and conducted for the interest of the public'.

Further reading

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* ed. Isaac Kramnick (2nd edn, Harmondsworth, 1976).

Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* introduced by Eric Foner (Harmondsworth, 1984).

The Thomas Paine Reader ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth, 1987).

Of the Origin and Design of Government in General

From **Common Sense (Philadelphia, 1776)**

Some writers have so confounded[1] society with government as to leave little or no distinction between them – whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions.[2] The first is a patron, the last a punisher.

Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil – in its worst state an intolerable one. For when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries by a government which we expect in a country without government, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer.

Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise.[3] For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform, and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver. But that not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property[4] to furnish means for the protection of the rest – and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him out of two evils to choose the least. Wherefore, security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others.

[*Freedom of Posterity*]

From **The Rights of Man Part I (1791)**

The English Parliament of 1688 did a certain thing[1] which, for themselves and their constituents, they had a right to do, and which it appeared right should be done. But, in addition to this right (which they possessed by delegation), they set up another right by assumption: that of binding and controlling posterity to the end of time. The case, therefore, divides itself into two parts – the right which they possessed by delegation, and the right which they set up by assumption. The first is admitted but with respect to the second I reply:

There never did, there never will, and there never can, exist a parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the 'end of time', or of commanding for ever how the world shall be governed, or who shall govern it. And therefore all such clauses, acts or declarations by which the makers of them attempt to do what they have neither the right nor the power to do – nor the power to execute – are in

Notes

GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL

[1] *confounded* confused.

[2] *The one . . . distinctions* Society encourages social intercourse; government promotes the social hierarchy.

[3] *the palaces of kings . . . paradise* an idea deriving from Rousseau's concept of the noble savage, outlined in his *Discourse on Inequality*.

[4] *surrender up a part of his property* in taxes – one cause of [illegible] American Revolution.

FREEDOM OF POSTERITY

[1] *a certain thing* i.e. replace the Catholic James II with [illegible] Protestant William of Orange. The Glorious Revolution [illegible] seen by English radicals as the forerunner of the revolution[illegible] in America and, subsequently, France.

themselves null and void. Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it.

The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man, neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow. The parliament or the people of 1688, or of any other period, had no more right to dispose of the people of the present day, or to bind or to control them *in any shape whatever*, than the parliament or the people of the present day have to dispose of, bind or control those who are to live a hundred or a thousand years hence. Every generation is and must be competent to all the purposes which its occasions require. It is the living, and not the dead, that are to be accommodated. When man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease with him, and having no longer any participation in the concerns of this world, he has no longer any authority in directing who shall be its governors, or how its government shall be organized, or how administered.

[*On Revolution*]

From The Rights of Man Part I (1791)

When we survey the wretched condition of man under the monarchical and hereditary systems of government, dragged from his home by one power, or driven by another, and impoverished by taxes more than by enemies, it becomes evident that those systems are bad, and that a general revolution in the principle and construction of governments is necessary.

What is government more than the management of the affairs of a nation? It is not, and from its nature cannot be, the property of any particular man or family, but of the whole community at whose expense it is supported. And though by force or contrivance it has been usurped into an inheritance, the usurpation cannot alter the right of things. Sovereignty, as a matter of right, appertains to the nation only, and not to any individual; and a nation has at all times an inherent indefeasible[1] right to abolish any form of government it finds inconvenient, and establish such as accords with its interest, disposition and happiness. The romantic[2] and barbarous distinction of men into kings and subjects, though it may suit the condition of courtiers, cannot that of citizens – and is exploded by the principle upon which governments are now founded. Every citizen is a member of the sovereignty, and as such can acknowledge no personal subjection, and his obedience can be only to the laws.

When men think of what government is, they must necessarily suppose it to possess a knowledge of all the objects and matters upon which its authority is to be exercised. In this view of government, the republican system as established by America and France operates to embrace the whole of a nation, and the knowledge necessary to the interest of all the parts is to be found in the centre, which the parts by representation form. But the old governments are on a construction that excludes knowledge as well as happiness – government by monks who know nothing of the world beyond the walls of a convent is as consistent as government by kings.

Notes

On Revolution

1 *indefeasible* undeniable.

2 *romantic* impractical, fanciful. It is interesting to find Paine using this word. Unaware of the revolution in literature that would take place within the next decade, he is thinking of Burke's claims that medieval codes of honour were the best means by which human conduct might be regulated.

What were formerly called revolutions were little more than a change of persons or an alteration of local circumstances. They rose and fell like things of course,[3] and had nothing in their existence or their fate that could influence beyond the spot that produced them. But what we now see in the world, from the revolutions of America and France, are a renovation of the natural order of things, a system of principles as universal as truth and the existence of man, and combining moral with political happiness and national prosperity.

I. Men are born and always continue free and equal in respect of their rights. Civil distinctions, therefore, can be founded only on public utility.
II. The end[4] of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; and these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance of oppression.
III. The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual or any body of men be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.

In these principles there is nothing to throw a nation into confusion by inflaming ambition. They are calculated to call forth wisdom and abilities, and to exercise them for the public good, and not for the emolument[5] or aggrandizement of particular descriptions of men or families. Monarchical sovereignty – the enemy of mankind and the source of misery – is abolished, and sovereignty itself is restored to its natural and original place: the nation. Were this the case throughout Europe, the cause of wars would be taken away.

[*Republicanism*]

From The Rights of Man Part II (1792)

What is called a republic is not any particular form of government. It is wholly characteristical of the purport,[1] matter or object for which government ought to be instituted, and on which it is to be employed: 'res-publica' (the public affairs, or the public good – or, literally translated, the public thing). It is a word of a good original,[2] referring to what ought to be the character and business of government, and in this sense it is naturally opposed to the word 'monarchy', which has a base original signification – it means arbitrary power in an individual person, in the exercise of which *himself* (and not the 'res-publica') is the object.

Every government that does not act on the principle of a republic – or, in other words, that does not make the res-publica its whole and sole object – is not a good government. Republican government is no other than government established and conducted for the interest of the public, as well individually as collectively. It is not necessarily connected with any particular form, but it most naturally associates with the representative form, as being best calculated to secure the end for which a nation is at the expense of supporting it.

Notes

[3] *of course* as a matter of course: over a course of time.
[4] *end* aim.
[5] *emolument* financial benefit.

Republicanism
[1] *purport* purpose, intention.
[2] *original* meaning, referent.