



THE OXFORD ENGLISH LITERARY HISTORY

VOLUME 12 | 1960–2000

THE LAST OF ENGLAND?

RANDALL STEVENSON

THE OXFORD ENGLISH
LITERARY HISTORY

Volume 12. 1960–2000

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General Editor: Jonathan Bate

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This series was conceived and commissioned by Kim Walwyn (1956–2002),
to whose memory it is dedicated.

THE OXFORD ENGLISH
LITERARY HISTORY

Volume 12. 1960–2000

The Last of England?

RANDALL STEVENSON

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For Roger Savage

Acknowledgements

My memories of the period 1960–2000 reach back, just about, to early 1960, when I recall asking my father what the word ‘decade’ meant. For answers to that and many other demands—for introducing me, in every sense, to the late twentieth century—my gratitude extends across and throughout this period to memories of my father, William Stevenson, and to my mother, Helen Stevenson.

It probably wasn’t precocious interest in periodization that prompted that question about ‘decade’, but it did anticipate innumerable enquiries about later years, and much good fortune in finding help and advice in dealing with them, from many individuals and institutions. The Arts and Humanities Research Board funded academic leave in 2002; the British Academy, a grant towards the cost of permissions and illustrations; the University of Edinburgh, further sabbatical leave, teaching assistance, and help with research costs. I’m also grateful to the series editors in Oxford University Press—Sophie Goldsworthy, Frances Whistler, Sarah Hyland, and Elizabeth Prochaska—for their thoughtful, generous, expert support; to Rowena Anketell for her diligent, thoughtful copy-editing; and to the fathomlessly patient staff at the National Library of Scotland.

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I'm also grateful to Michael Schmidt of Carcanet Press for allowing quotation from work by Donald Davie and other poets. The excerpt from 'Mr Bleaney', from *Collected Poems* by Philip Larkin (copyright © 1988, 1999 by the Estate of Philip Larkin), is reprinted by permission of Faber and Faber Ltd. and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC. The poem at the start of Chapter 8 is reprinted by permission of PFD on behalf of Carol Rumens: © Carol Rumens 1987—as printed in the original volume. Acknowledgements for the use of illustrations appear in the List of Figures on pp. xiii–xiv. For additional advice and help with these illustrations, thanks also to Donald Carroll; Tom Phillips; James Scott; Judith Chernaik and 'Poems on the Underground'; and Jules Mann at the Poetry Society.

R. S.

General Editor's Preface

The Oxford English Literary History is the twenty-first-century successor to the Oxford History of English Literature, which appeared in fifteen volumes between 1945 and 1997. As in the previous series, each volume offers an individual scholar's vision of a discrete period of literary history.¹ Each has a distinctive emphasis and structure, determined by its author's considered view of the principal contours of the period. But all the volumes are written in the belief that literary history is a discipline necessary for the revelation of the power of imaginative writing to serve as a means of human understanding, past, present, and future.

Our primary aim is to explore the diverse purposes of literary activity and the varied mental worlds of writers and readers in the past. Particular attention is given to the institutions in which literary acts take place (educated communities, publishing networks and so forth), the forms in which literary works are presented (traditions, genres, structural conventions), and the relationship between literature and broader historical continuities and transformations. Literary history is distinct from political history, but a historical understanding of literature cannot be divorced from cultural and intellectual revolutions or the effects of social change and the upheaval of war.

We do not seek to offer a comprehensive survey of the works of all 'major', let alone 'minor', writers of the last thousand years. All literary histories are inevitably incomplete—as was seen from the rediscovery in the late twentieth century of many long-forgotten women writers of earlier eras. Every literary history has to select; in so doing, it reconfigures the 'canon'. We cast our nets very widely and make claims for many works not previously regarded as canonical, but we are fully conscious of our partiality. Detailed case studies are preferred to summary listings.

¹ Since Volume 1, to 1350, covers many centuries, it is co-written by two scholars.

A further aim is to undertake a critical investigation of the very notion of a national literary heritage. The word 'literature' is often taken to refer to poems, plays, and novels, but historically a much wider range of writing may properly be considered as 'literary' or as belonging within the realm of what used to be called 'letters'. The boundaries of the literary in general and of *English* literary history in particular have changed through the centuries. Each volume maps those boundaries in the terms of its own period.

For the sake of consistency and feasibility, however, two broad definitions of 'English Literary History' have been applied. First, save in the polyglot culture of the earliest era, we have confined ourselves to the English language—a body of important work written in Latin between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries has been excluded. And secondly, we have concentrated on works that come from, or bear upon, England. Most of the writing of other English-speaking countries, notably the United States of America, is excluded. We are not offering a world history of writing in the English language. Those Americans who lived and worked in England are, however, included.

So too with Scottish, Irish, Welsh writers, and those from countries that were once part of the British Empire: where their work was produced or significantly disseminated in England, they are included. Indeed, such figures are of special importance in many volumes, exactly because their non-English origins often placed them in an ambivalent relationship with England. Throughout the series, particular attention is paid to encounters between English and other traditions. But we have also recognized that Scottish, Welsh, Irish, African, Asian, Australasian, Canadian, and Caribbean literatures all have their own histories, which we have not sought to colonize.

It would be possible to argue endlessly about periodization. The arrangement of the Oxford English Literary History is both traditional and innovative. For instance, the period around the beginning of the nineteenth century has long been thought of as the 'Romantic' one; however we may wish to modify the nomenclature, people will go on reading and studying the Lake Poets and the 'Shelley circle' in relation to each other, so it would have been factitious to introduce a volume division at, say, 1810. On the other hand, it is still too soon for there to be broad agreement on the literary-historical shape of the

twentieth century: to propose a single break at, say, 1945 would be to fall in with the false assumption that literature moves strictly in tandem with events. Each volume argues the case for its own period as a period, but at the same time beginning and ending dates are treated flexibly, and in many cases—especially with respect to the twentieth century—there is deliberate and considerable overlap between the temporal boundaries of adjacent volumes.

The voices of the last millennium are so various and vital that English literary history is always in the process of being rewritten. We seek both to chart and to contribute to that rewriting, for the benefit not just of students and scholars but of all serious readers.

Jonathan Bate

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A Note on References

Brief biographical information on selected authors will be found at the end of the volume, together with bibliographies covering their major works and some recent criticism concerning them. In addition, there are suggestions for more general reading relevant to the history of the period. The bibliographies are intended as starting points for further study, not comprehensive listings. The Author Bibliographies include recommended editions: an asterisk indicates those used in the main body of the text.

Quotations in the text from prose works and plays written in the period are usually followed by a reference in parenthesis. Where possible, these are given in a form that does not depend on access to a particular edition (e.g. chapter or book number, or act or scene number), but for works without convenient subdivision, the citation is of the page number of the edition asterisked in the relevant Author Bibliography, and /or specified in Works Cited. Titles of plays, when first mentioned, are followed by a note of the theatre which originally produced them—in London unless otherwise specified—and the date of this production. Poem titles are generally followed by a date of their first publication in book form, and the editions used are asterisked in the relevant Author Bibliography and /or specified in Works Cited.

All quotations from primary and secondary material are keyed to the list of Works Cited at the end of the book. Anthologies appear in this section under the names of their editors. Footnotes are mostly used to refer readers to other relevant sections of the text, where such connections might not be apparent through judicious use of the index.

Introduction: *Last Things First*

‘1960–2000: The *Last* of England?’ Surely England is more durable than that title suggests? It certainly still seemed so, twenty years before this period began, even at the height of the Second World War. ‘Worlds may change and go awry’, Ross Parker and Hughie Charles warned in their popular wartime song, only to reaffirm that ‘there’ll always be an England’. Such confidence is not necessarily contradicted in this volume of the Oxford English Literary History—not entirely, at any rate. ‘The Last of England’ of its title is in one way less doom-laden than simply descriptive, referring to the last or most recently produced literature in England: the last phase of the millennium-long tradition the History describes. Yet no study of the later twentieth century, doom-laden or not, could overlook how far sureties failed, even in the brief gap between the end of the war and 1960. Historians envisage most periods since the Industrial Revolution as ones of radical transformation: the latter half of the twentieth century saw the pace of change itself accelerate, breaking down a whole range of convictions once considered surely enduring.

England, of course, was by no means the only country to experience change and loss, sometimes encountered much more sharply elsewhere. Even as those wartime voices sang, a wider world *was* going awry. Throughout the West, in the years that followed, the war and the horrors marking its conclusion often seemed to have dimmed or extinguished enlightened ideals—faiths in reason and progress—which had illumined life and thinking for two centuries. Memories of the war cast a long, deep shadow over English life and literature later in the twentieth century, and are examined throughout this study. But in the decade or so immediately after 1945, it was probably French writing which envisaged a blacker,

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bleaker post-war world most starkly. Uniquely uncompromising vision of this darkened world made Samuel Beckett—though an Irishman, first writing in French, and translated only gradually during the 1950s—a presiding influence on literature in English at the start of the period, in 1960, and for some time thereafter.

Some profound post-war transformations were nevertheless specific to England, or at any rate to Britain generally. ‘Red, white and blue; what does it mean to you?’ Parker and Charles’s song enquired. ‘Not all it used to’ was the likeliest answer by the 1960s. ‘The empire, too, we can depend on you’, the song went on, but by 1962, there was virtually no empire left. Most of Britain’s colonies around the world had been granted their independence, surprisingly rapidly, during the previous fifteen years. In other ways, too, Britain’s world role diminished radically during these years. Even by 1946, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, was expressing views very different from those of his wartime predecessor, Winston Churchill, describing his country as no more than an ‘easterly extension of a strategic arc the centre of which is the American continent’ (Colls, p. 145). Clear confirmation that Britain’s world role had been taken over by the United States appeared ten years later, during the Suez crisis, and again in others that followed in the early 1960s. From the late 1940s to the 1960s and beyond, financial crises and devaluations of sterling showed dwindling imperial and military power paralleled by substantial decline in Britain’s economic and manufacturing power. As the historian Robert Colls suggested in *Identity of England* (2002), during a period of only about fifteen years following the war, ‘“decline”, as a peculiarly British characteristic, embedded itself right at the centre’ of the nation’s politics, and of its thinking about itself generally (p. 143).

While the red, white, and blue of the Union Jack fluttered less boldly, and over far fewer territories, there were also signs that the union it represented might itself be fragmenting. Scotland, Wales, and sections of the community in Northern Ireland contemplated independence increasingly enthusiastically during the 1960s: by the end of the 1990s, measures of autonomy established for each left Britain a rather disunited kingdom. More pressingly than for two centuries, England had to reconsider itself as a distinct unit, politically and culturally. The Oxford English Literary History is

symptomatic in concentrating more firmly than its predecessors on writing in England, separately from the traditions of neighbouring nations, or other anglophone ones abroad. A new interest in separateness, and in separate traditions, began to appear in literature itself in the 1990s, in novels such as Peter Ackroyd's *English Music* (1992), or Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998). It also appeared extensively in critical and historical writing. More than two dozen studies had been published by the end of the century, defining or analysing English life, or, often, worrying about ways its characteristics had blurred or faded.

For several—Roger Scruton's *England: An Elegy* (2000), for example—decline in world role had inevitably been accompanied by slippages and confusions within the country itself. In one way, England did end the period rather as it began, with social stratifications still more clear-cut than almost anywhere else in the world. Yet divisions of class and community had nevertheless altered and weakened, removing many of the frameworks through which social roles and English identities had once been defined. 'Nowadays, almost anyone is more English than the English', Will Self commented in his novel *How the Dead Live* (2000, ch. 4). Jeremy Paxman's *The English: A Portrait of a People* (1998) likewise observed that 'being English used to be so easy . . . [but] the conventions that defined the English are dead' (p. ix). Along with the national character, even the English landscape seemed increasingly imperilled. A mainstay of poetic imagination, nature in England had long been equated with the nature of England, and with its supposedly everlasting qualities, yet it seemed more and more menaced by change and decay. 'There'll always be an England | While there's a country lane', Parker and Charles opined in 1939: 'England gone, | The shadows, the meadows, the lanes' was Philip Larkin's more sombre reflection in 1974 ('Going, Going').

For some critics, decline and uncertainty of this kind seemed likely simply to be reproduced in the period's literature. Hugh Kenner's title, *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers* (1988) ominously suggested as much, and in discussing 'The Englishness of the English Novel' in 1980, Q. D. Leavis was in little doubt. Along with the disappearance of 'the traditional English life of the countryside', she considered that 'the England that bore the classical English novel

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has gone forever, and we can't expect a country of high-rise flat-dwellers, office workers and factory robots and unassimilated multi-racial minorities . . . to give rise to a literature comparable with the novel tradition'. Largely as a result, she concluded, 'the decay and approaching death of the English novel' was both inevitable and 'generally recognized' (*Collected Essays*, pp. 320, 325, 303). There were other commentators in the late 1970s, as she suggested, convinced of the novel's imminent demise. Yet their dire expectations were not fulfilled in the years that followed. In Q. D. Leavis's case at least, it is not difficult to see why. Her views interpreted difference far too readily in terms of decline, mistakenly envisaging inevitable change as terminal loss. Much of the same misplaced nostalgia shaped several of the elegiac studies of England mentioned above, Scruton's particularly, also underlying the widespread assumptions of national decline Robert Colls assessed in *Identity of England*.

Neither mid-century renunciation of empire, after all, nor the loosening of class hierarchies and social exclusions in the years that followed, need be understood only—or primarily—in terms of loss. Each marked the last of a certain kind of England, but one which was in many senses a world well lost. As it declined, another England gradually emerged: less enthralled by tradition, freer and more open, as a result, in outlook, lifestyle, and culture. Encouraged by wider affluence and improved education, this new society developed strongly in the 1960s. Many of its influences—described throughout this volume—extended long afterwards. Despite the economic crises of the next decade, and the conservative politics of the 1980s, broadening democratization in society and culture generally continued throughout later years, and came to seem characteristic of the period as a whole. 'You cannot leave England', Peter Porter's poem 'The Last of England' (1970) remarked, 'it turns | . . . majestically in the mind'. Throughout the later twentieth century, England did turn—gradually and mostly affirmatively—towards new mentalities and self-conceptions, in ways often hastened by the obvious obsolescences of the old.

In any case, even if the age *were* somehow defined as one exclusively of historical decline, there would be little reason to suppose its literature doomed to follow the same direction. Literary developments do not always straightforwardly reflect or run in parallel with

the wider history of their time, directly reproducing its ups and downs. On the contrary, what history refuses, culture provides: changeful, challenging times demand and direct new vision. Crucially, too, reshaping of the country's social fabric encouraged a range of new voices through which new visions might be expressed. Contrary to Q. D. Leavis's scepticism of factory-workers and flat-dwellers, literature later in the century came to be successfully produced, and read, in ways freer of the social exclusions of earlier decades, and of gendered ones. New diversity in the sources—and subjects—of imagination appeared particularly strongly in the work of women writers: initially in the novel, in the 1960s; eventually in all the genres. Tardier acceptance of women as poets and dramatists incidentally highlighted another characteristic of the period. Sharp asymmetries marked the development of individual genres, and the response of each to the changing life of the times, demanding separate assessment of poetry, drama, and narrative later in this study. By the late 1950s, for example, drama was already finding new excitement in contemporary shifts in social structures and world roles. Poetry, on the other hand—at any rate in the Movement idiom still influential at that time—often followed Philip Larkin in regretting an 'England gone', and in trying to sustain its values and conventions a little longer.

Contrary, too, to Q. D. Leavis's scepticism of 'racial minorities', black or immigrant authors were centrally involved in rescuing the novel from the 'decay or approaching death' she and other critics saw threatening it around 1980. For the Victorians, 'The Last of England' would have recalled Ford Madox Brown's famous 1850s painting of an emigrant ship departing for a new life in the colonies. A century or so later, the empire sailed back, with immigrant writers among those most committed to renewing the imagination of England. In the decade following Q. D. Leavis's judgement, fiction was revitalized in form and vision by Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo, Kazuo Ishiguro, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar, and others. Throughout the latter decades of the century, though on a more modest scale, black writers also contributed significantly to developments in poetry and drama. Their work nevertheless highlighted new uncertainties about 'English' traditions. Through domicile and education, through their subjects and themes, sometimes through outlook and

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style, the writers mentioned obviously belonged to an English context, though they remained unusually aware of others. In many ways, it was the problematic, partial nature of this belonging which proved so productive imaginatively, rather as it had for modernist authors—also often exiles and outsiders—earlier in the century. A certain distance from domestic life and literary convention encouraged new, transforming imagination of each. Significantly, England was often renamed, as well as reconfigured, by authors involved: as ‘Inglan’ in Linton Kwesi Johnson’s poetry, for example; or in Salman Rushdie’s translation of London into the fantasy city ‘Ellowen Deeowen’ in *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

Along with personal memories of an Indian childhood, influences on Rushdie’s writing included the fiction of Günter Grass, the magic realist novels of Gabriel García Márquez, and fantastic cinema produced in Bombay and in Hollywood. Such writing obviously could not be located, uncomplicatedly, at the end of a thousand-year history only of English literature. The era, in other words, in which the Oxford English Literary History chose to concentrate on an English context and tradition was one also marked by new complexities of culture and identity *within* England. Similar complexity more generally affected ‘English’ writing, attached less and less exclusively, throughout the twentieth century, to the experience of England itself. In 1990, Bernard Bergonzi questioned how, or if, the term ‘English literature’ could continue to ‘relate to a small, ancient nation and a global language’ (*Exploding English*, p. 27). The *Norton Anthology of English Literature*—produced in the United States, and used in university courses throughout the world—provided a clear answer in 2000. ‘The *national* conception of literary history, the conception by which English Literature meant the literature of England’ was no longer tenable, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt concluded in their editors’ introduction. English literature, they emphasized, had ‘ceased to be the product of the identity of a single nation’ (p. xxxv). The development of separate traditions among English-speaking nations elsewhere—of many English literatures—made it in some ways more important than ever to distinguish the particular nature of writing in England. Yet it also made it more difficult. In an increasingly globalized culture, ‘nation’ as a category of literary or even political analysis weakened during the period, and

seemed likely to continue to do so. Marking the last of a traditional England, the 1960–2000 period may also have seen the last of English literature as traditionally or nationally conceived, and the beginnings of new, broader categories of analysis. As the General Editor's Preface affirms, the Oxford English Literary History explores in all its volumes the intersection of local, national, and international influences on literature in England. The growing significance of such intersections for the later twentieth century is a particular interest of this one.

This volume also reflects—and reflects on—new questions raised in the period about the survival of literature itself, and not only its Englishness. Some of these are easily answered. From the late 1950s onwards, critics worried that a first age of television might be the last for literature, or for reading generally, especially as video and computer-based forms of entertainment developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 4 suggests that such worries mostly proved unfounded: reading, and the theatre, generally sustained or even expanded their appeal during the period. Yet the existing influence of cinema, and the new power of television, naturally did affect ways books were written and read. Though a history of literature is limited in the attention it can devote to other media, their influences on the written word, and on stage performance, are assessed throughout. Limitations of space also account for straightforward concentration on poetry, drama, and fiction in later parts—one consistent, in any case, with most contemporary assumptions about literature. Over past centuries, as the General Editor's Preface points out, the range of writing generally considered as literature has expanded and contracted like an accordion. It shrank to one of its narrower points in the first half of this period. By the end of the 1970s, writing in the form of essays, memoirs, and the like had mostly been squeezed out of literary study, and to an extent out of popular appreciation as literature, in favour of more and more exclusive concentration on imaginary or fictive forms. Later chapters mostly sustain this concentration, though Part IV, in particular, considers ways novelistic imagination was shaped by—and influenced—cognate forms of narrative such as travelogue and biography.

Constraints of space and practicality eliminate other organizational possibilities half-implied by critical thinking in some of its

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forms after 1980. Academic study of literature expanded enormously in scale throughout the period, and in its concern with critical theory, especially in the late 1970s and 1980s—often with direct effects on contemporary authors. Yet this academic study was not much concerned with tightening or limiting the boundaries of its subject. On the contrary, conventional conceptions of literature as a purely imaginative form often gave way to much broader categorizations, sceptical of distinctions between factual and imaginary, and ready to consider history and philosophy, for example, only as different kinds of fiction. More widely still, culture in all its forms, written or otherwise, often came to be seen as a kind of text, or a range of texts or sign systems, all or any of which might be usefully examined through the practices of literary analysis. Literary history, in this view, could expand to embrace everything in the bookshop, and in the streets outside. Yet critical theory also raised the possibility that a literary history might shrink down to a crisply dismissive introduction, followed only by a few blank pages. While opening out the literary accordion to include a greater range of texts, academic criticism also grew more suspicious of the music it had usually played: of how far, in particular, this might have been music to the ears only of an elite or class-based minority. Q. D. Leavis was not the only critic, early in the period, suspicious of factory-workers and flat-dwellers. Her husband F. R. Leavis, probably still the most influential of English critics in the 1960s, remained equally committed to a high culture, defined and enjoyed principally by a ‘cultured’, well-educated minority. The limitations of such views became increasingly apparent in later decades. Broadening tolerance, broadening education, and the democratization mentioned earlier affected criticism as well as culture generally. Several influential critics in the 1980s even considered avoiding any elitism—or just vagueness—surrounding the term ‘literature’ by eliminating its use altogether.

Yet this possibility was rarely advanced with complete enthusiasm. In any case, in journalism, reviewing, bookshops, literary prizes, the media, and public discourse generally—as well as in most universities—the term ‘literature’ continued to enjoy as vigorous a life as ever. Among critics and academics, scepticism about its use eventually had two main consequences. Critical analysis in the period extended to cover culture more widely, including areas of

writing—‘genre’ fiction, for example—hitherto mostly excluded from study. Literary critics also grew warier of treating the object of their study as a given—as a solid, securely established structure, simply awaiting their scrutiny and analysis. Instead, they were readier to examine how, and why, the category of literature was constructed, and what economic, political, or other interests might be involved. In examining not only individual works and writers, but what the General Editor’s Preface calls ‘the institutions in which literary acts take place’—along with the economies and historical pressures shaping writing—the Oxford English Literary History once again exemplifies the critical thinking of its time. Within this volume, this entails concentration on most of the agencies just named—on media, marketing, education, and the Arts Council, for example—as well as on the shifting patterns of social and historical pressure outlined in Chapter 1.

Concentration on overall patterns and pressures is in any case especially necessary in studying the recent past, its raw immediacies uniquely awkward for literary-historical analysis to digest. Still unsifted by the amnesia of centuries, authors and their works compete for attention in unusual numbers. Little space can be allowed any of them,¹ or for exemplification of their styles, or for more than preliminary assessment of their relative merits. An evaluation is implied, of course, by the extent of discussion allotted each. Readers might also deduce for themselves, within the patterns and developments described, an appropriate place even for a cherished author omitted from discussion altogether, whether for reasons of space, or merely oversight. Readers, too, may be unusually—and productively—disposed to reconfigure these patterns for themselves: it is not only recent authors who remain largely unsifted, but the huge range of recollections of encounters with their work, and of still-vivid memories of the period. What *did* members of Harold Pinter’s first audiences make of *The Birthday Party*? What were they talking about after the play, stepping back out into the spring air of 1958? Why did a bookshop browser pick up Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* in 1998? What did she or he make of *that*, on a first reading on the bus home? Tantalizingly, answers to such questions are far more

¹ Readers interested in individual careers will find a number of them briefly described in the Author Bibliographies.

widely accessible for the recent period than earlier ones, though correspondingly harder to reduce to general patterns and outlines. Essential though these are, they can emerge only tentatively, hazily, from a mass of still-vivid particulars.

Their lasting validity, too, remains inscrutable. Charles Dickens's writing in 1859, for example, or Joseph Conrad's in 1899, can be discussed not only in terms of what these writers followed from, but of what followed from them. Accounts of the later twentieth century, on the other hand, necessarily still look mostly backwards, construing Hughes's writing, or Pinter's, more as consequence than as cause. Constraints of this kind may help to account for the popularity of late twentieth-century analyses and critical movements with 'post-' in their title. The period's unusual haste in defining itself—another symptom of its sense of unusually radical change—probably sharpened its conviction of coming after something, or, especially as the millennium approached, marking the last of an era, or an England, in itself. Before too long, the late twentieth century may well be seen not as 'post-', but as 'inter-', or even 'pre-'. It is tempting to try to outlast the present, look into the seeds of time, and guess how this might occur. Future analyses are probably better served by an account only of what seemed significant during this period itself: of what most moved, shaped, and troubled its imagination; how, and why. That is what this study aims to provide.

Part I



Histories

‘Gleaming Twilight’: *Literature, Culture, and Society*

‘A story has no beginning or end’, Graham Greene warns in *The End of the Affair* (1951): ‘arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead’ (bk. 1, ch. 1). Like other stories, histories have no absolute beginnings. Yet some are less arbitrary than others, and 1960 is in many ways an obvious starting point. Factors shaping life and imagination throughout the rest of the century—many patterns in its literature, discussed in later chapters—originated either in that year, or at any rate in the late 1950s and the early part of the new decade. Its opening naturally encouraged reflection about new directions and developments: differing enthusiasm in looking ahead, on different sides of the Atlantic, highlighted some of the pressures shaping Britain’s outlook generally at the time. In the United States, presidential-nominee John F. Kennedy talked expansively of ‘a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960s—a frontier of unknown opportunities . . . new invention, innovation, imagination, decision’. The British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, more modestly noted only a ‘wind of change’ blowing across the threshold of the 1960s (Gilbert, pp. 224, 245).

He had reason to be cautious: the new decade seemed likelier to be dominated by Britain’s continuing retreat from existing frontiers, rather than by much experience of new ones. Following victory in the Second World War, and the establishment of the Welfare State between 1945 and 1950—and despite slow post-war recovery, rationing, and general austerity—national self-confidence

had remained relatively high until the mid-1950s. But it had scarcely recovered from the Suez crisis in 1956—‘a climactic year’, Doris Lessing considered, looking back in her novel *The Four-Gated City* (1969). Abortive military intervention in Egypt showed that Britain no longer had the authority, or the resources, to impose its will on a wider world, and that its actions abroad were largely subject to the approval of the United States. New uncertainties and shifting attitudes to authority were soon in evidence at home. ‘1956, or 7, or 8’, Lessing added, were ‘years that had given birth to this epoch’, encouraging ‘the idea of change, breaking up, clearing away, movement’ (pt. 3, ch. 1; pt. 4, ch. 1).

Vanishing status as a world power was emphasized by the terminal break-up of the British empire. At the start of the twentieth century, Britain had ruled 13 million square miles and 400 million subjects overseas: by the mid-1960s, only a scattering of fragments and islands remained. Much had been ceded shortly after the Second World War, though from a position of apparent strength: the ‘wind of change’ Macmillan referred to in 1960 rapidly removed the rest, with independence granted to Nigeria, Cyprus, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, Jamaica, Trinidad, Uganda, Kenya, Zanzibar, Malawi, and Malta, mostly between 1960 and 1962. Other contemporary events further confirmed rapid shrinkage in Britain’s influence. Kennedy’s insistence that the Soviet Union remove its missile sites from Cuba, though eventually effective, briefly threatened world nuclear war in 1962. The crisis incidentally suggested that Britain, neither directly involved nor much consulted, now figured only as a minor chess piece in Cold War struggles between the new super-powers. For the novelist Peter Vansittart, it confirmed that ‘for the first time in two centuries, Britain had no world role’ (p. 1).

Largely dependent on the United States for its nuclear capability, Britain was further humiliated by difficult negotiations for new weapons later in 1962. It hardly fared better with its European neighbours the following year, when application to join the Common Market, the early form of the European Union, was vetoed by a former wartime ally, General de Gaulle—partly on the grounds, ironically, of Britain’s supposedly close links with the United States. Membership was deferred for a decade. As the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, famously commented in 1962, Britain had ‘lost

an empire and not yet found a role' (Morgan, p. 216). Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain*, also published that year, confirmed that 'with those acres of red on the map dwindling, and the mission of the war dissolving', the country inevitably felt 'confused about her purpose'. 'Of all the stages in a great country's history,' he added, 'the aftermath of Empire must be the hardest' (p. 620).

Uncertainties in foreign affairs were compounded by a number of scandals nearer home, including three separate trials of British diplomats and officials, for spying for the Soviet Union, in 1961-2. The following year saw the defection to Moscow of the MI6 officer Kim Philby, and the revelation—accompanied by lurid details of sex, intrigue, and drug abuse—that the war minister, John Profumo, had been involved with a call girl who also had connections with the Soviet embassy. 'Never glad, confident morning again', a Member of Parliament remarked, quoting Robert Browning, during debates on the Profumo affair (Morgan, p. 225). The fabric of loyalty, patriotism, and idealism which had supposedly sustained Britain during and after the war appeared to be unravelling, along with its world role: gaps between high expectation and real capabilities abroad seemed matched by ones opening up between official and actual morality at home.

A measure of disillusion with the government, and with the establishment generally, naturally became more widely apparent at the time, clearly signalled by the growing popularity of satire in the early 1960s. The irreverent theatre review *Beyond the Fringe* transferred from Edinburgh to London in 1960. The satirical journal *Private Eye* first appeared in 1962, and the television satire *That Was the Week That Was* in the following year, employing as its scriptwriters several authors embarking on successful careers at the time—playwrights such as Peter Shaffer, Keith Waterhouse, Dennis Potter, and John Mortimer, as well as the *Observer's* celebrated theatre critic, Kenneth Tynan. To Mary Whitehouse, whose 'Clean-Up TV Campaign' began in 1963, *That Was the Week That Was* seemed 'anti-authority, anti-religious, anti-patriotism and pro-dirt' (Hewison, p. 29). It was at any rate a startling programme to find on the BBC, still supposed a guardian of public propriety in the early 1960s—as if growing disaffection with the establishment had infected even its own most respected institutions.



Fig. 1. Towards the end of its first year of publication, *Private Eye* sends Christmas greetings to world leaders: Nikita Krushev, John F. Kennedy, Charles de Gaulle, and Harold Macmillan. The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred a few weeks previously, in late October and November 1962.

Disaffection of this kind led in one way, straightforwardly enough, to a change of government: Labour, under Harold Wilson, replacing in 1964 a Tory party tainted by scandal and national decline. Yet it led in other ways beyond anything even this new government sought to achieve, public life at the time becoming increasingly characterized by the failure of established politics to match popular aspirations. Some of these aspirations had been formulated for the 1960s by a 'New Left' emerging at the end of the previous decade. This centred on the work of critics and commentators such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and E. P. Thompson, and around two journals, *Universities and Left Review* and the *New Reasoner*—the latter emphasizing the contemporary implications of a revolutionary tradition identified throughout English history. In January 1960 the two journals merged as *New Left Review*, its first editorial declaring commitment to a 'genuinely popular socialist movement . . . in cultural and social terms, as well as in economic and political' (p. 1). Despite some progressive legislation, Harold Wilson's government never seemed likely to fulfil hopes for a radical reshaping of British society, or for genuinely popular socialism. It seemed reluctant even to meet its supporters' more modest expectation that Welfare State reforms, initiated under Labour between 1945 and 1950, would be continued and completed.

Government adherence to Cold War politics also frustrated the most broadly popular movement to emerge from the late 1950s, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), founded in 1958. Drawing on disgust at Britain's late imperial ambitions at Suez, as well as anxiety at the proliferation and testing of atomic weapons, CND gathered support independently of conventional party allegiances. Its protests and demonstrations involved several public figures, notably the philosopher Bertrand Russell, as well as a wide range of contemporary authors—John Arden, Robert Bolt, John Berger, Shelagh Delaney, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, and Arnold Wesker, among others. By 1961, annual CND marches to the atomic weapons laboratory at Aldermaston—described in Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*—seemed to Raymond Williams to represent a genuinely popular 'new . . . spirit' at work in British politics (*Long Revolution*, p. 333). Minimal parliamentary response to this spirit fuelled doubts also

widely evident in the United States after the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963: doubts about how far anything worthwhile could be achieved within existing forms of government and established political organizations.

These doubts were greatly extended, eventually throughout the Western world, by the United States' military involvement in Vietnam, officially starting in 1964 and lasting until withdrawal in 1973. The first war of the television age, Vietnam was made horrifyingly immediate even by the much-censored footage shown on nightly news bulletins. As the editor of the underground magazine *Oz*, Richard Neville, remarked in 1970, Vietnam proved 'the One Great Youth Unifier', radicalizing a generation and provoking demonstrations on a huge scale—initially in the United States, but also in most European cities by the end of the 1960s (p. 19). In Britain, resistance to the Vietnam war helped to unify both youth and the extra-parliamentary left, rather as CND had earlier: it also made a US novel, Joseph Heller's anti-capitalist, anti-militarist *Catch-22*, among the most popular of the decade. Some of CND's tactics were initially followed by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, established in 1966, though demonstrations much less peaceful than the Aldermaston marches soon ensued—in particular, outside the United States' London embassy on several occasions in 1967 and 1968.

Demonstrations against Vietnam, and against the established political system generally, also centred on institutions rapidly growing in influence during the 1960s: the universities. Writing in the *New Review* (Summer 1978), the novelist Angela Carter described the 1944 Education Act, ensuring secondary schooling as far as the age of 15, as the most 'important cultural event in recent British history' (p. 32). 'By the sixties', she also remarked, its effects 'had more or less percolated through the entire system . . . they had to invent all those new universities, and the polytechnics, too, to cope with the pressure' (Maitland (ed.), pp. 210–11). Students numbers had doubled between the late 1940s and the 1960s: following the Robbins report in 1963, recommending the establishment of new institutions and the expansion of existing ones, they quadrupled during the rest of the decade. Fired by the conviction, as Carter suggested, that 'so much seemed at stake in Vietnam, the very nature

of our futures, perhaps', and by new opportunity for intellectual enquiry and collective action, this growing student body was drawn further into political activity as the decade went on (Maitland (ed.), p. 212). Almost all universities experienced some unrest, with prolonged occupations in Warwick, Hull, Essex, and, famously, the London School of Economics in 1967. There was even an 'Anti-University' in London for a time during the following year.

Yet student activism in Britain hardly compared with the *événements* which unfolded in France in May and June 1968—much the nearest approach, in reality, to 'the revolution' vaguely but regularly anticipated and discussed during the decade. Student demonstrations around the Sorbonne rapidly grew in scale, extending into riots, nights of violent clashes with police, and the construction of barricades throughout the university quarter of Paris. Matching disruption soon occurred in other French cities. Revolutionary liaisons developed between students and factory workers. A national strike eventually brought the government close to collapse, forcing General de Gaulle to flee temporarily to Germany. Though he returned to curb the strikes and win a general election in July, the world had nevertheless witnessed an unplanned, student- and youth-led revolt coming close to overthrowing a major European state—astonishingly, as if the Paris students' slogan 'imagination is seizing power' had genuinely been put into practice (Roszak, p. 22).

This unexpected near-revolution, and its defeat, naturally influenced profoundly a whole generation of French politicians and intellectuals. Even across the Channel, though there was little direct political reaction, the events in Paris seized the imagination of many authors—comparably, though on a lesser scale, to the effects on English writers which followed the actual French Revolution of 1789. 'Truly, it felt like Year One', Angela Carter remarked of the 'brief period of . . . heightened awareness' which generally ensued at the end of the 1960s (Maitland (ed.), pp. 209, 4). Events in 1968 remained especially haunting for the political dramatists whose work emerged alongside the New Left during the 1960s, and went on to dominate the English stage during the next decade.¹ A sense of huge political opportunity, and its loss, remained unforgettable in their later writing. Howard Brenton, for example, described May

¹ See Ch. 10, below.

1968 as 'crucial . . . a great watershed'; adding that 'it destroyed any remaining affection for the official culture . . . a generation dreaming of a beautiful utopia was kicked—kicked awake' (Trussler (ed.), pp. 96–7).

Other events in the summer of 1968 nevertheless suggested that dreams of 'beautiful utopia' had dimensions beyond the political ones which had been frustrated on the streets of Paris. Fashionable new lifestyles in Swinging London continued to swing, and flower power and dreams of love and peace to flourish in California. By July, flowers and free love were once again on offer on the streets around the Sorbonne, too. As David Caute suggests in *Sixty-Eight: The Year of the Barricades* (1988), 1968 witnessed not only a high tide in revolutionary politics, but also a 'heyday of hedonism, of private pleasure gift-wrapped in permissiveness, of an alternative "revolution" of the spirit and senses' (p. 35). Like the political developments discussed above, origins of this alternative revolution can also be retraced to the end of the 1950s—to new energies eventually emerging from a society wearied by the war but apparently, for much of the decade, still generally content with itself.

Critics at the time often saw some restlessness or rebelliousness focused by the literary figure of the 'Angry Young Man', epitomized by Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (Royal Court, 1956). Yet it was only a limited, amorphous, sort of dissent. Jimmy's representative status was best indicated not by his anger but by his complaints that 'there aren't any good, brave causes left'—or even much 'ordinary human enthusiasm'—and that 'if you've no world of your own' there is little alternative to engagement with 'someone else's' (III. i; I). Typically of the mid-1950s, he was a rebel without a cause, unable to find clear, widely shared directions for his disaffection. Other contemporary characters, and their authors, often seemed similarly aimless, or ultimately selfish, in their interests. Popular success for dramatists such as Osborne, or novelists such as Kingsley Amis, usually led them to discard any whiff of radicalism or left-wing politics surrounding their earlier careers. As the critic Gilbert Phelps remarked of a supposedly 'angry' generation, 'they beat against the doors not in order to destroy them, but in the confident hope that if they made enough fuss they would be let in' (Ford (ed.), p. 511). Unable to access worlds of their own, or even to

imagine them, they had little choice but to make what accommodation they could, angrily or otherwise, with society as it was currently structured.

By the end of the 1950s, contemporary life had begun to offer new causes, and even a new 'world' in which they might be pursued. Colin MacInnes's aptly named novel *Absolute Beginners* (1959) indicates the nature of the change. Dismissing the Angry Young Men as 'that bunch of cottage journalists', MacInnes's unnamed narrator celebrates instead a still younger generation—a 'whole teenage epic . . . teenage ball' (*Visions of London*, pp. 328, 257–8). Its members are no longer disposed to 'beat on the doors' of established society, but enjoy instead 'real splendour in the days when the kids discovered that, for the first time since centuries of kingdom-come, they'd money . . . we'd loot to spend at last, and our world was to be our world, the one we wanted and not standing on the doorstep of somebody else's' (p. 258). Many factors contributed to 'kids' creating their own world at last. National Service was abolished in 1959—though still explored in 1960s plays such as Arnold Wesker's *Chips with Everything* (Royal Court, 1962) and John McGrath's *Events While Guarding the Bofors Gun* (Hampstead, 1966)—removing the brisk military indoctrination in the establishment ethos previously facing young men on leaving school. Expansions in education opened up a whole new range of opportunities instead, and young people were further empowered later in the decade by the lowering of the age of voting and legal majority from 21 to 18.

Yet from the late 1950s onwards, much the most powerful lever in opening up a new, separate world for the young was financial, as MacInnes's 'Absolute Beginner' suggests. Chilled by winds of change abroad, Harold Macmillan spoke much more warmly of financial affairs at home, famously claiming that the British public had 'never had it so good'. His remark reflected an economic confidence confirmed by the economist J. K. Galbraith's title, *The Affluent Society*, published in 1959. By the end of the 1950s, this new confidence had largely dispelled the atmosphere of austerity, rationing, and bare sufficiency in which the decade began. Wages rose steadily throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, by 34 per cent between 1955 and 1960 alone, and personal disposable income increased by a further 20 per cent between 1961 and the end of the decade. In relation to earnings,

the price of many consumer items declined sharply. Along with relaxed credit arrangements, growing spending power became an influence in most areas of society. As Angus Wilson recorded in his novel *Late Call* (1964), 'the washing-up machine, the quick grill, the deep freeze, the cooker, the spin dryer, and all the other white monsters' had become 'everyday things' in many households even by the early 1960s, adding further to a new, more leisured mood at the time (ch. 2).

But the new affluence had more particular—and particularizing—effects on members of a younger generation. Bored by their parents' consumer durables and status symbols, young people preferred to spend their loot, as MacInnes emphasized, on 'luxuries that modify the social pattern': on fashions and accoutrements defining a separate world, identity, and lifestyle of their own (*England*, p. 54). 'You could everywhere see the signs of the un-silent teenage revolution', his narrator records in *Absolute Beginners*, 'the disc shops with those lovely sleeves set in the window . . . hair-style saloons . . . scooters and bubble-cars . . . coffee bars and darkened cellars' (*Visions of London*, p. 311). Even in the mid-1950s, signs of this kind had begun to identify separate forms of youth culture: the Teddy Boys, in particular, setting themselves apart through preferences for skiffle and unusually stylish dress. But the process rapidly gathered pace towards the end of the decade and in the early 1960s. 'Never before . . . has the younger generation been so *different* from its elders', MacInnes suggested of the late 1950s (*England*, p. 59). By 1962, young people were spending £850 million annually on themselves. Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*, published in that year, nervously satirized teenagers' increasingly distinctive styles of dress and speech, as well as their growing distance from their parents' habits and expectations.

New affluence and a new sense of style naturally encouraged industry and advertising to keep the teenage ball rolling, with more new fashions appearing and more money being spent. By 1967, the 15–19 age group accounted for half the clothing sold annually in Britain. Mods, Rockers, and eventually Hippies and Punks used dress and image—often in competition with each other—to consolidate distinct groupings of shared lifestyle and musical taste. Yet even by the mid-1960s, the teenage ball had begun to roll in directions

which neither industry nor advertisers had altogether anticipated. What began only as a separate youth culture grew into a counter-culture: new styles and fashions increasingly signified rejection of conventional society and commitment to alternative values. Teenagers and young people who might have continued to offer a convenient, high-profile market fraction began to turn against market and capital altogether, loosely aligning themselves instead with the politics of dissent emerging through CND and the New Left.

Some of this change was visible in, and encouraged by, the evolution of the most 'unsilent' component of the teenage revolution, rock and roll, its growing popularity reflected in the BBC's *Top of the Pops*, first broadcast in 1963. One of the early hits the programme featured was Bob Dylan's 'The Times They Are A-Changin''. Along with his 'Blowin' in the Wind', and 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'—the latter written during the Cuban Missile Crisis—it defined the climate of radical change felt by the younger generation at the time, especially in its warning to parents: 'don't criticise | What you can't understand' (Dylan, p. 132). Partly under Dylan's influence, rock music continued to acquire new seriousness and complexity. It also grew more subversive. Formed in 1960, the Beatles had three number one hits in succession by 1963, but were still considered appropriate performers for the Royal Command Variety show in the autumn of that year, the *Daily Mirror* describing them at the time as 'the nutty, noisy, happy, handsome Beatles' (6 Nov., p. 2). Groups soon rivalling them in popularity—the Rolling Stones and the Who, formed in 1963 and 1964 respectively—would have been harder to describe in such cosy terms. Rock stars, the Beatles eventually included, began to look cool, stoned, and disaffected, rather than happy and handsome, their lyrics becoming rebellious and sexy rather than innocently nutty.

Rock music, Thom Gunn suggested in his poem 'Elvis Presley' (1957), 'turns revolt into a style'. As the 1960s went on, it contributed to conflict not only with convention, but often with the law. Extensively broadcast by 'pirate' radio stations, until legislation closed them in 1967, rock and pop music had always had a faintly unofficial feel, accentuated around this time by its performers' much-publicized drug abuse. Two of the Rolling Stones were detained on drugs charges in 1967: even those nutty, handsome, Beatles were

soon implicated, with coded references to LSD on their *Sergeant Pepper* album that year, and John Lennon arrested the next. Among the population generally, prosecutions for cannabis possession alone increased threefold between 1967 and 1970, indicating how far, in ten years or so, the teenage ball had rolled on beyond its absolute beginners' preference for coffee bars. As Jim Morrison's group emphasized in its name, 'The Doors'—borrowed from William Blake, via Aldous Huxley's writing on drugs—a younger generation was no longer standing on anyone's doorstep, but moving on through 'doors of perception' towards new worlds of its own. Increasingly, these lay not only beyond conventional society, but beyond everyday reality altogether.

Other doors were opening, in the early 1960s, more easily than ever before. Philip Larkin famously indicated one of these—another beginning, if hardly an absolute one—when he commented in 'Annus Mirabilis' (1974) that 'Sexual intercourse began | In nineteen sixty-three | . . . | Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban | And the Beatles' first LP'. Sexual intercourse, evidently, pre-dated 1963. But new attitudes towards it did develop soon after contraception became more widely available in 1962, in the form of the Pill. An ensuing 'relaxation of manners . . . changed, well, everything', Angela Carter commented, emphasizing 'sex as a medium of pleasure' (Maitland (ed.), p. 214). As Larkin suggested, new attitudes also followed the lifting of the ban on D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), always assumed too explicit in its sexual descriptions to be published entire in Britain. Partly as a deliberate test of a new Obscene Publications Act in 1959, Penguin Books planned a paperback edition, duly prosecuted for obscenity in a sensational trial the following year. Penguin's victory had many implications during—and beyond—the decade that followed. Naturally, it seemed at the time to indicate the abolition of censorship, though as it turned out skirmishes between a conservative rear-guard and new liberalism in English arts and publishing continued for many years. Even after theatre censorship *had* officially been abolished, with the removal of the Lord Chamberlain's office in 1968, Mary Whitehouse was still able to bring a private prosecution, for alleged public indecency, against the National Theatre's production of Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* in 1980. The



Fig. 2. Huge queues outside a bookshop in Leicester Square, London, waiting to buy the Penguin edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, acquitted of obscenity early in November 1960.

Chatterley trial was nevertheless a decisive move towards new freedoms—ones generally allowing authors later in the century to explore sexuality and the physical more intimately than ever before.

The trial also contributed directly to Lawrence's growing influence on the early 1960s—a symptom as well as a source of new attitudes at the time. A writer whom Graham Hough described in 1960 as the best representative of 'the rebellion, the discontent and the aspiration' of the first half of the century might have appealed in any

case to the dissentious 1960s, but it was the publicity surrounding the trial which secured his unique popularity in the years which followed (*Image and Experience*, p. 134). Part of an extended Penguin reissue of Lawrence's work at the time, the new paperback *Lady Chatterley's Lover* sold two million copies in the six weeks between the end of the trial and Christmas, and another one and a half million the following year, making it one of the best-selling novels ever published in Britain. This contributed to a role for Lawrence's writing sometimes less as fiction than almost as the creed, or prophecy, of a newly liberated age. The hero of David Mercer's play *Ride a Cock Horse* (1965), for example, records the healthful effects of 'reading *Women in Love* aloud and eating cornflakes' on Saturday mornings (II. i). Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath named their first child Frieda, after Lawrence's wife, in 1960, and the biographer Claire Tomalin later recalled that notions 'loosely drawn from D. H. Lawrence via F. R. Leavis, coloured many young marriages' at the time (p. 204).

Some of the testimony in the trial particularly highlighted Lawrence's potential as prophet and precursor of a 'revolution of the spirit and senses'. Penguin called numerous distinguished writers and critics in its defence, including Walter Allen, E. M. Forster, C. Day Lewis, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams, most of them sensibly stressing that Lawrence's sex scenes were contained within an overall artistic purpose, and essential to it. But a number of defence witnesses also sought to justify Lawrence in terms more religious than aesthetic. Among them was John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, who described 'the sex relationship as something essentially sacred'—a view of interrelated secular and religious love which he went on to develop in *Honest to God* (1963), greatly disturbing conventional church opinion at the time (Rolph (ed.), p. 70). Such views, Lawrence's general popularity, and an age generally moving away from conventional religion all contributed to a 1960s 'revolution' which left spirit and sensuality in unusual proximity. Love and relationships came to seem not only emotional and sensual experiences, but potentially transcendent ones; sex not only a medium of pleasure, but another of the 'doors' offering escape from conventional life and perception—one which new forms of contraception made it easier than ever to open and pass through.

Views of this kind were encouraged by other 'prophets' and

thinkers popular at the time. Rather like Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, both R. D. Laing and Herbert Marcuse criticized modern society for forms of rationalism, materialism, and systematization which they considered almost insane in their nature and effects. As a practitioner and theorist of psychiatry, Laing expressed reluctance to readjust disturbed patients to a society he thought deranged in itself. For Marcuse, the ostensible liberalism of Western society was merely 'repressive affluence', disguising from its members how far their true natures and psychic energies were suppressed by 'the political machine, the corporate machine, the cultural and educational machine'—by 'the system' in general (pp. xii, xiv, xvii). 'The free play of individual needs and faculties', he added, could be restored by means of 'instinctual liberation . . . from sexuality constrained' (pp. 201–2). Such views allowed 1960s revolutions in spirit, sex, and sensuality to seem not so much an alternative to radical politics as an extension of politics by other means. Private indulgence, sexual permissiveness, and drug use could be construed not only as parts of a heyday of hedonism, but as radical acts in themselves, subverting 'the system', restoring energies suppressed by its machinery, and generally bringing personal and political into mutual alignment. 'Once you have blown your own mind', Richard Neville wryly suggested, summarizing this thinking in 1970, 'the Bastille will blow up itself' (p. 18).

At the time, a whole range of contemporary developments—from mystical cults to alternative theatre; underground newspapers to LSD; new sexuality to the barricades in Paris—*were* construed as somehow sharing an underlying unity of purpose. Later commentators sometimes supported another version of this idea, seeing all the new lifestyles and ideas of the 1960s as diverse manifestations of an 'immense freeing or unbinding of social energies' of the kind Fredric Jameson considered—in his essay 'Periodising the Sixties'—to have been fundamental to the decade (*Ideologies*, p. 208). Its various new energies can also be characterized, and seen collectively, through ideas of the carnivalesque which first reached the West in 1968, translated from the Russian of Mikhail Bakhtin, quickly influencing a generation of critics. For Bakhtin, the popular carnival of the middle ages represented a 'special condition' of social experience still significantly present in later periods and their literatures; one of

'liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order'. Through emphases on play, parody, pleasure, and the body, carnival offered a 'second life outside officialdom . . . [a] utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance . . . the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions' (*Rabelais*, pp. 6–7, 9, 10). In these terms, the liberating, non-official cultures and politics evident throughout the 1960s can be seen contributing collectively to a carnivalized decade: a period in which energies libidinal, social, and political were all simultaneously unbound.

Yet carnival, Bakhtin explained, offers only a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' (*Rabelais*, p. 10). As his critics often warned, it might therefore function as no more than a social safety valve, leaving untouched, even consolidated, the norms and privileges it cheerfully but briefly inverts. John Lennon suggested a comparable view of the decade just completed when he remarked in 1970 that 'the people who are in control and in power and the class system and the whole bullshit bourgeois scene is exactly the same . . . nothing happened except that we all dressed up . . . we are a bit freer and all that, but it's the same game, nothing's really changed' (Wenner, pp. 11–12). As he suggested, the 1960s had scarcely affected 'the people who are in power' or the established order of society, politically or economically, as the re-election of a Conservative government in 1970 helped confirm. According to *The Economist* the following year, 84 per cent of the nation's wealth remained in the hands of 7 per cent of its population—a statistic widely publicized through the naming of the theatre company, 7:84, founded at the time. By the early 1970s, other aspects of the economy had in any case begun to suggest that the carnival aspect and unbound energies of the 1960s *were* largely temporary. Arising from a mood of affluence at the beginning of the decade, they were soon threatened by a sharp economic decline at the start of the next.

Even during the 1960s, affluence was to an extent only another of the decade's beautiful dreams, temporarily obscuring the reality of long-term economic problems. Britain's economy had struggled to recover ever since the war, hindered by military spending which was far in excess of continental competitors', still accounting for 10 per cent of the gross national product even in the 1960s. Production and

exports had increased, but less rapidly than in most countries in Europe. Minimal unemployment, rising wages, and a per capita income still the highest in Europe contributed to late 1950s affluence which was genuine enough in a way. But without being matched by a genuine increase in productivity, it created a consumer boom too dependent on imports, causing crises in Britain's balance of trade which eventually required the devaluation of sterling in 1967. Even this measure was somehow construed as a blow to national pride, rather than a warning of fundamental economic problems. By the early 1970s, unchecked expectations of affluence began to exceed what the economy could sustain, at any rate as it was currently structured, leading to industrial unrest on a scale unmatched since the General Strike in 1926, culminating in two prolonged miners' strikes. The second, in the winter of 1973, coincided with a global recession caused by an embargo on supplies of oil, following war between Israel and Egypt, and a fourfold increase in its price. In order to deal with the resulting energy crisis, the Government imposed a three-day week on industry, a nationwide 50 mph speed limit on traffic, and a 10.30 p.m. curfew on broadcasting—encouraging all households go to bed early, even if they had not already been plunged into darkness by cuts in the electricity supply.

Economic difficulties could hardly, any longer, be dreamed away. 'It had all looked so different, four years ago, three years ago', Margaret Drabble recorded in *The Ice Age* (1977)—'so hopeful, so prosperous, so safe, so expansive'. But after the crises of the early 1970s 'the old headline phrases of freeze and squeeze had for the first time become for everyone . . . a living image, a reality: millions who had groaned over them in steadily increasing prosperity were now obliged to think again' (pp. 18, 62). 'Thinking again' generally meant thinking very differently from the 1960s. 'Suddenly there was inflation', Martin Amis recalled. 'That had an incredibly sobering effect on everyone, which we see to this day . . . the wild ideas—political and pharmaceutical—that were going around then had to be dispensed with as leisure-class fripperies' (*Guardian*, 23 Jan 2001, p. 15). Some sober and long-cherished political ideals were also threatened by an inflation rate moving above 25 per cent by the end of 1975, and by growing unemployment. A Labour government had replaced the Tories in 1974: to obtain help from the International

Monetary Fund in 1976, it had to abandon long-standing principles and agree to many cuts in public spending and social welfare. Though these and other measures reduced inflation later in the decade, continuing conflict with the unions and general nervousness about the economy helped the Tories to return to power in 1979.

Margaret Thatcher's new government soon indicated that the ideas of the 1960s and early 1970s were not only to be rethought, but as far as possible reversed. In another 'state of the nation' novel, *The Radiant Way* (1987), Margaret Drabble recorded a 'new rhetoric praising the Victorian values of family life' (p. 16) emerging in the early 1980s. Thatcher herself extolled in 1982 'the old virtues of discipline and self restraint' over the 'fashionable theories and permissive claptrap' of the 1960s (Waugh, *Harvest of the Sixties*, p. 18). Renewed 'discipline and restraint' were quickly imposed legislatively, and on the unions in particular. *The Radiant Way* painfully records its heroine watching television images of another miners' strike, in 1983, fiercely controlled and ultimately defeated this time by 'police in their riot gear . . . [and] charging horses' (p. 342). New disciplines and reversals of earlier assumptions were most clearly evident in Tory management of the economy. This was based on monetarist policies intended to control wages and inflation, on re-privatizing nationalized industries and assets, and on reduction of public spending wherever possible. With more than three million unemployed by the early 1980s, these policies had disturbing immediate consequences, contributing to frustrations which regularly erupted into rioting in the weary heart of British cities—in Toxteth, in Liverpool, and in Brixton and Southall, in London, during 1981 alone.

There were also radical longer-term implications for British life in the later twentieth century. Policies based on market forces rather than social welfare—summed up in Thatcher's memorable claim that 'there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women'—reversed much more than the values of the 1960s (Bloom and Day, p. 7). They discarded, or inverted, a commitment more or less supported by both major political parties ever since 1945—the principle, framed around the thinking of John Maynard Keynes, that governments should intervene to manage a capitalist economy and ensure that its benefits were accessible to the population as a whole.

The sense of common cause and shared outlook which had developed during the war evolved through such principles into the Welfare State established in the years afterwards. Much of the expansive mood of the 1960s, described above, resulted from the continuation of a post-war, welfare-capitalist consensus in later years—from a sense of security, improved educational opportunity, full employment, and agreed social priorities which had continued to accumulate since 1945. Some of the ‘beautiful utopia’ dreamed of in 1968 concerned ways such principles might be extended still further into the future.

As Raymond Williams explained in 1961, the idea of ‘a good society naturally unfolding itself’ had in some ways a still longer provenance, extending a process of gradual social improvement and democratization whose origins he located in the late eighteenth century. Williams also emphasized that the future of this ‘Long Revolution’, as he called it, depended on the strength of the economy, and warned that faith in its continuing progress might in the end prove ‘exceptionally misleading’ (*Long Revolution*, p. 294). After the reversals of the late 1970s and 1980s, it seemed more and more so. Surveying global politics in 1959, C. P. Snow suggested that ‘disparity between the rich and the poor . . . won’t last for long. Whatever else in the world we know survives to the year 2000, that won’t’ (*Two Cultures*, p. 40). But it did, globally and locally. Surveys in the 1990s showed gaps between rich and poor in Britain widening more rapidly than in almost any other country in the world, with as much as 25 per cent of the population living in poverty, and corresponding increases in crime, which doubled in England between 1979 and 1992. The economy in the 1990s was more stable than two decades previously, despite continuing overall decline, but its benefits were still less equitably shared, nationally and locally. Between 1980 and 1985, more than a million jobs were lost in the north of England, ten times as many as in the south. Within the cities, a new, relaxed lifestyle of high-street coffee bars and bistros thrived within a stone’s throw of rotting, sink estates.

For those educated, employed, and established, life in many areas was more comfortable, affluent, and full of potential than ever. But it was at the expense of a new, growing ‘underclass’, excluded from full participation in a ‘good society’ by poverty, low wages, or

unemployment. It was also, consequently, at the expense of the relative social cohesion, optimism, and 'never had it so good' feelings with which the period began. Despite worries about declining world influence, Harold Macmillan was ready to claim Britain as 'on the whole . . . the finest country in the world' in the 1950s (Paxman, p. 131). In *British Society since 1945* (1996), Arthur Marwick refers to a poll showing that in 1977 British people still considered themselves among the happiest in the world, even in the middle of Drabble's 'Ice Age'. But by the mid-1990s, another poll suggested that half of the population would emigrate if the chance arose—Marwick concluding that the country had become 'utterly torn apart', a society 'at odds with itself' (pp. 267, 420, 439). The 1980s, in particular, did experience 'the last of England' in one way, in the sense suggested by Derek Jarman's 1987 film of that name. Jarman's *Last of England* showed the failure of all sense of community, radical disparities between the affluent and the underclass, and anarchic, even terminal decline in the life of England's inner cities. Elected ten years later, in 1997, the Labour government's promises to mend divisions and repair the apparatus of the Welfare State remained firmly constrained by market forces. By the end of century, 'New Labour' policies had achieved only a partial return towards the values of post-war consensus which eighteen years of Tory government had so decisively reversed.

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This reversal, and its timing, invite any history to divide the period from 1960 to 2000 into two sections. It even, conveniently, falls almost into two halves: the first characterized by an affluence in economy, lifestyle, and imagination, growing in the 1960s and fading in the next decade; the second, by a disillusioned, fragmenting society after the late 1970s. Literature in the period did reproduce some of these divisions: forces contributing to them obviously affected writers both directly and indirectly. In the 1970s inflation, and the strategies later adopted to combat it, had a sobering effect not only on the wilder ideas of the previous decade, as Martin Amis remarked, but also directly on the economics of publishing and arts production generally. Inflation and recession in the later 1970s affected the book trade particularly severely, leaving publishers

much more reluctant than hitherto to take risks, encourage new authors, promote unfamiliar styles, or to publish poetry at all.² Support from the Arts Council was also increasingly restricted in the 1980s, one of several significant changes in its role during the period. These are worth examining further, as they illustrate so clearly, as well as directly affecting, relations between economic and artistic spheres in the later twentieth century. Arts Council Annual Reports offer a kind of barometer of the changing cultural, financial, and social confidence discussed above.

Founded in 1943, originally as the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the Arts Council firmly shared the commitments to a more equitable society, and to greater democracy of opportunity, which developed into the Welfare State. John Maynard Keynes explained in a broadcast at the end of the war that CEMA was intended to support both excellence in the arts and the widest possible access to them. Slogans such as ‘the best for the most’, ‘enjoyment of the “high” arts by a wider public’, and ‘raise and spread’, continued to appear in Reports in 1976/7 (pp. 7–8) and 1978/9 (p. 7), confirming that this ambition was broadly sustained over the next three decades. It was probably realized most successfully in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The chairman at the time, Lord Goodman, had good reason to be confident that the Arts Council would thrive ‘so long as the attainment of a more civilized society remains the ultimate objective of all political exertions’: successive governments had steadily increased their support (1969/70, p. 5). CEMA’s £235,000 grant in 1945/6 had risen to £1.5 million by 1960, and £4 million by 1965. Under the Labour government, which appointed the first-ever Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee, it had doubled to more than £8 million by the end of the 1960s. The 1970/1 Report could look back with satisfaction on ‘Fifteen Years’ Achievement in the Arts’—in particular, to ‘remarkable growth . . . a creative outburst’ in drama since 1956, including the foundation of a National Theatre, and of the Royal Shakespeare Company, in the early 1960s (pp. 15, 43).

Yet only a few years later, this ‘remarkable growth’ was imperilled—like so much else at the time—by the oil embargo and the ensuing recession. With increases in funding falling behind the rate

² See pp. 145–6, 186–7, and 430, below.

of inflation, the Arts Council entitled its 1975/6 Report 'The Arts in Hard Times', complaining that it no longer had the resources to encourage new ventures, nor to sustain properly ones already dependent on its support. Under the new Tory government, which reduced arts funding by £1 million immediately, and continued cutting in later years, such complaints soon grew more strident. They also changed significantly in tone. The 1981/2 Report continued to emphasize the role of the arts in 'expansion of consciousness', and to recall that public subsidy had been introduced 'in the darkest days of the Second World War . . . mainly because the arts made an indispensable contribution to the spirit of the nation in fighting the Nazis'. But it immediately added a contemporary note in claiming that the arts could 'contribute even more to the economic struggle' (p. 6). As the 1980s went on, the Arts Council increasingly defined its role in terms of this 'struggle', and of Tory priorities generally, stressing the potential of sponsorship and private-sector funding, and the importance of the arts for the economy generally. The 1985/6 Report, for example, famously suggested that 'the Arts are to tourism in Britain what the sun is to Spain' (p. 10).

Reports in the 1990s continued to highlight contributions to employment, tourism, and the country's image generally—ones formalized by the Arts Council's inclusion within the Department of National Heritage, set up in 1992, before its transfer to a new Department for Culture, Media and Sport at the end of the century. Like many other aspects of national life, in other words, the Arts Council's changing role showed how far consensual, post-war priorities of social and civic improvement, sustained through the 1960s, fell victim to the financial stresses of the next decades. By the 1980s, economic imperatives had largely replaced 'expansion of consciousness' and earlier commitments to 'civilized society' and 'the spirit of the nation'. These changing fortunes obviously affected literature directly, especially in the genres of drama, for which the Arts Council's support was crucial throughout the period, and poetry, to which it often gave significant help.³

Expansion and contraction in 'the spirit of the nation' naturally affected literature imaginatively as well as economically. Throughout the 1960s—from Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962)

³ Consequences for each are considered in Chs. 8 and 14, below.

to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969)—fiction often matched contemporary experiments in lifestyle with innovation in literary style. Partly under the influence of rock music, poetry at the time enjoyed a popular revival, poetic imagination also seeming an ideal vehicle for the decade's dreams and utopias. For its growing political commitments, the theatre offered an obvious arena for polemic and debate, and the carnivalesque atmosphere of the 1960s generally—its unbinding of Dionysiac energies fundamental to drama—was naturally one in which theatre thrived. By the mid-1970s, much of this new or expanded consciousness had begun to falter and fade, contributing to some gloomy prognoses about the future of literature, in each genre, by the end of the decade. The unpromising state of English fiction was anxiously surveyed in a forum in one of the most successful of the period's literary magazines, *Granta*, in 1980. Published in 1982, Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion's *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* was widely held to reflect lack of direction, and lack of excitement, in English writing at the time, despite the claims of the editors. In the same year, David Edgar worried in *Times Literary Supplement* about the current state of drama, and about what his generation of left-wing playwrights could make of the altered priorities of 'a privatised age' (10 Sept., p. 969). In *The Seventies: Portrait of a Decade* (1980), Christopher Booker even suggested that 'our culture . . . has reached the most dramatic dead end in the entire history of mankind' (p. 259).

By the early 1980s, in other words, it did seem that the literary imagination might simply reproduce the pattern outlined above: opening like a flower in the 1960s, fading in the next decade, then closing up again, with a snap of Mrs Thatcher's purse, thereafter. Yet different patterns developed. English writing did change character in the early 1980s, in ways discussed in the chapters which follow. But any assumption that it would simply change for the worse underestimated the complexity of relations between history and literary imagination—often readier, as the Introduction suggested, to resist than to reflect contemporary social change. If renewed materialism and social decline were often depressing, in the 1980s and later, they were also creatively provoking. In the work of novelists such as Ian McEwan and Martin Amis, for example, poets such as Peter Reading

and Tony Harrison, or a new generation of dramatists including Caryl Churchill and Mark Ravenhill, literature was regularly energized by adversarial encounters with its age. In particular, it was forced to extend and sharpen satirical idioms which had re-emerged in the 1960s, darkening them with a distinctively black humour which became a characteristic of literature late in the century.

Any open-and-shut model of the period's literature—or of the years from 1960 to 2000 more widely—would also underestimate the resilience of the liberal post-war trends gathering momentum in the 1960s. Along with the decade's developments generally, these trends were often reshaped or redirected later in the century, rather than altogether reversed. Change in social and cultural terms was perhaps even accelerated by its failure to materialize in the economic and political ones *New Left Review* had hoped for in 1960, and the Paris students had tried to instigate in the *événements* of 1968. Never likely to alter radically 'the people who are in control and in power', as John Lennon remarked at the time, revolutionary energies unbound in the 1960s were later deflected instead into more limited political ambitions, more moderate forms of social change. This was an easy enough transition, given the interrelation already assumed between personal and wider political issues during the decade itself.

Consequences were apparent throughout the later 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Even that most fundamental component of English social structure, class, eventually showed some signs of change as a result. John Lennon considered the class system to have emerged intact from the 1960s, and any later reduction in its influence—or in its interest for English writers—was certainly no more than partial. Distinctions of outlook and accent between 'Them and [uz]' in English society continued throughout the period to provide material for Tony Harrison's poetry, for example. In his survey *The Way We Live Now* (1995), Richard Hoggart still found in the 1990s 'evidence all around of the enduring power of the English sense of class-divisions' (p. 199). At the very end of the period, in his novel *How the Dead Live* (2000), Will Self envisaged these divisions not only dictating the way we live now, but even enduring beyond death itself. Yet by the end of the century there was also much evidence of weakening in the nation's hierarchies, and in the institutions on which they were based. After the Life Peerage Act of 1958, the House of Lords had

ceased to be the exclusive domain of hereditary peers: in 1999, it dispensed with them almost completely. By the 1990s, the monarchy seemed to have aged, as an institution, much more thoroughly even than the monarch herself, with the outpouring of grief at the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997, suggesting affections for royal figures of a different kind.

In daily life, throughout the period, there were also many signs of class divisions growing less stringent—a slackening initiated by the levelling influences of the war, and strongly apparent by the late 1950s. Though despairing of other ‘good brave causes’ in *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter remains implacably determined to attack every manifestation of the class system, emboldened by its increasingly fragile, fossilized aspect at the time. The readiness of other Angry Young Men to ‘beat on the doors’ of established society was likewise encouraged by confidence that they might already be opening. Many factors encouraged this optimism: broader education, the egalitarianism of the Welfare State, dwindling respect for the establishment, and an affluence which brought previously exclusive privileges, such as car ownership or foreign holidays, further within the reach of the population generally. New emphasis on status symbols of this kind was extensive enough to trouble commentators at both ends of the political spectrum at the time. The novelist Simon Raven worried in *The English Gentleman* (1961) that ‘material standards’ tended to ‘cheapen the notion of gentility’ (pp. 16–17). In *The Long Revolution* (1961) Raymond Williams likewise criticized the growing influence of ‘conspicuous possession of a range of objects of prestige’, rather than a more authentic ‘general respect’, as a marker of personal worth (p. 322).

Williams nevertheless acknowledged that material factors did contribute to signs of ‘the class system apparently breaking up’ on the edge of the 1960s. Developments during the decade soon encouraged it to do so further (*Long Revolution*, p. 293). The younger generation, Colin MacInnes considered, was ‘much more *classless* than any of the older age groups’ (*England*, p. 55). Throughout the alternative culture establishing itself at the time, new distinctions of age, style, outlook, or musical taste began to cut across and diminish longer-established ones of class, accent, or background. The huge success of the Beatles, in particular, and other rock groups of

working-class origin, rather belied John Lennon's conviction that class constraints remained unchanged at the end of the decade. Television, too, was generally levelling and democratizing in its influence—one rapidly expanding early in the period, and remaining enormously powerful throughout. A TV set was still a coveted 'object of prestige' in the 1950s, but television had reached 72 per cent of the population by 1960, and 98 per cent of households by 1980, making all the world's news and entertainment simultaneously, identically, available in all the nation's homes. Television 'projects a classless . . . world . . . into the remotest villages, where TV aerials stick up with the regularity of chimneypots', Anthony Sampson recorded in 1962 (p. 619). Its programming also moved steadily towards more demotic forms. Viewers themselves were increasingly involved in game shows, polls, and phone-ins, and the plummy tones favoured by the BBC's early director, Lord Reith, were gradually replaced by accents often closer to Tony Harrison's.

Conventional class divisions continued in some ways to shift and weaken under Thatcher governments in the 1980s—new, raw emphases on money, rather as Williams and Raven had feared, helping to make wealth and 'conspicuous possession' more significant markers of status than birth, accent, or education. 'She's radical all right', a character suggests of Mrs Thatcher in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988): 'what she wants . . . is literally to invent a whole goddamn new middle class in this country. Get rid of the old . . . and bring in the new. People without background, without history . . . In with the hungry guys with the wrong education . . . it's a bloody revolution' (pt. V, ch. 1). Replacement of conventional class-boundaries by deepening divisions between haves and have-nots, middle class and underclass, often seemed a revolution more 'bloody' than democratizing, as Rushdie indicates by referring to Thatcher as 'Mrs Torture' throughout *The Satanic Verses*. Her election in 1979, as Britain's first woman prime minister, had more affirmative implications for another set of factors cutting across class divisions later in the twentieth century, and radically altering its outlook generally—new awareness of gender roles, and extensive changes in the social position of women. Like the counter-culture generally, these began to develop partly in response to new economic and educational opportunities available by the 1960s. Proportions

of women in higher education increased during the decade, and numbers in full-time employment also grew substantially between 1950 and 1970, creating new financial independence and greater readiness to question conventional roles in marriage, the family, and home-making. This was reflected and consolidated in some of the progressive legislation which Labour governments did manage to introduce after 1964, despite disappointing their supporters in other ways: particularly the Abortion Act of 1967, the Divorce Reform Act of 1969, and the Equal Pay and Sexual Discrimination Acts which followed in 1975.

Though emerging nearly simultaneously, and from some of the same origins, a new sense of women's autonomy was shaped as much in reaction to the counter-culture as in further extension of its 'alternative revolution'. Its much-vaunted sexual liberation, in particular, soon seemed seriously asymmetric. Greater freedoms included still freer exploitation of the female form, regularly spreadeagled over the covers of underground magazines such as *Oz*. Supposed 'freeing or unbinding of social energies' often left women more subordinate than ever; more starkly objectified by unconstrained male desires. 'Everything is challenged, everything is new', a woman character remarks of the 1960s in scene iv of David Edgar and Susan Todd's *Teendreams* (Monstrous Regiment, 1979), 'so one does just wonder . . . why the fuck we're still doing the typing and making the tea' (Edgar, *Plays: Three*). Ian McEwan's narrator likewise recalls in *Enduring Love* (1997) that 'in England, hippiedom had been largely a boys' affair. A certain kind of quiet girl sat cross-legged at the edges, got stoned and brought the tea . . . these girls disappeared overnight at the first trump from the women's movement' (ch. 21).

Though growing audible throughout the later 1960s, this trump sounded with unmistakable clarity at the end of the decade. Angela Carter dated 'questioning of the nature of [her] reality as a woman' to the period of 'heightened awareness' in the summer of 1968 (Maitland (ed.), p. 4). 'Smouldering, bewildered consciousness . . . muttered dissatisfaction . . . suddenly shoots to the surface and EXPLODES', the underground magazine *Black Dwarf* declared when claiming 1969 'Year of the Militant Woman' (Rowbotham, p. 211). The following year, demands for equal pay and equal opportunity were formulated by a first Women's Liberation Conference, drawing

support from around seventy recently established women's groups. A range of new concepts of gender were also theorized and popularized at the time by two pioneering feminist tracts, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970).

Following what Millett called 'four decades of dormancy' since the end of the suffragette period in the 1920s, a woman's movement seemed to have re-established itself powerfully and quite suddenly by the early 1970s (Millett, p. 64). It was further focused by the establishment of a feminist journal, *Spare Rib*, and of Virago Press in 1973. Three decades of activism and developing awareness, thereafter, still left much to achieve at the end of the century. Women's pay, for example, continued to lag behind men's by more than 20 per cent, on average, in the late 1990s, while in literature it was still only in the genre of fiction that women's writing was even nearly as widely accepted as work by men.⁴ Nevertheless, as Alan Sinfield remarked in *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (1989), by the late 1980s 'the subordination of most women in modern western societies' had come to seem obvious, whereas thirty years previously it had scarcely been an issue at all (p. 203). Clearer perception of gender roles and growing equality for women were among the most distinctive new developments of the later twentieth century, influential throughout the life and imagination of the time.

While the early 1970s, in other words, saw a decline in some of the energies unbound during the previous decade, there were others whose influence was really only beginning. Further evidence of this appeared in the emergence of the Gay Liberation movement, likewise established in 1970 and soon focused around a journal, *Gay News*, founded in 1972. Emphases in the 1960s on sexual liberation and on 'doing your own thing' had benefited the gay community, like women, only rather obliquely, and tardily. But after the decriminalization of homosexuality, through the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, it began to enjoy freedom and public acceptance probably as great as at any time in history. This generally continued to develop in later decades, despite setbacks such as the Tory threats to Gay Liberation in 1980s 'Clause 28' legislation, forbidding affirmative references to homosexuality in education. Conservative attitudes, and the last of

⁴ See p. 462, below.

an England of one kind, continued in such areas to conflict with new, emerging patterns of behaviour. But in general, broadening tolerance of individual lifestyles and sexual preferences, and of new forms of relationship, continued to appear throughout the society of the time, sharing in its general democratization of outlook.

Since many of the changes involved were as much cultural as political in their origins, literature often played a leading part in their development, perhaps especially where women's issues were concerned. Literature naturally came to reflect new perceptions of sex and gender late in the century, but it had also had an initiatory role, offering a means of exploring in imagination possibilities not yet much developed within society itself. As Kate Millett remarked in *Sexual Politics*, 'the arena of sexual revolution is within human consciousness even more pre-eminently than it is within human institutions . . . even more a habit of mind and a way of life than a political system' (p. 63). Some time before the woman's movement sounded its trump at the end of the 1960s, a form of sexual revolution was anticipated in this way in the work of several women writers, particularly Doris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook* (1962). As a construct of 'human consciousness', but also a means through which consciousness and habits of mind are constructed, literature continued to provide an important focus for the attention of the woman's movement: an 'arena' in which attitudes and prejudices could be conveniently identified and their influences discussed. Long sections of Millett's argument in *Sexual Politics* were devoted in this way to literary criticism, concentrating on the author so widely influential during the 1960s, D. H. Lawrence. In her view, if Lawrence's work was in any way religious or sacred, it was only in the service of the oppressive patriarchal cult of the phallus. Freedom to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 had helped initiate the liberated mood of the decade which followed: Millett showed how far ideas had continued to develop by its end, and how effectively they could be expressed through literary criticism and cultural analysis. Feminist literary critics, and women readers generally, continued in later decades to find in male authors' constructions of reality—and of women characters in particular—useful evidence of the problems they faced, and to look for possible solutions in the work of women writers. Virago Press, and other exclusively women's imprints which

soon followed, helped to establish a wider availability and influence for this work than ever.

Other factors substantially reshaping society and literature in the period can be retraced to the late 1950s and 1960s, and to the difficult phase of 'the aftermath of empire' Anthony Sampson identified at the time. Immigration from former colonies had begun slowly in the late 1940s, accelerating in the next decade under the influence of a continuing post-war labour shortage. Around a quarter of a million immigrants from the Caribbean had arrived by the end of the 1950s, with growing numbers entering Britain from Pakistan and India at the start of the 1960s: by the early 1990s, 6 per cent of the population was immigrant in origin. As well as tracing the emergence of a youth culture, *Absolute Beginners* and other novels in Colin MacInnes's *Visions of London* trilogy—*City of Spades* (1957) and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960)—record the growing influence of immigrant communities on metropolitan life, and the prejudices beginning to be directed against them. *Absolute Beginners* depicts race riots which ensued in Notting Hill in 1958: these also occurred in Nottingham at the time. They were to recur regularly in the decades that followed—again in Notting Hill in the late 1970s. Unemployment, racial prejudice, and police pressure on black communities were also factors in the countrywide inner-city riots of the early 1980s. Uneasy governments passed legislation to control immigration in 1962, 1968, 1971, 1981, and 1988, and a Race Relations Board was established in 1966 to deal with tensions and prejudices already rampant within the country. They were soon heightened further by Enoch Powell's inflammatory prediction in 1968—forcing his dismissal from the Tory Shadow Cabinet—that 'much blood' would inevitably flow on the streets of Britain as a result of racial conflict.

Yet later developments on the whole proved Powell more of a political opportunist, and more misguided, even than he seemed at the time. Despite continuing tensions, race relations had at least begun to evolve in different directions by the 1990s. Blood did continue to be shed on the streets—in further riots, and, notoriously, in the unpunished murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. Prejudice, injustice, and racial harassment sometimes seemed to continue undiminished. Yet there were also many streets in British cities by the

1990s—the Uxbridge Road in London, for example—and many developments in the country generally which gave evidence for the more hopeful conclusion Caryl Phillips reached in *A New World Order* (2001). Under the influence of half a century of immigrants, Phillips considered, Britain had ‘changed radically’: generally towards more ‘open, fluid’ attitudes; even those of a ‘truly multicultural society’. As it had in relation to gender politics, writing played a particularly significant role in this development, Phillips remarking that the most genuinely ‘multicultural and multiracial area of British life—aside from the national athletics team—has been the literature’ (pp. 279–80, 295).

Along with new awareness of gender roles, this growing multiculturalism shaped a society which conceived itself very differently at the end of the period than at mid-century—in terms ‘far more horizontal and diffused’, Richard Hoggart suggested in 1995, in *The Way We Live Now* (p. 6). As class hierarchies changed or weakened, new divisions of gender and ethnicity contributed to a partial, half-revolution in English society: a ninety-degree rotation of some of the axes around which it defined itself; a shift of emphasis from vertical to lateral distinctions. Changes of this kind were summed up by Steven Connor in *Postmodernist Culture* (1989) as ‘modulation of hierarchy into heterarchy’ (p. 9). Though the move away from hierarchy was in general a liberating one, the new ‘diversity of voices and interests’ he considered to be involved did leave society in some ways more fragmentary than hitherto; more ‘torn apart’, as Marwick suggested. The progressive political energy of the post-war consensus, in particular, seemed to have dissipated into diverse micropolitics after encountering the economic barriers of the 1970s and 1980s—as though, in Connor’s image, ‘running its propulsive strength into the marshes and rivulets of a delta’ (pp. 244, 226). Donald Davie likewise worried in his poem ‘Standings’ (1988) that ‘the Albion of William Blake’ had fragmented into a ‘tessellation’ of diverse social ‘cantons’ and ‘republics’, defined by outlooks varying radically ‘from jurisdiction | To jurisdiction’.

Yet these new diversities of voice and interest had progressive effects on literature and culture. Long-standing literary concern with class hardly required new styles for its expression, as the formally conservative, social-realist writing of the Angry Young Men showed

in the late 1950s and early 1960s. New voices and interests were naturally likelier to develop new styles, or stretch and reshape some of the old. Concerned with 'revolution . . . within human consciousness', and with altering established 'habit of mind', women writers could hardly remain content with existing literary conventions, and were among the most innovative of late twentieth-century authors as a result. Some of the same commitment to new styles and visions began to emerge in gay literature later in the period. Immigrant writers had particular reason to abandon or amend established forms. Authors whom Caryl Phillips described as 'both inside and outside Britain at the same time . . . belonging and not belonging' naturally offered new perspectives on the country's life, but also new approaches to its literary conventions (*New World Order*, p. 234). The potential of authors in each of these areas was probably still not fully apparent in the early 1980s: by the end of the century, their work had done much to refute the gloomy prognoses about the future of literature often expressed at that time, and to renovate the period's writing at the levels of form and style.

By the end of the century, too, shifts from hierarchy to heterarchy had come to affect not only ways literature was written, but the whole manner in which culture was understood. Conventional conceptions of an exclusive or 'high' culture, or a single national one, had already been challenged by the development of alternative and counter-cultures in the 1960s. In a society increasingly diverse and democratized thereafter, culture continued to be reshaped by broader accessibility and more heterogeneous influence. While television was establishing an unrestricted, mass audience for itself in the 1960s, print culture had also become accessible on a new and wider scale, better education and rising levels of literacy creating a reading public larger than at any time in history. 'It is only in our own century that the regular reading even of newspapers has reached a majority of our people', Raymond Williams pointed out in 1961, adding that 'it is probable that in the 1950s, for the first time, we had a majority book-reading public' (*Long Revolution*, pp. 156, 171). This was soon extended further by expansions in the library system, and in paperback publishing, during the 1960s.⁵ Though Williams's 'Long Revolution' had hardly been completed in social or political

⁵ See Ch. 4, below.

terms by the end of the century—its progress in several ways retarded or even reversed since the 1980s—its ambition to open culture to ‘all people rather than to limited groups’ was closer to being realized. Theatres, libraries, and bookshops were less likely than forty years earlier to seem the exclusive province of a particular caste, and television, in particular, opened up new forms of cultural engagement for the population as a whole (*Long Revolution*, p. xi).

A symptom of this change appeared in the shifting significances attached to the term ‘culture’ itself during the period. At mid-century, ‘culture’ and ‘cultured’ remained closely cognate. Culture still seemed to belong to and reflect the tastes of ‘the cultured’—a well-educated, affluent fraction of the population. The Arts Council’s determination to ‘raise and spread’, or to bring ‘high’ art to a wider public, showed a continuing version of this assumption in later years: a conviction that what was considered culture might not appeal immediately, or even seem accessible, to the majority of the public. But by the end of the period, ‘culture’ had become a term less often used evaluatively, or exclusively. Instead, it was regularly used thoroughly *inclusively*, to refer to the increasingly diverse tastes and outlooks of the population as a whole, and to *all* the media and signifying practices of this society. ‘Culture’ came to mean all the ways in which society spoke to and made sense of itself, from rock music to opera, newspaper reports to lyric poetry, fashion style to film.

The term ‘literature’ moved similarly towards broader, less exclusive definition. ‘We know what it is, pretty well’, Graham Hough remarked of literature in his *Essay on Criticism* in 1966, referring to an established canon of great works (p. 9). Even by the end of the 1970s, most critics would have been less confident: likelier to question the authority of any interpretative community defined by Hough’s rather royal-sounding ‘we’, and to challenge any canonical conclusions it might have reached. Transitions in thinking of this kind made the period’s literary criticism symptomatic of general changes in its outlook, as well as, more directly, an influence on how its literature was read and understood.⁶ Increasingly diverse forms of analysis—the rapid development of feminism and postcolonialism, for example—reflected the lateral division of contemporary society into ‘cantons’ and ‘republics’, and the assumption that different but

⁶ See Ch. 3, below.

equally valuable forms of imagination might be at work in each. The broadening remit of literary criticism generally—its movement towards Cultural Studies, and its openness to forms of writing previously ignored—also reproduced the priorities of an increasingly democratized age.

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Other influences retraceable to the early 1960s began to affect English culture and self-perception towards the end of the century. In his essay 'Periodising the Sixties', Fredric Jameson related the decade's 'freeing or unbinding of energies' to 'the great movement of decolonisation' taking place around the world at its beginning. Western nations' dwindling authority abroad, he considered, encouraged 'those inner colonized of the First World—"minorities", marginals, and women—fully as much as its external subjects' to seek greater freedom and autonomy for themselves (*Ideologies*, pp. 180–1). Jameson's views help explain a new urge for independence not only among 'marginal' groups discussed above, but also in the peripheral nations of the United Kingdom. Struggle against a common enemy had strengthened Britain's cohesion during the war, but 1960s election results showed the return of political nationalism in Scotland and Wales. In Northern Ireland, the Civil Rights Association's demands for equality for the Catholic minority, typical of the 1960s, led to increasingly violent clashes with the Royal Ulster Constabulary late in the decade. After the arrival of the British Army in 1969, supposedly as a stabilizing influence, the Civil Rights initiative was generally taken over by the Provisional IRA, and accompanied by increasing violence between the religious communities. The IRA's struggle against the army soon extended into regular bombing campaigns on the mainland—adding further chilling elements to 'alarm, panic and despondency' in the 'Ice Age' which Margaret Drabble envisaged replacing the 'hopeful, safe, expansive' mood of the 1960s (*Ice Age*, p. 12). Bombings and violence continued throughout the next decades, until a political solution at last came into view late in the 1990s. By that time, measures of devolution had been accepted in Wales and in Scotland, though the electorate there had initially rejected self-government, in 1979. This left Britain still united as a kingdom at the end of the century, but with

the autonomy of its constituent countries more clearly established than at any time for hundreds of years. 'Decolonization' overseas at the start of the period, in other words, was soon matched by the incipient dissolution of a longer-standing English empire nearer home. Though most of the developments discussed so far affected Britain as a whole, there were others by the end of the century which were exclusive to England itself.

'Once upon a time', Jeremy Paxman commented in *The English: A Portrait of a People* (1998), 'the English knew who they were . . . the English didn't need to concern themselves with the symbols of their own identity: when you're top dog in the world's leading empire, you don't need to' (pp. 2, 12). But in a post-imperial age, and in the 1990s especially—sometimes also troubled by the growing influence of the European Union—questions about England's identity, autonomy, and traditions began to be raised more often. For contemporary writers, these questions proved thoroughly problematic, in some areas at least. Nick Hornby's popular autobiography *Fever Pitch* (1992), for example, concluded that 'the white south of England middle-class Englishman and woman is the most rootless creature on earth', finding only 'a void' when seeking 'acceptable cultural identity' (pp. 47–9). The late twentieth century turned out to be a particularly awkward time to raise such issues of cultural identity. Even by the start of the period, Graham Hough suggested in 1960, culture showed an 'international range . . . no longer regional, no longer national, but composite and eclectic' (*Image and Experience*, p. 57). Under the influence of increasingly globalized media, commerce, and communications, it became steadily more so in later decades. In one way, this made the need to define national culture and identity more pressing than ever, but it also made it harder to satisfy, and the issues involved more difficult to confine discretely within the nation's conversations with itself. Instead, there were many signs, late in the century, of England encountering a problem longer recognized elsewhere in the United Kingdom—that a nation's sense of identity is inevitably entangled with images it has to adopt in presenting itself to the outside world. Significantly, the Department of National Heritage established in 1992 was responsible not only for the arts and for historic monuments, but also for tourism. Like the Arts Council during the previous decade, a rapidly emergent 'heritage

industry' had to concentrate on what could be sold, to foreign visitors particularly. New pressures on English identity in the 1990s thus coincided awkwardly with a new need to turn English culture into foreign exchange, sometimes making artificial, or easily consumable, the very authenticities that 'heritage' supposedly sought to sustain.

This was often a target of satire at the time. Simon Armitage's poem 'The Twang' (2002), for example, highlights Ireland's greater facility in marketing itself abroad, contrasting an imaginary St George's day in New York with established St Patrick's day celebrations there. Salman Rushdie's Anglophile protagonist in *The Satanic Verses* worries about how far English culture and history might be 'altered' by the media at work in 'our degraded, imitative times, in which clowns re-enact what was first done by heroes and by kings' (pt. VII, ch. 2). 'Alteration' of this kind, and motives for it, were thoroughly explored in Julian Barnes's heritage-industry satire *England, England* (1998), which shows a theme park struggling to find convenient, convincing components of English culture and character to be used in its entertainments. Yet once these have been established, the theme park seems such an attractive alternative to the 'void' of cultural identity in England itself that it is soon able to take over the monarchy, other national institutions, and large sections of the population.

England, England satirizes the construction of a national identity principally based on the country's 'social and cultural history . . . eminently marketable, never more so than in the current climate' (p. 39). Yet the novel also retains strong historical sympathies of its own, largely for supposedly straightforward, bygone decencies of life in the English countryside. *England, England* offers in this way a symptom as well as an analysis of fears about 'the last of England', and their encouragement of forms of nostalgia widely in evidence at the end of the century. Jeremy Paxman found the subjects of his study, *The English*, to be 'a people marching backwards into the future' in the late 1990s, unable to drag their attention away from the past (p. 18). Retrospection of this kind was of course not altogether new. Stresses examined in *England, England* resemble ones explored in Nigel Dennis's survey of rootless mid-century life, *Cards of Identity* (1955)—a novel likewise examining English tendencies to